Exploring values-oriented organisations:

a multiple case study of design cooperatives

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Master's thesis for Master of Arts (Art & Design)
Master's Programme in Creative Sustainability

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Abstract

Organisational worker-owned models, such as worker cooperatives, have been steadily gaining momentum and challenging conventional hierarchical structures. Simultaneously, socially-oriented design practices continue to emerge in response to financial crises, climate change, increasing inequality, and the rise of far-right movements. Looking into the design industry, it is possible to observe that the cooperative structure is not yet common, but it is gradually earning recognition. Moreover, there is limited discussion in the literature regarding its functioning and impact. This master's thesis aims to explore the uniqueness of the worker cooperative model in the design industry, specifically focusing on socially-oriented design cooperatives with non-profit and politically driven aims. The primary objective is to contribute to understanding this phenomenon through a three-case analysis and address the current research gap.

The research adopts a qualitative approach. Its theoretical background outlines the foundation of the study examining theory on cooperatives, socially-oriented design, and values. In the empirical phase, a multiple case study methodology was selected to examine and compare three values-oriented cooperatives practising socially-oriented design from a political standpoint: Cooperativa de Diseño (ARG), Holon (ES), and Common Knowledge (UK). For the study, data from documentary sources was organised and contrasted with data from semi-structured interviews. The initial analysis of the data applied and adapted version of Rawluk et al.'s (2018) framework for mapping values statements, followed by a qualitative cross-case comparative analysis using both coding and affinity diagramming methods. Triangulation of findings was attained through a final group interview.

The results are introduced with the preliminary visual mapping of the values statements, subsequently followed by the findings from the cross-case comparative analysis. These consist of substantial emerging themes from the analysis, touching on the suitability of the cooperative model and its implementation; the cases' socially-oriented design practices and incorporation of an activist agenda in design work; and the challenges that arise from being organisations operating within and against capitalism.

The study's results indicate that these values-oriented organisations adhere to social values both in their functioning and design practice. Furthermore, the findings suggest that applying horizontal and cooperative approaches to design organisations benefits both the workers and the practice of socially-oriented design. Ultimately, the research reinforces the idea that using the cooperative model and collaborating with social organisations and local communities empowers alternative economies and helps enable a transition towards a just economy.

Keywords cooperatives, socially-oriented design, activism, values, multiple case study

Glossary of terminology

Cooperative (co-op). The term 'cooperative' will be used in writing instead of 'co-operative', which is the common spelling used in UK English. Then, I'll use the abbreviation 'co-op' to avoid redundancies.

Holacracy. Collaborative approach to designing organisations with power distribution. It is a newer approach based on the Sociocracy model.

***Horizontalidad* / Horizontality.** Having no strict hierarchy and making decisions by discussing and reaching a consensus.

'Non-productive' tasks. In opposition to 'productive' tasks, in this context they are the vital tasks for the design cooperatives that aren't directly related to their design work. For example, communication and outreach tasks.

Social organisation. A group of people organised with social objectives. It can be e.g., a charitable organisation or a grassroots activism group.

Sociocracy. Decision-making and governance model without hierarchies for organisations, based on forming circles as working groups.

Values and valuing statements. Terms used to refer in a general way to what is valued by individuals (valuing traits, procedures, practices) and why (values as abstract ideas or principles) (Rawluk et al., 2018).

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The discourse and practice of socially-oriented design have gained momentum in challenging times throughout history (Armstrong et al., 2014). In the last decades, it has expanded to countless definitions and approaches (Parameswaran et al., 2022). Nevertheless, regardless of this growth, it is commonly acknowledged that design that benefits the market over society is predominant, because designers can't control the resources that would let them meet their agendas (Thorpe & Gamman, 2011). Issues such as these require systems transitions, in this case, in the systems influencing the design industry (Boehnert, 2019).

In the practice of socially-oriented design, examining the design industry, it becomes apparent that the cooperative model is still relatively uncommon. However, its presence is gradually gaining recognition. Through this research, I aim to explore and showcase current models of horizontally-governed design cooperatives comprising groups of people making a living out of practices aligned with their political viewpoints and values. Hence, exploring how these designers are collectively organising to take control of their agency and of the resources that let them meet their agendas. To do this, this thesis puts its focus on three cases, Cooperativa de Diseño (ARG), Holon (ES), and Common Knowledge (UK). Delving into these three cases is aimed at illustrating the different ways the design cooperatives adopted an alternative way of practising design, framed around their strongly similar activist agenda.

Anthropologist David Graeber (2013), drawing from Roland Barthes' ideological naturalisation effect (Barthes, 1972), states that value systems cause the naturalisation of arbitrary ideologies. This implies that things that could be organised completely differently are taken for granted. The organisations examined in this thesis challenge the traditional hierarchical structures in design studios by e.g. sharing ownership and thoroughly embracing collaborative approaches. Additionally, they oppose the notion that the most apparent way to work in design is market-oriented and showcase an alternative way of working; in a values-oriented way. If, by challenging current worldviews, value systems, and altering mindsets, it is possible to shift paradigms (Meadows, 1999); these cases present an alternative approach by changing the view on what is valued in design work –both within the organisation itself and in the nature of the work they undertake.

Personal relevance:

In light of Ramia Mazé's take on her positionality in her contribution to the book *Design Struggles* (2021), I also choose to recognise my own positionality as unavoidable, as by acknowledging our positionality, we defy the "God trick of supposed universality and neutrality" (p. 260). Moreover, it serves as an expression of my personal standpoint within the contemporary context of an increasingly and concerningly individualistic society.

Additionally, the process of coding data necessitates a positionality; especially when discussing values (Saldaña, 2013). Depending on the researcher's values, attitudes and beliefs, a statement can be coded differently; hence, I find it necessary to state my positionality in the study, even when aiming for complete objectivity.

As a Creative Sustainability master student, it seems significant to learn about the potential that alternative forms of organisations have in carrying out design projects with goals beyond profit-making. That is, to learn about how the model supports the agency of the designers/employees to operate according to their own values and stances; as well as how they prevail under the pressures of the market economy; and how it all connects to advancing transitions to just and sustainable futures.

This thesis project started without a previous brief, out of an interest to further explore and apply the theory introduced in the master's and connect it to a contemporary phenomenon in design through an underlying premise. Additionally, throughout the studies, there has been a shared concern about the professional opportunities that we have after completing the master's degree. Mainly, regarding the scarcity of opportunities to engage in socially-oriented design or adopt a critical perspective in design, instead of working as designers within the hierarchy of a company. Therefore, with this thesis, I want to explore and reflect on an alternative, as well as to find and bring inspiration to my Creative Sustainability peers. Starting a values-oriented design cooperative is not an easy task. However, I believe that drawing attention to instances of real-world cases can help in understanding the possibilities we have as design professionals and perhaps ease the process.

1.2. Research Objectives and Questions

The underlying argument the thesis aims to explore is that working in design cooperatives, designers have additional agency to align their design practice to their sustainability-oriented values or stance. Then, in addition, working as design cooperatives could have a significant role in boosting transitions to just and sustainable futures.

The main research objectives regarding this master's thesis are as follows:

1. To explore how designers with sustainability-oriented values and activist stances align their work practice to their values through a cooperative model and how it affects them.

2. To examine the possible strengths and weaknesses of integrating cooperative approaches and values in socially-oriented design organisations.

The research questions were informed by - and aimed to achieve - the research objectives of the thesis. The following questions were the ones guiding the study:

1. How is the worker cooperative model implemented in design-driven cooperatives, and in which ways does it promote and strengthen socially-oriented practices aiming for social change?

2. How does working as a cooperative affect values and valuing, and vice versa, in socially-oriented design practices for social change?

3. How are these design cooperatives connected to transitions to just and sustainable futures?

1.3. Structure of the thesis

This study is organised in 5 additional chapters:

Chapter 2, **Theoretical background**, outlines the context for the research and the cases studied. In it, theory is gathered and presented in subsections, elaborating on literature on the different topics within the scope of the thesis. These being Cooperativism, Socially-oriented design, Values and valuing, and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3, **Methodology and Methods**, presents the chosen methodology for the research and describes the selected methods and processes for Data Collection and Data Analysis.

Chapter 4, **Findings**, presents the conclusions that emerged from the data analysis. It starts with a visual mapping exercise, and follows with the narrated findings of a cross-case analysis, following a structure informed by the research questions.

Chapter 5, **Discussion**, is where emerging themes that may be out of the scope of the research are discussed. It also presents the main takeaways from the findings connected to the theoretical background.

Chapter 6, **Conclusion**, contains the practical implications, limitations and potential directions for future study.

Chapter 2.
Theoretical background

This chapter will present the main four theoretical sections of the thesis. Each section will delve into the relevant topic and end with a summary that connects it to the multi-case study. However, the last section, dedicated to the theoretical framework, will not be summarised as it is more concise than the others.

2.1. Cooperativism

In this first section of the theoretical background, the topic of cooperativism is outlined, starting with a subsection that defines cooperative organisations and the social and solidarity economy. Subsequently, the second section examines the model of worker cooperatives, and its impact and resilience are discussed through literature. In the third subsection, the current use of the cooperative model in the creative field is explored, especially in the field of design. Finally, a synopsis is provided to conclude the section and connect it with the research in question.

2.1.1. Cooperatives and the Social and Solidarity Economy

A cooperative is defined as a mutually owned and democratically managed organisation, through which autonomous groups of people voluntarily unite "to achieve their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations" (*International Cooperative Alliance*, n.d.). They surfaced as an alternative to for-profit enterprises and emphasise the importance of collective and member well-being (Guttmann, 2021).

The 18th century saw significant changes and conflicts brought on by industrialization in capitalist and liberal societies. The working class started to push for a moral economy based on solidarity and communal well-being in response to the liberal economy's self-interest and profit-driven nature. They protested against the exploitation and loss of social rights caused by liberal legislation. Then, in Europe, mutualism and cooperativism increasingly gained prominence through the 19th century (*Els inicis de l'economia popular*, n.d.).

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), founded in 1895, is an organisation promoting cooperative development and endorsing the cooperative movement worldwide. According to the ICA, co-ops must be founded on the values of "self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity" (*International Cooperative Alliance*, n.d.). Furthermore, their members should acknowledge "the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and care for others" (*International Cooperative Alliance*, n.d.).

There are seven cooperative principles, available in the ICA website, that function as the modus operandi for co-ops to apply the cooperative values:

Voluntary and open membership	Cooperatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.
Democratic member control	Cooperatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.
Member economic participation	Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.
Autonomy and independence	Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.
Provision of education, training, and information	Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of cooperation.
Cooperation among cooperatives	Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

Concern for their communities	Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Table 1. Cooperative principles, excerpt from the website of the International Cooperative Alliance (*Cooperative Identity, Values & Principles*, n.d.)

In addition to the aforementioned, there are five types of cooperative organisations if classified according to who owns them: consumer cooperatives, purchasing or shared services cooperatives, producer cooperatives, multi-stakeholder cooperatives and worker cooperatives (*Types of Co-Ops*, n.d.). The design cooperatives that the thesis is examining are formally categorised as the latter type –worker cooperatives– in which noticeably, the owners of the company are the workers themselves.

Cooperatives are a fundamental part of the social and solidarity economy (SSE). The SSE is an economic sector composed of entities with non-profit motives and reliant on collective action (Guttmann, 2021). It has been described as leveraging business expertise to address social issues, thus, seeking to merge values of economic efficiency with social inclusion and environmental sustainability (North, 2017). This sector is claimed to have emerged in opposition to neoliberalism (ibid.). An example of the popularity of this concept can be seen as the United Nations has publicly endorsed the SSE and it is increasingly acknowledged for pursuing the UN's 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (Guttmann, 2021).

The SSE has historically been developed and applied primarily in Francophone and Iberophone nations. Currently, there are countries or regional blocks with advanced SSE policies, such as Colombia and France, as well as countries without a dedicated policy framework. In the latter, such as the United Kingdom, the growth of the SSE has been facilitated for example by the implementation of domestic policies that specifically support social enterprises (Jenkins, 2023).

However, it is also important to note that additional organisational structures are included in the social and solidarity economy apart from cooperatives, such as community organisations, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and mutual associations (Guttmann, 2021).

2.1.2. Worker cooperatives

Worker cooperatives are considered the least recognized within the cooperative movement (Pérotin, 2014). Audebrand (2017) describes them as being essentially characterised for being worker-owned, and thus, worker-controlled and worker-benefitting. As worker-owned, they are owned by their worker-members, instead of by external investors. Then, as worker-controlled, regardless of their economic commitment or level of interest, all members have the same voting rights in the general assembly. Finally, as a worker-benefiting organisation, its primary goal is to meet the needs of its worker-members.

A brief explanation of how they work is by profiting from selling goods or services and then sharing it among the workers in an egalitarian way. Cooperatives can be corporations conducting business for-profit or not-for-profit - with the defining terms varying on the country's regulations. In general, the term 'not-for-profit' can be used to denote an organisation's social purpose as opposed to its growth or pursuit of profit accumulation. Additionally, in not-for-profits, generally, the surplus earnings of the organisation must be re-invested into the cooperative or in a social cause. Sometimes, they can be described as 'coopitalist' firms when the fundamental commitments are weakened (Cameron, 2020).

Many positive traits of worker cooperatives are discussed in the literature. As a business model, they mix their social mission and business interests in a way that they are mutually constitutive. It is this duality that gives them the chance to affect positive –if not radical– change in the sectors and regions they exist in (Audebrand, 2017). These types of businesses promote economic democracy, as well as sustainable, local employment; they are deemed to affect their communities' economies, public finances, and health, in a positive way (Pérotin, 2014). A growing body of research reveals that this model is more resilient than conventional enterprises, as profit is not their primary goal, allowing them to adapt to economic volatility; worker co-ops outperform other enterprises in terms of productivity; and lastly, compared to regular employees, worker-owners are more devoted to their workplaces (Stephens, 2014). While a considerable number of worker co-ops fail, often during their early years, the rate is not higher than that of traditional enterprises. Furthermore, once established, they are intended to last as long as traditional businesses, if not longer (Olsen, 2013).

In their theoretical study comparing worker cooperatives to profit-maximising companies, Becerra and Tomás (2017) suggest that worker cooperatives contribute to dynamism in processes of innovation and social development. They argue that for profit-maximising companies, knowledge-generation and configuring problem-solutions (amongst other traits) tend to focus on enhancing the company's role as an 'innovative agent', while cooperatives prioritise cooperation and knowledge-sharing. The authors propose that worker cooperatives could be potential centres of innovation and advocate for the development of new financing mechanisms, such as development and learning loans, and subsidies for innovation.

Worker cooperatives are considered to be an alternative organisational form existing in the periphery of the dominant capitalist value paradigm, and they offer an alternative to it in four specific ways (Leca et al., 2014, as cited in Audebrand, 2017). Firstly, they divide the earnings among their worker-members according to their labour efforts, instead of maximising profits for their shareholders. Secondly, they rely on democratic governance, in contrast to the hierarchical power structure typified by the modern corporation. Thirdly, these cooperatives put a focus on collaboration and solidarity with other cooperatives and social organisations, and aim for the sustainable development of the communities they are part of. Lastly, by reconfiguring power dynamics, they seek to release their members from conventional managerial dominance.

Considering existing literature, it appears that the main reason for the scarcity of worker co-ops has more to do with barriers to their creation rather than issues with their survival

(Olsen, 2013). This is reflected in the success factors asserted by Corcoran and Wilson (2010), in which they state that success depends on having sufficient capital accessible; having technical assistance provided in their starting stages; having a mandatory reserve; having significant structures supporting, guiding, directing and helping educate the co-ops; and being rooted in solidarity and inter-cooperation.

2.1.3. Cooperatives in the design industry

In the design field, the predominant cooperative models are producer and worker cooperatives. In the former, workers collectively work as self-employed, and use the model to increase their access to markets and have a better negotiation of prices. It is typically found to be employed in collectives of independent artists and crafts organisations. On the other hand, in worker cooperatives, as discussed in the previous section, the workers are employees of the organisation and govern its operations and strategic direction. This model is more common in firms such as design and architecture collectives or studios. (Bunders et al., 2022; *Types of Co-Ops*, n.d.)

The design worker cooperatives Design Action Collective and Partner & Partners (2021) wrote an article in Eye on Design (an editorial platform published by the not-for-profit professional association of design in the United States, AIGA), about how the cooperative model fits their design studios. In it, they state that the model is the future of the design industry, and give it credit for the resilience of their businesses through the pandemic. Frequently, traditional design businesses disclose a significant disparity between the wages of the partners of the firm and their employees. Design Action Collective and Partner & Partners (2021) affirm that this difference in wages is dissipated with the co-op model, which establishes more equitable pay for all the workers, as well as transparency. Finally, and based on their own practices, they believe that cooperative work structures have the potential to drastically alter the nature of the design industry (Design Action Collective, 2021).

In a study with a more political standpoint on design, Elzenbaumer and Franz (2018) explore a worker-owned cooperative that specialises in printing and is additionally rooted in values of eco-social change. The organisation is aligned with anarchist ideals, and it was created parallelly to what its founders valued and what they despised. Acknowledging this, they created a set of practices through which they "(re)produce, reinforce and spread what they value" (ibid, p.792). Through working collectively in a cooperatively-owned business, the members seek to align their work with their values, needs, and desires.

2.1.4. A diversity of enterprise models

"Capitalocentric" or "capitalocentrism" is a term introduced by Gibson-Graham (1996, p.35). It outlines the notion that capitalism is the dominant economy and that it rules all noncapitalist forms of economy (ibid). Acknowledging the diversity of co-existing types of enterprise aids in challenging this notion, and additionally, using the term 'alternative' to refer to other types of enterprises is stated to be counterproductive. That is because it perpetuates the notion of capitalist enterprises being the predominant type. (Cameron, 2020)

The diverse economies iceberg by J.K. Gibson-Graham and the Community Economies Collective, as shown in figure 1, started as a way to challenge the power of capitalism.

It portrays countless economic activities and practices below what is considered to be the legitimate economy (containing wage labour, commodity markets and capitalist enterprises) (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2022).

Figure 1. Diverse Economies Iceberg. Source: Community Economies Collective is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

On the other hand, economy scholars study the coexistence of various forms of enterprise that prioritise social and environmental wellbeing. Apart from the cooperative enterprise form, other newer and more recognised types of enterprise foster said prioritisation, such as social enterprises, community enterprises, and certified B corporations, outlined by Cameron (2020). Social enterprises are created to fulfil a specific social mission. One of their most characteristic traits is employing people who have difficulty finding employment. This has attracted governments and solidified these firms in the landscape of enterprises. However, this type of enterprise is not worker-owned. Instead, the owner might be a social entrepreneur or entrepreneurial organisation, for instance, an NGO. Then, community enterprises are similar to social enterprises. However, they frequently have an agenda that challenges conventional business practices, have multiple stakeholders such as investors and local organisations, and tend to be connected to local grassroots movements. Alternative or diverse economies scholars are also interested in Certified B Corporations, B-Corps or benefit corporations. These are capitalist enterprises with ethical commitments, with an aim of providing for employees, the community, the environment, as well as stockholders (Kelly, 2012). These enterprises must pass a

certification in which they are assessed regarding four ‘sections’ of workers, community, environment and governance. However, to have the B certification, the firm must only score 80 from potentially 200 points. (Cameron, 2020)

Therefore, there are many activities and models in the current economy that do not work for profit accumulation and are not widely recognised within the predominant ‘capitalocentric’ discourse. In short, choosing a certain model over another depends on the objectives and purpose of the business, as each model differs in a range of traits (e.g. in their ownership structure) even if sharing a similar purpose.

