DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY & WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY

Building Community over Time:

Insights into the Social Dimension of Amsterdam Housing Cooperatives in the Late Development Stage

Master of Science
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ABSTRACT

Collective self-organized and participatory forms of housing are re-emerging across Europe. In Amsterdam, the municipality recently launched the 'Action Plan Housing Cooperatives', aiming to realize 15–20 cooperative projects by 2030. While the potential of such resident-led initiatives to strengthen the social dimension of housing is increasingly recognized, most research has focused on the 'use' phase of completed buildings. However, in the Netherlands, most housing cooperatives are still in the planning and development stage. The thesis investigates how members of cooperatives experience *social relationships*, *social interactions*, *trust*, and a *sense of community* during this development process with particular attention to characteristic elements of cooperative housing and the timing of member involvement.

The research connects theoretical concepts of social cohesion with a qualitative case study approach, including semi-structured interviews with members of two housing cooperatives in Amsterdam. Findings show that *collaboration on the project* was the strongest and most consistent driver for the development of the social dimension, particularly for building *trust* and *social relationships*. General member assemblies, small-group meetings, and meetings in person were central settings for this. Joint activities such as shared meals or workshops reinforced *trust* and a *sense of community* during the development phase, even though they often competed with the demands of project work. Stressful shared experiences often created tension in the short term but ultimately strengthened the social dimension. The length and intensity of members' involvement also played a role. Long-term members did not always experience a stronger social dimension within the cooperative but instead often shifted from a strong focus on social aspects to a more collaboration- and task-driven focus. Cross-cutting themes such as sharing practices, diversity, and collaboration with external stakeholders further shaped the experiences.

The findings underline that the social dimension of resident-led housing can already develop during the planning phase, before members move in together. They suggest practical implications not only for housing cooperatives themselves, but also for municipalities, architects, and developers. Housing cooperatives were found to take on tasks that are often considered municipal responsibilities, which underlines the importance of institutional support to prevent burnout among members and to allow them to focus on community-building. Diversity was experienced as enriching but also challenging, which points to a need for active guidance and support. Finally, the thesis shows that active participation in the development process of housing is central for strengthening social cohesion between residents, raising questions about the potential of resident participation in conventional new housing developments.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Across Europe, cities are facing increasing pressure to provide housing that is not only affordable and sustainable but also socially inclusive and accessible to diverse groups. Although a safe and stable home is recognized as a basic need, many countries are facing a worsening housing crisis (European Commission 2024). However, adequate housing involves more than availability, affordability and sustainability. Research shows that housing conditions such as household composition, access to facilities, and dwelling type directly influence mental health factors, including loneliness, anxiety, and overall life satisfaction (Keller et al. 2022). Loneliness, in particular, has become a growing concern worldwide, and is recognized as a serious health risk, especially among elderly or young adults (Gijsbers et al. 2024).

This European-wide housing crisis, is particularly acute in the Netherlands, where a growing population intersects with a severe housing shortage and limited available building space (van der Hagen 2024). Policy makers for too long assumed that the market would resolve housing shortages and societal issues by meeting demand through new developments (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations 2022). At the same time, Dutch housing policy has often prioritized physical restructuring over social cohesion measures. Strategies, such as promoting 'mixed neighborhoods', that combine social housing, mid-range rental and private sector units, are based on the assumption that spatial proximity will naturally generate interactions between different groups. However, research shows that simply placing diverse groups in the same area rarely results in more contact or social ties (Eshuis et al., 2014). The outcome is often neighborhoods that are physically diverse but socially fragmented (van Kempen and Bolt 2009). This raises the crucial question of which elements support the development of social cohesion between neighbors. It points to an often-neglected dimension of housing, namely the social dimension.

In recent decades, residents, municipalities, developers and architects started to explore alternative housing models that aim to address this social dimension. New housing developments often integrate communal amenities, *shared spaces* and access

to social infrastructure, which are associated with lower levels of loneliness and greater life satisfaction (Gijsbers et al. 2024). One increasingly prominent response to the challenges is 'Collaborative Housing', a term for self-organized and community-oriented forms of housing, often initiated by a group of residents (Czischke et al. 2020). In the Netherlands the model of 'housing cooperatives', as a sub-category of Collaborative Housing, is currently experiencing an upswing. The city of Amsterdam recently launched the 'Action Plan Housing cooperatives', aiming to realize 15 to 20 Housing Cooperative projects by 2030, with the long-term ambition that 10% of the city's housing stock will be owned by cooperatives within 25 years (Time to Access 2025). Literature highlights how such housing models strengthen individual social experiences but also collective solidarity through sharing and living with others (Cortés Urra et al. 2024).

A study published by Cortés Urra et al. in 2024 shows how features such as *shared drivers and motivations*, *stakeholder collaboration*, *joint activities*, and *shared spaces* can positively influence the social dimension of housing. However, existing studies overwhelmingly focus on Collaborative Housing initiatives in the 'use phase', with residents living together for some time. In contrast, little is known about how the social dimension evolves during the 'development phase', where residents often collaborate for several years to plan, finance and design their future house before moving in. This is a crucial gap, as the majority of housing cooperatives in the Netherlands are still in this development process.

1.1 Research aim and contribution

This thesis aims to address this gap by focusing on Amsterdam housing cooperatives in late development stages. Building on and adapting the conceptual model by Cortés-Urra et al. (2024) it researches the relationships between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements, experienced by members during their involvement. It also considers the timing and intensity of each member's involvement as additional analytical lens. These aspects are rarely considered in previous research but seem likely to influence how members experience the social dimension in housing cooperatives. Understanding how the social dimension develops in such housing models is crucial not only to learn how social cohesion can be more efficiently developed between members

of Dutch housing cooperatives but also to see what lessons they hold for new housing developments in general. If cooperatives can foster interactions, relationships, trust, and community even before residents move in, this challenges conventional housing practices and raises important questions about the role of resident involvement for policymakers, architects, and housing developers.

1.2 Research questions

This thesis aims to answer the following research question (RQ): **'What are the relationships between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements in the context of cousing cooperatives in late development stages in Amsterdam?'** In order to answer the main RQ, four sub-research questions (SRQs) are posed. Each of them narrows the scope and adds onto the previous one. The colors are used to guide through the Chapters of this research and provide a visual link for the reader to the respective (S)RQ:

SRQ 1 – 'What are indicators for the social dimension of housing?' aims to provide a theoretical base to identify and measure the social dimension in housing cooperatives in Amsterdam. It aims to establish a set of indicators that can be applied to the development stage of Housing cooperatives.

SRQ 2 – 'What are the defining elements of housing cooperatives in the late development stage in Amsterdam?' explores which 'cooperative housing elements' are most relevant in the Amsterdam context. It focuses on identifying and operationalizing a limited set of elements that potentially shape the experiences of members during the development process.

SRQ 3 – 'What relationships do members of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam experience between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements during the development process?' investigates how the two concepts defined in SRQ 1 and SRQ 2 are connected in practice. It examines experiences of members of two case studies to uncover how cooperative housing elements influence different aspects of the social dimension.

SRQ 4 – 'How are members' experiences shaped by the timing and intensity of their involvement?'

This question adds a temporal lens to the research by considering whether the length and the intensity in terms of hours and responsibility with which members are involved in a Housing Cooperative affects their experiences.

Together, SRQ 1 - 4 allow answering the main RQ. Table 1 provides an overview of the Chapters that elaborate on each SRQ.

Table 1: Overview of the (S)RQs and related Chapters of this research (source: author).

(Sub-) research questions	**Chapter**
SRQ 1 - What are indicators for the social dimension of housing?	**1.4** THEORY ABOUT THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HOUSING
SRQ 2 - What are the defining elements of housing cooperatives in the late development stage in Amsterdam?	**3** CONTEXT OF DUTCH HOUSING COOPERATIVES
SRQ 3 - What relationships do members of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam experience between cooperative housing elements and the social dimension of housing during the development process?	**5** FINDINGS ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL DIMENSION INDICATORS AND COOPERATIVE HOUSING ELEMENTS
SRQ 4 - How are members' experiences shaped by the timing and intensity of their involvement?	**6** FINDINGS ON THE ROLE OF TIMING AND INTENSITY OF INVOLVEMENT
Main RQ - What are the relationships the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements in the context of housing cooperatives in late development stages in Amsterdam?	**7** CONCLUSION

1.3 Thesis outline

This Chapter introduces the problem statement, research questions, and methodology of this thesis. **Chapter 2** then introduces the theoretical framework, including the conceptual model by Cortés-Urra et al. (2024), connecting indicators of the social dimension of housing with features of Collaborative Housing. It draws on insights from the relational and common identity component of social cohesion theory to refine the indicators for their application in this research. **Chapter 3** provides an overview on housing cooperatives (wooncoöperaties) in the Dutch context and operationalizes four

cooperative housing elements. The conceptual framework of the thesis is presented in **Chapter 4**, combining the previously defined social dimension indicators and cooperative housing elements. In **Chapter 5** the findings on **SRQ 3**, relationships between the above mentioned indicators and elements are presented and discussed. **Chapter 6** analyzes the findings on **SRQ 4,** introducing the influence of timing and intensity of member involvement. In **Chapter 7** the conclusion to answer the main RQ of this research is presented and **Chapter** Error! Reference source not found. reflects on t he conceptual, methodological and practical implications and limitations of the research.

1.4 Research methodology

To answer each of the four SRQs, a combination of desk-research and empirical research was applied. SRQ 1 and SRQ 2 were addressed through literature and document analysis. SRQ 3 and SRQ 4 were investigated through case study research of two Amsterdam housing cooperatives, combining semi-structured interviews with participatory exercises. Table 2 shows an overview of the SRQs and the respective methods, type of results and Chapters.

Table 2: Overview of the (S)RQs, with the related methods, type of results and Chapters (source: author).

(Sub-) research question	Methods	Type of results	Chapter
SRQ 1 - What are indicators for the social dimension of housing?	-literature review -synthesis and operationalization	Four social dimension indicators	**1.4** THEORY ABOUT THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HOUSING
SRQ 2 - What are the defining elements of housing cooperatives in the late development stage in Amsterdam?	-literature & document review -synthesis and identification of elements	Four cooperative housing elements	**3** CONTEXT OF DUTCH HOUSING COOPERATIVES
SRQ 3 - What relationships do members of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam experience between cooperative housing elements and the social dimension of housing during the development process?	-in-depth interview sessions: interview questionnaire, participatory concept mapping, observations -Atlas Ti coding -co-occurrence analysis	Thematic analysis of the relationships between social dimension indicators and cooperative housing elements based on the conceptual framework	**5** FINDINGS ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL DIMENSION INDICATORS AND COOPERATIVE HOUSING ELEMENTS
SRQ 4 - How are members' experiences shaped by the timing and intensity of their involvement?	-in-depth interview sessions: interview questionnaire, timeline drawing -Atlas Ti coding -comparison between member types	Differences in perception and experiences of the social dimension of housing for long-, mid- and short-term members	**6** FINDINGS ON THE ROLE OF TIMING AND INTENSITY OF INVOLVEMENT

Main RQ - What are the relationships between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements in the context of housing cooperatives in late development stages in Amsterdam?	-combination of all methods & findings	Conceptual model showing relationships between cooperative elements and the social dimension of housing and its influencing factors	**7** CONCLUSION

1.4.1 Literature and document analysis

To answer SRQ 1 and SRQ 2 a structured desk-based analysis was conducted to operationalize indicators of the social dimension of housing and identify defining cooperative housing elements relevant to the research scope. These form the conceptual foundation for the case study research. The analysis involved a structured review of academic literature on the social dimension of housing, social cohesion theory, and Collaborative Housing. For social cohesion theory (see Chapter 2.2), two recent review papers provided the primary basis, supplemented by earlier publications identified through backward citation tracking. The review of the social dimension of housing and the concept of Collaborative Housing was primarily based on Cortés-Urra et al. (2024), whose conceptual model closely aligns with the focus of this research (see Chapter 2.1). Additional references were identified through backward citation. Furthermore, policy documents, municipal websites, official websites of housing cooperatives, and publications from knowledge platforms for Dutch housing cooperatives were examined to define the context for this research and identify relevant cooperative housing elements (see Chapter 3).

1.4.2 Case study research

Primary data was collected through case studies with two housing cooperatives in Amsterdam to answer SRQ 3 and SRQ 4. Case study research is particularly suitable for researching complex structures, behaviors and relationships in real-life context in a nuanced way (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Case selection

From the eleven cooperative housing projects currently active in Amsterdam (PWA 2025), two were selected as cases for in-depth study: De Woonwolk (WW) and De Nieuwe Meent (dNM). The selection followed an information-oriented approach, referring to the anticipated information value (Flyvbjerg 2006) as well as practical considerations, such as their location in Amsterdam and their accessibility. Both cases meet the official criteria defined by the municipality of Amsterdam (2020) (see Chapter 3). At the time of research, they were also in advanced development stages, one in the pre-construction and one in the construction phase which aligns with the research scope. Both projects offered access to project documentation and interview partners through personal contacts.

Data collection

The data collection took place between May and July 2025. Initial access was gained through personal contacts with individual members who invited the researcher to public and volunteer events: At de Nieuwe Meent this included two 'Do-It-Together' events where future residents and volunteers carried out painting and construction work on the building. At De Woonwolk, an information evening for aspiring members was attended, followed by participation in a committee meeting and a general assembly. In both cases, observations and informal conversations with members during and around the events provided an initial understanding of the organizational structures and dynamics of the cooperative. Informal interviews were chosen deliberately, as they help participants feel comfortable and speak more openly about their experiences (Bernard 2017). Following these initial visits, cooperative members who had expressed interest in sharing their experiences were contacted personally or via text message. They were recruited through an opportunistic sampling method based on availability, accessibility and willingness to participate (Brady 2006). Fourteen members were approached this way of whom ten agreed to participate in in-depth individual interview sessions. While recruiting interviewees, efforts were made to ensure diversity across age, household composition, timing of involvement and gender, however time constraints limited the representation of certain groups within the sample.

Interview techniques

The interview sessions lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. They were conducted as semi-structured interviews, using an interview guide to explore the experiences of each member in depth. Questions addressed past experiences, feelings, and behaviors as well as anticipations for the future. The guide (see Appendix B) was organized around four themes reflecting the social dimension indicators defined in the theoretical framework (Chapter 2.3). Eight interviews were conducted in English and two in Dutch, depending on participant preference. All interviews were recorded with written informed consent and supplemented with handwritten notes on gestures, expressions, and observations around the interview. They were then transcribed (see Appendix E). Basic demographic information was collected to contextualize participants. To capture and encourage different aspects of the experience of each member three techniques were integrated into each interview session:

1. **Timeline drawing**: In parallel with the questionnaire, participants were invited to visually map key moments of their involvement in the cooperative on a pre-drawn timeline of the project's development process. They also created a graph indicating their perceived intensity of involvement over time. The conversations during the exercise were recorded and transcribed alongside the interview, and scans of the drawings were done. This exercise enabled the researcher to trace relationships between time, intensity, and social experiences.
2. **Participatory concept mapping:** At the end of each session, the participants took part in a participatory mapping exercise. Using colorful cards as prompts, they were invited to reflect on the four housing cooperative elements and four social dimension indicators of the conceptual framework. Together with the researcher, they arranged the cards on the table, while discussing relationships between the concepts, their perceived importance, sequencing and personal interpretation. The conversations during the exercise were recorded and transcribed, photos of the arranged cards were taken and complemented with notes by the researcher. This method provided participants with an interactive and visual way to express complex processes and connections and allowed clarifying follow-up questions.

3. **Direct observation (when applicable):** All interviews were conducted in a setting chosen by the participant: either around the Housing Cooperative building, at their current home, or at their workplace, sometimes with other members present. Some contexts allowed the researcher to complement the interviews with direct observations of *Social interactions* between members.

Data processing and analysis

All audio recordings were transcribed, anonymized, and analyzed through a combination of deductive and inductive thematic coding in Atlas.ti. The codes were based on the elements and indicators from the conceptual framework, supplemented with sub-categories from literature or inductively identified during analysis (see Appendix D for coding framework). For comparative purposes, interviewees were grouped by the timing of involvement in the cooperative as follows:

- Long-term members: first two years (dNM 2018-2019, WW 2021-2022)
- Mid-term members: ~year 2-4 (dNM 2020-2022, WW 2023-2024)
- Short-term members: ~after year 4 (dNM 2023-2025, WW 2025)

1.4.3 Expert interviews

To complement the perspectives of cooperative members and situate the findings in a broader context, three expert interviews were conducted with professionals involved in the Dutch cooperative housing movement. The experts represented different roles within this field:

1. An architect who designed De Woonwolk (case 1), contributing insights into the co-design process of cooperative housing;
2. An architect, resident of the Collaborative Housing project 'Centraal Wonen Delft' and founder of 'Co-wonen', advising collective housing initiatives;
3. A strategist at 'CrowdBuilding', working on partnerships and networks across financial, professional, and community actors in collective and cooperative self-built housing, as well as chair of the Amsterdam housing cooperative 'Torteltuin'.

The experts were recommended by cooperative members and other researchers in the field. They were then contacted via email. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face at the experts' workplaces and one online. They followed an open-ended questionnaire,

which was adapted to the expertise of each interviewee. The interviews were not analyzed systematically but informed the reflection of results in Chapter 8.

1.4.4 Ethical considerations and positionality

Participation in this research was voluntarily, and all interviewees were informed about the research objectives, expectations and data handling. They were asked to sign a consent that included permission to record and transcribe the interviews and emphasized the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences (see Appendix C). Names and personal identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms, and only the researcher had access to the raw data (see data management plan in Appendix A). Most interviews were conducted in English, although two were conducted in Dutch to accommodate the preference of participants. English was not the native language of either the researcher or the participants, and the researcher's Dutch proficiency (B2) may have influenced the level of detail or nuance in some conversations. To reduce categorization bias, demographic questions were kept open-ended, allowing participants to decide the level of detail they wished to share. The analysis gave particular attention to individual narratives, treating participants as experts of their own experiences.

The researcher's positionality may have shaped data collection and interpretation (Berger 2015). The researcher identifies as a white, cis- female, highly educated, young native German from a middle-income non-academic background. This profile made it relatively easy to connect with members of the Housing cooperatives, many of whom share similar characteristics. At the same time, it may have influenced which perspectives were most accessible. The researcher entered the field with strong interest in alternative housing models and the social aspects of living together, which may have introduced observer bias though care was taken not to emphasize these views during interviews and data analysis (Berger 2015).

