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The Role of Dominant Institutional Logics in the Meat Industry: An Analysis for Understanding Barriers to Change

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List of Abbreviations

AFS	Agricultural and Food Systems
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CL(s)	Competing Logic(s)
DL(s)	Dominant Logic(s)
DILs	Dominant Institutional Logics
EAI	Environment as Institution
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
HICs	High Income Countries
IARC	International Agency for Research on Cancer
IFAP	Industrial Food Animal production
IL(s)	Institutional Logic(s)
IP	Institutional Pressures
IT	Institutional Theory
OAI	Organization as Institution
OB(s)	Organizational behaviour(s)
PA	Participant A
PB	Participant B
PLB	Plant-based
PBD	Plant Based Diets
PBF(s)	Plant-based food(s)
PC	Participant C
PD	Participant D
WF	Water footprint

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1. Introduction

Meat is typically defined as the muscle tissue sourced from animals raised and processed for human consumption (Gokirmakli and Bayram, 2017). While the consumption of meat has undeniably played a significant role in human evolution, it's essential to recognize that humans are not purely self-made dietary creations but our dietary and nutritional requirements were shaped over 25 million years of evolutionary history (Milton, 2000).

Hunter-gatherers, who relied primarily on hunting and gathering for subsistence, originated in the Palaeolithic era (Holcombe and Holcombe, 2020). In those pre-agricultural times, human diets prioritized nutrients that supported physically demanding lifestyles, combining animal and plant foods to obtain energy and protein (Milton, 2000). Meat from hunting was a less reliable source due to seasonal variations, hunting challenges, and geographic factors (Milton, 2000). As hominins expanded into different regions and hunting techniques became more sophisticated, hunter-gatherers were able to adopt a more diverse diet, notably rich in animal products (Katzenberg and Waters-Rist, 2018). Hunting was essential for survival, symbolizing skill, masculinity, and strength, but it also played a crucial role in early communities by fostering social bonds and status through meat-sharing, which brought people together for gatherings and celebrations (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2022).

The Neolithic Revolution marked a shift toward controlling food sources through agriculture and animal domestication, transforming human diets (Price and Bar-Yosef, 2011). This process was rooted in a symbiotic relationship, where humans bred animals and cultivated crops in response to food competition and survival needs, ultimately ensuring a more stable food supply (Price and Bar-Yosef, 2011). The ability to manage food sources sparked a cultural shift, transitioning humans from hunter-gatherers to a more technological, settled, and urbanized society, driving significant population growth (Gowdy and Krall, 2014). Contrary to modern assumptions, plants were the primary source of energy during these periods, surpassing meat (Larsen, 2003). In this regard, a recent and fascinating study by Gorbunova (2024) used the new method of stable isotope analysis to shift the focus from archaeological remains to chemical evidence in the bones and teeth of early humans, revealing that meat consumption fluctuated significantly over time. While it was predominant during the Palaeolithic era, evidence suggests a gradual decline in reliance on animal-source foods in later societies, especially in Neolithic agricultural times (Gorbunova, 2024).

With this in mind, let’s fast-forward through time and different periods to streamline the analysis. What is particularly noteworthy later on is the distinct mentality surrounding meat

consumption in different epochs. By the 14th century, meat became a status symbol, particularly among royals and aristocrats in Europe who preferred butchered cuts over whole animals, distancing themselves from the reality of slaughter (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2022). For example, in ancient Pompeii in the Roman era, the diet of inhabitants reflected the social stratification between elite and non-elite classes (Moses, 2012). Elite diets often featured luxury meats like wild boar, birds, and suckling pigs, prized for their delicacy and prestige (Moses, 2012). Served on platters and prepared with high-quality butchery methods, these foods reinforced social status (Moses, 2012). Conversely, the non-elite diets primarily consisted of domestic animals like pigs, goats, and chickens, with less variety and fewer prestigious cuts, suggesting a more restricted diet (Moses, 2012). What is particularly interesting here is that from a certain point in history onward, meat consumption became closely linked to social status, reflecting broader societal shifts and reinforcing the connection between food choices, social identity, and symbols, shaping the mentality of past and future consumers.

Meat was scarce for most people and became widely available only after agricultural improvements, industrialization, urbanization, and global trade of the mid-19th century (Smil, 2002). It was in 1818, when Elisha Mills opened the first mass-production plant for processing pork in Cincinnati, that a significant shift occurred and meat started to become a central component of daily meals for many Americans (Coyle and McKinstry, 2023). Driven by changing consumer preferences, the retail industry saw the rise of supermarkets as a dominant model (Green, 2020). In fact, from the 1930s onward, and increasingly during the 1970s, small, specialized shops such as local grocers, butchers, and bakeries experienced a decline while supermarkets capitalized on this shift by streamlining diverse product offerings, maintaining lower prices, and providing a one-location shopping experience (Green, 2020). In the 1960s, factory farming transformed meat production in many major countries, leading slaughterhouses to automate in response to rising demand (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2022) which doubled or even tripled within relatively short periods in many industrialized countries including France, Britain, and the United States (Smil, 2002). This led to the scaling up of farms, the creation of fast-food chains, and the decline of certain roles like traditional butchers (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2022). As a result, consumers began to perceive meat differently; instead of seeing whole carcasses in butcher shops, they encountered packaged, sanitized products in supermarkets, creating a disconnection between the meat and its living origins (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2022).

Now that this historical overview has been traced the evolution of meat's role within cultural and societal contexts becomes clearer. Beyond its dietary and symbolic significance, meat is also a fundamental component of a vast economic system. The development of the meat

industry has been shaped not only by consumer preferences but also by broader capitalist structures, societal values, and institutional forces, which have ultimately modelled production dynamics. As Fiddes (1994, cited after Fiddes 1991, p. 277) aptly states: "Meat's essential value, not just as any old food but as the food above all others, derives directly from its capacity to represent to us most tangibly our power over the rest of the natural world." This perspective highlights meat's deep-rooted cultural significance, but in modern times, alternative diets, ethical concerns, and sustainability debates have added complexity to its role. As this industry evolves, so too does the balance between market demands and societal expectations.

Given its historical, cultural, and economic importance, the meat industry serves as an ideal case for examining how specific institutional logics (ILs) shape its norms and practices across the entire value chain—from farming and processing to distribution and sales. This research focuses on identifying the dominant institutional logics (DILs) that define industry practices and beliefs, and how they interact with emerging competing logics (CLs) in the sector. Situated at the intersection of organizational behaviour (OB) and psychology, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach to explore these dynamics, addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: *What are the DILs shaping practices and beliefs in the meat industry?*
RQ2: *How are the CLs perceived by industry members?*

The thesis begins with a comprehensive literature review, analysing the dynamics of ILs, their definitions, and key characteristics. Following this, OB and the institutionalization of norms are explored through the lens of isomorphism and institutional pressures (IP). Then the focus shifts to dominant logics (DLs), detailing how they underpin industry practices, before introducing CLs and their growing relevance. Subsequently, the study examines the contemporary landscape of the meat industry, highlighting current challenges, threats, and opportunities. A deductive approach is employed, with stakeholders in the meat industry value chain serving as key actors for the empirical portion of the research. This section outlines the research objectives and design followed by data collection and data analysis. The findings are presented in the latter part of the thesis, followed by an in-depth discussion that contextualizes the results within broader theoretical frameworks. Finally, conclusions leave space for a critical reflection. By exploring the balance between tradition and change, this study seeks to offer valuable insights into the evolving landscape of the meat sector and potentially contribute to future research in this field.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Institutional Logics

An enduring debate exists within the social sciences regarding the influence of institutions on both individuals and OB, as well as how individuals and organizations can both create and reshape those institutions (Thornton et al., 2012). In recent years, institutions have been understood as the fields in which organizations operate consisting of a mix of structural and cultural elements that greatly influence organizations and are essential for understanding both human societies and organizational dynamics (Abrutyn and Turner, 2011).

The concept of ILs is situated within institutional theory (IT), which has been significantly enriched by the contributions of numerous researchers. IT originated from the early work of Selznick (1948, 1949, 1957) who analysed the interaction between organizations and their institutional environments, followed by Parsons (1956) who emphasized how institutions integrate organizations into society through universalistic rules, contracts, and authority (cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). From a macro perspective, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that modernization rationalizes taken-for-granted rules, leading to isomorphism in organizational structures (cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Meyer and other colleagues (1987, 1997) argued that organizations conform to external demands for legitimacy, causing a partial separation between formal structures and technical operations (cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). They linked this to the influence of rationality in Western culture and viewed formal organizational structures as part of a broader global cultural system (Meyer et al., 1987, 1997, cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). From a micro perspective, Zucker (1977) emphasized the persistence of cultural norms and the taken-for-granted nature of institutions as key measures of institutionalization (cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). The concept of ILs was first introduced by Alford and Friedland (1985) to explain the conflicting practices and beliefs within modern Western institutions, such as capitalism, state bureaucracy, and political democracy, and how these institutions shape individuals' engagement in political struggles (cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Later they expanded on this by examining the interplay between individuals, organizations, and society and bridging macro-level structures with micro-level processes (Alford and Friedland, 1991, cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). They argued that institutions are shaped by material and symbolic systems that guide behaviour and provide a sense of meaning (Alford and Friedland, 1991, cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). *Symbolic carriers* include rules, norms, and belief systems embedded in ILs, representing the cultural and ideological components that shape how people think, behave, and interpret

their roles within organizational fields (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). On the other hand, *material carriers* refer to the tangible elements—routines, relationship systems, and artefacts—that materialize and sustain these symbolic components, ensuring the persistence and reproduction of institutional practices over time (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Such carriers exert a kind of pull toward conformity, driving organizations to align with established ILs (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Later, Jackall (1988) conceptualized ILs as being embedded within practices, maintained through cultural beliefs, and shaped by political dynamics (cited after Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). Thornton and Ocasio (2008) ultimately described ILs as socially constructed historical patterns that encompass material practices and belief systems, shaping how individuals sustain their material needs, structure time and space, and create meaning within their social realities. In essence, ILs function as organizing principles that guide the behaviour of participants within organizational fields (Alford and Friedland, 1991, cited after Scott 2012).

The cultural content embedded in ILs influences what is perceived as acceptable or effective in organizational practices across different societal sectors (Thornton et al., 2005). In Western societies, Thornton and colleagues (2005, p. 128) identify six key societal sectors—market, corporation, professions, family, religion, and state—each characterized by distinct cultural symbols and practices. These sectors, influenced by different ILs, shape the way individuals and organizations behave (Thornton et al., 2005). Within this framework, Thornton (2002) distinguishes between two main ILs: *the logic of the professions* and *the logic of the markets*. The *logic of the professions* applies to professional organizations, such as those in medicine, publishing, and other craft-based fields, emphasizing expertise, autonomy, and relational networks, while prioritizing knowledge and mission-driven goals (Thornton, 2002). In contrast, the *logic of the markets* governs large corporations, focusing on profit maximization, centralized decision-making, and efficiency to ensure competitiveness within clearly defined structures (Thornton, 2002)

The complexity of IT can be explored through Scott's (2012) three-pillar framework, an institutional analysis tool that outlines the key elements that constitute the foundation, maintenance and change of institutions, and that shape behaviour at both individual and organizational levels. Firstly, the *regulative pillar* relies on formal rules, monitoring, and sanctions that guide and influence behaviour by imposing penalties for violations and rewards for compliance (Scott, 2012). This is particularly evident in structured environments, such as markets or governments, where legal frameworks help ensure that self-interest is balanced and controlled (Scott, 2012). The *normative pillar* instils a sense of obligation and appropriateness, shaping behaviour through internalized beliefs about what is considered "right" or "appropriate" within social roles

(Scott, 2012). Unlike formal rules, sanctions for norm violations are often informal but highly influential, rooted in shared group values and internalized identities (Scott, 2012). Finally, the *cultural-cognitive pillar* emphasizes shared beliefs and cognitive frameworks that shape reality and help individuals make sense of the world (Scott, 2012). According to Scott (2012), three key considerations must be made to avoid misinterpretation of the framework:

(1) Institutions must be "inhabited" by social actors, as they influence the actions and interpretations of those within a field;

(2) The regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements rarely exist in isolation and, when aligned, create resilient social systems, but when misaligned, they can trigger social change;

(3) Legitimacy is essential for social acceptance, with each pillar contributing to it in different ways—through legality, morality, and shared taken-for-granted beliefs. Legitimacy is crucial because it is tied to the organization's competitiveness, which in turn depends on its alignment with the higher-order IL (Thornton, 2002). When the organizational strategy and structure diverge from such logics, legitimacy declines, increasing susceptibility to change pressures (Thornton, 2002). Similarly, a shift in ILs redirects organizational focus toward new issues and solutions, ultimately impacting the organization's overall strategy and structure (Thornton, 2002).

