

**Social impact through family firms' interorganizational relationships within a community
and a cooperative: An embedded view of stewardship**

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Abstract:

Current literature provides limited understanding on the processes through which interorganizational relationships contribute to social impact. We focus on a context, which is uniquely suited to understanding this phenomenon: a cooperative composed of family firms that operate in a rural community. We draw on stewardship and embeddedness perspectives to understand the way interorganizational relationships within a community and a cooperative allow family firms to engage in social impact. Relying on abductive logic and a qualitative multiple case study research, this study unveils the micro-processes and mechanisms through which interorganizational relationships within a cooperative and a community allow firms to operate on a continuum comprised of social value generation, sharing and replication practices. An embedded form of stewardship emerges as a core mechanism for interorganizational social impact activities. A conceptual model, based on generating, sharing and replicating processes of social impact is proposed. Implications and opportunities for further research are presented.

Keywords: Cooperatives, Family Firm, Stewardship, Embeddedness, Interorganizational relationships, Social Impact.

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1. Introduction

Whilst the importance of social impact generated by organizations is unequivocal, we still know little about how interorganizational relationships, spanning beyond an organization, generate social value (Sharma, 2020; Siemieniako, Kubacki, & Mitreğa, 2021). Addressing the interorganizational dimension of social impact is relevant as it remains under-researched and under-theorised. A focus on interorganizational relationships is important, as social impact may go beyond the approach of single firms and embody a collective approach based on diverse relationships (Mitreğa et al., 2018). Firms may associate with others in their regions (Sakarya et al., 2012) to create, deliver and safeguard social value (Miemczyk et al., 2012), to solve social problems and promote social inclusion (Reficco & Márquez, 2012). In this study, we investigate a typical context in which this occurs, a cooperative composed of family firms that operate in a rural community. While rural communities have been associated with local government organizations in rural areas (Ivey et al., 2004), in the present study we understand community as ‘a social network of interacting individuals, usually concentrated into a defined territory’ (Johnston et al., 2000, 101). Consequently, our understanding of community rests on the presence of a geographical space, which hosts socio-economic interactions and establishes a sense of belonging, identification, and connectedness of individuals to a place (Johnston et al., 2000; Mashek, Cannaday, & Tangney, 2007).

Social impact may be particularly relevant in a rural community context, where family firms (Howorth & Robinson, 2020), as a form of organization that strives for interorganizational social impact, are deeply embedded (Basco & Suwala, 2020). Rural cooperatives composed of family firms (Ajates, 2020; Hadjielias & Poutziouris, 2015) offer a relevant context to theorize about the way social impact may span organizational boundaries, as they may operate in diverse spatial settings, engaging in a variety of business relationships (Basco & Suwala, 2020; Johannisson et al., 2007). By doing this, we advocate for embeddedness and stewardship perspectives, which offer a framework to understand how interorganizational relationships within a community and a cooperative allow family firms to engage in social impact. Our undertaking is important for several reasons. First, social impact relates

to the positive social change or value (Islam, 2020; Lindgreen et al., 2020) that any organization, including family firms, create for people and communities outside their boundaries (Bacq & Eddleston, 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Examples include contributing to community development, solving social problems, and advocating for more inclusive policies (Felício et al., 2013). Individual family firms have been found to address societal concerns through resource commitment (e.g., human, financial) and time (Fitzgerald et al., 2010) with activities geared towards safeguarding the immediate environment, philanthropy, acts of kindness towards employees, and supporting social projects closer to home (Campopiano et al., 2014; Discua Cruz, 2020). As businesses relationships and organizational action are increasingly acknowledged to play a critical role in generating social impact (Brickson, 2007; Melander, 2017) within local or regional spatial geographies (de Beer, 2018; Tello, 2020), a focus on interorganizational relationships that generate social impact is warranted.

Second, one of the less-explored aspects of social impact is how it may reflect the interorganizational relationships of firms who decide to associate and cooperate within rural localities or regions. Family firms associated with cooperatives in rural communities may integrate economic and social dimensions of development (Oczkowski, Krivokapic-Skoko, & Plummer, 2013). Cooperatives found in diverse settings (Puusa, Hokkila, & Varis, 2016) offer a fertile ground for exploring the relevance of interorganizational relationships (Hadjielias & Poutziouris, 2015) for social impact.