During the research, the author became involved as an aspiring member of De Woonwolk (since May 2025, after the case selection) and volunteered in Do-It-Together activities at De Nieuwe Meent. This active involvement provided access to internal processes and informal knowledge, helped building trust with cooperative members and avoiding

insider-outsider bias (Granovetter 1973). At the same time, it created a double role with blurred boundaries between researcher and participant. Finally, the researcher approached the field of research from a background in environmental engineering and urban planning, with limited prior expertise in qualitative social research. This position shaped the research process in terms of the learning curve and interpretive lens of the thesis.

2 THEORY ABOUT THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HOUSING

This Chapter introduces theoretical framework of this research including the conceptual model by Cortés Urra and the theory of social cohesion. The conceptual model by Cortés Urra proposes a way to connect indicators of the social dimension of housing with elements of Collaborative Housing (see section 2.1). The theory of social cohesion is used as a theoretical lens to understand the quality and character of social relationships and how they affect collective outcomes such as cooperation, social diversity and sense of belonging (see section 2.2). Section 2.3 describes how the two theories are linked together in this research to answer **SRQ 1 – 'What are indicators for the social dimension of housing?'.** The indicators provide one side of the foundation for the conceptual framework of this thesis.

2.1 Conceptual Model of Cortés-Urra

Cortés Urra et al. (2024) propose a conceptual model to systematically connect features of Collaborative Housing with indicators of the social dimension of housing. It is based on previous literature on neighborhood social cohesion and social sustainability and among the first attempts to conceptualize and evaluate social dynamics in Collaborative Housing. It thus provides a valuable starting point for the conceptual framework of this research. While the model was developed for the case of Chile, its logic is based on international literature and can be extended to European contexts (Cortés Urra et al. 2024). The conceptual model connects two main theories: 1) features of Collaborative Housing and 2) social dimension indicators (see Figure 1).

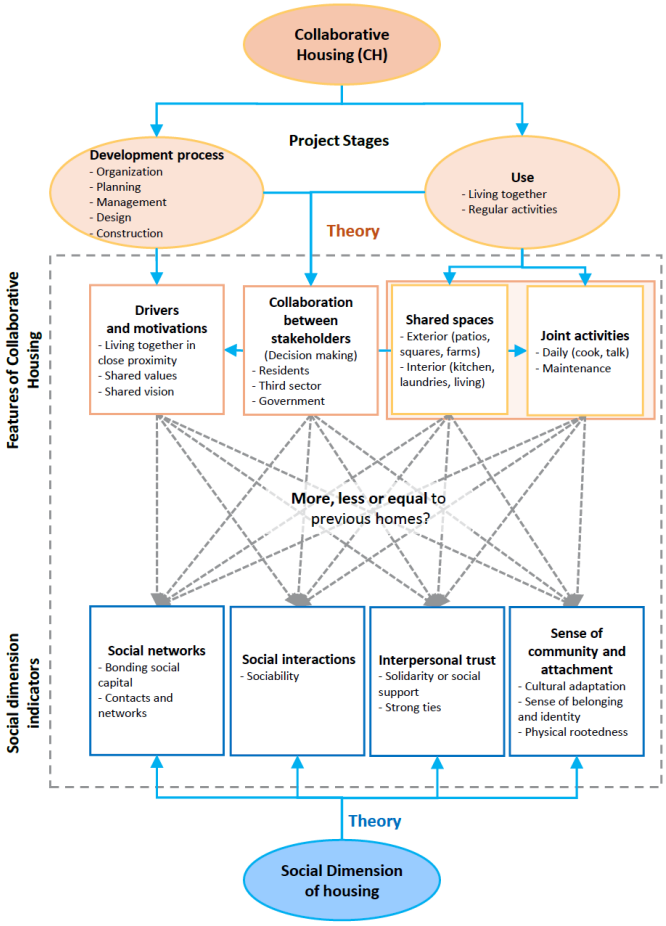

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Collaborative Housing and the social dimension of housing (Cortés Urra 2025, p. 189)

Cortés Urra et al. (2024) define four features of Collaborative Housing on one side of the model. These are:

1. The *motivation* of the residents to live together with other households in a project, based on a shared vision and shared values;
2. a high degree of *collaboration* with other residents as well as with different external stakeholders (governmental, private, third sector) in developing and producing the homes;
3. the inclusion of *shared spaces* in the interior, such as kitchens, laundry rooms and living rooms and/or exterior of the buildings, such as patios, squares or farms; and

4. the regular engagement of residents in *joint activities* around the housing project, such as community events, daily activities or maintenance tasks in common areas (Cortés Urra et al. 2024; Czischke et al. 2020)

On the other side, the model shows four indicators used to assess the so-called social dimension of housing. These indicators have been operationalized by the authors and provide a lens for evaluating social dynamics. They are defined as follows:

1. *Social networks*, referring to social ties between members of a group, so called 'bonding social capital', contacts and networks with members and neighbors;
2. *Social interactions*, understood as everyday encounters, conversations, and activities among residents as well as general sociability;
3. *Interpersonal trust*, describing the degree of solidarity, social support, and strong ties between people living in a community; and
4. *Sense of community and attachment*, referring to the extent to which individuals identify with a place or group, feel a sense of belonging and physical rootedness towards it and culturally adapt to it.

The model crosses each of the features of Collaborative Housing with each social indicator, to analyze how certain features may foster certain social experiences. E.g., if *the intention to live together* may influence *social interactions* or if doing *joint activities* relates to building *interpersonal trust* among the residents. It also differentiates whether the connections are perceived as more, less or equal to previous homes.

However, for this research, some parts of the framework need to be adjusted to fit the regulatory frame of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam. While the model considers the development phase as well as the use phase the building, the latter is out of the scope of this research (for elaboration see Chapter 3). It also does not include the element of time for the member's involvement. Such conceptual definitions will be addressed in the following chapter.

2.2 Social Cohesion

During the last years the concept of social cohesion has been used inflationary by scientists and policy makers as a tool to monitor societal development and adapt policies to face societal challenges (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017). While the definition of social cohesion is often vague and varies per author, (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017) this vagueness allows it to be adapted to various situations and real-life contexts (Bernard 1999). A recent literature review by Fonseca et al. (2019) defines social cohesion as follows: "The ongoing process of developing well-being, sense of belonging, and voluntary social participation of the members of society, while developing communities that tolerate and promote a multiplicity of values and cultures, and granting at the same time equal rights and opportunities in society" (Fonseca et al. 2019, p. 16). It can be concluded that social cohesion in groups encompasses both the experiences of individuals on the one hand and the character of the community they belong to on the other. Literature conceptualizes these as two main components: 1) a relational component, and 2) a common identity component (Eshuis et al. 2014; Janmaat and Green 2011; Moody and White 2003). The following section provides an overview over those two components.

2.2.1 Relational Component

The relational dimension is the most prominent aspect of social cohesion and encompasses relationships and networks between groups and individuals. It specifically refers to how people connect, interact and support each other individually, as well as how these interactions extend to wider communities (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017).

Social relationships, also called social ties, can be evaluated regarding their strength (Villarreal and Silva 2006). Granovetter (1973) defines the strength of a tie as a combination of the time invested, the emotional intensity, intimacy and support or solidarity. However, this does not necessarily imply that stronger ties are always more desirable. Strong ties are crucial when it comes to solidarity and support, as people are more motivated to help each other if they are connected through closer bonds. But studies show that weaker ties often prove to play a more important role when it comes to spreading new ideas or behaviors within larger groups of people. People with fewer close friendships but many loose ties across everyday contexts are best positioned to

access and spread information between otherwise separate groups (Granovetter 1973). Especially important can be so-called ‘bridging weak ties’ that connect otherwise separated strong-tie-clusters and, by that, foster a sense of community. These relational patterns resemble the concept of ‘social capital’, which encompasses ‘‘connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’’ (Putnam, 1995, cited in Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017, p. 585). Social ties are often activated by social interactions during context-related meetings, which are especially essential to maintain weak ties (Granovetter 1973). Their strength can be measured through the frequency of interactions, such as mutual visits or phone calls as well as through the composition and structure of networks (Coleman 1988; Villarreal and Silva 2006).

Trust

As mentioned above, trust is closely related to social relationships. Whether a person places trust in others often depends on intermediary personal contacts who can vouch for someone’s trustworthiness and mediate in the case of conflict. This way close social ties through family, community or shared beliefs can also form a kind of ‘social insurance’ based on trust that creates the base for collaboration (Coleman 1988). The more connected individuals are through direct or indirect ties, the more opportunities exist for trust to develop (Granovetter 1973). Social cohesion in a group would not be possible without a certain degree of interpersonal trust as well as trust in institutions to begin with (Chan et al. 2006; Dickes and Valentova 2013). Authors agree that trust strengthens cooperation, unity, and identification within groups, which is the base for collective action (Larsen 2013; Schiefer and van der Noll 2017). It often develops based on the belief of sharing a ‘moral community’ with others, grounded in common values, norms, and principles as well as the expectation that other people’s behavior is in principal lead by positive intentions (Larsen 2013).

Social inclusion

Finally, social cohesion does not only encompass relationships within groups but also between them. A cohesive community requires mutual tolerance and the social inclusion of minority groups, such as groups of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, or groups with a certain lifestyle or sexual orientation (Schiefer and van der

Noll 2017). This aligns with the differentiation of ‘bonding social capital’, meaning close ties within more homogenous groups, and ‘bridging social capital’, referring to ties across group boundaries (Cheong et al. 2007).

2.2.2 Common Identity Component

The common identity component of social cohesion encompasses the extent to which individuals feel attached to and identify with a larger group, here called community. In some aspects there is a conceptual overlap with the relational component, however, it goes beyond interpersonal ties and includes feelings of belonging, solidarity and shared values (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017).

Belonging and recognition

A sense of belonging to the same community is a central aspect of social cohesion. Individuals need to feel that they are recognized as members of the community and that their presence is valued (Chan et al. 2006; Jenson 2010). In residential neighborhoods, by instance, social cohesion increases when neighbors share similar values, particular interests and a common identification with the place. This leads to a higher interest in social interaction with other residents.

Equality and diversity

Shared values provide an essential base for social cohesion in a community, as they imply behavioral codes, structure social interactions and allow identifying common goals and plans (Kearns and Forrest 2000; Schiefer and van der Noll 2017). In collaborative housing, communities often form around ‘socio-cultural proximity’, such as similar lifestyles or activist networks, which strengthens social cohesion and internal solidarity (Bresson and Labit 2020). However, this mechanism can contradict social diversity as it might exclude individuals who do not have access of such networks in the first place (Jenson 2010). Collaborative housing initiatives are often dominated by people with high levels of social, cultural, and economic capital. These privileges enable them to mobilize knowledge, networks, and resources, while less fortunate groups often lack such capacities (Cortés Urra et al. 2024). In this sense, social cohesion is also a matter of power and privilege as access to and participation in projects is limited to those who have the necessary resources. This aligns with intersectional perspectives which brings

attention to how class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other positions intersect and form inequality and privilege (Bond 2021; Crenshaw 1989). For the common identity component of social cohesion this leads to hierarchical relations in which some people have more power in societies and groups than others.

Some authors thus frame social diversity as a potential threat to social cohesion by making shared cultural values, beliefs and practices more fragile (Janmaat and Green 2011). On the other hand, the role of shared values for social cohesion itself can be questioned as it implies a certain homogeneity of the group. Contemporary debates on social cohesion take a more critical standpoint on consensus about lifestyle, beliefs, and values within communities and emphasize that social cohesion of groups can instead be strengthened by the capacity to promote, accept and constructively deal with diversity and conflict (European Committee for Social Cohesion 2004; Spoonley et al. 2005). At the same time it is recognized that social diversity does not develop "naturally" but requires structural support and professional guidance (Bresson and Labit 2020).

Solidarity and responsibility

A cohesive community requires commitment to the common good and the willingness to sometimes subordinate individual needs for the benefit of the group (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017). This makes a community dependent on mutual support and an ethic of social responsibility (European Committee for Social Cohesion 2004). Solidarity in Collaborative Housing projects can be seen in practices of care, such as caring for sick members, elderly people and children, as well as in the pooling and sharing of financial and material resources. Such acts function as a social glue, strengthen a *sense of community*and increase physical and mental well-being, especially in times of crisis (Housing Europe 2023). Solidarity and care outside of traditional family constellations also play a central role in feminist arguments. Changes in family structures and gender roles have driven the search for alternative forms of living, such as collaborative housing, that redistribute responsibilities of care and allow wider networks of support (Lang et al. 2020).

2.3 Linking the theories

In the context of this research, a socially cohesive housing cooperative can be understood as a community successfully fostering the social dimension of housing. Thus, while the terms cannot be used interchangeably, they can be compared in terms of definition and operationalization. Brought together they can answer **SRQ 1 – 'What are indicators for the social dimension of housing?'** and provide the foundation for the conceptual framework of this thesis.

The two components of social cohesion overlap to great extent with the four social dimension indicators of the conceptual model by Cortés Urra. The indicator *social networks* of Cortés Urra (2025) aligns mostly with the relational component of social cohesion. However, this research follows Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) who propose to not only include social ties between members of a group (bonding social capital) but also between members of different groups (bridging social capital). They are operationalized under the theme *social relationships*. Following the theory of strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973) this research differentiates between friendships and partnerships (=strong ties) on the one hand and general relationships (=weak ties) on the other. Similarly, the indicator *sense of community and attachment* of the model connects to the common identity component of social cohesion. In this research they are assigned to the theme *sense of community* and include a sense of belonging and an identification with the project but also the aspect of group composition, related to equality and diversity, and cultural adaptation. Physical rootedness, however, will mostly gain relevance during the use-phase of the building and is thus outside the scope of this research. Unlike social cohesion theory, Cortés Urra introduces *social interactions* as well as *interpersonal trust* as separate social dimension indicators. While both themes are covered in social cohesion theory, they are here seen as subthemes of the relational component. In the context of this research, it seems wise to follow the structure proposed by Cortés Urra et al. (2024) as it was specifically developed for a housing context and the authors state "it can be used as an analytical framework to study the presence of the social dimension in Collaborative Housing forms in general" (p. 720). The theme *social interactions* merges most aspects of both theories and encompasses

the type and frequency of meetings (Granovetter 1973), encounters, conversations and activities (Cortés Urra 2025) of cooperative members. Social cohesion theory adds to the indicator of *interpersonal trust* by extending the theme with *trust in institutions* (Chan et al. 2006). For the development process of housing cooperatives, collaboration with internal and external stakeholders as an essential element (see Chapter 3) the theme should incorporate this aspect. *Trust* is hence understood as interpersonal trust, trust in external institutions and trust in internal structures.

The alignment and operationalization of the two theories is shown in Table 3. The themes are used to structure and conceptualize this research (see Chapter 4). Next to helping define these themes, social cohesion theory also offers a lens to evaluate mechanisms and dependencies between them. It will be used to interpret and connect insights about behaviors and social experiences in the findings chapter of this research.

Table 3: Alignment and operationalization of social dimension indicators and social cohesion theory (source: author)

Social Dimension Indicators by Cortes Urra	Social Cohesion Theory	Social Dimension Indicator
Social networks -social ties between members of a group -bonding social capital -contacts and networks	**Relational component** -social ties -bonding and bridging social capital	**Social relationships** -social ties within and between different groups -bonding and bridging social capital -contacts and networks
Social interactions -sociability -everyday encounters, conversations, and activities among residents	**Relational component** -frequency of interactions -context-related meetings	**Social interactions** -type and frequency of encounters, meetings, conversations and activities
Interpersonal trust -solidarity or social support -strong ties between people living in a community	**Relational component** -Interpersonal trust -trust in institutions	**Trust** -Interpersonal trust -trust in external institutions -trust in internal structures
Sense of community and attachment -cultural adaptation -sense of belonging and identity -physical rootedness	**Common identity component** -belonging and identification -equality and diversity	**Sense of community** -feeling of belonging -identification with the project -group composition (equality and diversity, cultural adaptation)

3 CONTEXT OF DUTCH HOUSING COOPERATIVES

The following chapter provides an overview on housing cooperatives in the Dutch context to prepare the ground for identifying and operationalizing a limited set of elements that potentially shape the experiences of members during the development process and answer **SRQ 2 – 'What are the defining elements of housing cooperatives in the late development stage in Amsterdam?'**. After describing their organizational form, position in the housing market and main challenges, the Chapter addresses three key characteristics: the development stage (section 3.2), the social orientation (section 3.4) and member participation as volunteering in housing cooperatives (section 3.3). Together, these insights are then combined with the conceptual framework by Cortés Urra et al. (2024) in section 3.5 to answer SRQ 2 of this research.

3.1 Definition and legal framework

The concept of **Collaborative Housing** has been increasingly recognized in academia during the last decades and is used as an umbrella term that includes various forms of co-housing and other self-organized residential models, such as cohousing, ecovillages, self-building initiatives, and resident-led housing cooperatives (Brysch 2023; Cortés Urra et al. 2024). What connects these models is that residents actively collaborate with one another, organize and coordinate their efforts to work towards their shared housing goals (Czischke et al. 2020). This collaboration can take place in different phases of the housing process, from conception and design to development, management, and maintenance. As shown in the conceptual model of Cortés-Urra et al. (see Chapter 2.1) authors suggest four defining features of Collaborative Housing in the European context. These are: 1) *shared values, drivers and motivations*, 2) *collaboration with stakeholders*, 3) *shared spaces*, and 4) *joint activities*. Together they form one side of the conceptual model (Cortés Urra et al. 2024; Czischke et al. 2020). However, this research focusses on the model of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam in particular, which makes it necessary to adjust these features to the local and regulatory context.

Housing cooperatives can be understood as a specific organizational and legal form of Collaborative Housing. A housing cooperative is a non-profit organization, in which residents collectively own and manage a housing estate, with the primary aim of providing affordable and inclusive housing for the cooperative's members. The members intentionally choose to live together in a community that shares spaces, resources and risks to different degrees (Reyes et al. 2022). Besides that, they are often collectively responsible for the design and construction of their own housing (Aernouts and Ryckewaert 2019).

In the Netherlands housing cooperatives, in Dutch called 'wooncoöperaties', were legally formalized with the Housing Act of 2015 (Ahedo et al. 2023; Rijksoverheid 2015). This thesis draws on the definition of the municipality of Amsterdam, according to which housing cooperatives fulfil at least the following requirements:

1. The control of the complex lies with the members who live there;
2. There is democratic governance;
3. Individual members cannot withdraw invested social capital from the cooperative; and
4. It has no profit motive (Amsterdam 2020).