Section summary:

Cooperatives focus on personal and community development and are informed by a set of values and principles. They are managed democratically by groups of people sharing ownership in order to fulfil shared needs and aspirations. They play a significant role in the social and solidarity economy sector. This sector includes organisations with altruistic goals and a preference for collective action; using business expertise to focus on social problems.

In this thesis, the focus is on worker cooperatives, where the owners of the company are its workers rather than external investors. Additionally, these are described as being democratically managed by its members, who have an equal right to vote. As a business model, they combine their business interests and social mission in a way that they are mutually supportive. These worker-owned cooperatives are said to exist outside the dominant capitalist value paradigm and provide a different form of ownership to the mainstream one. They promote economic democracy as well as long-term local employment. The scarcity of worker co-ops is primarily due to obstacles that prevent them from being formed, such as having sufficient capital and technical assistance in their start-up phase. Scholars support its potential for innovation and insist that new financing strategies need to be created.

The worker cooperative model is not commonly found in the design industry nor is it usually discussed in literature when it is present. Cooperative design enterprises are said to allow for more transparency in wages and resilience to financially challenging times, and to be fitting to align work with values, needs, and desires.

Recognising the diversity of coexisting types of enterprise contributes to challenging the notion that capitalism is the dominant economy and that it governs all noncapitalist forms of economy. Apart from the cooperative enterprise model, there are other business models that also prioritise social and environmental well-being to profit maximisation, such as social enterprises, community enterprises, and certified B corporations.

2.2. The Practice of Socially-oriented Design

This chapter frames the practice of socially-oriented design and will be divided into three subsections. The first section will explore the link between design and capitalist and neoliberal structures. The section does not provide a historical review of the field of design - as that would be extensive and outside the scope of the thesis - but touches on critiques and discourses that have arisen in the last decades. Then, the second section will unpack the socially-oriented practice of design from a political stance; one closely related to the studied cases. It will review relevant aspects of the prominent fields of Design for Social Innovation, Design Activism and Design for Sustainability Transitions or Transition Design. This overview will help the reader understand the different approaches of the case studies of this thesis from a theoretical point of view. Finally, the last section of this chapter will discuss an additional layer of socially-oriented design: the link between economy and design. This link studies how the economy influences the type of design that is being done, and subsequently, how this affects the types of value that are reproduced through design.

2.2.1. Design linked to capitalism and neoliberalism

The connection between the expansion of design and that of neoliberalism and the capitalist economy has been criticised by a range of scholars (Boehnert, 2014, 2018; Escobar, 2016; Fry, 2009; Julier, 2000, 2017, 2019; Julier & Kimbell, 2019; Papanek, 1971; Pater, 2021; Stern & Siegelbaum, 2019). This relation has been drawn from design's material origins, e.g., Industrial Design, to its extension into new dematerialized disciplines, such as Design Thinking or UX design (Stern & Siegelbaum, 2019).

Papanek is one of the pioneers in the critical discourse on how the design profession was (and is) complicit in working for the interests of capitalism, condemning its negative impact on the environment and its role in perpetuating social issues. His critiques in his work *Design for the Real World* (1971) were directed for the most part to the field of industrial design –as that was his background- and graphic design. Papanek's viewpoint has been relevant for more than 50 years. Nowadays, these aforementioned fields are still frequently associated with for-profit capitalist practices, such as the planned obsolescence of products, the endorsement of overconsumption through advertising, and the use of unsustainable materials and wasteful means of production for higher profits at a lower cost.

Papanek's discourse influenced many scholars and designers, encouraging critical analysis of the profession. More recent work exposing the various ways design is linked with neoliberal economic systems is by Julier (2000, 2017, 2019; Julier & Kimbell, 2019). In his book *Economies of Design* (Julier, 2017), he discusses the many ways in which

neoliberalism is endorsed by design, and outlines the many ways in which both inform each other.

Julier (2019) states that for designers, success is consistently linked to the main rationale of developing unique products, spaces, and services. Hence, it is important to recognise that a prominent frame of mind in the professional sphere of design is based on competitiveness and individuality. Nevertheless, this mentality is not representative of the field, as there are two general opposing design paradigms. Thorpe and Gamman (2011) describe them as market-driven design and innovation, and socially-oriented design. The former is the one that was criticised by Papanek, and the latter, the one working for social change and generally associated with the social economy (Whiteley, 1993, as cited by Thorpe & Gamman, 2011).

The following section will define the current paradigm of socially-oriented design and the main disciplines that outline and characterise the design practice of the selected case studies of this thesis.

2.2.2. The socially–oriented design approach

Social design research and practice has been examined extensively because it is complex to frame. A notorious work that outlines social design is the Social Design Futures report, by Armstrong et al. (2014), which was commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Through the report, the authors present the notion of social design as encompassing the practices with collective and social aims for change, rather than primarily commercial or consumer-oriented ones. They claim it unfailingly involves collaborating with non-experts, cooperation with non-design fields, and grassroots action. Social design is described more as a discourse with an extended background than a field of practice. Such discourse is seen gaining momentum at economically and socially challenging times such as post-war austerity in Britain (1945-1979), the oil crisis of the 1970s and, more recently, around the 2008 financial crisis and recession (Armstrong et al., 2014).

For the last decades, socially-oriented design has expanded into a myriad of perspectives and definitions. New approaches appear, which put an emphasis on research early in the process, with the designer serving as a facilitator instead of as an expert, and understanding design as collaborative, user-centred, participatory and contextual (Escobar, 2016). Parameswaran et al. (2022) provide the following list of socially-oriented branches and takes on design: eco-design, design for sustainability, design for health, inclusive design, design for social innovation, design for service, systemic design, transition design, design for policy, decolonised design or design justice. The authors identify different levels of depth in problem-solving among these approaches. They claim that some remain at surface level while others aim to question the grounds and epistemics of our societies (Parameswaran et al., 2022).

The report by Armstrong et al. (2014) defines as the most prominent approaches:

socially responsive design, design for social innovation, and design activism. The latter ones are more generally found to be mixed with political motives. Additionally, in 2015, the transition design framework was proposed by Irwin, Tonkinwise and Kossoff, as a distinctive as well as politically-informed way of designing that can be complementary to the aforementioned design approaches (Irwin et al., 2015). All of these methods generally incorporate non-expert practitioners, ordinary individuals, and professionals from other fields (Armstrong et al., 2014; Irwin, 2015).

The following are brief descriptions of design activism, design for social innovation and transition design, as these are approaches from socially-oriented design that are aligned with the design practice of the studied politically-informed and socially-oriented design cooperatives.

Design Activism relates to the creation of objects and experiences that can be used to protest or influence political discourse. It also entails designing interventions with communities that support raising awareness of social or environmental justice (Armstrong et al., 2014).

There are many authors taking on the topic of design activism and providing a definition. Thorpe (2008) proposes four criteria based on which design can be described as activism. Firstly, it must openly frame a challenge or problem. Secondly, with respect to that problem, it makes a contested argument for change (it advocates for change). Thirdly, it works for marginalised or disadvantaged groups. Lastly, it appears to be unconventional, disturbing authoritative systems or routine practices and taking place outside the typical avenues of change.

Design activism is characterised as advocating for design's significant function in fostering social change, boosting awareness of sustainability-oriented values and beliefs, or challenging the limitations that consumerism and mass manufacturing impose on people (Markussen, 2013). However, numerous instances of design activism are not only adversarial, but generative, presenting an alternative (Thorpe, 2008).

Different scholars have used other terms when discussing the politics of design activism such as 'design as politics' (Fry, 2011), 'adversarial design' (DiSalvo, 2012) and 'agonistic participatory design' (Mouffe, 1999).

Design for Social Innovation entails working closely with participants to investigate daily activities and perspectives, in addition to developing solutions through prototyping, implementation, and evaluation (Armstrong et al., 2014).

In his book, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation*, Manzini (2015) describes this approach as not a design discipline, but rather as one of the many ways how contemporary design emerges. He claims that partaking in it requires a new culture and way of understanding the world, as well as how design may contribute to it and people's lives –instead of an array of methods and/or abilities. Manzini (2015) describes social innovations as products, services, or business strategies that address social needs as well as build connections or relationships. As an approach it

promotes positive social change, benefits society and increases its ability to take action (ibid).

It is a 'co-design' approach, this implies that designers serve as facilitators in teams of various disciplines. It questions current socio-economic and political paradigms and aims for new ones and alternative economic models (Irwin, 2015).

Differentiating approaches such as Design Activism and Design for Social Innovation is somewhat complicated because they are both involved with the political as well as the social. Additionally, they share a common aim concerning a more sustainable environmental and social future (Markussen, 2019). However, according to Markussen, Design Activism escapes the "instrumentalizing logic of governance and policy-making" (p. 42), and uses design's critical aesthetic practice to contest and unsettle existing systems of power and authority.

Transition Design: The combination of design together with sustainability transitions started around the late 1990s, initially putting the focus on ecodesign. Subsequently, there was a recognition that infrastructural and organisational adjustments are required for large-scale changes, instead of focusing exclusively on the product development level. Hence, in the late 2000s to early 2010s, design for sustainability transitions was significantly influenced by system innovations and transition theories (Gaziulusoy & Erdoğan Öztekin, 2019). It was in 2015, that scholar Terry Irwin published an article that popularised the Transition Design framework among design academics and practitioners (Gaziulusoy & Houtbeckers, 2018). Then, together with Tonkinwise and Jossoff, they developed the educational framework to foster the study and design of transitions.

According to (Irwin et al., 2015), design for sustainability transitions is an emergent discipline that seeks to integrate what are usually disconnected discourses around transitions from academic, non-profit, community sectors and the field of design. It argues for the necessity of society undergoing transitions to sustainable futures, claiming design to be crucial to these transformations. This discipline questions established paradigms, generates alternative cultural visions as drivers of social transformations through design, and contributes to positive social and environmental change (Escobar, 2016).

The Transition Design framework determines a set of interconnected and interacting domains of "knowledge, action, and self-reflection" (Irwin, 2015, p.232), which are: 1) Vision; 2) Theories of Change; 3) Mindset & Posture; 4) New Ways of Designing. Firstly, the framework proposes envisioning desirable futures that can inform the projects and decisions of the present. These visions can serve as resources against which design interventions can be evaluated and contrasted. Second, many wicked problems are rooted in conventional and out-of-date notions of change –how it emerges and how it may be catalysed and directed. Thus, the ability to shift these notions is critical for transformational societal change, since every planned or designed path of action is informed by a theory of change (whether openly recognised or not). Third, the mindsets and postures of designers deeply impact what is considered as a problem, as well as how it is framed and solved in a particular setting. Accordingly, the framework encourages designers to question how their value system interacts with the design process. Fourth, Transition Design argues that designers working for transitions should practise

ways of designing that include creating narratives and visions for the future; bringing together local communities' and organisations' grassroots efforts; and collaborating in transdisciplinary teams to develop creative, place-based solutions informed by transition visions (Irwin, 2015).

Therefore, these are approaches that aim to question the dominant consumption-oriented design paradigm while advocating for socially inclusive and optimistic future visions. However, working within the design industry, even if a designer possesses the necessary systemic expertise to handle complex challenges, they will still be affected by circumstances that will limit their change-making abilities (Boehnert, 2014). This will be explored in the following subsection, touching on the connection between economy and design.

2.2.3. Economy and design

The previously mentioned approaches, particularly design for sustainability transitions, emphasise political-economic interventions as the primary leverage point for achieving sustainability transformations (Gaziulusoy & Houtbeckers, 2018). As Boehnert (2018) asserts, theorists in both design and economics have described the convergence of economy and design as crucial as well as critically under-theorised. This is concerning because sustainable and socially-oriented design is found to be either constrained or supported by economic structures.

In the design industry, there is a discord between the notion of economic value and that of social and environmental values. Economic value is impacting the social values present in design, which has consequences for sustainability (Boehnert, 2019). Taking as an example the current increase of global warming and climate change as a consequence, ecological economics considers that today's economic concepts of value need to be decentred. That is, in order to once again establish the importance of social and environmental values (Boehnert, 2018). However, market processes govern the social and ecological realms, and it is clear that the market logic has been enormously damaging, both socially and ecologically (Boehnert, 2019).

In design theory, the terms 'economies of design' and 'design economies' are used to refer to the variety of ways in which economic factors dictate priorities, impact what can be produced, and foster specific notions in design (Boehnert, 2019). As outlined by Julier, the concept of 'design economies' can be described as the ways in which design affects economic processes, when "design is the driving force of the way a context is organised" (Julier, 2017, p. 2). These can be represented by design-led innovations or design-driven entrepreneurship. Cooperatives and alternative currencies are also instances of economic interventions that can be considered design economies (Boehnert, 2019). On the other hand, Julier discusses the notion of 'economies of design' as "the context and processes where design functions" (Julier, 2017, p. 2). In other words, as the ways economic systems can influence the practice of design. Some of these ways can be e.g. market demands or economic considerations in supply chains (Julier, 2017).

Therefore, whereas ‘economies of design’ can reveal how design is impacted by what is valued in the economy, ‘design economies’ can support a generation of alternative or diverse values through design. In the context of this thesis, the studied organisations fit within the definition of design economies by supporting different forms of values through design. Then, on the other hand, the economies of design that impact these values-oriented organisations can be e.g. the scarcity in demand for design projects in the social and solidarity economy. Thus, political and economic structures end up controlling what is created and the values that are being transmitted by the design industry. It is crucial to be aware of them and examine their influence.

Section summary:

Design has been criticised for being linked to capitalist and neoliberal structures for decades. The main two paradigms or discourses within design in this context are: as approached from a market-oriented perspective or from a socially-oriented one. This section discussed design’s recognised bonds to neoliberal and capitalist ideals and those being the reason for which a critical discourse and socially-oriented purposes to design appeared.

The design profession is said to have the power to shape and influence reality (Papanek, 1971). Hence, there are professionals that are supportive of this discourse and interested in taking part in a practice of design embracing values of social and environmental justice.

Within the main approaches to socially-oriented design, there is Design activism, Social Innovation Design and Transition Design. These are linked to the thesis’ cases by outlining their design approach. There is no set of methods that establishes the approach for any of these; what matters is their political standpoint and desired level of change.

Economic structures and priorities usually end up defining the most prominent types of design, and it is a field of study with limited research. Making room for alternative economies in the design industry can allow for other practices of design; for the social values reproduced by design to be detached from the dominance of economic value.

2.3. Values and valuing

A predominant topic in the explored literature is that of values. Values are an important aspect of cooperativism: Additionally, they are also present in the literature on socially-oriented design. Hence, they are relevant for the values-oriented organisations comprising the multi-case study within the thesis. The concept of values must be explored to form a deeper understanding to then decide what perspective on it is the most fitting for the study. For the theoretical review on the topic of values, I go through literature touching on values in general, and specifically in the fields of design and sustainability science.

This section frames the scope of the thesis on values; it outlines certain seemingly important perspectives on the topic and discusses potentially significant linkages between these and the design cooperatives.

The section will be divided into three subsections. The first subsection will explore the takes on the relationship between the term value and the term values and provide the definitions that the thesis will abide by. Then, the second subsection will outline the appearance or use of values in the field of design. Lastly, the third subsection will explore literature that links the concept of values to the fields of transformational science and sustainability transitions. Finally, the summary will gather the main takeaways and their implications for the thesis.

2.3.1. Values definitions and review of literature

The topic of values is a profoundly complex one, as it has been defined by many scholars and in many different fields of study. They play a crucial role in disciplines such as sociology, psychology and anthropology (Schwartz, 2012). There are many theoretical approaches to this term that have been and could have been considered, to define the scope of my research question concerning values. This large range of approaches can reveal the numerous ways in which the notion of value forms our understanding of the world and of our behaviours (Horcea-Milcu et al., 2019).

The anthropologist David Graeber (2013) identifies three principal interpretations of ‘value’ coming from sociology, economy and linguistics. I will focus on the first two interpretations, as they become the most relevant for my research; first, in the sociological sense, values are conceptions of what is of utmost importance in life and can’t be given a definite form (values such as e.g., equity or justice). Then, in the economic sense, value is the degree to which things are desired and are comparable (value as e.g., monetary value, or a diploma representing the value of learning). In *It is value that brings universes into being* (2013), Graeber states that the intuition that there is a hidden level where these two meanings come together has been the base of the theory of value in the anthropological field for decades.

The dominant relationship between the concept of 'value' and that of 'values', as discussed in section 2.2.3, is explored through a three-day workshop by a group of twenty key thinkers and activists (including D. Graeber). This is gathered by David Bollier in the report *Re-imagining Value* (2017). They collaboratively explore the possibility of developing a post-capitalist, commons-friendly theory of value. The report claims that while economists aim to protect and normalise the concept of value as being exclusively money-based, many want to expand this meaning so that it relates more to the experience of being human. It also describes how current forms of value outside of market capitalism are seen as irrelevant to the economy, as they are mainly ignored or regarded as personal values. Amongst these he discloses social labour, digital communities and commons, or the care economy. This perspective appears to be similar to the take on the iceberg of diverse economies of Gibson-Graham (in section 2.1.4).

Another perspective on this dominance is the term economism. It is defined as the extension of the logic of the market to the various spheres of life, or as the colonisation of values by value, as examined by Boehnert (2018). In the context of ecological economics and considering the current path of climate change, she emphasises the importance of diluting the dominant notion of value in economics. That is, in order to advocate for social and environmental values.

Within the broader definition of social values, one of the most prominent contemporary theorists is Schwartz. His take on values comes from the field of psychology. He states that there are 10 basic individual values that serve to define various cultural groups, societies, and individuals (Schwartz, 2012). Additionally, they can serve the purpose of tracking and analysing changes that occur over time, as well as providing insights into the underlying motivations behind attitudes and behaviour. The author identifies dynamic connections among different types of values. Specifically, his main theory is that there are ten motivationally distinct types of values that apply transversely across cultures. Some of them are compatible with one another, whereas others are not. Schwartz's values theory is intriguing because of his thorough categorization and the insights derived from each motivational value. However, in this study, using his approach would mean focusing on the psychological aspect of values and an individualised take on cooperative members. This would be counterproductive to the thesis' goal of examining broader community-oriented aspects.

To explore how a values-oriented organisation applies what their members value into their practices, Elzenbaumer and Franz (2018) use the term 'value-practices'. They describe 'value-practices' as a set of actions, processes and relations that are based on a value system and that also (re)produce it, adapting the definition from De Angelis (2007).

For this thesis, I find relevance in the distinction between social values and economic value that Graeber (2013) draws, as well as the notion that non-monetary forms of value are frequently ignored or regarded as personal values, rendering them irrelevant to the economy. The idea of economism in values is also deemed significant for the study. Schwartz's basic human values theory was considered as a perspective for the analysis of values in the thesis. However, it seemed to be too categorising and individualistic for my aims, which are more parallel to Elzenbaumer's study of 'value-practices'.

2.3.2. The presence and use of values in design

In design, values are discussed as being affected by the practice of design, underlying or guiding the practice, or actively used in the process of design.

As a discussion of values being affected by the practice of design, there is Meadow's (1999) framework. In the leverage points framework, she claims that in any system, the highest leverage point is that of mindsets, paradigms and values. This implies that design's ability to change or transform paradigms and mindsets is its most powerful tool for facilitating systemic change. As discussed in subsection 2.2.3, the practice of design allows for the reproduction of certain social values, although it is usually hindered by the wider economic context. These notions can indicate that the practice of design has the potential for facilitating systemic change, by reproducing certain sets of social values.