Finally, literature that can explain the way social impact activities emerge through interorganizational relationships of family firms, embedded in a rural community and associated with a cooperative, is in many ways fragmented. Recent studies have analysed the influence of embeddedness in individual family firms and their social activities (Cunningham & Seaman, 2021; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2009). Yet, the literature does not sufficiently address how family firms align their views and practices with other firms to generate social impact. In that regard recent studies hint at exploring an embedded view of stewardship (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020; Lehrer & Segal, 2020) to theorize the approach and rationale of family firms, as an organizational form where

interorganizational relationships may exist at different levels (Miemczyk et al., 2012), to generate socially impactful activities.

Thus, we aim to explore *how interorganizational relationships within a community and a cooperative allow family firms to engage in social impact*, drawing on a qualitative approach (Leppäaho et al., 2016; Reay & Zhang, 2014). We study interorganisational relationships for social impact at the ‘micro-meso level’ (Ferguson, Brace-Govan, & Martin, 2020; Kubacki, Siemieniako, & Brennan, 2020). While we place attention on the meso-level to examine the way family firms relate with other organisations within (social) networks, including cooperatives and local communities (Becker, 2001; Pogutz & Winn, 2016; Muller et al., 2012), we do not lose focus on the role of individuals (at the micro-level) in driving interorganisational relations for social impact (Becker, 2001; Sakarya et al., 2012). Our study centres on family firms and associated networks of a rural food cooperative (LINK) which operates in forty (40) rural communities in Cyprus. Sixty-two (62) in-depth interviews with family firm owners, successors, non-family employees, and representatives of community organizations (local government, welfare organisations, charities). We draw on embeddedness and stewardship perspectives to analyze the data (Davis et al., 2010).

Our findings illustrate that cooperative-embedded family firms produce social value for their local communities by enacting specific value generating, sharing, and replicating processes. Value generation unfolds within the community sphere, bound by stewardship attitudes towards community. Value sharing unfolds within the cooperative sphere, bound by cooperative stewardship. Organizational stewards, who have generated social initiatives in their respective communities, are driven by stewardship to share best-practice initiatives within the LINK cooperative. Driven by family and business stewardship, members reproduce social initiatives in their own communities via a value replication process.

This study contributes to the literature on the social impact of interorganizational relationships by theorizing the micro-processes and mechanisms underpinning the generation, sharing, and replication of social impact through interorganizational relationships. Further, by drawing on an

embedded form of stewardship to explain interorganizational relationships for social impact, our study extends theory on stewardship and local embeddedness.

Next, a literature analysis is offered, followed by a justification of the research methods used, and a presentation of the key findings. We conclude with a discussion of the findings, key contributions to theory, literature, and practice. Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of this study and provide directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Interorganizational relationships and social impact

To ensure their competitiveness and longevity, firms establish a diverse range of interorganizational relationships (IORs) (Zhong et al., 2017), some of which may be of a long-term nature (Lumineau & Oliveira, 2018; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). Interorganizational relationships are one of the most important strategic resources of the firm (Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Bundy, Vogel, & Zachary, 2018), as they give access to other organizations' resources in a network (Davis, 2016; Sobrero & Roberts, 2001). A central function, therefore, of interorganizational relationships is the mobilization of resources and capabilities between interacting organizations (Kim, Chiou, & Calantone, 2018). Past work indicates that IORs enable access to knowledge (Seo, 2020), technological know-how and innovation capabilities (Davis, 2016), markets and material resources (Gulati & Singh, 1998), amongst others. An organization may exchange such resources through interactions with other entities involving, amongst others, suppliers, business clients, financial institutions, governmental authorities, subcontractors, strategic partners, and competitors (Cooper & Slagmulder, 2004).

