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**SENSEMAKING IN SMALL FARMING
STORIES: KNOWLEDGE CREATION
IN CREA GROUPS IN ARGENTINA**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Within the paradigm of practice-based knowledge, this thesis presents an in-depth study of a farming community in Argentina, the CREA (Regional Consortium of Agricultural Experimentation) Movement. CREA is a farming network consisting of 190 groups, with an average membership of 13 farmers per group. These farmers get together on a monthly basis, and with the guidance of an *asesor*, they exchange information and share experiences.

I use the notion of knowledge as something flexible and changing, which is created in the actual practice of doing things, enmeshed in the everyday life of (in this case) farmers. By approaching knowledge from this perspective I used small, ordinary events to look at the organization. The methodology followed uses stories told by interviewees as central moments of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). I analyse stories as entry points to study how members belong to these CREA groups and how these groups work. I rely on sense making in a two-fold way throughout this thesis: firstly as the theoretical framework to understand how CREA members look for meaning in their practice; and secondly by reflecting on my approach as a researcher studying such processes.

The primary data for this study was 27 in-depth interviews and ethnographically oriented observation of 26 CREA meetings. These data were complemented by archival data, which was also analysed. I observe that when the process of sensemaking is started, it is done within knowledge of the world that already exists, which sets particular boundaries to that exercise of sensemaking. Knowledge, in turn, is influenced and recreated by sensemaking. I conceptualise organizational change as the normal condition of organizing. In these circumstances, sensegiving and sensemaking stories were found to be important in handling and creating instances of stability. The analysis of dualities shows how tension can be functional and productive for the growth and development of an organization. Further, in my analysis of stories I discovered that old stories can be told in new ways and be adapted to the changing needs of its members. In this retelling, stories become effective tools for reassurance and collective identity building.

Considering the (knowing) actors in their farming setting was found crucial in that it is their context that very much shapes the characteristics of their knowledge-related experiences. This study may serve as an exemplar in developing a favourable context to surround knowledge creation practices. AACREA has shown a remarkable resilience in surviving in a country with frequent economic and political turmoil. My results show that this organization's survival throughout the years can be partly explained by the relational characteristics of the knowledge farmer members create and recreate.

To my dad, Juan

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“Theses are not finished, they are abandoned”

The elaboration of this dissertation has been the most challenging and testing experience I can account for. It took me long years of effort to accomplish. Overall, I got to value every minute I had for thinking about the topic I chose to study. I personally learned that when you choose a minuscule part of reality and look at it in depth, you feel like Socrates, when you become aware of so much more that you do not know.

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