In the previously discussed practice of transition design, in section 2.2.2, values are discussed as underlying or guiding the practice. Instead of focusing on their operationality, it acknowledges the importance of values and posture from the perspective of those who are reproducing them (designers). As one of the four main sections of its framework, Irwin (2015) frames the ideal mindset and posture of transition designers. She claims it should involve self-reflection, exploring personal values, being open to change, embracing diverse perspectives, understanding interconnections, prioritising community, being humble, leading effectively, and collaborating across disciplines.

The most common way that values are used in design is by being applied as 'entities' in the design process. There are two principal well-known approaches to doing this. Firstly, there is Value Sensitive Design (VSD), an early theoretically grounded approach to applying human values for design (Friedman et al., 2013). VSD emerged from the field of information technology and uses a 'tripartite' methodology of conceptual, empirical and technical research (Stone, 2021). In a relevant project in the context of the energy transition towards renewables, Mok and Hyysalo (2018) apply the VSD framework. The main goal is to facilitate the installation of solar panel technology on the roof of a heritage building. They investigate the conflicting values in the process and find a compromise among them, to situate the solar installation in a culturally sensitive way (ibid). On the other hand, a more expansive approach called design for values (DfV) runs parallel to VSD with the same goals but without utilising the tripartite methodology. In both approaches, since values are to be actively operationalised in the design process, there is a common perennial critique, which is the aforementioned problem of the non-specific definition of 'values' (Stone, 2021).

This last take on values in design, regardless of being relevant in the field, is not relevant in the context of this thesis as values will not be operationalised but observed. However, it is meaningful to acknowledge the need to establish a definition or perspective when working with values.

2.3.3. Values in sustainability and/or transitions research

Sustainability research frequently discusses values and their function in evasive ways. As seen, values are a concept of complex definition, and this also affects the discussion in transformation-oriented sustainability science on how to use values (Horcea-Milcu et al., 2019).

In 2022, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) published an assessment report taking on the significance of diverse values in envisioning and facilitating the transition towards just and sustainable futures. The assessment is anticipated to contribute to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity (IPBES, 2022). In it, they provide a definition for 'sustainability-aligned values'. These are defined as broad values "that are found to be associated with future scenarios linked to SDGS achievement or processes or outcomes of transformative change towards just and sustainable futures" (IPBES, 2022, p.354). Then, within 'sustainability-aligned values' they define "human to human sustainability-aligned values" (Martin, Adrian et al., 2022, p. 46) as those encompassing the development and acknowledgement of values in relation to others. These are said to aim beyond individualism and material wealth and are considered crucial steps towards transformations to sustainability. The most prominent and significant focus is on care (solidarity, altruism, responsibility, trust and loyalty), unity (sense of we), equity and justice (equality, fairness, commons perspective), and democracy and participation (democratically navegating different interests, ensuring access to decision-making) (IPBES, 2022). This definition of sustainability-aligned values is important because it encompasses those values predominantly in cooperativism and in guiding socially-oriented design.

Regarding the presence of values, Horcea-Milcu et al. (2019) encourage considering the roles and interactions values have, and their importance when focusing on transformational change towards sustainability. They share four perspectives on how values are applied in transformation-oriented sustainable science, and where. Firstly, the perspective of 'surfacing implicit values' focuses on the underlying values embedded within transformational research, often unexpressed and unacknowledged. Secondly, the 'negotiating values' perspective explores the inclusion and accommodation of diverse values in participatory decision-making processes. Thirdly, the 'eliciting values' perspective examines the explicit articulation of contextual value judgments, assigning values to choices, objects, or actions in addressing specific sustainability challenges. Lastly, the 'transforming through values' perspective emphasises the role of values as intervention points for driving systemic shifts and transformative changes towards sustainability, recognizing the need for deep-rooted shifts in values. These perspectives share a correlation with the takes on values from Transition Design, DfV and VSD, and Meadows (1999), discussed in the previous section 2.3.2.

Another take on the presence of values within sustainability science and one that also becomes crucial for this thesis, is Rawluk et al.'s (2018). The authors develop a framework principally directed at making sense of what communities care about when addressing social-ecological challenges. They use the terms 'values' and 'valuing' to refer to

different approaches to values. They apply the terms as an estimation of what matters to individuals (valuing: possessions, entities, or characteristics) and the reason why they value that (values: abstract principles, ideas). Therefore, the economic definition of value is not directly included, as the focus is on understanding what individuals value, rather than quantifying the value of those preferences or priorities. Rawluk et al. (2018) found interconnections between values and valuing across different levels and provide a framework to map the theoretical conceptualisations of values and explore their interconnectedness. Their take on values is used as the theoretical framework on which a preliminary analysis of the values in the cases will be made, and further explained in section 2.4 of the theoretical background.

Section summary:

The main definitions of value are: in the sociological sense, where values are conceptions of what is of utmost importance in life; and in the economic sense, where value is the degree to which objects are desired. There is a studied correlation between both definitions, in which it seems that the economic sense tends to dominate the social one. Many economists want to normalise the concept of value as being exclusively monetary, however, others want to expand this meaning to a post-capitalist, commons-friendly theory of value (Bollier, 2017).

I aim to maintain the social values perspective on this topic but refrain from delving extensively into the theoretical aspects of values from an epistemological and ontological standpoint. In the thesis, the terms values and valuing statements, as taken from Rawluk et al. (2018), will be used to refer in a general way to what is valued by individuals (valuing traits, procedures, practices) and why (values: abstract ideas).

The use of values in the design process, as in VSD or VfD, is not relevant, as this thesis aims at exploring the values and valuing present in the organisations and not operationalizing them. On the other hand, it is valuable to see how authors within design touch on the topic of values as being present and underlying in the practice (e.g. Irwin, 2015); or discuss how designers have the potential to affect values through their work for enacting systemic change (e.g., Meadows, 1999).

The IPBES (2022) assessment reviews the significance of certain types of values for transitions and in it they highlight sustainability-aligned values that are enacted by the design cooperatives.

Horcea-Milcu et al.s (2019)'s theory on the roles values have in seeking transformational change towards sustainability. The first perspective guides the sense behind the analysis of the data, meaning that the goal is finding the implicit values in the members of the cooperatives. The fourth perspective is present in the thesis' intention of connecting these cases to their potential for transforming through values. That is by being values-oriented organisations in their practice of design and in the way they work.

2.4. Theoretical framework

Rawluk et al. (2018) present a framework focusing on the diversity of conceptualizations from the social sciences, including economic and ecological ideas while excluding philosophical viewpoints.

The framework was developed in part to assist researchers who want to explore the complexity of value concepts. The authors propose that the framework can be broadly implemented; to make sense of the broad range of value concepts, to connect them, or to understand the correspondence between them. Furthermore, they state that it can be used to select divergent value concepts from various ways of knowing that offer different viewpoints on a topic, bringing them together for qualitative integration. Nonetheless, its main objective is to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration for organisations that support environmental sustainability while taking into account what people find important (Rawluk et al., 2018).

The authors use the notions of 'values' and 'valuing' to refer not only to values as ideas and principles, but in addition to take into account *that* which is valued (Rawluk et al., 2018). Hence, a valuing statement could be: "I deeply value *having open conversations*". These types of valuing statements could be then interconnected to values by, for example, relating *having open conversations* to *transparency* and *openness* as the values behind the valuing.

As was discussed in the previous section (2.3), there is a wide array of theoretical values conceptualizations. To navigate across the framework the authors suggest a set of questions that allow moving across deeper or shallower levels of abstractness and context-dependence (in appendix A). Then, they map the theoretical concepts of value accordingly. The array of mapped theoretical concepts is shown in the following figure 2.

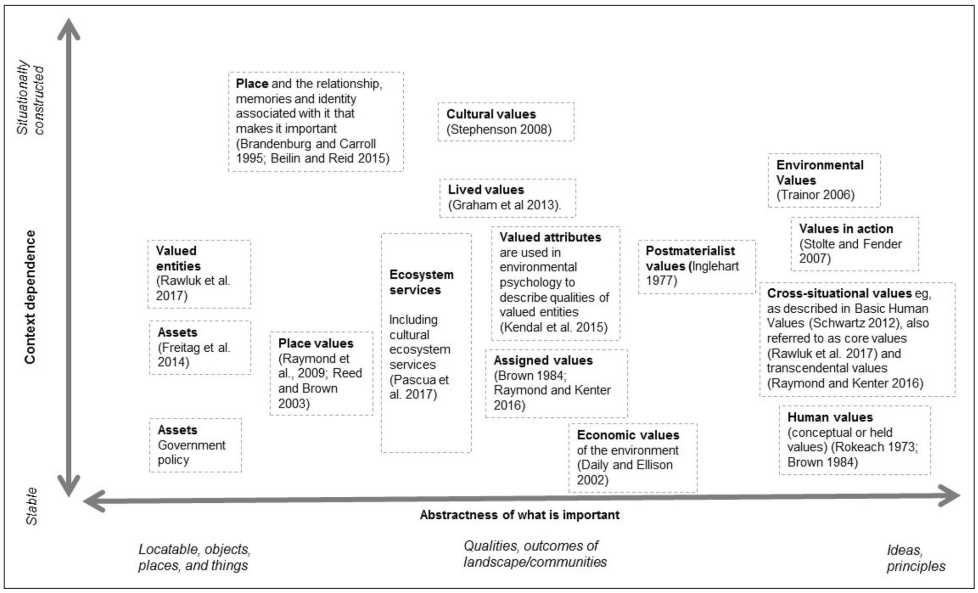


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for mapping the context dependence and abstractness of value concepts from several theoretical traditions (Rawluk et al., 2018)

The dimensions of the framework and a few concepts of value across said characteristics are as follows:

Along a spectrum that reflects **levels of abstractness**, various conceptions of value are present. At its more concrete or tangible end, 'valued assets' provide value to people and organisations in the form of goods and services. Similarly, there are 'valued entities' (important people, places, and objects), their value being spatially locatable and measurable, and principally formed through relationships. At the most abstract end, 'values' are ideas or principles for living a good life. Such as in Schwartz's typology of values (2012), concerning generally stable beliefs about desirable goals, which serve as criteria for selection or behaviour evaluation. At a mid-range level, the value concepts, such as 'valued attributes' and 'lived values', have both abstract and tangible qualities. Valued attributes encompass the valued features or properties given to an object or thing, as well as subjective sensations and emotions. Similarly, lived values comprise specific embodied manifestations of what is important. (Rawluk et al., 2018)

Value concepts appear as well along a spectrum relating to **levels of context-dependence**. In this scale, these range from values assumed to be consistent and generalisable in various situations and contexts, to values that are dynamic, constantly created, and situation- and context-dependent. To illustrate this, the authors put Schwartz's definition of values as rather invariant across time, against Stolte and Fender's notion that cultural framing changes the type of values applied to each situation. (Rawluk et al., 2018)

Addressing the various conceptualizations entails a substantial level of complexity that is not significant for this research, thus, the framework will be modified and simplified for the purpose of this study. This modification aims to utilise the mapping dimension of the framework and is detailed in the methods section of the data analysis, section 3.3.1.

Chapter 3.
Methodology and methods

This chapter presents the chosen methodology and the subsequent processes of data collection and data analysis with the selected and applied methods, justifying their choice in the context of this study. Firstly, it will present the multiple case study methodology, and explain why it is fitting for this research. Then, the data collection methods and process will be described, followed by the data analysis methods and process. Lastly, the rationale behind the selection of the cases for the study and a brief summary of each case will serve to conclude the chapter.

3.1. Multiple case study methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research approach combined with case studies. The case study methodology is used to examine contemporary real-life phenomena by conducting a thorough study of a limited set of events or circumstances and their relations (Zainal, 2007). This methodology was chosen to gain a detailed understanding of the happenings of socially-oriented design cooperatives, by conducting a study of three currently active organisations.

As one of the goals of the study was to propose a generalisation and build a more thorough understanding around a phenomenon, a ‘collective’ or ‘multiple’ case study was employed. As such, one combines two or more cases that differ in some manner from one another (Muratovski, 2016).

To complement this approach, the multiple case study was conducted through the application of various methods for data collection and data analysis.

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1. Methods

For the case study's data collection, it is recommended to have several sources of information to ensure solid research (Muratovski, 2016). Hence, various documentary sources were reviewed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Furthermore, to aid with the validity of the study, and triangulate findings, a validation interview was conducted towards the end of the data analysis process.

Documentary sources:

The collected data for the multiple case study comes from documentary evidence. On the one hand, this type of evidence includes media reports such as newspaper and magazine articles, and other reports in the media. On the other, administrative documents such as proposals, progress reports, and other internal documents. However, it should be noted that data from documentary sources are not always accurate or unbiased, and it should always be complemented with data from other sources (Muratovski, 2016). Therefore, in the current study, the additional data includes semi-structured interviews from each case.

The use of documentary information can be defined as a 'problem-oriented' data collection approach, meaning it considers a topic that has already been covered by other sources and does not claim to be a firsthand account of it (ibid).

Semi-structured interviews:

Semi-structured interviews are a method for gathering data that offers the possibility of lengthy responses, while also being constrained by their structure and scope (Muratovski, 2016). The nature of the design inquiry will influence the questions answered during interviews. As this research is intended to be exploratory in nature, the unstructured framework and flexible possibilities are appropriate (Martin & Hanington, 2012).

The interviews included predefined questions informed by the research questions of this thesis. A member from each case study was invited to a semi-structured interview to provide their additional perspective to complement the documentary evidence. Talking with one member was deemed appropriate because the documentary sources already included interviews with members.

Snowball and citation search:

This method was applied to select additional relevant literature that fits the scope of the research. In the case of snowball search it is conducted by selecting publications in the reference list of the starting article or literature, while in citation search, publications cited by the initial source are selected (Fötsch, 2023).

Validation group discussion:

Doing three case studies, and furthermore, carrying out a final interview allows for improving the veracity of this study; increasing confidence in the results or perhaps challenging the inquiry through triangulation. Methodological triangulation is the convergence of various methods on the same topic of study in order to validate information from multiple perspectives (Martin & Hanington, 2012).

In a group interview, the approach is more efficient and often results in more natural dialogue, with participants recalling or pushing one another about specifics and history (ibid).

3.2.2. Process

As mentioned in the previous section, the review of documentary sources and semi-structured interviews were the methods used to collect the data. In addition, to validate the findings from said methods, a group discussion was conducted at the end of the empirical part of the research process. In the following sections, the application of these processes will be illustrated.

Documentary sources:

The documentary sources that were reviewed within each case are varied, nonetheless, all of the cases have publicly available documents. These include their own documents regarding their internal organising in a handbook format, and writings such as articles on medium.com, or a blog section on their website. Additionally, they have been featured in books (Julier, 2017; Pater, 2021) and press documents such as interviews or podcasts.

The data collection through documentary sources employed both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include written texts as well as images, sounds, or artefacts, or, in the experimental sciences, documents that describe the experiment. On the other hand, most of the sources that academics cite in their journal articles are secondary sources, also referred to as ‘the literature’. These sources can be books, papers, and chapters written by other researchers. (Belcher, 2019)

The focus in reviewing the documentary evidence was directed at building an informed understanding of the various operational aspects and context of the cooperatives. Additionally, this data was applied for the realisation of the profiles of the individual cases, and provided information for the realisation of the semi-structured interviews.

The documentary sources consulted in relation to the cases are enclosed in the following table.

Case:	Documentation:
Cooperativa de Diseño	*Primary sources:* Cooperativa de Diseño website (publicly available) Press talks and articles disclosed in their website: Feria del centro: El diseño es cooperativo y solidario (10/12/2020) (publicly available) Barricada TV. No Pasarán: Cooperativa de Diseño (05/06/2021) (publicly available) *Secondary Sources:* Julier, G. (2017). Economies of Design. Sage Publishing. 137-138 Pater, R. (2021). CAPS LOCK. Valiz. 473-481
Holon	*Primary sources:* Holon website (publicly available) Holon's Co-op Handbook (publicly available) Holon medium channel publications (publicly available) Interview on Diseño y Diáspora (publicly available) Social Design - principles & practices to foster caring urban communities (published article, made available by cooperative member) *Secondary Sources:* N/A
Common Knowledge	*Primary sources:* Common Knowledge's website (publicly available) Common Knowledge's blog (publicly available) Common Knowledge's Handbook on GitHub (publicly available) *Secondary Sources:* Pater, R. (2021). CAPS LOCK. Valiz. 465-471

Table 2. List of documentary sources for each case study.

Semi-structured interviews:

Prior to the interviews, the cooperatives were notified about the project and asked for permission to interview one or two members. Favourably, the participation of one member was confirmed in each case, and participants provided informed consent to record the interviews. A member from each collective responded promptly to my communications and agreed to be interviewed; however, interviewing another member appeared difficult due to their full agendas. Finally, it was also discarded due to timing issues and the availability of complementary documentary sources to supplement the interview data.

The research questions of the thesis acted as the basis for developing the questions for the interviews. The interview questions were divided into three sections: 1) general characteristics of the cooperative, 2) presence and effect of values and stances, and

3) reflections on transitions. The first section focused on general questions about the cooperative's work and the second adapted prompts from Rawluk's (2018) framework (in appendix A) fitting the topic in question. Finally, the third one included two broad questions about their perspective on their visions and generating transitions. See questions in appendix B.

As advised by Muratovski (2016), the interviews' aim was to conduct them as natural conversations, in order to elicit more interesting and spontaneous responses from the participants. Additionally, leading questions were avoided, as they may imply that a specific answer is expected.

The laddering technique (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) was applied while planning the questions and while speaking to the interviewees. This method is used to understand the interviewees' underlying values in decision-making and consists of finding layers of meaning behind statements (Muratovski, 2016); asking interviewees why their valued attributes are meaningful to them. However, by applying this method there was a chance of causing discomfort by facilitating the conversation to turn overly personal, which was not the intention. Hence, it was applied sporadically throughout the conversations.

The semi-structured interview included 10 open questions in total, which was deemed appropriate due to the time constraints (lasting between 40 and 60 minutes) and the spoken format of the interviews. The conversations with Cooperativa de Diseño and Common Knowledge took place online. Nevertheless, the conversation with Holon was face-to-face in their working space.

Following the interviews, the lengthy process of transcribing the data, and in some cases translating the data from the respective languages began; from Catalan in the Holon interview, and from Spanish in the Cooperativa de Diseño. As these are both my native languages, the translation process through software was verified by comparing both sets of translated and not-translated data.

Case:	Participant/s:
Cooperativa de Diseño	Member representing the whole cooperative.
Holon	Adrià Garcia i Mateu, member, *Designer*
Common Knowledge	Gemma Copeland, member, *Design and Research*

Table 3. List of participants in the semi-structured interviews.

Final group discussion - Validation:

In order to conclude the research process, validate my findings, create a space for joint reflection, and connect the cooperatives with one another, the final stage of data collection involved a joint group discussion.

At least one representative from each cooperative took part in the online meeting; in the case of Holon, two core members attended, one had to leave early while another arrived late. The meeting, which lasted for 60 minutes, began with a check-in of the participants and brief introductions of themselves and their organisations. Then, it proceeded with a short explanation of the idea behind arranging the discussion, and continued with a few open questions based on the findings from the interviews and the documentary sources. The questions were answered in turns per cooperative, and the participants were prompted to interact and ask each other questions whenever they deemed it significant. See questions in appendix C.

Case:	Participant/s:
Cooperativa de Diseño	Member representing the whole cooperative.
Holon	Adrià Garcia i Mateu, member, *Designer* Markel Comerzana, member, *Designer*
Common Knowledge	Gemma Copeland, member, *Design and Research*

Table 4. List of participants in the group discussion.

3.3. Data analysis

3.3.1. Methods

To ensure a more solid understanding of each case, the gathered information from documentary sources was arranged into case stories. Then, the transcribed data from the interviews was analysed through an inductive thematic analysis process of coding and affinity diagramming, using mind mapping as a sense-making method throughout the processes. As an additional mapping and sense-making tool, the modified framework from Rawluk et al. was applied.