Past work has extensively researched diverse facets of IORs, including antecedents, processes, and outcomes. Oliver (1990) argues that “necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, efficiency, stability, and legitimacy” (p. 242) prompt organizations to establish interorganizational relationships. For instance, organizations may enter IORs because of the necessity to access resources, which may not possess or maintain in insufficient quantities (Zaheer, Gözübüyük, & Milanov, 2010). Process studies highlight that interorganizational relationships encompass processes of trust development (Svärd, 2016; Zhong

et al., 2017), where initial contractually mediated interactions may be incrementally substituted by social reciprocity and informal trust-based governance modes (Marion et al., 2015). Studies within this research strand place the individual at the centre of interorganizational interactions (Makkonen et al., 2012), focusing on the social relationships and friendship which unfold through prolonged interactions between individual actors representing diverse organizations (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). Ritter & Gemünden (2003), in turn, highlight that, for interorganizational relationships to be maintained, interacting organizations need to encompass the capabilities “to handle, use, and exploit” such relationships (p. 745). In terms of outcomes, interorganizational relationships are featured as a means through which organizations can fulfill business goals, which are otherwise unattainable independently (Cheng, 2011). Research highlights the importance of IORs on a diverse set of organizational outcomes such as innovation, customer sales, financial performance, and organizational learning (Mol, 2001; Pérez-Luño et al., 2011).

Although interorganizational relationships have been researched extensively, the processes underlying the social impact of such relationships received scant attention (Siemieniako et al., 2021). Social impact refers to the social value that a company can create for people and communities outside the boundaries of the firm (Bacq & Eddleston, 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016), such as in alleviating poverty and generating social inclusion (Reficco & Márquez, 2012). Social impact has long revolved around “*a significant improvement or deterioration in people’s well-being or a significant improvement change in an aspect of community concern*” (Dietz, 1987, p. 56). Past research highlights the importance of interorganizational relationships for social impact. IORs can provide opportunities for collaboration on corporate social sustainability within supply chains (Sodhi & Tang, 2018; Miemczyk et al., 2012), in tackling grand challenges, such as pandemic-related health issues (Bramanti, Rocha, & Redelico, 2020), and in allowing socially oriented organizations to co-create joint social value propositions (McDermott, Kurucz, & Colbert, 2018). Yet, little is known on the processes through which interorganizational relationships have social impacts on communities and regions where IORs are located.

2.2 Family firms and social impact in rural communities

Scholars have argued that the social impact of businesses would differ in urban and rural communities (Goldman, 2000; Kannothra, Manning, & Haigh, 2018). In this study, rural means a distinctive type of locality (Halfacree, 1993) and is defined in terms of the level of population density, the rate of population loss or gain, settlement size, local economic structure, and landscape (Stathopoulou, Psaltopoulos, & Skuras, 2004). Rural communities stand to enjoy some benefits with the creation of social impact by family firms, because what they do is visible and has repercussions for community development (Baù et al., 2019).

Studies suggest that family firms dominate the rural business landscape (Backman & Palmberg, 2015) and are better suited to exploit highly embedded rural contexts compared to large urban settings (Basco & Suwala, 2020). Family firms are the most widespread organizational form around the world (Howorth & Robinson, 2020). They are broadly defined as firms in which family members are involved in the ownership and management of the firm, reflecting an intertwining of family and business objectives (Howorth et al., 2010). Such definition is relevant, as a family firm is a context where family expectations operate in tandem with business objectives, such as growth and performance (Fletcher, 2002). Such intertwinement influences diverse motivations for family firms (Chrisman et al., 2007). Social impact, in the context of a family firm, is relevant as it relates to *“beneficial outcomes resulting from prosocial behavior that are enjoyed by the intended targets of that behavior and/or by the broader community of individuals, organizations, and/or environments”* (Rawhouser et al., 2019, p. 83). Such outcomes may have a significant impact on a rural community (Nowak et al., 1990, p. 364), supported by relationships, practices, and ways of engagement between members of the social environment where they operate (Vanclay, 2014).

A key feature of family firms for social impact rests on the embeddedness in the local community where they operate, supported by diverse business connections and social relations (Basco & Suwala, 2020). The values, beliefs, personal backgrounds, and experiences of founders or incumbents (Hemingway & Maclagan, 2004), as well as the family reputation (Deephouse &

Jaskiewicz, 2013), the long term presence of a family in a community (Discua Cruz, 2020), and how it contributes to the unique features of the location(s) where they operate (Spielmann et al., 2019), and the level of integration of family members in a community (Litz & Stewart, 2000; Niehm et al., 2008), have been found to influence engagement in social impact activities.