The trend towards cooperative housing in the Netherlands is growing. The municipality of Amsterdam recently publishing an action plan ('Actieplan Woningcoöperaties') which states the aims of realizing 15 to 20 housing cooperative projects within the following four years and managing 10% of the whole housing stock as cooperative models within 25 years (Time to Access 2025). Because of the relatively small number of already established housing cooperatives in the Netherlands and the complexity of the development process, they are not expected to make a substantial short-term contribution to national challenges around housing affordability. Their added value instead lies in addressing specific housing needs for target groups that struggle to access the conventional housing market, and in offering features such as affordability, commonality, sustainability, and accessibility (Briene et al. 2021).

Despite growing interest in cooperative housing, several financial and institutional challenges limit their development. While the municipality of Amsterdam supports cooperative housing initiatives by providing specific land plots for housing cooperatives,

other municipalities are reluctant to do so because they generally receive a higher price if they sell the land to commercial developers. Establishing a housing cooperative is acknowledged to be a very complex and time consuming process, and many initiatives fail to reach completion due to institutional and financial barriers (Ahedo et al. 2023). Many banks still consider housing cooperatives as complex and risky, making it difficult to get access to loans and financial means for the construction of the building. Sustainable cooperative models depend on innovative financing, partnerships with municipalities, and non-speculative land use, but they often also face challenges around inclusivity, financial stability, and resident participation (Lang and Giovannini 2025). Currently, most of the groups in the Netherlands are still in the incubation or initiation phase with only a few pioneering projects already being active.

3.2 The development stage of Housing cooperatives

According to literature, housing cooperatives, like Collaborative Housing, can be related to two dimensions: 'developing together' and 'living together' (see Figure 2) (Brysch 2023; Cortés Urra 2025). 'Developing together' is mainly referring to the process of collectively designing, constructing and managing a future house while 'living together' refers to what happens once the building is completed, including the use of shared spaces and interaction with neighbors (Brysch 2023).

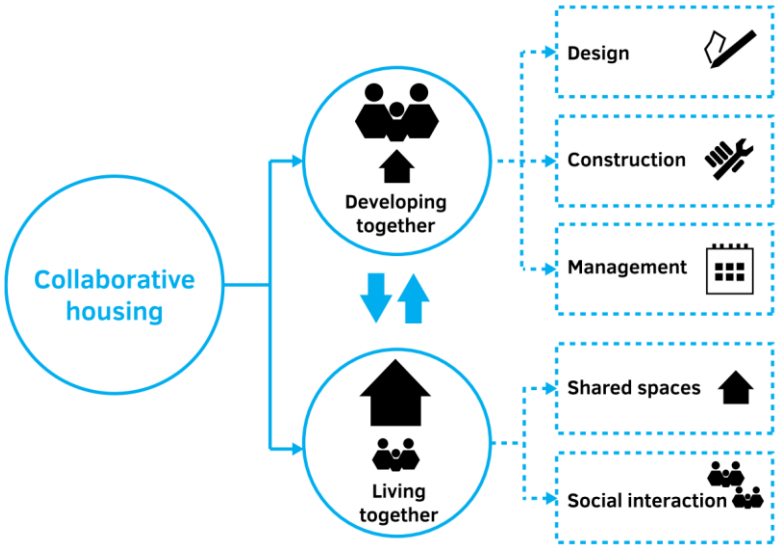

Figure 2: The two dimensions of Collaborative Housing (Brysch 2023)

As mentioned above, in the Netherlands most housing cooperatives are currently still in the phase of 'developing together', in this thesis referred to as *development stage*. We should thus define the characteristics of this stage to adapt defining features of the housing model for this research if needed. During this stage the future residents of the cooperative self-organize, with roles and responsibilities usually distributed among members. This often includes taking on tasks traditionally carried out by professionals, such as project management, architectural design, construction coordination, or administrative work. In some cases, external experts are hired for legal, financial, design or facilitation support to manage the complexity of the project (Landenberger and Gütschow 2019). According to Brysch (2023), participation and workload in 'developing together' is often concentrated within a core group. The degree of self-organization and involvement can also vary depending on the size of the group, with smaller groups being more efficient and viable in achieving their goals than larger ones. Additionally, participation in the development stage is often unevenly distributed among future residents as some of them only join the cooperative at later stages (Brysch 2023). As member participation is central in this stage insights from volunteering literature are useful for understanding differences in involvement.

3.3 Member participation as volunteering

Participation of members in housing cooperatives is, in most cases, based on volunteering. Members are often not only financially contributing but required to be actively involved in the daily operation of the cooperative by doing chores, joining a committee, or taking on management tasks (CHF Canada 2010). This clearly differentiates such initiatives from conventional rental housing, as without members' direct contribution, cooperatives could neither function in daily life nor be established and built in the first place.

Insights from volunteering research are useful for understanding differences in such participation. Studies have examined the factors that drive and sustain active, long-term volunteer involvement. They suggest that participation is not only shaped by motivation and values, but also by the type of task volunteers take on and their relationships to others in the group. For example, volunteers who feel a strong sense of commitment to the people they are helping are more likely to dedicate substantial time and energy to

their role (Shantz et al., 2014). In the context of Housing cooperatives, these so-called ‘beneficiaries’ are usually the volunteers themselves and their fellow co-members. Similarly, volunteers who identify strongly with their role are also more likely to devote a higher amount of time and remain engaged over a longer period while those with weaker identification contribute less long-term and with less hours per week (Shantz et al. 2014). At the same time, volunteers who take on a high workload may experience negative emotional consequences from their work and even burn out when feelings of frustration, exhaustion and dissatisfaction overweigh the benefits they experience (Morse et al. 2022). Some literature debates the connection between volunteering and social cohesion. While volunteering is often used as an indicator for social cohesion, other authors see value in differentiating them (Abrahams et al. 2023). They argue that specifically the relationship between the intensity and frequency of volunteering and social cohesion, is unclear.

Dutch housing cooperatives therefore represent a unique type of volunteering participation. Members are volunteers but at the same time beneficiaries of their own volunteering and collectively work towards a building as a tangible outcome as well as a type of community as an intangible one. As literature acknowledges that the time and intensity of volunteering are related to social outcomes in complex ways but does not provide clear conclusions on how those mechanisms work, it is valuable to explore these dimensions further. They are additionally influenced by the internal social orientation of most Housing cooperatives.

3.4 Social orientation of Housing cooperatives

Social orientation is one of the central characteristics of cooperative housing (Ahedo et al. 2023; Lang and Giovannini 2025). Studies show that Housing Cooperative members in Amsterdam are strongly motivated by values of sustainability, social cohesion, and long-term affordability (Lang et al. 2020; Ritt 2022). Additionally, most Dutch housing cooperatives define their own ‘core values’ as pillars of collaboration and compass for making collective decisions (Cooplink 2021). Comparative research across Denmark, the Netherlands, and Spain further shows that housing cooperatives have the ability to resist commodification, foster social resilience, and serve as socially oriented

alternatives to speculative housing markets (Ahedo et al. 2023; Lang and Giovannini 2025). It is also suggested that these housing models can effectively address housing affordability challenges while at the same time empowering residents, and offering a more inclusive housing option for vulnerable populations (Lang and Giovannini 2025). Another characteristic of most housing cooperatives is solidarity, both internally and externally, which relates back to the common identity component of social cohesion (see Chapter 2.2.2). Internal solidarity arises from relationships between members, and is usually based on shared understandings, identities, and organized interactions, such as rituals. External solidarity refers to practices with "outsiders" and other groups through public regulations and sociocultural structures (Ahedo et al. 2023; Sørvoll and Bengtsson 2018). In the Dutch context, most socially oriented cooperatives aim to combine both dimensions by being open, accessible, and affordable for lower- and middle-income groups (Ahedo et al., 2023).

3.5 Elements of housing cooperatives in the development stage

Based on the literature and Dutch context, four elements stand out as defining housing cooperatives in the development stage in Amsterdam that potentially shape the experiences of members during the development process. Following the four features of Collaborative Housing by Cortés Urra et al. (2024) (see Chapter 2.1) and the previously described context, they allow answering **SRQ 2 – 'What are the defining elements of housing cooperatives in the late development stage in Amsterdam?'** The results are synthesized in Table 4 and described below.

Table 4: Alignment and operationalization of the features of Collaborative Housing and the context of Dutch housing cooperatives as four elements (source: author)

Features of Collaborative Housing	Context of Dutch Housing cooperatives	Elements of Dutch Housing cooperatives
Drivers and motivations -living together in close proximity -Shared values -Shared vision	-core values -social cohesion & solidarity -affordability	**Shared values and motivations** -motivation to live together (community motivation, financial motivation, social motivation) -shared values & core values
Collaboration between stakeholders (decision making) -residents -third sector -government	-self-organization -distribution of responsibilities among members -involvement of advisors, banks and municipalities	**Collaboration on the project** -project-related internal collaboration (structure, decisions, meetings) -collaboration with external stakeholders (governmental, private, third sector)
Shared spaces -exterior -interior	-still in development stage	**Physical proximity** -meetings in person -future shared spaces
Joint activities -daily (cook, talk) -maintenance	-organized interactions and rituals	**Joint activities** -fun activities -project-related activities

The Collaborative Housing feature *drivers and motivations*, aligns with the social orientation of most Dutch housing cooperatives. To recognize the importance of shared values such as sustainability or inclusion (Lang and Giovannini 2025) (see also Chapter 2.2) this thesis considers the Collaborative Housing element of *shared values and*

motivations. The second feature of *collaboration between stakeholders* can be understood as collaboration with other residents and different external stakeholders. As explained before, in housing cooperatives that are still in the development stage, collaboration is expected to mainly take place as self-organization, with some involvement of external stakeholders (Landenberger and Gütschow 2019). In this thesis these are summarized under *collaboration on the project*. *Shared spaces* gain in importance once a Housing Cooperative is in its use-stage. With most Dutch projects still being in the development stage, the element is altered into the element of *physical proximity*, relating to meetings in person on the one hand and expectations and plans towards future *shared spaces* in the building on the other. Lastly, the feature of *joint activities* is expected to also apply to Dutch Housing cooperatives, even though their nature might be less defined by daily and maintenance activities, which are dependent on the physical building. They might rather include different types of organized or spontaneous fun or project-related activities (Sørvoll and Bengtsson 2018).

In addition to these defining elements, the context review also highlighted further aspects relevant for understanding member experiences in the development stage. The experience of the social dimension may be influenced by both the timing of when members joined and the intensity of their involvement. The aspects are expected to be particularly relevant in the development stage of Dutch housing cooperatives as they are dependent on volunteering work of members, which can be unevenly distributed during the process, and often concentrated within a core group (Brysch 2023; CHF Canada 2010). While some members are engaged from the very beginning, others join later or take on fewer responsibilities, which might shape opportunities for relationship-building and interactions, trust-related experiences, and the identification with the community. For this reason, this thesis treats timing and intensity as an additional dimension in the conceptual framework. They will be explored in **SRQ 4 – 'How are members' experiences shaped by the timing and intensity of their involvement?'** (see Chapter 6).

4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework used in this thesis builds on the model by Cortés-Urra as well as social cohesion theory and the context of Dutch Housing cooperatives. It is applied as base for the member interview guides, a lens for the analysis of findings and a way to visually map relationships. It connects the four themes 1) *social relationships*, 2) *social interactions*, 3) *trust*, and 4) *sense of community* for the social dimension of housing with the four elements of housing cooperatives in development stage in Amsterdam: 1) *shared values and motivations*, 2) *collaboration on the project*, 3) *joint activities*, and 4) *physical proximity*. The framework does not assume causal relationships but instead maps how these indicators and elements relate and interact. As an additional variable, the framework considers the timing of member involvement, as described in the previous chapter, and its impact on the relationships between all themes and elements.

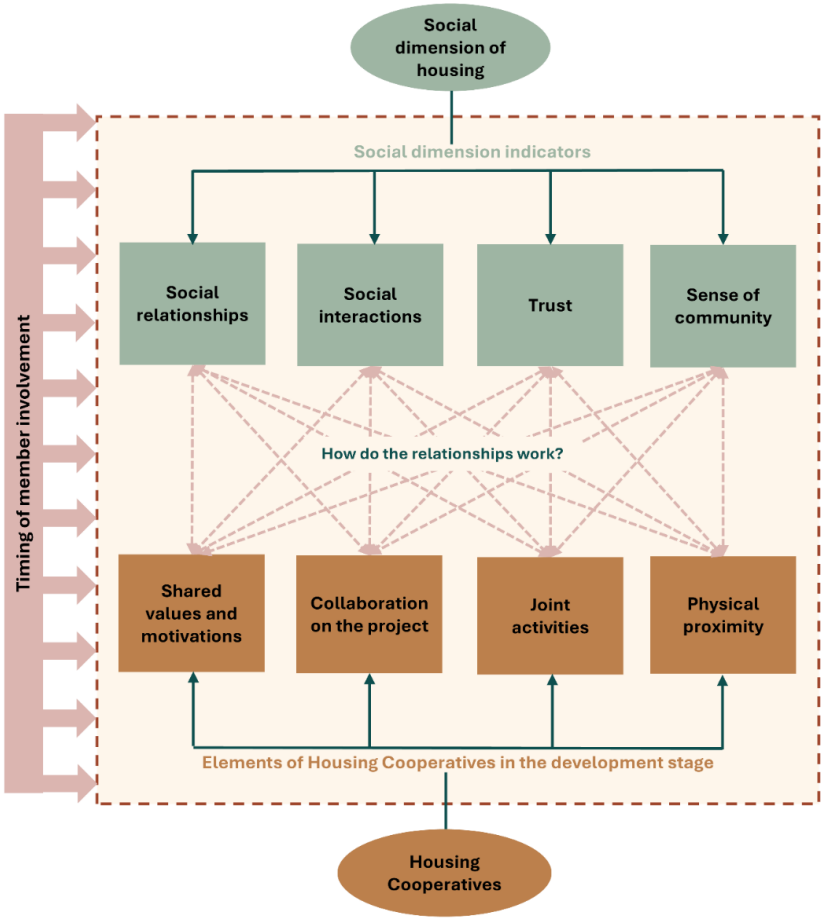

Figure 3: The conceptual framework of this research (source: author, mainly based on Cortés Urra et al. (2024))

5 FINDINGS ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL DIMENSION INDICATORS AND COOPERATIVE HOUSING ELEMENTS

The findings in this Chapter aim to answer **SRQ 3 – 'What relationships do members of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam experience between cooperative housing elements and the social dimension of housing during the development process?'** They are presented separately for each case, starting with a short case description, secondly providing an overview of the interview participants and thirdly presenting the findings. They are structured along the four social dimension indicators of the conceptual framework and analyze their connections to the cooperative housing elements.

The relation to existing literature is outlined and their potential implications are discussed directly after each finding. This was a deliberate choice to avoid repetition of raw findings and situate each finding in the conceptual framework of this research while it was still specified in concrete terms. This allows for a more nuanced interpretation and helps to highlight where the findings support, refine, or challenge existing literature. After presenting the findings per case, the key patterns and differences are compared and concluded in section 5.3 and connections are visualized based on the conceptual framework.

The findings are drawn from interviews with members of two housing cooperatives. During the interview, the members visualized parts of their narratives in a hand-drawn timeline. The timelines show each member's experience in relation to the timing in the development process of the Housing Cooperative and their own start of involvement. Additionally, each member drew the perceived intensity of involvement over time. An example of a timeline drawing is shown in Figure 4.

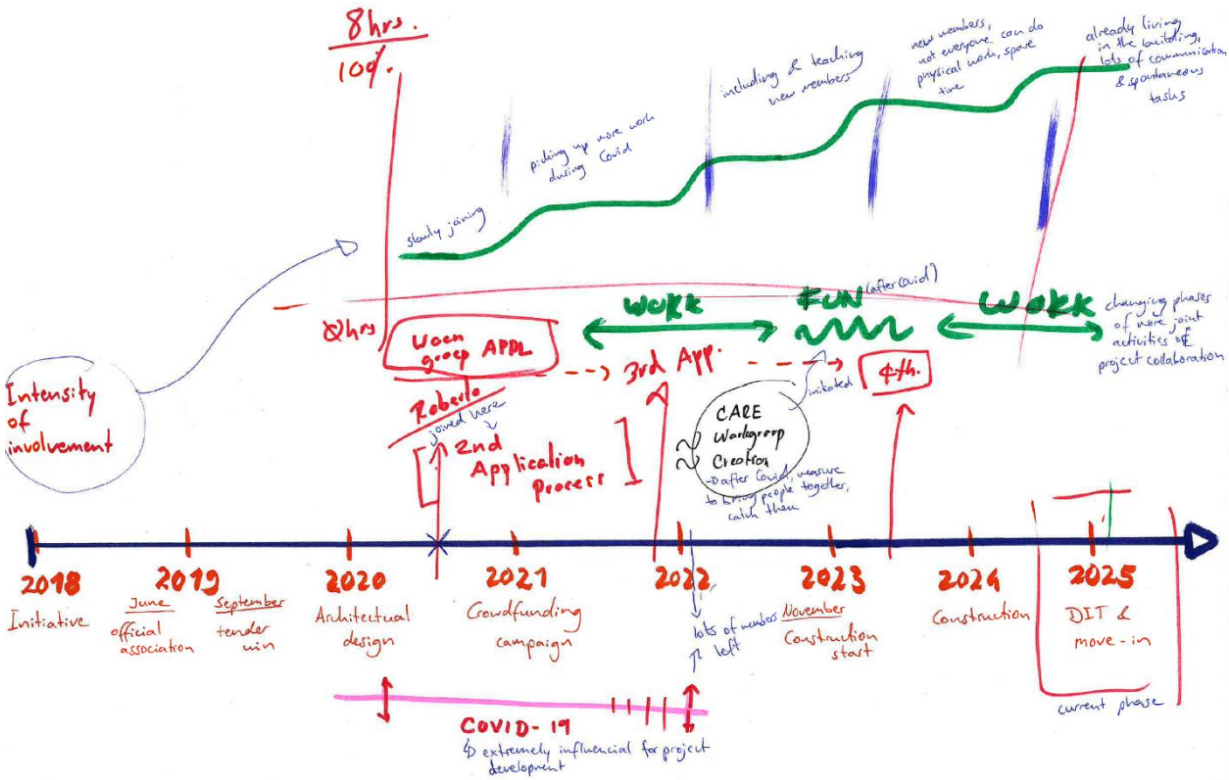

Figure 4: Example of a result of the timeline drawing exercise (source: interview session with participant 'Ron')

The interviewees also carried out a participatory concept mapping exercise together with the researcher, linking concepts of the conceptual framework (see Figure 5). The insights resulting from the exercises are included in the related sections.