Individual case stories:

The gathered data can be organised by case and grouped into individual case stories. Using strict structures can help build a solid context for each case, particularly around its nature, its background, its environment, and additional political and institutional contextual factors, as recommended by Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam (2018).

Mind mapping:

Mind mapping is a technique for visually structuring a problem space in order to gain a better understanding of it. It offers a nonlinear method of externalising information, allowing it to consolidate, analyse, convey, store, and retrieve data (Martin & Hanington, 2012). During the data analysis process it was used as a method for analysis and sense-making.

This method allows for the identification of the overarching theme of the map, relationships between the components, and the relative value of the information that is displayed, all at the same time (ibid).

Coding:

Coding the data was a fitting approach to analyse the transcripts of the interviews. The *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldaña, 2013) was used to inform the process. Saldaña's guide is thoroughly instructive and advises specific approaches for beginner qualitative researchers, therefore it was deemed appropriate. Subsequently, the coding process was executed using Saldaña's (2013) manual and ATLAS.ti as the software to analyse the qualitative data.

Coding is applied to categorise, and in this case, it entails categorising qualitative data from interviews by assigning codes to statements. A code is a word or sentence used to ascribe an interpretation to a fragment of data that will allow the researcher to conduct processes of analysis through e.g., pattern detection and categorisation (Saldaña, 2013).

The coding analysis was carried out in two iterations of coding. Firstly, through open coding, letting themes emerge from the data. Then, a similar approach of eclectic coding which mixes two or more coding techniques, and is suggested for beginning qualitative researchers in the manual.

Affinity Diagramming:

By way of affinity diagramming, observations and insights collected from the literature research and the interviews are clustered. This procedure eases the search for underlying commonalities and links in the data as well as unidentified emerging themes (Martin & Hanington, 2012).

In this research, affinity diagramming is used for Contextual Inquiry, which produces an emerging narrative about people, their tasks, and the nature of their problems. This approach is realised by initially recording observations or quotes into notes, and then conducting a process of clustering regarding a shared similar intent, problem, or issue. This process is used for inductive thematic analysis, which as an inductive exercise, implies that rather than categorising notes, the task is done by initially arranging specific facts or quotes into groups, which then give rise to general and overarching themes (ibid).

Multiple dimensions of values and valuing framework:

As presented in section 2.4, Rawluk et al. (2018) develop their framework to map value and valuing concepts and to showcase the different constructions of values according to their context dependence and level of abstractness.

To use the framework in the context of this analysis, I modified it as well as simplified it regarding its typology of value concepts. Thus, the revisions sought to extend it for its application as somewhat of a design tool; to be utilised as an intuitive mapping guide for the various types of value statements collected. That is, not using it for its ontological and epistemological lens on value concepts, which isn't relevant for the required purpose of its application.

With that in mind, the framework is combined with the iceberg model. The iceberg model (Figure 3) is a systems thinking tool that illustrates the various layers that make up a system and how they interact. The tool distinguishes between the system's noticeable 'tip of the iceberg' manifestations and the 'below the surface' less visible patterns, drives, and paradigms that give rise to the perceivable events (Betley et al., 2021). These traits of the model aid in making a parallel between the deeper levels of abstraction from Rawluk et al. 's framework and the deeper levels of structures and mental models 'below the surface' of a system.

As seen in Figure 4, Rawluk et al. 's value mapping framework has two axes, the horizontal refers to 'levels of abstractness' and the vertical to 'context dependence'. To show the superficial and underlying structures as with the systems thinking iceberg, the altered value and valuing framework is flipped 90 degrees (Figure 5). This flip, even though it might resonate with representations of hierarchies, is meant to showcase the levels of abstractness as in the original framework. Therefore, not aiming to disclose hierarchical characteristics in the system.

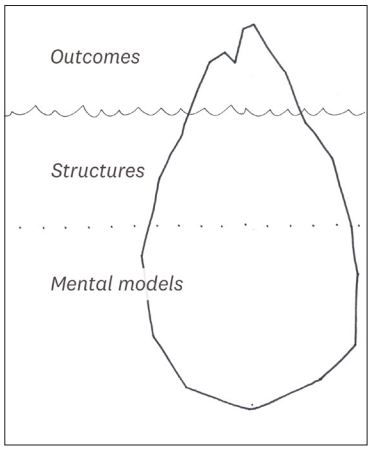


Figure 3. Systems thinking, elementary Iceberg Model version (Lycia, 2018)

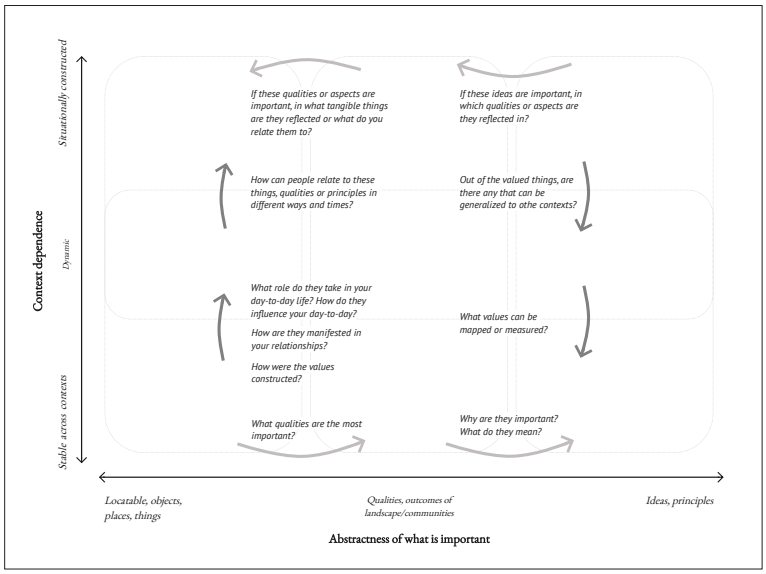


Figure 4. Figure gathering all of Rawluk et al. 's (2018) original framework prompts to navigate along levels of abstractness and context dependence (in appendix A). (Bécares Mas, 2023)

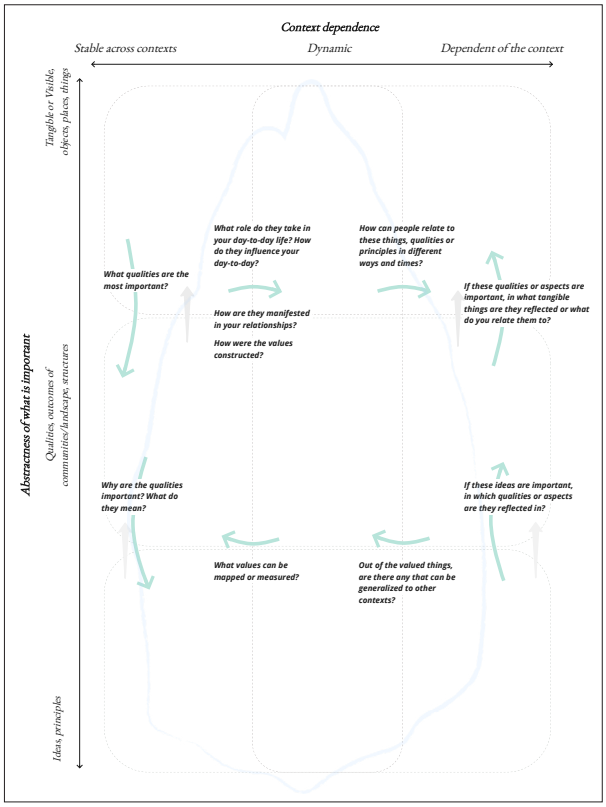


Figure 5. Altered framework (Bécares Mas, 2023)

The main aim of the use of the modified framework is to reflect on the values and valuing statements that were stated in the interviews and find the correlations between them and the functioning of the values-oriented organisations. Conducting this mapping process helps comprehend current conditions as well as re-vision them, as knowledge maps allow for more efficient exploration of the complexity and the formation of emergent ideas (Boehnert, 2019).

An additional trait of this framework emerges from the reflections that are displayed in Bollier's (2019) report, discussed in section 2.3.1. The report revolved around developing a theory of value that could defend other types of non-monetary value. The use of this modified framework in the context of an economic entity such as a cooperative, is informing the narrative of representing and defending other types of value, however, without the goal to encapsulate this discourse or present a solution to the aforementioned discussion. Therefore, emerging from this use, is the map of interlinked values and valuing statements that inform and drive these organisations, regardless of monetary value.

3.3.2. Process:

For the analysis of the gathered data, Muratovksi (2016) recommends structuring the process into a structured set of phases. This has been applied by starting with a phase to organise and categorise the data, followed by another, to interpret themes and patterns; both conducted using the selected methods for data analysis. After these processes, the conclusions extracted from the data analysis are narrated in the findings section.

Organising and categorising data - The collected information from documentary sources were grouped case by case in categories that encompassed the overarching

themes structuring the gathered information, informed by the research questions. These included:

- Background of the case
- Reason behind working as a cooperative
- Organisational structure of the cooperative
- Values and stances
- Projects and clients
- Other emerging topics

This case-by-case information was gathered and organised to conform the individual case stories, in the following section 3.5.

Interpreting themes and patterns - After the information was gathered and categorised, a cross-case comparative analysis was conducted to examine any similarities and differences in the cases using qualitative interpretation rather than quantitative metrics as advised by Yin (2009). The analysis was conducted through the previously discussed methods of coding and affinity diagramming, to identify emerging themes and patterns. Then, Rawluk et al.'s (2018) modified framework was used to map and visualise the values and valuing statements from the interviews and serve as a visual introduction to the findings. After the final validation interview, the findings from the cross-case analysis were revised, gathered and structured.

Coding

The coding process was used to categorise the data from the interviews, as well as to draw insights from it. The structure of the interviews influenced the principal codes, which consisted of the general themes that drove the conversations. However, the remaining majority of the codes were developed by highlighting noticeable characteristics of the data. The final set of codes was of 51, and they were divided into the following coding groups (as seen in figure 6): Running a design cooperative, Internal member interactions, External co-op interactions, Political approach in design work, Values and valuing, and Transitions and sustainability.

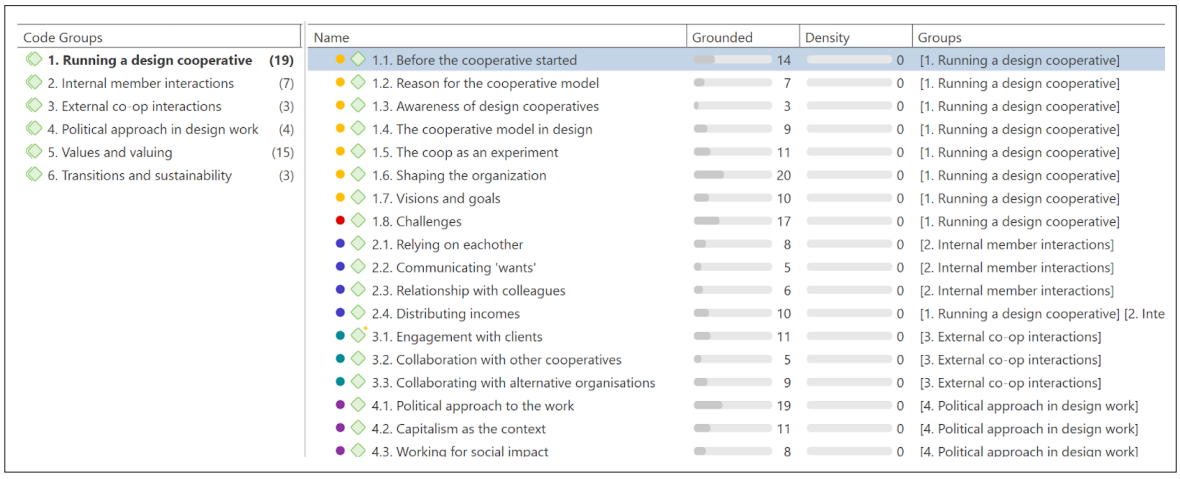


Figure 6. Fragment of the second round of the inductive coding process. Screenshot of the Atlas.ti software.

Before starting the coding, an initial revision of the qualitative data took place through open coding. Then, Eclectic Coding was applied which consists of combining two or more coding methods, and for this reason, it allows for flexibility in the analysis of the data. In the coding of this thesis' data, there was principally a combination of Initial coding, Structural coding and Values coding.

It is recommended that two consecutive processes of coding are implemented to interpret the data from semi-structured interviews (Saldaña, 2013). Therefore, after the first draft of coding, which was conducted in an intuitive manner, there was a revision and removal of redundant content and a subsequent re-coding. Afterwards, the main structure and emerging themes were identified and further analysed through affinity diagramming.

Affinity diagramming:

The coding process was useful to classify the raw data into thematic sections and find nuances in statements relating to certain topics. After coding, the method of affinity diagramming was applied to further conduct an inductive thematic analysis of each section through the Miro software (as seen in figure 7). There was a revision connecting quotes thematically to the thesis' research questions.

Through affinity diagramming, insights that informed each set of themes from the coding process were gathered, providing nuances regarding commonalities and differences in the cases. This brought to light perspectives that were previously overlooked, as well as making visible the irrelevance of topics that were expected to be important. All of these will be addressed in the findings section, in Chapter 5.

Figure 7. Fragment of the inductive affinity diagramming process. Screenshot from the Miro project board.

After the affinity diagramming process, statements regarding valuing and values were applied to be mapped through Rawluk et al.'s framework (2018).

Multiple dimensions of values and valuing framework:

The application of the modified framework was used for sense-making, and as an introduction to the findings. To conduct the mapping process, I used collected data from the interviews concerning the cooperatives' values, the interviewees' most valued attributes from working in the cooperatives, and their descriptions of the inner workings of the co-ops. The process was carried out in the following way:

Starting with the highest abstractness level: Amongst the mapped values, I added the cooperative values which were mentioned by the interviewees (including self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility, and care for others (*International Cooperative Alliance*, n.d.)); sorority and equity, as specifically mentioned by Cooperativa de Diseño; interdependence and equality, as mentioned by Common Knowledge; and trust and sense of responsibility, as emerging from the Holon interview. Additionally, I mapped values that emerged from the data, such as curiosity, justice, personal development and a sense of community.

Considering the context dependence, I arranged them by mapping the ones that had more professional and cooperative-based connotations as context-dependent on the right side. However, considering the level of abstractness, I considered the rest as having a dynamic and stable relation to context.

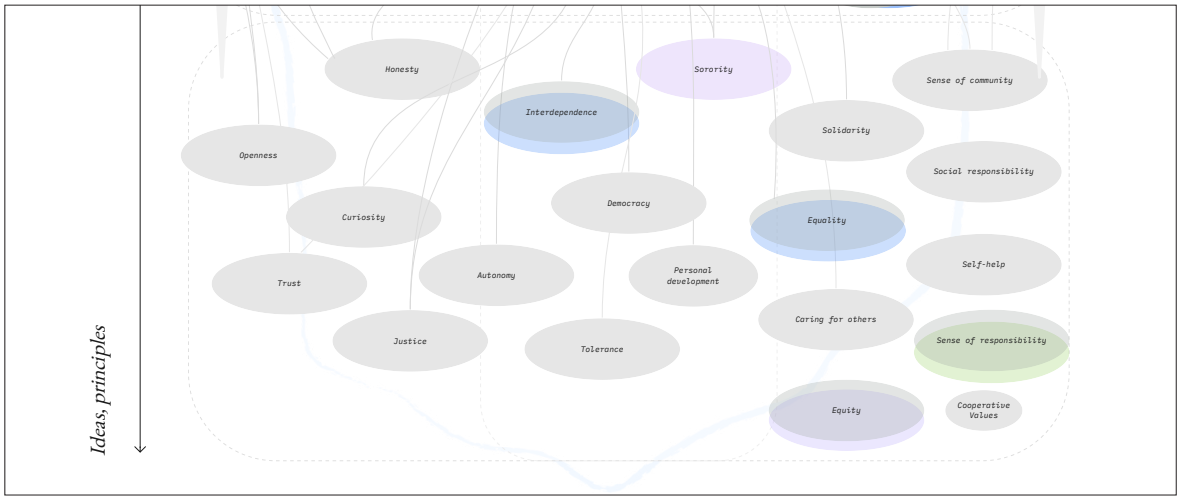


Figure 8. Mapping the most abstract values.

Following with the mid-level abstractness level: Starting with the most stable valuing statements (on the left), I mapped: prioritising communication, embracing transparency, and perceiving or valuing work differently. Then, detailing these valued characteristics of working in the co-ops, I connected them to the ways these are enacted: by having regular meetings, check-ins and talks; by having an alternative logic of work; and, by collaboratively and democratically shaping the organisation. Providing more detail to these statements, I added more context-specific attributes or practices valued by the cooperative members. These are, for example, being and contributing in an environment where colleagues are engaged and happy; the freedom to follow personal interests and grow; checking in with one another.

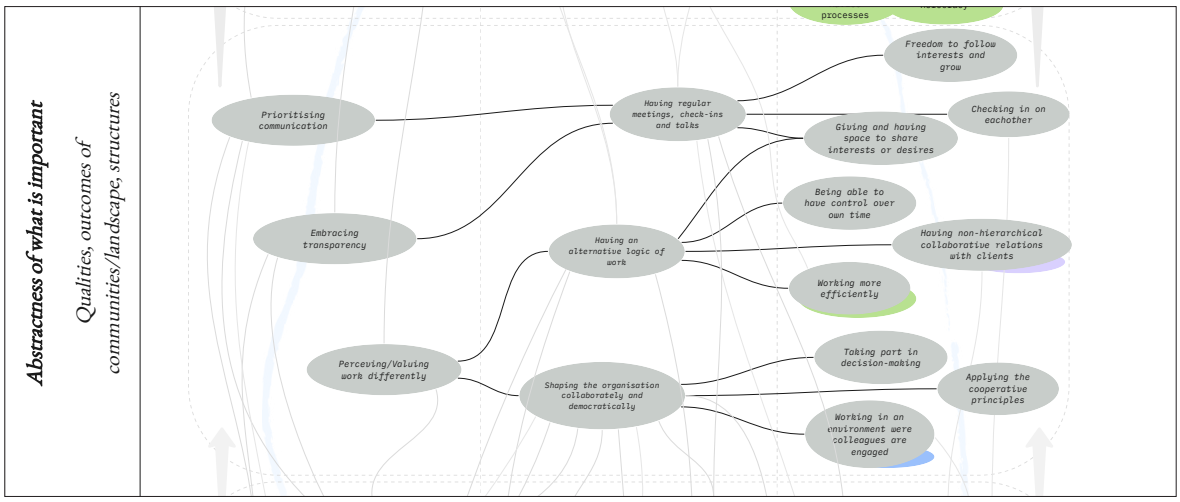


Figure 9. Mapping mid-level abstract values and valuing statements.

Finalising with the lower level abstractness level: On the further left I mapped the value of being a member of these organisations. This informs and is informed by the more dynamic valued ways of enacting their membership, which is in the approach to design, the choice of clients and projects, working in networks, the distribution of income, and the distribution of labour. Lastly, as specific 'tangible' ways in which these dynamic traits are implemented, I mapped how they enacted them, for example, practising transition design as the specific design approach by Holon; paying a salary assigned per days worked a week, as the specific way Common Knowledge distributes their incomes; or, working with local social and solidarity economy organisations, grassroots groups and communities, as the main choice of clients by Cooperativa de Diseño.