Rural communities reflect social, material, cultural features, and a diverse combination of resources, thus offering opportunities for social impact (Korsgaard et al., 2015). In rural communities, family firms may create indirect economic benefits, such as attracting visitors, which provides an availability of markets for community products or services, thus increasing production level and income, which improves the living conditions of people in a community (Cortez Arias & Discua Cruz, 2018). In rural settings, family firms may develop multiple organizational connections both amongst family members (internally) and outside their organizational domains (i.e., in their local settings), as they may seek to engage in practices that allow interaction with diverse stakeholders and develop diverse relationships at various levels (Basco & Suwala, 2020). We explore the relevance of such multiple connections for social impact next.

2.3 Embeddedness and the rural family firm

The term “embeddedness” refers broadly to a business’s level of activity in diverse networks (Granovetter, 1985). Where a family firm has developed multiple connections within a community over time, it is likely to be “embedded” (Howorth & Robinson, 2020, p.153). There is a general assumption that family firms are more embedded within their regional community than non-family counterparts (Bird & Wennberg, 2014, p. 424). Embeddedness highlights an implicit and recursive relationship between family firms and their location (Basco & Suwala, 2020). For firms, access to resources, development of goodwill, local knowledge and emotional support are some of the benefits of embeddedness (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Zahra et al., 2014). The local embeddedness of family members may empower family firms to reconfigure and utilise existing community resources and embrace a sense of local and regional belonging (Basco & Bartkevičiūtė, 2020). In this study embeddedness is a multilayered concept where individuals, families, and family firms are

simultaneously interacting in multiple social, spatial, and institutional communities (Howorth & Robinson, 2020, p.145), reflecting a pattern of business activity based on interorganizational relationships (Basco & Suwala, 2020; Cao et al., 2018).

Embeddedness is important to understand social impact in rural communities for several reasons. First, family firms embedded in rural community may exhibit strong interorganizational relationships over time (Johannisson et al., 2007), as they have a disposition to “*form alliances and build close connections with the community and are exposed less to the anonymity of urban areas*” (Bird & Wennberg, 2014, p. 425). Second, diverse interactions may be influenced by the long term view of a family in the community, decision-making based on family and business objectives and the responsibility felt toward employees and locality (Lumpkin & Brigham, 2011; Pearson & Marler, 2010). Finally, family firms may be expected to live up to embedded expectations relevant to the welfare of the community. Expectations about looking after the community and its constituents (e.g., to hire local community members) may exist with family members, who often respond by being at the heart of rural community projects (Howorth & Robinson, 2020, p.9). Thus, embeddedness, influenced by norms and expectations from interorganizational relationships within a rural community, may encourage or condition the approach of family firms to pursue social impact activities.

Thus, in as much as the benefits that social value creation may generate, it is contingent on the actions of family firm incumbents influenced by values, attitudes, objectives pursued, laws, and business practices within their locality (Howorth et al., 2010; Westhead & Howorth, 2007) and the interorganizational relationships they have with others (Steier et al., 2009). A family firm owner contemplating engaging in social impact activities may have a biased perspective, representing a particular interest (e.g., based in personal needs, family objectives and experiences), and may be influenced by interactions with family members, local community actors, and other businesses (Discua Cruz, 2020). Failure to proactively or reactively identify or address societal concerns may deteriorate community relationships, influence employee productivity, absenteeism or difficulty in recruiting and

retaining local staff (Miraglia & Johns, 2020). Such contrasts suggest that social impact may be created or destroyed based on the nature of the interorganizational relationships.

Recent studies suggest that when firms associate with others, as either an outcome of an alliance or an intended collective effort, they may follow diverse patterns to leverage interorganizational relationships, namely extension, embeddedness, or autonomy (Cao et al., 2018). The first may relate to engaging in social activities implemented by a central office, board, or headquarters, which guide the projects to develop or pursue. By following an embeddedness pattern, the priority of firms may be to align with the social impact practices of local networks. If an autonomy pattern is followed, local business owners may explore what can be done and develop new social impact activities. Thus, social impact activities by firms associated with others may be influenced by exploitative (extension, embeddedness) or explorative (autonomy) patterns that reflect diverse levels of interorganizational relationships. Cao et al. (2018) found that, by becoming embedded, firms engage in an exploitative pattern where they find the most efficient route to leverage information provided by their communities, build on their competencies, and adapt to local needs, often via alliances with local stakeholders. Thus, embeddedness could play an important role in explaining how interorganizational relationships influence the engagement of family firms in social impact activities.