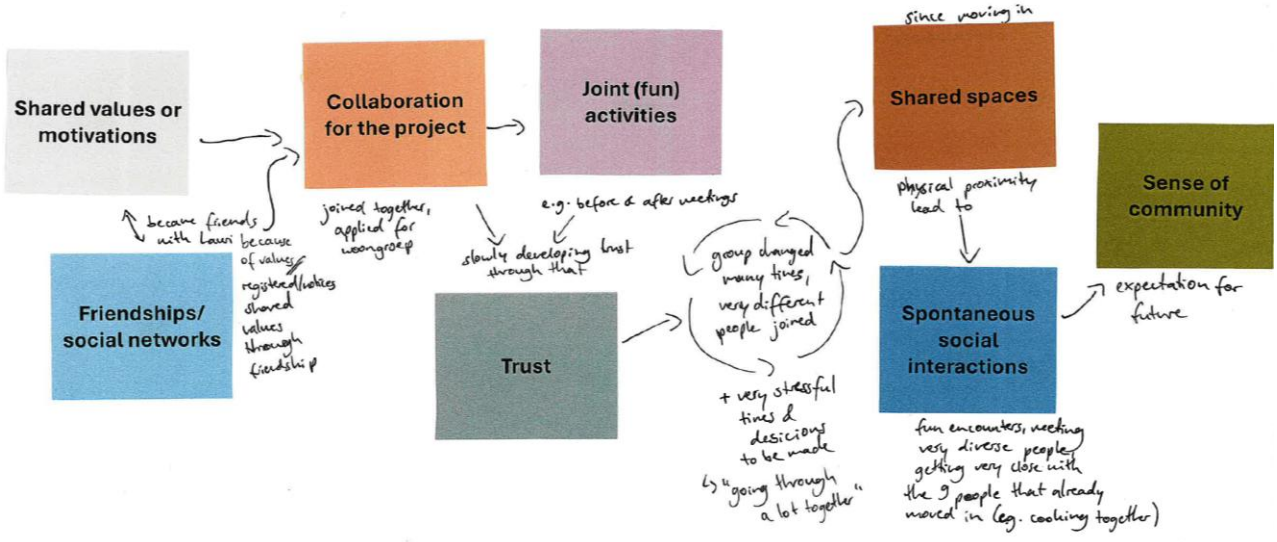

Figure 5: Example of a result of the participatory concept mapping exercise (source: interview session with participant 'Ron' with notes by the author).

5.1 Case 1: De Woonwolk

This Chapter presents findings on the relationships between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements, experienced and reported by members of Case 1: Housing Cooperative *De Woonwolk*.

5.1.1 Case description

De Woonwolk is a cooperative housing initiative that will be built in Buiksloterham, Amsterdam-Noord. While the initiative started around 2020, the group got legally registered as 'Coöperatieve Stichting De Woonwolk' in 2022. The project will consist of 53 rental units in the mid-rental segment. At the time of this research, the group is finalizing its financing through a crowdlending campaign before construction is supposed to start by the end of 2025. The move-in of the future residents is planned for 2026-27 (De Woonwolk 2025). In addition to the private rental units approximately 9% of the building's total floor area will be allocated to communal functions. Shared facilities include three collective living rooms, a shared makerspace, a rooftop garden with a seating area, kitchen, and podium for neighborhood events and a semi-public garden at ground level (Cooplink 2023; De Woonwolk 2025). The cooperative aims for a diverse group of members, including single individuals and families across a range of ages, backgrounds, genders, and orientations. The three core values of the cooperative are:

1. Kunst & Cultuur (Art & Culture)
2. Duurzaamheid (Sustainability)
3. Gemeenschap (Community)

The 53 official members are future residents and at the same time co-developers of the project. They participate in the planning and design of the building in collaboration with various stakeholders. The architectural design was carried out in a co-design process with Sophie Valla Architects. The governance model includes a board consisting of four people (chair, secretary, treasurer, and principal member) and several specialized committees for the fields of architecture, activities, communication, crowdlending, finances, subsidies, admission, coordination and coordination. Every member is expected to actively contribute to at least one committee with a rough guideline of four hours per week. Group decisions and updates are discussed during monthly general assemblies (Algemene Ledenvergadering (ALV)). The committee structures are inspired by sociocratic circle models with shared responsibility and inclusive dialogue. Each

future household holds one vote in decision-making processes. New members are selected through a personal application process. Prospective members express their motivation and values in a creative format, based on which the admission committee assesses the alignment in vision, values, and personal compatibility with the group (De Woonwolk 2025).

5.1.2 Interview participants

Of the six members of De Woonwolk that participated in this research, four were mid-term members, who joined the project in 2023 or 2024, one was a long-term member involved since the beginning in 2021, and one was a short-term member who joined in 2025. For an overview of the participants see Table 5. The age range of participants went from 25 to 70 years, with three being younger than 30 years, one between 30 and 60, and two older than 60. All interviews were anonymized, and all names are changed to pseudonyms. The gender distribution was evenly split between male and female. Household types were evenly divided between single-person households and larger households with partners or families. In these cases, interviewees sometimes spoke from a perspective that included other household members, but all represented the official cooperative member for their household[1]. Five interviewees have Dutch nationality, of whom two reported a non-European ethnic background; one participant is a non-Dutch European. Their roles within De Woonwolk varied: one interviewee served as board member, three held leading committee roles, and two were active members without current leadership positions. The group also represented a range of professional backgrounds, including a student, a hospitality professional, one working in the environmental field, one in a craft trade, and two in education and academia.

[1] In De Woonwolk only one person per household holds the official membership and right to vote for proposals

Table 5: Overview of interviewed members of Case 1 'De Woonwolk' (source: author)

Nr.	Pseudo-nym	Role	Type of member	Type of household	Age	Gender	Profes-sion	Ethnic background
1	*Nick*	board member	long-term	single apartment	<30	man	student	Dutch with non-European background)
5	*Helena*	leading committee role	mid-term	couple/ family apartment	<30	woman	hospita-lity	Dutch with non-European background)
6	*Ida*	regular member	mid-term	couple/ family apartment	<30	woman	environ-mental field	Dutch
7	*Martijn*	regular member	mid-term	couple/ family apartment	>60	man	crafts-manshi p	Dutch
8	*Therese*	leading committee role	mid-term	single apartment	>60	woman	educa-tion	Dutch
9	*Kris*	leading committee role	short-term	single apartment	30-60	man	acade-mia	European background

5.1.3 Social relationships

Building Social Relationships

Social relationships were mentioned throughout all interviews with members of *De Woonwolk*. The main part hereby referred to general relationships within the housing cooperative, with few specific mentions of friendships or partnerships. We can see a differentiation in line with the concepts of weak and strong ties by Granovetter (1973). All interviewees explained that they are still in the process of gradually getting to know each other and only one member joined while already knowing others in the cooperative. This contrasts the idea that people often rely on existing intermediary personal contacts as a kind of "social insurance" when deciding whether to trust in and get involved with new groups (Coleman 1988).

Overall, active *collaboration on the project* was described as central for building and strengthening relationships. Additionally, one member said "Relations, that is the basis

for processes and tasks." (*Martijn*, member interviews). That links to the conceptual model by Cortés Urra (2025) as it suggests an undirected[2] connection between the indicator of *social relationships* on the one hand and the element *collaboration on the project*, including processes and tasks, on the other. Most interviewees also highlighted that they perceive working in smaller groups, such as committees, as more impactful for the development and strengthening of relationships than large meetings. This might add onto the findings by Brysch (2023) who concludes that in the stage of 'developing together' smaller groups are often more efficient and viable in achieving their goals than larger ones. It suggests that the same mechanism might be true for relationship-building. In addition to *project collaboration*, informal social activities, like shared meals or drinks as well as activities around the committee meetings, created opportunities to strengthen ties and develop friendships. They appeared to be important for the majority of the Woonwolk interviewees but were not prioritized by everyone. Some participated only in social activities organized by the cooperative's 'activity committee', but others also self-organized for having drinks, partying together or shopping together in their free time. These findings confirm Cortés-Urra et al.'s (2024) model, which links *joint activities* to the strengthening of *social networks*.

Furthermore, it was highlighted that building strong ties is a slow process and not necessarily the aim when participating in the project. One member emphasized that he does not need close relationships with everyone in the cooperative if there is a base for respectful cooperation. Another member added that in his experience friendships are not always desirable when it comes to working together and might sometimes even hinder good collaboration:

> There are people in De Woonwolk that I love working with, but we're not super good friends. And there's also people that I became very good friends with, but they're not necessarily my number one working partner (*Nick*, member interviews).

The examples support the argument by Granovetter (1973) who states that weak ties often play a more important role for cooperation in larger group, while strong ties are not

[2] the connection works equally in both directions

always required or even desirable. According to him, strong ties gain importance for fostering local social cohesion in smaller groups, as closer connected people are more motivated to show solidarity and support each other. The findings of this research underscore this observation.

Influential Factors

Furthermore, the interviews suggest that whether an interaction takes place online or in person significantly shapes the quality of relationships. Half of the interviewees described online meetings as efficient for task-related work but insufficient for building personal relationships. In contrast, physical meetings were seen as essential for relationship-building. This reflects Granovetter's (1973) insight that social ties are often activated by *social interactions* during context-related meetings, which might not be given in an online context.

One member also emphasized the role of general *physical proximity* for social ties, stating: "Especially with me living out of Amsterdam, my relationship to the people was online and it was harder to build relationships" (*Kris*, member interviews). While this finding aligns with Cortés Urra et al. (2024) who acknowledge the role of *shared spaces* and *physical proximity* for fostering the social dimension of housing, the strong contrast members drew between online and offline meetings was unexpected. This points towards a challenge for contemporary cooperatives who try to balance efficient project work with future residents partly still living in different cities with the need for physical interactions as a base for interpersonal relationships.

Challenges and Conflicts

All interviewed members also reported interpersonal challenges within the cooperative. They were usually described as smaller-scale tensions with individual members or groups but some of them escalated into conflicts that persisted over a longer period of time which led to feelings of insecurity and frustration and a decreasing sense of belonging. This suggests that negative experiences around *social relationships* can weaken the common identify component of social cohesion (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017), while the reviewed literature mostly emphasized positive connections between the indicators *social relationships* and *sense of community*.

Some members described a period in which three aspiring members constantly challenged decisions already made, divided parts of the group and posed a "quite existential threat to *De Woonwolk*" (*Nick*, member interviews). Initially, these members were trusted with access to a large number of documents and responsibilities based on the assumption that they shared the values, norms and principles of the cooperative and that their behavior was led by positive intentions. Larsen (2013) refers to this as the belief of sharing a "moral community". However, the assumption proved misplaced which showed the vulnerability of a community based on trust as its only insurance. Coleman (1988) might be useful for interpreting this finding, as he emphasizes that a social insurance is often being enforced through intermediary personal contacts. In this case, the absence of such previous relationships might have contributed to the escalation of the conflict. The management of the conflict in summer of 2024 also demanded a lot of organizational and emotional time and energy. As *Therese* recalled:

> It was a lot of hassle, I had a lot of meetings, with a mediation that was last year in the summer, with two members. It was very complicated, it took a lot of time [...] (Therese, member interviews).

Two members even marked a clear rise and peak in the graph visualizing their perceived intensity of involvement during that time and referred to the high workload they took on for the conflict resolution (see Figure 6).

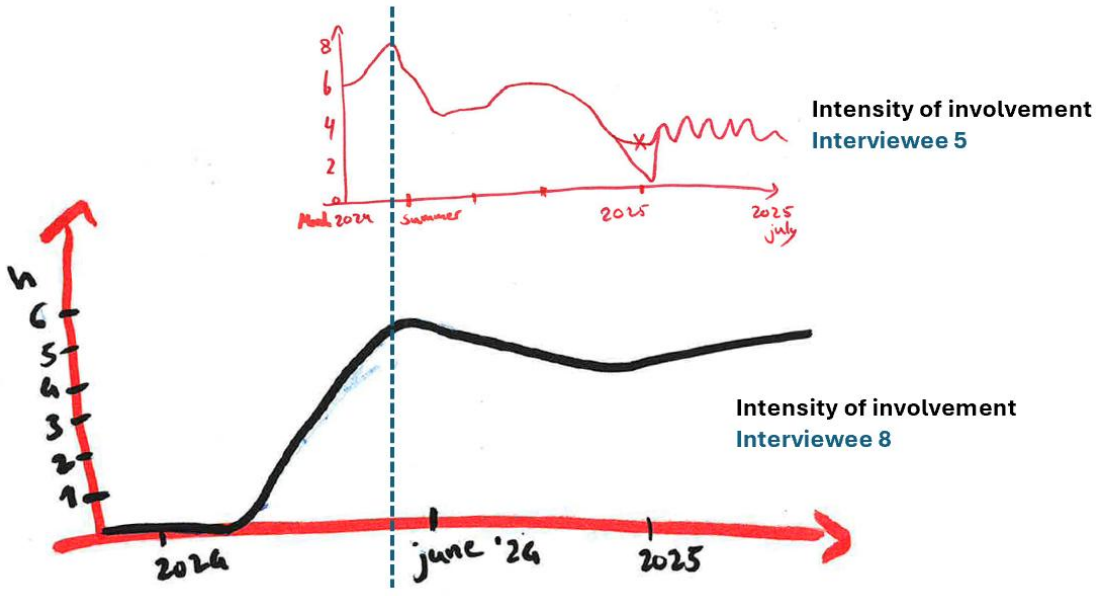

Figure 6: Excerpt from the timeline-drawing exercise of participants 'Helena' and 'Therese' both showing a peak of intensity during the conflict resolution in summer 2024 (source: author).

Interestingly, this suggests that the complexity of developing a housing cooperative cannot be explained solely by institutional and financial barriers as stated by Ahedo et al. (2023). Social conflicts and negative relationships between members seem to have the same, if not more, potential to extend timelines, drain resources, and worst-case threaten to fail a project.

5.1.4 *Social interactions*

Formation and starting conditions

Social interactions were not a major subject during the interviews. They were primarily mentioned when participants were prompted by the concept cards of the participatory concept mapping exercise or when reflecting on expectations for living together in future. This resonates with Cortés Urra et al. (2024) who categorize the indicator of *social interactions* under the use-phase of Collaborative Housing and not under the development-phase. However, when looking at the data again, several statements that were originally coded under *social relationships* also illustrate patterns of *social interactions*. This contradicts the differentiation of these two indicators by Cortés Urra et al. (2024) and aligns more with how e.g. Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) define the relational component of social cohesion.

Influencing factors

Social interactions in the current and previous stages of the project were perceived as occurring most often in the context of project meetings, particularly in-person meetings. According to the interviewees, lunch after a general member assembly (ALV) created an important opportunity for informal encounters and exchanges. Several participants noted that these meetings are also the main setting to get in touch with new members. Some interviewees additionally described *social interactions* with new members as being easier when less people are present. Interviewee *Helena* highlighted: “The last borrel [...] not a lot of people showed up, but then I we also had the time to talk to each other” (member interviews). These influencing factors reflect the earlier observations in the section on *social relationships* that in-person meetings and smaller groups are more effective both for collaboration (see (Brysch 2023)) and for fostering social interaction.

Future outlook

When asked about the image they have of living together in the cooperative in future, five out of the six *Woonwolk* participants expressed enthusiasm for frequent *social interactions* with other members in the communal spaces of the building. During the participatory concept mapping one member emphasized that having *shared spaces* will inevitably lead to *social interactions*: “I do feel like there's really a need for shared spaces to facilitate spontaneous social interactions. [...]” (*Helena*, member interviews). The outlook aligns with the framework of Cortés Urra et al. (2024), which emphasizes *shared spaces* and *joined activities* as defining features during the ‘use-phase’ of Collaborative Housing.

5.1.5 Trust

Formation and starting conditions

Trust was a recurring theme in all Woonwolk interviews. It was referred to in the forms of *interpersonal trust*, *trust in the community, trust in the project & process* and *trust by the community*. As social cohesion theory underlines that *trust* is essential for holding a group together (Chan et al. 2006; Dickes and Valentova 2013) it is unsurprising that it was one of the most frequently discussed topics in *De Woonwolk*. Throughout the interviews, the cooperative members consistently linked their perception of *trust* to experiences of *project collaboration*, both positive and negative ones. Several interviewees emphasized that trust did not primarily develop from friendships but rather from working together and seeing the organizational structure working out in practice. Four of the participants also shared that they entered the cooperative with a general attitude of trust towards other members. As *Martijn* explained: “I trust people until proven otherwise. Basically, I just assume that everybody can be trusted in this group [...]. And then you do find out if somebody's trustworthy or not.” (member interviews). This reflects what Chan et al. (2006) and Dickes and Valentova (2013) describe as the necessity of having a certain degree of i*nterpersonal trust* as a basis for collaboration.

Reliability and expectations

All interviewees expressed conflicting emotions about the reliability of other members when it comes to completing project-related tasks. Some members described that it sometimes comes to chaotic situations such as last-minute cancellations, while others

highlighted a culture of openness and support where everyone can admit not being able to finish tasks. As *Helena* explained:

> I feel like there's quite a lot of trust actually in [...] people doing the tasks that they need to do. And also, feeling free enough to publicly say: 'Hey, I didn't have enough time or not enough energy [...]. And I didn't finish this task. I'm sorry, could anybody else pick this up? I really, really think it's so important and nice that we created this environment (member interviews).

For half of the interviewees, previous project experiences also led to a more laid-back attitude towards reliability and finishing tasks. It was recognized that the non-professional structure of the cooperative has downsides, as responsibilities sometimes feel non-committal and are not followed through, but the flat hierarchy was generally appreciated. As *Kris* phrased it, dealing with unreliability is "just part of the process" (member interviews). This dual perspective might illustrate the tension between what Larsen (2013) calls trust based on sharing a "moral community" and the practical limitations of housing cooperatives defined as non-professional no-profit organizations where the control lies with (future) residents (Amsterdam 2020).