2.2 Mechanisms of Institutional Isomorphism and Perspectives on Institutionalization

While Scott's (2012) framework illustrates how institutions are structured and maintained, the studies of the sociologists DiMaggio and Powell on IT provided very detailed insights into the concept of *institutional isomorphism*, which explains why organizations within the same industry become more alike over time going through the process of "homogenization" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). According to them, there are three main mechanisms through which isomorphism occurs. First, *coercive isomorphism* occurs when organizations face formal and informal pressures from external entities, such as government authorities and socio-cultural expectations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). For example, organizations may adjust their practices to comply with legal requirements, such as implementing pollution control technologies to meet environmental regulations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). These coercive pressures can result in changes that may appear primarily symbolic but still gradually reshape power dynamics within organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The second element is *mimetic isomorphism* and it occurs when organizations within the same field imitate one another (DiMaggio

and Powell, 1983). This might happen in response to uncertainty, especially when they face ambiguous challenges or unclear solutions, or to replicate successful models perceived as effective (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Such a behaviour reflects a tendency to align with established models to enhance legitimacy and credibility (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Thirdly, *normative isomorphism* stems primarily from professionalization and shared norms and values within occupational groups (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). For example, professionals in similar fields tend to share educational backgrounds and career paths, leading to homogeneity in practices and OB (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This type of isomorphism leads to a workforce that behaves similarly across different organizations, which can stifle innovation and diversity in practices (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). These mechanisms are often connected and their effects are reflected cumulatively; for instance, an organization might comply with a government mandate, embodying coercive isomorphism, while also adopting practices seen as successful in peer organizations, expressing mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Building on the ideas of DiMaggio and Powell, Zucker (1987) argued that institutions establish relative permanence in social systems, shaping norms, behaviours, and structures. As Table 1 shows, Zucker (1987) identified two approaches to treating institutions.

Theoretical approach	Environment as institution	Organization as institution
Motif	Reproductive	Generative
Source	Growth of state	Small groups & imitation of other organizations
Locus	Outside organization State linked	Internal process Similar organizations
Outcomes	(1) Decoupling from technical core (2) Inefficiency	(1) Stability (2) Efficiency contingent on alternatives

Table 1: Two Perspectives on Institutions

(Zucker, 1987)

The distinction between environment as institution (EAI) and organization as institution (OAI) is crucial for understanding how institutionalization shapes organizations through different mechanisms (Zucker, 1987). The EAI perspective highlights a reproductive approach focused on external pressures, particularly the expansion of state authority and the broader rationalization of society, which drive organizations to conform to gain legitimacy, resources, and survival advantages (Zucker, 1987). This explains the systemic uniformity across sectors, especially in

highly regulated or state-linked environments, where organizations adopt standardized structures and practices to align with institutional expectations (Zucker, 1987). However, this conformity often leads to decoupling, where formal structures become disconnected from technical efficiency, prioritizing legitimacy over performance, creating inefficiencies, and reinforcing the constraints of the "iron cage[1]" (Zucker, 1987). In contrast, the OAI perspective highlights a generative approach that emphasizes internal processes, where institutionalization arises through organizational routines, peer imitation, and professional norms (Zucker, 1987).
Organizations are not merely passive recipients of external pressures; they actively shape institutional elements by embedding them in formal structures and routines, which, over time, become taken-for-granted practices (Zucker, 1987). This process explains how organizations can drive change by legitimizing new practices, yet paradoxically, institutionalized structures can also limit adaptability by making alternative approaches invisible (Zucker, 1987). Institutional elements tend to spread within and across organizations in a contagion-like manner, reinforcing legitimacy but also perpetuating inefficiencies when more effective alternatives are ignored (Zucker, 1987). Both perspectives illustrate that organizations balance stability and change, adapting to institutional demands while also shaping the institutional environment itself (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

2.3 The Role of Norms in Institutionalization and Organizational Behaviour

In the context of ILs' conformity, "norms" define what is common within a certain environment and specify which behaviours and beliefs are considered "right" and, therefore, replicable (Morris et al., 2015). Norms manifest in observable patterns of social environments in different ways, playing a role in institutionalization and OB (Morris et al., 2015). Figure 1 shows a model of their components and key interrelationships.

[1] For context, the 'iron cage' refers to the isomorphic pressures imposed by institutionalized norms, practices, and logics, which constrain organizational actions and enforce legitimacy by compelling organizations to conform to field structures within the iron cage itself (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, cited after Zietsma and McKnight, 2009).

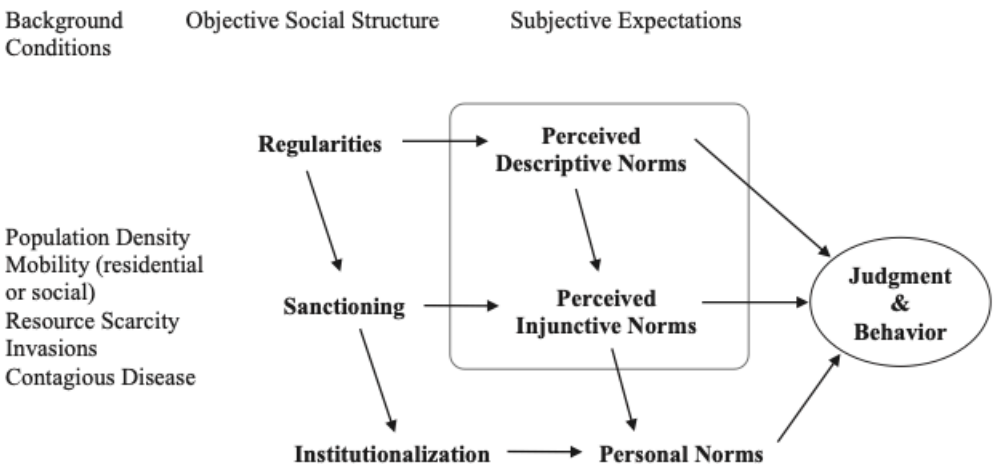

Figure 1: *Institutionalization of Norms*
(Morris et al., 2015)

First, norms exist in the widespread *regularities* of a group's behaviour and belief, influencing individual behaviour through operant conditioning and fostering conformity to social defaults (Morris et al., 2015). *Sanctioning* also plays a key role, with social rewards and punishments reinforcing approved behaviours, shaping individual self-regard and societal compliance (Morris et al., 2015). *Institutionalization* formalizes norms, embedding them in social structures and ensuring their longevity and societal acceptance (Morris et al., 2015).

Norms also exist in individuals' perceptions, expectations, and beliefs (Morris et al., 2015). Firstly, *perceived descriptive norms* establish expectations about what is typical to do or think, guiding behaviour while also serving as a basis for predicting others' actions, planning future behaviour, and facilitating social coordination (Morris et al., 2015). *Perceived injunctive norms* reflect social approval or disapproval while *personal norms* represent internalized self-expectations on one's behaviour to maintain personal values (Morris et al., 2015). The institutionalization of norms occurs as these behaviours and perceptions evolve, becoming embedded within societal systems through a dynamic process of interaction between objective and subjective elements (Morris et al., 2015). At this point, regular practices evolve into widely accepted norms, becoming codified within cultural, economic, and legal systems (Morris et al., 2015).

In OB understanding how social structures shape individual actions and group interactions is crucial, as people adhere to norms through cognitive and motivational processes (Morris et al., 2015). The theories presented by Morris and colleagues (2015), as summarized in Table 2, provide valuable insights into how norms influence actions within groups and institutions, highlighting their integral role in organizational dynamics.

Theory	Function	Mental representations involved	Corresponding cultural patterns manifest when
Internalization	Self expression Guilt avoidance	Self-integrated values Introjected standards	Decisions made in private Authority figures primed
Social identity	Self categorization, need for belonging	Ingroup prototype	Collective identity cues, ingroup interaction, outgroup salience, identity threats, existential threats, or leadership aspirations
Rational choice	Utility maximization	Descriptive norms used to coordinate Perceived descriptive and injunctive norms needed for cooperation in mixed-motive games	Doing an activity jointly rather than solo When conditions enable communication and sanctioning
Social autopilot	Effort-free, tactical navigation	Perceived descriptive norms	Cognitively busy, ego depleted, or epistemically insecure
Social radar	Identity signaling and validation	Perceived injunctive norms	Engaged in social metacognition When facing audiences, aspirational groups, or life transitions

Table 2: *Mental and Cultural Patterns in People's Adherence to Norms*
(Morris et al., 2015)

Internalization is the process of absorbing societal norms and values through social interactions, embedding them into personal beliefs (Morris et al., 2015). While internalized norms guide behaviour, societal expectations often prevail in conflicts between personal and social norms (Morris et al., 2015). S*ocial identity* indicates that OB is influenced by group identity, with individuals conforming to ingroup norms to maintain distinctiveness and leaders shaping these norms and driving cultural change by institutionalizing them through policies and practices (Morris et al., 2015). *Rational choice* focuses on how individuals and organizations make decisions based on perceived costs and benefits; norms evolve through rational adherence to behaviours that are seen as beneficial and are maintained by influential individuals who reduce the cost of non-compliance, fostering wider cultural shifts (Morris et al., 2015). Descriptive norms (*social autopilot*) guide behaviour automatically in uncertain or stressful situations, while injunctive norms (*social radar*) require deliberate effort to align with group expectations (Morris et al., 2015). Based on this, organizations may follow descriptive norms automatically, guiding immediate actions in a way that aligns with socially accepted practices, meanwhile, adherence to injunctive norms often requires strategic effort, as organizations prioritize broader goals and values over immediate desires (Morris et al., 2015).

Norms often evolve from the bottom up, beginning as practical behaviours that spread through imitation and coordination, eventually becoming sanctioned and institutionalized (Morris et al., 2015). However, norms can also change top-down through leadership initiatives, though such efforts often face resistance if they target institutional structures without first fostering behavioural changes (Morris et al., 2015). Nevertheless, organizations do not always passively conform to norms but their responses to normative pressures can vary based on their strategic interests, available resources, and perceptions of the issue's importance (Durand et al., 2019).

2.4 Dominant Logics: Evolution and Impact on Organizations

The institutionalization of norms takes place as behaviours and perceptions develop and become ingrained in societal systems (Morris et al., 2015). Within organizations, such norms crystallize giving birth to DLs. Deeply embedded in the organization's culture and practices, DLs shape how leaders organize and process information and interpret opportunities, risks, and actions through structured schemas (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). DLs include both knowledge structures—such as technologies, resources, and capabilities—and management processes that drive organizational goals (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). In this context, the relationship between the key factors shaping DLs in organizations is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

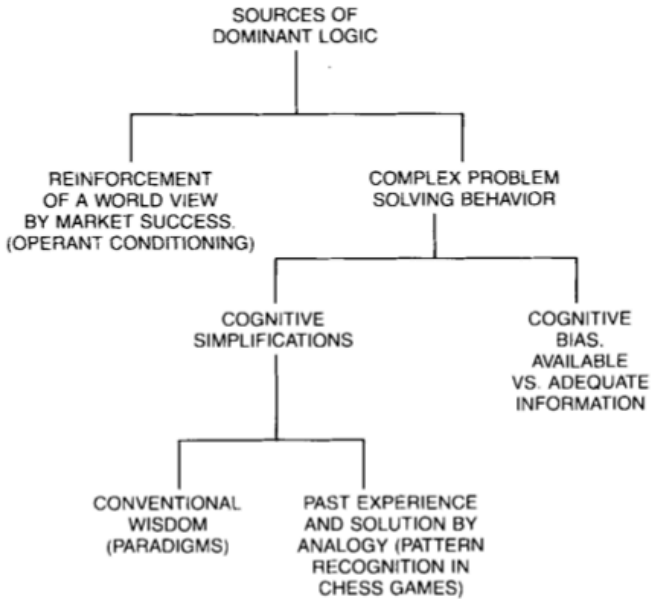

Figure 2: Mapping the Evolution of Dominant Logics

(Prahalad and Bettis, 1986)

DLs become entrenched through two main factors; *the reinforcement of past successes* and the *simplifications in problem-solving behaviour* (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). The former, also named *operant conditioning*, explains how behaviours are shaped by their consequences: in a business context, successful behaviours are positively reinforced, leading to the development of DLs that prioritize effective practices and strategies (Prahalad & Bettis, 1986). The two factors lead to *cognitive simplifications*, when organizations rely on shortcuts to process information more efficiently, and *cognitive biases*, which occur when decision-makers prioritize readily available information over more comprehensive data (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). Cognitive biases are systematic distortions in human cognition that affect decision-making by shaping perceptions, limiting alternatives, and influencing risk assessment, often leading to

deviations from objective reality while sometimes facilitating adaptive decision-making under constraints (Haselton et al., 2015, Das and Teng, 1999, Marshall et al., 2013, cited after Acciarini et al., 2021). In fact, while traditionally viewed as rational and analytical, decision-making is often "boundedly rational" (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992, cited after Acciarini et al., 2021) due to cognitive biases, heuristics[2] and other dynamics influencing information processing (Acciarini et al., 2021).

These cognitive implications feed into *paradigms* and *analogies with past experiences* (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). Paradigms refer to the shared beliefs, values, and techniques within a community (Kuhn, 1970) and different paradigms can lead to varying interpretations of events ultimately shaping managerial decision-making and problem-solving (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). The tendency to rely on past experiences and analogies, such as *pattern recognition in chess*[3]*,* can be helpful in certain circumstances but it may also hinder organizations from adapting to diverse or changing environments as it can cause managers to misapply core business knowledge in new contexts, highlighting the need for significant learning before adapting to a different DL (Prahalad & Bettis, 1986). In some cases, organizations go through the process of *condensation,* where practices are standardized and DLs solidify becoming an inflexible and strongly aligned system ultimately leading to rigidity within the organization leaving little room for innovation or adaptation in response to changing external conditions (Bettis et al., 2012).