As family firms embedded in rural settings create relevant links in diverse spatial networks (Basco & Suwala, 2020), where information about social impact activities may become available and acted upon (Fitzgerald et al., 2010), their approach may also involve aligning their interests with others. Such approach suggest that, in the process, they may become custodians of diverse local, social, and business cultural items (Spielman et al., 2019) and look after the welfare of their firm as well as that of their communities and organizations they may become associated with. Such notions suggest that embeddedness may be inherently linked to a stewardship perspective, which we discuss next.

2.4 A stewardship perspective of social impact

Stewardship theory acknowledges that individuals are not always self-centred and may explain situations in which family firm owners/managers look after the organizational good and its mission

rather than pursuing opportunistic ends by aligning their objectives with those of the organization (Davis et al., 2010, 1997). Recent studies demonstrate that family firms possess stronger stewardship climates than non-family counterparts (Carradus et al., 2020; Neubaum et al., 2017), and they suggest that there is room to expect behaviours based on an intrinsic desire to pursue collective goals, which may involve interorganizational relationships at various levels (Madison et al., 2016). To date, the application of stewardship theory has mostly concentrated on the study of management behaviour, as an antithesis to agency perspectives and with a focus on the individual and group levels (Lehrer & Segal, 2020). Although some studies have considered stewardship as a managerial behaviour (Hernandez, 2012), a form of organizational culture (Afonso Alves et al., 2020), and organization-wide characteristic (Pearson & Marler, 2010), studies have not considered stewardship from an embeddedness angle, which may explain interorganizational dimensions of social impact in family firms.

The use of stewardship in this study is relevant, as it relates to collective and wider interests, highlighting family members' sense of social responsibility and obligation to be stewards in their communities (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020; Hernandez, 2012) and taking into account relationships at various levels (Segal & Lehrer, 2012). In rural communities, the development of a family firm may manifest in an implicit and powerful motivation to engage in activities that can safeguard not only a family's identity, livelihood, assets, and lifestyle, but also the common good of their communities (Spielmann et al., 2019). This may translate into family members becoming organizational stewards, developing strong links with the community, becoming gradually embedded and informed about pressing societal needs (Discua Cruz, 2020), whilst actively interacting with local businesses or institutions, which could prompt a collective approach (Johannisson et al., 2007).

In this study, we argue that stewardship can also be understood as an interorganizational issue for family firms. Firm leaders may develop a steward role of orchestrators within networks, engaging in activities that strive to bring together diverse actors (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020) in local business and institutional and community networks (Spielmann et al. 2019). Dessaigne and Pardo (2020)

suggest that family leaders can be labelled as stewards when they seek to align the behaviours and actions of network members. Alignment is made possible by strengthening common norms, which relate to shared understandings and rules of behaviours amongst network actors. Without alignment of norms, network activities will be difficult to take place (Mouzas & Ford, 2009), particularly as firms may develop relationships and interactions at various levels (Miemczyk et al., 2012).

An embedded view of stewardship in family firms may then be reflected in incumbents seeking not only to safeguard a family firm but to do what they perceive is best for the firm (Howorth & Robinson, 2020) and the community (Basco & Suwala, 2020; Johannisson et al., 2007) by leveraging interorganizational relationships (Miemczyk et al., 2012; Mitrega et al., 2018). We speculate that because the rural community must be kept in focus, family firm owners, acting as stewards, may also focus on aligning norms with other actors in a network (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020). From such perspective, we may explain how family firms, embedded in rural communities and cooperatives, see interorganizational relationships as having a larger purpose in the development of socially impactful activities.

2.5 Cooperatives and community

Cooperatives are relevant for this study, as they are bound by strong altruistic and social principles that distinguish them from other types of organizations, such as democratic control, the promotion of member education, close cooperation between members, and a high concern for the sustainable development of their communities (Alves, Ferreira, & Araújo, 2019). A cooperative involves individuals or companies coming together voluntarily to meet common needs through a jointly owned enterprise (Hussi et al., 1993; ICA, 1995). Cooperatives, as member-owned and controlled enterprises, play an important role in developing the socio-economic status of their members and rural communities (Hussi et al., 1993). Therefore, a focus on generating value in the cooperative may relate to both business and social goals. In a rural setting, businesses join cooperatives to draw economic gains by overcoming resource constraints in production, marketing, and technologies (Mojo, Fischer, & Degefa, 2017). Yet, rural cooperatives are bound by explicit social goals, which engage

cooperative-based firms in collective actions to address social gaps in rural areas and in meeting the social needs of their members (Billiet et al., 2021; Tregear & Cooper, 2016).