Influencing factors

Trust was also shaped by the way members were entrusted with responsibility. Receiving trust from others to handle important tasks or sensitive matters, such as managing the payment system, was described as affirming: "[...] at some point I took over from another member with the obligations and the management of the payment system. [...] that you get that trust by others is of course also nice" (*Therese*, member interviews). This resonates with Jenson (2010) and Chan et al. (2006) who emphasize that individuals need to feel that their presence and work in a group are valued. Interestingly, however, the reviewed literature does not explicitly acknowledge the aspect of receiving *trust* in form of responsibility as an essential part for this feeling of being valued. Instead it predominantly frames *interpersonal trust* as grounded it similar values, principles and interests (Larsen 2013). This suggests that *trust* within De Woonwolk is not only a prerequisite for *collaboration*, but that the connection between these two is undirected, as it is also actively reinforced through the delegation of project-related responsibility.

A board member described transparency, such as openly sharing all project documents, as a foundation for *trust* in De Woonwolk. In his experience most members value this transparency, yet the critical incident already described in section 5.1.3 showed how this trust could be misused and have serious consequences for the project. *Trust* in the project initially went down in response to the conflict that arose from this instance. However, the successful mediation and democratic resolution of the conflict later strengthened trust in the community and the democratic system behind it. According to *Nick*:

> [...] it gives a lot of trust when that system works [...]. So, I really learned from that, I can trust De Woonwolk, my community, because we have a functioning democracy [...]. And this, even though it was hard, it didn't manage to destroy the community (*Nick*, member interviews).

This dynamic shows that in cooperative housing trust often not only relies on a 'social insurance' through interpersonal ties and shared values (Coleman 1988; Larsen 2013) but that institutional mechanisms such as the democratic system (Amsterdam 2020) and conflict mediation practices play an important role, especially in repairing trust when it is broken.

While members felt comfortable sharing general personal updates or explaining when they could not contribute to tasks, most pointed out that deeply personal matters were not yet shared within the cooperative. Short- and mid-term members in particular described relying on friends outside the cooperative for such support: "You can always share how you are doing. [...] Or say that you don't have time. [...] But I don't really have such a strong bond of trust yet, so it's mainly about De Woonwolk" (*Therese*, member interviews). Some members expressed the intention to gradually build stronger personal relationships that allow trusting more and sharing personal matters within *De Woonwolk* over time. The gap between trust around project-related topics and personal trust suggests that during the development phase *social networks* outside the cooperative still play a stronger role for emotional support, consistent with Brysch's (2023) argument that the focus of 'developing together' primarily lies on collectively designing, constructing and managing a house while 'living together' has a stronger focus on more personal bonds with neighbors.

5.1.6 Sense of community

Context and starting conditions

Sense of community was described in many different aspects in the interviews, of which the highlights are here presented. All interviewed members stated 'living in a community' as one of their main motivations for joining De Woonwolk. In the interview coding the indicator *sense of community* was most frequently linked to the element *collaboration on the project*, often in combination with shared values. This resonates with Kearns and Forrest (2000) and Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) who define common identity as based in shared values and common goals and plans.

Formation

Several members enthusiastically described their positive first impressions of the group and an atmosphere described as non-hierarchical and welcoming, which was an essential base for them to get involved in the project. This corresponds with Jenson (2010) who stresses feelings of belonging and recognition as the foundation for collaborating. Building on this, all interviewees emphasized that developing the project together is a central driver for community formation. As one member put it:

> [...] this development stage is really important for the community building. Like the fact that we are creating this all together with our sweat and our tears now will maybe create the strongest connected generation of Woonwolkers ever (*Nick*, member interviews).

A long-term member pointed out that during the beginning stage of the cooperative, project-related *activities*, such as architectural design workshops, and the celebration of small successes were central to starting the community. This finding aligns with Cortés-Urra et al. (2024), who highlights and *joined activities* as one of the foundations for the social dimension of housing cooperatives. Informal *social activities* were perceived as supportive to balance out challenging parts of the process and sustain motivation. Interestingly, members pointed out that *fun activities* were often less prioritized than *collaboration* work, which suggests a weaker connection between this cooperative housing element and the indicator *sense of community*.

Influencing factors

Four main factors were seen as influencing the *sense of community*: care practices, personal contributions, shared experiences, and member turnovers. Care practices, such as bringing food to people feeling burned-out or unwell or offering help for moving houses were seen as essential for keeping the community together and avoiding people dropping out of the project. Such practices support the argument of internal solidarity (Ahedo et al. 2023; Sørvoll and Bengtsson 2018) as a characteristic of most Housing cooperatives. Personal contributions in form of time and energy, were often valued more than financial contributions: "One hand washes the other, we say in Dutch. I like that approach. [...] That not all the time people think in money, but in connection." (*Martijn*, member interviews). This suggests that the community in housing cooperatives is mainly built on a non-material basis. Intense shared experiences of working on the project, such as working together late before deadlines, were described as hard but socially important bonding moments. Some of the long- and mid-term members described how in those moments they enjoyed getting to know each other better on a very intimate level. This resonates with the idea that particularly in times of stress or crisis solidarity can function as a social glue, strengthen a *sense of community* and support physical and mental well-being (Housing Europe 2023). Member turnover and breaks were acknowledged as influencing community-building in *De Woonwolk*. Most interviewees saw this as a natural part of the life cycle of the project: "[...] almost all the people that have been there from the start by now have had a phase where they say, 'OK, I need a break for a few months'" (*Nick*, member interviews). But it also requires flexibility and a constant adaptation to new group constellations which can be challenging for feeling attached to and identifying with the larger group.

Future outlook

All interviewed members anticipated that once the cooperative is built, the focus will shift more from *project-related collaboration* to community building. They highlighted the need to rethink the current role of some committees to support member wellbeing and social life. This relates to the framework by Cortés Urra et al. (2024) that emphasizes the role of organizational structures to sustain the social dimension of housing in the 'use-phase'. At the same time, four participants expressed regret not to have invested

more time into community-building and -bonding early on, which shows that community-building requires constant and intentional effort.

5.2 Case 2: de Nieuwe Meent

This Chapter presents the findings obtained from the interviews with members of Case 2: ‘de Nieuwe Meent’. It again focuses on the relationships between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements, making it possible to compare the insights of both cases afterwards.

5.2.1 Case description

De Nieuwe Meent (dNM) is a housing cooperative located in Watergraafsmeer, Amsterdam-Oost. The cooperative was initiated in 2018 by a group of activists, architects, and community organizers, and selected through a tender of the municipality of Amsterdam (de Nieuwe Meent 2025). The construction started in June 2022, and the building was delivered by contractors in the beginning of 2025. Some members have already begun moving in in spring 2025 while at the time of this research most of the building is still in stage of self-build construction inside the housing units. The official move-in is planned for August 2025. The housing cooperative consists of 40 social rental units, of which 15 are independent apartments and 25 are structured in 5 co-living groups, each occupying one floor. The building includes shared facilities such as a laundry room, a communal living room, an event space, a roof terrace and an inner courtyard. The design was realized by the future residents themselves in close cooperation with the architects of Time to Access and Roel van der Zeeuw Architects. It also features semi-public spaces that will be accessible to the wider neighborhood. The housing cooperative defined the following four core values:

1. Commoning
2. Care
3. Diversity
4. Sustainability (Cooplink (2021), de Nieuwe Meent (2025))

De Nieuwe Meent operates through a governance model with a general member assembly called ‘Meentvergadering’, a ‘Meentraad’ consisting of tenants and legal members, a board called ‘Meentbestuur’ and several self-organizing committees. It also draws on an advisory committee with external advisors. The future residents are

expected to participate in one or more committees or positions and contribute to various aspects of the cooperative, from legal matters to community events. Prospective members undergo a selection process in which applicants submit a motivation and the alignment with the values of the cooperative is checked. In line with the core values, a strong emphasis lies on diversity in terms of age, background, gender, orientation and other aspects (de Nieuwe Meent 2025).

5.2.2 Participants

Of the four interviewed members of de Nieuwe Meent, two were long-term members, involved since the early stages of the project (2018-2020), one was a mid-term member who joined between 2020 and 2023, and one was a short-term member who joined after 2023 (see Table 6). Participants ranged in age from 29 to 48 years, with two younger than 30 and two between 30 and 60. The gender distribution was evenly split between male and female. All participants will move into one of the five ‘woongroepen’ (communal living groups) within de Nieuwe Meent. Two participants have active partners in the project: in one case, the partner has been actively involved in the development process but will continue living outside of the cooperative building; in the other, the partner will live in one of the studio apartments in the same building. Two interviewees have Dutch nationality, of which one with a non-European ethnic background, and two have a non-European background. Their roles within the cooperative varied: two participants are or have been board members, two currently hold leading committee roles, and one is an active member without a leadership position. The interviewees professional backgrounds include education and academia, architecture, and two people in social and public services. Again, all interviews were anonymized, and all names were changed to pseudonyms.

Table 6: Overview of interview participants of Case 2 'de Nieuwe Meent' (source: author).

Nr.	Pseudo-nym	Role	Type of member	Type of household	Age	Gender	Profes-sion	Ethnic background
2	Ron	leading committee role	mid-term	woongroep, partner living in dNM apartment	30-60	man	acade-mia	non-European background
3	Lisa	board member	long-term	woongroep	<30	woman	public work	Dutch
4	Lars	regular member	short-term	woongroep	<30	man	social work	Dutch with non-European background)
10	Marion	leading committee role	long-term	woongroep, active partner living outside dNM	30-60	woman	architec ture	non-European background

5.2.3 Social relationships

Context and starting conditions

Similar to case 1, *social relationships* emerged in the forms of strong ties (friendships and partnerships) and weak ties (more general relationships) during the interviews (Granovetter 1973). Two of the interviewed members entered the project together with close friends or partners and two without any pre-existing relationships. For non-Dutch members, the participation was also a way to build *social relationships* in a new cultural context:

> For me, it was very important to create this sort of family in the Netherlands, which I don't have. [...] coming from the Global South, where cultures were way more collectivized, [...] this feels very much like home (*Ron*, member interviews).

Entering the housing cooperative was thus often motivated by the wish to meet new people, build close, long-term relationships and integrate into society. Others acknowledged that de Nieuwe Meent might have had a very different process than other Collaborative Housing projects because it was built by people with very diverse backgrounds, not coming from the same “artistic bubble”. Social diversity was not

perceived as a threat but a reality and chance, anchored in the core values of the cooperative (European Committee for Social Cohesion 2004).

Formation of relationships

Social relationships in *de Nieuwe Meent* developed most strongly during informal *interactions* around official project meetings, such as during potluck lunches around 'Meentvergadering' (general member assembly). Creative and physical tasks were mentioned as particularly effective in connecting people: "Every time we do something a bit embodiment, a bit physical, [...] you find out what beautiful people you're busy with" (*Lars*, member interviews). This supports findings from Case 1 that informal, unstructured *interactions* are essential for building stronger ties in Housing cooperatives. Being part of the same 'woongroep' (future living group of five people) also significantly accelerated the strengthening of relationships. Three members highlighted that collective interieur design sessions and get-to-know dinners created friendships before moving in. Similar to findings in *De Woonwolk*, this highlights how smaller organizational subgroups within housing cooperatives are both more efficient (Brysch 2023) but also foster stronger ties. The members' engagement and motivation for building strong relationships inside the cooperative differed per interviewee. Some described being "very full with social activities" and not having "a lot of capacity for people" (*Marion*, member interviews). This indicates that the strength of *social relationships* between cooperative members is not only dependent on *collaboration on the project* or '*joint activities*' (Cortés Urra et al. 2024) but also on members' existing *social networks* outside of the project and capacities for social interaction.

Influencing factors

Several factors influenced the pace, type and depth of relationship-building in *de Nieuwe Meent*. Covid-19 was described as a major event, as online meetings slowed the integration of new members and hindered informal initial connections. Members leaving during Covid-19 times led to a very high workload and intensity but at the same time the reduced group size allowed more intense contact among those who remained which led to deeper relationships and friendships among long-term members: "People like [...] my fellow board members for the very hectic times, I also feel a very close relationship to them. Because we've been through a lot together" (*Lisa*, member interviews). This relates

to what Housing Europe (2023) describes as a 'social glue' arising from solidarity in times of crisis and suggests that this dynamic is often concentrated within a core group that leads the development process as described by Brysch (2023).

Another recurring factor was the workload imbalance. An uneven distribution of workload was sometimes experienced as creating distance between members. Frustration grew when tasks were unevenly distributed, leaving some board members feeling burned-out and abandoned with a lot of work: "They also have [...] resentment towards having been doing so much work" (*Ron*, member interviews). This suggests that while solidarity in stressful situations can bond people in a core group, this dynamic also risks exhausting members and leave feelings of frustration and resentment that hinder relationship-building with less involved members. This can be better understand drawing on Brysch (2023) who argues that participation of future residents in the development stage is often unevenly distributed in Collaborative Housing. However, its potential negative effect on interpersonal relationships does not seem addressed in the reviewed current literature, which tends to highlight positive aspects.

Future outlook

Several members emphasized the need to balance *project-related collaboration* with more informal *activities* in future. They shared a desire to "heal" the effects of stressful phases with high workload by investing more in fun non-work-related activities, such as shared meals or casual personal conversations. At the same time, some members expressed hope that moving in together will naturally strengthen *social relationships* between members, especially within the 'woongroepen'. This aligns with literature on social cohesion, which highlights that personal relationships and bonds beyond functional collaboration structures are crucial (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017). It also suggests that moving in together marks a transition point after which spontaneous interactions and fun activities become more central to relationship building. This could relate to the framework by Cortés Urra et al. (2024) who locate *joint activities* solely in the use-phase of Collaborative Housing, however the findings show that they are already present in the development phase. Members who recently moved into the building reported that relationship-building felt more natural and spontaneous in everyday life than before.

Several interviewees expressed excitement about experiencing the diversity of the community in daily life and framed it as an opportunity to connect across different age groups and lifestyles: “I'm super excited to start living here. […] coming from such diverse backgrounds, you can learn from each and every one” (*Lars*, member interviews). This resonates with authors that see diversity not only as a challenge but also as a resource to strengthen social cohesion in a group (Spoonley et al. 2005).

5.2.4 *Social interactions*

Context and starting conditions

Social interactions were mentioned little but somewhat more frequently than in *De Woonwolk*. This may be explained by the fact that a few members had already moved into the building at the time of the interviews. Again, significant overlaps with the indicator *social relationships* existed.

Formation and influencing factors

Physical proximity emerged as a main driver for *social interaction*. Members that already live in the building reported that daily encounters fundamentally changed the group dynamic: “Now I definitely have way more contact with people that are living in the building. […] When we're together, it's a very different dynamic, a very different story” (*Ron*, member interviews). *Shared spaces* that are essential in their everyday life, like the one temporary kitchen container, were described as essential places for social interaction. Even for members not yet living in the building, visits to the construction site were moments of spontaneous *interaction*. Furthermore, when *interactions* happened mainly online, physical distance created challenges. As also seen in De Woonwolk, digital meetings thus made it harder to build relationships. This underlines how *physical proximity* and *shared spaces* play an essential role for the social dimension of housing (Cortés Urra et al. 2024).

Future outlook

Looking ahead, the interviewees anticipated both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, all expected a significant increase in spontaneous encounters and casual conversations after moving in, which they expect to lead to more *joint activities*: “Now it barely happens. But I feel like […] if you're living together, you're going to run into each other a lot” (*Lisa*, member interviews). This expectation reflects the assumption of

Cortés Urra et al. (2024) that *social interactions* lead to *joined activities*. On the other hand, some members expressed concern that spontaneous *interactions* in the building could sometimes feel intrusive or overwhelming: “I fear that it might become a bit overcrowded sometimes. That when I feel asocial, that I will run into people [...]“ (*Lars*, member interviews). This finding might relate back to the question of social capacity in the previous section, that adds another dimension to Cortés Urra et al.’s (2024) framework.

5.2.5 Trust

Context and starting conditions

The topic of *trust* was referred to mostly in terms of i*nterpersonal trust* in *de Nieuwe Meent*. It was mentioned less frequently than in De Woonwolk, and when asked directly, most members expressed hesitation, especially when asked if they trust other members of the cooperative to follow through on promises and commitments. They explained this with previous experiences of unreliability, which sometimes also had negative consequences for the projects: “we have had some instances of people not showing up, or not even signing up” (*Lars*, member interviews). Instead, members tended to rely on a smaller circle of members they considered reliable. Similar to findings in *De Woonwolk*, this suggests that *interpersonal trust* in the development phase of a cooperative is fragile and highly influenced by previous challenges and conflict.

Formation and influencing factors

Trust appeared to be fostered mainly through *collaboration on the project* but also through informal moments, *shared values* and open communication. Some interviewees highlighted that *trust* and *collaboration* are reinforcing each other. When members did do the work they promised, trust grew but *trust* itself also motivated people to fulfill commitments in the first place. This undirected connection mirrors Cortés-Urra et al.’s (2024) framework. In addition, informal, playful *interactions* were described as helping to build *trust*: “I think we could play more. [...] Just those informal moments. I think those really create new memories and trust between people” (*Lars*, member interviews), suggesting that next to project-related contacts, trust also develops through positive shared experiences and the creation of collective memories. This aligns with Sørvoll and

Bengtsson (2018) who argue that organized interactions, such as rituals contribute to social cohesion.

Some members emphasized the importance of aligning on the cooperative's core values, stating that they are lately "missing some discussions about it" (*Marion*, member interviews). This suggests that explicitly revisiting these core values strengthens *trust*, which supports Kearns and Forrest's (2000) argument that *shared values* provide an essential base for social cohesion in a community. All interviewees agreed that sensitive and open communication about personal situations and capacities reduced resentment and negative feelings and led to more *trust*. When members explained their limited capacities, e.g. due to health, family, or precarious situations frustration often turned into understanding. This indicates that *trust* is highly connected with communication about and the acceptance of different capacities, which can be understand through structural inequalities described by Crenshaw (1989).

Trust in de Nieuwe Meent was particularly fragile during conflicts around diversity, leaving some members with long-lasting feelings of insecurity around belonging and acceptance:

> We had a lot of questions around [...] diversity, mostly focused on questions of color, and it trickled down to questions around background. [...] that was a moment where a lot of things were uncertain, and a lot of things were behind the scenes. [...] And until now, I do feel this question of trust. I feel I'm very sensitive to every remark for how I'm accepted or not accepted (Marion, member interviews).

This suggests that *trust* is also linked to sensitive identity-related dynamics. It underlines Bresson & Labit's (2020) point that social differences can strain cohesion in groups because of the absence of 'bonding social capital' (Cheong et al. 2007).

The members anticipated that *interpersonal trust* would grow once everyone lives together as being neighbors increases accountability and thus reliability. As *Lisa* said: "you can't disappear anymore" (member interviews). This underscores the expectation that *physical proximity* interrelates with *trust* (Cortés Urra et al. 2024).