DLs “infiltrate” organizations in a gradual process, where they are built and validated until they become a stable part of the environment, evolving into a self-reinforcing system centred on the DL itself (Bettis et al., 2012). This process begins as an invisible cognitive framework among top management, without explicit manifestations, and gradually evolves into a dominant force embedded in the company’s structures, systems, routines, and culture, ultimately guiding decision-making and aligning operations with strategic priorities over time (Bettis et al., 2012). In this way, they create a lens through which opportunities, risks, and possible actions are viewed, building a sense of familiarity and security around specific ways of thinking and acting (Bettis.et al., 2012). The development and reinforcement of DLs are shown in Figure 3 below.

[2] According to Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier (2011) the human brain makes decisions through three components: logics, statistics and heuristics. While logics and statistics represent rational reasoning, heuristics refer to simplified, often irrational decision-making strategies that help individuals make decisions quickly and with minimal effort (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011).

[3] The analogy with chess players, drawn from Prahalad & Bettis (1986), refers to players who rely on past patterns rather than optimal strategies. Studies have shown that stronger players recall more patterns from previous games, allowing them to make effective decisions based on experience. Similarly, in business, top managers often rely on past successes to navigate challenges, however, when the economic landscape shifts - just as if the rules of chess were altered - this stored ‘vocabulary’ of past experiences may become less useful, making problem-solving more difficult.

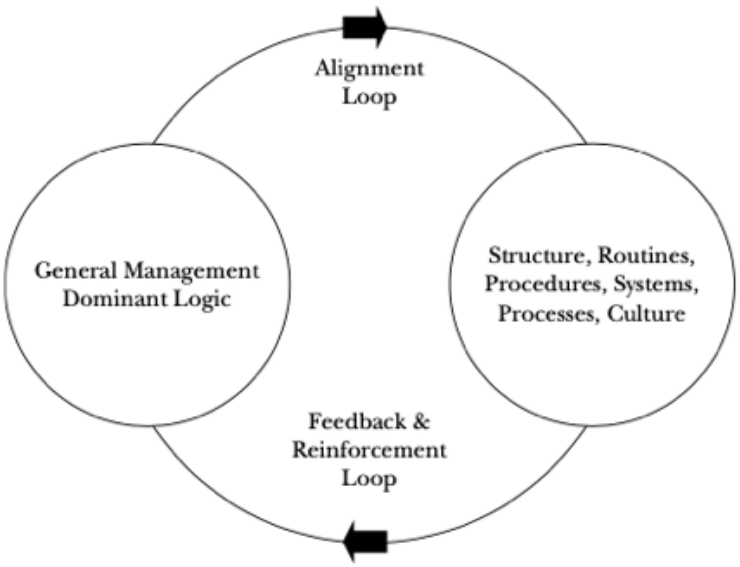

Figure 3: Generation of Dominant Logics' Loops

(Bettis et al., 2012)

Firstly, *the alignment loop* refers to how organizational structures, procedures, culture, etc. are shaped to reflect and support management's DLs, ensuring internal operations align with the leadership's mindset and strategic direction (Bettis et al., 2012). At the same time, *the feedback & reinforcement loop* describes how operations, routines, and systems provide feedback to management, reinforcing organizational practices and norms by shaping information and decisions in a way that maintains and strengthens the prevailing DLs (Bettis et al., 2012). Together, these loops create a self-reinforcing cycle that sustains and entrenches the DLs within the organization (Bettis et al., 2012). If a particular strategy or decision-making framework leads to market success, it is "reinforced", embedding itself within the organization and serving as a foundation for the emergence of a DL (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). Firms become "conditioned" to repeat successful behaviours, making it harder to adjust to changing circumstances (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). The more established the DL becomes, the more difficult it is for the organization to adapt to new environments, and the organization becomes vulnerable to a process of *fossilization*, where it becomes resistant to change and less responsive to shifts in the market or within the industry (Bettis et al., 2012). At this point it could be very risky as this can inhibit the organization's adaptability, leading to declining performance, stagnation, and obsolescence and in some cases, failure or dissolution (Bettis et al., 2012).

2.5 Competing Logics: Institutional Conformity, Contradictions and Immunity

As already mentioned, organizations maintain legitimacy and competitive advantage by adhering to prevailing ILs (Thornton, 2002), with *institutional conformity* emerging as a result (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Organizations conform to established logics to avoid sanctions, reduce uncertainty, and prevent cognitive dissonance caused by deviating from accepted practices (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Institutionalization is often driven by authoritative entities, such as professional organizations and regulatory bodies, as well as by the imitation of successful peers (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Conflicting principles across different sectors may arise, leading to tensions within organizations, especially when DLs from one sector clash with those from another (Thornton et al., 2012). These tensions underscore the presence of CLs—the coexistence of different belief systems and practices within an organizational field (Scott, 1994, cited after Reay and Hinings, 2009). While typically DILs guide the actions and decisions of field participants, new CLs can arise when alternative approaches are introduced by new actors or changing contexts (Reay and Hinings, 2009) like shifts in economic, political, or social pressures, which consequently influence changes in institutional norms and practices (Tina Dacin et al., 2002). When an organization's strategy and structure diverge from established ILs, it risks losing legitimacy and competitiveness, increasing its vulnerability (Thornton, 2002). In such cases, agents within the organization promote new logics in response to emerging market demands, regulatory changes, or internal pressures (Tina Dacin et al., 2002). For instance, healthcare in the U.S. and Canada transitioned from being dominated by professional logics to a coexistence of professional, state, and market logics, demonstrating how CLs can create contentious but balanced power dynamics (Thornton et al., 2012). In other fields like publishing and finance, shifts from professional to market logics show how CLs evolve under societal pressures, while resistance to corporate logics in universities and banking illustrates how established logics can act as boundaries against change (Thornton et al., 2012). Contextual factors, such as geography in finance or regional family and state logics in Spanish manufacturing, further shape how CLs influence organizational practices (Thornton et al., 2012). In some cases, logics blend, as seen in the arts, where market and aesthetic logics coexist, reflecting how IP and cultural values converge to shape OB (Thornton et al., 2012). These examples underscore the adaptability and contested nature of CLs as they guide and reshape societal and organizational fields (Thornton et al., 2012). However, even when a CL takes hold, previous logics often persist subtly, continuing to influence behaviour beneath the surface (Reay and Hinings, 2009).

In fact, while individuals may outwardly conform to emerging logics, they often retain practices associated with the previous ones in less visible ways (Reay and Hinings, 2009).

When *institutional contradictions* arise—when conflicting logics coexist or established norms clash with an organization's interests or values—organizations face challenges that can prompt them to reconsider their conformity (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Institutional contradictions can manifest in three primary ways. First, *multiple logics with divergent expectations* coexist, creating conflicting logics and tensions that challenge existing DLs and norms within an organization (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Second, *dissonance with organizational interests* arises when institutional expectations conflict with organizational goals, such as efficiency or adaptability, leading to friction between external demands and internal objectives (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Third, a *clash with personal values* occurs when ILs contradict an individual's core beliefs and objectives, leading to a reassessment of the legitimacy of the practices they are part of and encouraging them to explore alternative logics (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). In response to contradictions, Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) identify three "theorizations of change" that reflect different approaches to managing contradictions (cited after Lepoutre and Valente, 2012):

(1) First, *teleological change* is intentional and driven by strategic action and leadership. (2) In contrast, *cosmological change* occurs naturally over time, shaped by broader social or environmental forces rather than direct human intervention.

(3) Finally, *ontological change* hinges on aligning changes with core values, as organizations evaluate compatibility with their foundational beliefs.

In examining how organizations respond to CLs, it becomes evident that not all organizations react uniformly to contradictions arising from these logics (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Here, some organizations develop *institutional immunity*—defined as a reduced sensitivity to DLs—allowing them to deviate from established norms and adopt new practices, while others remain constrained by their historical trajectories, cultural contexts, and the pressures of conformity (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012).

Moreover, the process of framing—when organizational leaders interpret and enact their environment through cognitive processes (Fiss and Zajac, 2006, cited after Lepoutre and Valente, 2012) —plays a critical role in how contradictions are understood and addressed, influencing whether organizations cling to traditional practices or actively integrate emerging logics (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012). Overall, the interplay between symbolic and material elements shapes how organizations navigate institutional contradictions while the speed and extent of

their responses to such contradictions ultimately determine the nature and trajectory of changes in their practices and structures (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012).

2.6 Economic, Historical, and Social Context of Meat

The meat sector is a complex system encompassing animal farming, slaughtering, and distribution, ultimately leading to consumption. Industrial meat production has long been embedded in technological and economic systems, predating many industrial practices: for instance, Henry Ford reportedly modelled the automobile assembly line after meatpacking disassembly lines first developed in Cincinnati during the 19th century (Blanchette, 2018). Refrigeration methods pioneered by Chicago meatpackers in the 1890s laid the foundation for today's global cold chains, while advancements in antibiotics and nutritional sciences in the mid-20th century were crucial to developing efficient animal feeds (Blanchette, 2018). The developments in this sector reflect how capitalist systems have significantly changed and influenced human lives, from labour to diets (Blanchette, 2018). Strict hygiene protocols, animal identification, traceability, and thorough ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections (FAO, 2004) are rigorously followed to support the industry's growth and ensure a consistent consumer experience, ultimately distancing shoppers from the "dirty work" of slaughtering as they encounter neatly packaged products on store shelves.

Today, the livestock sector comprises 40% of agricultural output and has considerable political and economic influence, heavily investing in advertising and lobbying (Godfray et al., 2018). Meat has become more affordable relative to income than ever before, with consumption patterns varying globally (Godfray et al., 2018). This happened thanks to advancements in production, driving economies of scale and stimulating food industries (Pais et al., 2020). Economic development in many regions has led to increased purchasing power, which not only boosts the demand for food but also shifts the types of food consumed (Gerbens-Leenes et al., 2013). In recent decades, changing consumption patterns have driven a notable rise in demand for animal products, with per capita meat consumption increasing alongside income in wealthier nations until reaching a certain level of satisfaction, often exceeding recommended protein intake (Gerbens-Leenes et al., 2013). This shows that the rising global demand for meat is largely attributed to population growth and increased wealth, especially in emerging economies, where dietary habits are shifting to resemble those in high-income countries (HICs) (Pais et al., 2020). For HICs, which consume two to three times the world average, meat is an economic staple that supports a vast network of jobs and infrastructure (Pais et al., 2020). The agricultural and food systems (AFS) sector is a massive global employer, with an estimated

1.06 billion people working directly in AFS-related jobs (Davis et al., 2023). When including indirect roles, such as those in trade and transportation, this number rises to 1.23 billion (Davis et al., 2023). Additionally, approximately 3.83 billion people globally depend, at least partially, on livelihoods tied to AFS as the sector encompasses diverse activities including primary production, food processing, and related services (Davis et al., 2023). However, household surveys suggest that actual engagement in AFS could be 24% higher than official employment figures due to factors like seasonal work, multiple job holding, and subsistence farming, which aren't included in formal labour definitions (Davis et al., 2023). This highlights the critical role AFS play in global realities; in emerging economies, the shift to meat-based diets drives economic development, while in HICs, the industry represents a significant source of revenue (Pais et al., 2020). In 2024, the global meat market generated €1.35 trillion, led by China at $260.39 billion and the U.S. at $125.13 billion which also led the processed meat revenue at $40.7 billion, followed by Germany at $20 billion (Statista Research Department, 2024). Between 2021 and 2023, North America recorded the highest per capita meat consumption globally, with individuals consuming an average of 78.5 kilograms annually (Shahbandeh, 2024). Just to have an idea, in contrast, the average annual meat consumption in Africa during the same period was significantly lower, at approximately 9.7 kilograms per person (Shahbandeh, 2024). The extremely high meat consumption worldwide, especially in HICs, plays a key role in shaping the industry operations. As a matter of fact, in the single year of 2022 alone, the global consumption of meat reached staggering levels, with an astonishing 1.49 billion pigs and 75.2 billion chickens slaughtered worldwide (Ritchie et al., 2019). The industrialization of animal reproduction—such as artificial insemination and the export of surplus or undesirable animal parts—and post-slaughter distribution further underscores the complexity of meat production practices, reflecting the intricate and globalized networks that sustain the industry (Blanchette, 2018).

However, the meat industry is not only an economic powerhouse but also a reflection of deeply ingrained cultural narratives shaped by psychological and social influences (Godfray et al., 2018). For instance, in 2006, the U.S. Burger King launched a commercial for its beef burger, titled "Manthem" (Kramer, 2011). The ad parodied Helen Reddy's anthem "I Am Woman," with the male singer expressing a hunger for meat and dismissing healthier options as "chick food," reinforcing traditional associations between masculinity and meat consumption (Kramer, 2011). The ad culminates with the line, "I am hungry, I am incorrigible, I am man", tying meat consumption to ideals of strength, power, and dominance (Kramer, 2011). This cultural narrative surrounding meat, however, extends beyond mere marketing which is not the focus of this research but it was just a catchy example to show how meat consumption and its demand, and

therefore production and its supply, reinforce deeply embedded societal norms around certain notions—in this case, gender and strength. People often choose meat based on convenience, cultural significance, and personal beliefs, which tie into their identity (Godfray et al., 2018). Many find meat appealing for its easy access, quick preparation, and role in cultural traditions, like barbecues or holiday meals. Additionally, meat consumption is often regarded as "part of our evolution" and thus considered "natural" (Godfray et al., 2018). However, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the narrative surrounding the evolution of meat consumption is primarily shaped by societal factors rather than strictly biological ones.