Family firms represent a context where stewardship principles would explain family members' preference to pursue social goals that can benefit not only their firms but also their immediate community (Carradus et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2010). In rural communities, family members may be more interested to develop strong links with the community and to become gradually embedded and informed about the pressing needs or items of importance (Discua Cruz, 2020), whilst engaging in collective actions within rural cooperatives (Hadjielias & Poutziouris, 2015). Hadjielias and Poutziouris (2015), focusing on cooperatives composed of family firms, identified that conditions of trust, altruism, collective thinking, stewardship, friendship, and congruence of family values are necessary for the emergence and maintenance of cooperative relations. Yet despite uncovering that cooperatives can be composed of firms that depend on dynamic relationships, their study did not address the way family members in cooperatives act to generate value that can lead to social impact within rural communities.

The purpose of individuals creating and developing a business in any community may deal with more than simply venture creation but be a process that focuses on creating value propositions (Halliday, 2016; Lusch et al., 2007). Such value propositions encourage business activities that can promote social value creation and thus generate social impact (Ratten & Jones, 2018). Such a view acknowledges that the way social value may be created or shared may not be limited to what a single business, isolated from the community and from cooperating from others, is able to do (Johannisson et al., 2007). Thus, for business owners in a rural community, discerning the process to engage in activities that address societal concerns and create social value may imply interacting and working with other firms in a community or rural area in which they are embedded.

3. Methods

To understand *how interorganizational relationships within a community and a cooperative allow family firms to engage in social impact*, this study draws on a qualitative multiple case study research

approach (Leppäaho et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). Such an approach is part of the methodological canon of family firm research (Reay & Zhang, 2014) and is suited for examining processes within interorganizational relations (Halinen & Törnroos, 2005). We rely on an abductive research logic, supported by existing theory and informed by extant literature (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Suddaby, 2006; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This approach provides space for emergent insights, as it is informed by prior theoretical understanding but not constrained by it (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Suddaby, 2006), leading to theory development (Gioia et al., 2013).

Through an abductive approach, stewardship theory was positioned as a loose framework, to blend existing theory and concepts (e.g., stewardship towards business, stewardship towards community) and emergent empirical insights (i.e., interviewee's subjective and contextually-bounded meanings) (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Drawing on a cross-fertilisation between existing concepts (i.e., family firms, embeddedness, stewardship) and emergent concepts (i.e., rural cooperatives), the phenomenon of interorganizational socially impactful activities was approached (Gioia et al., 2013).

To collect data drawing on an abductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), our interview protocol focused on semi-structured interviews (Bell et al., 2018). This approach facilitated drawing key insights from research participants (Sillince, Jarzabkowski, & Shaw, 2012). Interview data were then triangulated with data from observations and documents (Patton, 2002).

3.1 Study context

This study was carried out in Cyprus, a European Union member state and island nation situated in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Cyprus is dominated by family firms, which account for approximately 90% of total businesses in the country (EFB, 2014). The typical family firm is small and owned-managed by the controlling family (CCCI – EY, 2017). Many family firms in sectors dealing with agribusiness, consumer goods and supplies, tourism, and handicraft are members of a cooperative organization (Cyprus Authority for Cooperative Societies, 2017). The Cypriot culture is characterized by high collectivism and altruism towards others (Papasolomou-Doukakis, Krambia-Kapardis, & Katsiolouides, 2005), and it has cemented a strong tradition of socially oriented

engagement (Aniftos, 2017). This tradition was influenced by nearby countries, where the cooperative movement emerged as a response to states' inability to sufficiently address societal needs (Aniftos, 2017). Thus, cooperatives have been socially and economically influential in Cyprus (Aniftos, 2017). Therefore, Cyprus constitutes an ideal context to examine phenomena of social impact in rural areas in the context of cooperatives composed of family firms.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

Data was collected from seven small rural family firms who are members of a Cypriot retail cooperative (South-Eastern Europe), referred to as *LINK Cooperative*. Table 1 presents the profiles of LINK Cooperative members and the case organizations.