5.2.6 Sense of community

Context and starting conditions

The interviewees described *sense of community* in *de Nieuwe Meent* in multiple ways. While most interviewees acknowledged it being present, they also hesitated to say that it extends across the entire cooperative. Some members highlighted that despite the lack of homogeneity, they perceive a *sense of community* but in a "messy, funny way" (*Marion*, member interviews). Others pointed out the existence of subgroups with a shared identity such as "the queer living group" (*Lisa*, member interviews). This resonates with the idea of strong-tie-clusters by Granovetter (1973) which according to him foster stronger local social cohesion of smaller groups.

Formation

Both long-term members agreed that a *sense of community* initially formed around *project work* rather than interpersonal *relationships*, which only developed later. Over time, project work with shared stressful situations and problem-solving fostered community-building: "because we've been through so much, because the project has been such stress, I think we also just bonded out of that" (*Ron*, member interviews). Members described both closeness and exhaustion from these experiences and acknowledged that that with changing member constellations, feeling a *sense of community* sometimes took up to two years. Similar to findings in De Woonwolk, the recognition and appreciation of individual skills and way of working during project-work played an important role in the feeling of belonging. Additionally, fun activities, shared meals, and regular social events were consistently mentioned as important for community-building and bonding. This confirms the framework by Cortés Urra et al. (2024) with Collaborative Housing building on a mix of interactions around *project collaboration* and *joint activities*.

Influencing factors

The background of the interviewed members strongly shaped how they experienced and valued community. Some that grew up in more collectivist cultures, emphasized community as a central part of their identity: "For me, community is super important [...] Because I come from the Global South, because I come from a big family, because I come from a culture that finds this very, very important" (*Ron*, member interviews).

Contrary, members with negative past experiences in community-oriented settings found the idea of community sometimes intimidating and challenging. This shows how prior experiences, and socialization can strengthen but also hinder commitment to community. It supports Crenshaw's (1989) argument that intersectional backgrounds deeply influence the experience of group dynamics and priorities. All interviewees said that *values* were central to the *sense of community* but could also create friction. 'Diversity' and 'care', in particular, generated tensions, as they could be interpreted and applied differently and must constantly be negotiated and balanced (Spoonley et al. 2005). Some interviewees also reflected critically on their own practices and admitted that urgent project tasks, such as finance or legal matter often took priority over community-building, creating a "negative spiral". This suggest that members often prioritize institutional and financial challenges over difficult social and community dynamics and like Ahedo et al. (2023) perceive them the most crucial factors to potentially make the project fail.

Future outlook

Several members expressed optimism about future communal life, especially around everyday practices like shared meals, birthday celebrations, and raising children together. Those already living in the building reported strong bonds with other members. This underlines the role of *physical proximity* and highlights how a *sense of community* might not only be strengthened through *project collaboration* but also through daily *interactions* and common rituals (Sørvoll and Bengtsson 2018).

5.3 Conclusion on relationships between cooperative housing elements and the social dimension of housing

This section compares and concludes main findings of case 1 and 2 to answer **SRQ 3 - What relationships do members of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam experience between cooperative housing elements and the social dimension of housing during the development process?** The relationships found, here referred to as 'connections' to avoid confusion with the social dimension indicator, were compared across the two cases, shortly concluded per indicator and visualized in a network map based on the conceptual framework of this research (see Figure 7).

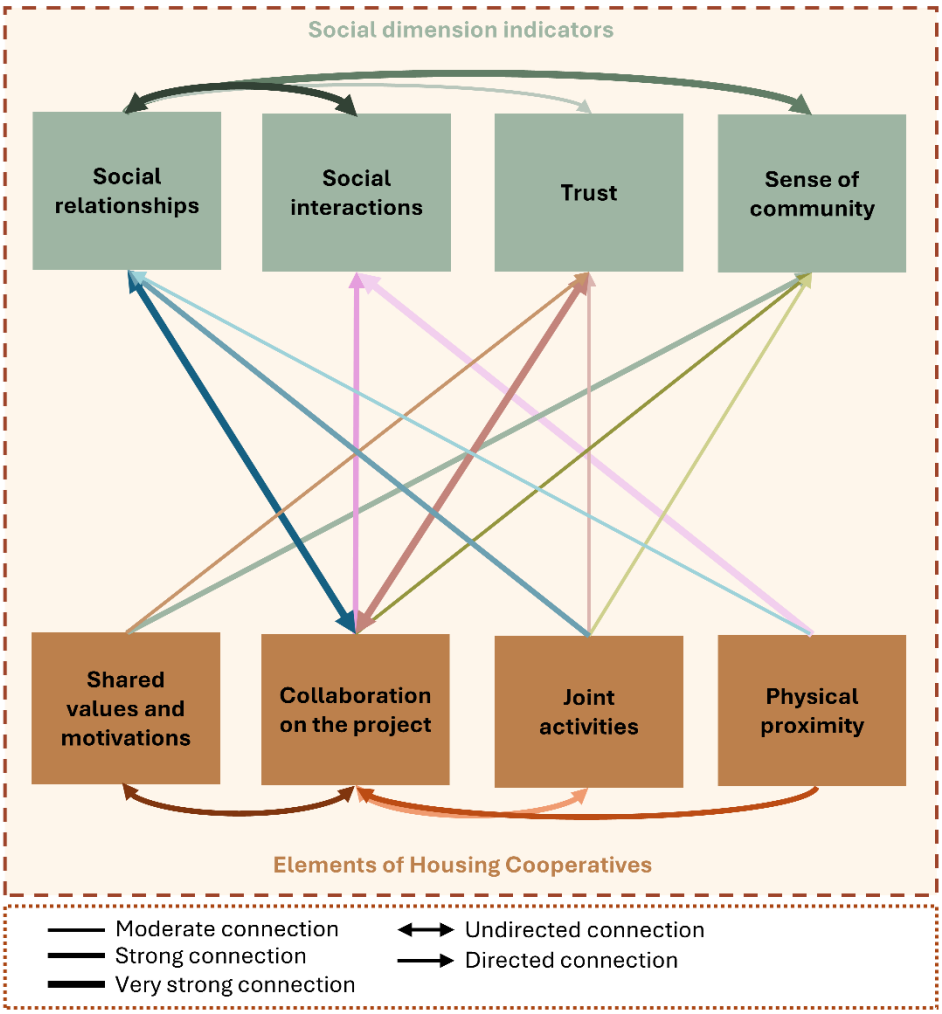

Figure 7: Network map showing the connections between the elements of housing cooperatives and the social dimension indicators (source: author)

Across both *De Woonwolk* and *de Nieuwe Meent*, the interviewed members experienced the social dimension of housing deeply interconnected with all the cooperative housing elements (indicator-element connections). Additionally, connections were found not only between several social dimension indicators (indicator-indicator) but also between cooperative housing elements (element-element). The connections are categorized as 'moderate' = mentioned by 4 or more interviewees or emphasized strongly by 2 or more; 'strong' = mentioned by 6 or more interviewees or emphasized strongly by 4 or more; and 'very strong' = mentioned by 8 or more interviewees or emphasized strongly by 6 or more.

5.3.1 Social relationships

In both cases *social relationships* were found to be very strongly related to *collaboration on the project* in form of an undirected connection. In line with findings by Granovetter (1973), particularly weak ties were seen as the basis for tasks and processes while on the other hand meetings around project work are the main facilitator for the formation and strengthening of ties. At the same time, strong ties such as friendships were perceived as less relevant and sometimes even hindering collaboration.

Joint activities, both organized ("project-related") and informal ("fun"), were found to strongly strengthen *social relationships* across both cases. However, even though most members emphasized their importance, it was acknowledged that in the development stage *collaboration on the project* was often prioritized over *joint activities*. Smaller organizational subgroups within the cooperatives, such as workgroups, committees or living groups, are generally seen as more efficient and viable in strengthening relationships than larger groups (see Brysch, 2023). Additionally, a strong contrast for the formation of *social relationships* was found in terms of *physical proximity* when comparing online and offline meetings: while digital meetings work well for efficient project work, they are perceived as significantly hindering the development of both weak and strong ties.

5.3.2 *Social interactions*

Spontaneous *social interactions* of both housing cooperatives were limited and strongly overlapped with formation of *social relationships*. This suggests that the differentiation of the two indicators in the framework by Cortés-Urra et al. (2024) does not apply in the same way to Dutch housing cooperatives in the development stage, but that in this stage

social relationships encompass *social interactions* similar to the relational component of social cohesion (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017). However, the *interactions* described were mostly tied to project work as they were experienced around different types of *collaboration* meetings.

5.3.3 Trust

Trust emerged as a fragile and complex topic. It was seen as a prerequisite for *project collaboration* but at the same time members experienced that its presence and formation was highly dependent on the perceived reliability of other members in the cooperative. Challenges and crises, often related to *social relationships*, were experienced as testing *trust* within the group. The findings show that there is tension between what Larsen (2013) calls *trust* based on sharing a "moral community" and the practical limitations of housing cooperatives defined as non-professional organization. Furthermore, informal, playful *activities* helped building trust in both cases, as they facilitated positive shared experiences and rituals (Sørvoll and Bengtsson 2018). Members of *de Nieuwe Meent* additionally perceived a stronger *trust* in the community when they are sure of aligning on the cooperative's core *values*.

5.3.4 Sense of community

A *sense of community* was perceived in both cases but in different manifestations. *De Nieuwe Meent* members experienced more local social cohesion in smaller groups of strong-tie-clusters (Granovetter 1973) while most *De Woonwolk* members experienced a feeling of belonging and a shared identity with the larger group. However, in both cases, *shared values* and the *motivation* to live in a community are key elements for a perceived *sense of community*. At the same time, according to members of *de Nieuwe Meent* the practical implications of *shared values* could also create friction in the group. Next to this, *fun activities*, such as shared meals and regular social events were important rituals for community-building and bonding. Additionally, sharing stressful situations around *project collaboration* brought out solidarity which functioned as a 'social glue' (Housing Europe 2023). In other cases, negative experiences in *social relationships* with individual members could weaken the *sense of community* as a whole. Here, the recognition and appreciation of one's work or skills played an important role in strengthening the feeling of belonging. At the same time, changing member constellations and the integration of

new members were perceived as a strain for community building as they made it harder to feel attached to and identify with the larger group.

5.3.5 Outlook to the use-phase

As this research focused on cases and experiences during the development stage, only limited conclusions can be drawn about the use-phase. The outlook presented here is largely based on members' expectations at the time of the study. According to these, findings of both cases suggest that many dynamics identified during the development phase are likely to persist after moving in, although some of them are expected to gain importance, with living potentially marking a transition point of the social dimension. The key changes anticipated are highlighted in Figure 8. Participants in both cases expected *physical proximity* and *shared spaces* to become more central during the use-phase. These were seen as opportunities for strengthening *social relationships* with the future neighbors, increasing accountability and *interpersonal trust*. At *de Nieuwe Meent*, where some members had already moved in, a stronger *sense of community* was reported. Underscoring findings of Cortés Urra et al. (2024) living together was also expected to strongly increase spontaneous *social interactions*, generally viewed as positive, though in some cases also perceived as potentially intrusive. Such *interactions* were foreseen to lead naturally to more *joint activities* and to further reinforce a *sense of community* in the group. The general anticipated increase in activities, relationship- and community-building could suggest that members involved in the development stage are also motivated to continue investing time and resources in maintaining both the building and the community once the use-phase begins.

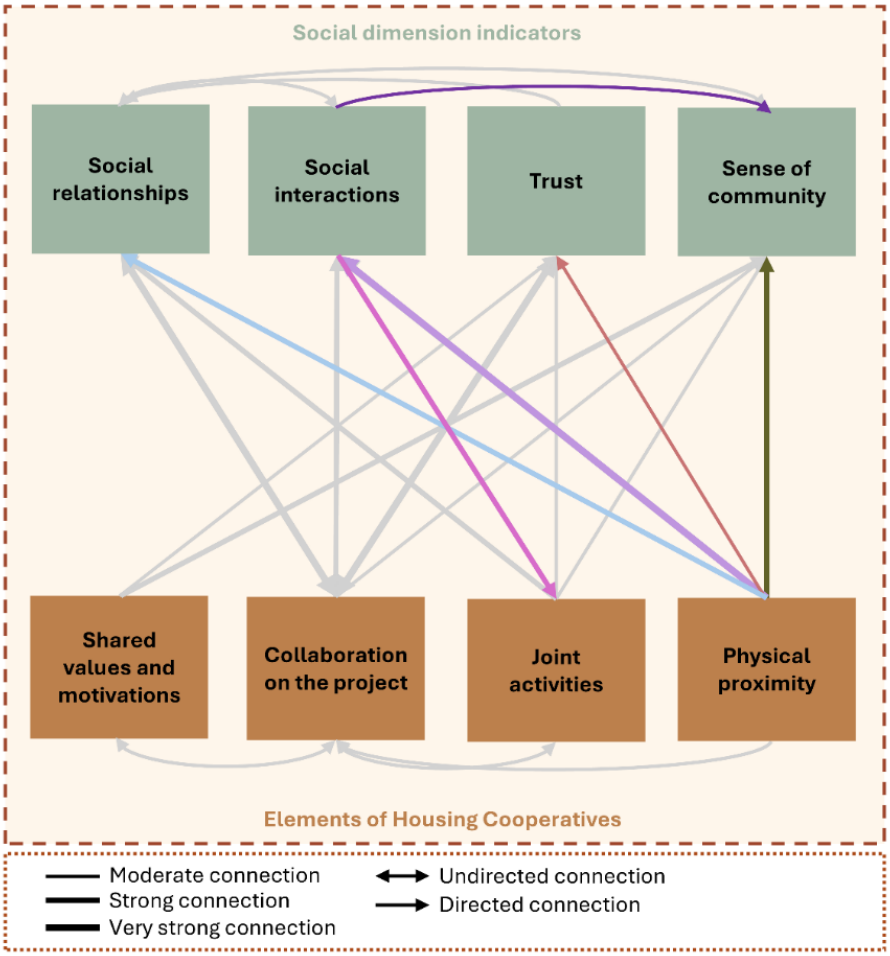

Figure 8: Anticipated changes regarding indicator and element connections during the use-phase of Housing cooperatives (source: author).

6 FINDINGS ON THE ROLE OF TIMING AND INTENSITY OF INVOLVEMENT

Next to the general experiences of the social dimension of housing by Housing Cooperative members, this thesis explores how the timing, length and intensity of each members involvement influences their experience. It aims to answer **SRQ 4 – 'How are members' experiences shaped by the timing and intensity of involvement?'** Timing was included in the research design as many members only join housing cooperatives at a later stage while others belong to a core group of initiators of the project that are involved for many years (Brysch 2023). Similarly, intensity was included because members in housing cooperatives contribute through volunteering, which varies in hours and responsibility and can impact their experiences (CHF Canada 2010; Shantz et al. 2014).

Unlike the previous Chapter where findings are presented per case and compared afterwards, this section is organized by three different 'member types' across both cases:

- *Long-term members,* who joined the cooperative during the first 2 years of its development;
- *Mid-term members,* that got involved between year 2 and 5; and
- *Short-term members,* that joined after year 5 of the development process.

This was chosen because the subgroups of long-, mid-, and short-term members were small within each cooperative, so that it made little sense to treat them separately. Instead, combining insights across both cases allows for a better overall understanding of how timing and intensity of involvement shape members' experiences.

Members that reflect each of the above type were interviewed in both cases. They were then asked to recall the year and project stage of their first contact with the Housing Cooperative and their experiences of getting involved. Additionally, all participants marked important events and phases in the timeline of their project. Each drew a graph showing the perceived intensity of their involvement in hours per week over time,

highlighting the factors or reasons for moments of increase of decline. The findings per member type are described below.

6.1 Long-term members

Across both cases *long-term members* were more likely to hold board roles in the cooperative, which at the same time co-occurred with a general higher intensity of involvement (see Figure 9).

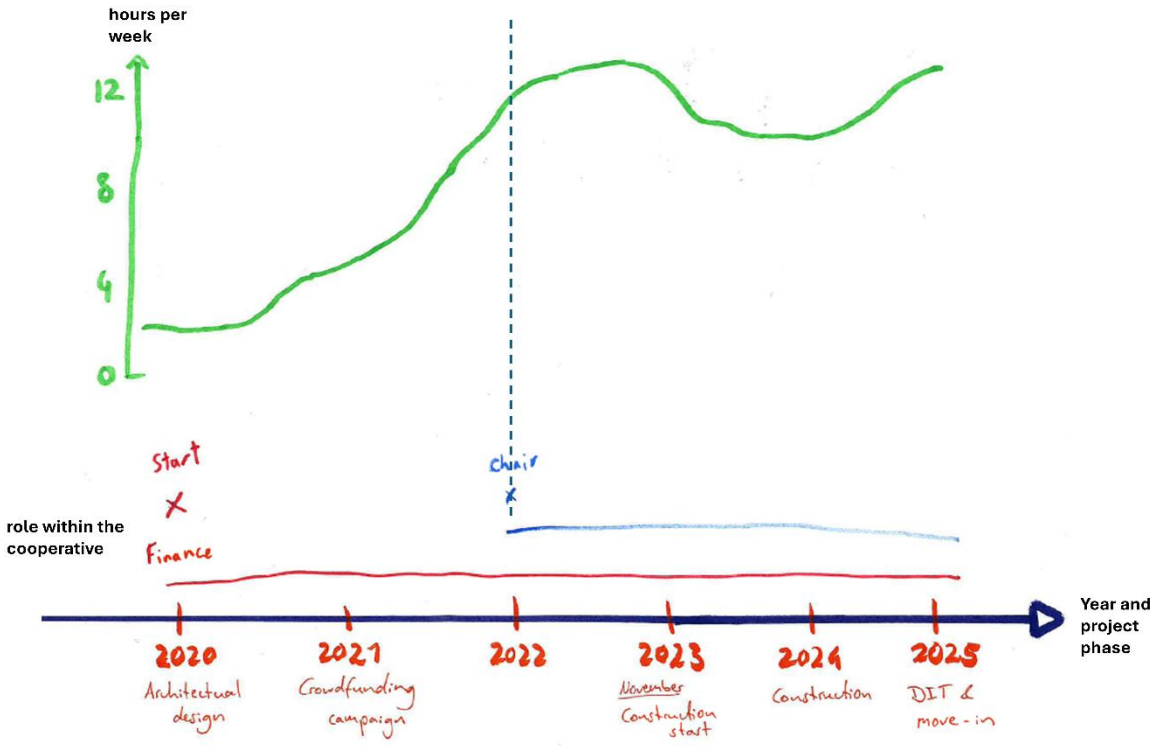

Figure 9: Long-term members often experienced an increase in intensity of involvement once they took on a board role (source: author, timeline drawing exercise with member interviewee 'Lisa')

Their tasks included collaboration with external stakeholders such as banks, contractors, and financial advisors as well as participation in frequent formal meetings and negotiations. These responsibilities required high effort, particularly during periods of project crisis, reflecting main challenges of housing cooperatives identified in literature (Ahedo et al. 2023). Two out of three long-term members described phases of involvement so intense that they resembled an unpaid full- or part-time job (see Figure 10).