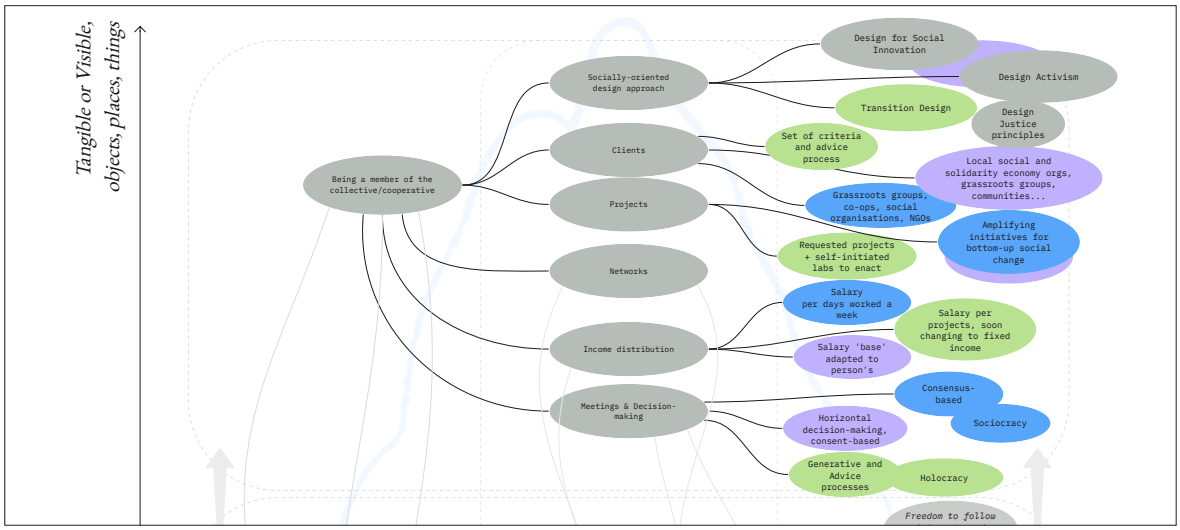


Figure 10. Mapping the least abstract / the tangible or visible values and valuing statements or concepts.

After conducting the horizontal mapping of the values and valuing statements, I proceeded to connect these across levels of abstractness. This process made it clear that the various values that emerged from the data were interconnected to the valuing statements that they stated and the approaches they put to practise in each cooperative.

3.4. Case selection

The thesis topic was inspired by a lecture from the Aalto University course Design for Social Change - Strategy (in 2020), in which Holon member Adrià Garcia i Mateu took part in a panel discussion titled "*How Can You Make a Living as a Design Activist?*" (Julier, 2020). Therefore, naturally, the Holon cooperative was the first design cooperative that was considered fitting for the multiple case study. Additionally, it was chosen because it was accessible and had a substantial amount of information available to review.

The Cooperativa de Diseño and Common Knowledge cases were also deemed appropriate due to online information being available to the general public and their inclusion in literature by Julier (2017) and Pater (2021), reviewed for the literature background. Julier (2017) discusses the informal and alternative economies operating in the liminal spaces of conventional neoliberalism in Chapter 7 of his book, Economies of Design. He discusses Cooperativa de Diseño in the frame of *horizontalidad*; the resulting political process of how design operates in a state of severe economic crisis in Argentina. Furthermore, Robert Pater makes reference to Cooperativa de Diseño as well as Common Knowledge in the book *CAPS LOCK: How capitalism took hold of graphic design, and how to escape from it* (2021). The author uses the Cooperativa de Diseño to showcase a group trying to dismantle the relations between capitalism and design. Likewise, Common Knowledge is featured as an example of a worker cooperative that reinforces radical politics through technology.

A different case study was initially conducted in place of Common Knowledge. There was an intention to include a case that was based in Finland when cooperatives were first being assessed for the multiple case study. Sonder Collective, a design cooperative working for social impact primarily in the health sector, was chosen as the initial option to be reviewed. Throughout the literature review, a more well-informed criteria for the selection of the cooperatives was developed, which required a stronger emphasis on political positioning and participation in the Social and Solidarity Economy. After conducting additional research considering the criteria and interviewing core members of both collectives, it was deemed more fitting for the research to include Common Knowledge as a case instead of Sonder collective.

Therefore, the selected cases were three socially-oriented design cooperatives enacting their activist stances in their design practice and participating in the Social and Solidarity Economy.

3.5. Introduction to the cases

The documentary data was organised by case and arranged into the following individual case stories. Each case will be introduced through the subsections of background, reason for starting the cooperative, political and historical context, mission and values, clients and projects, and finally, organisational structure; discussing membership, decision-making processes, distribution of tasks and roles, and networks. However, the general similarities and differences between the cases can be observed in the following table.

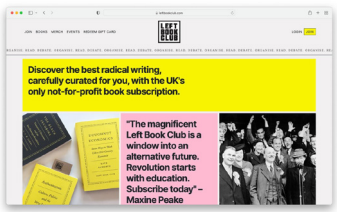
Case:	Cooperativa de Diseño Buenos Aires 2011	Holon Barcelona 2014	Common Knowledge London 2018
Design services offering	Identity design and graphic communication, product design and development, audiovisual design, packaging design, photography, editorial design, furniture and interior design, management of socio-productive projects, workshops and training, transfer and support for other collectives.	Design research, workshops and transformation projects facilitation, design strategies, co-design services, facilitation of public policy designs, digital guides and manuals, and re-definition of brand experiences across touchpoints.	Design and development (Full-stack web development, Product design, UX/UI, graphic design), Strategy (workshop facilitation, community building, strategic advice), Research and prototyping (Rapid prototyping, design sprints, technical auditing), and Training (workshops and coaching for digital capacity).
Approach to projects	The collective produces political work for non-profits as well as commercial work that can impact the local economy.  Figure 11. QOM Lashepi Alpi Baskets. (Comunidades - Cooperativa de Diseño, n.d.)	As their design practice is rooted in Transition Design, Holon rethinks the idea of projects as programmes of interventions based on challenges.  Figure 12. Identity of Forum Viacoop, with Apòstrof co-op. (Holon, 2022)	Their focus is on amplifying initiatives for bottom-up change through digital tools.  Figure 13. Left Book Club digital membership systems. (Common Knowledge, 2022)
Type of clients	Cooperatives or self-managed organisations, factories or recovered companies, communities, local SMEs or startups, grassroots activism groups.	They accept project proposals or collaborations based on a set of criteria public in their Handbook.	Broad range of clients, but frequently grassroots organisations and activist groups, cooperatives, and NGOs.

Table 5. Side-to-side introduction to the cases.

3.5.1. LA COOPERATIVA DE DISEÑO

> *"We are women in the field of design. We do collective, interdisciplinary, horizontal design for the social economy"* (Agencia de Notícias Solidarias, 2019)

Background / General information:

Cooperativa de Diseño is a design studio that was established in 2011 as a cooperative in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which currently has 6 designers as members.

Their studio covers a wide range of design disciplines; its members graduated from a public university of industrial and graphic design, as well as audiovisual production, so they are a multidisciplinary team of designers (Agencia de Notícias Solidarias, 2019).

Reason for starting the cooperative:

Back in 2011, when they started, they were looking to align their work to 'popular needs'; generating a space to work and reflect on the social and political role that designers have in Argentina as well as Latin America (Barricada TV, 2021). After graduating and "seeing as available options for development": climbing the ladder in a company, starting their own studio or being freelancers; they had an open call among their friends. Finally a group of women got together, which they say ended up defining their practice and their personal lives (Agencia de Notícias Solidarias, 2019).

In this group, they were united by the logic of being able to work in a self-managed way. On the one hand because of their orientation to 'popular needs'. On the other, they looked for an internal organisation that was fair, promoting collective and participative work, and allowing for other dynamics with the clients who could participate in the development of the work. (Barricada TV, 2021)

Their workspace is inside the IMPA factory, one of the first recovered factories in Buenos Aires around the 90s. For the Cooperativa, its existence is closely linked to IMPA, which was the space that welcomed them from their beginning. (Barricada TV, 2021)

Political and historical context:

In Argentina, the fraudulent governments of the 1930s and early 1940s, the dictatorship of 1976-83, and the 1990s, generated the political conditions that sustained different variants of the agro-export, foreignization, and pre-industrial model. Then, the predominance of financial speculation characterised the following decades. This combination of factors induced Argentina in a dependent position, reliant on foreign aid and compromising its national decision-making power (Ferrer, 2009).

In 1928 in Argentina, the first worker cooperative was formed by construction workers, but worker cooperativism did not grow significantly over the next 30 years. It was in

the 1990s and the first 15 years of the 21st century that the number and significance of worker cooperatives increased exponentially. Around the 1990s, worker cooperativism experienced significant growth throughout Latin America, driven by the aforementioned political and socio-economic factors associated with the neoliberal era (Schujman, 2015). Around that time, recovered factories became a significant social movement in Argentina. They gained strength in the aftermath of the financial crisis throughout the 2000s, when speculative practices by business owners were combined with high unemployment rates, poverty, capital flight, bankruptcies, and firm closures (Heras & Vieta, 2020). This led in part to industrial workers re-appropriating failing companies and turning them into workers' cooperatives. These instances of bottom-up organising activities are grounded in solidarity and driven by the workers (Heras & Vieta, 2020), and in turn inspire the activist stance of the Cooperativa de Diseño (Barricada TV, 2021).

The National Institute of Associationism and Social Economy (Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social, INAES) is the governing entity in charge of implementing the cooperative and mutual legal framework. It is in charge of all national cooperatives and mutuals, and its main goal is to promote, develop and monitor these entities. (INAES, n.d.)

Mission and values:

There are no organisational values stated on their website, however, it is clearly stated that they work on design projects with a social impact, in a collective and integral way, to put design at the service of the popular sectors (*Cooperativa de Diseño*, n.d.).

They aim to run a practice that questions capitalist practices, links with other co-ops and transforms ideas about how we work and create value (Julier, 2017). Additionally, they want to show that you can collaborate in building up a vibrant local economy that preserves value amongst the community instead of serving the interest of corporations (Pater, 2021).

Clients and projects:

Clients: Their catalogue of work offers or projects, is divided according to the type of collaborator or client it is for. These are projects for cooperatives or self-managed organisations, factories or recovered companies, communities, SMEs or startups, gender and activism groups, and 'transference and formation' (*Cooperativa de Diseño*, n.d.).

They do work both for nonprofit and for-profit clients. Instead of doing only political work for non-profits, the collective also produces commercial work. That is because they are aware of the empowering impact that design can have in certain contexts. They state that their goals in working with more commercial projects are to bolster the national industry by replacing imports with competitive products (Pater, 2021).

They credit all their work collectively and look for a horizontal relationship with their clients, aiming for no power relations (Julier, 2017).

Projects: As previously stated, they're a multidisciplinary studio, so they produce a major range of design work. It differs from identity design and graphic communication, product design and development, audiovisual design, packaging design, photography, editorial design, furniture and interior design, management of socio-productive projects, workshops and training, transfer and support for other collective (*Cooperativa de Diseño*, n.d.).

The Cooperativa de Diseño aligns methods and tools of mainstream design work to a form of cooperative labour that fits their political viewpoints and adheres to their activist goals. (Julier, 2017)

They state that their job isn't something they do 'in their leisure time' or for charity. Hence, they defend that working for social movements should be compensated as in every other job. (Pater, 2021)

Organisational structure:

Membership:

They started out with 7 members, and now have one less. The other original members have remained in the organisation for 12 years. They established that their salaries must sustain basic needs and labour rights (vacation time, health care and parental leave) (Pater, 2021). For this, they calculated a 'base' salary, which was decided based on each member's particular situation – regarding e.g. housing or other sources of income. (Julier, 2017)

Decision-making processes:

They practise horizontal decision-making, *horizontalidad*, which consists of having no strict hierarchy and making decisions by discussing and reaching a consensus. Someone's voice might carry more weight than others if they're more knowledgeable on the topic, still, everyone's opinion is equally considered when significant decisions are taken (Julier, 2017).

They gather weekly in assembly; once a semester for a projection and balance assembly; and yearly for the assembly for the election of authorities mandated by the INAES (National Institute of Associationism and Social Economy) (Agencia de Notícias Solidarias, 2019).

Horizontal decision-making is being used by designers in participatory design projects and working collaboratively with clients. Cooperativa de Diseño, however, insists that if it's not being applied to the organisation, the hierarchical structure remains. (Julier, 2017)

Distribution of tasks and roles:

For cooperative management, roles which are unrelated to their professional training, there's the administration committee. This committee comes by mandate of INAES, and includes a president, treasurer (rotating role) and secretary. Besides these roles, they gradually found for themselves the other roles that were necessary to push the co-op,

the non-productive tasks (Agencia de Notícias Solidarias, 2019).

Unlike in the other cases, information about their organisational structure was available internally only. In the interview, they stated that they work in pairs, rotating the roles, because none have training for them nor enjoy that part of their job.

Networks:

They are started and are a part of the *Red Nacional de Cooperativas de Diseño* (Design Cooperatives National Network of Argentina) with other design cooperatives from across the country, such as El Maizal, Cooperativa Factorial, Montón, Óita La Cooperativa, and Salta la Chiva.

The network started during the pandemic as a way to unite their strengths to cope with it; to collectively come together on a social level with a logic of solidarity. It was thought out as a supportive network, aiming to tackle the sectors' (both the design and cooperative sectors) labour issues through thinking about discussions and actions. They come from very different parts of the country, so their perspectives differ from one another. Nevertheless, the network principally has a supportive and 'discussive' goal, to bring to light the problems that they face and try to solve them together.
(Feria del Centro, 2020)

3.5.2. HOLON COLLECTIVE

> *"From experience to the ecosystem, we shape the everyday life of transitions."* (*Holon*, n.d.)

Background / General information:

Holon is a not-for-profit cooperative of associated work (legal form in Catalonia) legally established in 2018. However, they have been working as a collective since 2014 using other legal forms.

It currently has 7 core members, nevertheless, the number of members is hard to pinpoint since they operate as a network and also rely on professionals on other levels of membership; Collaborator members as well as a circle of Holon friends, with their different rights and duties (Diseño y Diáspora, 2020).

They are based in Can Batlló, a self-managed cultural community facility in the neighbourhood of La Bordeta in Barcelona. Can Batlló was an old textile factory comprising many buildings that now hold the social and cultural facility (*Can Batlló*, n.d.). They share their space within Coòpolis, a device to promote the Social and Solidarity economy in Barcelona; primarily oriented towards the creation of new cooperatives as well as the generation of jobs in existing cooperatives ('Història', n.d.).

They are for the most part an online collective; project teams are the ones that tend to meet in person as their work is self-organised (*Handbook*, n.d.).

Reason for starting the cooperative:

Holon emerged as a collective in 2014, gathering a mix of designers coming from different work experiences and 'ways of seeing the world', looking for projects to which they felt aligned (Diseño y Diáspora, 2020). They view themselves as accessible to professionals who want to make an impact, working on aligned projects with a clear mission (*Holon*, n.d.).

Their start as a collective of designers enclosed a will to distance themselves from the hierarchical structure of traditional design firms. That is because of their understanding that those structures can hinder personal as well as professional growth. They decided to organise their practice as a cooperative because they saw the cooperative approach as particularly beneficial for creative agencies, in addition to seeking its democratic traits (Holon, 2019).

Political and historical context:

Nowadays, Catalonia is at the top of the co-operative ranking in Spain, accounting for 19% of cooperatives in the state's total amount. Consumer cooperatives and housing cooperatives are the two cooperative types that have increased the most. (COCETA, 2022) In Catalonia, the first production cooperatives were created in the second half of the 19th century and aimed to liberate workers from exploitation and control by enabling self-management and collective knowledge sharing. Onwards from the end of the Franco dictatorial regime in 1975, cooperativism revived. In the following years, worker-owned enterprises such as cooperatives were promoted by the Spanish Constitution, and the first Catalan law on cooperatives in democracy was passed, setting up the Federation of Worker Cooperatives of Catalonia (FCTAC). These were years in which worker cooperativism was rediscovered in the midst of an economic crisis. Then, from the 2000s on, the cooperatives created in the 1990s united, connecting with the global solidarity economy, and from that, the Solidarity Economy Network (XES) was established. (*Les cooperatives de treball*, n.d.)

In the years before the Holon cooperative was established, from 2008 onwards, the labour market in Spain suffered a high wage devaluation and an increase in instability (Climent Sanjuán, 2023). In 2010, there was an economic and social change for the worse. There was a setback on the social policy fronts marked by cuts on the Spanish welfare state which were implemented both by the central Spanish government and the regional government in Catalonia. The culmination of these setbacks was the 'labour counter-reform' promoted by the Spanish government. A reform that increased precariousness, especially for young people, and eased the dismissal of workers. (Manzanares et al., 2010)

On May 15th (15M) 2011, a pivotal protest began against the public cuts and the economic

doctrine that were set to get out of the financial crisis. With the 15M protest movement, the idea that politics could be done from outside the political parties was revived. Hundreds of collectives and initiatives flourished then from 2011 to 2014 (Sánchez, 2021), such as the common collaborative economy and platform cooperativism; the feminist and care economy; ways of managing common resources such as community facilities or urban gardens; and cooperative incubators (*Les cooperatives de treball*, n.d.). A month after 15M and after decades of demands, the neighbourhood of Bordeta finally reclaimed the industrial site of Can Batlló, where Holon is based. Can Batlló brought together projects for the neighbourhood regarding mutual support networks; culture and training; public and community spaces; education; housing; and economic activity. ('Història', n.d.)

Mission and values:

As their purpose, Holon states in their Handbook (n.d.) that the organisation emerged "*as a response to what feels like a world in transition, arguably colliding by a shared shift in consciousness to perceive ourselves as interdependent planetary societies of living beings. We strive to make this emerging paradigm mainstream through design.*" (*Handbook*, n.d.)

The values that guide the organisation are:

1. *"To celebrate that we are nature*
2. *To focus on the path of transitions over the pace*
3. *To make others successful"*

(*Handbook*, n.d.)

The mission of the organisation is:

"T*o bring people and the planet to profit in a beautiful way. Ultimately, we are invited by organisations to help them shape the everyday life of transitions to planetary societies.*" (*Handbook*, n.d.)

Clients and projects:

Clients: Their range of clients can include non-profit cooperatives, associations, foundations, local SMEs, international corporations, UN programs, etc (Holon, n.d.). However, they must follow a set of criteria established in their Handbook; to ensure the organisations are aligned with Holon's purpose.

Organisations must fulfil two of these characteristics:

"- Workers have rights according to the UN Global Compact.
- Are cooperatives, social business (UK), B corps, foundations or non-profit.
- Income inequality is not wider than 1/7 within the organisation"

Additionally, at least one of these:

"- Statement of intention in their communication materials and ideology (if available)
- Operating in the frames of the Social and Solidarity Economy
- ISO 14001 and similar

- EMAS and other eco certificates
- They have a clear social and environmental strategy aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals." (*Handbook*, n.d.)

In case this information isn't clear to them, they have another process and set of criteria. For this case, the client would have to follow a minimum of two out of the three subsequent conditions:

"- To have made substantial progress and moves towards SDG in the last 5 years

- They do not belong to a capital concentration group operating under monopolistic logic

- Holon would have to work with them with strategic departments, and their concrete project offering shall be based on what they are aware is the leading edge regarding transitions in their sector or domain." (*Handbook*, n.d.)

To assess these last traits, they have internal conversations on a Slack channel discussing their points of view regarding the impact the project would have and their trust towards the contact person (*Handbook*, n.d.).

Projects: As their design practice is rooted in Transition Design, Holon rethinks the idea of projects. They claim that instead of working on design projects, they conduct programmes of interventions based on identified challenges informed by their political reflection. Apart from doing projects for clients, they aim to work in self-imposed and self-financed briefs, without a specific client, which they call 'labs' (Diseño y Diáspora, 2020).