The critique of reducing animals to mere commodities within capitalist frameworks highlights the substantial cultural and political work that transforms their bodies into expendable products reflecting a broader inquiry into the moral ramifications of industrial practices that facilitate meat production and distribution (Blanchette, 2018). As an institution, the meat industry reflects societal values and economic dynamics, operating within a framework shaped by both consumer demand and broader cultural narratives. Organizations and industries adapt to market trends by balancing profitability with societal expectations, driving the scale and efficiency of meat production while addressing ethical, public health, and environmental concerns, particularly those linked to industrial food animal production (IFAP) (Hernandez et al., 2022). For this research, the above-mentioned factors are considered CLs.

2.6.1 Ethics Behind Meat

Despite some regional variations, most of the world's meat and animal products come from industrial production systems, which are uniquely complex and central to capitalist systems (Blanchette, 2018). IFAP practices confine animals to overcrowded, stressful environments that severely impact their well-being, leading to both physical and psychological harm (Webster, 1994). Limited space inhibits natural behaviours, causing distress, joint deformities, and physical pain, while barren environments and lack of exercise result in boredom, frustration, and increased disease vulnerability (Hernandez et al., 2022). Additionally, procedures like tail docking in pigs, castration without pain relief, and breeding for high-production traits, such as fast-growing chickens, further exacerbate these welfare issues (Webster, 1994; Hernandez et al., 2022). Furthermore, poor handling during transport and slaughter further intensifies the suffering of animals, as they endure unnecessary stress and harm during these processes (Webster, 1994). Intensive farming practices dominate, with over half of Europe’s hens confined to cages and many animals slaughtered after living only 2 to 20% of their expected natural lifespan (Bonnet et al., 2020). Although slaughter methods are carefully regulated to “minimize” animal

suffering (FAO, 2004), these processes raise important ethical concerns making animal welfare central to the growing debates surrounding the sector. To address these concerns, the meat industry employs various strategies: embracing plant-based (PLB) trends by offering meatless alternatives, using labels like "free-range" and "sustainable", rebranding meat as a luxury product through aesthetic marketing, and investing in advertising techniques that disconnect meat from live animals to minimize consumer discomfort (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2022). Conversely, meat opponents emphasize the suffering and sentience of animals (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2022), raising ethical concerns about food choices.

In this context, veganism is expanding, particularly among younger, urban, and affluent populations, driving the growth of plant-based foods (PBFs) sales in Western markets, prompting major food corporations to integrate PLB alternatives into mainstream markets and increase global accessibility (Sexton et al., 2022). The market for PLB products has expanded in recent years making ethical considerations the primary motivation for those transitioning to plant-based diets (PBDs) (Wunsch, 2024). In this regard, a 2023 global survey of Veganuary[4] participants found that 44% were motivated by animal welfare concerns, with 21% citing health reasons and 19% environmental considerations (Wunsch, 2024). In 2024, the global PBF market was valued at $24.6 billion, with PLB meat at $10.2 billion and milk substitutes at $23.2 billion, led by China and the U.S. (Wunsch, 2024). The trend is expected to continue, with the meat substitutes market forecast to grow by 33.46% and reach 877.03 thousand tons by 2029, extending a decade-long upward trajectory (Wunsch, 2024).

An interesting aspect to consider is not only the ethical concerns of consumers but also the concerns raised by individuals within the meat production value chain itself which will be part of the empirical section further down. Ethnographic studies reveal that slaughterhouses are not just economic sites but spaces that manage societal attitudes toward death by framing killing and violence as a factory process (Blanchette, 2018). Specifically, veterinarians, who play a crucial role in the management of IFAP systems, are stuck in a growing awareness (Hernandez et al., 2022). Their views on IFAP vary, with some advocating for responsible farming practices as they experience moral distress and navigate the ethical complexities of these systems, while others adopt more pragmatic or intuitive approaches (Hernandez et al., 2022). Ethical frameworks for reform in IFAP are also evolving; traditionally, a utilitarian approach has dominated, prioritizing human needs over animal welfare, however, alternative ethical frameworks—such

[4]According to Statista (2024), the Veganuary campaign encourages individuals to adopt a vegan diet for the entire month of January. This initiative aims to promote plant-based eating while raising awareness about the environmental and ethical implications of animal agriculture.

as virtue ethics—are gaining prominence, emphasising responsibility and attentiveness toward both animals and the environment (Hernandez et al., 2022).

2.6.2 Health Implications of Meat Consumption

Overcrowded conditions in the above-presented systems facilitate the spread of diseases among animals, which, compounded by the routine use of antibiotics, increases the potential for antimicrobial resistance (Hernandez et al., 2022). The impact of IFAP extends beyond animal welfare, posing risks to public health as well (Hernandez et al., 2022) and complicating the discussions surrounding meat consumption versus alternative diets. Growing vegan movements emphasize that PBDs can provide complete nutrition and promote overall health, offering numerous benefits. As a matter of fact, various recent studies show that well-planned PBDs, rich in PBFs and low in salt, saturated fats, and sugars, can reduce the risk of premature death and noncommunicable diseases (WHO, 2021) in addition to reduced risks of heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and obesity (Koutentakis et al., 2023). Also, emerging research shows that these diets can be nutritionally complete and beneficial for all life stages (Jakše, 2023). However, further research is needed as the field and knowledge evolve. Conversely, a growing body of research consistently links high consumption of red and processed meats to chronic diseases and increased mortality rates (Godfray et al., 2018). High saturated fat content in meat can raise low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, while high salt levels may elevate blood pressure, and the production of trimethylamine N-oxide from L-carnitine in meat could lead to additional health risks (Godfray et al., 2018). In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified processed meat as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1), linking it primarily to colorectal cancer and increased risk of stomach cancer (Bouvard et al., 2015). Meanwhile, red meat was classified as probably carcinogenic (Group 2A), with observed links to colorectal, pancreatic, and prostate cancers (Bouvard et al., 2015). Epidemiological studies show a dose-response relationship, with colorectal cancer risk increasing by 17% per 100 grams of red meat and by 18% per 50 grams of processed meat consumed daily (Bouvard et al., 2015). In this regard, the IARC estimates that high processed meat intake is associated with approximately 34,000 cancer-related deaths globally each year (Godfray et al., 2018). Growing awareness of the issues surrounding high meat consumption is driving more people to switch to alternative diets or reduce their meat intake, as evidenced by the rising number of flexitarians[5] which reached 44.8 million in 2023 and is projected to grow to 44.97 million by 2033 (Wunsch, 2023).

[5] The Oxford English Dictionary defines a flexitarian as "a person who follows a primarily but not strictly vegetarian diet" (https://www.oed.com/dictionary/flexitarian_n?tl=true).

2.6.3 Environmental Sustainability and Meat Production

Environmental sustainability remains the most significant factor in meat production.

Agriculture is the largest global land user, occupying half of the world's habitable land surpassing forests and grasslands while utilizing 70% of freshwater withdrawals and causing 78% of global ocean and freshwater eutrophication (Ritchie et al., 2022). Livestock occupies 80% of agricultural land, including both grazing areas and cropland for animal feed (Ritchie and Roser, 2019). Notably, crops for human food use only 16% of agricultural land with the remaining 4% dedicated to non-food crops for biofuels and textiles (Ritchie and Roser, 2019). This extensive land use, most of which supports livestock and animal feed, contributes to deforestation, land degradation through overgrazing, and biodiversity loss caused by habitat destruction and pollution (Bonnet et al., 2020).

Livestock biomass accounts for 94% of non-human mammal biomass, exceeding wild mammals by a 15:1 ratio (Ritchie et al., 2022). This highlights the impact of human agriculture on ecosystems, with domesticated animals vastly outnumbering their wild counterparts; for instance, poultry constitutes 71% of global bird biomass, outnumbering wild birds more than threefold, underscoring the immense resources and land allocated to animal agriculture. Although livestock occupies most agricultural land, it supplies only 17% of global calories and 38% of protein through meat, dairy, and farmed fish and the remaining percentages come from PBFs suggesting that the sector is resource-intensive but yields lower returns in terms of energy provided to the global population (Ritchie and Roser, 2019).

Globally, food production alone contributes to over a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGEs) with livestock and fisheries contributing to 31% of food-related emissions, with ruminant livestock, particularly cattle producing methane during digestion, and manure and pasture management adding to this total (Ritchie, 2019). Crop production, including both human food and animal feed, contributes about 27% of food emissions while land use accounts for 24%, with livestock-related land use (16%) generating twice the emissions of land used for crops for human consumption (8%) (Ritchie, 2019). Finally, supply chains, which encompass food processing, transportation, packaging, and retail, contribute another 18% to food emissions (Ritchie, 2019). Though transport emissions make up only about 6% of global food-related emissions, supply chain activities play a critical role in generating emissions associated with food waste; in fact, about 3.3 billion tonnes of CO_2 is tied to food waste from supply chain losses or consumer disposal (Ritchie, 2019). The meat sector’s significant carbon footprint is one of its most pressing environmental impacts, with high consumption of both electricity and thermal energy amplifying this effect (Iten et al., 2021). Refrigeration systems, vital for meat

safety, represent a significant portion of the industry's electricity usage, and fuel combustion for heat production further exacerbates environmental strain (Iten et al., 2021). Additionally, the industry's reliance on non-renewable energy sources heightens its environmental burden across all stages of meat production and processing (Iten et al., 2021).

Also, livestock production, especially cattle, is a leading driver of global tropical deforestation, contributing to 41% of tropical forest loss, equivalent to 2.1 million hectares annually with Brazil alone accounting for 24% (Ritchie, 2021). Alongside oilseed crops like soy and palm oil, which together account for 18% of deforestation, agricultural activities contribute to nearly 60% of global deforestation (Ritchie, 2021). Notably, most soy production is used as livestock feed, with only 6% consumed directly by humans (Ritchie, 2021).

Additionally, water usage is another major issue. Globally, animal production accounts for nearly one-third of agriculture's total water footprint (WF), a proportion that is expected to grow (Gerbens-Leenes, 2013). The largest contributor to this WF is animal feed, which constitutes 98% of the total, while water used for drinking, service, and feed mixing make up only a small fraction—1.1%, 0.8%, and 0.03%, respectively (Mekonnen and Hoekstra, 2012). Beef has the highest WF, while poultry and pork, though lower, can have more pollutive impacts based on production methods and location (Gerbens-Leenes, 2013). The production of one kilogram of beef requires over 15,000 litres of water, accounting for green, blue, and grey WFs[6] (Mekonnen and Hoekstra, 2012). This figure starkly contrasts with the significantly lower water requirements of plant proteins, such as pulses, which necessitate four times less water (Mekonnen and Hoekstra, 2012). These inefficiencies underscore the environmental and economic rationale emphasizing the need for interventions to improve IFAP systems.

2.6.4 Regulatory Shifts and Interventions Transforming the Meat Industry

The need to reform IFAP systems is widely acknowledged, with animal welfare and nongovernmental organizations driving awareness and advocacy for change, though deeply rooted systems pose significant obstacles (Hernandez et al., 2022). Despite strengthened regulatory frameworks and emerging practices for global animal welfare, current international efforts—such as those by the WOAH[7]—highlight how international law still falls short in offering comprehensive protections for animals (Nollkaemper, 2023). While animal welfare values are

[6]According to Gerbens-Leenes (2013), the green WF refers to the rainwater consumed or evaporated during product production, the blue WF measures the volume of surface and groundwater consumed, and the grey WF represents the amount of freshwater required to dilute and assimilate pollutants based on water quality standards. These three types of water provide a comprehensive view of water consumption and pollution in product (i.e. meat) supply chains.

[7] World Organisation for Animal Health

globally shared, their regional implementation fragments international law, posing significant challenges for regulating meat production under global governance (Nollkaemper, 2023). Legislation in this field evolves incrementally, informed by scientific research, stakeholder input, and political will, and must balance societal expectations with practical compliance as excessively progressive laws often risk limited adoption (Hernandez, et al., 2022).

In the EU, animal welfare has been a legislative focus since the 1970s, with the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) recognizing animals as sentient (Hernandez et al., 2022). Regulations developed by the European Commission (EC) and adopted by member states provide a baseline. For example, since 2013, the EU has banned individual stalls for gestating sows, requiring group housing from day 29 of pregnancy until one week before farrowing (Hernandez et al., 2022). However, some countries, like Sweden and Norway, implement stricter measures, such as banning tail docking and requiring longer weaning periods (Hernandez et al., 2022). Similarly, major retail chains in Europe as well as in Australia, Canada, and the USA have pledged to source pork only from farms that do not use gestation crates (Hernandez et al., 2022). While laws exist to ensure animals are treated well and either given a decent life or slaughtered "humanely", the life expectancy of animals in industrial farming remains a topic of debate. For example, cows can live up to 20 years, but those in commercial farming typically live only about 25% of that time, while pigs, with a much longer natural lifespan, often live just 7% of it (Hoffman and Valencak, 2020). Overall, animal welfare remains a contentious issue, as the potential for stronger international legal protections for animals in industrial farming paradoxically depends more on the value placed on human interests affected by meat production than on animal welfare itself (Nollkaemper, 2023).