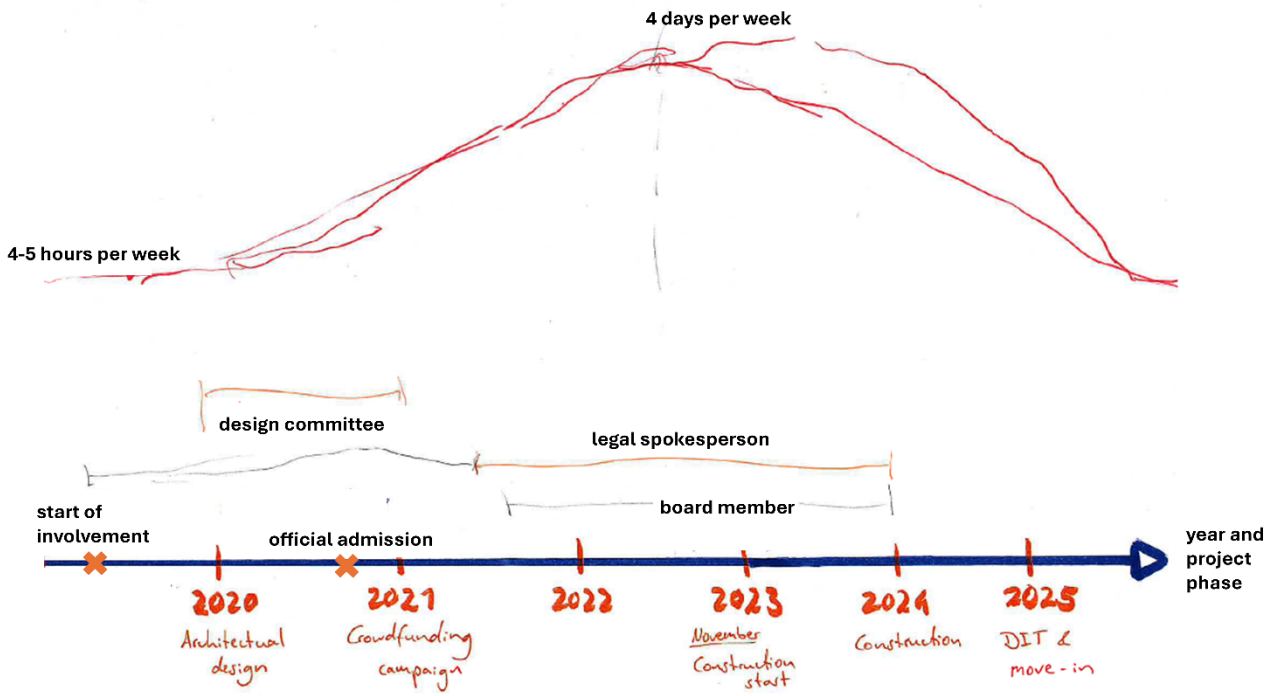

Figure 10: For some board members the intensity of involvement went up to 4 days a week as an unpaid part-time job (source: author, timeline drawing exercise with member interviewee 'Marion')

This occasionally led to personal financial struggles and high stress levels. All interviewed long-term members reported symptoms of burnout, frustration, and exhaustion, requiring them to step down from their responsibilities or take temporary breaks. These findings align with volunteering research, which highlights that high-intensity, long-term volunteer engagement can have negative emotional consequences (Morse et al. 2022). It highlights that members who are involved since the early stages of the project are often more exposed to risks of stress and overwork, such as emotional and financial costs which might lead them to withdraw. This relates to discussions around personal capacity, where full participation in projects is restricted to those who have capacity (Bond 2021; Crenshaw 1989). But it also suggests that people who have the privilege of capacity in the first place, tend to devote a high amount and long period of time to their role (Shantz et al. 2014) which can lead to them overstepping their personal boundaries in the course of the project.

In terms of the social dimension long-term members reported a higher number of strong *social relationships* and friendships, often developed through shared challenges and experiences of solidarity (Housing Europe 2023). At the same time, they also invested less in relationships with new members and focused more on organizational tasks than

on personal interactions and developing *sense of community*. This suggests that longer time and higher intensity of involvement do not automatically strengthen experiences of the social dimension, but they may shift the engagement toward project-focused tasks. It extends prior volunteering that states relationship between the intensity and frequency of volunteering and social cohesion as unclear (Abrahams et al. 2023).

6.2 Mid-term members

Mid-term members often held leading committee roles in their Housing cooperatives. They reported a moderate to high intensity of involvement, that often increased when taking on such a role (see Figure 11).

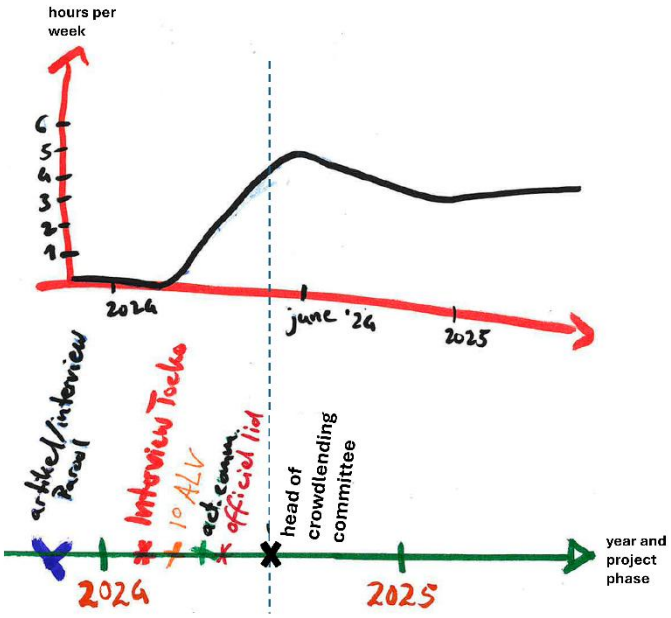

Figure 11: Most mid-term members reported an increase in intensity of involvement when they took on a leading committee role (source: author, timeline drawing exercise with member interviewee 'Therese')

Mid-term members' engagement was strongly focused on relationship- and community-building. All of them described a *sense of community* as a central *value and motivation* to join the housing cooperative. Compared to the other two member types this suggests that mid-term members show the strongest identification and emotional investment in community-building in the development stage. At the same time, many expressed hesitation and nuances around the topic of *trust*. *Mid-term members* were more likely than *short-term members* to have shared personal struggles and unreliable behavior from other members. Particularly in *De Woonwolk*, several mid-term members

experienced a major conflict with aspiring members in the beginning phase of their involvement, which was perceived as influential for an increasing intensity of involvement but also for the strengthening of some *social relationships* and *trust* through a shared experience (Shantz et al. 2014). In *de Nieuwe Meent*, the timespan of *mid-term members* overlaps with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, which hindered relationship-building. This suggests that members that get involved between year 2 and 5 of the development stage of housing cooperatives are likely to experience challenges during the beginning time of involvement which influences their experiences of the social dimension in the long-term.

6.3 Short-term members

Short-term members in both housing cooperatives perceived themselves to be in the stage of getting to know people and organizational structures. Across both cases, these members typically held general membership roles rather than formal committee or board positions, resulting in a lower intensity of involvement, with few exceptions of *short-term members* holding leading committee roles. Their engagement often relied on small-group collaboration, such as participating in committee tasks or project-related activities, which provided opportunities to build weak ties that may later strengthen (Granovetter 1973). This suggests that *social relationships* and *sense of community* develop gradually for members, often taking a longer time to establish more stable social connections. In terms of *trust*, short-term members entered the cooperative with a baseline level of confidence in the project and its members. They reported few instances of conflict, but some recalled initial feelings of insecurity around finding their place within the community. In de Nieuwe Meent, *short-term members* showed higher curiosity for the understanding of shared or differing *values* and the personal situation of other members, compared to other member types. This suggests a high openness for *social relationships*.

6.4 Conclusion on the timing and intensity of involvement

Taken together, the findings show that *long-, mid-* and *short-term members* experienced the social dimension of housing in significantly different ways. While longer involvement

might be expected to foster more *social relationships* and a stronger *sense of community*, this was not always the case. *Long-term members* were often involved with a high intensity, more prone to frustration, burnout, and sometimes distancing from *relationships*, particularly with new members. *Mid-term members* showed a middle to high intensity of involvement as well as the strongest identification and emotional investment in relationship- and community-building. *Short-term members*, in contrast, were still in the early phase of relationship-building and often involved with lower intensity, however open to exploring aspects of the social dimension. These dynamics highlight that length and intensity often occur together and are closely related to social outcomes in Housing cooperatives, but they also depend on the interplay of roles, tasks, workload, and support structures. This influence adds an important layer to the connections outlined in Chapter 5.3 (see Figure 12).

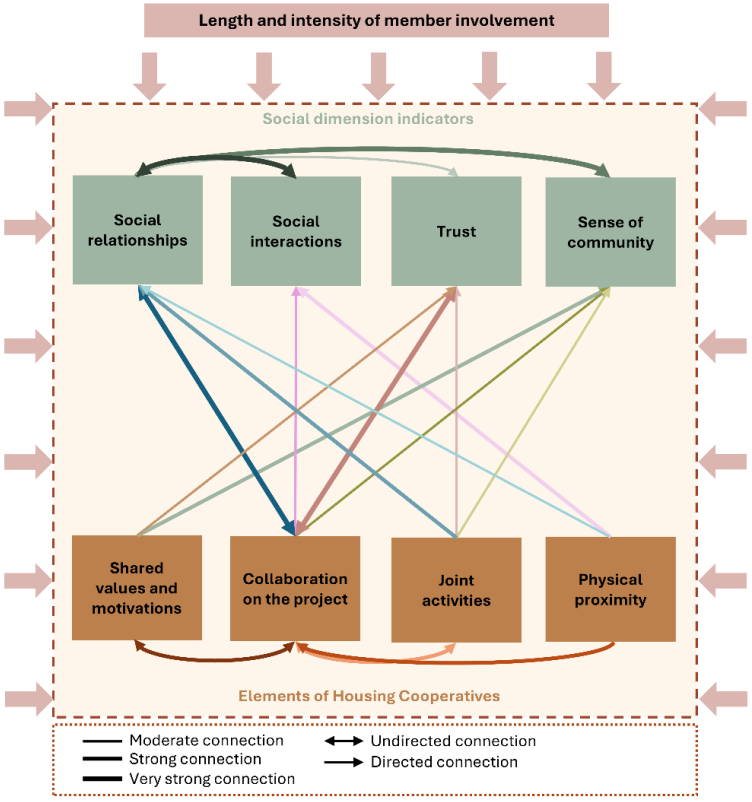

Figure 12: The length and intensity of member involvement have a significant influence on the connections of the framework (source: author)

6.5 Cross-cutting themes influencing the social dimension

While this chapter primarily addressed SRQ 4 by examining how the timing and intensity of member involvement shape experiences of the social dimension, the interviews also revealed several themes that extend beyond these two factors. These dynamics

influence several indicators of the social dimension at once, making them essential for a fuller understanding of social dynamics in housing cooperatives in the development stage. They do not directly answer SRQ 4 but can be understood as complementing the analysis. The most prominent themes, organized from a micro level of daily life to a macro level of external collaboration, are presented below.

6.5.1 Sharing practices

All interviewees expressed enthusiasm about sharing personal items once living together. For some, this was connected to underlying *shared values* around ownership and solidarity, present in both cooperatives. Actions such as leaving a cargo bike for communal use or preparing food for a group of people were already practiced and positively received. At the same time, members set boundaries around sharing, especially when concerned about safety and financial risks: “A bicycle, no problem. A car, take it. [...] But with tools, that is difficult. [...] That saw is very expensive. And if it goes wrong, you loose your finger” (*Martijn*, member interviews). Sharing practices can be seen as a way of expressing *trust* and strengthening *social relationships* (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995) but can also be understand as a type of *joint activity* and *collaboration*. While sharing can thus strengthen the social dimension of housing, findings suggest that considerations of risk and personal boundaries might limit it in practice.

6.5.2 Diversity as a core value

Diversity was a theme recurring often, in both positive and challenging ways. Interviewees of *de Nieuwe Meent* highlighted how cultural backgrounds as well as language barriers sometimes made it more difficult to participate and develop a *sense of community*. They emphasized that a diverse group, requires enough people with the capacity to care for others, else it can create disbalances and lead to stress and resentment, negatively influencing *social relationships*: “For quite a long time the care balance [...] has not been right and is still not right. I think we still have too many people that need care and too little people that can give care.” (*Lisa*, member interviews). At the same time, diversity was also experienced as necessary and enriching for housing cooperatives. *De Nieuwe Meent* collectively chose to prioritize people in need for the allocation of housing units and members reported a high quality of *social relationships*

resulting from the groups' diversity. Examples of everyday care were not only mentioned often but also observed during one interview on-site, when the interviewee jumped to help another member that was struggling to navigate through sand in a wheelchair. By contrast, members of *De Woonwolk* valued different skills and cultural backgrounds and voiced their personal commitment to a diverse group, however they collectively decided to "sacrifice" a full commitment to diversity for the survival of the project. They described at one point having to make the difficult decision of raising rents and reducing the number of family units in order to save the financial feasibility of the cooperative. This decision was noticeable in practice, as it limited the inclusivity and accessibility of the project: "We wanted to diversify the group. And we had some discussion about what kind of things [...] we prioritize. But then it never really showed in the people" (*Helena*, member interviews). The findings aligns with broader patterns in Collaborative Housing projects, which are often dominated by individuals with the privilege of high social, cultural, and economic capital (Cortés Urra et al. 2024). It seems that even when even when diversity is valued by members structural and financial constraints often reproduce inequalities. It suggests that only a strong internal commitment to diversity, like seen in *de Nieuwe Meent*, can to a group inclusive for people with different backgrounds, financial means and other positions (Bond 2021; Crenshaw 1989). While diversity as a core value increases vulnerability, and workload imbalances (Janmaat and Green 2011) it can also strengthen the social dimension of housing, contradicting parts of literature that emphasize the importance of socio-cultural proximity for social cohesion (Bresson & Labit, 2020). The findings indicate that members of housing cooperatives tend to views cohesion as the capacity to promote, accept and manage diversity constructively which aligns with arguments by the European Committee for Social Cohesion (2004) and Jenson (2010).

6.5.3 Challenges around external stakeholder collaboration

As already mentioned in the section on *long-term members*, collaboration with external stakeholders, especially banks, contractors, and financial advisors was perceived as a major source of stress. Some interviewees experienced frustration when provided limited understanding and support: "With the more official institutes like the bank and the municipality [...] it's difficult. Because they often still view you as a professional

project developer, which is obviously not the case" (*Lisa*, member interviews). These challenges around external stakeholder collaboration strained the emotional well-being of members and decreased their social capacity, thereby affecting all social dimension indicators. While these pressures forced members to rely on each other to navigate difficult situations, they also left less time and energy to focus on community-building. This aligns with literature which sees external pressures and lack of support from banks and municipalities as main barriers for housing cooperatives (Ahedo et al. 2023; Lang and Giovannini 2025). At the same time, literature does not acknowledge the implications of challenging stakeholder collaboration for emotional well-being and community-building.

7 CONCLUSION

While Collaborative Housing has been studied in various international contexts, existing literature tends to focus on communities already in the use-phase, when residents have lived together for some time. In the Dutch context, however, most housing cooperatives are still in development, and little is known about how the social dimension of housing takes shape before residents move in. This thesis addressed this gap by examining how members of Amsterdam housing cooperatives in late development stages experience the connections between cooperative housing elements and the social dimension of housing. It aims to answer the research question: **'What are the relationships between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements in the context of housing cooperatives in late development stages in Amsterdam?'**

Four SRQs were posed and answered throughout the previous Chapters: In Chapter 2 the indicators *social relationships*, *social interaction, trust,* and *sense of community* were established, drawing on the conceptual framework inspired by Cortés-Urra et al. (2024), as well as social cohesion theory. This allowed answering **SRQ 1 – 'What are indicators for the social dimension of housing?'** The indicators provided one side of the conceptual framework and were used as a structure for presenting the findings of SRQ 3. Chapter 3 provided the context for the research, highlighting the definition and legal framework of Dutch housing cooperatives as well as key aspects about the development stage, member participation and social orientation. It enabled identifying the cooperative housing elements *shared values and motivations*, *collaboration on the project*, *joint activities*, and *physical proximity,* thereby answering **SRQ 2 – 'What are the defining elements of housing cooperatives in the late development stage in Amsterdam?'** and providing the second side of the conceptual framework. **SRQ 3 – 'What relationships do members of housing cooperatives in Amsterdam experience between the social dimension of housing and cooperative housing elements during the development process?'** was addressed in Chapter 5, concluding that members of housing cooperatives in late development stages in Amsterdam experience the social dimension of housing as deeply connected with all elements of cooperative housing. Finally, Chapter 6 answered **SRQ 4 – 'How are members' experiences shaped by the timing and intensity of their involvement?'** by comparing experiences of long-, mid-

and short-term members of the two cases. It was found that the connections are not only significantly shaped by the length and intensity of members' involvement, but also by sharing practices, the core value of diversity and external stakeholder collaboration as cross-cutting themes that emerged during the research. The findings regarding the **Main RQ** are visualized in a network map based on the conceptual framework of this research (see
Figure 13) and concluded below.

