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Community economies: Diverse economic practices and strategies in European eco-communities

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Anotace

Cílem práce je rozšířit konceptuální rámec komunitních ekonomik autorek Gibson-Graham na konkrétní případ eko-komunit. Práce zkoumá pestré ekonomické praktiky komunitní ekonomiky, které rozvíjejí evropské ekokomunity v různých kontextech, a potvrzuje, že ekokomunity jsou prostorem demokratického rozhodování, aktérem se schopností formulovat strategie a přijímat a usměrňovat ekonomická rozhodnutí. Výzkum kombinuje zúčastněné pozorování, polostrukturované rozhovory a kvalitativní obsahovou analýzu primárních dokumentů v šesti studovaných regionech.

Abstract

The thesis aims to extend Gibson-Graham's conceptual framework of community economies to the specific case of eco-communities. It explores the diverse community economy practices developed by European eco-communities in different contexts and confirms that eco-communities are spaces of democratic decision-making with an agency to formulate strategies and to hold and redirect economic decisions. The research combines participant observation, semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis of primary documents in six case study regions.

Declaration

I declare that I have worked on this dissertation thesis, entitled Community economies: Diverse economic practices and strategies in European eco-communities, independently and using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

Brno, December 11, 2023

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Jan Malý Blažek

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My work on an Antipode book series chapter (Malý Blažek, Forthcoming) on the community economy in eco-communities is an original result of this dissertation thesis, and it was written as part of Masaryk University's specific research support for student projects, MUNI/A/1460/2021, 'Challenges of Sustainable Society through the Lenses of Humanities and Social Sciences'.

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I acknowledge the contribution of all co-authors of the three collaborative papers presented above, which I cite in this research. I declare that I explicitly acknowledge and cite any ideas or parts of these papers that do not originate from this dissertation thesis and/or my personal contribution.

I proofread the text using DeepL Write software and parts of the final version were proofread by Bradley McGregor, whom I would like to thank.

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ANT	–	Actor-network theory
FIC	–	Foundation for Intentional Community
GEN	–	Global Ecovillage Network
LETS	–	Local Exchange Trade System

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1 Introduction

Eco-communities: Surviving Well Together is the working title of a forthcoming book on eco-communities by editor Jenny Pickerill (Pickerill, Forthcoming). In one of the chapters, I had the opportunity to present some of the ideas and findings from this thesis. The original subtitle of the book was *Living Together Differently*. I think the change of title makes a lot of sense. The question that we must ask ourselves in this century, in the face of climate and ecological crises and other co-existing ones, is not just how to live a good life together but also how to survive together. Eco-communities provide us with valuable experience on both counts.

This research explores projects that imagine, experiment and prefigure how we can create economies at the community level, with a common set of rules that address vulnerabilities and unsustainability related to housing and livelihoods.

It is about diverse economic practices and strategies that enable 'being in common' (Healy et al., 2023). It is also about the dilemmas, contradictions and complexities involved. It is an attempt to understand how the community economy emerges as a space of decision-making, what practices it involves and how the economic imagination of the community economy differs in various arrangements of identities, capitals, infrastructures, decision-making processes and local contexts. The research is an examination of how the community economy manifests itself in different modes of collectivism.

The empirical aim of the thesis is to answer*: What diverse community economy practices are developed by European eco-communities in different contexts.*

The theoretical aim of the thesis is to extend the community economies conceptual framework of Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) to the specific case of eco-communities. Building on the conceptualisation I first outlined in the article in *Human Affairs* entitled *Economic micro-systems? Non-market and not-only-for-profit economic activities in eco-communities*. (Blažek, 2016a), I describe the eco-community economy as a specific economic micro-system that allows for the combination of a range of market and non-market. collective and individual practices, be it the gift economy, the care economy (including care of the commons), various forms of sharing and exchange, subsistence and other forms of material production. This thesis thus provides a framework within which the economies of eco-communities can be further explored, as well as empirical results.

1.1 Research rationale

Eco-communities form innovative models of local living and housing that aim to secure people's basic needs, relying upon the management of the commons with low (or

lower) material throughput while improving quality of life (Asara et al., 2015) and deliberately balancing human, social, natural and built capital (Mulder et al., 2006) through processes of economic democracy. Together with other economic alternatives, they have been the focus of many heterodox economists, geographers, anthropologists and environmentalists as they are understood as important socio-technical niches and incubators of community-based innovations at a local level (Boyer, 2014; Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Researchers from these and other disciplines study eco-communities mostly through ethnographic research. Several studies have argued that eco-communities can significantly reduce energy consumption (Cattaneo & Gavaldà, 2010; Hawasly et al., 2010; Williams, 2008), carbon gas emissions (Simon et al., 2004) and members' ecological footprints (Tinsley & George, 2006). Many case studies have been conducted on environmentally-friendly collective lifestyles (Jones, 2011; Kirby, 2003; Sanguinetti, 2014). There have been discussions on the utopianism and cultural critique of eco-communities (Clarence-Smith, 2022; Lockyer, 2007; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013; Metcalf, 2012; Sargisson, 2007), in relation to land use and urban planning (Boyer, 2014; Miles, 2008; Pickerill et al., 2023), ecological construction (Chatterton, 2013; Lang et al., 2020; Pickerill & Maxey, 2012a; Zhu et al., 2012), gender roles (Pickerill, 2015), food production (Newman & Nixon, 2014) or global education on voluntary simplicity (Litfin, 2009; Sanford, 2017).

For their thick multi-layered socio-environmental, political or cultural objectives, it has been maybe sometimes forgotten that one of the core and foundational function of most eco-communities is provision of housing. And as with most individuals and families, the cost of land and housing and the design of the built infrastructure are critical determinants of the long-term socio-economic situation of eco-communities. With the ongoing housing affordability crisis in many cities and regions, theoretical discussions have recently developed in nearby field of collaborative housing, including a recent special issue of Housing, Theory and Society (Czischke et al., 2020) and several books which opened topics regarding the collaborative approach, partnerships and public policies (van Bortel et al., 2018), inclusivity and affordability (Archer, 2022; LaFond et al., 2017) and mapping emerging trends (Tummers, 2016). A similar volume that would reconceptualise the field of more environmentally oriented communities, with their particularly thick layer of additional objectives and activities, is currently lacking, although there are publications on environmentally sustainable and socially equitable housing from the degrowth perspective (Nelson, 2018; Nelson & Schneider, 2018) and experiences with diverse strategies and dilemmas (Chatterton, 2013; Chitewere & Taylor, 2010).

Surprisingly, less attention has been paid to understanding how eco-communities function economically (cf. Cattaneo & Gavaldà, 2010; Litfin, 2014; Wagner, 2012). There is a need for further scholarship, theoretical framing and discussion including on the link between economic and financial sustainability on the one hand and social and environmental objectives and outputs on the other.

This research aims to contribute to the debate by providing a theoretical framework as well as empirical evidence of current trends and practices in Europe. I have identified seven reasons why eco-community economies are unique economic alternatives and should be examined more profoundly:

(1) They are structures that are relatively easy to identify in terms of space and membership. They are primarily *residential* and are usually formed in a well-defined and site-specific physical location where members live, manage common infrastructure and develop their livelihoods. Because of their housing function, they tend to be long-lived. From a research perspective, this provides an opportunity to observe longer-term strategies and outcomes. But it also creates a pleasant research advantage—for which I again thank all the eco-communities that participated in this research—the existence of hosting and volunteer facilities creates a relative ease for participant observation and ethnographic exploration and engagement in a variety of activities.

(2) They are *intentional* communities. This means that they have a collectively formed vision and mission; in other words, they form a collective identity that includes goals, values and motivations. These are usually well-written in statutes and other binding and recommendatory documents. These are not simply bureaucratic documents. They are lived, revised and tested in daily practice as boundaries for behaviour and action. In terms of research, therefore, it is possible to focus both on questions relating to individual households and also—and this is particularly the case in this research—on the study of the community as a structure, as an organisation, as a whole. Importantly for environmental studies, the collective identity of eco-communities includes *intentional environmental goals.*

(3) They are *democratic* projects; that is, they ensure that individual members have the opportunity (not always the necessity) to participate in decision-making and in the processes involved in planning and running a co-creative project.

(4) They are *participatory*, and thus are created with the aim or need for individual members to cooperate with each other in a broader sense and to share material, legal or symbolic aspects.

(5) They are *economically diverse* projects. Within an eco-community (depending on its size), we find many economic strategies, including gift economies, care economies, sharing, monetary and non-monetary transactions and relations, collective and individual activities, income-generating activities, social and solidarity activities and self-sufficiency. The economy of eco-communities often includes the provision and redistribution of basic needs, namely housing, food and social care. For me, this characteristic was the main motivation for researching eco-communities

(6) Rather uniquely among alternative economies—although we can find it in some workers' collectives—eco-communities are fundamentally linked to the occupied dwelling in which they are located and operate, both in terms of physical boundaries and, more importantly, the financial costs of acquiring the buildings and land.

They (re)create the built environment of apartment blocks, former schools, restored farmhouses with hectares of land or abandoned factories—environments that are usually the domain of neoliberal investment (whether in the hands of the state or corporations), often ending up demolished and rebuilt with profit-maximising motives. In the case of eco-communities, on the other hand, it is the *builders and dwellers* who balance the individual needs of quality life with common needs (the need to be together and to live well together).

(7) Eco-communities create, test and apply a set of practices that are more or less successful in finding solutions to reconfigure the arrangement with the market and with the public administration, mobilising resources and applying solutions that are oriented towards social and, above all, environmental objectives. Together with Lara Monticelli, I consider eco-communities practices of *prefigurative politics* (Monticelli, 2022) that can lead to resilience, whether in terms of reducing carbon footprints and adapting to climate change, growing food, providing housing and intergenerational care, or engaging in a participatory way in the development of built environments.

What forms of eco-communities can be subsumed under such a broadly defined concept? Together with several eco-community scholars, Jenny Pickerill, Joshua Lockyer, Anitra Nelson and Tendai Chitewere, we agreed on the following definition of eco-communities during a joint residency a few years ago:

> We deliberately adopt a broad concept of eco-communities that encompasses eco-villages, intentional communities, low-impact developments and different forms of collaborative and participatory housing initiatives with intentional environmental goals, including many cohousing, baugruppe projects and housing co-operatives, among other interventions. (Pickerill et al., 2023).

In this study, I define the research field in a similar way. However, I also explore (albeit with less emphasis) the borderline phenomena that share some of the seven common features I presented above but which may be less strictly related to housing, may be temporary, may be non-democratic in the sense defined above, may not have intentional environmental ambitions and/or may involve other public and private actors (state, city or developer) in the production of dwellings besides the groups of residents themselves. In this boundary group, I include some community centres, family community farms, temporary communities, projects belonging to marginalised groups as well as some religious communities (especially Christian, Buddhist and New Age communities), social community projects and multi-stakeholder participatory developments.

This thesis is the result of my long-standing interest in eco-communities. It brings findings from research visits and semi-structured interviews in more than forty European

projects of different forms and contexts that took place between 2015 and 2018 and from more than six hundred projects that were included in the qualitative content analysis of primary documents between 2022 and 2023.

In the desk research, I use secondary sources mainly from sociological, geographical and anthropological studies and theories, but the topic is also relevant for urban and rural studies.

The research has been designed to include eco-communities in all their diversity, with a primary (though not exclusive) focus on a few key phenomena in each of the regions studied. Thus, this study includes small farmers' collectives, urban communes, community farms and centres, ecovillages, low-impact developments and other radical ecology projects, tenant syndicates and other networks, cohousing, building groups, cooperatives and other collaborative housing projects.

The regions included in this research are Portugal, Catalonia (and part of the rest of Spain), Austria, Germany (with a focus on the federal states of central and eastern Germany), Denmark, Wales and England. The case studies were selected in order to include two southern, two northern and two central European countries.

1.2 Being in common economically: Theoretical framework of the thesis

Eco-communities are diverse, as are the contexts in which they emerge, the places in which they are located, the infrastructures they use, the activities in which residents engage and the values that guide them. The main theme of this dissertation thesis is the economic diversity in eco-communities: specifically, the diversity of ideas, strategies and practices that influence how eco-communities operate in the economic sphere—how they create *diverse community economies*. I should therefore explain what I mean by the words diversity, community and economy.

Please do not see the title of the thesis as intellectual laziness. Diversity is not just a starting point for research but a constantly reflected observation. The adjective 'diverse' was used by Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. xix) to describe the economy. In contrast to the very simplistic understanding of economy in the market sense, the authors conceptualised other different, *diverse economies*. These include economic practices that differ from mainstream market economies in terms of values and the relationship to money and ownership, but also in other ways, for example, in the way work is organised, performed and valued, in the way decisions are made about what is produced and consumed, from what resources and in what ways. There is not just one different economy but a whole range of different economies. The work of Gibson-Graham and subsequent authors is important not only because it maps and conceptualises often unique solutions, but also because it names and makes

visible practices and solutions that are commonplace but marginalised in a market economy, whether those are manifestations of care, subsistence or gift economies.

Community economies is a concept from the same authors (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. xix) that develops the part of diverse economies where democratic decision-making takes place. They are, in the authors' words, 'a space of decision making where we recognise and negotiate our interdependence with other humans, other species, and our environment'. The community economy thus aspires to be first and foremost a democratic economy. Democracy is complemented by communitarianism.

Healy, Heras and North (Healy et al., 2023, p. 13) explain the community in community economies—in the words of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy—as the ability of *being in common*. The community economy then allows us to be in common in economic relations:

> What does the reconfiguration of 'economy as always plural' and this sense of 'community as always open' do for us? It allows us to identify the dilemmas and difficulties of 'being in common', and to identify potentialities of living in common on a planet that has been overexploited over the centuries (…). What is necessary for shared survival? These questions foreground both community and economy as dilemmatic spaces of problem posing and decision making in interdependence.

Whether we are looking at eco-communities—the focus of this thesis—or, for example, food co-operatives, community-supported agriculture, worker collectives or car-sharing co-operatives, the functioning of these examples is based on social, democratic and economic 'tightness': infrastructure, organisation and membership relationships that ensure all users or workers have the opportunity (and sometimes the necessity) to define, determine, influence and participate in the creation of the community economy. This applies to various attributes, such as the valuation of work and production, the relationship between producers and consumers or the relationship between resources and waste, attributes that are seen as essentially immutable or unchangeable in a conventional market economy. What is specific about eco-communities is that members create these spaces for democratic decision-making deliberately and intentionally. What is particularly interesting in this research, is that being in common manifests itself in different forms of collectivism: eco-communities differ substantially in the scale of the community economy as well as what it contains and what it does not.

What all eco-communities have in common is that they consciously form a collective identity that includes a shared vision, goals and values. However, it is not easy to steer a rudder held by dozens of hands. Democratic governance and scrutiny ensure that the vision and goals are relatively stable. What is constantly changing, however, are the strategies and practices used to achieve them. Eco-communities use strategy

and planning tools. Strategies are discussed in working group meetings and negotiated in plenary sessions. They involve power dynamics, individual conflicts, dilemmas and contradictions and can lead to the departure of some and the arrival of others. The world of diverse economies also requires much greater economic imagination, in the sense of finding, creating, applying and reflecting on different practices. Moreover, all of this takes place at the scale of the economy, which includes the (re)production of housing and built infrastructure and is influenced by the contexts in which the project arises, by temporality in terms of the commitment and investment dynamics and, more generally, by past experiences and future perspectives.

Eco-communities are often perceived as alternatives—as alternative economies, structures and cultures. One of the aims of this thesis is to present them as 'normal' social organisations and economic structures. I believe that a degree of normalisation can help to build a shared understanding that is critical for the ultimate goal of living and surviving well together.

In Table 1, I outline an initial understanding of the factors influencing community economies that need to be monitored.

Table 1: Decision-making space in community economies

IDENTITY	INFRASTRUCTURE	CAPITAL	DECISION-MAKING	CONTEXTS
Ideas	Tools	Finance	Imagination	Form
Vision	Rules	Knowledge, skills	Temporality	Size
Objectives	Built infrastructure	Community culture	Power	Location
				Networks

Intentional community living is about constantly negotiating between different proposals, learning from dead ends as well as from successful practices. Projects evolve over time, and this research is nothing more than testimony from a limited understanding of all the details in each of the communities studied. This is not a study of economic performance. I am not evaluating eco-communities in terms of consumption efficiency or the economic output of collective production, nor am I studying the energy savings of shared infrastructure or collective work. I am interested in the details behind the choice of practices and their mix. I believe that this work can be relevant to both academics and practitioners.

This is the story of *being in common* in economic terms: how is it to live together or close to each other, to share resources, mutual help, a collective budget or ownership? And how is it to design, organise and decide these things? My motivation to do this research was the hope of finding out whether the qualities of living together, such

as the quality of built infrastructure, the ability to grow food or run a community windmill, are contextual, ideological and dependent on access to various capital or whether they are also procedural and imaginative and dependent on the actual mix of collective practices and strategies for solving everyday tasks and puzzles. If eco-communities are laboratories that find and test new practices and solutions for sustainable living, then their performance must also be a result of their ability to imagine how to actually do it together.

It has already been said that community economies are based on negotiation and shared decision-making. Of course, practices are not immutable over time, and their consequences are not always straightforward and clearly interpretable, especially as they are related to the multi-layered goals that eco-communities have. In fact, decision-making involves dilemmas, and decisions involve contradictions.

There is no value-free economy. All economic activities have social and environmental implications and impacts, which naturally complicates the creation of collective strategies and decisions about them much more. In this thesis, I do not evaluate which of the practices are better. I leave it up to the reader to judge how eco-communities deal with the dilemmas involved in creating a socially and environmentally responsible economy.

1.3 Thesis structure

Following the introduction (chapter 1), the theoretical part first presents the existing conceptualisations and typologies of eco-communities from the perspective of intentional communities and collaborative housing fields and then adds the perspective of contextual frameworks and flat ontologies to discuss the importance of actor networks and assemblages in the co-production of eco-communities (chapter 2). I then turn to a theoretical understanding of economies in eco-communities, conceptualising eco-communities as economic micro-systems that combine non-market, non-profit, not-only-for-profit and for-profit economic practices (chapter 3). In the methodological chapter (chapter 4), I present and discuss the chosen methods, the research sample and the limitations of the study. I then apply the conceptual framework of community diverse economies and explore how eco-communities form the spaces of democratic decision-making with a certain agency to formulate strategies and hold and redirect economic decisions in a social and environmental direction. I also look at identified promises, contradictions or dilemmas (chapter 5). In the discussion (chapter 6) and discuss the relevance and implications of studying eco-communities and other heterodox economic alternatives in relation to capitalism.

The structure of the text reflects the interconnectedness of the theoretical and empirical research. In research (and even more so in doctoral studies), there is a gradual refinement of research questions, not to mention an interplay between findings

from the field and from theory. In my case, due to childcare and the interruption of this project, there was a considerable time lag between writing the initial literature reviews and field reports and the final manuscript, which also required a new wave of mapping and content analysis. I describe and reflect on all the constraints in the methodology section of the text.

1.4 About the author

I am an economist and an environmental geographer. I have been studying eco-communities since my Masters. I combine qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews with participant observation in the form of short visits and longer ethnographic stays. My work on eco-communities is inspired by authors I have had the privilege to work with, such as Jenny Pickerill, Anitra Nelson and Joshua Lockyer. Since 2020, I have been working on the topic of participatory housing introduction to the super homeownership housing regime in the Czech Republic (Kodenko Kubala et al., 2023; Malý Blažek et al., 2023). We work in an interdisciplinary team with sociologists and architects using participatory action research methods. In my professional practice, I design strategic planning and participatory processes in municipalities related to housing and climate, which complements my multifaceted interest in multi-level governance of the commons. Although I have several years of experience with living in housing collectives, I am not a community practitioner. I live with my wife and daughter in a detached house and our nearest neighbours live almost a kilometre away.

My personal biases are mainly a combination of my interests and sensitivities, combined with my background as a researcher from the Czech Republic, a country with a post-socialist history, that is, a country that experienced state-enforced collectivisation, particularly in the organisation of state enterprises and cooperatives. I grew up at a time when there was a strong anti-communist discourse, which manifested itself, among other ways, in privatisation, including the privatisation of housing and the idea that individual ownership of housing is the best solution. At the same time, this is the experience of a country where, for many reasons, the social and environmental movement has not created many eco-community projects and eco-communities are very rare (although there is a history of squatting and of spiritual and social communities). And it is the story of a country, where, until recently, was a relative housing affordability, but is now facing a severe housing unaffordability crisis. This experience certainly shapes my own economic imagination.

In my work, I am interested in eco-communities in the sense of intentional environmental communities and in the sense of collaborative housing and living. I perceive, in particular, my positive openness to the promise and potential of communal living for resilience in times of crisis. Having visited a large number of projects, my attitude is one of confidence in the feasibility of the solutions offered, but also of a certain

normalisation —in the sense that I tend to consider these alternatives to be regular forms of social organisation. With regard to my personal experience of the housing affordability crisis in the Czech Republic, the work is also intertwined with the current efforts of various actors, including myself and my colleagues, to find solutions to this crisis. I see part of the solution especially in collaboration between households and in the involvement of public actors—the state, cities and non-profit developers. I am likewise convinced that it makes sense to create eco-communities in collaboration with these actors and that the practices and experiences of eco-communities with economic democracy and community management need to be mainstreamed into other forms of housing and social organisation.

Finally, from a regional perspective, the context of the Czech Republic must be seen as that of the Global North. I am much more able (though still limited) to understand the contexts of the countries of Southern, Northern and, especially, Central Europe than I will ever be able to understand the contexts of the countries of other continents and particularly the countries of the so-called Global South. In this sense, this thesis is clearly defined in Europe: I am following European projects, and when I draw conclusions beyond the specific contexts of the particular projects and countries that I have included in the case studies, I am drawing conclusions only for the European region.

2 Forms, objectives, infrastructures: Do conceptualisations matter?

I begin the theoretical part of the thesis with an overview of the conceptual frameworks and typologies related to eco-communities. One of the problems in the research of eco-communities is the lack of shared understanding about what an eco-community actually is (and is not). There is a strong *best practice* effect: a considerable reductionism in empirical binding with frequent reference to a few specific examples of better-known, prominent and often larger projects (Joubert et al., 2015; Litfin, 2014). This exemplary presentation can trigger a narrative of high expectations. The literature on eco-communities is also largely conflated and/or confused with the literature on some of its forms: *ecovillages*, when the focus is on 'laboratories' of environmental solutions, or *cohousings*, when the focus is on housing-oriented eco-communities. This may have an impact on how eco-communities are understood in the wider academic debate, but also among non-academic audiences. Put simply, the overuse of examples and form reductionism influences how we imagine eco-communities, what qualities we ascribe to them and how we understand the phenomenon in the context of social movement theories, the production of housing, socioecological transformations or economic alternatives.

Therefore, in this chapter, I first present the traditional classification of eco-communities as a subcategory of intentional communities. I present typologies used by practitioners and scholars, particularly from (Western) European and American contexts, and look at how they divide the field into different forms and models. After, I present academic conceptualisations from a similar perspective: *collaborative housing,* a rapidly developing field at present. Third, I look at eco-communities in terms of flat ontologies, in relation to other actors and contexts. I apply actor-network theory and discuss the role of infrastructures.

2.1 Traditional conceptualisation: Eco-communities alongside other intentional communities

Diane Leafe Christian, a community practitioner and author, defines residential or land-based intentional communities as 'a group of people who have chosen to live with or near enough to each other to carry out their shared lifestyle or common purpose together' (Christian, 2003, p. xvi). The Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC)[1] founded in the United States as early as 1948 (Blue & Morris, 2017) describes an intentional community 'as a group of people who have decided to live together with the

[1] Formerly known as the Fellowship for Intentional Community

goal of building a shared lifestyle that reflects their shared values' (The Fellowship for Intentional Community, 2010).

The editors of *eurotopia: Directory of Communities and Ecovillages in Europe*—themselves mostly practitioners—use the term community 'when a group of people live together intentionally in order to pursue ideological (and also material) goals together, be it explorative or fulfilled. That is, when these people care to abandon a little of their individual privacy in order to communally create personal aspects of life' (Würfel, 2014, p. 6).

According to this logic, eco-communities are intentional communities in which a group of people fulfil environmentally conscious goals. They include projects based on concrete environmental aspects and indicators, such as carbon footprint reduction, ecological building, food provision and self-sufficiency, as well as projects whose ethics are based on voluntary simplicity, deep ecology or radical political and transformative ecologies.

The environmental aspect often stands alongside social, political or spiritual goals and interests (H. Jackson, 1999). This raises questions: Are eco-communities limited to projects in which environmental goals are the first priority, or also—as I argue—to projects in which environmental goals are intentional but can be complementary, for example, with shared spirituality or the provision of housing as the main drivers? This is the case in many communities where, for example, ecological restoration of land and food production is combined with holistic education, personal development or New Age spiritual practices. Is the term 'eco-community' then accurate and helpful as regards a common understanding? In this chapter, I search for the answer from the perspective of intentional communities.

2.1.1 The emergence of the ecovillage: Formalisation of an ecological objective

The broad family of intentional communities has its origins in historical monastic orders and early modern utopian communities (see e.g. Delanty, 2003; Goitia, 2003; Holloway, 1966; Metcalf, 2012; Young, 2013) as well as in utopian literature and theoretical knowledge dating back to ancient authors (cf. Vacková, 2010). The phenomenon of 'specialised' environmental communities is much more recent. Jonathan Dawson suggests that the pioneering example is Sólheimar, an Icelandic eco-community founded in 1931 (Dawson, 2010, p. 7).

Later in the twentieth century, some of the temporary camps and communities established as part of the hippie movement and counterculture in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the United States and Europe, were informed by the growing ecological crisis. Some of them are now of great importance to the whole intentional community

movement (such as the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, founded in 1962; Twin Oaks in the United States in 1967; or Auroville in India in 1968[2]).

The next major wave began with the development of the *ecovillage* concept in the 1990s. At that time, Robert and Diane Gilman in the United States and Hildur and Ross Jackson in Denmark were working on the theoretical grounding and promotion of the concept, supporting the existing back-to-the-land communities, ecological builders and dwellers, and permaculture projects and building on their experiences to create a new global community movement with sustainability (in the broadest sense) as its main priority. Hildur and Ross Jackson founded the Gaia Trust (1987), the Danish Ecovillage Network (1994) and, finally, the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN, 1995) (J. T. R. Jackson, 2000), which to this day serves as a knowledge infrastructure, a network and an important actor in building the discourse around ecovillages.