Instead, sustainability is increasingly a focus for the meat industry. In the EU, regulatory actions aim to reduce GHGEs in agriculture, especially in beef and dairy, by promoting organic farming, biodiversity, and better animal welfare (EC, 2020). The Climate Law sets a 50-55% GHGEs reduction target by 2030, with agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture playing a crucial role in achieving climate neutrality (EC, 2020). Farmers are supported through investments in renewable energy, carbon sequestration, and waste-to-energy initiatives, while sustainable practices are encouraged via alternative feeds (e.g., plant proteins, insects), reduced methane emissions, and a 50% reduction in antimicrobial use by 2030 (EC, 2020). The EU aims for 25% of agricultural land to be organic by 2030, with a focus on peatland restoration to boost carbon sequestration and biodiversity (EC, 2022). The EU Biodiversity Strategy and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support land management practices like rotational cropping and fallow land, aiming to restore 20% of land and sea by 2030 and achieve full ecosystem recovery by

2050 (EC, 2020; 2022). Eco-schemes incentivize sustainable practices, aiming for 10% of agricultural land dedicated to natural habitats and encouraging grass-based livestock systems that produce lower emissions compared to intensive farming (EC, 2020). Sustainable food processing, packaging, and transport are prioritized to reduce pollution and biodiversity loss, supporting regional food systems and shorter supply chains (EC, 2020). Investments through tailored programs and financial tools foster innovation in alternative proteins, agroecology, and soil health (EC, 2020). The EU recognizes that these measures will impact imported meat products by ensuring they meet its environmental and climate goals, potentially limiting market access to non-EU producers if they fail to meet such requirements (EC, 2020).

These stricter regulations, coupled with shifting consumer preferences, have led the EC to project a decline in meat consumption by 2035 (EC, 2023). Specifically, beef and pig meat consumption are expected to fall because of high prices, societal criticism, and stricter regulations, with CAP support unable to reverse the trend (EC, 2023). In contrast, poultry consumption may grow modestly due to pricing and health perceptions, though environmental regulations will constrain expansion (EC, 2023). This shift will push the meat industry toward lower emissions and greater sustainability, creating challenges but also long-term opportunities for producers who adapt to the evolving market landscape.

3. Empirical Part

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Objectives

Drawing from the literature, organizations are shaped by ILs that take root in both symbolic and material mechanisms, ultimately fostering habitual patterns of thought and practice reflected in the members who work in organizations. These logics gain such momentum that they become dominant, crystallizing within the organization or, in the case of significant industry isomorphism, across the entire sector. The meat industry holds tight onto strong traditional foundations which have consequently allowed the sector to experience substantial growth around certain logics and established practices, driven by a constant consumer demand. In contrast, the emergence of CLs and pressures arising from increasing awareness, stricter policies, and evolving consumer demands are driving a wave of change that could compel the industry to adapt.

The research can assume that on the one hand, *market logics* drive the industry's emphasis on profit maximization, efficiency, and scalability, while CLs—advocating for sustainable practices, animal welfare, and public health considerations—might create tensions influencing how key actors navigate decisions within the industry. Therefore, understanding how the meat industry is shaped by these forces is crucial to unpacking the ongoing transformations and challenges within the sector. The goal of this research is to provide concrete evidence to support existing literature and expand current theory by contrasting it with observed events or conflicting findings (Lepoutre and Valente, 2012).

3.1.2 Research design

To carry out this analysis, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it effectively captures the experiences, perceptions, and behaviours of participants within the industry (Tenny et al., 2017). This study employs a deductive approach, utilizing established theoretical frameworks to guide data collection and analysis in order to address the two RQs of the thesis. A semi-structured interview method was used to gather insights, offering both consistency and flexibility in data collection. An interview guideline was developed to provide structure, while also allowing the interviewer to adapt, modify, or introduce new questions based on the conversation's flow with each interviewee. This approach ensured that key topics were thoroughly explored without overlooking important points, while also giving participants the opportunity to speak freely. Table 3 below presents the interview guideline sections along with their corresponding objectives.

Interview Guideline Section	Objective of the section
Section 1: Introduction and Background	Gather introductory information about the interviewee, including their background, experience, and role within the meat industry. It aims to understand their responsibilities, daily tasks, and their position within the broader value chain, providing context for their perspectives and insights in subsequent discussions.
Section 2: Dominant Logics	Explore the dominant logics within the meat sector based on the interviewee's experience, focusing on current practices, organizational goals, and the standards that guide their work. It aims to understand how these logics emerge through training or experience, whether they have evolved over time, and how they are reinforced.
Section 3: Institutional Pressures	Explore the extent of regulative, normative, and mimetic pressures in the meat sector and assess their influence on industry practices.

Section 4: Competing Logics	Investigate conflicting logics within the meat industry, focusing on emerging challenges and tensions such as sustainability, ethics, and shifting consumer preferences. It examines how the industry is adapting to change, including regulatory initiatives and market trends, and how these conflicts are managed between traditional practices and the push for more innovative methods.
Section 5: Personal Perceptions & Employee Well-being	Understand the interviewee's personal reflections on ethical and sustainability issues in their work and the mental and emotional aspects of it. It seeks to explore any discomfort or conflicts employees may experience between their personal values and professional practices, how they manage these situations, and assess the support and training provided by organizations to help them cope with the emotional demands of the job.
Section 6: Industry Evolution & Additional Thoughts	Gather insights into the interviewee's vision for improving the industry. It aims to understand their perspective on any potential change for the future of the sector. It also provides an opportunity for the interviewee to freely share any additional thoughts or insights that could further enhance understanding of the dynamics within the meat industry.
Section 7: Additional Questions Based on Participant Type	Extra specific questions tailored to gather detailed insights based on the participant's specific role within the meat industry (asked throughout the interview)

Table 3: Overview of Interview Guideline Sections and Objectives

(own presentation)

Each section was designed to address key themes identified in the literature while ensuring alignment with the study's overarching research goals. Questions also incorporated real-world examples of non-conforming entities within the industry to allow the research to capture a diverse set of perspectives in line with current trends and industry developments, setting the stage for a comprehensive analysis.

The interview was designed to last between 30 to 40 minutes and participation was voluntary, anonymous, and offered no incentives. Participants reviewed and signed a consent form beforehand, with verbal consent also recorded for documentation. The interviews took place in Italy, where many participants were not fluent in English. To ensure they could express themselves fully and comfortably, the interviews were conducted in Italian. Each session was recorded and later transcribed. Although the transcriptions are not in English, all quotes in the Findings section (in italics) have been translated by the author, a native Italian speaker.

3.1.3 Data Collection

The interviewees selected for this study were chosen to reflect a wide range of perspectives within the meat value chain to capture unique viewpoints from multiple key areas of the industry. The group consisted of four individuals. The first interviewee, Participant A (PA), was a

veterinary inspector with 20 years of experience at a slaughterhouse in Catania, Italy. The facility served the local area, combining animals sourced from both large industrial operations and local farms, positioning itself as a medium-small scale slaughterhouse. Their position offered a closer look at animal health inspections in such a facility, providing valuable insights from someone directly involved in the early stages of meat production.

The second participant, Participant B (PB), was a logistics manager responsible for overseeing the importation of meat from Spain (Galicia) to Italy. Additionally, they had a background as a veterinarian with experience in both extensive and intensive farming. They provided a comprehensive and detailed perspective on the industry's dynamics, offering valuable insights into both farming practices and the logistics of the international meat trade. The third interviewee, Participant C (PC), was a seasoned professional in the meat processing industry, with extensive experience working in industrial slaughterhouses across the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions in northern Italy. Later, they transitioned to the supermarket sector and now manage the meat departments of 27 stores in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region for one of Italy's most prominent supermarket chains, Eurospin. With 34 years of experience across various roles and operations in the meat industry, their insights provided a detailed and comprehensive perspective on the industry's processes and practices.

The final participant, Participant D (PD), was responsible for a distribution and storage centre of animal-based food products, particularly on-bone and vacuum-packed meats, on behalf of third parties. They managed the logistics and distribution of meat across Eastern Sicily, sourcing products from large industrial producers in Italy, Germany, France, and the Netherlands for major supermarket chains in Italy[8]. They also worked with private clients, handling custom meat orders, including those from overseas. Their involvement offered a deeper understanding of the industrial processes behind the cold chain distribution system and meat supply chain management.

The diversity in professional backgrounds among the interviewees was intentional. From regulatory inspections and animal welfare to retail and consumer-facing practices, the broad range of viewpoints allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how different ILs manifest throughout the sector.

[8] Participant D mentioned Eurospar, Decò, Coop, Hard Discount, etc., as examples of large-scale retailers, which are among the largest supermarket chains in Italy.

3.1.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis followed a qualitative thematic approach, allowing for the identification and interpretation of patterns across the interview responses. The process began with the full transcription of each interview to ensure accuracy and comprehensive data retention. To structure the analysis, the sections from the interview guideline were used as categories for organizing the data. Within each category, codes were developed to capture recurring patterns and specific insights, as visible in Table 4.

Categories	Codes
Introduction	Participant Role Experience
Dominant Logics	Current Practices and Standards Emergence of Dominant Logics Reinforcement of Dominant Logics
Institutional Pressures	Regulative Pressures Normative Pressures Mimetic Pressures
Competing Logics	Emerging Challenges and Adaptation to Change Balancing Conflicting Demands
Personal Perceptions	Ethical Conflicts Sustainability Views Coping Mechanisms
Employee Well-being	Emotional Demands Company Support Mindset Requirements
Industry Evolution	Future developments Balance of Practices
Conclusion	Final Reflections and Additional thoughts

T*able 3: Qualitative approach: Categories and Codes*

(own presentation)

During the coding process, segments of the transcripts were labelled based on meaningful phrases and observations aligned with the predefined category. Emergent codes were also created as new themes arose during the analysis, ensuring that unanticipated insights were captured. By comparing responses from participants, the analysis highlighted key points of convergence and divergence, offering a comprehensive understanding of the industry's dynamics.

3.2 Findings

3.2.1 Dominant Logics in the Meat Industry

Current Practices and Norms

For a veterinary inspector (PA), the primary responsibility is to ensure hygiene standards are upheld and all procedures comply with legal state regulations. Inspections begin with the arrival of trucks and continue throughout the entire process, including ante-mortem and post-mortem controls to ensure compliance (PA). Additionally, random sampling checks for antibiotic use are performed to maintain quality and safety standards (PA).

PB, who shares a similar veterinary background to PA, offered a contrasting perspective due to the differing contexts in which they work. While Participant A operates within a small yet industrialized setup, PB works in a smaller-scale farming operation in northern Spain. Both described the slaughtering process as highly standardized, but the practices vary significantly between their settings. This distinction highlights a critical point: the scale of operations substantially influences the animal supply and related procedures. As demand grows, processes become more industrialized, while smaller-scale operations can more easily sustain alternative farming methods. Participant B elaborated on this, stating (ll. 393 – 398):

"In Galicia, they have a farming method that differs from the rest of Spain and Europe, as they practice free-range, pasture-based farming. Here, calves are not separated from their mothers at birth, as is common in industrial farming systems. Instead, they remain with their mothers in the pasture until they are weaned. These animals are born and raised alongside their mothers throughout the entire nursing period". According to them, this approach not only preserves traditional farming practices but also prioritizes animal welfare and ethical treatments, describing it as *"a significant improvement compared to intensive farming"* (PB, ll. 413 – 414). However, maintaining compliance with European regulations and safety standards remains the overarching priority once again, along with ensuring prevention measures and quality control (PB).

The situation is completely different in highly industrialized operations, such as supermarket chains. Here, daily routines are highly repetitive, from measuring the temperature of the refrigerated display cases each day to managing inventory for missing items and products nearing their expiration dates (PC). PC provided a detailed explanation of how Eurospin[9] operates, ensuring product uniformity across Italy. The meat comes from a large-scale operation with its own production chain sourcing the bulls from France, specifically of the "Limousin" breed,

[9] Eurospin is the largest Italian discount store with over 1,100 locations in Italy and Slovenia (Eurospin Website https://www.eurospin.it).

which is well-suited for slaughter (PC). The chain controls every stage, from raising and slaughtering to processing and distribution across Italy, ensuring standardized operations and products nationwide (PC). Once again, strict adherence to rules and regulations is a key priority: PC specifically highlighted the importance of HACCP protocols, which are essential in the supermarket context. Furthermore, the regulations set by the EU must be rigorously followed, not only at the retail level but also throughout the entire process, including transportation, slaughtering, and all related operations (PC).

PD also comes from a large industrial distribution background and emphasized that their routine involves carefully checking all European guidelines, such as monitoring truck unloading temperatures and cleanliness, inspecting refrigeration units, and ensuring equipment functionality. Overall, all participant emphasized task standardization and regulatory adherence as core aspects of current practices.

In identifying the key priorities of both their roles and the organizations they work for, participants raised interesting points that reflect market dynamics. When discussing the farming and sourcing of animals, PA explained how farmers manage growth cycles and select breeds to meet demand efficiently. Referring to farmers, PA stated: *"They choose breeds that reach the desired weight in less time, are suitable for slaughter, and yield a higher meat output"* (ll. 64 – 66). They described how demand is the key driving force, particularly in the small-scale facility where they used to work. For example, during periods of high consumption, such as Christmas, demand significantly increases, requiring the organization to adapt accordingly. As a result, *"farmers must be able to have as many animals as possible,"* (ll. 105-107) which often involves sourcing animals from abroad and confining them in holding pens for fattening before slaughter, to ensure a sufficient supply for planned slaughters (PA).