They have a wide range of design services in their portfolio, as they are structured to work collaboratively as an interdisciplinary network of professionals. As they state on their website, they conduct "design research, design and facilitate workshops and transformation projects, develop design strategies, co-design services, facilitate public policy designs, produce digital guides and manuals, and re-define brand experiences across touchpoints" (*Holon*, n.d.).

Organisational structure:

Membership:

As previously mentioned, their membership network ranges from core member, to collaborative member to Holon friend. In the membership section of their handbook they outline the multiple differentiating attributes that exist between membership roles within the organisation. As the main differences; for core members, the cooperative is their principal employment and they must assume a role in a management circle. In addition, they support the managerial role of another member and contribute actively to business development tasks and employment-generating activities. Alternatively, collaborating members are partially involved in the cooperative. They must participate in non-productive tasks, nevertheless, they can choose to contribute voluntarily to business

development tasks and employment-generating activities. Lastly, the 'Friend' category entails a sporadic commitment to the cooperative as well as voluntary participation in both the business development tasks and a management circle. All members can participate in projects through their team setting process, regardless of their membership status, and are paid on a project basis. (*Membership - Handbook*, n.d.)

Decision-making processes:

There isn't a sole way of decision-making specified in the collective. Nonetheless, in their handbook they highlighted and described the ones they deem work best for them, which are:

> Generative decision-making process - depicted as a consent-based decision-making approach based on the 'integrated decision-making process' from *Holacracy*, and drawing from the culture and practice of the *Art of Hosting*. Further explained in their Handbook's section.
>
> Advice process - a process that is "designed" for online discussions, in which an initiator of an action asks for advice from the community and experts. Then, they assess this advice, make a decision based on it and communicate it.

In their handbook, they also outline other forms of decision-making that are commonly used, and state their strengths and weaknesses. Amongst these: Decisions by consent, Consensus, Democratic, Delegation, and Autocratic. (*Handbook*, n.d.)

Distribution of tasks and roles:

They are organised in five circles for the distribution of the non-productive tasks or reproductive tasks, as they call them according to Marx's theory of labour. These circles are: Project coordination, Business, Community, Administration, and Communication. Each circle is led by a core member and supported by another, and their roles change over time (*Handbook*, n.d.).

Networks:

Holon is a member of the *Xarxa d'Economia Solidària de Catalunya* (Social and Solidarity Network of Catalonia) and *Barcelona+sostenible* (Barcelona+sustainable) networks (*Holon*, n.d.). These are national and municipal networks that connect Holon to aligned organisations, however, they are not related to design.

3.5.3. COMMON KNOWLEDGE

> "We see worker cooperatives as one way of prefiguring an alternative future, in which solidarity, interdependence and self-determination are at the centre." (*Running*, 2020)

Background / General information:

Common Knowledge is a not-for-profit worker cooperative that designs and builds digital tools, legally established in 2018, in the United Kingdom. They currently have five members and two additional employees as trainees.

The organisation is based in London and it is specialised in software and digital tools for grassroots and social movements. Additionally, they deliver training and strategic advice, as well as assist progressive organisations in sharing resources and knowledge.

Even if the co-op is located in the UK, the employees of Common Knowledge work from various time zones. As a consequence, remote work has been the main option for all employees since early 2020. To better adapt to their variety of schedules and improve their work-life balance, they started implementing 'asynchronous working practices', which are based on written communication rather than verbal (*Asyncronous Working*, n.d.).

Reason for starting the cooperative:

Common Knowledge began in 2018 looking to increase the impact of activist organisations. They were searching for a way to assist activist organisations increase their reach through digital tools, they hoped to improve the frequent issue of people not knowing how to join them (Pater, 2021).

The worker cooperative model was chosen because they believe that the way they organise ends up impacting what they make. As key benefits, they highlight having more instrumentality over their labour and time. They see this model as a prompt to question the whole structure of their work, which they deem essential as they aim to enable radical change. The co-founder's vision was of a multiplicity of small teams in a collaborative network, in contrast to siloed large cooperatives. (Pater, 2021) They understand taking the worker cooperative model as "one way of prefiguring an alternative future, in which solidarity, interdependence and self-determination is at the centre" (*Common Knowledge*, n.d.).

Political and historical context:

The history of cooperatives in the UK is said to start in 1761, with the founding of the first cooperative organisation of the industrial age. Then, the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, the first specific cooperative law, was passed in 1852. Mutualism and cooperativism gained popularity in Europe during the 19th century and the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers (1844), the first modern cooperative, served as an example of how consumer cooperatives were on the rise (*Les cooperatives de treball,* n.d.). The first modern cooperative Congress took place in London in 1869, establishing the cooperative-promoting organisation that is now known as Co-operatives UK (Bibby, 2014), of which Common Knowledge is a member.

Looking at the political-economic context in the UK, a pivotal point was the promotion of the neoliberal model by Margaret Thatcher and its consequences. Her neoliberal politics took place from 1979 to 1990, and advocated for a new economic model centred around finance and the growth of the City of London. It was around that time that a new generation of political activists increasingly looked to worker cooperatives for cooperative solutions (Bibby, 2014). In the 2008 financial crisis, many shortcomings in the neoliberal model were exposed, showing that it primarily benefited the elites and the labour market connected to the City. Between the 1990s and 2015, the United Kingdom experienced a process of deindustrialization, resulting in a persistent trade deficit and a precarious public sector. Concurrently, there was a notable shift from industrial employment to an increasing reliance on low-paid service sector jobs, particularly in the hospitality and tourism industries. (Climent Sanjuán, 2023)

The wider context of Common Knowledge is characterised by the request of the British government to exit the EU, in 2017, the year before the start of the cooperative. It was in an economic context of growing social inequality, a gradual increase in poverty among the working classes and high levels of precariousness in the public sector. (ibid)

Mission and values:

The mission of Common Knowledge is "We are a not-for-profit worker co-operative of technologists, designers, researchers and facilitators. We work with grassroots organisers and communities around the world to build power and achieve radical change. We use digital technologies to multiply the impact and capacity of social movements" (*Common Knowledge*, n.d.).

Before stating the following collective values in their website, they highlight how they are bound to embody them in their relations and interactions at work.

> "Solidarity: We act in solidarity with those who are struggling against all forms of oppression. Solidarity is power. Diversity is strength.
>
> Interdependence: We understand and respect the complexity of political and technological structures. We trust people to know their own context best. We think before intervening and intervene at the appropriate scale. We listen deeply and reflect with intention.
>
> Thoughtfulness: We understand and respect the complexity of political and technological structures. We trust people to know their own context best. We think before intervening and intervene at the appropriate scale. We listen deeply and reflect with intention.
>
> Practice: We believe learning is an endless journey. We use theory and practice to intensify each other. We are curious, creative and interdisciplinary. We ask questions and lean into change.
>
> Optimism: We approach problems as challenges and see failures as opportunities to grow. We remember the capacity of people to collectively build a better future. We trust that people can." (*About*, n.d.)

Common Knowledge claims to stand by the Cooperative Principles and the Design Justice Principles in addition to their values (*Common Knowledge*, n.d.).

Clients and projects:

In order to collaborate with clients and work non-hierarchically, they make use of the Sociocracy and Scrum frameworks. Sociocracy is applied to optimise organisation efficiency and uses consent-based decision-making. On the other hand, Scrum is a common model in the software development sphere that entails working in sprints. They work through two-week sprint cycles. Scrum emphasises horizontal cooperation over formal processes and hierarchies. (*Asyncronous Working*, n.d.)

Clients: The collective principally works for grassroots and activist groups, as well as NGOs, foundations, unions or cooperatives. Their intention is to collaborate with organisations that want to imagine and build radically different futures. Their approach is to listen to their needs, amplify their work and build internal digital capacity (Pater, 2021).

They aim to build a supportive community with the groups they work with instead of just offering a service; looking to impulse cross-pollination and knowledge-sharing (*Common Knowledge*, n.d.).

Projects: They currently present their service offering in four categories: Design and development, Strategy, Research and prototyping, and Training. Their projects can take different shapes along the process. Usually they avoid building new digital tools and instead they tend to approach their projects using off-the-shelf tools or guiding people to use technology more effectively. Hence, they see the repurposing of existing tools and techniques as their preferred approach. (*Common Knowledge,* n.d.)

Organisational structure:

Membership:

Common Knowledge operates as a worker cooperative, hence, members are employed as workers and serve as directors of the company, taking part in its management. Nonetheless, they also have employed apprentices who are not members.

Members cannot earn dividends because the cooperative is not-for-profit; they receive salaries, which are equal for all. Then, the financial surplus is directed into maintaining the co-op, to solidarity work or underfunded groups. The cooperative aims to publicly state all its finances. They have applied to and received income from grants, additionally to their client work, which they list in their website. (Pater, 2021)

Decision-making processes:

As previously stated, the collective uses sociocracy as its framework for decision-making and governance of the co-op. In Pater's (2021) book, they describe it as a consent-

based framework, which means that the responses to a proposal are either to give their consent to it or to block it; instead of casting votes or reaching a consensus. This form of decision-making relies on mutual trust, as giving consent to a proposal is affirming that it is 'good enough for now and safe enough to try' (Pater, 2021).

Distribution of tasks and roles:

In the practices section of their handbook, it is stated that they are organised through stewardship of responsibility areas. They have a meeting focusing on a different responsibility area each week (so each responsibility area reports in a meeting on a monthly basis). This stewardship rotates every 6 months from Governance, Financial Administration, Public Communications and Opportunity Development. (*Handbook/ Practices*, n.d.)

In addition, they state that they have regular meetings, both regarding their project work and their responsibility areas. The attendance of meetings is considered a key aspect of being part of Common Knowledge because it is where issues involving everyone are discussed. Nonetheless, they aim to have two days without meetings each week to focus on individual tasks. (*Handbook/Practices,* n.d.)

Networks:

The cooperative is a member of the larger Co-operatives UK, a cooperative whose members are cooperative organisations and organisations which support cooperatives and cooperation around the UK. The organisation does advocacy work, shares resources, and provides training and support to its co-op members (*Co-Operatives UK*, n.d.).

Additionally, they are part of the network Co-Tech along with other ethical cooperatives offering technological and digital services in the UK. The aim of Co-Tech is to improve the technology sector in the country, shifting its focus from generating private profit to meeting worker, customer and end-user needs (*CoTech*, n.d.).

Chapter 4. Findings

The data collection and analysis processes were conducted to gather and examine the selected data in order to address the research questions that guided the study. The findings from those processes will be discussed through two subsections, starting with the underlying values and valuing, and followed by the experiences of the design cooperatives.

The first subsection on mapping the values will present the modified version of the framework by Rawluk et al. (2018) and its application to map values and valuing statements from the cases. Mapping will provide a preliminary schematic and visual version of the findings regarding values. Thus, in parallel to the following cross-case comparative analysis, it will show the relationships between tangible or surface-level operational attributes and concepts, with intangible and abstract values and ideals. It will therefore explore how cooperative work affects values and vice versa, specifically addressing the second research question.

The next subsection will cover the cross-case comparative analysis formulated from the coding and affinity diagramming processes. The thematic analysis follows clusters that relate to the research questions, and draws parallels and disagreements between the cases. The main clusters are: choice and suitability of the cooperative model, implementation of the cooperative model, practising socially-oriented design aiming for social change, and value clashes. Each cluster will have a summary that is informed by the group discussion.

4.1. The underlying values and valuing

As discussed in previous sections, the altered version of Rawluk et al.'s (2018) 'Multiple dimensions of values and valuing' framework is used as the tool to map values and valuing statements and insights from the data. As it is flexible in its application, the modifications (detailed in the data analysis methods section 3.3.1) sought to extend its use to be applied as an intuitive mapping tool. This tool aims to enable mapping the various types of value statements collected and their relational component, thus, visualising and reflecting on the depth levels and linkages of values and valuing that emerge from the data.

With this framework I conduct a preliminary mapping, detailed in section 3.3.2.3, building a understanding of values and valuing in the context of the cases, before conducting the more in-depth cross-case analysis. Then, the following map of interlinked values and valuing statements (Figure 14) that inform the design cooperatives emerged from the application of the tool.

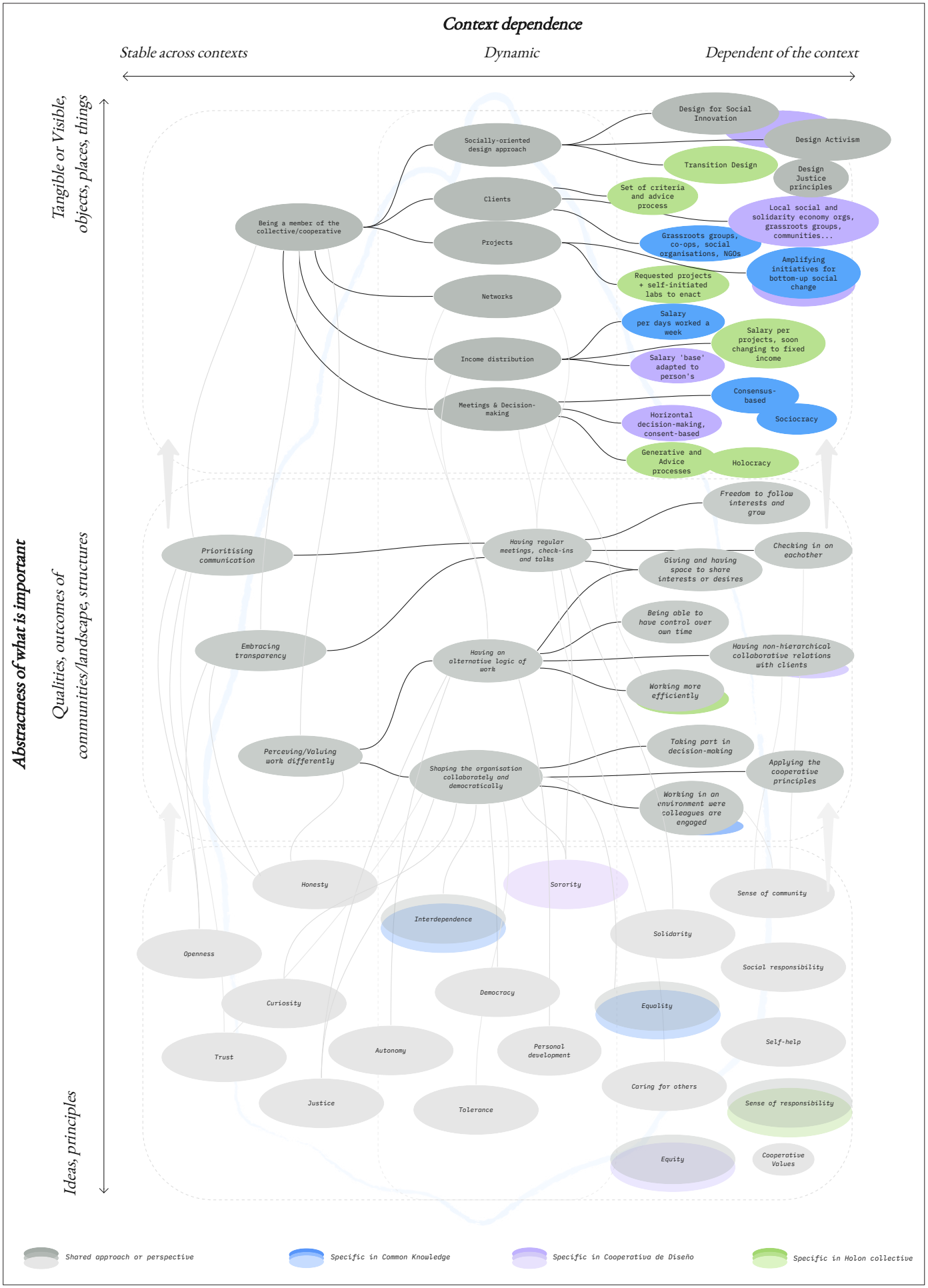


Figure 14. Preliminary map of values and valuing (Bécares Mas, 2023)

At the deepest-lowest end of the map I mapped the most abstract values that are present in the cooperatives' operations. The majority of them being shared values that were identified in all the cases' data and specifically stated in response to an interview question (appendix B, question 5).

At mid-level of depth there are valuing statements, the valued qualities or outcomes of communities. These refer to what the interviewees found important in working in the cooperatives and what they valued most. This was also drawn from an interview question about what was valued the most from working as cooperatives (appendix B, question 4).

At the most shallow level, the tangible or visible valued concepts are mapped. In this case, the valued concepts are the methods/approaches collectively decided by the members and implemented by the cooperatives in their operational design. In this level, as seen in the comparative analysis and as noticed by the number of colours of the mapped concepts, the cases differ the most since it refers to each case's applied methods/approaches.

The process of mapping the selected values and valuing concepts revealed how present the members' values and viewpoints are in the cooperative, as well as brought to light the many similarities of the cases regarding values. Values with a bigger amount of connections were made visible, informing as well about the values that, even if present, were harder to link. Thus, the main values present in these cases –in other terms, the most connected ones– were found to be: honesty, justice, democracy and caring for others. These were easily connected to each other across levels of abstractness, and so, inform the shallower levels of abstraction in valuing the work in the co-ops. The ease and speed with which the mapping process was conducted could indicate that the mentioned and detected values are indeed informing the functioning of the co-ops on a variety of levels.

Therefore, examining how working as a cooperative affects values and valuing in these socially-oriented design practices, this mapping showcases that working as a cooperative can facilitate embedding sustainability-aligned values beyond individualism and material wealth. These, such as trust, justice, democracy and care, are present in the organisations and their design practice, and inform their choices on many levels.

4.2. Experiences and approaches of the design cooperatives

The cross-case comparative analysis served to explore the similarities and differences among the cases. As it is applied using qualitative interpretation rather than quantitative metrics (Yin, 2009), the findings are presented in a narrative way.

The clusters follow a structure based on the research questions, adding principally to the first and second research questions. The third research question is specifically addressed in the discussion, as it requires linking to the theoretical background.

4.2.1. Shared viewpoint behind the choice and suitability of the cooperative model

As a common experience, interviewees were initially motivated to join or start the collectives by a desire to align their design work with their ideals and values. The interviewees mentioned a lack of expectations regarding their future in the traditional sphere of design, and aspirations to effect change towards social and environmental justice. Their activist attitudes towards the use of design tools and practises to boost the grassroots and Social and Solidarity economies reflected their shared perception of design as a discipline capable of generating change as well as their sense of responsibility as designers.

Then, the decision to join or start the cooperatives was in part motivated by a shared sense of dissatisfaction with their previous experiences. Therefore, those were also an incentive to avoid working in a hierarchical organisation and aim to shape a de-centered collective with a like-minded group of people. In addition to the working dimension, another purpose of founding these collectives with shared values was to create spaces for them to reflect on their social and political roles.

The organisations found their final legal form as cooperatives, the idea resulting from the fact that they were already in touch with the cooperative and grassroots communities.

"We were a bit concerned that the training we'd had in design was more oriented towards marketing for certain markets, for a certain industry - it had nothing to do with our social values or with the problems we saw socially. In other words, we didn't see it responding to anything that was happening around us, nor with the reality of our country"

Member from Cooperativa de Diseño

"We started as a 'collective' moving from the pyramidal logic of traditional agencies, built sometimes as narrowing organisations for personal and professional growth. Traditionally those founding members (mostly white men) stay on top and whoever wants to grow ends up starting another pyramid elsewhere."

(Holon, 2019)

"One of the things that always really interested me, even before the co-op, was how you do some things, not just the outcomes of the work but organising processes."