The Gaia Trust also funded a research project called 'Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities' (Gilman & Gilman, 1991). In 1991, the magazine *In Context* published a special issue with a famous text in which Robert Gilman summarised this research on environmentally-oriented intentional communities and defined the term ecovillage (then hyphenated as 'eco-village'). According to Gilman, ecovillages should be designed as 'human scale full featured settlements in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future' (Gilman, 1991).

Gilman presented ecovillage principles in such a general way that the technology-oriented and techno-sceptic spiritual groups as well as eco-pragmatists and communities from both the Global North and Global South could identify with the concept. He also identified challenges to the implementation of the ecovillage concept and presented them in the form of unanswered questions. This analytical openness was combined with a utopian manifestation—Gilman presented the ecovillage concept as an ideal to which communities should aspire: 'There are even some communities that could, within a few years, be considered full eco-villages' (Gilman, 1991).

Who decides the arbitrary question of 'whether a project can be *considered* an ecovillage' has in fact been answered by the subsequent actions of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) itself, and Gilman's manifesto largely reflects the way the network operates to this day. There is a contrast between GEN's openness (and vagueness) about who qualifies as a prospective member of the network[3] and GEN's aspiration to

[2] My research activities involved extensive mapping and content analysis of websites, statutes, brochures and other primary documents of eco-communities and their networks in Europe and beyond. For this reason, throughout the thesis, I do not cite these primary sources (see chapter 4: Methodology).

[3] I have analysed the contents of the GEN database as well as the continental and national networks. It contains not only a global database of ecovillages and other eco-communities, but also many

provide positivist answers to complex sustainable outcomes. They had developed a community sustainability assessment, which has been recently updated into an ecovillage impact assessment, a tool which uses the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to 'measure the impact' of ecovillages through a spectrum of aspects. GEN on their website currently defines an ecovillage as 'an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designing its pathway through locally owned, participatory processes, and aims to address the Ecovillage Principles in the 4 Areas of Regeneration (social, culture, ecology, economy into a whole systems design)'.

Ecovillages and GEN have had a significant impact on the eco-community movement as well as on the scholarship. And although Diane Leafe Christian (2012, p. 19) softened the ambitious Gilman's definition by stating that 'Ecovillages are not, and certainly don't claim to be, exemplary models of what they're attempting to learn and teach. They are essentially "works in progress," learning as they go, making mistakes, and correcting course accordingly', I argue that some of the leading ecovillages did end up as examples of sustainable living, leaving less space for the development of other concepts to be integrated into the movement.

2.1.2 The ecovillage-cohousing dichotomy: The role of best practices and other forms

In the 1970s, the first *cohousing* communities were established in Denmark (called *bofællesskab*) and gained popularity especially in Northern Europe and in the United States (McCamant & Durrett, 2011). Later, the emerging movement created knowledge infrastructures and networks that, among other things, aimed to disseminate and replicate the concept (such as the Cohousing Association of the United States). Cohousing is defined as 'participatory designed neighbourhood developments that creatively mix private and common dwellings to recreate a sense of community, while preserving a high degree of individual privacy' (Lietaert, 2010, p. 576; Sanguinetti, 2014).

Since the emergence of ecovillages, intentional communities have often been conceptualised in a dichotomy with cohousing (cf. Meltzer, 2010). Both concepts have several features in common: (1) member participation in spatial planning and project management, (2) intentional neighbourhood design, (3) member participation in governance and (4) shared facilities, cooking and eating; shared tools and appliances; shared chores and shared cultural activities (cf. Lietaert, 2010).

The main difference from the perspective of eco-communities is that while the concept of ecovillages was introduced to provide a framework and vision for

'projects on paper' and many outdated profiles. The vignettes should not always be considered actual profiles of eco-communities but rather vague advertisements for various projects and ideas of individuals who in one way or another are related to the ecovillage movement through New Age spirituality, eco-building, unschooling or permaculture.

environmentally ambitious communities, cohousing has an environmental potential. Nonetheless, the concept is not vitally linked to ecology. The second major difference between the two concepts lies in their general purpose. Cohousing is designed to provide housing, not livelihoods. Money usually comes from the outside economy. The construction of housing and infrastructure is more often left to professionals. On the other hand, houses in ecovillages are often (but not always) built by the residents themselves, who also more often tend to create livelihoods and jobs within the community.

The presented similarities and differences create an almost perfect dichotomy, even more so when Lietaert (2010, p. 577) characterises cohousing as fitting with an urban lifestyle and ecovillages with rural life. In reality, the boundaries between the concepts are not so clear-cut. Some communities identify with both the ecovillage and cohousing concepts. Munksøgård, for instance, is a well-known Danish ecovillage composed of five small bofællesskab groups; similarly, EcoVillage Ithaca in the United States consists of three cohousing neighbourhoods. Meltzer (2010) even describes communities that combine cohousing structures with ideas of holistic ecovillage design as mainstream ecovillages.

There is no doubt that both concepts have had a profound impact on the way the general public and academics perceive intentional communities. The question is why other communities have not received the same attention. Perhaps, this has been driven by efforts to promote community life and, ultimately, to make new structures more easily replicable in both rural and urban areas. However, there are other, often older forms of intentional communities with the aim of communal housing and living, collective economy, education or spiritual services, often with their own histories going back decades and centuries (see timeline in Kelley, 2011).

Based on her observation as a community practitioner in the American context, Christian (2007, p. xviii) summarises the intentional community forms as follows:

1. ecovillages;
2. cohousing;
3. urban group households, which include student housing co-ops, elderly housing co-ops and limited equity housing co-ops;
4. rural back-to-the-land homesteading communities, conference and retreat centres, holistic healing centres and sustainability education centres;
5. spiritual communities, which include yoga ashrams, Buddhist meditation centres, Christian communities (both service-oriented, such as L'arche communities, and Christian housing communities) and other service-oriented communities (Camphill Communities); and
6. income sharing communes.

However, there are also classifications that open the field of intentional communities to variants between bottom-up and top-down[4] projects (see section 2.2.3 for further discussion in the case of collaborative housing) as well as to projects that originate in neighbourhoods in the Global South, such as the Colufifa villages organised around GEN-Senegal (cf. Dawson, 2010, 2013).

How do the networks themselves conceptualise the field? The directory of the FIC lists projects that fall into the categories of ecovillages, cohousing, communes, spiritual or religious communities, shared housing, student co-ops, but also transition towns or eco-neighbourhoods and traditional or indigenous communities. The Global Ecovillage Network shows on their ecovillage map not only four types of ecovillages (religious or spiritual, intentional (sic), traditional and indigenous), but also transition towns, cohousings, shared housing, holistic centres, many types of eco-projects (including permaculture, tourism and educational projects) and, finally, eco cities and eco-communities (sic).

What do all these listed forms of intentional communities share in common? Intentionality—a collective identity of a group living together. While ecology is the key aspect that defines the ecovillage movement, *living together* is the core narrative in the intentional community movement. On the other hand, these typologies are based on the self-identification of actual projects that have profiles within the networks while also reflecting the politics of the networks. For example, GEN takes great care to act globally and collaborate with traditional projects in the Global South, which are then identified as specific concepts (cf. Joubert et al., 2015). FIC builds its identity using communities historically developed in a mainly American context (egalitarian communities, student cooperatives, Christian communities, etc.).

Both stories interestingly converge by bringing together in one field a history of socially, economically and/or ecologically radical communes and egalitarian communities; ashrams and social care-oriented spiritual communities; and housing-oriented cohousings. The projects vary in size, legal identity, organisational structures or ideologies (cf. Goitia, 2003), but it is the underlying goals that vary considerably. Environmental, economic, educational, spiritual and housing objectives (and possibly others) can be identified. This creates a challenge for the community movement to be able to inform the public and create a shared understanding among communities. And this is also the reason why FIC is very careful to share stories from all of the listed forms equally (Roth, 2018).

The last practitioner typology I offer in this chapter is the popular directory of European communities called *eurotopia*, which in its 2014 edition classifies the

[4] The often-cited example of top-down intentional community is the pioneering project BedZed: Beddington Zero Energy Development in London, UK. The same company (Bioregional) has also initiated several other developments in the rich countries of the Global North, such as Grow Community in Seattle, USA and the WestWyck Ecovillage in Melbourne, Australia.

projects listed in the book as a community (short for intentional community), an ecovillage (usually also a community), a settlement/co-housing project (with the explanation that 'it can be, but does not have to be, a community') or a shared flat (which, according to the authors, is usually not a community and therefore cannot be listed in the directory). Religion or political identities are not formative enough for the authors to cluster them in the directory. As the editor of the book Michael Würfel (2014, p. 41) argues, there are many non-exclusive combinations of identities, such as 'spiritual and politically left-wing' or even 'esoteric and left-wing', but the editors have chosen to keep it simple. Again, while other clusters seem relatively open in their definitions, *ecovillages* remain a symbol of ecologically oriented multi-faceted projects with 'social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainability'.

2.2 Eco-communities conceptualised as collaborative housing

The agreement among scholars and practitioners that cohousing is an intentional community creates space to include other intentionally created collaborative and participatory forms of housing in the field. Compared to research on intentional communities, scholars of collaborative housing have recently paid strong attention to conceptualising the field (see Czischke et al., 2020; Griffith et al., 2022; Tummers, 2016b; and also Malý Blažek et al., 2023).[5]

Intentional cooperation in housing is not a new phenomenon. In the sense of active, coordinated and collaborative involvement of households in the process of building and managing dwellings, collective ownership and sharing services and space, it has appeared in several waves since the end of the nineteenth century. The editors of the book *A History of Collective Living* describe the historical tendencies towards what they call 'shared housing' as being driven over the decades by three motives: economic, political and social (S. Schmid et al., 2019). Lang and Mullins (2020) explained the historical developments of collaborative housing in the UK context as stemming from the utopian motives of the nineteenth-century cooperative movement, the repetitive motives of economic and housing crises throughout the twentieth century and the robust political motives related to housing and societal and demographic challenges.

Over the last two decades, the segment has been re-emerging, especially in Europe and other countries of the Global North. One factor that accelerated this process was

[5] This section elaborating the conceptualisations of collaborative housing was partially published in an article for the *Czech Sociological Review* (Malý Blažek et al., 2023). I co-authored the paper with my colleagues Tomáš Hoření Samec, Petr Kubala and Václav Orcígr. However, the parts of the paper that focus on conceptualisations on which I base parts of this chapter were my personal contribution to the manuscript. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge the influence of my colleagues on the final version of this text.

the period after the 2008 mortgage and financial crisis, the associated decline in housing affordability and its increasing commodification and financialisation (Bresson & Denèfle, 2015; Ferreri & Vidal, 2021; Tummers, 2016).

This latest wave encompasses a range of housing models that vary in size, mode of provision, character of collaboration among residents and arrangements with other private and public actors in the construction process and in their various objectives beyond housing (id22: Institute for Creative Sustainability, 2012; Wohnbund e.V., 2015).

In this framework, participatory housing refers primarily to cohousing, building groups (baugruppen), tenant associations, housing cooperatives and cooperative neighbourhoods and, especially in smaller towns and rural areas, self-help housing groups and the already widely discussed ecovillages. In addition, various forms of institutional shared housing (community housing for seniors or people with disabilities) and even some municipal and rental housing with participatory elements can also be included (Czischke et al., 2020).

2.2.1 Mobility innovation and local variants of collaborative housing

While some local forms have successfully spread to other countries, including their original terms (in German, e.g., a *baugruppe* or *syndikat* of tenants) (Hurlin, 2019), in new contexts, the meaning is often transformed or the concept takes on new content and connotations (as policy mobility studies show in urban policy transfers; cf. McCann & Ward, 2012). In other cases, specific local forms retain a local scope for cultural or legal reasons, such as Denmark's strongly community-oriented cohousing—*bofallesskab,* despite cohousing, as a concept, having spread widely, especially in Northern Europe and the United States. Another example are the radically ecological homesteads of *low-im*pact developments and neighbourhoods in the United Kingdom (Pickerill & Maxey, 2012) or community land trusts (Conaty et al., 2003; Thompson, 2020), which have spread mainly in the Anglo-Saxon context.

Through the mobility of innovation or in international comparisons, local nuances that distinguish (or confuse) certain forms of housing can be lost.[6] Social movements

[6] For example, in German-speaking countries, there are also *Wohngemeinschaften* (flatshare communities—groups of mostly temporary rental housing); *Baugruppen* (building groups), also known as *Baugemeinschaften* (building communities—residents forming a group/community to collaboratively build and manage housing); *Wohnprojekten* (housing projects—groups creating housing with a shared vision) and *Hausprojekten* (house projects—often politically active and emancipatory projects). Yet, it is common for one project to be titled a *Baugruppe*, a *Wohnprojekt*, *gemeinschaftliches Wohnen* (community housing) or cohousing over its lifespan. Similarly, in the French context, many related forms exist: *co-habitat, habitat groupe, habitat partage, habitat participatif, habitat*

add further, specific housing forms, including squats, trailer parks, autonomous projects, residential community centres and collectives.

The often problematic legal anchoring of resident cooperation in many countries adds to the confusion. For example, some building groups use the hybrid legal structure of associations and limited liability companies, whereas others establish cooperatives. Elsewhere, we find both 'old' and 'new' forms of housing cooperatives operating in parallel under the same legal framework, with the new forms emerging, for example, as a response to the lack of democratic control and participatory involvement in existing housing forms (Thompson, 2020).

2.2.2 Intentionality in collaborative housing

Intentionality in collaborative housing can be understood as the actual self-definition of a group of households to act as a housing project with a specific vision and objectives. While some projects are created for the sole purpose of housing, many emphasise self-organisation and community character as well as political, cultural, social, environmental or spiritual objectives. This is particularly evident in ecovillages, residential enterprises (e.g., agricultural, educational or manufacturing) and the political projects described above.

Intentionality can also be found in examples of 'temporary' and 'liminal' forms of housing, such as 'right to the city' projects (see, e.g., Capanema Alvares et al., 2022) or projects created by marginalised groups, such as homeless people (cf. Vašát, 2023) or refugees (Kanavaris, 2022).

However, many 'standard' collaborative housing projects, such as those (self-)defined as baugruppe, cohousing or housing cooperatives, also have explicit or implicit goals[7] often related to the target resident group, like projects aimed at ageing people (Cummings & Kropf, 2020; Scanlon & Arrigoitia, 2015), feminist projects aimed at women or LGBTQ+ groups, social community housing for migrants or people with disabilities (see id22: Institute for Creative Sustainability, 2012). The development of collaborative housing is also largely a response to the environmental unsustainability of existing forms of housing or the energy intensity of construction. Similar to intentional communities, the ecological promise of collaborative housing is found in the spatial design and stewardship of shared resources. Ecology also manifests itself as an element in urban competitions for collaborative housing. Moreover, a certain proportion of 'standard' collaborative housing projects have environmental responsibility

autogere, habitat alternatif, cooperative d'habitants and *cooperatives d'habitation* (Bresson & Denèfle, 2015).

[7] Indeed, one of Zurich's best-known building cooperatives is called *mehr als wohnen* (more than housing). It provides a platform for non-profit sustainable housing and neighbourhood development (Boudet et al., 2017).

explicitly stated in their objectives (Chatterton, 2015; Nelson, 2018; Nelson & Schneider, 2018).

2.2.3 The liminal zone of community-based initiatives: Between bottom-up and top-down projects

The richness of local contexts and perspectives has produced a plethora of concepts, terms and models related to collaborative housing. However, for a number of reasons outlined above, concepts are confused and redefined, not only during the mobility of innovation between countries and actors but also over time. One response to this situation, at least in academic circles, has been a debate on the scope of the overarching conceptualisation. One of the key aspects that distinguishes collaborative forms of housing from dominant forms of rental, ownership or municipal housing is the active involvement of a group of residents in the creation, duration or eventual dissolution of an entire project. The fundamental questions in this debate are therefore where the boundaries of this segment lie and what the active involvement of residents actually means.

Tummers (2016) uses the umbrella term co-housing (with a hyphen) to refer to the re-emergence of participatory housing in Europe in the 21st century and, basically, to cover the residents' initiatives to collectively shape housing. In France, the term *habitat participatif* (participatory housing) has been adopted for initiatives in which the collective of residents is a key actor in the construction and management of housing (Bresson & Denèfle, 2015). However, Zimmermann (2014), a representative of the urban planning department of the city of Strasbourg, France, points out that participatory housing cannot be understood only as the independent self-help construction of housing groups. He defines habitat participatif as housing in which residents are already actively involved in urban planning and housing policymaking—in specific decisions about the design, construction and management of housing. Although the French authors suggest merging habitat participatif with the Anglo-Saxon term co-housing, the French term encompasses projects created in different combinations of cooperation, including top-down projects in which the municipality, the state or even the non-profit sector is the main developer. Other authors (Czischke et al., 2020; Lang & Stoeger, 2018) propose covering the segment with the term 'collaborative housing', which encompasses a wide range of concepts and local variants of participatory housing and community-oriented housing, categories defined by an emphasis on residents' cooperation within the group (community-oriented) and in terms of cooperation with other actors (participatory)(Thompson, 2020).

There are examples of projects in which the public actor has a leading role in the creation of participatory housing—whether in setting the conditions, such as designating land for participatory forms of housing in the spatial plan, as is common in some German or Austrian cities; in defining criteria for public tenders or other forms of

resident selection; or even in developing participatory municipal housing (id22: Institute for Creative Sustainability, 2012). The city or state may also have a role as a lending institution, a consultant, a moderator or a facilitator of the process (Boyer, 2014; Lang & Stoeger, 2018; Szemző et al., 2019). Tummers (2015) adds that only in the context of local urban planning may one fully understand the importance of co-housing projects as 'micro-laboratories' for urban development, housing typologies, management of common spaces and the implementation of new financing models or legal forms. In this sense, Droste (2015) reflects on the influence of urban housing policies on the development of co-housing in Germany, which can significantly increase the potential of these forms in terms of housing affordability (cf. LaFond et al., 2017).

As Czischke et al. (2020) point out, the aforementioned community land trusts are also a form of participatory housing that goes beyond 'builders and dwellers'. Land trusts are anchored in the local community through investment, ownership, social control and governance. They are often established alongside or in partnership with the municipality, but the key role remains with the local community. It is the local collective ownership and management and the non-profit nature of the commons that makes housing affordable in this system. In addition, private limited-profit associations, such as building cooperatives and other non-profit developers, also play an important role in the construction of participatory housing. A similar role is also played by larger housing cooperatives and other limited-profit developers when they collaborate on urban housing policies, as in Zurich (Kurz, 2017) or Vienna (Rießland, 2020).

Nevertheless, both Czischke (2020) and Thompson (2020) mention that if the notion of collaborative housing is expanded to include various top-down forms, the risk that private and institutional actors will appropriate the segment increases, as does the risk of limiting democratic control and the commodification of housing. In any case, the inclusion of top-down forms under the umbrella term 'collaborative housing' opens a debate about one of its key characteristics—the decisive influence of resident groups on the design, construction and management of housing.

There is no clear dividing line between 'truly community-based' (i.e., self-organised or even autonomous) projects and those moderated by other actors with the 'more subtle involvement' of residents. In this respect, Gruber and Lang's (2018) typology of collaborative housing models in Vienna is useful. It categorises the intensity of the involvement of cities, limited-profit companies (housing cooperatives, developers) and resident groups in the construction and management process. In contrast to the conventional model, where residents are only involved in the use/management of common spaces, the authors define four models of collaborative housing: (i) a participatory model, in which residents fully control the management of shared spaces and are also involved in the planning process and financing; (ii) a partnership model, in which residents have full control over the planning, use and management of shared spaces and are significantly involved in all other aspects, including financing, allocation and the

reallocation of housing units; (iii) an autonomous baugruppe model in which the group is autonomous and only cooperates with other actors in financing; and (iv) a syndicate model, in which the residents are fully autonomous.

The risk of the concept itself being appropriated is perhaps not as great as that of the original idea being co-opted into the profit-making market logic, with potentially positive results in more participatory and people-responsive developer-led neighbourhood development projects, but also with negative impacts of the external regime on the bottom-up non-speculative housing projects in terms of inappropriate legal, policy or financial conditions if the participation or not-for-profit nature of the segment is not protected.

Similar process can be seen, for example, in the practices of the sharing economy (also called the collaborative economy). Despite the progress of community initiatives and urban commons, it is the digital sharing economy platforms that particularly benefit from the sharing and collaborative trend in today's neoliberal city (Acquier et al., 2017; Blažek, 2018a; Frenken & Schor, 2017). This is also due to the ambivalent support of municipalities, which see sharing as an opportunity to cultivate decentralised governance, participation and non-commercial civil society activities on the one hand, and to develop commercial smart city techno-innovations on the other (Gruszka, 2017) (further on sharing economy see section 3.1). Perhaps also in response to this trend, LaFond et al. (2017) include under participatory housing only those practices that are actually created by the self-organised communities of future residents, hence the terms 'community-led housing' or, again, 'co-housing'. This does not necessarily mean that a group cannot cooperate with other actors, whether private or public. The fundamental principle, according to the authors, is direct democratic control over the process of housing construction and management.

In conclusion, although different authors use different terms—collaborative housing (Czischke et al., 2020), co-housing (Tummers, 2015), participatory housing (Bresson & Denèfle, 2015; Malý Blažek et al., 2023) or community-oriented housing (LaFond et al., 2017)—it is arguably the intentionality of the form of housing and of the objectives, the active involvement of households and democratic control over construction and management that are the three key characteristics of these segments that distinguish them from other forms of housing.

There are also some paradoxes and critique in the debate on collaborative housing in relation to the promise of their socially and environmentally transformative potential. Michael La Fond draws attention to the interdependence of democratic control and the social ecology of housing: control over the economic, social and environmental aspects of housing—affordability as well as energy efficiency—is particularly important because of the interdependence of the housing crisis and the ecological and climate crises (id22: Institute for Creative Sustainability, 2022). However, Pernilla Hagbert describes that the relevance of collaborative housing for the development of sustainable living

environments must be seen in two ways (Hagbert, 2019, pp. 183–184): On the one hand, collaborative housing promises that socially and environmentally responsible residents are doing their best to build alternative, affordable, yet socially and environmentally sustainable housing (cf. Becker et al., 2018). On the other hand, Hagbert argues that sustainable co-housing may actually be an outcome of green growth eco-modernism, where households are customers in a market that is oriented towards sustainable housing consumption.

Certainly, there is an interesting boundary to be explored between common and public areas and community and local economy services in collaborative housing developments. In this context, it is important to highlight another paradox described by Bricocoli (2020, p. 248). The author illustrates that the intentional internalisation of services (such as a rooftop swimming pool, sauna or library) within co-housing buildings promotes a sense of community but can ultimately lead to separation from the urban and neighbourhood context. Pickerill (2016, p. 32) describes the actual physical exclusion of some projects in opposition to the participatory approach in building the commons:

> Many attempt to open up their land to visitors, often creating public footpaths and welcoming signs. But while property and social relations are organised in many eco-communities to benefit all, they tend to benefit their members far more than the wider communities they are embedded in. This incompleteness, however, is not necessarily a sign of failure but, rather, an indicator of the complexity of what the commons constitute and how commoning can be practised.

Finally, there are intentional and unintentional forms of exclusion in community projects which are explored by several authors. Arbell (2022) argues that cohousings in England are reproduced as predominantly White and middle-class spaces due to cultural capital and habitus (in Bourdieusian tradition), and not necessarily socio-economic affordability as the main barriers to inclusion. Chitewere and Taylor use the example of Ecovillage at Ithaca in the United States to argue that eco-communities tend to develop socio-economically, culturally or racially homogenous communities. ‘In making the decision to focus on building a community for the middle class, residents have limited their engagement with social justice issues and have struggled with incorporating minorities and the poor into their community’ (Chitewere & Taylor, 2010, p. 142).

2.3 Conceptualisation of eco-communities in contexts

So far, I described how community residential projects develop in different modes of production, different sizes, locations or objectives. The intention of this chapter is to clarify, before the analytical part of the thesis, not only how to distinguish eco-communities, but also how to study them in contexts, be they socio-cultural, economic or others. Thus far, I have introduced framings of eco-communities as intentional communities and as collaborative housing. The problem with the conceptualisations and typologies presented so far—which has implications for this thesis—is twofold.

First, there is a tendency, and particularly in the scholarship on intentional communities, to understand specific communities such as ecovillages, cohousings or housing co-ops as static and often mutually exclusive forms.

Second, the conceptualisations and networks of intentional communities mentioned in the previous chapters create a division between communities that have an environmental focus as their highest priority and other communities that aim for environmental responsibility but are created for reasons other than 'living lightly on the planet'. I argue that this is risky for several reasons: (a) it potentially increases the demands on certain environmentally oriented communities, be they from researchers or practitioners; (b) it reduces the demands on other communities in terms of their environmental impact; and (c) from a research perspective, it makes it tempting to study the environmental action in this dichotomy.

In this chapter, I search for a shared understanding between the intentional community debates and collaborative housing debates about what eco-community represents. I consider how eco-communities can be understood and conceptualised from the perspective of flat ontologies. First, I will use examples of contextual typologies that can allow the phenomena to be studied from various angles and contexts, and then I will frame eco-communities in terms of actor networks using the logic of actor-network theory.

2.3.1 Contextual frameworks and cluster typologies

Aware of the need for a more conceptual typology of intentional communities, Meijering et al. (2007) analysed more than a thousand intentional communities in Europe, the United States and Oceania and divided the field into four clusters based on location (remote or urban), ideology and reasons for the communities foundation, economy (work in/outside the community, self-sufficiency, shared facilities, outside services) and social aspect (communal activities, use of media/telecommunications, social contacts outside the community and networking). I present below abbreviated vignettes of the four clusters described by the authors (Ibid. 2007, pp. 45–46):

- *Religious communities* can be found in both urban and rural areas. They are characterised by strong ideological values based on religious or spiritual beliefs. This leads to withdrawal from mainstream society. In some cases, contacts remain as members provide social services to people in need. Economic independence is limited to basic facilities. A sense of community and home is created through communal 'rituals' but also through shared meals and work. Contacts with other like-minded communities are also actively sought. Through these contacts, networks are formed.
- *Ecological communities* retreat to remote locations where they try to live up to their ecological ideals by developing sustainable lifestyles. They actively reduce the need for economic relations with society, for example, by reducing the use of consumer goods, by limiting work in paid jobs outside the community and by striving for economic self-sufficiency, mainly by producing food and energy and thus working within the community. They maintain social contacts with family and friends and give courses, for example, on organic farming. Some participate in environmental social movements, and they sometimes (re)create rural traditions, such as celebrating the summer and winter solstices.
- *Communal communities* maintain an ideological focus on interpersonal contact between members. They retreat from urban to rural areas or villages. Community facilities act as meeting places and encourage interaction. Most members also remain relatively outward-oriented in their social lives as well, for example, through close contact with friends and family outside the community.
- *Practical communities* are the most numerous of the four types and live together for practical reasons: living in a community is cheap, and facilities and goods are shared. Examples include sharing a house and a common kitchen, maintaining a vegetable garden, sharing household appliances and car-pooling. Practical communities are not unified by a common 'ideology', defined as a common set of norms and values shared by community members. Rather, practical considerations serve as the unifying 'ideology'. They are mostly located in (sub)urban areas. Economically and socially, these communities remain integrated in society. Members frequently use services and often work outside the community. They are also socially outward-oriented.