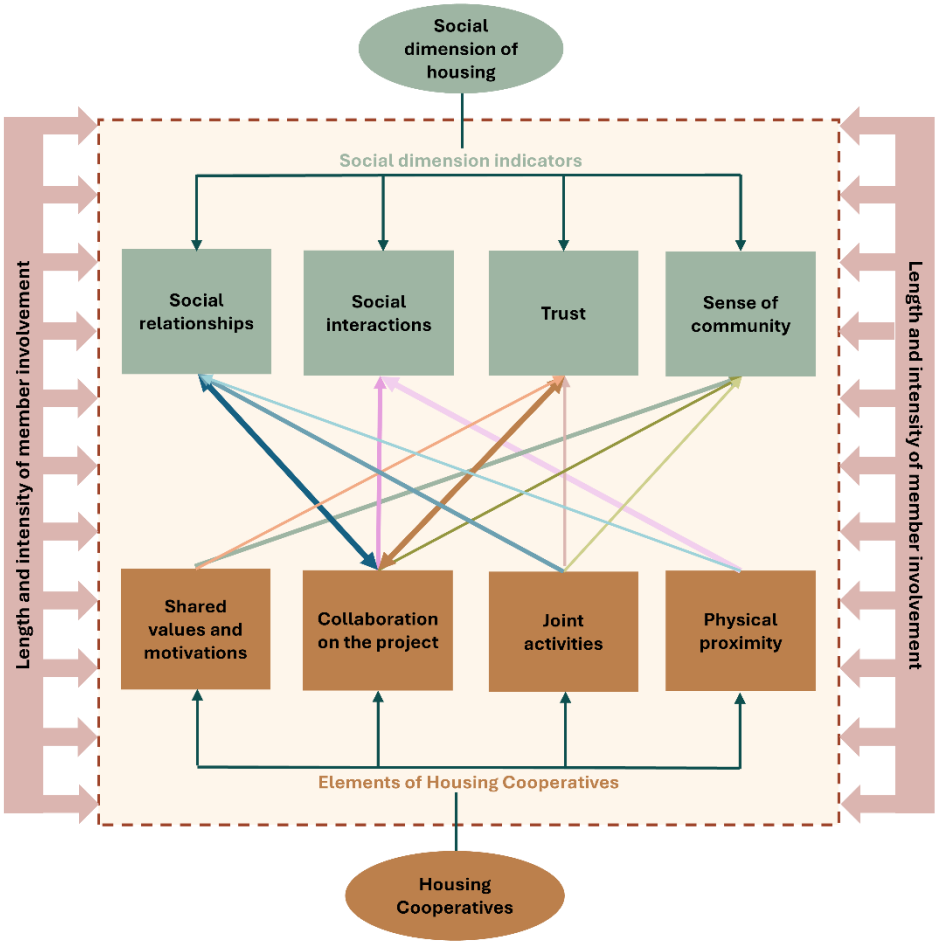

Figure 13: The findings of this thesis are visualized in a network map based on the conceptual framework (source: author)

Across both cases, the strongest and most consistent connections were found between the element *collaboration on the project* and all four social dimension indicators, but particularly *social relationships* and *trust*. In the development stage, project work functions as a central setting around which the social life of housing cooperatives develops. General assemblies, small-group meetings and the collective management of

challenging situations facilitate the social dimension of housing. Additionally, *joint activities* such as shared meals, workshops, or informal events were consistently described as reinforcing *trust* and a *sense of community*. However, they often competed with the demands of urgent project work, which often ended up being prioritized. Shared experiences such as financial challenges, conflicts between members or the Covid-19 pandemic were also found to be stressful in the short term but fostering solidarity and a *sense of community* in the long-term. Additionally, strong connections emerged between the collaborative housing elements *joint activities* and *collaboration on the project*, with the most influential activities often being organized around project meetings. *Physical proximity* additionally made social developments around project-collaboration easier. The social indicator *social relationships* influenced the *sense of community* in terms of member turnovers, care practices and 'social insurances'. Members generally anticipated an increase in activities, relationship- and community-building in the use-phase, suggesting high motivation to maintain and strengthen the social dimension of housing in future.

This research also shows that the length and intensity of each member's involvement influence the connections described. *Long-, mid-,* and *short-term members* experience significantly different social dynamics. Long-term members often worked on the housing cooperative with a high intensity, which led to stress and burnout. They often built strong relationships through shared experiences but shifted their general focus from *social relationships* to mostly *project-related collaboration*. Mid-term members showed the strongest emotional investment in the *sense of community*. They often experienced situations of conflict in early stages of their involvement, which supported strong *social relationships*. Short-term members were in a phase of getting to know people and project. They relied on small groups to build social ties and emphasized *trust* and openness for *social relationships*. These findings challenge the assumption that long and intense involvement always strengthens the social dimension of housing. Instead, they show a shift during involvement, with short- and mid-term members strongly focusing on social aspects and long-term members having a more collaboration- and task-driven focus within the cooperative.

Next to the influence of timing and intensity, it was found that several cross-cutting themes significantly shaped experiences of the social dimension in housing

cooperatives. Sharing practices were experienced to strengthen *trust* and *social relationships,* however with personal boundaries. Diversity, as a core value was found challenging but enriching to promote and deal with in practice. While it increases risk for vulnerability and imbalances in the community, it also enhances the quality of *interactions* and *relationships*. Collaboration with external stakeholders, particularly banks and municipalities, was experienced as a major source of stress and high workload. As institutional barriers they also negatively influence the emotional capacity of members for *social relationships* and *community-building*.

To conclude the **main RQ** of this thesis, it can be said that in Amsterdam housing cooperatives in the development stage, the social dimension of housing is most strongly influenced by various aspects of *project collaboration* but is also influenced by dynamics around *joint activities*, *shared values*, and *spatial proximity*. The relationships are mediated by the timing and intensity of member engagement, as well as by overarching themes such as sharing practices, diversity, and external stakeholders.

8 REFLECTION

After answering the RQ of this thesis, it is interesting to reflect on the findings, their limitations and implications. This chapter hence reflects on the theoretical contribution, the methodology, practical implications and future opportunities.

8.1 Theoretical contribution and conceptual reflections

Theoretical contribution

The research contributes to the conceptual understanding of Collaborative Housing by refining and extending the conceptual model of Cortés Urra et al. (2024) to the Dutch context and to the development phase, rather than the more frequently studied use phase. At the same time, it adds onto more specific literature on housing cooperatives in the Netherlands with new empirical insights on Amsterdam-based cooperatives in late development stages. These insights include themes so far underexplored in this field, like the manifestation of the social dimension of housing in such cooperatives, the role of timing and intensity of involvement, and additional cross-cutting themes. The research further refines the four social dimension indicators of Cortés Urra et al. by drawing on the relational and common identity components of social cohesion theory (Eshuis et al. 2014; Schiefer and van der Noll 2017).

Refinements of the conceptual framework

Building on these insights, the thesis proposes a new conceptual framework, based on Cortés Urra et al. (2024), that combines the adapted elements and indicators with the added dimensions of timing and intensity. This framework was tested on two Amsterdam cases and provided valuable insights, however the findings also point to aspects that could be further refined or included. These were: 1) The social dimension indicators of *social relationships* and *social interactions* proved difficult to differentiate in practice. They strongly overlapped and might be better conceptualized as a single indicator. 2) The cooperative housing element *collaboration on the project* encompassed the highest number and range of connections to other elements and indicators. To get more nuanced insights into its mechanisms it could be subdivided into several more specific features, such as *collaboration with external stakeholders*, *general member assemblies*, *small*

workgroups, and *organizational structures*. 3) *Physical proximity* was anticipated to mostly gain significance in the use-phase of Housing cooperatives. It therefore received slightly less attention in the design of the interview guide and data analysis. However, the findings show that it already shaped members' experiences in the development phase, particularly in contrast between online and in-person meetings. It therefore deserves closer theoretical consideration.

It was not possible to implement and test these changes within the scope of this work. However, the conceptual framework can be further validated and refined in future, by applying it to other Dutch or international contexts.

Additional dynamics

Additionally, the research revealed dynamics that are so far not well captured in the theoretical framework and existing literature on Collaborative Housing and social cohesion. For example, the role of shared stressful experiences for strengthening social bonds emerged as a recurring theme. Literature on solidarity and care in times of crisis touches on this (Housing Europe 2023; Putnam 1995) but the findings suggest that such processes may be an important driver for the development of the social dimension in housing cooperatives. Literature in the field of psychology for example highlights this phenomenon under the term 'shared adversity' and argues how sharing an adverse experience leads to increased supportive interactions between team members (Bastian et al. 2018). Future research could further explore these experiences in the context of Housing cooperatives. Finally, the findings of this research point to the often-overlooked role of emotions, such as frustration and stress (Morse et al. 2022) but also enthusiasm as drivers of relationship- and community-building.

8.2 Methodological reflections

The methodological approach of this research proved valuable to analyze the social dimension in housing cooperatives in-depth, but it also came with limitations. It is important to recognize that the conceptual framework developed and applied in this research is a useful analytical lens but only a simplified representation of complex social

experiences and processes and cannot capture all nuances of the social dimension during the development stage.

Creative research methods

The creative research methods 'timeline drawing' and 'participatory concept mapping' used in this research proved to be highly valuable, especially for exploring the added timing dimension of member involvement. The timeline drawing exercise, combined with the graph of perceived intensity of involvement provided rich insights into connections between this intensity, the length and members' roles at certain moments. However, the exercise could be even further improved with a pre-defined scale of working hours per week. The participatory concept mapping exercise functioned mainly as a visual prompt during the interview sessions than as an independent data source. Most relevant insights from the exercise were already captured in the interview transcripts. However, it supported the research as it helped specifying certain interview questions and allowed clarifying questions.

Case study scope

The research focused on two housing cooperatives and 10 interview participants, which provided in-depth insights but limits the generalizability of findings. The small sample size and specific characteristics of the selected cases, such as core values, mean that the observed relationships between cooperative elements and the social dimension may not represent other cooperatives in Amsterdam or other Dutch cities one-to-one. Nevertheless, the depth of insights offers transferable lessons that can inform other Dutch housing cooperatives and the broader societal debate on the social dimension of housing. Future research could additionally expand insights by including more cases at different stages of development.

Research duration and recollections from memory

The scope of this research was limited to six months, with fieldwork taking place within three months. This timeframe was long enough to allow for gradual approach of interview participants, a sufficient data basis and analysis. However, some authors point out that a longer research phase can be valuable to fully understand the lives of the participants, build trust, and observe recurring patterns (Bernard 2017). The data collection also relied on the recollections from members on past experiences. These are inherently subjective

and likely to be incomplete, influenced by current circumstances, or influenced by hindsight (Scribbr 2025). More long-term studies with real-time observation could help to complement the findings with a more nuanced understanding of dynamics and reduce memory bias.

Researcher positionality

The researcher's dual role as an aspiring member in one cooperative facilitated easier access, trust, and informal knowledge but it may also have introduced biases in observing and interpreting social interactions. Similarly, the prior interest in and positive attitudes toward the housing cooperatives might have influenced the framing of questions and the interpretation of data. The study primarily reflects the experiences of members who were willing and able to participate, potentially underrepresenting less engaged or marginalized members. While the researcher's participation in work sessions of the cooperatives, like in construction teams or committees, helped balance the time investment of members it may also have created implicit expectations of "returning a favor" toward the researcher. Cultural and language factors may have influenced data collection and interpretation, given that English was not the native language of most participants or the researcher.

8.3 Practical implications

The findings of this research underline that the social dimension of housing can develop in community-oriented housing forms, even before the residents move in together. This has practical implications for cooperative and Collaborative Housing initiatives themselves but also for architects, developers and municipalities that aim to address broader societal challenges such as loneliness, social fragmentation and unequal access to housing (see Chapter 1 Introduction). While Collaborative Housing initiatives cannot be the quick and all-encompassing solution to the housing crisis in the Netherlands (Briene et al. 2021), they show potential to strengthen social cohesion and provide long-term societal benefits. Some thoughts on practical implications that could result from this research are highlighted here. They are supported by insights from three expert interviews conducted during the course of this research. While the arguments are outside the conceptual framework of this thesis, they help placing findings into a broader

practical context of Collaborative Housing, institutional support and new housing developments in general.

Institutional support

According to findings of this research, housing cooperatives often take on tasks typically considered to be the responsibility of municipalities, like providing housing for people in urgent need, organizing social care, or more sustainable architectural designs. Several experts in the field of Collaborative Housing interviewed for this thesis emphasized the high societal benefits that resident-led housing initiatives provide. At the same time, long-term members of such initiatives were found to often experience frustration, resentment and burnout, resulting in a weakening of the social dimension. Especially tasks around external stakeholder collaboration and financing of housing cooperatives were major sources of stress and tension among members. An expert emphasized that even though it's fun and inspirational to be involved in a Housing Cooperative it has to be recognized as serious work (expert interviews). Municipalities could thus benefit from reconsidering whether cooperatives are rather treated as private undertakings or recognized as providers of public value for tackling societal challenges. Experts interviewed emphasized that municipalities could play a stronger role in supporting cooperatives, which would allow members to focus on other societal values such as sustainable construction, inclusivity, or community building. They acknowledged that the municipality of Amsterdam is already pushing for more standardized approaches and financial support, however, they still emphasized the need to make financial structures more accessible and provide sufficient land plots for similar initiatives.

Diversity and inclusion in housing cooperatives

The thesis highlights the topic of diversity in cooperative housing projects as both a value and a challenge. While cooperatives often aim for inclusivity, diversity can in practice lead to social tensions that undermine the feasibility of a project, so that groups often end up with members of similar backgrounds and high socioeconomic and cultural capital (Cortés-Urra et al., 2024). However, findings also show that alternative housing models could help address the previously identified societal challenges, such as loneliness, anxiety, and overall life satisfaction (see Chapter 1), especially for more vulnerable groups. This might raise the question of how diversity could be actively

supported. For housing cooperatives, having a board led by a diverse group of people as well as reserving housing units for more vulnerable groups in society can help diversity efforts (expert interviews). For policymakers and municipalities, institutional support can help bridge the gap between members' ideals around group diversity and realities of project survival. Such support could be achieved in the form of a community advisor that guides initiatives in a sensitive and inclusive process of community-building (*Marion*, member interviews). In general, it could be valuable to acknowledge that even when diversity among members of housing cooperatives is generally desired and embraced, it is difficult to achieve and balance in practice. According to Bresson and Labit (2020) it thus requires active outreach, financial instruments and structural support.

Resident involvement in new housing developments

This research shows that active collaboration on a housing project plays an important role for facilitating resident *relationships*, *interactions*, *trust* and a *sense of community*. This raises the question whether merely providing shared spaces or offering organized neighborhood events in new housing developments is enough to foster the social dimension of housing. The findings suggest that a collective development process is central and that interventions in the use-phase alone might not be sufficient. They align with Eshuis et al. (2014) who emphasizes that shared spaces in housing are only being used, if they are supported by joint management and an honest interest in interaction.

These findings can provide a base to reflect on the role of architects and professional housing developers and the importance of resident-participation in the design process. They suggest, for example, that members that are already involved in the development process of housing cooperatives are also willing to invest time and resources into maintaining the building and the community living in it in the use-phase. This could be understood as a call to rethink skepticism of some housing corporations and architects towards resident participation. As an expert noted, it is often not the case that participation processes themselves take up a lot of time, but rather that resistance arises when residents are not involved in decisions which in term prolongs processes (expert interviews). The different experiences of long-, mid-, and short-term members in relation to the respective project phases could indicate that involving residents at a later stage of architectural planning, for example in the allocation of communal spaces or the

composition of the future neighborhood, could have the greatest impact on strengthening the social dimension of housing. Findings also show that collectively planning and designing community spaces strengthens *social relationships* and a *sense of community*. Architects collaborating with resident-led housing initiatives emphasized that residents need to experience active participation and the feeling of being heard, meaning that they should be involved early in design processes and given real choices (expert interviews). They explained that residents need to feel collective ownership over their house to encourage the development of a social dimension (expert interviews). This suggests that participatory processes in new residential developments could reduce the time needed to overcome resistance while strengthening the social benefits of active participation in cooperation and decision-making, as outlined in this study.

8.4 Summary and outlook

This thesis has shown that the social dimension of housing is already actively shaped during the development phase of cooperative projects. By refining an existing conceptual framework and applying it to two Amsterdam cases, it highlighted the importance of resident collaboration and participation, the ambivalent role of length and intensity of involvement, challenges and opportunities of diversity, and the potentially evolving role of other stakeholders. While the methodological approach has limitations, the findings underscore the potential of housing cooperatives to contribute to broader societal goals around housing such as accessibility, resident social cohesion, and well-being. In a broader context, the findings of this research illustrate that cities can not only be shaped by top-down decisions and markets, but also by residents themselves. Their initiative can inspire alternative forms of living together in future.

This thesis points to several promising directions for future research. First, the role of shared adversity or bonding through stress within Collaborative Housing could be investigated further. While these findings indicate that such experiences strengthen social bonds, it remains unclear under what conditions such bonding is beneficial or when it leads to strong negative emotions, risking exclusion or burnout of members. Second, the challenge of diversity as a core value of a housing cooperative emerged an important topic. Future work could examine different approaches to achieve the aim of

a diverse group of members and its influence on the social dimension of housing. Third, comparative studies between cooperatives in the development and use phase are needed to understand how social dynamics evolve over time and how the relationships found develop long-term. And finally, the findings raise questions about the effectiveness of current support structures for resident-led housing initiatives to tackle societal and social challenges associated with the Dutch housing crisis. Future studies could evaluate the impact of introducing community advisors, other financial or organizational support for such initiatives.

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APPENDICES

Overview of appendices

The following appendices are provided as separate documents to keep the thesis concise and allow easier comparison:

Appendix A	Data Management Plan
Appendix B	Interview guides
Appendix C	Coding framework
Appendix D	Anonymized interview transcripts

AI declaration

I acknowledge the use the AI supported transcription software Turboscribe AI for interview transcription. Additionally, the AI supported tool 'ChatGPT' was used to generate suggestions for critical reflection, improving clarity, and flow of parts of this thesis. The researcher hereby declares that the use of AI does not compromise authenticity of the work but rather serves as a supplementary tool. The analysis and interpretation of data were conducted by the researcher. Exemplifying prompts, used in 'ChatGBT' are presented below:

Critical reflection

I entered the following prompt: *"If these are my research questions, what type of methods and results would you expect for each?"* I then reviewed the generated outcome critically and used it as a base to improve the quality of my research questions and methods.

Improving clarity

I entered the following prompt: *"How can I make clear that the first sentence of this paragraph refers to indicator-element connections and the second one to indicator-indicator as well as element-element connections?"* used the output as a starting point to write a clearer and more differentiated introduction paragraph for chapter 5.3.

Improving flow

I entered the following prompt: *"This is part of my thesis introduction. How can I connect the first and second paragraph, so they flow better?"* I used the output to write an improved bridging sentence for chapter 1.