[Insert Table 1 here]

A two-stage sampling process was employed to choose participating companies, combining purposive and snowball sampling methods (Holgerson, 2013). First, a cooperative organization was sought, given the focus on interorganizational relations of cooperative-embedded businesses. LINK Cooperative was purposively chosen, as it fulfilled a number of criteria, including its rural geographic reach, influence on rural communities, and being comprised of family firms (Hadjielias & Poutziouris, 2015). Second, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to identify suitable family firms within the cooperative (Holgerson, 2013), focusing on family firms engaged in interorganizational relationships for social impact within their communities. Associated firms needed to be both family-owned and managed to meet the family firm definition (Howorth et al., 2010).

To reach our intended firm profile, authors approached the general manager of the LINK cooperative, who facilitated access to four family firms that contributed substantially to their local communities: ALFA, GAMMA, DELTA, and ZETA. Following an iterative process (Eisenhardt, 1989), three more firms – BETA, EPSILON, and LAMBDA – were identified. These additional cases were reached through a snowball approach, where initial participants contacted other firms in the LINK Cooperative with whom they had interorganizational relations having social impact.

Data was collected from in-depth interviews over a period of 22 months (March 2015 until January 2017). To attain an in-depth understanding of the way interorganizational relations contribute to social impact on communities, we were interested in the accounts of multiple participants (Yin, 2018). Drawing on previous work on family firms engaging with communities and local regions (e.g., Basco & Suwala, 2020; Fletcher, De Massis, & Nordqvist, 2016), interviews were carried out with people within and outside the business, including senior and junior members from the controlling family, non-family employees, and community actors representing local governments, welfare organizations, and local businesses. Table 2 provides the profile of interviewees per case study.

[Insert Table 2 here]

A total of 62 interviews were carried out. This number also includes the follow-up interviews, which were conducted with key people within each case study (see Table 2). A second interview with certain individuals was carried out to enhance understanding of the phenomenon (Jehn, 1997), given its dynamic nature, and to strengthen the credibility of our findings (McLarty & Holt, 2019). Participants were interviewed until data saturation through a back and forth process between data analysis and data collection (Gioia et al., 2013). Interviewees were chosen for their relevance to the phenomenon (Rotter, Airike, & Mark-Herbert, 2014), and efforts were made to choose people in diverse roles to obtain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon within each case (Yin, 2018). The chosen participants allowed comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). To avoid possible risks linked to the inability of interviewees to comprehend the research questions, we pilot-tested the interview guide with two individuals (a senior and a junior family member) from the LINK Cooperative and conducted the interviews in Greek, the native language of the research participants (Doyle, 1991).

Drawing on best practices in multiple case study research (e.g., Battistella et al., 2017), data were triangulated through the use of observations and documents. The first author carried out observations during visits to the research sites and recorded them as field notes. Additionally, data were drawn from internal documents of the Cooperative, including business plans, reports,

promotional flyers, and newsletters and external documents, including press releases and articles about the Cooperative. This approach supported data validity and reliability (Yin, 2018).

3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis was guided by the three-stage analytical coding process set by the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). This is a method consistent with an abductive research approach, as it facilitates data analysis via an iterative process between findings, existing theory, and literature (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Drawing on prior studies (e.g., Goffin & Koners, 2011; Jankowicz, 2004), data coding was carried out by two authors, who were working in parallel. During the first stage, the two authors undertook separately open coding (Goffin & Koners, 2011), which is ideal in capturing emergent insights (Holton, 2007), whilst adhering to informant terms (Gioia et al., 2013). Each author assigned *initial* codes to chunks of text (e.g., phrases, sentences, words, paragraphs), whilst analyzing transcript by transcript until saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Then, the two authors examined and discussed commonalities and discrepancies (Goffin & Koners, 2011; Pan, Maclaurin, & Crofts, 2007). Intercoder agreement was achieved through this process (Welch & Bjorkman, 2015), developing a master coding list (Pan et al., 2007). For instance, first-order concepts capture the tradition, values, and emotions that business families maintain towards their community, and the different ways in which family members interact with community stakeholders in the context of social initiatives (e.g., sensing gaps, discussion of social initiatives, negotiations, resource mobilization) (see Figure 1 for the full list of second order concepts).