The four-cluster typology summarises some of the main features of the community movement: *community*, *spirituality*, *ecology* and *practicality*. This conceptualisation is attractive because it is not extensive. However, the problem is not that other possible identities are missing (especially *politics*) but, as Escribano et al. (2020, p. 3) point out, that it presents the clusters as mutually exclusive (cf. Würfel, 2014, p. 41). For example, the ecological communities cluster is limited to those who build their livelihoods and work around the community. It has already been mentioned that there are projects that combine spiritual and ecological identities as well as practical

(housing) projects that are also political or ecological. Escribano et al. (2020, p. 3) show in their research of environmentally-oriented intentional communities in Catalonia that many communities 'were closer in nature to the description of practical and/or communal communities, due to their geographical location or economic model, than to ecological communities, despite their ecological projects'. The authors continue, writing that 'an important shortcoming of value-based classifications is that it groups ecological communities together in a single category, thus depicting them as homogeneous, as if all ecological communities have the same internal features'.

The problem with the proposed typologies of intentional communities is that none provide a framework that would allow a project to be classified according to its actual performance, actual infrastructures, political ideas, legalities or other aspects. It also seems that the economic aspect has been neglected, as have relations with the market or the state or the question of actual material production of the dwellings (cf. Gruber & Lang, 2018).

In this regard, Escribano et al. (2020) present a typology of environmental intentional communities based mainly on economic and legal means; specifically, the legal status of land use (squatting, renting, ownership), forms of cohabitation (collective, individual, mixed) and the economic activities undertaken (self-sufficiency, mixed, market-oriented). The typology in their research serves to understand the research problem as a dynamic phenomenon embedded in the local cultural and sociopolitical context of Catalonia. Such typologies cannot by themselves provide a general understanding of the phenomenon, especially given the relatively small research sample (n = 27), but, as the authors conclude, they can be useful for comparative studies.

There is a risk, however, that in studies of this kind, researchers may tend to emphasise the factors they are monitoring over others. This was precisely the case for Escribano et al. (2020, p. 3), who argue that the 'material means of reproduction (…) are the most influential factor for the long-term survival' of the environmental intentional communities in Catalonia—the material means of reproduction being the main factors studied.

2.3.2 Actor-network theory and community assemblages

The previous sections showed the importance of the actors and contexts in which conceptual frameworks are formed. In this chapter, I will look more closely at the importance of infrastructures and actor networks using the approach of actor-network theory (ANT) and urban assemblages. In this respect, I argue that eco-communities are an excellent field of study because they are dynamic assemblages in their own right as well as multi-bodied actors in different actor networks that interfere in the context in which they are situated.

It is important to note that for the time being, I am still maintaining the dual understanding of the research field of intentional communities and collaborative housing.

I am also aware that this dichotomy is somewhat teleological and exaggerates the differences between the two fields of study. However, it helps to illustrate the difference between static and dynamic conceptualisations.

The role of infrastructures and institutions has been debated in urban and housing studies as well as in the context of collaborative housing specifically. Infrastructures are not only considered 'integrating' elements, such as transport, water and electricity distribution systems or roads, as in conventional definitions, but essentially as sociotechnical tools and systems that have the capacity to organise, shape and model urban life. These conceptualisations see infrastructures 'as dynamic patterns underpinning the organisation of social life' (Power & Mee, 2020, p. 5). We can therefore speak of knowledge, material, support and other infrastructures. Urban and social change in general, therefore, take place with the appropriate creation and connection of infrastructures that can organise and model life differently.

This is no different for the study of collaborative housing infrastructures and institutions. Lang and Mullins (2020), based on an analysis of collaborative housing in the United Kingdom, show that it is the lack of dedicated institutions providing knowledge and resources in this field that causes a lack of expansion in these forms of housing. Helamaa (2019) arrives at a similar conclusion based on the Finnish context, identifying underdeveloped support systems as the biggest barrier to the development of collaborative housing. Ansell and Gash (2018) then describe the potential of 'collaborative platforms' which can enable the emergence of new projects at the local level in different fields, not just housing. Similarly, in other texts, Lang et al. (2020) and Lang and Stoeger (2018) highlight the role of 'intermediary' institutions or institutional contexts in scaling up grassroots initiatives. All these texts point to the fact that the absence or underdevelopment of infrastructure designed for collaborative housing is a significant barrier to the development of these housing forms.[8]

As described in section 2.2 on collaborative housing, there is an important debate about the contexts in which community projects emerge, who is involved in the production of housing and who is excluded. Debates about the role of collaborative housing in addressing the housing affordability crisis and other crises are currently taking place in many European countries and cities, with different actors entering the discussion, including academics, project managers, architects and policymakers. At least in the academic debate, there seems to be a certain saturation of different forms (and terminology). Contrast this contextualisation with the intentional communities and ecovillages as introduced in section 2.1. The typologies seem rather decontextualised and static by comparison. They remain formative classifications, based partly on

[8] This 'infrastructures' review is based on the research proposal 'Knowledge infrastructures of participatory housing: Making new forms of housing available through a network of public consultation points in the Czech Republic', which I led as the primary applicant in the call of Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, programme Sigma in 2023.

ethnographic studies but mostly on the perspective of practitioners or key networks such as FIC or GEN.[9] There is a paradox: On the one hand, networks of intentional communities are relatively loose and include very different types of initiatives (Kunze & Avelino, 2015). On the other hand, the debates about practices remain descriptive, with only a few examples of best practices (this is especially true of ecovillages, despite their great influence). However, this is similar in the debate on collaborative housing that has its 'best practices' too, such as projects in Vienna, Zurich, Berlin and other cities that format the experience into various forms—promises that these can be achieved in other contexts.

While in the field of intentional communities, the debate over conceptualisation is limited to a few studies, and in contrast to collaborative housing, where this debate is particularly robust and current including overarching conceptualisations, it is almost nonexistent in eco-community research. With Collinge (2006, p. 244) who paraphrases the perspective of feminist geographers as 'the masculine desire to stabilize meaning leads therefore to the drawing of boundaries around territories', I argue that in the search for a common language in eco-community debates, a more declassifying ontology might be helpful.

One of the option offers the approach known as practice theory, which 'suggests shifting the research focus away from studying individuals, their motives and background features primarily, towards a more indepth investigation of "context", or the activities, the social practices, they engage in' (Spaargaren et al., 2016, p. 4). For example, in relation to the material factors presented by Escribano et al. (2020), the context of a self-help agricultural community in rural Catalonia may be close to that of a self-organised house collective in a German city; in relation to capital, the contexts may be very different. The same causal factors can give rise to different practices in different contexts (cf. Ash, 2020, p. 349).

Another classic option is to look at actors in the networks in which they are engaged in the sense of actor-network theory (ANT) or 'urban assemblages' (cf. I. Farias & Bender, 2010; London & Pablo, 2017). As we wrote together with colleagues in an

[9] This is perhaps the result of a historical mistrust between community practitioners and academics, which is described by Andreas & Wagner (2014, p. 27). They refer to Ross Jackson's (2000) book *And We Are Doing It! Building an Ecovillage Future*, where he presents ecovillagers as unique members of the socioecological movement, not writing papers for the next conference or philosophising over solutions to the environmental crisis, but actually creating the solutions directly: 'They are doing it.'

article on the topic of introducing the concept of participatory housing in the Czech Republic (Kodenko Kubala et al., 2023, pp. 41–42)[10]:

> According to ANT, the world is a place that is held together by the constant interconnection of 'materially heterogeneous elements' into various provisional collectives or assemblages composed of people, materials, technologies, regulations and so on.

Ontologies such as ANT and urban assemblages understand the differences between entities as relational (Müller & Schurr, 2016, p. 217). Marston, et al. (2007, p. 51) and others describe these approaches as flat ontologies. They look at the state of affairs, 'within which situations or sites are constituted as singularities—that is, as a collectivity of bodies or things, orders and events, and doings and sayings that hang together so as to lend distinct consistency to assemblages of dynamic relations.' The ANT and assemblage logic was applied in the recent research of Schikowitz and Pohler (2023, p. 5) who studied relational practices in collaborative housing projects in Vienna and analysed how various groups assembled and related to other actors and non-human elements of the network. According to the authors, 'What makes up a Baugruppe and enables it to act in common is a constellation of relations which brings together people, places, buildings, legal forms and entities, economic entities, craft-workers, administrative units, ideas and values, habits and routines, and many more. Thereby, agency is not created through the sum of the single entities, but through specific ways of relating or assembling them.'

In this sense, all previously mentioned concepts and typologies can be considered rigid, especially those based on static concepts and form, while the assemblage ontology seem to be very dynamic. However, the evidence of our research confirms that in fact the process of assembling and relating to other actors, the arrangements also exhibit varying degrees of rigidity. We build the argument on Annique Hommels (2005), who use the concept of 'obduracy'. According to the author, the 'urban assemblages' are constantly in the process of change (i.e., constantly being rebuilt and renovated) while also resisting change. The obduracy has three layers: (1) frames—the established ways of thinking and doing that different groups carry in their heads and bodies; (2) embeddedness— how individual elements, such as forms of housing, are embedded in wider actor networks (the wider and more robust the network, the more resistant to change a given form of housing may be); and (3) persistent tradition—the 'cultural layer' of urban obduracy (i.e., a collective idea of what is right, how things

[10] Petr Kodenko Kubala, a colleague and ANT-oriented scholar, produced the inspiration to use assemblages and ANT to analyse the implementation of participatory housing in the Czech Republic. My role in this research as a primary investigator was mainly in the methodology and production of participatory research workshops and roundtables with actors in the partner cities.

should be and what the good life or good housing is). (Kodenko Kubala et al., 2023, pp. 41–42).

Collectivities such as eco-communities create assemblages at two levels – in their own right within the bodies, structures, sites or rules in which they assemble a community, but also within wider formal as well as informal actor networks in which they co-produce the policies, ideas, buildings or financial means. At all levels they show a degree of change as well as obduracy to change.

2.4 Conclusion: Eco-community as an agreement

The purpose of this chapter was to formulate *who is the object of this study*—the eco-community. Do we (academics) agree on what eco-communities are and what are the common characteristics of the social structures they assemble, the social practices they develop, the places they occupy and the infrastructures they are part of? In this chapter, I have tried to show how the frameworks we use change expectations about eco-communities.

First, I briefly presented the historical context behind the narrative of eco-communities as 'environmentally oriented intentional communities' in order to understand what the *eco* in eco-community means. Eco-communities from the perspective of intentional community practitioners are understood as a group of people who have chosen to live together with the goal of building a shared lifestyle that reflects their shared—environmental—values. This definition is questionable in the sense of whether the environmental aspect must be the primary objective or a complementary one. Paradoxically, although environmental awareness is very common in intentional communities, the presented typologies of intentional communities fail to provide a common understanding of the different contexts in which communities are set. For the purposes of this research, I argued in this section that:

- The term eco-community encompasses *any* residential community project that has an explicit environmental objective.
- The environmental perspective should be understood in a socioeconomic and sociotechnical context, especially in relation to needs and other objectives, be they financial, economic, social or cultural.

Secondly, I discussed that conceptualisations of eco-communities (both in the intentional community and collaborative housing literature) offer dozens of classifications of form or objectives, yet they are arbitrary, rigid, and at times fluid. The boundaries between intentional communities and collaborative housing, or between ecovillages and other communities, are unclear and have not proved to be very useful in categorising the social structures under study. While all other forms of intentional community are relatively open in their definitions, ecovillages along with cohousing, are

quite strictly and rigidly defined, and the definitions are reproduced by academics as well as the networks of practitioners. Ecovillages remain a symbol for ecologically oriented multi-faceted projects with social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

- Both in the academic literature and among practitioners in the field of eco-communities (especially intentional communities), a strong attention is paid to concepts. They are often open in definitions, but paradoxically reproducing how things should be.

Thirdly, I have summarised the current debate on the different conceptualisations of collaborative housing in order to understand where the boundary of *intentionality* lies. Arguably, the intentionality of the housing form and objectives, the active involvement of households and democratic control over construction and management are the three key characteristics of this segment that distinguish it from other forms of housing. The current literature provides much evidence that the intentionality of housing projects should be, however, understood in the sociotechnical context in which they are produced, including the infrastructures, materials and networks of actors, be they human and non-human, embedded in both dynamic and resistant assemblages.

- Eco-communities can be seen as assemblages of human and non-human elements in their own right, but also within wider actor networks that they co-create.

What is the difference, if any, between the concepts of intentional communities and collaborative housing? A possible explanation is the different emphasis or expectation on the agreed upon characteristics of *intentionality, community* and *collaboration* and different ties within the actor networks, rather than differences in terms of practice. This is important for this study, which aims to explore the diversity of economic practices in eco-communities in different projects and contexts.

- Intentional communities and collaborative housing differ in terms of the assemblages they co-create rather than the practices they develop. If they have an explicit environmental objective, they can be considered eco-communities.

What remains to be seen is what kind of framework can help to create shared understanding, not only between the actors involved but also with those who are not involved in the (re)production of eco-communities, and whether and how the experience of eco-communities can be transferred to other forms of social organisation.

3 Economic micro-system: Non-market and not-only-for-profit economies in eco-communities[11]

While there is evidence of concrete environmental outcomes from eco-communities and anthropological research has informed on the cultural or governance aspects of living together, relatively little research has focused on eco-communities from an economic perspective, including the economic and financial sustainability of these projects, their impact on local economies, their role in the social and solidarity economy and their conceptualisation of different economic, organisational and co-production models and their replicable potential (see Wagner, 2012 for review). I argue that in order to understand their potential in terms of transformation/resilience, there needs to be a more robust elaboration of how their social and environmental goals and outcomes relate to their economies. This requires both a theoretical framework and more empirical evidence.

The research gap may be due to the diverse objectives of eco-communities, whether environmental, political, spiritual or housing. However, some stimulating studies have been conducted. For example, Cattaneo and Gavaldà (2010) investigated how two urban squats in Catalonia performed in terms of time and energy consumption, arguing that it is possible to live well in less energy-intensive economies. Similarly, a study comparing intentional and unintentional communities by Mulder et al. (2006) provides an understanding of the contribution of built, human, social and natural capital to quality of life, with the results indicating that intentional communities, according to the authors, can better balance the different capitals (e.g., by substituting built capital with social capital) and therefore manage to achieve a good quality of life despite having significantly less financial means than households in unintentional communities. In their Catalan study, Escribano et al. (2020) looked at three material factors—the legal situation, the cohabitation form and the economic orientation (more in section 2.3.1)—to demonstrate the different economic perspectives of eco-communities. In their mixed-methods study of an Australian ecovillage, Milani Price et al. (2020) explored the relationship with the market economy, arguing that a community's alternative economic practices rely to some extent on the market economy and that market economy strategies and diverse economy practices are increasingly converging. Other economic studies have been limited to specific issues, such as the level of self-sufficiency (DePasqualin et al., 2008) and the livelihood strategies of individual members (Gálová, 2013), or, conversely, to the summary of evidence about eco-communities, for example in relation to wellbeing policies (Hall, 2015).

[11] I have based this section on my article, originally published in *Human Affairs* (Blažek, 2016a).

In Chapter 2, I argued that eco-communities develop different forms of living together and also different ways of relating to other actors. Following this logic, the aim of this chapter is to conceptually describe how economic activities in eco-communities can be structured and what the implications and effects of economic democracy are. I look at how eco-communities relate to the dominant market economy, how they co-create economic infrastructures and how they relate to social and environmental goals, be they affordable housing, inclusivity, living on one planet or others.

I begin by describing eco-communities as economic micro-systems: structures that combine the individual economies of members and a community economy that includes non-market sharing, gifting and exchange among members, supporters and partners and not-only-for-profit, non-profit and for-profit activities of the community in the local economy. I begin with two mainstream economic terms, 'households' and 'firms', in order to discuss these two ways of positioning the economy in eco-communities. I then look at how this economic construction is viewed by heterodox economic thought, building, in particular, on Johanisova et al.'s (2013) concept of social enterprises and their elaboration on non-market capital.

Eco-community economies depend on the socio-economic and cultural context, on political goals, social and environmental values, and on the different emphases of the community economy and the individual economies of its members. The empirical part of the thesis will focus on these influences. The aim of this chapter is to build a framework around a theoretical community, a community as an economic micro-system that can include all kinds of economic practices. In chapter 5, I add agency to the micro-system and apply the concept of community economies to explore how a decision making space in which multiple individuals build community infrastructure to democratically coordinate their economic actions works in specific European eco-communities.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis in the research rationale (section 1.1), it is interesting to study the economies of eco-communities because, compared to other community-based initiatives, such as car-sharing cooperatives or food cooperatives, they develop more complex economies, providing goods and services of different kinds. Indeed, their complexity can be seen in the combination of individual economies with community economies, in the combination of consumption and production activities and in the combination of non-market and non-monetary activities with those that are related to the market and to different kinds of 'monies' (fiat and alternative currencies) (Nelson, 2022) in one way or another. Another key characteristic of eco-communities is that they are organised around their residential function, an aspect that is crucial to understanding their economic structures. These communities combine, within the same (infra)structure, the characteristics of environments known in economic theory as households and firms.

Leaving aside the individual economies of members, in this section, I begin the conceptualisation of the eco-community economy by looking specifically at the non-market economic activities of subsistence, gift economy and exchange between residents (what can be called the *community household economy*). I then look at the not-only-for-profit production of goods and services (what can be called the *community firm economy*), activities that serve the public economy and foster the financial sustainability of the community. In the proposed micro-system framework, the household and firm environments are not 'counterparts' for the market mechanism coordinated by price but multi-bodied actors coordinated by democratic decision-making in the community.

3.1 Two-sector economy model and the household-firm dichotomy

For mainstream economists, the economy is 'created' as a result of the market activities of four types of agents: households (consumers), firms (producers), the public sector (governments) and the financial sector (banks). Most economics textbooks have for decades used the circular flow diagram of the economy, with the market relationship between households and firms at its centre (also known as the 'two-sector' model of the economy).[12] Households are described as consumers of goods and services and as owners of the factors of production (labour, land and capital), which they supply to firms—the primary producers of goods and services. In return, households receive wages and profits and purchase goods and services from firms. The price (of services, goods and factors of production) then provides the necessary information for the market to allocate resources. These principles of the market economy are based on the assumption that the household's goal is to maximise its utility, whereas the firm's goal is to maximise profits.

The first problem with this model is that the terms 'household' and 'firm' have different meanings in law, statistics, sociology and demography than they do in economic theory. 'Household' usually refers to one or more people sharing a house and/or income. A firm is any kind of institution that produces goods and services, including a

[12] Kate Raworth, in *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (Raworth, 2017), recalls the history and power of economics textbooks. Microeconomics and macroeconomics courses around the world are based on new editions of Paul Samuelson's textbook (see, for example, Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2010), first written in 1948 when the world needed an economic boost and a story based on economic growth after decades of war. Raworth argues that in the twenty-first century, it is time for a new big story and offers the diagram of a doughnut to symbolise an economy embedded in planetary boundaries and societal complexities. My first exposure to economics as an undergraduate was also through Samuelson's book.

for-profit enterprise but also a 'common good' enterprise, such as a public or non-profit institution.

The second problem is that it ignores society and the planet. As Raworth (2017, p. 58) describes it: 'It makes no mention of the energy and materials on which economic activity depends, nor of the society within which those activities *take place*.' Corragio (2018, p. 17) adds that it is by no means a coherent model since 'it relies on the extraction of labour and nature that are not the products of the system'.[13]

The third problem is that it ignores a large part of the non-market economy. That is, the economy of households in providing goods and services is not considered at all, be it care, self-help and other non-market activities (for the feminist critique, see, for example, Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2019).[14]

The fourth problem is that it is based on a sharp dichotomy between households and firms (between consumption and production), whereas in reality the roles of households and firms are much more mixed. For example, the model neglects the growing role of *prosumption*—the productive role of consumers. This criticism comes from authors who focus on the late capitalist economy. They point out that what can be considered a market economy is changing into more prosumer-like practices in the sharing economy, platform capitalism and peer-to-peer production, and that the division between households and firms is not as clear as it was in the industrial era (Acquier et al., 2017a; Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006; Böcker & Meelen, 2017; Cockayne, 2016; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Martin, 2016).[15]

It would be false to limit the mainstream economy only to the market economy and economic relations only to competition, but the neoliberal system forces its participants to financialise and market as many activities as possible, including care or environmental services. Predominantly in cities, corporate- and technology-led innovation has shifted the focus of market mechanisms to households. In the new logic of on-demand and access economies, companies (start-ups) develop digital platforms,

[13] Contrary to mainstream economists: ecological economists, the proponents of degrowth or social and solidarity economies, see the embeddedness between economy, society and nature as an inevitable and central feature of the economy and its social and ecological metabolism (Corragio, 2018; Giampietro et al., 2014; Kallis, 2013; Kallis et al., 2012; Raworth, 2017).

[14] Samuelson's book was first written shortly after the Second World War. At that time, American households were essentially women who were not working in paid-jobs but who did the housework, so it is not surprising that Samuelson's view of the economy had no understanding of caring or other unpaid work.

[15] I have built this section partly on my previous research on the sharing economy (Blažek, 2018a) and the argument I had used in Pickerill et al. (2023). This section of the article is my original text. I acknowledge and thank especially Jenny Pickerill for reviewing the text and improving the English and overall quality.

through which households (quasi-freelancers) buy/sell and rent/lease goods and services to other households. There have been several attempts to conceptualise the sharing economy. Frenken and Schor (2017) define it as peer-to-peer platforms where users grant temporary access to goods, possibly (but not necessarily) for money. Acquier et al. (Acquier et al., 2017) propose an umbrella construct that includes all elements of sharing: (1) *access* and (2) the *platform economy* (two commercial elements), but also (3) a *community-based economy*, often involving non-contractual, non-hierarchical and non-monetized forms of interaction.[16]

While competition is generally accepted, celebrated and taught as the key character of the global capitalist economy, sharing and collaboration are terms for which there seems to be an ongoing struggle to explain economically and politically. The European Parliament uses a narrow definition of the sharing economy, including only for-profit and digital platforms (Goudin, 2016; Murillo et al., 2017). The European Commission, on the other hand, also includes non-profit, non-technological, commons-based or social and solidarity economy practices (EC, 2016) and even uses a different term: the collaborative economy.

But criticism can also be found from earlier authors who use examples of traditional (pre-industrial) societies and peasant economies. Alexander Chayanov, for example, writes of traditional subsistence farmers, whose goal, according to the author, was to improve their living conditions (quality of life) rather than to maximise profits (Chayanov et al., 1986). Douthwaite (1996, pp. 31–32) defines a peasant economy as a society 'in which most families own their own means of making their livelihoods, be this a workshop, a fishing-boat, a retail business, a professional practice, or a farm'. The author continues that in a peasant economy, families are 'free to join with other families to own the source of livelihoods collectively', meaning that projects are owned by those who also provide the labour for them. He argues that whilst in the industrial economy, shareholders are motivated to minimise labour costs and maximise return

[16] Proponents of the sharing economy emphasise the potential of shared consumption to reduce energy demand by providing temporary access to under-utilized physical assets (Mi & Coffman, 2019). Critics argue that savings are limited, owing to the Jevons paradox (greater access to goods at cheaper prices increases overall consumption) (Murillo et al., 2017) and that this form of exchange ignores old problems of social stratification and income inequality while contributing to new ones such as the fragmentation of labour and precarity of jobs (Edward, 2020) and the housing crisis (Garcia-López et al., 2020). After the fast market capture from these now giant corporations, many cities and states around the world have (temporarily) banned some of the services until proper legislation is put in place. (Dillet, 2021; Reuters, 2018).

on investments, peasant projects aim to minimise returns on borrowed capital and maximise a wide range of benefits, including income, for the group involved.[17]

Overall, the assumption that the economy is equivalent to the market economy, which can be divided into households maximising utility and firms maximising profit, is limited and criticised, using examples from different historical periods (see Dale, 2016; Nelson, 2022; Polanyi, 1944; Simmel, 1991).[18]

Applying the logic of the two-sector economy model to the economies of eco-communities, individuals and families would be considered households (in the economic sense) when they consume goods and services from the market or when they are employed in the public economy outside the community. They would be considered firms when they set up businesses—entities that produce goods or services for the market or that create paid jobs. All other activities that exist alongside the market economy, such as sharing, subsistence and care between neighbours or within households, are neglected in this model. Moreover, this model is unable to distinguish between market activities undertaken in pursuit of goals other than economic profit.

[17] The problem with Douthwaite's definition of a peasant economy is that it contrasts a modern industrial capitalist economy with another simplistic model of an economy, at the centre of which is an ideal traditional peasant project in the countryside, where people lived a 'balanced life' and were able to manage resources sustainably over generations, ignoring many conditions and influences, such as climate conditions, the influence of pre-modern states, towns and feudalism (Douthwaite, 1996, pp. 9–12). Another problem with the peasant economy model is pointed out by Hammel (2005) on Chayanov, who considered households as autarkic units, as he ignored the exchange of labour and goods between peasants.

[18] In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi (1944) gives examples of traditional economies based on subsistence, mutual aid and redistribution, describing them from a 'substantivist position' in which there are many principles that emerge from unique socio-cultural and historical contexts and, thus, in contrast to the 'formalist' model of neoclassical economics, which sees the market principles of maximising of utility and profit as universal. Gareth Dale, in his book *Reconstructing Karl Polanyi*, emphasises that Polanyi's importance for economic history is that 'he differentiates markets, money and trade as a separate phenomena' (Dale, 2016, p. 183). Dale quotes the anthropologist James Carrier who explains that 'people in many times and places have engaged in trade, have given and received objects and services among themselves and with those in neighbouring societies, without necessarily having the notion of the Market' (Carrier, 1997, p. 26; Dale, 2016, p. 184). Dale's interpretation of Polanyi is that the capitalist motivation of profit does not contradict Polanyi's general thesis as long as it does not become the general motivation of society.