PC emphasized the importance of speed in supermarket realities to ensure that the meat counters are always well-stocked, however, they clarified that speed does not equate to neglecting the product or compromising its quality. In a candid moment, they acknowledged that *"the primary focus of companies is always to maximize profits"* (ll. 831 – 832, 842). In this context, PC also criticized the significant waste of meat that is produced but left unsold and ultimately discarded, calling it *"a blatant disregard for both the animals and for those in need who can't afford food* (ll. 840 – 841). They pointed out that this waste reflects a lack of concern from companies, who prioritize profits above all else.

Speed was also emphasized by PD, who highlighted the need for fast logistics to maximize product shelf life for the end customer. They also noted that while demand remains steady, it intensifies during festive periods, where volumes increase significantly, and efficiency must

remain high. Interestingly, they added that one of the main objectives is to "*minimize costs as much as possible*" (ll. 1397) while still meeting all requirements and maintaining efficient deliveries.

PB's perspective offered a contrasting view, as they come from a scenario that they described as *"completely different from large-scale distribution"* (l. 581). Their Galician meat is not sold to major retail chains but is instead supplied to selected butcher shops, and restaurants, or sold directly through a website to end consumers. The company's primary goal is growth, and as PB stated: *"We aim to raise awareness of this type of meat, especially the farming methods, without expanding into large-scale distribution, remaining a niche market with a focus on high quality and tradition"* (ll. 417 – 422). However, for a year, their meat was distributed to Metro[10], which significantly increased demand and, in turn, their production (PB). PB acknowledged that the goal of "growing" inevitably leads to their operations shifting from a small family business to a medium-small enterprise. However, they firmly believe their farming methods will remain unchanged, vowing never to adopt intensive or less ethical practices.

Emergence of DLs

To better understand the emergence of DLs, questions about training and corporate education were explored. Interestingly, the responses indicated that most knowledge is gained through practice. Both PA and PB come from a veterinary background, which involves earning a degree and completing specialized training. Beyond this formal education, PA explained that once the relevant laws are learned and the veterinary degree is obtained, the rest is acquired through hands-on experience. Similarly, PB stated: *"There is no formal training since we work directly with the farmers. Essentially, we learn from the day-to-day life and experiences of the farmers"* (ll. 437 – 439).

Likewise, PD, with 35 years of experience, highlighted that their training came primarily from their father, who used to work in the meat trade and taught them the key principles of handling meat. However, they emphasized the need for structured programs to build a more skilled workforce.

PC, with 34 years of experience, confirmed that they did not receive formal training and learned everything on the job by observing and learning from those around them. However, they noted that training opportunities have improved over time. Today, PC is directly involved in training new hires by offering HACCP courses, workplace safety training for butcher shop operations, and internships that equip culinary students with foundational skills and autonomy to work in

[10] Originally from Germany, Metro wholesale trade leader, offering a wide range of food and non-food products (Metro website at https://www.metro.it/metro-italia).

the field. They explained that this process requires completing a three-year vocational school program and acknowledged that patience is essential, as new employees often need to accept a relatively low starting wage.

When asked whether the most challenging skill to learn was operational or emotional, Participants A, B, and D identified operational tasks as the most challenging part of their work. While problem-solving was acknowledged, the primary focus remains on hands-on responsibilities, reflecting the practical and action-oriented nature of their role.

However, PC offered a different perspective, emphasizing that in their experience in a slaughterhouse, the most difficult skill was *"undoubtedly emotional"* (l. 961). They explained, "*there's no denying that the initial impact can be devastating and might even lead someone to leave the job*" (ll. 961-963) and once the emotional part is overcome, the operational skills take place (PC).

Reinforcement of DLs

Reinforcement of practices happens through daily routines, and the established procedures are essential for embedding common ways of working within each participant's organizational context. As a result, practices and daily tasks in each role segment are highly standardized and all participants described the job as largely static, with little evolution or significant changes over time. The primary changes have been related to regulations, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased the frequency and rigor of sanitary controls (PA, PB, PC).

PA, who has worked in the industry for many years, mentioned some technological advancements, such as the use of ruminal boluses to track animals instead of ear tags. However, they emphasized that *"everything has remained the same; the regulations regarding slaughtering have essentially remained unchanged"* (ll. 155 – 156).

PC added how the issue of surplus has evolved. Initially, they criticized the excessive waste generated at the supermarket level, attributing it to a significant mismatch between supply and demand. They explained that, in their view, more animals are slaughtered than necessary, particularly during high-demand periods like festive seasons. This practice, they noted, is driven not only by rampant consumerism but also by the fierce competition among supermarkets. PC elaborated, saying: *"Nowadays, we have areas where, on a 400-meter stretch of road, four supermarkets are competing against one another. Companies, fearing they might run out of products and lose customers to competitors, overstock to ensure availability. It's better to waste the surplus than risk losing a customer who might prefer a rival store"* (ll. 890 – 895). This highlights the significant increase in both demand and competition over the years. PC also mentioned that, in recent years, Eurospin has started donating surplus products to a charitable

organization. They expressed appreciation for this initiative but acknowledged that logistical challenges and product expiration dates sometimes make it difficult to follow through consistently.

PD mentioned the introduction of new, less-polluting gases for cooling refrigeration units and transport trucks, as mandated by the EU. They emphasized that striving to make the industry as less environmentally impactful as possible feels to them like a moral obligation to the population who breathes the air.

3.2.2 Institutional Forces and Pressures

Regulative Pressures

What appeared clear from the beginning is the strong emphasis on complying with legal, sanitary, and safety standards as a non-negotiable aspect of the roles of every participant with a strong focus on adhering to European regulations and ensuring proper procedures. PA described all regulations as *"indispensable"* (l. 170) emphasizing that the laws governing the entire slaughtering process—from farming to post-mortem inspections—are essential, particularly because they directly concern public health.

This sentiment was echoed by PB, who also added to the conversation the exportation laws. They noted that these regulations facilitate the exchange of products between countries within the EU, ensuring smooth operations without creating complications.

PC highlighted HACCP protocols as some of the strictest regulations, emphasizing their critical role in safeguarding customer health, worker safety, and public health. Despite being demanding, these protocols are essential to prevent sanitary infections and ensure proper animal traceability, particularly in large-scale industrial operations sourcing animals globally (PC).

PD shared the same view, repeatedly emphasizing the importance of adhering to hygiene standards, maintaining proper temperatures, and taking all necessary measures to respect regulations and safeguard public health.

Normative Pressures

This section proved to be the most challenging for participants to address. When asked whether there were any unofficial practices shared within the sector, PB acknowledged their existence but was unable to provide concrete examples.

PA stated that they did not know how to respond, while PC indirectly touched upon the question in their comments. Specifically, while criticizing the system for producing beyond actual demand and revolving around profits, they emphasized that the quality of work ultimately depends on the professionals within the sector, their dedication, and their passion—qualities they

personally hold dear after many years in the industry. They shared an example of this ethos during inspections requested by the company at specific retail locations when high levels of waste—and, consequently, reduced profitability for the company—occur. In such cases, they described being driven by an ethical and genuine human interest in understanding the reasons behind the inefficiency that generates waste. They expressed a sense of personal disappointment knowing that products are being discarded unnecessarily. This effort goes beyond the routine tasks required by the company and reflects a more informal practice motivated by their own values and the sense of responsibility they feel toward their role.

PD mentioned informal practices adopted within the facility that have become company standards. These include ensuring all deliveries are completed by a certain time to maintain product freshness and extend shelf life, maintaining trusted suppliers, using materials like steel instead of iron to prevent rust, and providing employees with five uniforms plus laundry services to ensure cleanliness, along with a requirement to wear safety shoes. Unlike formal rules, such practices are internalized into the company philosophy, reflecting an alignment with normative appropriateness.

Mimetic Pressures

What appeared clear from the responses is that mimetic influences are highly perceived within the sector. PA reflected on their experience, emphasizing the shift towards more technological methods for tracking and registering animals over time. They described how the facility they worked for was the driving force behind this innovation, which was subsequently adopted by another facility in the same city and gradually spread around the territory.

Similarly, PB noted the influence of *"leading companies"* (l. 493) that drive innovation in the sector, serving as examples for smaller businesses to adopt new techniques and improve operations.

PC described how adopting practices inspired by others in the industry is routine, calling it *"daily bread"* (l. 1085), an Italian colloquial phrase for commonplace activities. They explained that supermarkets often seek the simplest ways to boost sales, citing Eurospin's creation of its own version of "Cordon Bleu", inspired by Aia[11], a major Italian brand. Similarly, Eurospin introduced a meat cut called "Picanha," previously sold by only one supermarket chain, but added to their production line after observing significant customer interest (PC).

[11]The Veronesi Group, parent company of the Aia brand and one of the main proponents of intensive farming in the industry, was invited to participate in this research and was provided with a tailored questionnaire focused on their perceptions of the sector. However, they declined, stating that "time and internal corporate discussions are required before releasing information."

PD highlighted how the company they work for is part of a supply chain that includes major industry players, leading the way in implementing new practices to stay competitive. They mentioned how they were provided with a mechanical arm for unloading meat from trucks, a significant improvement from the previous method of manually unloading it. Their facility was one of the first in the local area to be provided with this innovation, inspired by other facilities in northern Italy where the mechanical arm was already in use.

3.2.3 The Impact of Competing Logics

Emerging Challenges and Adapting to Change

The emergence of specific challenges within the meat sector is perceived differently by participants. When asked about the main challenges the industry faces, PA cited growing competition from imported pre-cut, refrigerated meat. They framed this issue as a loss of authenticity and locality in the product, though they acknowledged its role in optimizing supply.

PD shared a similar view, noting that vacuum-packed meat sourced from abroad is replacing bone-in cuts. This shift is mainly due to the gradual disappearance of the butcher's role and the growing preference among retailers for the convenience of pre-portioned, ready-to-sell items (PD). They also highlighted the rising costs that make the distribution sector increasingly difficult, with shrinking profit margins.

In contrast, PC highlighted a declining focus on animal welfare and increased waste. They criticized intensive farming practices, noting that these methods often result in overproduction, far exceeding actual demand and terribly contributing to waste.

Meanwhile, PB emphasized sustainability as the most pressing challenge, followed by waste and animal welfare.

To further answer questions in this section, participants were presented with specific examples, drawing from the EC's initiatives highlighted in Section 2.6.4 of the literature. When asked whether these initiatives were perceived as a significant challenge that the industry would struggle to adapt to, responses varied. PA was unable to provide a definitive answer but assumed that, in general, these new regulations would not lead to significant changes in the practices or operations of the industry.

PB, despite feeling somewhat detached from larger operations due to their background in a smaller-scale environment, expressed strong confidence and optimism. They recognized the urge behind their implementation but firmly stated that those regulations would have a significant but positive impact on the entire sector, as it would be fully capable of aligning with the new standards and continue to evolve and improve.

PD appeared unfamiliar with the response, but expressed confidence as their facility operates within a supply chain managed by major companies that cannot afford a negative public image. PC's response differed, as they expressed significant concerns from an environmental perspective, particularly regarding the vast resources consumed by intensive farming practices. They stated that, in their view, the meat industry will struggle immensely to align with the new EU regulations due to its reliance on traditional methods. They pointed out that the meat industry still heavily depends on fossil fuels to heat barns, diesel-powered trucks for transportation, and the animals themselves require an enormous amount of electricity. For example, they described poultry farming, where *"chickens are raised in enormous barns with lights on 24 hours a day and antibiotic use to ensure the animals eat continuously, allowing them to grow faster"* (PC, ll. 1145 – 1148). PC also used the example of the production of "Bon Roll", a product made by a specific machine that requires a vast amount of electricity. According to them, the industry will face significant difficulty in transitioning to alternative energy sources and maintaining large-scale operations, expressing uncertainty about how well such long-standing, traditional practices could adapt to new energy demands and regulations.

To explore the tensions emerging with the rise of alternative products—PBFs—real-world examples were presented, such as the Tonazzo[12] family. Perceptions of this shift varied widely among participants. While all acknowledged the new trend and the emergence of a new type of consumer, both PA and PB asserted that meat consumption would persist, albeit in a more balanced and quality-focused manner. However, they both did not view the growth of the vegan sector as a significant challenge, nor did they foresee a reduction in meat production.

Once again, PC offered a different perspective. They described the situation as an inevitable change, stating that meat consumption is primarily rooted in tradition and habits. However, this will change over time as the preferences of younger generations lead to a shift in dietary habits, prompting production companies to adapt in order to remain profitable (PC). They explained that, instead of producing a meat burger, companies will shift to PLB alternatives, as the demand for these products will increase significantly in the coming years, with PLB burgers eventually overtaking meat burgers in consumption. Interestingly, they did not name it as a "decline" but as "evolution" (PC, l. 1201).

[12] The Tonazzo family, a well-known Italian business with 136 years of experience in the meat industry, has fully transitioned to plant-based production (Pomo, 2024). They now focus exclusively on vegan products, joining companies like Vivera (Netherlands) and NOBLE Jerky (USA) (Pomo, 2024). Even traditional meat producers, such as Rügenwalder Mühle (Germany), are adding plant-based options to their lineup (Pomo, 2024). This information was published by Pomo in an article on the 'Essere Animali' website, a non-profit organization advocating for animal rights. The news has attracted widespread attention, appearing in major Italian newspapers and TV programs.