Member from Common Knowledge

There's a general agreement that the cooperative model is a great fit for the design field, given that many design studios are of comparable size. The organisations claimed that the cooperative model was significantly agile for a design firm. This referred to its emphasis on horizontality, allowing for collectively distributing the roles in creative teams, as well as having more perspectives involved in the creative processes.

Another noticeable characteristic of these organisations is that there are no investors nor private shareholders profiting from the cooperatives or directing their actions. This allows them to collectively implement their purpose-oriented approaches and direction, which increases their efficiency in achieving their collective goals. Then, the cooperative model allows these organisations to bring their socially-oriented values into their work practices, in addition to their design practice.

"I think that cooperative formats are clearly much more optimal for the work and for the development of people, and they are more durable [...] I believe that the quality of the work can also be better because you have more eyes. It is more difficult for you to miss something, especially in complex issues."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"Being in a co-op it's – well, it's in the name – recognizing that everything is done together and that, we're interdependent and reliant on each other, that kind of thing, and I think that might not be appealing to designers."

Member of Common Knowledge

"We decided to build on democratic approaches to organise human agency, or cooperatives to say it shortly. This was beyond values of fairness with the intuition that it would be specially productive for creative agencies."

(Holon, 2019)

During the conversations, the interviewed members highlighted the significance of how design collectives approach the organisational structure, the decision-making and the design practice, rather than viewing the worker cooperative model as the all-encompassing solution. Thus, design collectives can take various legal forms and shapes while being founded on cooperative ideas and principles. Furthermore, pointing out that numerous cooperatives exist solely for profit, without social or environmental goals, as discussed in the theoretical background.

"The way of working is important, but it is more important which projects you end up doing, which end up coming out, what impact they end up having. [...] You can also be a capitalist cooperative, for profit."

Member from Holon

"The most important thing to form a cooperative is to form it as a team, not so much on paper. We all started as a team and then we did the paperwork."

Feria del Centro, Cooperativa de Diseño

Cooperatives in design, as well as designer unions and alternative business structures for design companies are being increasingly recognised. The collectives agreed that there has been a shift in the conversation in the last years, with a focus on purpose-

oriented design studios, and an aim to avoid burnouts and bad working conditions. Additionally, they often get asked to participate in talks and interviews.

"When we started with the co-op it was almost utopian to say 'we are going to work for social organisations in a cooperative here in Argentina' [...] it seemed like something without anchorage. Today we work well, we are recognized, we travel. It is a source of great pride too. Something that seemed to make no sense, well, it did."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"I think that there's just not enough people who know about it [the cooperative model]. It's an option that seems confusing or overwhelming so it's hard to get people involved. Although it does seem like there is a lot of interest just from what I've noticed in the past year or so."

Member from Common Knowledge

"In 2018-2019, we also sensed this conversation was growing and prepared a general reflection we call 'the worlds we make' trying to link different questions or conversations to transform design agencies."

Member from Holon

Summary informed by the group discussion:

The model of cooperatives was agreed to be a good fit for design studios or collectives. However, there was consensus on the relevance of implementing a cooperative way to work above the legal form. The cases' participants jointly discussed their experiences in receiving more attention and showed enthusiasm in advocating for their collectives.

"It was hard at the beginning, in 2011, being a women's co-op was something strange, many people were like, why? why are you doing that? [...] Everyone was sceptical but now 12 years later... we get different attention, good attention."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"We get a lot of attention just from being a co-op, or you know, lots of researchers, universities, students asking for interviews, that kind of thing, which I think is great, particularly if it starts in academia and spreads out."

Member of Common Knowledge

4.2.2. The cooperative model allows for diverse organisational designs yet fosters shared experiences and values

Given the shapeable trait of the cooperative model, the organisational structures of each case differ, and each cooperative incorporates its own approach. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that there are significant parallels in the reasoning that underpins their

approaches, which are based on their activist stances and their socially-oriented design practice.

The possibility to compare the approaches side by side is helpful, as it allows one to see how each organisation selects its own practices based on what works best for them:

Case:	Cooperativa de Diseño	Holon	Common Knowledge
Approach to projects	The collective produces political work for non-profits as well as commercial work that can impact the local economy.	As their design practice is rooted in Transition Design, Holon rethinks the idea of projects as programmes of interventions based on challenges.	Their focus is on amplifying initiatives for bottom-up change through digital tools.
Decision-making processes	They practise horizontal decision-making: no strict hierarchy and making decisions by discussing and reaching a consensus. They gather: Weekly in assembly; once a semester for a projection and balance assembly; and once a year for the election of authorities.	There is no specific approach to decision-making in the collective. Nonetheless, they highlight the Generative decision-making process and Advice process.	Sociocracy: Decisions are made by consent, not consensus, so either block or consent to it. Meetings to discuss policies and issues that impact everyone. They have meetings everyday except for Mondays and Wednesdays.
Distribution of productive roles	No assigned designer roles, they aim to do everything collaboratively. Still, each member has a specific background/speciality.	They have a membership network that ranges from core member, to collaborative member, to Holon friend. In turn, ranging from primary, to partial, and to sporadic involvement. There are no specific positions for members, as the roles can vary depending on the projects.	Each employee of the co-op has an assigned speciality.
Distribution of non-productive' tasks/roles	They have the administrative committee (president, treasurer and secretary) for which they do the work in pairs and rotate every 2 or 3 years + other roles that they decided flexibly by themselves and found work best for the cooperative's functioning, e.g., caring for the space.	They're organised in five circles: Project coordination, Business, Community, Administration, and Communication.	The stewardship of critical co-op functions rotates every 6 months: Governance, Financial Administration, Public Communications, Opportunity Development. Sociocracy's circles, but there are not enough members, so they are distributed as stewardship of roles.

Table 6. Synopsis of the principal traits of the organisational design of each case study.

The overall shared approach to giving shape to the organisations is based on experimentation. Reaching the best solutions requires ongoing work as well as regular check-ins and discussions regarding their situation. All cooperatives display a 'work-in-progress' attitude towards their organisational form or model and present themselves as under construction, not yet in their final form.

The ability to shape the cooperative allows for empathetic approaches tailored to individual or collective concerns. The adaptability of the cooperatives is an important advantage in ensuring the well-being of the members. This is noticeable when personal circumstances necessitate a group decision, such as taking time off or parental leave. They share the practice of collectively addressing finances in order to safeguard one another from financial precarity. Therefore, the cooperatives seek to look out for their members as well as for the overall benefit of the community through meetings and collective decision-making.

Another important feature of the organisational structure is the distribution of non-productive labour; that which does not directly contribute to the cooperatives' productive side. There was an exchange about how the distribution of these responsibilities was the source of concerns about unequal labour distribution. Therefore, each cooperative used a different strategy to assign responsibilities across roles/areas/circles with similar overarching objectives. Similarly in all co-ops, these tasks are either shared or taken on as stewardship with expected support from other members.

The cooperative structure also gives members more independence. One of the valued benefits of being in a co-op is having total control over their time, which allows them to pursue their interests. Therefore, it was agreed that an additional benefit of working in a cooperative was that it supports personal and professional development.

"I find it really valuable and engaging to always be able to shape the co-op in different ways"

Member of Common Knowledge

"I feel that collectively we are doing the bounce back and rebalancing the sustainability whilst also relaxing the reflection dimension of the cooperatives and such - most of the projects we have are with cooperatives and this type of thing, but I know that last year we worked again with a multinational company to help them with sustainability issues"

Member of Holon

"Taking equity again, not as something resolved, but as something permanent, but we try to make it there."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

Relationships with other members/colleagues are characterised by having to design the cooperatives together, which translate into closer relationships built on trust and interdependence. The amount of work weighing on people, however, may put a strain on the caring side of the relationships. Nonetheless, the collaborative mindset prevails at work, where responsibilities are considered to be communal even if they are distributed.

There is room for personal development and professional development, and members are encouraged to express their desires in the workplace. Other people's fulfilment at

work is valued, and the sense of community is noticeable in checking in and ensuring that everyone is pleased with their projects and tasks. Practising these collaborative work relationships is based on creating spaces for discussion, with an emphasis on listening and discussing, even when the subjects to address are difficult or create discomfort.

"The people who work in this way, more cooperative (whether they are cooperative or not, whether they have the paper or not), are people who have more long-term relationships, of trust, you get sick and you know that there is someone who will accompany you, you have someone there to talk to, they are more sustainable relations, they are stronger, and I believe that the quality of the work can also be better because you have more eyes."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"You're in these kind of collaborative relationships with the other people in the co-op where everyone, most of the time, is really happy and engaged in doing what they want to do. And I think we developed much closer relationships than if you're working somewhere and the relationship that you would have with your boss, like actually more than just a colleague at another workplace cause you've really been doing this together."

Member of Common Knowledge

Summary informed by the group discussion:

When discussing their experiences forming the cooperatives, the participants from all cooperatives agreed that it was advantageous to shape the cooperatives around their individual and shared life situations. A significant point that was raised in the group discussion had to do with being able to collectively adapt their work and organisations to 'what it means to be a person'. Therefore, not being defined by their work, but instead, shape their work according to their personal situation and what moves them.

"The whole idea of work, or how I situate it, it's related to this idea of personal lifestyle or how does my life project, let's say, and how this kind of interacts."

Member of Holon

"I think we also try to develop and to build ourselves around work that, that is connected to the to your desires, your values, and what you think is good for the people, for the country, for the planet."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"I really agree with that in terms of the shaping life projects idea, I think with our coop, we're really trying to design something that works for all of us and our various kind of situations and it's an amazing opportunity [...] It just feels so much more fitting to what it is to be a person with needs and desires and stuff. And whereas in past studios that I worked at it just feels like you have to kind of fit into this worker box that they put you in. [...] I feel like work is something that should work for you"

Member of Common Knowledge

4.2.3. The design cooperatives share perspectives on socially–oriented practices of design but vary in their agendas and approaches to transitions

The design cooperatives enact the values of open communication, trust, and mutual respect through fostering horizontal relationships with their clients. This encourages the interchange of knowledge and insights, allowing the collectives to inform their solutions from a participatory approach. The interviewees emphasised creating these collaborative ties with clients, highlighting the horizontal dynamic. There was a shared notion that the client has a deeper awareness of their wants and expectations than the designers. Therefore, they tend to frequently provide clients/collaborators with an active role in defining the design process.

Social organisations are the common customer of these design cooperatives; nevertheless, they frequently lack sufficient resources to allocate to design projects. In these instances, the cooperatives either adapted their projects to match the clients' budgets or the clients applied for funding. They agreed that the work they realise must be fairly compensated and is not charitable. However, all cooperatives prioritised working for other cooperatives, organisations in the Social and Solidarity Economies and grassroots groups.

All the cases are members of cooperative networks or networks of the Social and Solidarity Economies, demonstrating the importance of having access to support from other organisations with similar guiding principles.

"Recognising the interdependence of all things is why we are so interested in working with climate stuff. It's also why we really try to look at the network of organisations we work with and like making connections. Because it's not just about an organisation working in a vacuum or us working in a vacuum."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"We work a lot with funding or state projects, everything that would be considered the big package of the social economy. Maybe at the beginning it was a little more varied. Still, also today, realistically, it sometimes happens that we do work for a company, let's say, but these are exceptions."

Member of Common Knowledge

"It would be great to be able to generate a first list of design cooperatives, if this can help to make a network here in Catalonia, or to make a European network and afterwards be able to ask for help, to transform European design schools to promote democracy at work - because cooperatives are ultimately democracy at work"

Member of Holon

When enacting social activism through design, each cooperative implements their purpose and activist stance in practice in a different way. It was understood that there were certain preferred rhetorics or terms regarding their political viewpoint, that is why I use the term social or political agenda or stance.

For Common Knowledge, their stance is most politically aligned with anarchism and

leaning towards Luddism in their criticism of technology, especially when it negatively affects people's quality of life. The collective was formed from an open call for people interested in working on tech projects for grassroots politics, with a focus on decentralising power. Hence, bottom-up change rather than top-down change is one of the factors that influences everything, especially what projects will be prioritised. Their approach is based on amplifying the range of these organisations usually through the design of digital platforms or training to optimise the use of existing ones.

Cooperativa de Diseño has a strong ideological positioning and tries to stay consistent with it. It encompasses popular movements, class struggles and feminist struggles, especially in the Argentinian context. Their approach is influenced by their intention to create a space where they can work as designers as well as reflect on the social and political role designers play in Latin America and Argentina. They employ design as a means of raising awareness of issues and initiating dialogue, and also to empower the local economy to become less dependent on imports.

The Holon collective frames their practice as design that is politically situated in logics of social and environmental justice. Their practice in the start revolved around environmental sustainability and circularity, and through internal reflections, evolved to include logic of the social and solidarity economies. They enact their position through Transition Design. The reflection is that they work in Transition Design for mobilisation, embracing design's agency of change. Hence, they work around a strategy to accomplish a long-term future of social and environmental justice, which is then applied to the projects they choose or start themselves.

Each case takes a different approach to implementing their positioning in their practice, while they all stem from social and political concerns and involvement.

"We have a strong ideological stance, we try to be as consistent as possible with it. With all the complexity there is today, with the class struggle, the feminist struggle. We try to really put those values into practice and not make it a discursive thing, but work with them, understand the problems, and contribute as much as we can."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"In our case, the strategic reflection is articulated in terms of transitions, for what we'd call social and environmental justice in the super long term future. But if we reduce it to concrete things, then it's in terms of housing, energy, food, public design schools, plastics... and then generating such political visions within the economic sectors in which we operate."

Member of Holon

"I think in general we're, politically, it would be most aligned with anarchism and those values I think like in terms of technology, it would be Luddism, like being critical of technology, particularly when it's like affecting people's lives negatively. And I think, this is siding with anarchism, the idea of grassroots bottom up change instead of top down. It's really key, that's one of the things that informs everything and informs what we'll prioritise in terms of projects..."

Member of Common Knowledge

Regarding their perspectives on advancing transitions through design practice, the different cooperatives diverge. They agree on the potential of using design for their activism and as a force for change, as seen in the previous section. However, they differ when it comes to transitions and their role as designers and cooperatives in their implementation.

As seen in the previous section, Common Knowledge, aims for bottom-up change, which is reflected in the type of projects and clients they prioritise. They aren't actively seeking to achieve a particular future vision through their design practice, but aim to help other movements successfully put their clear vision into action. Many of the cooperative's projects relate to just transitions, e.g. a project consulting alternatives with workers of the North Sea oil fields and how a green transition could be fair relating to the loss of their jobs in the extraction of fossil fuels.

The Cooperativa de Diseño isn't working around an envisioned future either. In their experience, they try to bring conversations about social and environmental sustainability to their practice. However, they state that many times there are a variety of challenges that entail prioritising more urgent matters. For example, prioritising that the members of a community that asked them to design packaging for a product they aren't fully aligned with can make a living. Considering these paradoxes, they discuss sustainability transitions and try to put them into practice, but it is currently not a priority in their work.

Alternatively to the previous cases, Holon works with transitions in their practice, through the Transition Design framework. Then, they make interventions at the design level that all come from a political stance and aim to trigger a shift towards their envisioned future. For example, considering the conflict between housing laws, property laws and speculation, they aim to make a shift towards the right to housing, which is where they stand politically. For this, they plan a set of interventions at the design level. They use diverse theories of change and are open to discussing different approaches to achieve their vision, not being reduced to a single change strategy.

Thus, when it comes to transitions and their roles as designers and cooperatives in their implementation, the cases have differences: Holon uses transitions actively in their practice, unlike the other two collectives in which the topic is present but not thoroughly pursued. Nonetheless, it can be stated that they are collectively supporting a transition at the work-level, by advocating for the worker-owned model of businesses and cooperation amongst cooperatives.

"Sometimes there are many challenges interlinked, and I think that from design what we manage to do is to divide and make all the challenges visible on the same level and work on that level. [...] That's why I think that from this point of view we do think about the transition, about a more sustainable future, yes, but in practice it has to be integrated, and that's what we are aiming for."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"I think we're most excited to work with organisations that are not just against everything. We're really interested in people that are making propositions for how the world could be instead and then also like how you would get there."

Member of Common Knowledge

"Transition Design for me is talking about the economic policy frameworks that we are talking about, and then at the level of transitions, applying it more to specific cases, such as Housing: What is happening? Well, you have an endemic conflict between housing law and property law and speculating. Okay. Where do we stand politically? Right to housing. How can we move forward from here? So at the design level you are making interventions."

Member of Holon

Summary informed by the group discussion:

The design cooperatives showed consensus regarding their choice of clients being informed by their values and principles, and acknowledged the existence of collectively agreed-on exceptions. They value the perspectives of clients/collaborators and aim to actively involve them in the design process because they embrace participatory practices in their design approach.

The case study participants demonstrated enthusiasm when the group discussion was proposed. They showcased their interest in connecting with similar organisations and maintaining the connection. Additionally, there was an exchange about forming an international network of design cooperatives.

"We should create a network of design coops, it's something that we have always on the table and especially particularly to the Cooperativa de Diseño in Argentina which we've always been like: okay, we should write to them."

Member of Holon

"Let's set it [the network] up!"

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"I would really love to talk to both of those groups, I wanted to meet them for a while."

Member of Common Knowledge

4.2.4. Values clashes manifest in unresolved tensions and challenges

Ambition and having total control over one's workload can potentially lead to self-exploitation. It was stated as common that there are frequent concerns with members pushing themselves, because they are passionate and very involved in what they do. This was discussed as something that hindered being active in the caring 'side', foremost for oneself. The interviewees affirmed that this is a frequent issue and they have to do regular check-ins with their colleagues to make sure they aren't overworking.

Operating and managing a company alongside the design work can add significant workload for individuals. The need to handle various operational aspects of the company can be overwhelming. Therefore, the cooperatives assign roles, or stewardships, supported by other members, and members look out for their colleagues' wellbeing.

"We're kind of militants while we are doing work. We are also kind of self-identifying very much with the kind of work that we are doing - and I think that's problematic sometimes and I have been stabilising a not very healthy relationship to work in that sense. You know that work can really be your personality and work is not your personality. We are reproducing the kind of things that we are against. And I have been more and more defining myself as an abolisher of work and not so much as I identified myself as the self-employed kind of person looking to change the world."

Member of Holon

"The challenge is when you maybe need to tell someone to, for example, take a holiday. Like: you haven't taken holiday for a really long time and you're like clearly burning out. And so, it's like healthcare or something. I think that we create lots of spaces in which to talk about it though, which is really good."

Member from Common Knowledge

Despite the emphasis on socially conscious design, a clear consensus appeared in recognising that these cooperatives operate within the larger framework of the market economy. Therefore, they are in a competitive market, and in it, a significant challenge is balancing the social objectives with their financial feasibility.

Another source of tension in these socially-oriented design cooperatives was the issue of financial support for the most 'committed' or socially significant projects. As the collectives have to get paid fairly for their work, they adapt the length of their design projects to the budget available to the organisations. Then, when the budgets directed at design projects are usually non-existent or quite limited, this is then reflected in the lengths they can go to with the design work.

"Ten years ago there was like this figure of: I work during the day for Coca-cola and at night I do my charity work. We said no to that, this is our main job and we have to be paid well and we have to live from this. It's complex, the organisations don't have money to allocate, and it's varied. Often some get state funding or if they are more international, feminist orgs... maybe they get international funding and within that framework we sometimes manage to formulate the project with them and they can also pay us at the right price, no more and no less. [...] The design work also allows us to define the scope, e.g. if they don't have much, we can do a simpler website, if they have good funding, we can do whatever they want."