3.2 Non-market economies of subsistence, gift and exchange

In the last section, I defined households as one or more people sharing a house and/or income. Eco-communities are certainly specific types of households. In terms of dwellings, communities occupy individual houses; farms; single-family housing developments; former industrial, medical or military sites; apartment buildings and other sites. From the financial perspective, a community budget consists of individual contributions and fees, money from income-generating activities, public funds, donations from a wider network and so on. Funds are pooled and used for operating costs (e.g., bulk purchases of food, supplies for households and common areas), repairs and investments, or individual purposes. In larger communities, the structure may be decentralised into smaller groups of residents (called circles in Auroville, India, or bonding groups in Sieben Linden, Germany) who have their own independent household economies in which they share their income more deeply than with the rest of the community. In such cases, regular costs such as food and housing are shared between units, while the community fund is used mainly for infrastructure maintenance and investments as well as cultural and other activities.

I have already discussed that households do not just buy goods and services from the market and provide factors of production to firms. In reality, there is a robust, diverse and often neglected economic activity called the *non-market household economy*, which I will focus on in this section. I am particularly interested in activities subject to community decision-making. These are not necessarily communal activities and may include individual activities, but they are, to some extent, regulated, supported and negotiated at the community level. They are *non-market community household economies*. From this perspective, eco-communities are composed of one or more household units, occupying one or more dwelling units and (partially) sharing space, budget, things, tasks, mutual care and subsistence, and the non-market exchange of goods and services. It should be noted, that in addition to community household economies, there are also *non-market individual household economies*. In short, these can be described as economic activities of subsistence, care and sharing that take place and are negotiated at the individual household level (e.g., a single person or a family[19]).

I will start the theoretical exploration of the eco-community household economy with the 'three-layer cake with icing' model constructed by Henderson (1996) using the work of Polanyi (1944) and others and discussed by Johanisova et al. (2013). Henderson divides the economy into monetised and a non-monetised parts. The monetised

[19] 'Eco-communities tend to have a more open sense of what constitutes a family.' They often go beyond the single-family dwelling as the defining form of social structure (Pickerill, 2016, p. 47). This has implications for the materiality of dwellings, but also for the social and economic consequences of what constitutes a household.

part includes all cash transactions in the private and public sectors of the market economy, whereas the non-monetised part plays the role of sweat equity or the caring economy.[20] This part includes all reciprocal, caring and subsistence activities, such as social services (e.g., care for the elderly, children and the sick as well as the subsistence economy), household production for personal use and barter exchange, do-it-yourself production, volunteering, mutual aid and sharing.[21] These non-market economies can be grouped into four categories: care, sharing, exchange and subsistence.[22]

This potentially very large portion of economic activity has been neglected by mainstream economists and is usually only accepted when it is moved from the non-monetary to the monetary market economy through processes known as commodification (valuing things and human activities in terms of market prices) and commercialisation (entering the market with a new commodity). As a result of these processes, the non-monetary economy shrinks, economic activities carried out on principles other than selling for profit are given a market price, and what remains as non-monetary remains hidden.

There have been attempts to discuss the value of the non-monetary household economy (see, for example, Ironmonger, 1996) and to raise awareness, particularly from a feminist perspective (for a literature review, see, for example, D'Alisa & Cattaneo, 2013, pp. 71–72). In the Polanyian tradition, many authors argue that factors of production should not be commodified and that instead the reverse process of decommodification and a new value system must be developed (Bohle & Greskovits, 2019; Dale, 2016; Nierling, 2012). D'Alisa and Cattaneo (2013) argue for decommodification from a degrowth perspective, stating that domestic work is less energy intensive than its market economy substitute. They base their argument not on money but on time as the value of work.

As I argue in this thesis, eco-communities are organised to intentionally develop the core principles of the non-market economy—care, sharing, gift, exchange and subsistence. Collective structures of people living together or close to each other support

[20] Henderson (1996) also uses the term *love economy*. See also Nørgård (2013), who refers to the non-monetized economy as the *amateur economy*.

[21] In addition to the private (the icing), public and sweat-equity layers, Henderson's (1996) cake includes a 'Mother Nature' base layer that subsidises the top layers with the environmental costs of production (cf. with the diverse economy framework in section 4.2).

[22] Petrapoulou (2013, p. 63) emphasises that the concepts of exchange (barter economy) and gifting (economy of grace) are the building blocks of the social economy, which she sees as equivalent to the non-market economy. However, as I describe in the next section, there is a liminal zone in the social economy between the market and the non-market that needs to be elaborated (cf. Johanisova et al., 2013).

the upscaling of non-market economy principles. Sometimes the emphasis is on care and sharing, sometimes on subsistence and exchange.

In terms of the *care and sharing economies*, their role lies in activities related to housework and care and the sharing of infrastructure, spaces, things, tasks, as well as in social and reproductive activities. In particular, housework and tasks of care and reproduction have been neglected throughout economic history because they 'fall outside the ambit of prices and price making for goods and services in the market oriented accounts of the capitalist managers' (Nelson, 2022, p. 83). The care economy has an important history of gender injustice and of the resulting women's liberation activities. For example, degrowth proponents understand the care economy as a central activity around which the economy should be organised, not only for its intrinsic social importance, but also for gender and environmental justice (Dengler & Strunk, 2018).

Understanding the care and sharing economy in terms of care of the commons (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015) and the sharing of infrastructure, goods and services have, in turn, not only social and gendered implications but also potentially major environmental ones, including the sharing and care of complex low-impact energy infrastructure. Jenny Pickerill describes this as a process of configuring spaces, things and social practices into purposeful arrangements of physical and social materialities (Pickerill, 2016, p. 32), that is, *building the commons*. These configurations of materiality are also embedded in the economy. The collaborative activities often reduce costs for individuals (costs of production in economic terms). This can be defined as the effect of economies of scale (Ibid. 2016, p. 37) or, more precisely, *non-market economies of scale*—the greater the capacity of the non-market economy, the smaller the potential cost of household production and the greater the potential 'community basket' of goods and services. The best example of this is time spent on regular activities, such as cooking, shopping and maintenance. It is not uncommon for an eco-community to serve a cooked meal every day using a rotation system that allows an individual adult member to cook once every two or three weeks. The more they share, the less residents need to work in principle (Chatterton, 2013; Jarvis, 2011, 2019).[23]

In terms of *subsistence economy*, eco-communities typically focus on food provision, self-help building of houses and the management of renewable resources, including energy infrastructure. These activities can often be understood as the core economic activities of an eco-community lifestyle. They can also be understood in the context of social and physical materiality or in terms of addressing the gender inequalities

[23] However, more research is needed on time management in eco-communities. A democratic economy takes time, and a lot of time is spent in intellectual debates and meetings about management, operations, goals or values. Again, this needs to be understood in context. If I use the two-sector model, family households also spend some time on organisational, visioning and strategic discussions. In companies (firms), meetings are also commonplace.

mentioned above. They are linked to socio-economic and physical access to land (and generally to nature) and built infrastructure, usually managed by people as commons. The self-provision of food and non-food resources is most commonly done through agricultural and horticultural techniques and foraging. In urban environments, the self-provisioning of food and non-food also includes non-standard solutions, such as growing on rooftops and collecting expired products from supermarkets. In a broader sense, the act of cooking as a form of localising the economy within a community can also be seen as part of the subsistence economy. Self-help building can then be understood in the broader sense of the co-production of housing that I discussed in section 2.2, but also in the narrower sense of collecting and transforming materials in the building process and coordinating construction. Energy infrastructure then includes not only community-owned solar, wind and water turbines that produce 'clean energy' but also insulation materials, coordinated energy management and, especially in old buildings, existing built infrastructure, which includes fossil-fuel based and other highly demanding energy systems.

I consider self-help housing, food and energy production as well as other community-based subsistence economies to be emancipatory because they allow people to control a large part of the production cycle and the quality of the materials used or reused. Particularly in the case of self-help food, housing and energy systems, emancipation can also be seen in the discovery of new skills and solutions and in emancipation from the market and the state, which have largely taken over the production of these items, at least in Western and Northern European countries (Blažek, 2019a).

Next, any surplus from the subsistence economy or, more generally, any available service can be exchanged within the community. In terms of *exchange*, members provide each other with various goods and services, including all kinds of specialist consultancies, surplus individual goods and so on. This relates to another feature of the non-market community economy: *the alternative valuation of work*. One of the potential strategies for valuing subsistence and exchange that has been tested by several eco-communities is the introduction of alternative value and exchange systems or local currencies.

Time-based currencies or local exchange trade systems (or LETS), for example, make it possible to value the working time allocated to mutual aid between members of the non-market system. Convertible local currencies then facilitate the exchange of goods and services in the local and regional economy (Dittmer, 2013; Douthwaite, 1996; Stodder & Lietaer, 2015; Weber, 2018) with a promise of contributing to the collective good.[24] As Weber (2018, p. 146) points out, people need to be willing to buy

[24] An example of convertible local currencies was the Catalonian network of currencies implemented by an umbrella organization called Cooperativa Integral Catalana. The system was tested by several

local goods and services before a regional currency is introduced, as the motivations for abandoning the official currency in favour of a complementary currency that offers less choice are limited and dilemmatic.[25] In most cases, Weber argues, local currencies cannot really compete in terms of economic cost-benefit and the proponents of alternative currencies see community coherence and bonds both as the precondition and the goal of the currency system. However, empirical evidence of successful community currencies is limited, and in most cases, regional currencies owe their success to the qualities of the public economy or strong regional culture rather than the quality of the system per se (Dittmer, 2013, p. 8).

Another option for alternative valuation or non-valuation is the *gift economy*[26] where an exchange is made 'on demand'[27] by the recipient (a person is asked for help; a community is asked to share knowledge or surplus) or 'from stock' by the giver (there is something to give). The act of giving is discussed by Marcel Mauss (2002) in his famous work as a moral form of exchange.[28] Using cases from traditional societies, Mauss describes the ethics of the gift economy as the *obligation* to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to repay or reciprocate. According to Mauss, the role of the gift in traditional (archaic) societies was to create socio-economic bonds (cf. with community bonds as a prerequisite and the goal of alternative currencies). It is a ritual of perpetuating reciprocity. There was nothing like a free gift from which no return was expected. The author argues that the gift is primarily a result of the need for long-term bonds between actors.

small and medium-sized eco-communities, farmers and individuals organized within the cooperative network of so called ecoxarxas in the region, with a promise to not become complementary but rather to overcome the dominant fiat currency (Liegey & Nelson, 2020, p. 150). It did not succeed. However, A more successful and longer-lasting example of a local currency was the Totnes pound, first issued in 2007 and last used in 2019, which apparently finished due to an increasingly cashless economy (Hopkins, 2008, p. 188);(online).

[25] Weber (2018, pp. 147–150) presents four types of benefits, that is, reasons why people might prefer a complementary currency. These include: (1) problems of access to the official currency, (2) exclusivity for certain goods and services granted to a regional currency, (3) lower transaction costs and (4) participation in an attractive social community.

[26] One example is the free flow model of the gift economy used in the political communes of *the Interkomm n*etwork in Germany's Kassel region.

[27] Anitra Nelson (2022, p. 53) discusses the on-demand economy as the core ('eco-political cell') of any democratic community economy, where production is created only after demand has been discussed.

[28] Originally published in *L'Année sociologique* in 1925 as 'Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaques' (Essay on the gift. Form and reason of exchange in archaic societies).

However, Anitra Nelson offers a critique of Mauss and the economic anthropologists who have followed his work as 'incorporating many of the biases and arrogance of "us" in capitalism feeling different from the multitude of noncapitalist "them"' (Nelson, 2022, p. 121) (cf. with the critique of Douthwaite related to a peasant economy). Nelson argues that the contrasting characterisation of capitalist and noncapitalist societies misses important comparisons. Mauss presents the act of giving as 'neither random nor impulsive, but operates as a deep rhythmic pattern reproducing relationships with both economic and cultural implications and ramifications' (Nelson, 2022, p. 120). According to Nelson, capitalist society can also be framed as 'a system of ritual gift-giving' based on debt and on obligatory exchange between workers and capitalists, exchanging wages for work and income for goods and services. This is not as Mauss sees it, that the commodity exchange in capitalism is voluntary and not obligatory or culturally-embedded, only the notion of the use of *money* 'inclines us to think of a continuous cycle of discrete, free, voluntary and equivalent exchanges' (Nelson, 2022, p. 122).

Nelson's points provide a basis for questions. To use her words (Nelson, 2022, p. 120), is gift-giving in eco-communities based on 'selfless generosity graciously accepted' or is it an 'instrument of social power implying obligations to the extent of burdens'? Similarly, is subsistence in eco-communities emancipatory, as I propose to look at it, or can it be a result of economic scarcity? And, finally, what outcomes do we find when looking at economic alternatives in a critical but supportive way that eliminates both the negative and positive biases associated with positioning activities in relation to the market and capitalism?

In chapter 5, I argue that it is the economic democracy of the community economy that sheds light on the answers to such questions. However, it is important to remember again that the practices associated with the principles of a non-market economy do vary. Types of money-free economies include, for example, all-income sharing communes at the more radical end and lighter versions such as neighbourhood freeshops, where people leave things they no longer want (Liegey & Nelson, 2020, p. 150).

3.3 Liminal zone of production: Not-only-for-profit economies and non-market capitals

Now I will add the *economy of community firms*, be they businesses, companies, cooperatives, projects or work groups. In chapter 3.1, I defined a firm as any kind of institution that produces goods and services. Again, the situation in eco-communities is much more diverse than that. Each eco-community needs to operate with sufficient resources for (i) the material (re)production of the settlements, (ii) the maintenance of regular operations and (iii) the financing of personal, individual needs beyond those provided within the non-market economies between households. In this section, I look

at activities which serve at least these three goals and are at least partially attached to the market.

Again, I focus particularly on activities that are subject to community decision-making. These are not necessarily communal activities but also individual activities that are to some extent regulated, supported and negotiated by the community. Again, strategies vary according to the socio-economic situation, goals, values and size of the non-market economy. What is typical is that the activities are organised with varying degrees of autonomy from the community in terms of economic autonomy as well as governance.

These activities are typically *outgoing* activities, producing goods and services, including food production; cultural, educational and manufacturing activities; and the rental of space, such as offices or seminar rooms.[29] However, there are *incoming* activities as well. These distribute goods and services provided, at least partially, via the market. Incoming activities include solidarity practices, such as pooling incomes and solidarity funds, so called sliding scale systems—people are asked to pay/donate different prices for specific products based on their financial situation—or shopping in bulk.

Given that eco-communities have many non-economic objectives, their production activities can be described as the *not-only-for-profit economy of community firms*. As Johanisova et al. (2013) point out, not-only-for-profit activities (together with not-for-profit) form a liminal zone between the monetised and non-monetised parts of the economy, as explored by Henderson (1996) and sometimes referred to as the 'social economy' or a 'third sector' (Birkhölzer, 2006; North & Scott Cato, 2018). For the purposes of this study, I fill this liminal zone with structures defined by Johanisova et al. (2013) as *primary* and *secondary social enterprises.* The term 'primary social enterprise' can be used to describe activities that produce goods and services to serve the public (preferably in nearby communities), that have explicit social or environmental goals, that are at least partially attached to the market and that generate (not necessarily financial) resources for the benefit of the producers.

The basic liminality of primary social enterprises in eco-communities can be seen in the fact that they have objectives other than those purely for-profit. Indeed, the

[29] Examples of community enterprises in eco-communities include a bakery in Lakabe, Basque Country; a microbrewery in Can Tonal, Catalonia, Spain; and a consultancy company Ecological Solutions in Crystal Waters, Australia. Examples of communities with individual enterprises linked to the community decision-making include Calafou, Catalonia, Spain, where members were asked to run their personal enterprises preferably using the social currency system to work locally and on-site rather than in the capitalist system. Examples of multi-enterprise communities include Earthaven, USA; Auroville; Findhorn Foundation and EcoVillage Ithaca, all of which have many enterprises organised as community enterprises as well as individual and autonomous projects.

economic micro-system of a complex eco-community may contain examples of enterprises that operate to support financial sustainability, while others focus more on other aspects (social, environmental, political, etc.). In this sense, not-only-for-profit activities may include both non-profit and for-profit activities.

The second liminal zone is between provision and production activities. Eco-community businesses often have two types of clients—market (external) and non-market (internal) (cf. with the discussion on prosumption in the previous sections of this chapter). Some activities may be significantly linked to the non-market economy, others serve partly the public and partly the eco-community, and there are also activities which are focused exclusively on the public economy. From one place and within one structure, often without leaving their homes or neighbourhood, members in eco-communities can participate in various community schemes: food cooperatives, mobility sharing schemes, community-supported agriculture or homeschooling, for example. There are also situations where it makes more sense for eco-communities to join public schemes rather than develop their own or, conversely, where eco-communities act as hubs for these initiatives, offering memberships to neighbours and local citizens. There are thousands of non-profit or not-only-for-profit initiatives across the world that focus on the needs of local communities in provisioning of food (soup kitchens, food pantries, community gardens and food co-operatives), housing people in need, mobility (bike sharing or carpooling), and jobs and collective production of services (job training centres, working co-operatives, bike kitchens) (Sekulova et al., 2017; Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012).

The third liminal zone is between the individual and the community economy. Individuals work for all kinds of entities in the public economy (see, for example, Gálová, 2013 about the case of Zaježka, an ecovillage in Slovakia). In most cases, these activities are decided by individual households but there are many situations where, for example, eco-communities prefer that members only work part-time in the public economy, and in more intensive community economies (typically in communes), individual jobs are also planned at the community level.

Nevertheless, a community economy is not only a sum of practices. Leaving the crucial element of economic democracy for the next chapter, what are the economic aspects of the multi-bodied human, other than human and more than human actor networks producing goods and services organised at a particular place and sharing particular capitals? Following Johanisova et al. (2013, p. 14), they argue that primary social enterprises are often supported by infrastructure, which they define as *secondary social enterprises.* These, according to the authors, provide market services and, in particular *non-market capitals* (land, natural resources, manufactured capital, financial capital and knowledge/skills). Non-market capital has been defined by Bruyn (1992) as capital that is 'taken out of the market and placed under democratic control'. In secondary social enterprises, this means that the capital is owned by a democratic body

composed of representatives of the primary social enterprise, that it is provided at a subsidised cost or that it takes into account the social and environmental benefits of production (positive externalities in economic terms).

Applying the concept to eco-communities, it is clear that primary social enterprises are supported by the community (the secondary social enterprise) in a number of ways. One service provided by the secondary enterprise could be the local currency system, which provides certain exclusivity granted for some goods and services. Others could be community banks that provide interest-free loans or community funds and trusts that provide guarantees to primary social enterprises (Dawson, 2004). There is also the work of volunteers[30], cheaper rents for land and housing, knowledge and skills, and the sharing of infrastructure between households and enterprises, all of which can be seen as services provided by the community to enterprises. Sometimes the act of 'taking out of the market' is explicit, as is the case of 'taking out the property out of the market', a strategy successfully used in the growing tenant networks in Germany and other countries (Hurlin, 2019). Moreover, the role of eco-communities as secondary social enterprises can be seen in the provision of infrastructure, services and non-market capital to other individuals and enterprises in the local area, for example supporting the development of micro-enterprises as in Vale da Lama, where a wider collective associated with the project developed small enterprises using the project infrastructure, or providing land and infrastructure to local farmers, as in EcoVillage Ithaca, where the common land was leased to local people (Dawson, 2010). In many educational projects, the eco-community set up to run an enterprise which then becomes the main driver of activities (e.g., in the Makvärket Cultural and the Environmental Collective, Denmark). In these situations, the eco-community as a whole can be seen as a secondary social enterprise.[31] Finally, non-market capital can also be provided by external secondary social enterprises, who have goals beyond for-profit, including community land trusts, foundations, ethical banks and also the state, who, in some cases, offers public support. In these cases, the non-market capital can take the form of subventions, project funding but also provision of land and consultancies.

[30] In some eco-communities, volunteers come to help individual members (e.g., in Friland). Other communities run volunteer programmes where volunteers help with the maintenance and construction of community infrastructure and with the production of the primary enterprise's goods and services (e.g., Vale da Lama in Portugal).

[31] In the Vale da Lama example, the housing function supported the enterprise not only by saving resources through infrastructure sharing but also by providing rent-free housing for the workers (the residents of the eco-community), who were then paid lower wages. However, although workers did receive some benefits, such as fresh food from the organic farm they ran, the practice was controversial, and the workers preferred to be paid higher wages instead. However, Vale da Lama was a very special community that had temporarily evolved from an eco-resort business project.

Eco-communities develop not only the non-market economies between members, but also activities which are at least partially attached to the market. Non-market capital can make it possible to do business that is not-only-for-profit, but also to be more socially and environmentally embedded in consumption and redistribution. There is a potential to create synergies between provision and production activities. As some of these activities are taken out of the market, they can subsidise (e.g., through economies of scale, cost reduction, risk reduction, knowledge) activities that remain in the competitive market.

4 Methodology

The main theme of this dissertation is economic diversity in eco-communities and, specifically, the diversity of practices and strategies that influence how eco-communities operate in the economic sphere, how they create diverse community economies. My empirical aim for this project was to answer: *What community economic practices are developed by European eco-communities?*

This was exploratory interdisciplinary social science research, as my training is in economics, geography and environmental studies. Specifically, I was informed by qualitative research from sociology, environmental geography or economic anthropology. I used and combined the following qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (see section 4.1):

- Desk research of secondary sources
- Mapping of the field
- Participant observation in selected eco-communities
- Semi-structured interviews with key informants in selected eco-communities
- Content analysis of primary sources (websites, statutes, brochures and other documents) from identified eco-communities and networks.

The analysis included field notes, memos from online fieldwork and interview transcripts. I used open coding for the analysis (see section 4.2).

The field research was designed to include two pilot case studies (regions of study) and then further case studies until theoretical saturation was reached. The content analysis included the websites and primary documents of projects and networks. For family and funding reasons, the research was interrupted and divided into two periods. The field activities took place between September 2015 and November 2018, while the content analysis took place between September 2022 and June 2023 (see section 4.3 for details about the limits of the research).

The research design followed an inductive logic, in which theory was constantly compared with the ongoing experience and data collection from the field until theoretical saturation was reached.

The inductive logic also had practical reasons. The fragmented funding divided the research into six periods of fieldwork, with each fieldwork period lasting between one and three months (see Table 2). Between site visits, the research activities included transcribing interviews, preliminary data analysis and desk research of secondary sources.

The methodology was constantly tested. After the pilot research, the focus was shifted, from 1- to 7-week-long in-depth participant observations (volunteering, participation in daily activities,) to shorter and more standardised visits of usually 1 to 3

days, which in most cases included a guided tour and a semi-structured interview with key informants.

The epistemology of the research was also reflected during the research. At the beginning of the research, I was inspired by grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I also studied the foundations of ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995). It was only later that I became aware of the ongoing debate about flat ontologies, which suggest studying transformative social practices through the lens of, for example, practice theory (Spaargaren et al., 2016). I followed practice theory in the sense of 'zooming in' to multiple sites and contexts while, at the same time, 'zooming out' to the level of content analysis in the case study regions, and even to more abstract levels of conceptualisations of community economies based on the diverse economy ontology. The issue of infrastructures and networks of actors also became important during the research, and the content analysis was partly a response to this. However, I was not familiar with these concepts when I designed the research, the initial research questions or the interview questions.

The research was designed to include eco-communities in their diversity, with a primary (though not exclusive) focus on a few key phenomena identified during the preliminary mapping of European eco-communities. Thus, this study includes agriculture collectives, urban communes, community centres, ecovillages, low impact developments and other radical ecology projects, tenants' associations and other formal and informal networks, cohousing, building groups, co-operatives and other collaborative housing projects.

The research sample included projects in Portugal, Catalonia (and part of the rest of Spain), Austria, Germany (with a focus on central and eastern Germany), Denmark, Wales and England. In total, the research sample included 44 site visits, 42 interviewed projects, 648 projects for content analysis and 167 networks and infrastructures. The case studies were selected to include two southern, two northern and two central European countries.

The research opened up many subsequent empirical and theoretical questions which helped me to navigate the research, but it would be beyond the capacity of this project to answer all of them, and they can be the subject of further research (see chapter 6: Discussion).

4.1 Data collection and research sample

The fieldwork was divided into two pilot research case studies (Portugal, 2015; Catalonia, 2016) and then four further research case studies (Austria, 2017; Denmark, 2017; Germany, 2018; and England-Wales, 2018). Research activities included mapping, case selection, site visits and interviews, ending with the study of online primary

sources (websites, statutes, brochures), which took place in 2022-2023. In the following sections, I describe and reflect on the process in detail.

Table 2: Field research of European eco-communities 2015-2018: Basic information

Case study	PORTUGAL	CATALONIA	AUSTRIA	DENMARK	GERMANY	ENGLAND + WALES
Month Year	Sep–Dec 2015	Jan–Feb 2016	May–Jul 2017	Oct 2017	May–Jul 2018	Nov 2018
Time	4 months	1 month	3 months	1 month	3 months	1 month
Mode of transport	Bike, Hitchiking, Plane	Bus, Train	Car, Bus, Train	Train, Hitchhiking	Train, Hitchhiking	Train, Bus Hitchhiking, Carsharing

4.1.1 Mapping and selection of cases

Informed by secondary literature, I identified six regions in Europe in which a specific phenomenon is present. With these pre-fieldwork lenses, I looked primarily (though not exclusively) at Portuguese permaculture educational communities, Danish eco-building communities, Catalan eco-community networks with alternative currency systems, Austrian urban building groups and rural agricultural collectives, German ecovillages and income sharing communities and Welsh and English low impact developments.

For each case study, I first mapped all projects that could be identified as eco-communities. I used web search engines, network directories such as GEN and FIC (The Fellowship for Intentional Community, 2010), independent directories such as eurotopia (Würfel, 2014), but also other, less known, often local networks, infrastructures or databases. I also used the snowball method of asking eco-community members I visited. Finally, I also contacted local experts in the field asking to share their contacts. During the preliminary mapping period, I identified a total of 580 projects and contacted 273 of them (see Table 3).