Similarly, PD noted that meat consumption has decreased and will continue to decline due to the competitive factors mentioned earlier, the rise of alternative products, and the growing awareness of health issues. In this regard, they cited: *"nowadays when you visit a doctor for an issue, the first thing they recommend is to cut out meat"* (ll. 1674 – 1675).

While Participants A and B did not view this issue as a challenge, the perspectives of the other two participants were different, likely due to the contrast between smaller operations and large industrial enterprises.

Balancing Conflicting Demands

When asked about potential conflicts between traditional practices and the adoption of new methods in the organizations participants work for, PA saw no significant tension. Likely this is because their experience is based on a few years ago, in a context where the situation was different.

PB, however, emphasized that the whole meat industry is starting to realize that its continuous existence is based on its ability to adapt to the *"current world"* (l. 520). They noted that significant progress has been made regarding animal welfare and that even intensive farming organizations will increasingly adapt to emerging tensions—eventually mastering them—especially in Europe, where control and quality standards are much better compared to countries like the U.S. In general, they were not concerned about emerging tensions and were confident the industry would succeed in any way (PB).

PC, in contrast, extensively discussed their scepticism, pointing out how the traditionalism of current practices represents a major obstacle to change in a long-lasting and well-established sector where innovation is not easy to include.

In a less direct way, but with a similar meaning, PD discussed how maintaining traditional practices alongside new methods—such as the high costs of less-polluting gases—creates challenges for those working in the industry, indicating that adapting is difficult.

3.2.4 Personal Perceptions and Employee Well-being

Uncovering the emotional dimensions of participants' roles, extending beyond the professionalism mandated by regulations or company standards, highlighted interesting points. Here, the questions were more personal, focusing on whether the interviewees had ever faced ethical concerns or felt conflicted by certain practices, and what the right mindset is to cope with such discomfort. The responses were both insightful and thought-provoking.

PA, with a few sighs and moments of reflection, started by saying that the role of a veterinarian is constantly in conflict, as the profession involves both caring for animals and facing their

eventual death. They explained: "*From an ethical standpoint, it's not easy to care for these animals knowing they will eventually be slaughtered for public consumption. However, we understand that it is a market demand, and we ensure that the laws are followed, the animals are treated with respect, and their dignity is preserved. We manage this internal conflict with the awareness that we are performing a public service that safeguards public health"* (ll. 287 – 292). The right mindset that makes them resilient is understanding the importance of their work to people, *"but with a so-called small heart*[13] *when it comes to animals*" (PA, ll. 293 – 294).

PB appeared more distant from the question, explaining that when they first started this job, they became more sensitive to the issue. During their internship as a student, they worked in various intensive farming operations, including facilities like "Aia" for chickens, "Casa Modena[14]*"* for pigs, and others, where they witnessed the realities of intensive farming

Despite all regulations being followed, they felt that ethics were still far behind in such environments. Sighing, they mentioned that knowing animals are treated poorly doesn't sit well with them, yet emotionally, it hasn't had such a strong impact on them that it would make them stop eating meat. Instead, their mindset has shifted towards extensive farming practices—like the one where they currently work—rather than intensive ones. This shift is also reflected in their meat consumption, where they avoid large-scale distribution and prefer local butchers, knowing that the animals are raised in a certain manner (PB). Whether this is a psychological response to an emotional impact they claim not to have experienced would be interesting to analyse in future research.

Similarly, PD, finding it difficult to answer the question, admitted they had never really thought about it and had always viewed the operations as simply part of the job. They emphasized that the right mindset is recognizing the need to feed people while ensuring everything is properly controlled. Essentially, their perspective has always been highly operational.

In contrast, PC had a moment of honest reflection. When asked about their experience at the slaughterhouse, they shared: "*I worked in a slaughterhouse for about six years. Let's say the experience at the beginning was… I wouldn't say traumatic, but let's say it was impactful. Even though I come from a butchery background, slaughtering is a different world. In butchery, the animal comes in already dead, so you see it as a dead animal. When you're in the*

[13] This expression is a colloquial Italian phrase that conveys when a person feels pity, compassion, or sensitivity towards a situation to the point of "shrinking their heart". In the case of the interviewee, it suggests that the person experiences a certain emotional difficulty in confronting the harsh realities of the job. Therefore, they say, 'one makes their heart small' and continues with what needs to be done (explanation by the author, as no online dictionaries provide a definition due to its local and native usage).

[14] As Aia, Casa Modena is one of the most famous Italian brands in meat production. Casa Modena is another member of the Veronesi Group.

slaughterhouse, it's different. The psychological impact is heavy because you see the trucks arriving, unloading the animals, and you see them right there. Then, you know you have to work on an animal that's still warm, an animal that's only been dead for a few minutes, still dripping with blood and everything that comes with that. Personally, I found it difficult in the first two or three months. At one point, I even thought about quitting" (ll. 922 – 931). They discussed how it's something one either adapts to or leaves, with no emotional support or training, and that it's something one must learn to cope with on their own (PC). Reflecting on their experience, PC recalled questioning the ethical implications of slaughtering 400 animals a day, wondering, *"Will all these animals be eaten? Do we really need to kill so many? Is this necessary?"* (ll. 1212 – 1214). They also noted that, despite the animals being destined for slaughter, many workers maintain a level of respect for them, tied to professionalism and decency. However, they also shared instances of horrific behaviour by some individuals—who were immediately dismissed—such as extinguishing cigarettes on animals. This highlights the emotional toll the industry takes on workers, a fact they now focus on while training young individuals aspiring to become butchers for supermarkets. PC noted a significant lack of emotional support or training, particularly when it comes to handling animals and their parts, emphasizing that throughout their career, they have never received any such support. Motivated by this, they are now highly attuned to assessing whether trainees have the willingness and resilience to handle a supermarket job that involves constant exposure to elements like bones, blood, and fat, which they noted *"may be disturbing for sensitive individuals"* (ll. 766 – 767). Despite leaving the slaughterhouse, this conflict remains evident in their current work, as PC is now troubled by the issue of waste, as explained above. They shared how it affects them ethically to see meat being discarded unnecessarily, stating: "*Throwing away large amounts of meat that perhaps wouldn't have been wasted if it hadn't been over-ordered could have saved an animal's life"* (ll. 1228 – 1230). The motivation is often financial, as it's a well-paid job, and according to them, this is the primary reason for doing it, based on their own experience (PC). In fact, for them, economic motivation and a passion for butchery—something they learned as a child—have been key drivers, even though their ethical awareness has grown over time (PC).

3.2.5 Industry Evolution and Additional Thoughts

Industry Evolution

Although many aspects of the participants' perspectives on the industry's direction had already been indirectly addressed in previous sections, this segment allowed them to offer additional

insights. They were asked if there was one thing they would change about the entire meat sector, beyond the scope of their specific roles.

PA, viewing the issue from a veterinary perspective, concluded that there was nothing they would change, noting that significant progress had been made over the years and that high standards, compared to the past, had been achieved.

Conversely, Participants B, C, and D emphasized that excessive waste is one of the sector's primary issues and something that needs to be addressed. Both PB and PC believed that far more animals are slaughtered than the market demands and stressed the need to find a balance. PD also shared insights from their experience, criticizing the practice of discarding meat prematurely. They argued that when meat is properly stored at the correct temperatures and adequately traced, it can have a longer shelf life than what retailers typically allow.

Additional thoughts

Interestingly, when participants were invited to share any additional thoughts freely, PC offered a personal reflection on the dynamics of the industry. They remarked that: *"at the operational level, there are hardworking people, but at the top, there are bureaucrats and investors. Unfortunately, those in charge are focused solely on maximizing profits, with little interest in driving meaningful change"* (ll. 1268 – 1271). They pointed to this profit-driven mentality as the core obstacle preventing the system from evolving (PC).

PD recalled instances where trucks from other companies arrived in an unsanitary condition, the cold chain was broken, and goods were mishandled. They expressed hope that, in the future, all logistics workers will adhere to necessary protocols and that the sector will continue to lead the way with specialized workers improving industry standards. Additionally, during the interview, they also criticized the entire food production system, including the poorly regulated agricultural sector, which, according to their experience, would need much scrutiny.

Finally, PB concluded with a recommendation for everyone to visit both extensive and intensive farming operations. They emphasized the importance of understanding what the market offers and being aware of what one consumes in order to make informed and confident choices. They then shared a personal reflection: according to them, simply avoiding meat does not address broader issues, as the dairy and egg industry is much worse. They argued that these sectors receive less scrutiny because public attention is disproportionately focused on meat and its problems, often with the sole aim of *"disrupting this sector"* (PB, l. 720). Based on their experience working at "Parmigiano Reggiano" in the Emilia-Romagna region, they added: *"The dairy industry is terrible. In the dairy industry, calves are separated from their mothers as soon as they are born. They never nurse directly from a cow's udder. Instead, they are fed artificial*

milk or milk that cannot be sold, so it is used to feed the calves" (PB, ll. 714 – 717). This introduces a fascinating and critical reflection on a broader scale, encompassing the entirety of the industry, that could be explored in future research.

3.2.6 Emergent Codes

During the interviews, several recurring themes emerged spontaneously, without prompting, reflecting participants' perspectives on meat consumption and industry practices.

Cultural and Traditional Significance of Meat Consumption

Participants repeatedly highlighted the cultural and historical importance of meat in human diets, referencing its evolutionary role. PA stated: *"Humans are carnivores, even if vegans disagree (...). Meat is good and should be eaten"* (ll. 319 – 321, 324).

PB reinforced this view, arguing: *"You can't simply eliminate an entire sector—it has existed for centuries and provides jobs to many people. A world without meat is not sustainable. I believe that if everyone were vegetarian, there wouldn't be enough space and resources to feed everyone"* (ll. 548 – 553).

Similarly, PD asserted: *"I have always eaten meat and will continue to do so"* (ll. 1668 – 1669).

Scepticism Toward Plant-Based Alternatives

Participants A, B, and D rejected the idea of completely eliminating meat from their diets, expressing disapproval to *"extremisms"* (PB, l. 560). PD commented: *"I can't see a PLB product that could truly replace meat"* (ll. 1670 – 1671).

Conversely, PC acknowledged their personal attachment to eating meat as part of their routines but highlighted the shift in societal patterns that will drive a change in dietary habits.

Quality Over Quantity and Criticism of Intensive Farming

While participants defended meat consumption, they were critical of industrial farming. PA and PB, in particular, emphasized the importance of prioritizing high-quality meat over mass-produced alternatives and criticized intensive farming practices.

Similarly, PC consistently voiced concerns about intensive farming, stressing the need for more ethical and sustainable meat production methods.

4. Discussion

Empirical results generated several key insights.

Two ILs were identified and shared by all participants, to the extent that they can be considered dominant in the sector. The first is strict adherence to EU regulations, particularly sanitary and safety standards, which are essential for operational success and for maintaining legitimacy and coherence. This reflects the industry's commitment to compliance, which is seen as crucial for its functioning. The second logic is market-driven deeply embedded across all industry levels, with a clear focus on profit maximization—including cost minimization in the case of PD—and operational efficiency, as evidenced by the emphasis on speed. While this focus on efficiency and profitability may be expected in large industrial operations, as described by Participants C and D, it also shapes smaller-scale businesses. PA highlighted how high consumer demand drives practices such as importing animals and ramping up slaughter operations during peak periods. Similarly, PB, despite operating in what may seem like a more "idyllic" alternative to intensive farming, emphasized that their company's goal remains growth through expanded product distribution, even within a niche market. This highlights how market-driven forces shape businesses of all sizes reinforcing the dominance of profit and efficiency across the sector.

The emergence of DLs is evident in corporate training, which occurs through direct interaction with other industry professionals, ensuring alignment with management's DLs and coherence between leadership's mindset and the organization's internal operations while maintaining sector conformity (Bettis et al., 2012). Most of the job skills are acquired on-site, with only basic preparation for the role, as the majority of learning happens directly in the field. This approach fosters an internal transmission of knowledge, heavily reliant on the experience of seasoned workers who act as role models. While this can be seen as a form of mentoring, it also highlights a deeply ingrained traditionalism in teaching methods, which are often passed down unchanged. Such an approach could limit innovation. Notably, PC highlighted advancements in training today, suggesting a shift in approach. However, this practice might be specific to Eurospin and not representative of the entire sector.

The reinforcement of DLs is also visible in the static nature of industry practices which is evident in the minimal changes the industry has undergone over the years. Participants acknowledged that, while there have been advancements in technology and animal welfare, the only significant changes have been in regulations—particularly after COVID-19—while most practices have remained unchanged. This is particularly interesting, considering that one of the most experienced participants started working in the industry 34 years ago. In this context, the

industry's persistence in its practices is likely driven by constant demand, which is seen as a sign of success, thus "conditioning" the industry to repeat the same successful behaviours (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986). Such phenomena can hinder organizations from adapting to changing environments or addressing challenges, such as the costly gases mandated by the EU which place a significant burden on logistics facilities. While this indicates a system that meets demand, it raises questions about its ability to adapt to future changes.

Despite the interviewees representing different segments of the value chain, the industry appeared highly homogenized, indicating a significant degree of isomorphism. Such isomorphism is evident in the standardization of practices across various settings, driven by regulatory frameworks, market dynamics, and shared industry practices. Coercive isomorphism was especially prominent and applied universally, irrespective of the scale of operations. All participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of adhering to standardized procedures mandated by the EU regulations and reinforced by public expectations to ensure hygiene, quality, and public safety.