Member of Cooperativa de Diseño

"No matter how much you want your practice to be inclusive, those of us who work with local councils, cooperatives, etc., still operate in a market environment, and therefore I am competing with other coops on prices, for example, this already mediates the practice of design."

Member of Holon

"We sometimes kinda joke that, you know, we're trying to be this kind of non-profit anti-capitalist cooperative within capitalism and it feels like sometimes things are really stacked against you."

Member of Common Knowledge

Some design cooperatives were affected by phases of minimal earnings and even faced financial crises. Nevertheless, they managed to sustain their existence despite these challenges, which principally were reflected in the members having lower incomes. Navigating through these difficult times without dissolution demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of the cooperative format, as was seen in the literature background.

In all the collectives, the times of financial precarity were in the past, but they agreed on there being a sort of permanent uncertainty. In one case, concerns emerged around

retirement because the tax payments for cooperatives only provide the minimum retirement wage.

"We did a 20% pay cut for all the members, which obviously helped, but it was not great for everybody. But that stopped the water rushing out of the boat. And then we did a bunch of really practical things in terms of lowering the amount of money we spent on things and getting better kinds of early warning systems and ways of visualising the money coming in and out because we didn't have very much of that."

Member of Common Knowledge

"Now, we are forecasting to be able to pay a small salary monthly. We were a project-based cooperative and that made us quite antifragile, in the sense of distributing the risk. So, the risk is not so much on the cooperative, it's a little bit more distributed on the members."

Member of Holon

"They [Cooperativa de Diseño] admit that 'to build an ethical design collective and to live from it at the same time is really hard'."

(Pater, 2022)

Summary informed by the group discussion:

The economic context as a challenge is significantly present in the conversations, seeing as all the collectives went through times of financial struggles and managed to get through. As they share an anti-capitalist viewpoint, navigating the market economy as competing firms is an unresolved paradox they have to live with. Additionally, their possibilities in the sense of the scale of their design projects are restrained, as working for social organisations means they must adapt to defined budgets. Thus, these tensions coming from a macroeconomic context put their values-based approach under strain.

"Most of the work that we are doing is quite precarious in the strictly economic sense. I think one of the images that we have as a collective is that we have very many of our projects are small projects. The people we work with cannot afford to go for huge projects."

Member of Holon

"I think sometimes because you know the co-op is, for us, not about being directors of a company, obviously. It's about doing the thing that we feel is our purpose and working together and working in a different way. But you do still need to know how to make it exist within capitalism."

Member of Common Knowledge

Chapter 5. Discussion

In this chapter, the research findings will be contextualised in light of the research questions and connected to previous studies and literature reviewed in the theoretical background. Additionally, the implications of the findings to this field of study will be discussed, and conclusions from the analysis will be made.

The questions guiding the research were:

1. How is the worker cooperative model implemented in design-driven cooperatives, and in which ways does it promote and strengthen socially-oriented practices aiming for social change?

2. How does working as a cooperative affect values and valuing, and vice versa, in socially-oriented design practices for social change?

3. How are these design cooperatives connected to transitions to just and sustainable futures?

I address the research questions by drawing conclusions and discussing the findings and the theoretical framework in three main clusters. The first cluster discusses how social values hold greater significance than economic value when individuals in these organisations assess the importance of their work. However, when examining the broader context of their design practice, specifically within the economy of design, the importance of social values tends to diminish. This diverging perspective is discussed in the second cluster. Lastly, in relation to the third research question, I outline ways in which these design cooperatives are potentially connected to advancing economic transitions. This is addressed through their sustainability-oriented values and their social design practices, as well as their use of the worker cooperative model.

5.1. Prioritising their social values

Working as cooperatives is fitting for design work, however, working with an activist stance and from social and environmental values, entails difficulties in finding a balance between creating economic value and maintaining those values as cooperatives. As a result, financial hardships were experienced in all of the cases. Nonetheless, they persevered and made adjustments because of the adaptability of the format and their commitment to both the community and the organisations.

In the interviews, the selected cooperatives specifically expressed their standpoint against the predominant capitalist paradigm and their goal of empowering and contributing to other economies, such as the social and solidarity economy or the grassroots economy. The worker cooperative model supports the adoption of practices that notably oppose capitalist ideals (Leca et al., 2014) and the cases take advantage of this. The four ways in which the model offers an alternative to conventional capitalist models are present in the cases: the division of earnings instead of profit maximisation for shareholders; the democratic governance and horizontal structure; the focus on collaboration and solidarity with other cooperatives and social organisations; and the goal to liberate their members from managerial dominance (Leca et al., 2014).

The worker cooperative model is considered significantly resilient through economic adversity because the workers prioritise job preservation over other alternatives like dissolving the company (Pérotin, 2014). In the studied cases, their adaptations to economic uncertainty naturally resulted in somewhat precarious conditions for the workers; some of which have other sources of income in parallel to working in the co-ops.

Hence, it appears that the employees working in these purpose-oriented cooperatives prioritise maintaining their social values and ideals over generating growth in economic value – without implying an intention to live precariously. The cases work cooperatively and implement the cooperative model to put their social values into action, both in their socially-oriented design practice and their organisational functioning.

5.2. Pressured by the economic context

As previously discussed, the findings indicate or draw attention to the importance of the relationship between balancing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This confirms that even if the structure of the organisation is favourable for the social and environmental dimensions, the economic context in which it operates still has a significant impact on its ability to uphold those values. This supports the claim that sustainable and socially oriented design is constrained by economic structures (Boehnert, 2018).

The economic context in which design firms operate impacts their ability to choose a values-oriented approach. Thus, if they cannot afford to make lifestyle adjustments or find additional sources of income, their options become limited. This is one of the

most common challenges that cooperative firms face; the disconnect between social and economic values (Leca et al., 2014). In the findings, it was recognised as a common hindrance for the cases that moreover aim at practising design principally from a social standpoint. Then, they find themselves in a rather contradictory state of being within, against and looking beyond the capitalist present (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010).

In order to alleviate the economic challenges faced by these organisations, it was observed that a common damaging approach is engaging in self-exploitation. This was attributed to a number of factors, discussed in the findings section 4.2.4, including the need to take on a larger number of projects due to their small-scale nature, operating and managing the company alongside the design work, and their strong commitment to their work. Additionally, to maintain their financial stability, all the cases shared having had discussions in the co-op and/or have had to make exceptional compromises in taking on projects or clients that weren't fully aligned with their values.

5.3. Connected with boosting transitions

As values-oriented design organisations:

Through their design practice, cooperatives such as these challenge current socioeconomic and political paradigms in search of new ones and alternative economic models. The co-ops advocate for the role that design can have in promoting social change. Additionally, they employ design activism approaches, openly confronting issues and presenting arguments for change. They actively work towards improving the conditions of marginalised or disadvantaged groups, as well as questioning established systems and practices (Markussen, 2013).

The previous findings in chapter 4, support the idea that these cases apply the deepest leverage point of shifting mindsets, values and paradigms (Meadows, 1999) in the scale of what design work can be, as well as changing the notion of how to work in the design industry. That is, by discussing, acknowledging and enacting their values at work, and aiming to mainly participate in values-oriented projects; as well as openly promoting their way of working in interviews and academia. They incorporate values such as collaboration, care for each other, interdependence, transparency, trust, fairness and democracy, in their professional sphere in the design industry. While these values are classified as sustainability-aligned values, they are described as critical steps towards sustainability transformations. These are seen to transcend individualism and material wealth, focusing instead on care, unity, and justice (IPBES, 2022). The cases move beyond individualism and material wealth and aim at (re)producing sustainability-aligned values, specifically "human-human sustainability-aligned values" (IPBES, 2022, p.46) such as care, fairness and democracy, in their work and through their scope of design. The study can indicate that the studied design cooperatives are taking steps towards transformations to sustainability.

Regarding transitions and their roles as designers and cooperatives in their execution,

they diverge in their perspectives. Still, this research suggests that making use of design to channel their critical viewpoint on the capitalist economy and empowering diverse economies other than the market economy has an impact. As Boehnert states "Communication design, service design, transition design, systems-oriented design, and design activism are all practices that have the potential to create new design resources, services, tools, that can help to disrupt, shift, and potentially transform economies on a variety of scales" (Boehnert, 2018, p.361) and that is the notion the findings suggest that these cases are working from, regardless of their perspectives of change. Hence, it can be hypothesised that the cases are promoting an economic transition towards diverse economies (separate from the predominant market economy and including for example the SSE or grassroots economies).

Additionally, in parallel to Julier's suggestion that "getting excited about a new design also infers getting excited about economic transformation" (2017, p.3), by enacting their activist agendas through design, the design cooperatives promote economic transformation in certain spheres.

As worker cooperatives working not-for-profit:

The case of Cooperativa de Diseño was said to draw from Argentinian worker-owned recovered factories (mentioned in section 3.5.1). These instances of bottom-up organising helped preserve and promote the technological and productive potential of the local economy, in addition to helping workers maintain their employment (Vieta & Heras, 2022).

The studied organisations are challenging "capitalocentric" notions (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p.35) within the design industry by advocating for and using the alternative worker-owned model to conduct their business. Additionally, by empowering social enterprises, cooperatives, grassroots organisations and communities with their design projects, these design cooperatives affect alternative economic processes through design.

Nevertheless, through the interviews, a common understanding was that sometimes the process of becoming a worker cooperative can take time. Thus, what seemed crucial was already starting to work cooperatively and horizontally, even if the legal form wasn't yet incorporated.

Many scholars agree that the most effective way to impact the capitalist-dominated system is to create connections and strengthen networks with aligned values. The cooperative movement can scale up by forming collaborative networks with other co-ops and various organisational forms within the social and solidarity economy that share common values (Guttman, 2020). The present study raises the possibility that the cases already aim at working in networks and foremost collaborating with organisations from the social and solidarity economy. However, that can be hindered because of the competitiveness of the market demand.

Chapter 6.
Conclusion

6.1. Practical implications

Through the research, a need for literature connecting economy and design was identified, as well as studies on cooperatives in design. This master's thesis principally brings together theory from the economic field regarding cooperative businesses, from design research regarding socially-oriented design and values, and from sociology and the social sciences regarding values. It provides useful insights for design businesses, cooperatives, or social enterprises looking to align their practices with social impact and sustainability goals. On the one hand, it highlights best practices or lessons learned from case studies or analyses, which can help practitioners replicate successful approaches. On the other hand, it draws attention to issues and challenges increasing critical awareness. Finally, it discusses the potential of these organisations regarding transitions.

6.2. Limitations of the study

The mapping process could have been more nuanced and in-depth, however, its application was limited due to relying solely on conversations with people and a scarcity of data. I believe my role in mapping the concepts/statements was too detached from the sources and in order to build a more solid map, the people from the organisations should be mapping their shared values together. As this process was experimental, the exercise resulted in a preliminary mapping that has served its exploratory sense-making purpose but is not regarded as conclusive.

There has been an intention to maintain a distant position from the problem-solving mentality through the course of the thesis. Initially framing the project as an explorative one helped in embracing sense-making instead of problem-solving. Having a background in industrial design engineering and only recently getting more in touch with the social sciences and humanities, changing this perspective on projects has been a source of uncertainty through the process.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

As done in Elzenbaumer and Franz's article on the Footprint worker's cooperative (2018), it would be significant to dedicate more time to the gathering of qualitative data. For example, repeating semi-structured interviews regularly through the years and seeing the evolution of the mapped value/s statements. In their research, the authors did interviews in 2011 and in 2016, as well as paired it with participant observation over 9 months which offered more data to draw conclusions from.

The cases present an alternative approach to design work with the potential to shift paradigms in the design industry, both within the organisation and in the nature of their design practices. Thus, the hypotheses linking the potential of design cooperatives to foster transitions, as outlined in section 5.3 of the Discussion chapter, could be explored further through transition frameworks like the multi-level perspective (MLP). Additionally, considering the cooperative's aim to provoke change, it would be significant as well to examine the long-term impact of the cases' projects.

As there is an acknowledged need for it, future research can benefit from investigating the connection concerning the intersection of economy and design, and the cooperative model within the design field. The discussed challenges faced by these design organisations should be investigated further, together with the strategies to overcome them. Finally, in addition, there is a clear need to learn more about how design cooperatives contribute to alternative economic models and sustainable practices.

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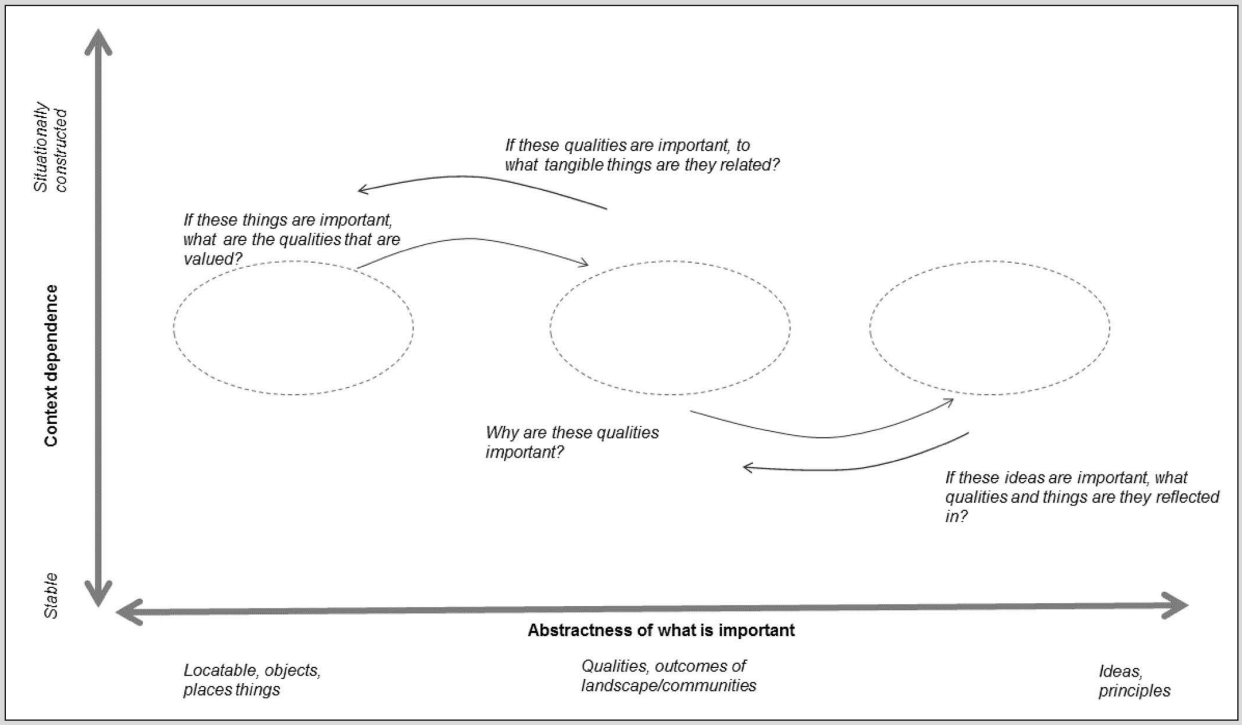
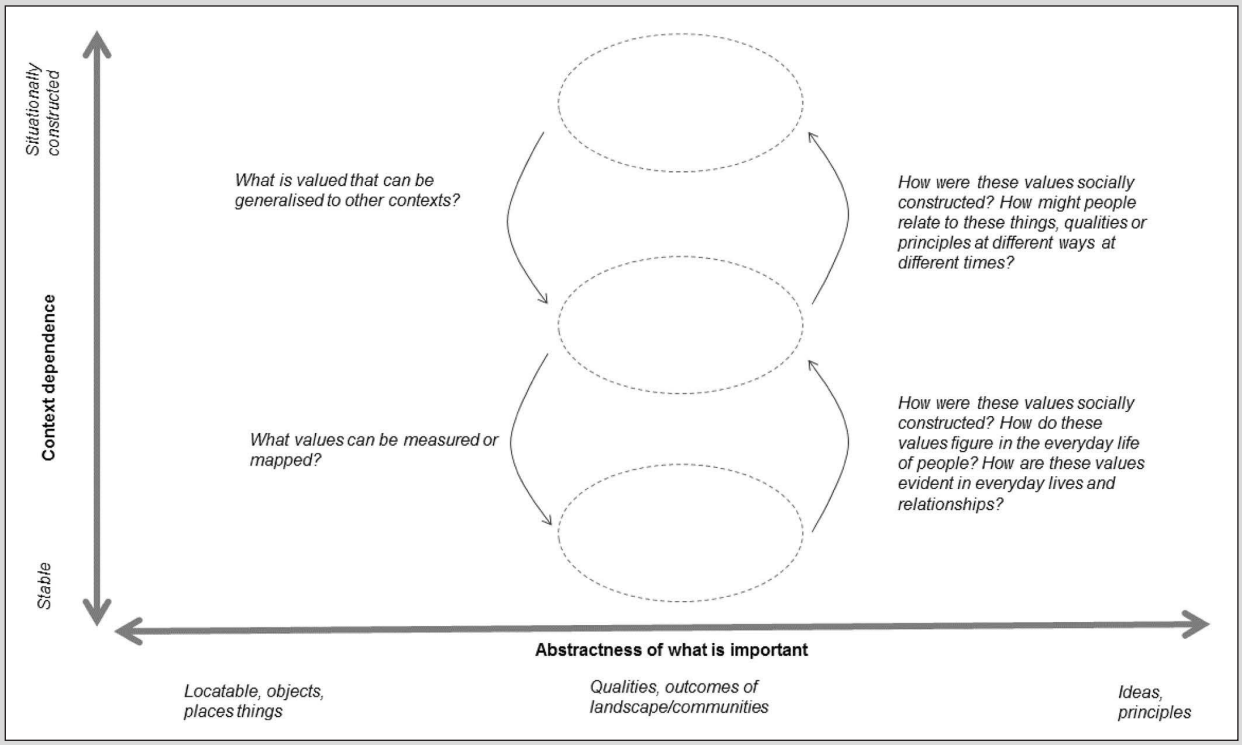
APPENDIX A.

Suggested questions to navigate the conceptual framework (Rawluk et al., 2018)



1. Prompts to move across the conceptual framework horizontally across abstractness.



2. Questions to navigate the conceptual framework vertically across context dependence.

APPENDIX B.
Semi-structured interview questions

Part 1 – Introduction and general information on the co-op

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your current role in the design cooperative?

2. How do you understand membership and employment in the co-op? What roles do members take? How do you distribute the tasks unrelated to design?

3. What type of entities do you work with? / Collaborate with (exchange information/ knowledge)? / Get funding from?

Part 2 – Own perspective and co-op values

4. What do you value most from working in the design cooperative? Why?

5. How would you describe the values/posture of the cooperative?

6. In what aspects of the coop are these values/posture reflected? Are they reflected in any way in your day-to-day or individual behaviour?

7. What would you say are the main challenges or obstacles in upholding these values/ posture in the design cooperative?

8. What are your thoughts on using the cooperative model for working in the design field?

Part 3 – Visions and futures

9. Do you have a collective vision or goal of what you aim to achieve? How do you implement it and keep track of it?

10. Do you discuss or approach transitions to just and sustainable futures in your work?

APPENDIX C.
Final group interview prompts

1. Have you noticed growing attention and discussion surrounding design collectives operating as cooperatives or worker-owned organisations?

2. In the interviews, it seemed like there was a consensus about having a different perspective on working in design. I am interested to know your thoughts on how you currently approach or perceive work.

3. In the interviews, the topic of financial precarity within the collectives was mentioned. I am curious to know more about how each cooperative dealt with this situation as a group.

4. I'd like to hear your thoughts on how the collectives' discussions have changed over time; particularly how they have shifted from being primarily concerned with methods of working to a larger emphasis on making an impact.