I identified projects to be contacted were selected on the basis of five criteria, with 'Yes' and Unknown being acceptable for further contact and 'No' being eliminated:

- *Community-based*: projects have an explicit community focus
- *Residential*: projects indicate that members of the community live on site (at least temporarily)
- *Environmental*: projects show an explicit or implicit environmental focus

- *Democratic and participatory*: projects do not demonstrate authoritarian leadership
- *Community economy*: projects indicate an explicit or implicit focus on aspects of the community economy
- *Alive*: projects are active at the time of my contact

My intention was to eliminate potential problems related to my limited knowledge of local contexts or limited information on websites and databases. However, especially during the initial pilot research in Portugal, I also identified, contacted and visited projects that turned out not to be eco-communities in a sense I define them in this thesis. This was due to the relatively fluid (self-)determination of permaculture projects, which emphasised community values, were called ecovillages (ecoaldeia), while in reality there were often only one or two people living on the site with very limited community economy. Informed with flat ontologies, I decided to keep these projects in the research.

Table 3 Field research of European eco-communities 2015-2018: Mapping eco-communities in selected case studies

Case study	PORTUGAL	CATALONIA	AUSTRIA	DENMARK	GERMANY	ENGLAND/ WALES	TOTAL
Identified	86	30	113	83	140	128	**580**
Contacted	47	10	43	29	69	75	**273**
Contacted-identified ratio	0.55	0.33	0.38	0.35	0.49	0.59	**0.47**
Interviewed-contacted ratio	0.02	0.20	0.28	0.34	0.12	0.09	**0.18**

The final case selection was based on acceptance by the eco-communities and also on logistical possibilities. The intention was to avoid the well-known model projects, which are overstudied (e.g., Tamera or Sieben Linden).

The geography of the cases (periphery vs metropolitan area; absolute distance from the Czech Republic), the available time and the modes of transport (see Table 2), the research methodology and the progress of the research influenced the success of entering the fields in different contexts. The mode of transport played an especially important role. It should be added that the logistics of the research had environmental ambitions. I used a combination of cycling, hitchhiking, train and bus to move around the field. While in Portugal the bicycle was suitable for slow travel between the

communities studied, it prevented me from visiting some interesting projects in the north of the country. In Austria I was able to visit many more projects because I used a private car several times to travel to remote areas. I used a plane once—for personal reasons, I had to finish the research in Portugal with short notice. In some cases, especially towards the end of the research and theoretical saturation, I interviewed some cases online.

4.1.2 Site visits

The site visits took place between September 2015 and November 2018. In total, I spent 184 days in the eco-communities. In the pilot studies in Portugal and Catalonia, the fieldwork was designed as ethnographic-informed participant observation visits, lasting between 5 and 42 days. After the pilot research, the methodology was adapted to shorter visits of 1 to 3 days in most cases (with the exception of a few longer cases).

Mostly I entered sites that I had never visited before or have since. In a few cases, I re-entered sites that I had visited in the past or re-entered sites after the research had been finished. On these occasions, I collected data relating to another project, but they also turned out to be relevant contextual information for this project. Particularly in the pilot research, when I was less familiar with the research field, I visited several projects that appeared to be not eco-communities as they were non-residential or non-community-based. In two cases I entered a site that showed some signs of non-democratic decision-making, but I kept them in the research sample as they were both formally democratic.

On the sites, I followed the participant observation methodology. I collected field notes and audio recordings of interviews and took guided tours of community sites with key contacts/informants. My site visits were usually organised as visits to specific hosts (in larger projects) or visits to the community group (in smaller projects). If I stayed for more than one day, I always slept in the community, either in my hosts' homes or in community rooms. For shorter visits, the key contact usually organised my stay, the tour, food in the community and interviews with themselves or other designated person(s). For longer visits, I usually played the role of a volunteer, coordinating myself as part of the volunteer system, staying in the volunteer facilities and taking care of the daily activities in terms of care of the commons as well as food production or other activities. In some projects—usually those I had visited in the past or where we had been able to build trust—I was also invited to take part in decision-making and, in one case, I was invited to join the community.

I used an audio recorder and, to a very limited extent, a camera, and I wrote 3–5 pages of field notes from each of the cases. In all cases, I presented myself as a researcher who would observe, participate and 'produce' interviews.

In Table 4, I present the selected cases of the research. Interviews (in bold) were conducted with 44 cases and 42 cases were visited. In italics are projects that were

visited or interviewed but cannot be considered as eco-communities. However, in a flat ontology approach they could be understood as important research cases that provide valuable context.

Table 4 Field research of European eco-communities 2015-2018: List of field-studied cases

PORTUGAL	CATALONIA	AUSTRIA	DENMARK	GERMANY	ENGLAND + WALES
Centro Tinkuy	**Calafou**	**Cambium Leben in Gemeinschaft**	**Andels-samfundet i Hjortshøj**	**Kuckucksmühle**	**Brithdir Mawr**
Cabeca do Mato	Can Decreix	***Field 8***	**Den Selvforsynende Landsby**	**Lebensgut Cobstädt**	**Lancaster Co-housing**
Ecoaldea de Janas	Can Mas Deu	**Gleis 21**	**Hailingenlille**	**Locomuna**	**LILAC (online)**
Projecto 270	Can Tonal	**Hofkollektiv Zwetchke**	**Hertha Levefæl-lesskab**[32]	**Luftschlosserei (online)**	**On the Brink**
Quinta dos Sete nomes	***Cooperativa Integral Catalana***	**Lebensgut Miteinander**	**Himmelands-byen**	**Mensch Meierei**	**Share Instead**
Vale da Lama	Som Comuni-tat Pujarnol	**LiSA (online)**	**Kirstinelund Øko-bofæl-lesskab**	**Sulzbrunn (online)**	**Sprinhill Co-housing**
		Mühle Nikitch	**Makvärket**	**ufaFabrik**	**Tinker's Bubble**
		Ökotopisches Centrum	**Økosamfundet Soleng (online)**	**Vlierhof (online)**	
		PAN	**Toustrup Mark**		
		Seedcamp	**Tranehoj**		
		SchloR			
		Wohnen im Grünen Markt			
		Wohnprojekt Hasendorf			
		Wohnprojekt Wien			

[32] Hertha is an ecovillage oriented at co-living with people with disabilities

4.1.3 Interviews

Another key method of the research design was the semi-structured interviews. I prepared a list of questions which were divided into several parts and consisted of a total of 113 questions (see Appendix A). The questions were tested during the pilot phase. The interviews usually lasted 90 minutes, with a few shorter/longer interviews or interviews divided into two or three shorter parts. In most cases, the interviews were conducted in private, with only myself and the research participant present. In a few cases the interview was conducted in a public place (e.g., cafeteria) or online. A couple interviews were conducted with two people answering the questions together. In one of the first cases (Vale da Lama, Portugal), I tested semi-structured interviews with all key members of the project (8 interviews). However, this method proved to be very demanding for the communities studied, in terms of the time required or the language skills of several members. Similarly, the results of multi-bodied participants in semi-structured interviews did not prove necessary in my multi-method research. What proved useful was to split the interview into two parts and to conduct it in general terms with my key contact and in more detail with a specialist in economic aspects. In total I have produced 44 site visits and 42 interviews with in total 53 research informants (see
Table 5 for details).

Table 5. Field research of European eco-communities 2015-2018: Interviews and site visits

Case study	POR-TUGAL	CATA-LONIA	AUS-TRIA	DEN-MARK	GER-MANY	ENGLAND + WALES	TO-TAL
Visited cases (with interviews)	1	2	11	9	5	6	34
Interviews (no visit)	0	0	3	1	3	1	6
Visited cases (no interview)	5	4	1	0	0	0	10
Visited cases TOTAL	6	6	12	9	5	6	**44**
Interviewed cases TOTAL	1	2	14	10	8	7	**42**
Visit days TOTAL	90	25	20	27	8	14	**184**

The research participants in the interviews were my hosts with whom I stayed during the site visit, founders or other key figures of the project (this was usually the case in smaller or newly established projects) or members who were involved in public relations or economic tasks (usually in larger or well-established projects). Prior to the interview, all research participants were informed about the research objectives and methods and gave their consent. The interviews were recorded.

The interview design in terms of questions remained the same throughout the research period, with only minor linguistic changes. What evolved with experience was the emphasis given to particular sections or questions of the interview. In Catalonia, there was a language barrier which prevented more interviews from being conducted.

4.1.4 Content of websites and primary documents

Between September 2022 and June 2023, I carried out the final research activity. The original database which served the purpose of 'entering' the research field needed to be updated after the years of hiatus. It also needed to be upgraded to provide the research with an analytical source of information that would make it possible to look at some basic information on the prevailing legal entity, size or form of ownership, but also more conceptual issues related to forms, objectives and infrastructure, as discussed in chapter 2:

- location (urban/rural/suburban),
- year of foundation,
- legal entity,
- population,
- area,
- key objectives (housing, ecology, community, spirituality, education, social care, culture, politics, work),
- form (ecovillage, spiritual eco-community, healing centre, housing co-operative, temporary community, etc.),
- property (apartment house, farm, historic house, medical site, military site, trailer park, village, etc.), and
- prevailing network (GEN, habiTAT, Mietshäuser Syndikat, Landsforeningen for Økosamfund, Kommuja, Stiftung Trias, etc).

At the end of the research, the database consisted of 648 identified cases in the regions studied (Table 6). In addition, during the mapping process, I also listed (not studied) projects from other European regions and beyond, with a total of 365 projects. At this stage of the mapping, I also focused on actor networks, including the networks of eco-communities, knowledge infrastructures or foundations, and I identified 167 of such entities.

Table 6: Online content analysis of European eco-communities: Re-mapping cases in six case studied regions 2022–2023

Case study	**POR-TU-GAL**	**CAT-ALO-NIA**	**AUS-TRIA**	**DEN-MARK**	**GER-MANY**	**ENG-LAND + WALES**	NET-WORKS	**TO-TAL**
Identi-fied cases	104	56	148	77	141	122	167	**648 + 167**

The final mapping included the activity of 'zooming out' to study connectivities and relationships between economic practices and between projects and contexts. I visited the websites of the identified cases (if they had one) and studied their content, including official documents (statutes, contracts) and other statements.

4.2 Analysis

The analysis consisted of the following documents and materials:

- interviews (81 hours of audio recordings, the majority of which were the semi-structured interviews, and a smaller proportion of audio recordings of site walks—introductory guided tours by my hosts. The audio recordings were transcribed manually using F4 software and, in later case studies, also semi-automatically using specialised software. In total, 1,579 pages of recordings were transcribed),
- site visits (110 pages of field notes, low quality photographs),
- online content analysis (613 quotations on economic practices), and
- databases (648 cases with nine main criteria and 167 networks).

I combined the data and experiences from interviews, participant observation, the case database and online content to triangulate my research findings. Due to the large number of documents and also because of my experience with MS Excel, I carried out the analysis in MS Excel. I used open coding to analyse the online content of 613 quotations, out of which I created 145 memos for more complex aspects related to the regions studied. These were used to formulate the findings of the research. I did not code the transcribed interviews or field notes as this would have been beyond my capacity. Instead, I used them to 'travel' between sites and 'dive' back into the field of specific economic practices.

4.3 Limits of research

4.3.1 Spatial aspect

This thesis focused on six regional contexts: Portugal, Catalonia, Austria, Germany, Denmark and England/Wales. It was based on the assumption that the diversity of eco-communities is, among other things, a consequence of the diversity of contexts. Indeed, many forms of eco-community have their roots in, or are strongly associated with, a particular region or country. I selected the six field research case studies on the basis of a preliminary study of secondary sources. I identified regional specificities and divided the case studies in such a way that two regions from Northern Europe, two from Central Western Europe and two from Southern Europe were included in the research. However, I deliberately avoided the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, which I see as the first research limitation.

I avoided this region for three reasons: (1) At the beginning of the project it seemed that eco-communities were not a significant phenomenon in the CEE region. (2) I wanted to avoid a study that would be driven by comparisons between post-socialist contexts and Western European contexts. There was a danger that both the author and the reader would simply slip into a comparative perspective, whereas the focus of this research lies elsewhere. (3) The third reason is practical. This was the work of a single author, and I was already at the limits of my capacity to follow the phenomenon in the South, North and West. It would not have been possible to select only one CEE region—I did not want to oversimplify any region by selecting a 'representative' one. With the housing and environmental crises unfolding, I am convinced that an in-depth study of the phenomenon in the CEE countries is now necessary.

The choice of spatial context for this study is, of course, very deterministic. One could defend, for example, the choice of Sweden or the Netherlands rather than Denmark or Germany. I ask the reader to see the choice of case studies simply as a contextual framework within which the story of this research is told. I am also aware of my limited knowledge of the local contexts. This study certainly could not provide a complete picture of the legal, political and historical contexts, as well as of the specific networks and assemblages of actors discussed in the theoretical chapters. Instead, it examined the interconnectedness of practices between cases.

So why did an author working in the Czech Republic, who argues that the ability to gain insight into a research field is always greater for a local author, not include the Czech Republic in his study? So far, the eco-community movement in the Czech Republic is limited. It is one of the few countries in Europe that does not have its own national Global Ecovillage Network; only one of the projects in the Czech Republic has been included in the Eurotopia community database, and in the area of cooperative housing, the first projects are only just beginning to emerge. However, while this project was still unfinished, a team of colleagues developed a participatory action research project

based on, among other things, the experience gained in this thesis. We dealt with the issue of participatory housing's introduction to the Czech Republic (Kodenko Kubala et al., 2023; Malý Blažek et al., 2023).

4.3.2 Temporality

It took me nine years from the initial research designs to the writing of the final manuscript, and yet I feel that the work is only partially complete. This alone may raise some suspicion about the author's ability to 'produce' research. There are three reasons why this project has taken so long. (1) The fieldwork and research design were too large. They did not match the fragmentation and size of the funding (see Acknowledgements). Each of the six case studies went through its own stage of funding application, preparation, mapping, logistics and research production. (2) Shortly after the last field trip in November 2018, my daughter was born. I went on parental leave and later left the PhD program to work outside of academia to fund my family needs. It was only when I was able to secure funding to finish that I did so. (3) Doctoral studies are not easy. Doctoral students are in a very vulnerable position. I myself went through a long period of losing confidence in my own writing. In fact, psychological difficulties are common among doctoral students, as a recent study in Belgium shows (Levecque et al., 2017). Luckily, I discussed my doubts about how to complete the dissertation project with Judit Farkas, an eco-community scholar from Hungary; she gave me a short, wise and sensitive look and said, 'The dissertation is about presenting where you are.' Well, in this thesis, I am sharing where I am.

The temporality has its consequences. After so many years, I have evolved as a person and as a researcher, as has my interest in eco-communities. Since the end of the fieldwork phase of my research, the focus of my work has shifted significantly to the issue of collaborative housing, and I have turned to research in the Czech Republic. I have learnt new methods and skills. However, I believe that this slight temporal and thematic distance and new experiences have actually helped to make the work more coherent and up to date with current debates.

Perhaps more importantly from a research perspective, not only the author but also the field of research has evolved over time. Additional activities were therefore necessary. I carried out a robust online content analysis. However, the interviews and participant observations in the communities could not, of course, be revised. They must not be seen as capturing the current state of affairs in 2023, but rather as observations of the eco-community phenomenon captured over the periods of specific visits to individual projects. Communities never stop forming, constituting, reforming, eroding and fragmenting. People, strategies, solutions and practices change, and, in this sense, any research visit to an eco-community, unless it is an autoethnographic study, becomes outdated immediately after the visit. In the case of this research, some eco-communities have undergone radical changes or even ceased to exist, many of the

projects are operating much the same, on solid foundations and are celebrating another five years in operation. And, of course, new projects have emerged since then.

4.4 Research ethics

There were no identified ethical concerns related to this research. I did not collect any personal information apart from publicly accessible information presented on the projects websites. I do not present photos or the names of my research participants. The only information I present is the name of the eco-communities, which were included in this research.

Members of eco-communities were, in all cases, informed about the research prior to my arrival. After online contact with research information, only those eco-communities who accepted my inquiry about participation in the research and a research interview invited me to visit the community. After my arrival and at the beginning of each interview, the research participants were informed about the research project again and consented to it in an audio recording.

4.5 Reflection on the research methodology

The main challenge with this research design was that it was too large for a single person's research. However, the design confirmed that the diversity of eco-communities is so wide and formative that theoretical saturation was only reached after the fifth and sixth case studied region.

Nevertheless, in this methodological reflection, I would like to present another challenge related to the positioning of a researcher in the participant observation research of social (economic) practices and strategies. The multi-site research proved there is no single participant observation, but several, including autoethnographic observations (studying one's own reflections as a researcher and as a participant).

My position as a researcher in the field particularly influenced the actual production of the research interview—the interview as a formalised 'research moment'. Paradoxically, in places where my presence was longer and more in-depth, it was often difficult to conduct the research interview, as the role of researcher was mixed with my role in the project as a volunteer, guest, friend and so forth. The ongoing daily activities of the project made it difficult to agree on a specific time for a formalised interview, which in some cases resulted in the interview not taking place during the visit. This was also one of the reasons why I adapted the research methodology and shifted the focus to short and less participatory visits with an agreed programme and interview prior to my arrival. This resulted in a more 'official' research visit with not only semi-structured interviews but also recorded tours after my arrival.

On the other hand, the advantage of longer site visits is that the researcher is able to conduct not only formalised interviews, but also informal discussions within and beyond the research topic.

The positioning of a researcher is not only practical but also epistemological. Claudio Cattaneo (2006), an eco-community scholar and squatting practitioner, presents four types of scientific intervention while studying neorural residents and squatters in Catalonia. He describes (a) *participant observation*, (b) *ethnographic investigation,* (c) *investigation with minimal impact* and (d) *participant observing*. He argues that participant observation (a), with its origins in natural sciences such as biology, is not well suited to the study of complex social systems (such as the economy) simply because the social systems being observed are too complex. The problem lies in the focus of the researcher conducting participant observation on *observation*. Observation is supported by specific scientific methods (field notes, photographs, interviews) and is expected to be objective. However, the *participant* element is much more in line with post-normal science. It is more vague, subjective and depends on the relationship to the observed reality with one's own agency. Ethnographic research (b) is then a more robust type of participant observation. It is expected to produce an in-depth description and interpretation of the cases studied, and also with a robust materiality of the research produced in field diaries, audio-visual documentaries and so on.

Cattaneo then argues in favour of investigation with minimal impact (c), which allows more trust to be built up between the research participants and the observer. An example of a low impact method is a free conversation as opposed to a formalised interview. Participant observing (d) is then Cattaneo's formulation of his position as a squatter participant living a reality that he later observes—participant observing is a method that focuses on participation that is later scientifically observed. He is aware that this methodology is on the edge of academic recognition, but as he says, 'At the edge of academia is also my condition of a participant: through the observation of the reality that I live I dedicate time to produce an academic work' (Cattaneo, 2006, p. 32).

In reflecting on my position using Cattaneo's approach, I used both (a) participant observation and (d) participant observing methods. On the one hand, I chose the projects and practices of participation, approached them, participated in them and left without being able to change the specific cases before the moment of my arrival and after the moment of my departure. I had a goal of achieving and I had prepared my research methods. I presented myself as a researcher carrying out a dissertation project. At the same time, I built the research project and the research design out of my personal social reality, and the social reality contained multiple experiences as a participant. I was never only a researcher but inseparably also a visiting participant with my lived experience of visiting dozens of community projects. I could sometimes be seen as a 'travelling communard'. And I reproduced these experiences in the field research and in my participation and confidence in moving through the terrains.

Multi-sited research differs between sites in the actual production of, in the words of Spaargaren et al. (2016, p. 18), 'diving into situated performances'. The process of diving is not something that can be taken for granted. With each new site visit, this process begins anew, building on the experiences of the previous site visits. Based on my experience of diving in 44 cases in different contexts, I confirm that there is not one participant observation but multiple ones. Practice theory provides an epistemology that is helpful in navigating the study of practices in multiple sites. When studying broader processes of social change, it argues for a combination of 'zooming-in' methods of participation and engagement (Nicolini, 2013) but also 'zooming-out' modalities in which, for example, connectivity between practices can be studied from a distance (Spaargaren et al., 2016).

In this research, the ability to dive into performances was particularly important in terms of aspects of governance, decision-making, strategizing or imagining—aspects that can be particularly relevant to the topic of community economies. These aspects leave some traces of material 'evidence'. For example, a bulletin board on the wall contains the care of the commons formatted into working groups. And there are also other documents such as statutes, house rules, articles or photos. But unlike a general community culture or attitude to environmental responsiveness, which can be at least partially absorbed, when a researcher becomes more experienced, within hours or days of site visits, the area of decision-making and imagining is much more problematic for essentially any research other than autoethnographic. Whether it is the power dynamics, the qualities of work organisation, the qualities of relationships, the shared histories and shared futures of particular decisions, all of these things need special techniques of 'diving'. Although decisions are sometimes made in public, much more often, they are the result of a complex process that is fragmented, long, private and often not very fruitful. There are also many barriers to external participation in the decision-making process, including language: decisions are best made in the mother tongue.

In cases with which I was more familiar or where the research participants were particularly welcoming, I was invited to attend the decision-making meetings as an observer, and, in an instant, my position changed from one of deep immersion in the practices (participant observation) to observation with very limited participation. In my experience, even after repeated visits and even after spending a few months in a particular project (I have spent between 1 and 6 months in a few eco-communities in the past), there is a very strong barrier to participate in decisions and strategies. What helps is having a peer, a confidant who takes part in the decisions and who is able to reflexively and regularly discuss what is being decided, how and why.

Nevertheless, the robust research design proved its potential to triangulate evidence from and in between cases and regions, from zoomings-in and zoomings-out and from my autoethnography experience as a participant in community-oriented projects and as a researcher in participatory action research.

5 Diverse community economies: Spaces of collaboration, decision making and collectivity

In this chapter, I dive back into my research in European eco-communities. The evidence in all the chapters is based on the triangulation of multi-method research that I described in the Methodology chapter. However, in each chapter I try to develop the story through the evidence from specific activities. I divide the evidence into three chapters with different modalities.

Section 5.1 provides evidence from the zoom-out modality. I offer a four-level conceptualisation of eco-communities, combining the techniques of conceptualisation presented in chapter 2. I propose to consider eco-communities in three main clusters: (1) *ecology oriented*, (2) *housing oriented*, and (3) *politics oriented*.

In section 5.2, I use Gibson-Graham et al.'s (2013) framework of community economies, which I introduced at the beginning of the thesis. I use the framework to consider the community economy as a space of decision-making and economic democracy, where the different economic practices are strategically discussed, negotiated and governed. I divide the community economy in eco-communities into three areas of economic activity: 1) community investment and ownership (the production of housing and the built environment); 2) community provision of goods and services; 3) community production for the public economy.[33] I use the term 'economic playground' to express that community economies are full of 'games' (different economic practices and strategies) which have certain rules and governance as a way of relating to the community economy.

Section 5.3 lists some of the key interpretations in relation to the research questions. I offer findings in terms of the a) economic promises—showing how the theoretical economic promises are fulfilled; b) prefiguration and imagination—showing how eco-communities imagine and transform their community economies; c) contradictions and dilemmas—showing some of the identified contradictions and dilemmas that arise in the implementation of multidimensional sustainability goals.

The conceptualisation is a primary outcome of the mapping and online content analysis. The framework of diverse community economies is the primary result of desk research, site visits and interviews. Interpretations are based on all methods.

[33] By public economy I mean the external economy that takes place outside the community economy, be it private, state or third sector economic actors and activities.

5.1 Eco-communities in Europe: four-level conceptualisation

In this chapter I offer a conceptualisation of eco-communities, based on the online content analysis and site visits. It combines both zooming-in and zooming-out modalities, some of the elements of the conceptualisations and typologies presented in chapter 2, and has four levels:

1. *Clusters*: It is attractive not to be extensive,
2. *Forms*: Forms are useful for shared understanding between academics and towards practitioners,
3. *Local variants*: Contextualisation is important as mobility innovation between regions is limited,
4. *Actor networks*: Eco-communities are social organisations that assemble within, against and beyond complex relations to other human and non-human actors.

The first component of the conceptualisation was the analysis of strategic objectives (level 1). For each of the 648 cases studied, I included explicit and/or implicit strategic objectives formulated in primary documents. These included housing, ecology, politics, autonomy, affordability, agriculture, education, culture or self-sufficiency. The second component (level 2) was the (self-)definition of a form of community, such as cohousing, cultural centre, permaculture community or ecovillage.

I then zoomed out to compare the objectives with the forms. If the combination resulted in a specific phenomenon that was not known as a specific local form, I 'created' a new form. For example, in Denmark there was a strong difference between three types of bofællesskab: in addition to traditional bofællesskab and senior bofællesskab, there seemed to be bofællesskabs with much more explicit and stronger ecological objectives, usually a more collectivist economy and collective ownership.

The local lenses (level 3) also made it possible to look at specific local variants or specific communities that were not present in other case studies. One example is a *hofkollektiv* - a rural, politically oriented income sharing community that focuses on agriculture as one of its main sources of income and is well connected to urban social movements with cultural, social as well as economic capital.

Finally, I have used my experience from the field as well as the available information on prevailing network(s) to detail the information on how eco-communities in the categories relate to other actors (level 4).

It should be noted that the conceptualisation could have included specific categories of cultural, social or spiritual eco-communities. Although the predominant objectives could have been culture, social care or shared spirituality, the general characteristics both in the local contexts and in the zoom-out comparisons demonstrated to be close to the three clusters of ecology, housing and politics. The conceptualisation also illustrates both eco-communities and some borderline phenomena that may not fully

fit the definition of eco-communities. It is an open categorisation: some projects may fit into more than one cluster.