Normative homogenization was challenging to identify because each participant represented a different point in the value chain, making direct role comparisons difficult. PC, in particular, discussed Eurospin's entire supply chain, emphasizing a high level of normative isomorphism. This is evident in the organization's highly systematic, operational, and standardized workflows, which are designed to maintain efficiency across the supply chain and foster a workforce that operates uniformly nationwide. However, such practices might be specific to Eurospin and not representative of the entire sector.

Furthermore, the responses from participants revealed the significant role of both formal and informal norms within the meat industry. While many acknowledged the existence of unofficial practices, they were unable to provide concrete examples, suggesting that these practices are deeply internalized and taken-for-granted, and may not always be consciously discussed. Conversely, PC's reflection on how personal values drive actions during inspections illustrates how informal practices extend beyond the routine tasks required by the organization, reflecting a personal ethos. Similarly, PD mentioned informal practices that have become internalized as standards within the facility, demonstrating how these practices evolve into accepted norms over time. This demonstrates a deeper alignment with normative appropriateness**,** where workers actions are guided by shared understandings of what is considered "right" or "good" within the sector. Overall, this suggests that while the meat industry is influenced by external regulatory pressures, internal norms—shaped by individual values and professional experiences—

also play a critical role in guiding organizational practices allowing for some flexibility and innovation, while still adhering to broader industry standards.

The most evident factor, however, was the strong presence of mimetic pressures, particularly in the adoption of successful market models and the influence of "leading companies" that set industry standards. Whether through industrial innovations or the replication of proven products, these dynamics foster a high degree of mimetic isomorphism, making industry homogenization almost inevitable in a market where companies compete for customers and economic dominance. This raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of these practices and the potential for innovation in such a standardized environment.

The above results align with Zucker's (1987) perspective, demonstrating that the meat industry exhibits characteristics of both EAI and OAI, though it leans more toward the former. The EAI perspective is evident in the industry's response to external pressures which drive uniformity and standardization across the value chain. However, OAI is also present, as internal dynamics—like mimetic behaviour and industry norms—contribute to the adoption of certain practices within organizations. This dual influence highlights that while external pressures predominantly shape the sector's structural and operational framework, internal OBs still foster some degree of flexibility enabling limited innovation and adaptation within the established boundaries.

These findings highlight the significance of both material and symbolic factors as key influences. Material factors included standardized processes that structure industry practices, such as automated production lines, storage and distribution systems, and quality control measures. These mechanisms ensure efficiency, regulatory compliance, and product availability, reinforcing uniformity across the sector by embedding industry standards into operational routines. In contrast, symbolic carriers were visible in regulatory adherence, shared beliefs, and cultural ideologies that reinforce institutional norms. First, compliance with regulations not only meets legal requirements but also symbolizes legitimacy and commitment to public service, helping workers understand their roles and contributing to a collective belief in safeguarding public health. As Scott (2012) notes, this moral drive aligns with normative legitimacy, embedding societal expectations within industry practices and providing actors with a sense of identity. Second, the informal practices described in the responses can be seen as symbolic carriers of industry values such as professionalism, ethics, and commitment to quality. For example, animal welfare practices, as described by PB, serve as symbolic shared beliefs of ethical responsibility, emphasizing care and respect for animals. These values not only guide actions within the organization but also shape the broader industry's legitimacy and public perception. Third, the

consistent emphasis, shared by all participants, on the continued importance of meat consumption for human diets and industry sustainability undermines the presence of symbolic carriers in the shape of cultural ideologies. Despite not being prompted, participants repeatedly stressed that meat cannot be eliminated or replaced, which suggests a form of symbolic legitimization. Reaffirming the value of meat and their role in its production appears to function as a defence mechanism against external scrutiny, potentially reflecting social desirability responding[15]. Some participants even voiced personal beliefs, such as humans being carnivores or that vegetarianism could not feed the global population, even though these views are not supported by science. While these statements are not direct IP or formalized symbolic carriers, they reflect a shared professional identity shaped by the cultural and occupational context of the industry. In this sense, they function as informal symbolic carriers, blending institutionalized narratives with personal belief systems, demonstrating how professional norms influence individual attitudes and cognitive frameworks. These findings support Scott's (2012) three-pillar framework. The regulatory pillar shapes OB, with companies required to comply with EU laws, which influence workers' practices. The normative pillar further strengthens this by instilling a sense of professional responsibility, evident in the high level of professionalism among employees. Finally, the cultural-cognitive pillar helps workers find purpose in their roles, framing their work as part of a "great mission" that involves providing a product while safeguarding public health and, in the case of PD, protecting the air people breathe.

When it comes to CLs, the situation appears quite controversial. In this context, the discussion of companies that have developed institutional immunity to certain DLs was used to introduce the growing market trends around PBFs. While all participants acknowledged the emergence of this new market segment, PA and PB did not view it as a sign of declining meat consumption and did not perceive any tension within the meat industry regarding this shift. Conversely, PC and PD suggested that change is already happening and will keep occurring, driven by the rise of new food traditions and awareness, eventually transforming the entire industry and leading to a shift in production. This difference in perspectives is intriguing, as it is unclear whether it arises from participants' experience in the sector, a desire to emphasize the industry's strengths without casting it negatively, or subjective emotional reactions to sensitive topics discussed during the interviews. Additionally, Participants A and D agreed that internal competition is

[15]According to Paulhus (2017), Social Desirability Responding refers to the tendency of individuals to answer questions in a way that portrays them favourably, rather than providing honest or objective responses. In the specific case of emergent codes, this bias may have led participants to emphasize the positive aspects of their roles or the industry, even if not prompted, reflecting a desire to present themselves in a socially acceptable light.

increasing due to the introduction of pre-cut and vacuum-packed meat imported from abroad. On one hand, they argued, this shift will eliminate certain traditional roles, force some companies to exit the market, and reduce the focus on local products. On the other hand, it will improve efficiency and optimize the supply chain.

What was more evident, however, was the widespread concern about sustainability, especially in terms of waste, which emerged as a universally recognized issue in light of political shifts putting pressure on organizations. Perspectives again diverged. On one hand, long-term industry workers expressed scepticism, some more directly than others. PC observed a deeply entrenched traditionalism resistant to innovation, and a strong institutional conformity that makes any deviation from deeply rooted practices difficult, describing the sector as inevitably condensed around DLs. PD described the challenges of adopting new practices, such as using less-polluting gases, demonstrating difficulty with innovation. However, like PA, PD struggled to provide a clear response, revealing a sense of detachment from the reality they are actually part of, relying more on optimism and trust in the overall sector. The same optimism was shared by PB who believed the sector has the potential to evolve, becoming more sustainable and ethical. This divergence in responses underscores the complexity of the issue, reflecting a tension between entrenched traditionalism and optimism for innovation, leaving the discussion about the industry's capacity to adapt and the challenges of change still unresolved.

One particularly striking insight was the ethical dimension of those working in the industry. The emotional impact of industrial practices on workers appears to be profound, at times even traumatic, leaving a lasting impression. Some participants cope by consciously respecting animals, even while processing them for retail operations. Others engage with farming realities through more sustainable practices, while some rely on their professionalism, focusing solely on fulfilling their duties. In PC's case, and partially in PA's, this aligns with the conflict between personal values and professional obligations described by Lepoutre and Valente (2012). Participants are driven by personal reasons—either because the job has been passed down through generations (PA, l. 346) or for economic reasons—despite an ethical awareness that causes discomfort, which they eventually suppress. This concept also connects with the idea of "social autopilot" described by Morris et al. (2015), where workers develop coping mechanisms to handle the emotional demands of their roles while maintaining operational efficiency. PA's situation in particular relates to the literature part on the internal conflict experienced by veterinarians, as described by Hernandez. In PA's case, a utilitarian approach is adopted, yet the emotional impact is consciously hidden, driven by the coping mechanisms mentioned by Morris. Within the scope of this research, such results demonstrate how ILs are internalized and

reinforced within the industry, contributing to its overall homogeneity and pushing workers to suppress emotional responses in favour of task execution—despite the lack of training or support to manage such emotions. Some workers recognize the importance of animal welfare, sustainable practices, and reducing inefficiencies like waste, suggesting an internal push for more ethical and sustainable approaches within the industry. However, whether this signals an emerging institutional contradiction remains uncertain and requires further analysis. What is evident, though, is the strong institutional conformity among workers, shaped by the internalization of societal norms and values, as well as their social identity within both their organization and the broader sector (Morris et al., 2015). This conformity leads to automatic responses, allowing workers to detach emotionally, even if they experience such emotions to varying degrees. Nonetheless, growing social pressures, heightened industry awareness, and the rise of immune companies may drive change, encouraging workers to critically reflect on these issues.

Finally, the open-ended questions at the end of the interview, along with responses gathered throughout, revealed three key insights. First, workers acknowledged the inefficiencies in the industry, particularly in waste management, which all participants identified as a critical issue. PB and PC emphasized that supply significantly exceeds demand, highlighting a system than needs a balance. PC also critiqued competition, arguing that the rivalry between supermarkets and companies fuels excessive consumerism and profit maximization, often at the expense of broader issues like animal welfare. Additionally, concerns about regulatory adherence were raised, with PD noting instances of trucks failing to maintain proper temperatures or leaving meat exposed to the sun, thereby breaking the cold chain. Participants also highlighted ongoing animal welfare issues, such as the use of constant lighting for caged chickens (PC), which, though allowed under EU regulations, continue to be a concern. These examples suggest that regulatory compliance does not always equate to high standards of animal welfare, raising questions about the effectiveness of such regulations. Nevertheless, workers' strong awareness of these inefficiencies, coupled with their deep involvement in industry dynamics, suggests they could play a pivotal role in driving change

Second, examples provided by participants—such as the issue of less-polluting but costly gases and the reliance on machines that consume large amounts of energy for routine operations—highlight the industry's dependence on outdated methods and the challenges of implementing innovative changes. This further emphasizes the need for systemic support and targeted interventions to facilitate a smoother transition for companies.

Third, participants' responses expanded the conversation beyond the meat industry, emphasizing the complexity and interconnectivity of the entire food production system setting the stage

for future research to examine the broader food production landscape and the various ILs at play.

5. Limitations

The main limitation of this study is its temporal scope. Data collection was constrained by time, especially as the research was conducted by a single researcher. This affected various aspects, including sample size. Given the scope of a bachelor's thesis, the study was limited to 4 participants, a manageable number yet leaving room for further exploration with a larger sample that could offer a more nuanced understanding and allow for detailed comparative analysis across different contexts.

Another challenge was participant recruitment. Since participation was voluntary and had no incentives, securing a diverse range of respondents was difficult. Larger brands—like the Veronesi Group—opted out due to corporate policies or concerns about the study's nature. Also, Unconventional, a market leader in vegan alternatives in Italy, and Umnin, an emergent brand, couldn't participate due to time constraints. Perspectives from such organizations would have enriched the analysis by providing both industry-leading insights and alternative viewpoints.

6. Future Research

Although the sample size was small, the consistency of results across different members suggests that the patterns observed in this study may indicate broader trends within the industry, highlighting the potential for future studies to validate or expand upon these findings.

Also, future research could compare the meat industry with other sectors in food production to identify common patterns of ILs and potential strategies for innovation and change.

Similarly, the effectiveness of European regulations aimed at improving the sector could be examined, with a focus on their scope and potential constraints, as well as their impact on organizations that are deeply embedded in traditional practices. A balanced evaluation could explore both the progress made and the challenges these changes pose to established frameworks within the sector.

Furthermore, the challenge of accessing certain industry leaders points to an opportunity for research to address barriers to participation. Exploring why some companies are resistant to engaging in research, particularly when it concerns sustainability and ethics, could provide a more nuanced understanding of industry resistance to change.

Finally, the study suggests that more research into the mental aspects of workers' roles in industries with high emotional and moral conflicts could deepen the understanding of the mechanisms at play.

7. Conclusion

The goal of this research was to identify the DILs within the meat industry and examine whether and how CLs existed and were perceived.

Findings revealed a deeply entrenched adherence to regulatory and market-driven logics, reinforcing standardization, efficiency, and profit maximization across all levels. Meanwhile institutional isomorphisms shape industry-wide conformity, limiting innovation while ensuring legitimacy.

Yet, beneath this uniformity, contradictions emerged. While participants largely conformed to dominant industry narratives, their reflections on sustainability, ethical dilemmas, and market shifts suggest tensions within the system. CLs emerged in such discussions but their perception remains marginal and diversified among participants, as resistance to change is sustained by industry traditionalism, regulatory structures, and an internalized professional ethos. However, workers' awareness over the industry's inefficiencies suggest the potential for institutional contradictions to intensify, highlighting the industry's delicate balance between tradition and transformation.

The industry's reliance on deeply embedded norms allows for stability but raises critical questions: if the mechanisms that uphold the industry's legitimacy are also barriers to progress, does true transformation require crisis rather than reform? While the meat industry currently operates in controlled continuity, mounting external pressures—from regulatory shifts to ethical scrutiny—may eventually force a reckoning. Whether this will lead to meaningful change or a deeper entrenchment of existing practices remains uncertain, but recognising the issue is often the first step toward change—whether intentional or inevitable.

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