5.1.1 Ecology oriented eco-communities

Table 7: Ecology oriented eco-communities in six European countries

Clusters	**ECOLOGY ORIENTED ECO-COMMUNITIES**
Forms	Ecovillages, Eco-settlements, Retreat and educational centres, Temporary environmental camps, Ecological cohousing, Top-down eco-districts, Farming collectives, Social eco-communities, Spiritual eco-communities
Local variants	Low impact developments (Wales and England) Permaculture family farms (Portugal) Hofkollektives (Austria) Camphill communities (Wales and England)
Actor networks	GEN, local GEN networks, volunteers and visitors, environmental activists, New Age seekers, local municipalities, alternative media, local networks and community-based enterprises

This cluster included projects where the environmental objective was strong and usually predominant. It is a cluster with a strong role of local networks (GEN Germany, Landsforeningen for Økosamfund and others). Ecology oriented eco-communities are typically rural and focus on land management, food production, ecological building or environmental education. When they include urban housing projects (ecological co-housing or top-down eco-districts), they involve developers or cities developing carbon neutral eco-districts. They also include some site-specific projects based in industrial brownfields or abandoned rural areas, spiritually oriented deep ecology projects and service oriented social eco-communities. Orientation to ecology is explicit and can be considered as transformative social innovation or practice.

They differ in their relationship to market actors. While the urban projects are often co-produced by a combination of actors, the relationship of rural projects to actors with capitals is less clear. However, local municipalities play an important regulatory role and have the power to enable/disable the development of concrete settlements. Rural eco-communities are often linked to non-governmental funds and infrastructures that help to carry out their educational activities. An exception is Catalonia, where projects are much more autonomous in their actions and in the resources available.

For most rural projects, the main source of income (and/or labour) is visitors, be they volunteers, travellers, participants in educational courses or clients of eco-

retreats. The influx of visitors is large and visitors come from long distances. Volunteers are also important in organic farm projects, but their economies are based on food production rather than education and volunteers are usually not charged for their stay. Rural ecological communities often attract seekers of peace, inner-growth and meditation from different social groups, who often consume and produce alternative information and media, and whose lifestyle often combine voluntary simplicity with relatively high expenditures on educational courses and retreats.

Eco-settlements are an interesting category. They include small homesteads of a group of friends sharing a farmhouse or other sites, but also large settlements in former military bases, medical centres or castles, for example. The small ones often form households with a shared economy, common facilities and gardens, often in combination of a shared community house with individual tiny houses or caravans. The large ones, together with the largest ecovillages, include projects with multi-level governance and economies, including diverse community enterprises with different modalities of orientation towards profit and/or other objectives. The dominant practice of a community economy is the management of the commons, especially land, because of the strong connection to land and 'mother' nature. They often manage dozens of hectares of land, including forests, pastures, gardens or ponds. The ownership structure is often not very transparent combining family ownership, inheritance, community land trusts, rented land from neighbours and other forms of relating.

Ecology oriented eco-communities are typically located in peripheral regions, where the land is available and/or cheaper: in Austria near the borders with Hungary or Czechia, in Catalonia and the rest of Spain in abandoned villages in the mountains. Portugal, with its warm but relatively humid climate and abundance of land, tends to attract international seekers, for example from the UK or Germany, who have been able to buy hectares of land in abandoned farms.

At the very edge of the spectrum, and in limited numbers, are low impact developments and other radical ecology and environmental justice projects such as temporary environmental camps. They focus on minimal impact in terms of carbon or ecological footprint. They are not necessarily politically motivated (anti-capitalist/leftist), but they have strong environmental ethos.

The boundary of ecological eco-communities includes practices of eco-resorts and (spiritual) retreat centres. where the community aspect is often (not always) a business product rather than an actual relationship between residents.

5.1.2 Housing oriented eco-communities

Table 8: Housing oriented eco-communities in six European countries

Clusters	**HOUSING ORIENTED ECO-COMMUNITIES**
Forms	Housing co-operatives, Cohousings, Building groups, Top-down community oriented developments and participatory districts, Housing projects of marginalised groups, Open-space communities, Co-living businesses
Local variants	Tenant syndicates (Germany, Austria) Foundations networks (Germany) Co-operative networks (Catalonia) Christian cohousing (Austria) Bofællesskab (Denmark)
Actor networks	foundations, cities, banks, profit developers, limited-profit developers, community financing schemes

This cluster included projects in which community-oriented, collaborative or co-operative housing and living was a primary and dominant objective. Environmental aspect manifest itself in practices of community gardening, community supported agriculture, food coops, car sharing and others, or in terms of application of ecological technology. This cluster also includes most of the non-eco-communities - community and co-operative housing projects in which the environmental aspect was very loose, or projects with limited community orientation.

Housing communities are projects that have appeared in several waves over the last decades. With the exception of Portugal, where the community scene is much more rural, in the other studied regions the housing scene has been currently progressing, with dozens of new projects being developed in recent years. This creates an interesting situation in which older housing co-operatives or cohousings coexist next to new ones but assemble in different actor networks. For example, the projects developed around the 2010s in Austria or Germany were bottom-up, community-led, middle-class projects, with important infrastructures of architects and project managers, available funds and policies. The most recent projects, due to the rising costs of land especially in the big cities, are created in often more complex networks of actors, including public and private developers. As a result, they often contain both stronger housing policies in terms of affordability or environmental objectives, but also weaker objectives from developers, who sell, as in the case of Denmark, full-featured cohousing products that include, not only housing units but also, for example, cooking classes to enable residents to cook for groups. It is typical for housing oriented projects that they actively adapt to new conditions, co-create the infrastructure and funding

schemes, publish manuals for future projects or set knowledge networks. Networks of peer projects and networks of housing developers also play a key role —they formulate the organisation and ownership structure, help with funding or development.

As a result of these strong assemblages, housing oriented projects tend to standardise in terms of production, but also in terms of shared practices or governance. The critical component that divides housing oriented communities into two main groups is the ownership structure. Compared to the other clusters, the legal element is very important and very transparent, with cohousing typically having a private ownership structure and housing cooperatives having a cooperative structure.

Compared to the other clusters, housing oriented eco-communities are, not surprisingly also the most home oriented. They create dwellings with designated private, semi-private and public areas, but because of their community orientation, they face the risk of creating specific gated communities. In the boundary zone are temporary projects, including open communities, which are based on the open source culture of the hackers' labs, co-living—a product of sharing economy sold mainly to digital nomads, and also collaborative projects of marginalised groups of people, including temporary shelters of the houseless people, which, in terms of environmental impact live very low-demanding.

5.1.3 Politics oriented eco-communities

Table 9: Politics oriented eco-communities in six European countries

Clusters	**POLITICS ORIENTED ECO-COMMUNITIES**
Forms	Egalitarian communes, Autonomous projects, Community centres and industrial colonies, Squats, Trailerparks, Temporary camps
Local variants	Kommuja (Germany, Austria) habiTAT (Austria) Hofkollektiv (Austria) Radical routes (UK)
Actor networks	social movements, municipalities, property owners, community-based initiatives

The third cluster includes projects for which autonomy, political action, social and environmental justice or the right to the city are important objectives of their activities. They include both housing and ecology oriented projects, as they are often projects with more than one objective. Politics oriented projects have explicit and well-articulated goals and usually include social solidarity and collective economies, including examples of all income sharing egalitarian communes (e.g. Kommuja network in

Germany). They are active in politically motivated networks and they see networking as part of their political action. Within the networks they share solidarity practices and are often well connected to the local community in terms of providing services to (or working with) vulnerable groups. Sometimes they form alternative economies based on alternative currencies or free gifts. An important part of their action is the aspect of alternative ownership, occupation and squatting, including some of the largest and best known projects in Europe: for example, Christiania in Copenhagen or UfaFabrik in Berlin.

In Table 10, I apply the three cluster typology presented in this thesis.

Table 10: Cluster conceptualisation of field-studied eco-communities

Ecology oriented	Vale Da Lama, Ecoaldeia de Janas, *Projecto 270*[34]*, Quinta dos Sete Nomes, Centro Tinkuy, Cabeca do Mato*, Som Comunitat Pujarnol, PAN, Andelssamfundet i Hjortshøj, Den Selvforsynende Landsby, Hailingenlille, Kirstinelund Øko-bofællesskab, Økosamfundet Soleng, Lebensgut Cobstädt, Luftschlosserei, Sulzbrunn, Vlierhof, Brithdir Mawr, Tinker's Bubble
Housing oriented	*Field 8*, Gleis 21, Lebensgut Miteinander, LiSA, Ökotopisches Centrum, Wohnen im Grünen Markt, Wohnprojekt Hasendorf, Wohnprojekt Wien, Toustrup Mark, Lancaster Cohousing, LILAC, On the Brink, Share Instead, Springhill Cohousing
Politics oriented	Calafou, Can Decreix, Can Mas Deu, Can Tonal, *Cooperativa Integral Catalana*, Cambium Leben in Gemeinschaft, Hofkollektiv Zwetschke, Mühle Nikitsch, SchloR, Makvärket, Kuckuckmühle, Locomuna, Mensch Meierei, ufaFabrik

5.2 Community playground: Space of decision-making[35]

In chapter 3, I presented the eco-community economic micro-system consisting of the community economy and the individual economies of members. It served to unfold the specifics of different forms of non-market and market economies. I divided the community economy into the non-market community household economy and the not-only-for-profit community enterprise economy. I applied the concept of primary and

[34] In italics, I highlight cases that were identified as non-eco-communities

[35] I built this section on the forthcoming chapter in Jenny Pickerill's book *Surviving well together* (Malý Blažek, Forthcoming).

secondary social enterprise to show that activities in communities are particularly organised with community infrastructures supporting the particular economic activities. However, a number of concerns arise, such as how the non-market, not-only-for-profit and the for-profit activities are balanced in the context of other than only economic objectives, or how the community economy interacts with individual economies. In short, how are the practices assembled, negotiated and governed?

I build on Gibson-Graham et al. 's (2013, p. xix) concept of *community economies* to explore what are the implications and effects of economic democracy. Applying the concept on the economy of eco-communities, I introduce the term *economic playground* to express that the eco-community economies are full of *games* (diverse economic activities) all of which have specific rules.

Gibson-Graham define the economy as 'a diverse social space in which we have multiple roles' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, p. xx). This diverse economy encompasses economic activities in households, local economies, regional and global economies. It encompasses not only market and non-market activities, but also a plethora of alternative ways in between. The authors use five identifiers of economic diversity related to labour, enterprise, transactions, property and finance (see Table 11). Eco-communities are prime examples of this economic diversity. But they are also prime examples of what Gibson-Graham et al. (2013, p. xix) call the community *economy*:

> A space of decision making where we recognize and negotiate our interdependence with other humans, other species, and our environment.

While in diverse economies, scholar using the approach present positive, neutral and immoral practices all together, they use the term community economy in the sense of building a post-capitalist future, where solidarity and social and environmental justice are inseparable from the community economy (Gritzas & Kavoulakos, 2016).

Table 11: Gibson-Graham's diverse economy

LABOR	ENTERPRISE	TRANSACTIONS	PROPERTY	FINANCE
Paid	**Capitalist**	**Market**	**Private**	**Mainstream market**
Alternative paid	**Alternative capitalist**	**Alternative market**	**Alternative private**	**Alternative market**
Self-employed	Green capitalist firm	Fair trade, direct trade	State-owned	State banks
Cooperative	Socially responsible firm	Reciprocal exchange	Tenanted	Government-sponsored lenders
Indentured	State-run enterprise	Alternative currency	Ninety-nine-year lease	Credit unions
Reciprocal labour		Local trading system	Customary	Microfinance
In-kind		Community supported agriculture	Community-managed	Friendly societies
Work for welfare		Barter	Community trust	Community-based financial institutions
		Underground economy		
		Informal market		
Unpaid	**Non-capitalist**	**Non-market**	**Open access**	**Non-market**
Housework	Cooperative	Household flows	Atmosphere	Sweat equity
Family care	Social enterprise	Gift giving	Water	Community-supported business
Neighbourhood work	Self-employed business	Gleaning	Open ocean	Rotating credit funds
Volunteering	Slave enterprise	State allocations	Ecosystems services	Family lending
Self-provisioning	Feudal estate	Hunting, fishing, gathering		Donations
Slave labour		Theft, poaching		Interest-free loans

Source: (Gibson-Graham et al., 2018)

Eco-communities create diverse non-market and liminal-market economies (see chapter 3). According to the framework of community economies – they create a space for designing alternative rules and alternative economic realities that *can* be bent in a socio-environmental direction, be it social inclusivity, low impact housing or low carbon emissions. But this active prefiguration (Clarence-Smith, 2022; Clarence-Smith & Monticelli, 2022) can also end in a shared luxury or exclusive gated neighbourhoods. The fact that economies are democratic does not guarantee that they are solidary or ecological. This can only be guaranteed by combining the democratic decision-making with social and ecological visions, ties, ethics, empowerment, organisation and regulations (legal statutes and other binding documents), while also being influenced by materials, technologies, policies and other contexts and actors (C. Farias, 2017; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). In other words, a community economy is a democratic economy and it enables ethical socio-environmental actions when they are formulated. It is certainly a space where economic activities can flourish, less dependent on the dominant capitalist system and the state, but closely linked to collective social and environmental values, goals and visions. Using the assemblage theory, it can be seen as a space filled with people, nature, infrastructures, networks, labour, material and financial flows.

In eco-communities, the community economy is the part of the economy that is governed, negotiated and managed at the community level. Its importance and robustness are intentionally negotiated and varies considerably from case to case. In income-sharing communes, the community economy includes virtually all economic activities; in most projects, it exists alongside the individual economies of members, which are negotiated at the household level.

In the dominant economic system, which is based on the logic of growth, profit, commodification and extraction of resources, it is difficult to run economic activities which are socially and environmentally sustainable. The limits of the system are simply embedded in its very basic logic. As I argued in the last section, non-market and alternative market economies need trellises to function according to the needs of the inhabitants (just as price is the logical trellis of the market economy). It is necessary to ensure that voices are heard, decisions are made and responsibilities are shared. Particularly in larger collective structures, it can be difficult to identify everyone's needs and allocate resources accordingly and the democratic governance needs other trellises such as the alternative value and exchange systems mentioned above, as well as local currencies and income redistribution systems from the individual to the collective economy, including the models where income is fully shared.

In keeping with the positive, experimental narrative typical of many eco-communities, I call the democratic space of the community economy an *economic playground*. The *games* (economic activities) played in the playground vary in size, purpose, impact and rules. What are the functions of the playground? (1) The playground is the space for governance that help each member, work group or community-based enterprise to

negotiate their preferences and activities and decide within the broader vision and mission of the eco-community. (2) It is the space for navigation between eco-community goals—given the diversity of practices, the playground holds, redirects and shifts the social, environmental and economic variables between activities. As a result, some activities serve financial means; others may have social or environmental benefits. 3) It is a space of transformation - the playground acts as a 'transformer' of economic flows between the diverse economies (market—alternative market—non-market).[36] A community playground is the *infrastructure* for playing diverse economy games, *knowledge* of the diverse games, but also the *ability* to play the games (including creating new games and rules), as well as negotiating which games to play, with whom, how to maintain the playground, or how to invest in it. More broadly, how to cooperate with other actors.

In the next section I present the economic practices that are created in the three areas of the community economic playground: collaborative financing, collaborative provision and collaborative production.

5.2.1 Financing of housing and the built environment

In terms of the (re)production of housing and the built environment, the rising costs of land, materials and energy costs affect and determine the long-term socio-economic situation of eco-communities. In fact, the right financial and ownership plan at the outset has a fundamental impact on the economic situation, but also on the 'capacity' of the community economy to 'hold' and meet the social and environmental objectives. To put it simply, eco-communities are projects which usually at the very beginning of their existence, have to face the reality of the property market and therefore have to raise a large amount of money in a relatively short period of time.

Nevertheless, eco-communities are looking for solutions. Especially the *housing oriented* and *politics oriented* eco-communities are early adopters of

[36] Consider the provision of food. In a market economy, restaurant workers cook food and sell it to customers. But diverse economies in the Gibson-Graham framework also allow for all other imaginable ways of providing food. Food can be provided for free (without the logic of transaction), at a solidarity price (everyone pays a voluntary amount according to their needs), or at a price close to the market price. The choice of strategy may change over time. The reason for the change may be, for example, the need to switch from a non-market / alternative market to a market in terms of inputs, which may lead to an increase in costs—e.g., when it is no longer possible to get 'expired' food from the local supermarket at a solidarity price, or when it has to be taken into account that the community enterprise has run out of public support for the employment of marginalised people and has to secure wages independently from the state.

financial/economic and property/legal frameworks and tools such as direct loans, asset pools[37], mutual home ownership[38], solidarity funds or tenant syndicates.[39] (CLH London, 2020; Holm & Laimer, 2021; Hurlin, 2019). These schemes and instruments allow:

- Actively generate funds from trusts and local communities, while reducing the need for bank loans,
- Administer debt and rent in different ownership models (including post-ownership[40]),
- Allocate assets from members to the community and vice versa,
- Managing the commons.

Other housing strategies include advocacy with municipalities and other public and private actors (e.g., for land rental or co-production); or active and voluntary participation of members in project management and construction.

Finally, eco-communities apply solutions which are related to physical materiality, such as architectural design, that focuses on extensive use of common spaces, nature-based solutions, recycling and upcycling of materials, and also, the creativity and development of housing in sites, previously dedicated to other functions, such as medical and social centres, farms and agricultural facilities and even military sites. These and other activities and strong orientation on self-help building can be seen also in ecology oriented eco-communities.

[37] Asset pools are one of the relatively lesser-known community finance strategies that theoretically allow for post-ownership—in the developing of projects, in which the loan is never paid back and the assets are owned not by the community of residents but by the bondholders. An example is the Wealth Pool (*Vermögenspool*) in Austria. With the ongoing housing crisis, the financial demands of ownership have been rising and it is much harder to reach it for individual households but also collectives and cooperatives. The Wealth Pool shareholder model may guarantee the same feeling of secured housing as homeownership does, but the housing security is much more connected to good relationships, community capital, trust and control, rather than to the need to own.

[38] An example is the *Mutual Home Ownership Society* in the UK.

[39] These networks buy out properties from the market. The most-known example is *Mietshäuser Syndikat* in Germany (online). Another option is buying out properties in collaboration with foundations, such as *Stiftung Trias* in Germany or *Stiftung Edith Myron* in Switzerland.

[40] The most used post-ownership strategy is *squatting*, which includes temporary as well as long-term right-to-the-city projects occupying houses and other sites in cities, projects occupying abandoned farms and historical settlements in rural areas, and, squatting projects of marginalised groups, mainly houseless people (Cattaneo, 2006; Kanavaris, 2022; Martínez López, 2014; Squatting Europe Kollective, 2013; Vašát, 2023; Vasudevan, 2017; Wilbert & White, 2011).

5.2.2 Collaborative provision of goods and services

While the financing and ownership of common property is usually a serious game with strict rules and legal regulations, it is in collaborative consumption, or rather, collaborative provision that the economic games get fun. Again, it involves the consumption of goods and services produced in all kinds of economies: in the market, in alternative markets, and in the community itself. Members create, manage and join activities in many areas, including food, mobility, education or care for people and, in general for the commons. These games are played especially by *ecology oriented* and *politics oriented* eco-communities. They are organised as

- Pooling systems that redistribute capital from individuals to the community and eventually vice versa,
- Alternative value and exchange systems and local currencies that value and record individual contributions and exchanges between members,
- Free flow and solidarity systems, where contributions are more open or less important to track.

The community playground is then the space that holds and directs all these practices, requiring one or more levels of democratic governance on the one hand and offering resource savings through economies of scale on the other.

5.2.3 Production for the public economy

The third area of the community economy covers the production of goods and services, that serve the public (non-member) economy, and generate (not necessarily financial) resources. These include food production, manufacturing, social services, education or culture, but also the rental of land or office space. They mostly operate for financial gains, but aim to be in line with the values and principles of the eco-community. Again, the democratic space of the eco-community economy offers the advantages of keeping the different practices together and of switching between the diverse market and non-market economies with non-market capital, and of navigating and negotiating the objectives of production. These activities are mostly run by *ecology oriented* and *politics oriented* eco-communities. The production for the public economy includes:

- Individual enterprises that can be economically, legally and administratively independent to the eco-community
- Micro-enterprises, which can be economically and legally independent but dependent on the eco-community in terms of governance
- Community enterprises, which are legally and economically dependent to the eco-community, in addition to their governance.

The Table 12 summarises the identified practices and apply the concept of diverse economies on eco-communities:

Table 12: Application of diverse economy framework on eco-community economies

COMMUNITY ECONOMIES					
Non-market economies					
Housing decom-modifica-tion	Self-man-agement and build-ing	Money pooling	Solidarity funds	Income redistribu-tion	Income sharing
Mobility sharing	Food coops	Self-sufficient farming	Home-schooling	Care sharing	Free flow
Alternative market economies					
Asset pools	Direct loans	Community supported agriculture	Alternative currencies	Micro-enterprises	Community enterprises
Public and market economies					
Subsidies	Partner-ships	Shopping	Selling	Bills	Bank loans
INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIES					
Individual household incomes, expenditures and activities					

5.2.4 'Neither money, nor time can be privatised': Community playgrounds as an imaginative practice

In the previous sections I used the concept of the community playground to present the economic practices identified in European eco-communities. I have found that eco-communities differ in the combinations of economic practices outlined in Table 12. However, community playgrounds are essentially imaginative practices and depend on many factors related to identities, capital, infrastructure, decision-making, forms or broader socio-technical, cultural, economic and political contexts (see Table 1 in the *Introduction*). It is beyond the scope of this research to explore all these particular factors, as they open up many new questions (see chapter 6: *Discussion*). Instead, in this section I offer to 'zoom' back into the field to look at how community economies can be imagined and constructed. I present examples of European eco-communities that were interviewed and visited as part of this research. I have chosen a community centre, an income sharing commune, a large eco-settlement, an ecological cohousing, a low impact development and an urban building group.

- *Makvärket* is a cultural and environmental collective formed around a project to restore an old ceramics factory into a cultural community centre. It is located in the Danish countryside, well connected by train, car and cycle path to Copenhagen, the capital city with a vibrant history of self-organised community projects such as The Floating City, Ungdomhuset or Christiania, all of which combine autonomous culture, education and politics with (post-capitalist) structural and material experiments. Makvärket has translated this vibe into a large 10,000 square metre factory in the countryside, with lots of embedded material and space for material storage. The economy has been created around non-market and non-monetary practices in work (with tens of thousands of hours of volunteer work), freegan culture and dumpster diving, slow development, co-education and the use of second-hand materials, but also around donations, cultural activities and public funds for building repairs. The collective consists of permanent - though not necessarily resident—members and a fluctuating residential community of visitors from around the world. To support themselves, some members of the collective have worked and studied in Copenhagen or other cities, or have partly been employed by a construction company that owns the building (the factory was sold to the construction company by the local municipality for a symbolic price). I have been able to visit the project several times and observe the long-term process of stabilising and localising of the collective in small housing communities in the villages around the factory. Today, the factory serves as a cultural and community centre, but also as a workshop for individual and community micro-businesses, and to some extent as a safe space and starting point for many global newcomers to the Copenhagen area. It serves as an example of multi-level governance, a sensitive renewal of the local factory and the work it generates, but also of new rural (and rural-urban) relationships.
- *Lokomuna* is an urban commune in Kassel, a historic city with a student atmosphere in the centre of Germany, which is a very special place for eco-communities, with a high density of political communes in the region, including the well-known Kommune Niederkaufungen, founded in 1986. In Locomuna, the economy is based on a radical redistribution of income, wealth and time from the individual to the community level. Members share not only all costs but also their time ('Neither money nor time can be privatised', as they say). Spending money is decided and regulated by the collective, as is free time ('Everyone should have the same amount of free time'). This may be difficult to accept, but the community supports individuals in all life situations and crossroads, so that, for example, they have enough time to find the right job or study at any age. They are well connected to other communities in the Kassel area in a regional network of communities within which they are experimenting with a free-flow economy based on need, not cost. They are also unique in their system of wealth redistribution. When

people join, they must give all their capital (if they have any) to the commune. Over time, as the loans are repaid, the house becomes an asset and anyone who wishes to leave receives a fair share of the wealth created. This system ensures that people with lower incomes are not 'trapped' in the collective economy. If they want to leave, they get enough capital to maintain a good quality of life in the future.

- *Cambium Leben in Gemeinschaft* is a relatively new community in Fehring, a small town in rural Styria, Austria. In Austria, non-urban eco-communities are often located in areas with cheaper land, typically on the periphery near the borders with the Czech Republic or, in this case, Hungary and Slovenia. But the group's history links Austria's two largest cities. A founding group in Vienna (Cambium) merged with a group with similar aims in Graz (Leben in Gemeinschaft) to form a single large rural project, and soon bought an old military barracks and land from the state of Styria. They successfully implemented the asset pool model, 'an alternative, interest-free, value-preserving, legal asset cycle independent of the banking system' (Distelberger, n.d.) to acquire property worth €2 million. The system is based on diversification and permanent replacement of shareholders 'in the pool'. If some of the shareholders need money back, they are swapped with a new person. In theory, this system makes it possible to buy back the investment after it has been made, or at least at a much slower rate. The community is also experimenting with the solidarity economy; at the time of my visit, for example, they had a sliding scale payment system for rent and food, with different levels of individual contributions. This solidarity and the high level of sharing (spaces, tasks) make living in the community relatively economically inclusive. However, as many similar projects struggle to do, also for Leben in Gemeinschaft it remains a challenge to create spaces that are inclusive in terms of other socio-demographic and cultural characteristics such as education or ethnicity.
- *LILAC – Low Impact Living Affordable Community* in Leeds, UK is a cohousing project often cited as a successful example of ecological and affordable housing in a new urban development. The project consists of 20 households living in straw bale houses and sharing a common house for meals and other activities. The LILAC community has pioneered a Mutual Home Ownership Society, an affordable housing finance model in which community members pay 35% of their income as rent (or 10% once they have paid off their personal shares, with an option to pay off between 90-110% of target shares) (CLH London, 2020).. As a result, individuals pay off 'their' shares at different rates and timeframe. LILAC also has an equity fund in which those who leave get back what they have invested. This solidarity takes equity out of the property market. The model is affordable across generations, but as newly built ecological housing it is not inclusive of people on

really low incomes, as there is still a minimum rent required to ensure that the loans can be repaid.

- *Tinker's Bubble* is a small, low-impact woodland community of self-built cottages in Somerset, UK. The project focuses on a local economy, zero use of fossil fuels and an economic connection to the land, working with the resources it provides. The economy is based on voluntary simplicity and low, land-sustaining levels of material and monetary flows. In their case, there are two commercial commodities - wood in the forest and apples in the orchards. So Tinker's Bubble produces hand-pressed apple juice and wooden frames using only hand tools, horses and a sawmill powered by a wood-fired steam engine. The hours devoted to this production are derived from the very low financial needs of the members (around £30-40 per person per week plus a few pounds per week to repay the property). The rest of the time is devoted to self-sufficient activities. The model is socio-economically inclusive, but the radically low consumption and low-impact living conditions in the forest houses have been challenging and unacceptable to many people.
- *LiSA—Living in Seestadt Aspern* is one of the many new building groups (*Baugruppe*; *Wohnprojekt,* see section 2.2.1*)* in Seestadt Aspern, a model district in Vienna, Austria. A building group is a group of households (association, cooperative) that finances and maintains a collective property, individuals use their apartments and benefit from sharing (cars, tools, skills, care, rooms, etc.) and pay stable monthly payments (rent to pay loans). In LiSA, with a population of about 70 adults and 20 children, the house was purchased in a standard way (bought from a developer at a regular price, with a bank loan with a 35-year repayment horizon). But unlike other similar projects built in the city at the time, LiSA deliberately focused on the social and income diversity of the households. As a result of this solidarity, a third of the members contributed more than the target share and the community was affordable for people with little or no capital. In addition, half of the flats are small to increase the diversity of rents. In addition, LiSA deliberately sought applicants of different nationalities, made two flats available to an adult day care centre, and set up a solidarity fund for situations such as when a member is temporarily unable to pay the rent.

5.3 Promises, prefigurations, dilemmas and contradictions

To return to the central framework of this thesis, creating the space for decision making means that members need to agree on ecological principles and material throughput, economic models for financing development, income and property distribution and inclusivity, production and consumption, the localisation of their activities, the

degree of autonomy from the dominant regime, and many other aspects. Because the reality of eco-communities is highly contextual and dependent on many factors, I cannot offer answers such as to which combination of economic practices, values and resources will produce the best results. Instead, in this section I combine the modalities of zooming in and zooming out to reflect on some of the findings that have emerged across contexts. I divide the results into three parts. (1) Reciprocity, care, sharing and other non-market economies fulfil the theoretical potential outlined in Chapter 3. Eco-communities are living examples of the benefits of a non-market economy. They also succeed in (re)producing housing in different contexts. (2) Eco-communities differ in their capacity to prefigure practices in a social-ecological direction, because they differ in their conception of community economy. (3) Eco-communities need financial and other capital, which they often inject from external resources, including non-market, alternative market and market sources. My research suggests that many projects are not making the most of their diverse community economies, perhaps because they lack a certain economic imagination. The economic playgrounds are as joyful and innovative as they can be stressful and demanding, as luxurious as they can be impoverished.

5.3.1 Eco-communities succeed in (re)producing and sharing of housing and settlements in different sites and legal forms

- *Eco-communities provide housing in a variety of legal forms and locations,* including former military barracks, health and social care facilities, farms, factories and multi-generational villas. They bring new solutions for mobilising different sources of finance. They are pioneers in low energy construction, in building with a range of ecological materials and in building tiny houses. However, there is a clear divide between projects that remain 'on paper' and those that have moved beyond the early planning and construction stages. A lot of work needs to be done in the early stages of projects - developing a land or building site, forming a group of residents, establishing rules and organisational models, and finding funding. Eco-communities must therefore first demonstrate the ability to cooperate, finance and self-organise the (re)production of houses, homesteads, built environments and public spaces, be it a settlement of eco-houses, a former industrial, medical or military site, a modern apartment building in the city or a historic farmstead.
- *Reciprocity and care are most stimulated in neighbourhood settlements and depend on project culture rather than ownership.* Eco-communities vary in terms of mutual help and care. There is no evidence that these attributes are stronger in more collectivist structures. On the contrary, the feeling that it is always possible to ask someone 'who knows how', and that there is someone nearby who cares about how your day has been and will ask if you need anything, was subsequently

present in most eco-communities, including those where the housing units were privately owned. One example is Friland ecovillage in Denmark, which was actually my first contact with ecovillages (I visited Friland in 2011). Friland is a fairly loose neighbourhood of eco-houses made from ecologically-sourced materials, such as straw bales or sea muscles. The houses are privately owned and the collective economy is mostly limited to management of the commons, neighbourly reciprocity, care and cooperation in building the houses. In the house where I was doing some clay plastering, there were not only visitors like me, but also helping neighbours, some of whom had already finished their homes, while others were just starting to build. Many hands (and minds) are a great gift in self-help building. And in Friland, as in many other eco-community projects, those hands seemed to be everywhere.

- *Common areas are usually well organised. If not, there is a fight about it.* Common areas in eco-communities are well used. Common rooms, workshops or gardens are relatively tidy and often well equipped because they are used on a daily basis. The boundaries between private and public space are clear. There are different levels of communal spaces—from those used by a few households living in a cluster of flats, to those used by members of a house or neighbourhood, to multi-purpose communal and semi-public spaces. Each area is also a system in itself. Common space means organised space. If the space is not well organised, there is likely to be a conflict over it.
- *Economies of scale and the sharing economy are a joy and a benefit.* An example of the economic and environmental benefits of living together is buying non-perishable food in bulk or cooking together - it saves money, time, fuel and other resources. Eco-communities are a huge step ahead of individual households in private apartments or detached houses in this respect, simply by doing this and combining it with the sharing of utilities, infrastructure and things. The sharing economy in eco-communities is usually a joy. There are moments when cleaning a common room is a chore, but sharing a meal, cooking or cleaning up after dinner are seen as socially important and enjoyable activities.
- *Law is always a challenge. Knowledge infrastructures are a big help. Projects make their own rules.* The non-professional, non-profit and bottom-up (re)production of collective housing estates and shared housing is not very common and raises many questions about spatial planning and building law from local authorities in cities as well as in the countryside, including fire regulations, parking regulations or land use. What matters is whether and how projects work with authorities on solutions, i.e. whether the knowledge and motivation comes from projects, authorities or public or private knowledge infrastructures. Also important are the political motivations of municipal representatives, whether they want to and learn how to support projects with public tenders. Corporate law is also a

challenge, but projects are usually able to adapt to it. Most projects establish their own rules and regulations that go beyond the legal standard. These infrastructures combine statutes, other binding documents and democratic governance. In Denmark, for example, ecovillages are usually developed in stages. Andelssamfundet I Hjortshøj, one of the largest ecovillages in Denmark, has expanded eight times in the thirty years of its existence. This means that eight different construction groups have developed the land and built houses according to a master plan and rules that combine the needs of the municipality and the ecovillage. Each group is different in terms of architecture, ownership, financing, degree of self-help building and social mix. Also, the networks and infrastructures that fall under the umbrella of collaborative housing seem to respond dynamically to the complexity of housing projects and change their roles, both through the creation of manuals and methodologies (Feldmann, 2022), and through the formation of different levels of knowledge infrastructures, ranging from information networks (e.g. Co-Housing Berlin, in Germany), to support initiatives (e.g. Initiative Gemeinsam Bauen und Wohnen in Austria), to the role of developer (die Wogen in Austria). Networks that focus on the implementation of specific models play a special role: not only the Mietshäuser Syndikat in Germany or the housing cooperative network Sostre Cívic in Catalonia, but also networks of egalitarian communities in German-speaking Europe (Interkomm, Longo Maï, Kommuja).

- *Assemblages create innovation but also standardisation.* There are cross-contextual principles, such as sociocracy, non-violent communication or permaculture, that are dominant in communities across contexts as a result of dissemination in books, blogs, videos and in person. Many communities are so committed to these principles that they make them the subject of their local educational (and often business) experience. Communities create networks, platforms and knowledge infrastructures where they share experiences and sometimes even standards—desired qualities. For example, when a new housing project applies to the Mietshäuser Syndikat, a tenant housing network in Germany, it must reapply proven solutions and principles because it is actually joining the legal structure of the syndicate. Some standardisation also results from wider networks of actors and assemblages in local contexts (architects, agents, foundations, banks, authorities and regulations). An extreme form of standardisation is the developer-led eco-community, where much of the project is designed top-down before the actual housing group enters the project.

5.3.2 A small prefigurative change in economic practice can have a big impact, especially in more mainstream projects

- *Eco-communities demonstrate a greater or lesser ability to actively prefigure pre-determined life strategies*. They expand the economic imagination by creating unique and replicable best practices. Sometimes only (relatively) small changes significantly affect the qualities of a project. On several occasions, developers in Austria shrugged their shoulders when I asked them how they were addressing housing affordability and inclusivity. 'There is no good solution, without a contribution from each family it is not possible to finance the project'. When I spoke to a representative of the Viennese project LiSA— Leben in Seestadt Aspern, he captured exactly what intentionality and prefiguration mean. The project was deliberately founded on a model of solidarity shares. The average deposit per square metre of investment in LiSA was basically the same as in other projects at the time. In LiSA, however, the price was not mandatory, but a target. With this relatively simple change in perspective, one third of the households paid a higher deposit than necessary, two thirds of the households were therefore able to pay a lower deposit, while some of them were even able to enter the project without any savings.
- *More collectivism means more solidarity, but all-income sharing communes are on the edge of imagination*. Collective economy in eco-communities usually means that some expenses, some care and some production activities are shared. In egalitarian communes, all income and property is usually shared. Although communes create infrastructures that meet the challenges, such as legal contracts that reflect not only entry but also exit from such a system, they remain a relatively limited phenomenon. For most people interested in communal living, a commune seems to be at the limit of their economic imagination, even though the daily life of these communities does not differ much from other projects where members also take decisions on economic matters. What collectivism in communes means is that more decisions have to be made about how the income of the commune is generated and used. This means collectivisation and democratisation in a number of areas that we normally approach as individuals and households—how we plan our future and who we consult and make decisions with about our education, employment or leisure. In the urban community of Lokomuna in Kassel, Germany, for example, the promise of solidary collectivity manifests itself in the community day care for a member in need. Similarly, the community is in a position to provide socio-economic support to its members if they wish to study or set up a business. Of course, it must be accepted that a radical redistribution of capital means not only a potentially greater socio-economic

empowerment, but also regulation if the economic action is not in favour of the commune or against its principles.

- *Devaluing work leads to arguments and compromises.* Many collaborative housing projects in different countries, historical periods and forms have had a similar experience—they start by counting every hour of contribution and only as they build trust (and probably give up hope of equal performance) do they move on to a free flow. It seems that the ability to be together is learnable and varies with experience and trust. For example, in Wohnprojekt Wien, the Viennese building and living group that built an award-winning apartment building in 2012 and became one of the ambassadors of collaborative housing in Austria, they considered whether and how to define what should be a fair level of participation in the project for each adult member. They tested different approaches, calculated the number of hours per month needed in each area of the project, discussed options, and set a minimum level of involvement. In the end, they decided that the easiest way was to stop "measuring". Everyone is expected to contribute. Even in Spreefeld Berlin, one of the ambassador projects of collaborative housing in Germany, not everyone is expected to contribute. In community-oriented urban housing on this scale, it is apparently enough for 10 per cent of members to be actively involved in the day-to-day running of things - be it community activities, organising finances or renovations. It is a compromise: 'If you want to live together, you have to accept different levels of commitment from individuals.' However, projects that require more than 'just' sharing and caring for the commons sometimes struggle with what is the right amount of work. Especially in rural projects, the size of the projects is often enormous, and so is the 'never-ending' need for work. In such projects, the discussion about the right amount of work is often ongoing, and the feeling that someone is not contributing enough to the common good creates tension and conflict.

5.3.3 Production stays in capitalism. Eco-communities need 'injections' of market, alternative market and non-market capitals

- *Imaginations of alternative economies are not immune to the logic of the market.* In eco-communities, members share progressive visions, spaces and tasks, and spend time negotiating in community meetings. They often experiment with their bodies, relationships and spirituality. They are sensitive to the environment and are often willing and able to discuss all kinds of sensitive issues. However, the dominant economic system and the simplification of the economy to market mechanisms and GDP, to consumption and production, to growth and profit, and to low prices for goods and services that do not reflect market failures, all have an enormous cultural impact on behaviour, including on those who are actively

involved in creating alternatives. Particularly in the Global North, social bonds have been formed financially in individual financial units (households), with individualised financial responsibility and bank accounts. In education we are not taught how to create and manage commons, or how to measure local economic impact. Any small experiment in this area requires a big effort. It requires concrete knowledge or, for example willingness to trade-off quality of infrastructure with economic stability. Calafou, for example, is an 'eco-industrial post-capitalist colony'. It is another brownfield/factory regeneration collective, this time in rural Catalonia, just outside a small village at the bottom of the Anoia river valley, about ninety minutes by train from Barcelona, the regional capital. At the time of my visit, the community was closely linked to a large Catalan cooperative called Cooperativa Integral Catalana, a cooperative project that had grown out of the anti-austerity movement 15-M and had several thousand members in Barcelona and across Catalonia. Calafou, as a member of the cooperative, was providing food and other basic goods and services within an alternative currency system, using the ECO currency, which was exchangeable 1:1 for euros. However, several members admitted that the alternative system would have had a much greater impact on people's lives if they had really trusted it. Even though it was, at the time, one of the largest local exchange systems in Europe, with thousands of members, it was tempting to join the mainstream system and prefer to receive income in euros rather than ECOs. In Cambium Leben in Gemeinschaft, described in the previous section, they experimented with solidarity schemes such as a sliding scale payment system for rent and food. The community's economic working group proposed a price range (where the median price was equal to the average cost) and members were asked to pay the costs within this range. However, when the system was introduced, many people, including those who did not have financial resources at the time, paid average or even above-average prices. People had to learn how to actively use the benefits of the social solidarity economy.

- *Living conditions and access to capital are important. Creating an eco-community is not always possible*. One of the explanations for why eco-communities are not more common is that they—even though they succeed in (re)production of housing (see section 5.3.1), remain difficult to set up. The no less simple answer is that there needs to be 'the right combination of people, place, capital and time'. The planning process is long and there are many obstacles along the way. Many potential communards drop out when they realise how difficult the process is. The years-long process also creates new life situations along the way, and people drop out of newly built houses, for example, because they separate from their partners. Projects that start with the intention of a single owner or couple also tend to fail. For example, in the Projecto270 or Cabeca do Mato 'community' farms in Portugal, we (the pilot research projects we visited during our travels with my wife)

were greeted by a lonely farmer or a middle-aged couple who did not speak very clearly about the reasons why, despite their efforts, they were living all alone in what they considered to be an ecovillage in the making, with built infrastructure and housing for dozens of inhabitants.

- *The potential for job and business creation is limited and depends on the wider context.* What remains a challenge is that eco-communities are often dependent on an influx of volunteers, supporting memberships, community capital, bank loans or selling knowledge in the global economy. Where these non-market, alternative market and market capitals are lacking, eco-communities are in a much more difficult position. For many people, one of the motivations for joining an eco-community is to localise work and build livelihoods around the projects, so they can work on the land, or in the house, with other members or individually. However, care of the commons or subsistence farming is usually unpaid and there is a strong need to create income-generating activities. This is a challenge in many cases, often due to physical limitations when the built infrastructure is designed primarily to provide housing. Very few eco-communities are able to provide paid employment for non-residents (an example is Svanholm commune in Denmark). Urban projects on former industrial sites can provide more jobs, as in the case of the ufaFabrik in Berlin, a former film studio and now a cultural and educational facility. Rural projects also have a much greater need to create jobs for residents. Ecovillages are often able to create multi-level business structures that include educational activities, food production or ecotourism. Unique examples are hofkollektives—politics oriented farming collectives that are well connected to financial, social and cultural capital in urban networks. However, there are also many eco-communities where the enterprises lack demand or production quality. In fact, most rural projects need a strong 'injection' of capital from outside: (1) a non-market capital, whether it is a neighbouring farmer offering land for free, or sharing a tractor, or when volunteers work in farming. There is an initial need to build up volunteer facilities and organisational structures, but other costs associated with volunteers are very low due to economies of scale. Much agriculture, for example, would not be possible without the extra helping hand. (2) Injections from alternative markets are also important, whether in the form of direct loans or friends coming to help with reconstructions. Finally (3), for some projects, it is much easier to inject market capital into the community economy. Income is often generated in outside jobs or online or through the influx of visitors and tourists. Extreme examples are deep ecology projects such as eco-resorts, permaculture farms or retreat and yoga centres, which tend to be well connected to global economy. This is particularly true in Portugal, where population density is low, distances are long and tourism is strong. The business includes the sale of permaculture courses, yoga retreats or self-development activities that

often attract people from all over the world, so that the overall environmental impact of the projects is dramatically at odds with the local lifestyle of community members who focus on food self-sufficiency, building eco-houses and working with the soil.

- *Radical autonomy and radical ecology are not for everyone. Big ambitions and lack of resources can lead to (temporary) social deprivation.* The Tinker's Bubble in England is probably the lowest impact development included in this research in terms of carbon footprint. In addition, the cost of living here is a fraction of what residents in the UK need. Residents live in self-built woodland cabins and earn over £30 a week by selling hand-pressed apple juice and cider and/or steam-powered wooden frames. The ascetic life in the woods is demanding, however, and is essentially off-limits to most families with children or people with disabilities. But the potential for social deprivation is not only linked to radical environmentalism. There is certainly a lack of resources in many ambitious projects that renovate large derelict sites, such as old factories, with almost no financial capital (compared to what is considered business-as-usual). For all self-help projects, the temporality of 'building while living' is demanding and can take many years.

6 Discussion: Positioning the diverse economy research in eco-communities to capitalism

In this thesis, I used complementary frameworks: 1) the eco-community *economic micro-system* (Blažek, 2016a), which explains the various non-monetary and not-only-for-profit economic activities as often interrelated and liminal in terms of resources, clients and goals; 2) *diverse economies* (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013, 2018) that help to structure the diversity of practices and strategies in both eco-community economy and public economies into market, alternative market and non-market; and 3) a *community economy* (Ibid. 2013, 2018) that provides the necessary emancipatory space for economic democracy to flourish less dependent on the dominant system, a space that theoretically holds and redirects economic decisions in a social and environmental direction.

I have argued that eco-communities are prime examples of community economies because they implement multiple and diverse economic practices that are navigated, negotiated and transformed in processes of democratic governance that embed physical and social materialities and histories, technologies, politics, nature and people. I call these spaces of community economy in eco-communities 'economic playgrounds' (Malý Blažek, Forthcoming). Similar to real playgrounds, they can be understood as infrastructures that enable the creation and play of concrete 'games', i.e. the creation of concrete economic practices and strategies 'that can be bent in an eco-social direction.

This research was theoretically and empirically navigated with an explorative and actually descriptive research question: *What diverse community economy practices are developed by European eco-communities in different contexts?* To answer this question, I provided an empirically grounded theoretical framework. I identified three main clusters of eco-communities, which differ on several criteria and operate in different assemblages of community economies. More important than providing answers, the research has opened up new questions for fur further research on eco-community economies.

- What do eco-communities achieve in terms of socio-material outcomes of diverse economic practices?
- What failures in terms of social and environmental responsiveness do eco-communities create, what dilemmas do they face and where do they contradict themselves in their actions?
- How do eco-communities invest in land, housing and built infrastructure and how do they adapt their community economy to different property ownership regimes?
- Within which infrastructures and actor networks do eco-communities operate?

- Are mobility innovations possible between housing, ecology and politics oriented eco-communities?
- How do eco-communities interact within, beyond and against the external regimes and wider structural contexts?

Eco-communities are niche. Even when I use a broader conceptualisation of eco-communities—as I did in this thesis—we are talking about a marginal way of living and organising relationships, at least in terms of demographic share. In Auroville, the world's largest eco-community in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the population is less than 5,000. Other large eco-communities in the world have several hundred inhabitants; and the vast majority of communities have only a few to dozens of members. Is it scalable to reconfigure the way global society produces, shares and redistributes resources, preferably in a way that is solidary, inclusive, climate and ecologically responsive? And does it even make sense to seek answers by studying eco-communities when only a fraction of the population lives in them?

For the discussion, I have chosen a topic on the positioning of community economies in eco-communities (and research on them) in relation to capitalism. Should research on eco-community economies focus more on the actual 'enabling capacities' of eco-communities or on the role of the structural, political-economic, cultural contexts in which they emerge?

6.1 Actors of social-ecological transformation

First, I argue that the relevance of eco-communities needs to be understood and recognised within broader social and environmental movements and trends. Evidence of economic cooperation between local communities can be found in the example of the rapidly developing collaborative and participatory forms of housing in Europe (see Chapter 2.2), and more broadly in the development of deliberative democracy that rehabilitates the theme of management of the commons, which can be seen, for example, in urban practices and policies (Blažek, 2018a; Thompson, 2021), as well as across contexts, as in the case of RECs - renewable energy communities (Ferreri & Vidal, 2021; Inês et al., 2020). More broadly, community-oriented economies have gained importance in recent years through shared and collaborative economy practices (Acquier et al., 2017), which can be seen as a consequence of the shift in the focus of social movements from the state to the market in recent decades (Signori & Forno, 2019). Although there are a number of controversial 'community-oriented' practices that take the form of rather difficult-to-regulate platform capitalism (Papadimitropoulos, 2021) and the appropriation of the commons by neoliberal actors, there are no less important examples of socially and environmentally responsible and ethical not-only-for-profit

activities and innovations that re-think and re-politicise what economy, resilience, sustainability or interconnectedness to other elements of social-ecological systems mean.

Together with other community-based initiatives (Avelino et al., 2015; Celata & Sanna, 2014; Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012) or (eco-)social enterprises (Borgaza & Defourny, 2001; Johanisová & Fraňková, 2013) that e.g. provide accessible housing (land trusts, co-operative developers), finances (credit unions, ethical banks, community currency systems) or food (community-supported agriculture, catering collectives), eco-communities constitute innovative models of local living and housing that aim to secure basic needs and are understood to play an important role in the sustainability transitions to a less energy-intensive post-carbon society. Given their long experience, it can be argued that eco-communities are among the pioneers and laboratories of many of the now emerging practices, of new ways of acting and organising in transformative collective actions and prefigurative policies and practices. According to Lara Monticelli, eco-communities, are good examples especially because of their capacity and focus on socio-material innovation across contexts (translocal empowerment), diverse repertoire of actions and strategic collaboration across overlapping movements (Clarence-Smith & Monticelli, 2022; Monticelli, 2022). Similarly, eco-communities are considered good practices by degrowth scholars (Cattaneo, 2015; Nelson & Schneider, 2018).

Piling up social-ecological practices in one place, as I have just done, may look promising, but it somehow preserves and separates the 'good' transformative practices from others, even if they are mainstream or controversial in one way or another. As a result, it can co-produce a narrative in which alternatives remain niche. Indeed, the insistence on concrete static concepts—including the insistence on the concept of *eco-communities*—can limit our understanding of the transformative potential of alternative practices.

My dissertation hopes to open up new horizons for the study of eco-communities by bringing together studies of intentional communities and collaborative housing. Findings from this research show that housing assemblages include diverse practices from different countries and with different aims. Further research can be informed by studies of mobility innovation and explore cross-contextual mobility and the role of local institutional actors in production of eco-communities (cf. McCann & Ward, 2012). As the success of the mobility innovation of collaborative housing in Europe has shown, the ability to enter, shape and create different networks, infrastructures and practices, and to work in partnership with others, does not necessarily lose social or environmental capacity - concrete practices can bend the context in a social-ecological direction. But they can also fail. What is clear is that eco-communities will need to develop new strategies and new partnerships if they are to succeed in producing residential economic alternatives in the future.

6.2 On the wide edge of capitalism

The potential for transformative innovations is inextricably linked to capitalism. Secondly, I argue that economic alternatives do not necessarily mean alternatives to capitalism. Instead, the relationship of eco-communities to capitalism can be seen as 'always struggling with being with, against and beyond capitalism', as we write with colleagues in Pickerill et al. (2023).

As Martin Dokupil Škabraha(2020, p. 16) writes in *Beyond Capitalism*, 'A different economy[41] also means a different society (...)', adding that 'we do not have a different society'. In this sense, he draws attention to the need to build a post-capitalist society on the foundations of the current one. There is no other way than to use the existing infrastructure, just as it is not possible to erase individual and collective memories and experiences. This brings some advantages, but of course also a whole range of problems related to the memory of post-colonialism but also, in other contexts, as the example of my and my colleagues' efforts to introduce new democratic forms of housing in the Czech Republic shows, still to the memory of post-socialism (Kodenko Kubala et al., 2023). Thus, we can expect a post-growth society to be undermined among other things by a nostalgia for growth and a post-capitalist society by nostalgia for capitalism as such, with the notion of unlimited possibilities of consumerism. In this sense, eco-communities are carriers of an important experience to the fathomless futures, creating and testing systems in which people share a significant part (and sometimes all) of their resources with each other, with the aim of creating more resilient communities with a good quality of life. And it is only through this lived experience that they confirm that it is possible.

With colleagues (Pickerill et al., 2023) we write:

> (…) eco-communities benefit from the semi-bounded physical and social space they create to experiment within. This is akin to Erik Olin Wright's (Wright, 2010) notion of interstitial transformation, where alternatives embed in spaces on the fringes of capitalism. Here experiments can be developed, tested, demonstrated and improved, democratic egalitarian solutions evolved and support slowly secured.

As I try to point out in this thesis, there is a big difference between eco-communities precisely in their relationship to other (dominant) actors and to capitalism in general. By no means all of them (quite the opposite) claim to be "alternatives to

[41] In the Czech texts, diverse economies are often translated as 'different' or 'other' economies (Johanisová & Fraňková, 2020).

capitalism". Degrowth rhetoric is also rare. Many communities claim to be alternatives to the traditional family and focus on the "holistic" and spiritual aspects of living together and, generally, relate their critique to modernity or Western society. On more material issues, it is not uncommon that particular communities focus on solving specific tasks and relate their critique to particular actors: such as focus on self-sufficiency and growing healthy food and related critique of agrobusiness.

The editors of *Pluriverse—A Post-development Dictionary* (Kothari et al., 2019) distinguish between *reformist* and *transformative* development solutions, the former incorporating ideas and practices mainly from the Global North that do not aim to change the foundations of capitalism and individualism, while the latter are based on cooperativism, sustainability and justice, drawing on the knowledge of often indigenous actors in the Global South and on environmental, spiritual or feminist movements. Eco-communities, as I have defined them in this thesis, and especially as I have mapped and observed them in the course of this research in six Western, Southern and Central European countries, cannot be lumped into one category or the other. Instead, I argue in this thesis that studying complex systems and producing shared understanding requires more complex conceptualisations. I offer a four-level conceptualisation of housing oriented, ecology oriented and politics oriented clusters to navigate through the practice of eco-communities.

As Monticelli (2022, p. 5) writes, whether by design or as a necessary consequence, diverse economies (including in eco-communities) exist *'within and despite capitalism inextricably intertwined with it*. Milani Price et al. (2020) even argue that the diverse economy and what they call the 'modern market economy' are becoming increasingly confluent. According to the authors, they are converging in terms of creating alternatives to capitalist modes of production, alternative measures and attitudes to economic growth, ecological responsiveness/environmental intentions and social relationality in economic transactions. While, it is debatable to what extent the spheres of confluence are actually converging, the position of eco-communities within, beyond and against capitalism is certainly non-static, since non-static are both capitalism and economic alternatives (cf. Massey, 2012). What is also changing is the positioning of transformative social practices. Eco-communities are described as utopias (Sargisson, 2007), nowtopias (Carlsson & Manning, 2010), ecotopias (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013), real utopias (Wright, 2010) prefigurative utopias (Clarence-Smith, 2022) and others.

Eco-communities create places on the edge of capitalism. I would add that this edge is very wide and includes both 'transformative' autonomous and anti-capitalist collectives or radically ecological communities that seek to maximise their self-sufficiency, and essentially "reformist" communities that actively contribute to and operate within (green) capitalism. What broadly unites them is the desire to live, if possible, "somewhere in the doughnut" as Kate Raworth envisions it - that is, within planetary limits and yet in a socially non-deprived situation (Raworth, 2017). What distinguishes

them is the intensity of the desire not to break out of planetary limits and not to fall into socially difficult waters.

6.3 More hopeful ontology and epistemology

Third, following the radical epistemologies and ontology of community economies I argue for the study of diverse economic practices beyond capitalocentric perspectives.

Market economy practices are only the 'tip of the iceberg' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2018, p. 10). And capitalism is not a name for an economic system, it is, as Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi describe it, a name for a system that separates economic and non-economic institutions. Capitalist economy is only one 'zone', only one 'logic' but it separates economy from polity, social reproduction from production, family from workers or economy from social-ecological regimes (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018). The diverse economies framework allows to understand that the economy is much more compact, embedded and diverse in terms of labour, entrepreneurship, transactions, ownership and financing (see Table 11). It allows to consider the economy as a space filled with diverse partnerships, consumption, distribution and production, instruments, platforms, networks, governance, values, ethics and imaginations. The diverse economy framework represents other economies (non-market, alternative market) and places them alongside the market.

The dominance of capitalism is, according to proponents of diverse economies, more discursive than real (see Nelson, 2022, p. 98). As Benedikt Schmid (2018, p. 285) argues, it allows not to look at diverse economic practices and strategies from a '*capitalocentric perspective'*; from the logic of the paradigm built on aspects of economic growth, technocratic efficiency or profit maximisation. Imagining a diverse economy in relation to the dominant capitalist discourse, according to Schmid actually 'reproduces the (capitalist) economy'.

North (2018, pp. 79–80) refers to the Gibson-Grahams' perspective as a '*more hopeful ontology'*:

> It focuses on developing a richer language of economic possibility where none previously existed; cultivating new economic subjects able to engage in debates about how we want to live, rather than being the passive carriers of exploitative practices.

Gibson-Graham describe and categorise economic reality, but not for the purpose of deciding what is necessarily right and what is necessarily wrong and the authors are aware that the categories are open-ended and that practices are messy. 'We are currently exploring other ways of representing economic diversity that is not "boxed in"

but makes space for recognizing how these practices are messy, fragmented, contradictional, and unstable' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2018, p. 11).

The main role of the framework, as I see it, is to help pose emancipatory and epistemological questions to different actors, including ourselves, such as those formulated by Gibson-Graham & Roelvink (2010, p. 331) and also reproduced/updated by Peter North (2018, p. 73):

- 'How a commons is produced and sustained,
- Whether and how products and surplus is to be consumed and related,
- What is necessary to personal, social and ecological survival,
- How surplus is appropriated from and distributed to humans and the more than human,
- How do we live well.'

Heterodox economists, geographers and anthropologists are developing new concepts out of the need to seek answers to the 'big' questions outlined above, and also to study the differences between practices that ask such fundamental questions and those that tend to ask less. As Johanisová & Fraňková (2013) discuss in their example of eco-social enterprises, there is a tendency to view economic alternatives on a mainstream–radical axis. From a mainstream perspective, alternatives are complementary to the mainstream, they act economically within the system to achieve their multifaceted goals and mitigate some of the mainstream problems; in the case of eco-communities, for example, the housing crisis, social cohesion or rural depopulation. From a radical perspective, alternatives oppose to the dominant system and, to achieve their goals, develop new economic practices and legal structures that reject mainstream approaches.

Eco-communities include not only examples of the inspiring projects presented in this thesis, which nourish the social, solidarity, non-market or low-impact economies as their fundamental objectives. There are also projects which are economically less-innovative; in which members pay personal mortgages, have nine-to-five jobs, and in which the threshold for participation derives primarily from personal wealth. On the very top end, we find ecological community neighbourhoods full of collective luxuries and smart infrastructure, where the price of living is exclusive. How can we compare their economies and sustainabilities with projects who operate with a fraction of money, for example, political projects, such as squats and radical ecology projects, or with communities that operate as full income-sharing economies? What could we learn from such a comparative analysis and is it, in fact, desirable?

Radical (as well as mainstream) strategies are implemented by most projects, although we can expect that radical ecology or strongly politically driven projects to be less willing to compromise their values. For sustainability assessments, Johanisová &

Fraňková (2013) suggest that researchers should also position themselves along the mainstream—radical axis. In this thesis, for example, I present the market-based sharing economy practices to be more mainstream than solidarity economy practices, even though both may have similar ecological outcomes in different contexts. For example, in Gleis 21, another construction/co-housing project in Vienna, Austria, one of the members said that she perceives her project as very mainstream because the members are socio-economically relatively homogeneous in the (upper) middle class. However, the project is non-hierarchical, provides housing for refugees, runs a food co-operative or solidarity fund, and has built high quality ecological housing. The project can be perceived as either radical or mainstream, depending on the context and (self-)positioning.

However, I do not want to qualify this work in order to decide which eco-communities are radical enough or too commercial. An example of research that community economy epistemology enables is North's questions in research on alternative currencies. He does not ask whether alternative currencies work, who is to blame if they do not work or what their transformative limits are. Instead, he simply asks "*for whom do the currencies work, and who struggles to use them*?" (North, 2014). Instead of studying the limits of why something cannot happen, radical epistemology calls for studying the conditions of how practices happen against, within and beyond capitalism (Pickerill et al.,2023). Similarly, the questions of limits to scalability are not very productive. In radical epistemology, scalable practice has been given the same relevance as non-scalable practice. In this research, I followed this epistemology and did not aim to provide definitive answers as to whether and how community economies make the eco-social promises possible.

6.4 Fertile soil: successes, contradictions and dilemmas in context

Finally, I argue that recognising community economies in a perspective that is not subservient to capitalism does not mean that the contexts in which practices emerge are any less important. On the contrary. Eco-community economies should be studied in relation to the socio-technical, economic, political and cultural contexts they co-create; with Schmid (2018, p. 287) who takes a practice theory approach to organisations building on Schatzki (2016, p. 6):

> *Practices and their enactment, in turn, are conditioned by other practices and their broader alignments within the "gigantic maze" of practices of which they are part.*

Studying the qualities of community-based social practices can lead into searching for more 'successful' or in the case of eco-communities more 'sustainable' or 'resilient' practices. However, according to Sekulova et al. (2017), there does not seem to be a single fixed set of success factors that ensure that a particular quality of social practice is enabled. Instead, Sekulova et al. describe the importance of *fertile soil* - qualities of the social (or socio-technical) texture. The authors describe soil fertility as the combination of capitals, actors and their motivations, but also tensions and contradictions that influence whether and how community-based projects emerge and grow. In terms of grassroot community innovations, the authors argue that aspects that influence soil fertility include 'a shared history of social organizing, protest, and activism; diversity; values of cooperation and trust; concern with justice and sustainability; presence of counter-cultures; actors' agency and self-empowerment; social networking; non-restrictive external regime; and availability of physical space/s' (Sekulova et al., 2017, p. 2364). Furthermore, authors add that community-based projects often face 'fertile dilemmas'—those often-contradictory moments when new imaginaries and new strategies emerge that are 'key drivers in their developmental context'. These include moments of (un)success and failure.

The findings from the field confirmed that eco-communities are, with words of Jenny Pickerill (2016, p. 32) 'incomplete, partial and sometimes problematic', whether it is questions of inclusion and exclusion in the creation of the commons, or contradictions around the self-sufficiency education sold through permaculture. Eco-communities are not resistant to 'fertility dilemmas' or, in the context of my research, 'sustainability dilemmas'. On the contrary, these could be important moments that can shape the nexus between social/ecological and economic/financial spheres. What needs to be explored is whether the dilemmas arise from purposeful actions, from contradictions in objectives, or from conditions that projects have to face.

Building on the fertile soil framework in the context of this research, a certain size of eco-community, a diversity of economic practices in community economies, or the size of community economy versus individual economies may not necessarily lead to more successful (in whatever sense) outcomes. It is important to look also beyond the 'democratic body' of the community economy to the qualities of the actor networks and wider socio-technical infrastructures in which practices are co-created, co-performed and ultimately co-negotiated. The key component can be the embeddedness of eco-communities in the external regime and economy, in terms of financial and non-financial liabilities and commitments. Some of the key elements and potential barriers to enabling qualities of the community economy are the actual investments in built and natural capital. This often determine how „big and fun" the economic playground can be.

No framework can ensure that the process of enacting more resilient futures will be easy and that it will avoid dilemmas, conflicts or contradictions. To return to the

central argument of this thesis, and to stay with the metaphor of soil, what affects its fertility is the active gardener's input, who attracts and shapes the energetic/material/monetary/societal flows in the 'right direction'. Soil fertility is ability to hold the space for interaction of different fertility elements and to provide resilience in different times, in different settings, in different 'societal' climate. The gardener should have the skills and tools to actively improve fertility through design and labour, just as eco-communities do in developing their economies. But just as garden design reflects the interdependence of geological, climatic, biological, economic and socio-technical conditions and agencies of other actors, the community economy, likewise, reflects the structural contexts, networks and infrastructures as well as internal processes of individual members, particular economic activities and negotiations at the community level.

One of the dilemmas identified, particularly important for the more mainstream eco-communities whose primary function is to provide housing, was whether to balance or trade-off between environmental sustainability or housing comfort and social inclusion. This is a very difficult dilemma today, due to a combination of factors, but especially the increasing financial demands of building new housing, especially in cities. However, in some of the projects studied, the affordability of housing has fundamentally increased when projects have implemented some of the practices of the social economy. Another dilemma was often present in the more policy-oriented projects. These are projects that are particularly innovative in their financing strategies and in their active use of money as a collective tool, leading to much greater socio-economic inclusivity, but they sometimes struggle with a very time-consuming governance structure and may lack a focus on the quality of life of each individual, which, combined with high demands such as less comfortable conditions, can also lead to certain exclusions or exits. The third dilemma identified was the balance between the level of self-sufficiency, work in the public economy and financial sustainability. This situation is typical of projects where intensive work on project development is combined with income-generating work outside the community, for example in many ecovillages and other rural projects, where concrete actions are particularly time-consuming because they involve land, soil restoration or self-building of ecological settlements. This can lead to tensions such as reduced participation in community activities, family instability and, ultimately, abandonment of the community.

There are dozens of such dilemmas that projects have to face and resolve. Sometimes they have to lower their expectations. And sometimes their solutions are contradictory. For example, if we were to compare different eco-communities in terms of their ecological outcome, it would not be surprising that projects positioned at the more radical end of an imaginary axis, using second-hand materials, avoiding the use of fossil fuels and/or aiming at energy or food self-sufficiency (e.g. most low impact developments and some ecovillages) would probably have more ecologically sustainable outcomes than more mainstream projects (such as some urban community-

oriented developments and cohousing groups), which often adopt 'light green' approaches materialised in prefabricated ecological building materials, organic shopping or car sharing. But what if we found that some ecologically radical projects are economically dependent on an influx of visitors from far away (accumulating air miles), or their food production is dependent on volunteer programmes where volunteers are actually asked to pay for their stay, while the social innovation impact of some more mainstream projects at city or country level generates pro-environmental changes in neighbourhoods and in the housing sector and related policies? What if we found that some projects with strong environmental sustainability values cannot afford sustainable building solutions but are socio-economically affordable, while other projects with generally weaker sustainability values are at the top end of building ecology but are not socially inclusive? Or that some of the deep ecology back-to-the-land eco-communities have far-right and/or libertarian values and their attitude to the outside world is extremely selfish, if not threatening? These are important lessons for evaluators of community economies in eco-communities, because they show us how they are connected to their social ecologies; that non-market, alternative or local practices are not necessarily always more sustainable and ethical; and that they can create more tensions and problems than they solve.

7 Conclusions

My intention in this thesis was neither to celebrate eco-communities, nor to criticise them for failing to achieve a certain level of commoning or sustainability outcomes. There are eco-communities that are environmentally focused but economically mainstream, just as there are projects that have not yet achieved their environmental goals but are more economically and socially inclusive, seeking new imaginaries and radical solutions based on economic democracy, solidarity, sharing and non-monetary practices. There are many that do not focus as much on economic transformation as on other issues, but there are a few that make serious efforts.

In the *Introduction*, I defined eco-communities for this research broadly as: residential, intentional, ecological, democratic, participatory, economically diverse, housing and livelihood and prefigurative communities.

In chapter 2: *Forms, objectives, infrastructures: Do conceptualisations matter?* I presented eco-communities from two close but very different fields of study: intentional communities and collaborative housing. I showed that in both the academic literature—but also among practitioners (especially in the field of intentional communities)—a great deal of attention is paid to concepts. They are often open in their definitions, but paradoxically reproduce reality in a very static sense. Drawing on the approach of flat ontologies, I argued for the study of eco-communities as specific two-level assemblages of human and non-human actors within the social organisation they form, but also within wider networks of actors that they co-create. I argued that:

- Intentional communities and collaborative housing differ in terms of the assemblages they co-create rather than the practices they develop. If they have an explicit environmental objective, they can be considered eco-communities.
- The environmental as well as any other perspective should be understood in a socioeconomic and sociotechnical context, especially in relation to needs and other objectives, be they financial, economic, social or cultural

In Chapter 3: *Economic micro-system: Non-market and not-only-for-profit economies in eco-communities*, I presented the complexity of non-market and market economic relations in eco-communities. I have described the economic micro-system in eco-communities as consisting of economic practices that are formed along three liminal zones: the liminality between non-market and market activities, between individual and community economies and between non-profit, not-only-for-profit and for-profit (money-driven) activities.

In chapter 4, I presented the detailed *Methodology* of the qualitative multi-method research. The fieldwork was divided into 6 case studies: Portugal (2015), Catalonia (2016), Austria (2017), Denmark (2017), Germany (2018), Wales and England (2018) and the online content analysis (2022-2023). It included desk research, online content

analysis of 648 eco-communities and 167 networks and infrastructures, 184 days of participant observation in 44 projects and semi-structured interviews with 42 projects.

The aim of the empirical part of the thesis was to look at how the 'promise of enabling' of diverse economic practices in community economies was performed. In chapter 5: *Diverse community economies: Spaces of collaboration, decision making and collectivity,* I used Gibson-Graham's community economies framework to describe how eco-communities manage, navigate and transform their economic activities in spaces of economic democracy. To explore how the democratic space is constructed, I have called it a community economic playground, which contains the diverse economic practices (games with concrete rules). Through democratic decision-making, community economies have an agency that enables them to play 'concrete games' in economic playgrounds, i.e. to manage, navigate and transform the particular economic activities between market, alternative market and non-market. I argued that there are potential barriers to such diversity, such as the degree of initial 'lock-in' to the market economy through the required investment in built and natural capital. Lock-in to the market determines how 'big and fun' the playground will be, and how diverse a project's dilemma-solving strategies can be over time. Indeed, both radical and more mainstream projects use radical (and mainstream) strategies and often do not fully exploit the potential of the community economy. Across contexts, I have found that (1) some of the theoretical promises of community economies outlined in chapter 3 are being fulfilled (especially in terms of non-market economies of care, sharing and management of the commons), and that eco-communities are succeeding in (re)producing housing and settlements in different locations and legal forms. (2) Eco-communities differ in their capacity to prefigure practices in a social-ecological direction, because they differ in their conception of community economy. (3) Eco-communities often fail to find alternatives to the market economy, especially in terms of their business activities or job creation. In fact, eco-communities often need financial and non-financial injections to run their activities, including non-market capital from volunteer work, community funding and money earned on the market.

I answered the empirical question: *What diverse community economy practices are developed by European eco-communities in different contexts,* by dividing the research field into three identified clusters of ecology, housing and politics oriented eco-communities.

In terms of financing of housing and the built infrastructure, the ecology oriented eco-communities focus on low impact and self-help solutions, while other, especially the housing and politics oriented communities develop innovative solutions which allow to:

- Actively generate funds from trusts and local communities, while reducing the need for bank loans,

- Administer debt and rent in different ownership models (including post-ownership),
- Allocate assets from members to the community and vice versa,
- Manage the commons,
- Advocate housing issues with municipalities.

In terms of collaborative provision of goods and services, especially politics and ecology oriented eco-communities focus on:

- Pooling systems that redistribute capital from individuals to the community and eventually vice versa,
- Alternative value and exchange systems and local currencies that value and record individual contributions and exchanges between members,
- Free flow and solidarity systems, where contributions are more open or less important to track.

In terms of production for the external economy, ecological and politics oriented eco-communities create:

- Individual enterprises that can be economically, legally and administratively independent to the eco-community,
- Micro-enterprises, which can be economically and legally independent but dependent on the eco-community in terms of governance ,
- Community enterprises, which are legally and economically dependent to the eco-community, in addition to their governance.

In Chapter 6: *Discussion: Positioning the diverse economy research in eco-communities to capitalism*, I discussed that there is one further perspective that can be recognised: the relationship between what constitutes the community economy and what is a reflection of the external regime and wider actors and conditions. I described that eco-communities are situated on the wide edge of capitalism, and argued in favour of hopeful ontologies and epistemologies that would enable to raise critical, empowering questions to be asked that explore the possibilities rather than the limits of the inextricably intertwined relationship between capitalism and its alternatives. I have also outlined new questions for further research.

I suggest to study more deeply the (self-)positioning of projects to capitalism and propose to further explore the smaller scale economic alternatives rather than repeat research on world-known projects. I argue to continue studying eco-communities together with nearby collaborative housing field as this merge can benefit both academic debate as well as mobility innovation between projects. The concept of community economy playground provides a guide to navigate through multi-layered goals and multiple voices in community initiatives, often resulting in dilemmas which require

balancing or trading-off between the strategic objectives. Developing a community economy alone does not automatically lead to environmental, social or economic sustainability, but if organized well it can provide the needed space/playground for supporting sensible social and environmental decisions, and space for solving dilemmas in reaching the objectives. What eco-communities teach us, fundamentally, is that the economies we develop and represent can be reconfigured in a more sustainable manner, if we take an active role in them.

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Appendix A Semi-structured interviews: List of questions

Goals, Mission, Vision, Brand

1. Can you say a few words about your role in the project?
2. Is the project more home or work for you?
3. What is the mission of the project?
4. What is the project's vision?
5. Are the mission and vision derived from collective values?
6. What are the goals and objectives of the project that fulfil the mission and vision? Are some more important than others? What is the relationship between them?
7. How would you describe in a few words what stage of the project you are currently at? Where do you see yourself in the future?
8. What are the main challenges of the project (environmental, social and economic)?
9. Is there anything you would like to change about the way you are doing things? Is there anything you would like to change but cannot?
10. How do you demonstrate that you are meeting the objectives; that you are "getting there"?
11. Do you have any personal goals that you want to achieve within the project?
12. Are you inspired by any type of community? What kind of community are you?
13. How would you characterise the project's brand?

Foundation

14. How did the idea start?
15. Why did you choose this location? If you could, would you change it now for any reason?
16. Could you tell me what was here when you first came and how the infrastructure was built up step by step? Can you draw a timeline of the project with milestones?
17. What was the initial economic situation? What was your initial budget? Where did you get the money from?

Investment - infrastructure, expansion

18. Are you planning to build more infrastructure? Do you plan to build more houses? Do you plan to expand the community?
19. Do you consider whether your investments are environmentally sustainable? How do you take this into account?

20. Over what period of time do you expect to recover your investment? Has reality lived up to your initial expectations?
21. What are your next investment steps?
22. Does economic sustainability influence your investment choices? Does the need for economic sustainability affect your environmental sustainability?

Infrastructure - land use, design, energy (labour, material, financial)

23. How big is the site? How many houses and people live here / are part of the project?
24. Where do you see the biggest gaps in planning? What area is currently underdeveloped and why?
25. On the contrary, where do you think the design is quite successful, unique or well developed?
26. Are you developing any new design element?
27. Overall, do you think you have developed a successful design?
28. Do you think the project is sustainable overall and in detail?
29. Does your design reflect a balance between inputs? Labour, natural resources and money? Are some of these resources extracted OR others left unused?
30. What does the project need today (in terms of resources)?
31. What is the most resource-consuming part of your project? a) in terms of materials; b) in terms of social energy; c) in terms of finance?
32. Where do you see your energy leakages a) in material, b) in social and c) in financial flows?
33. What kind of energy saving infrastructure are you currently developing?
34. What is the most difficult resource to obtain; to maintain here?
35. Do you think you use enough local materials?
36. Would you say you are a low tech or high tech community?
37. What have you built yourself?

Housing

38. How expensive are the houses and the land? Compared to the usual price in the area?
39. How much do you pay for rent?
40. What are your bills?
41. Do members pay rent / fees or membership fees?

Operations - running the community

42. Could you describe what kind of operations are needed to run the project?
43. Do you have any rules / system for collective maintenance?

44. What are the biggest expenses (or areas of expenses) of the daily maintenance of the project? Please consider expenses in money, labour, materials? How much money, time and energy does it take to maintain the community?
45. Where do you think you could save money (or labour or natural resources) if you were more effective in your maintenance?
46. Which processes are environmentally sustainable and which are not? The same please apply to economic and social sustainability?

Community, organisational structure, governance, ownership

47. Could you describe your organisational structure? What legal entity are you?
48. What about governance? Who decides what and how?
49. Do you have working groups?
50. Are there any circles or areas in your organisation that need more revision than others?
51. Who owns the housing?
52. Are there any areas that are collectively owned? What is the ratio?
53. How are economic activities organised, managed and owned?
54. Are you non-hierarchical?
55. Are you open to new local members?
56. Is there any other way a person can participate (not just as a volunteer or resident)?

Economic structure

57. Can you explain how the community works economically? Do members have their own economic activities? Do you have a collective economy? Do you carry out some activities as a community?
58. What does economy mean to you?
59. Is there an economic model you want to achieve?
60. Do you have a business plan?
61. What are your economic activities? Can you describe them? What are your turnover, costs, income and profit?
62. What's your main source of income? What's the complementary source?
63. What is the economic relationship between the different parts of the project? Are some of them more important than others?
64. Are you satisfied with the way you make money?
65. Are you planning to expand your activities?
66. Can someone who does not live in the community join the organisation, take part in the economic activities?

Production

67. What do you produce for yourself? What do you produce for others?
68. To what extent are you self-sufficient in food/energy, etc.? What is your aim?
69. Would you change anything about your production?
70. Which part of your production do you consider social/ecological and which not? Does this change over time? What does it depend on?

Consumption

71. Can you describe your economic needs - the basic level that characterises your consumption?
72. Can you describe your economic wants - the more luxurious, comfortable goods?
73. What do you buy from outside? Do you have any ethical constraints on your shopping (not just food)?

Finances, economic sustainability

74. How does financial sustainability influence the way you work, the investment strategies you choose, the production and consumption patterns you choose?
75. What would you do differently if you had more money? In investment/production/consumption? What would you do differently if you had less?
76. Do you have to support the project financially (personal savings, subsidies) or is it currently stable? How would you characterise your economic situation? Are you satisfied with it?
77. Do some areas of the project financially support others that are not self-sustaining?
78. What do you account? How do you account for being economically sustainable?
79. Do you put money into a common pool, a fund? What do you use this money for?
80. Do you use crowdfunding, fundraising, direct loans, bank loans?
81. Do you use ethical money?

Non-market / Non-monetary economy / Non-market capital

82. Have you set up a system of internal accounts for sharing work, tasks, products?
83. Do you use alternative currencies? Do you use local money / your own money?
84. How do you decide when to pay for internal/external services? When do you do things locally and when do you use professionals?
85. Do you use non-monetary exchanges with other projects/communities/individuals outside the community?

86. What are your non-market capitals, i.e. capitals that help you develop non-market relationships and/or support your competitiveness in the market economy?

Labour + volunteers

87. Do you have wages? How do you share your income?
88. On average, how much time do you spend working for the community?
89. How do you account for the work done by volunteers?
90. Has the number of volunteers been stable in recent years?
91. Is it expensive to keep volunteers?
92. What are the main problems related to volunteers? Have you ever thought about integrating them into the governance structures?

Individual economy

93. Do your members work outside the community? How much time do they spend at work?
94. What kind of jobs do they have?

Local economy

95. How would you describe your role in the local economy for local people?
96. Do you use local resources? Are your clients and partners local? Do you consume locally?

Environmental policies and implementation

97. Do you think you would be more financially sustainable if you had weaker environmental and social goals? In other words, are these targets financially demanding?
98. Let's think of an environmental solution you want to achieve (for example, increasing the amount of water collected), what role does financial sustainability play in finding the solution?
99. How do you report on whether you are achieving your environmental goals?

Social commitment

100. What's the atmosphere like in your community?
101. What is your understanding of social sustainability?
102. Are you socially inclusive?
103. Does social sustainability affect your economic sustainability? How?
104. How do you consider the social sustainability / stability of the project?

Publicity, promotion, events

105. Are there any problems with the locals, how are the neighbours?
106. Do you cooperate with them? Do you cooperate with local farms, local businesses or other projects in the projects in the area or in other regions?
107. What kind of events do you organise? What is your motivation for doing so?
108. How do you promote yourself?

Politics

109. Are there any political obstacles or legal restrictions affecting the project in terms of land use, resource management or construction processes?
110. Are you receiving any public funding or support from the State/Municipality?
111. Do you cooperate with local authorities, governments?
112. What kind of public help would be useful for you, from the state, from institutions?
113. How can people support you?

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