During the second stage, the master list codes were grouped (Holton, 2007) to develop second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013). Again, the same two authors carried out this process separately, by examining the commonalities and differences amongst “first-order concepts” and reducing them to fewer themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Then the authors met to discuss their outcomes and reach agreement on a single list of second-order themes (Goffin & Koners, 2011). For instance, the first order concepts on “tradition”, “values”, and “emotions” that business families maintain towards their community were grouped into a second-order theme, which was named “Family Stewardship towards

Community” (see Figure 1 for the full list of second-order themes and their links to first order concepts).

After agreeing on the second-order themes, the authors worked together to discuss emergent themes and extant literature to get a better sense of the findings (Bansal & Kistruck, 2006) and to determine which emergent concepts reflected existing concepts in the literature (Sillince et al., 2012) and which were nascent concepts (Gioia et al., 2013). This iterative process facilitated understanding of the connections and relationships between the study’s emergent themes and allowed the distillation of second-order themes into fewer aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). For instance, since the second order themes “community embeddedness” and “cooperative embeddedness” were referring to two essential facets of a family firm embeddedness, they were grouped under a single aggregated dimension named “Dual Embeddedness” (see Figure 1 for the full list of aggregate dimensions and their links to second order themes). Finally, the two authors arrived at a data structure (Figure 1), which explains how the final overarching themes are linked to raw data, codes, and sub-themes. This step allows the reader to visualize how each aggregated dimension traces back to raw data (Gioia et al., 2013).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

In analyzing the findings, emphasis was placed on the meanings of research participants both within and across case studies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). Our data analysis leads to theory development (Gioia et al., 2013), which is featured in a conceptual diagram in the discussion section of this paper that explains how interorganizational socially impactful activities emerge in the context of a cooperative composed of family firms.

4. Findings

4.1 A dual embeddedness within cooperative and community

Evidence suggest the presence of multiple identities within the case companies, defined by a dualistic embeddedness within the LINK Cooperative and their rural community. Research participants acknowledge this dualistic embeddedness:

“We are a small grocery, fortunate to be part of the LINK family [...] We are serving a village of 2500 inhabitants. This community is our centre of the universe” [Peter, Owner-manager of Gamma LINK].

Within each sphere of embeddedness (i.e., Cooperative and Community), the participating family firms (see Table 3) maintain different types of interactions with commercial, non-profit, and/or local government organizations.

[Insert table 3 here]

The LINK Cooperative offers an arena for interactions between LINK member firms. Besides its commercial importance for member firms, the LINK Cooperative is also a space where the representatives of LINK member-firms interact socially and bond with one another. This was initially noted in the following quote:

“With the colleagues of LINK, we talk a lot. We visit each other, regularly. We will go around, me or them, visit each other’s shop to exchange ideas about work and socialize” [Nicolas, Owner-manager of Alfa LINK].

What frames the Cooperative-embedded relations between LINK member-firms is the constant interaction that occurs periodically between associated family firms (see Table 3). As the LINK Cooperative is comprised of small family firms, owned and managed by families, then the members that interact across member-firms are primarily family firm owners and/or their successors. This is best exemplified by the following quote:

“Within LINK, we coexist with other families, owners of other business. This is important because we deal with people that share something similar to us, we understand each other” [Chris, Successor of Epsilon LINK].

Besides the LINK Cooperative, case companies are also embedded within rural communities. The participating firms are found in rural villages; thus, they are embedded in the local socio-economic fabric of their rural localities. Evidence suggests that community embeddedness involves interlinked commercial and social interactions that case companies establish with diverse community-based organizational actors, such as local suppliers, community council organizations, and non-profit welfare organizations (see Table 3). For instance, whilst doing business with local suppliers/ producers, any associated member can maintain social bonds and friendship with the same suppliers. The latter is

manifested through interpersonal interactions between family firm owners and owners of supplier organizations and linked to their presence in the same community. This is exemplified as follows:

“We will definitely cooperate with local companies, for example a producer of yoghurts from the village. We wish to promote them and help them given that we are friends and co-villagers” [Laura, Co-Owner of Lambda LINK].

Another distinctive feature of community embeddedness is the central role of family firm owners and/or their successors in establishing and maintaining relations between their firm and other organizations within the community. This was noted by:

“With the major, we are very good friends, we go out to dinner and to talk. This helps our business to have a good contact with the village council, whatever help I need or they need, we will support each other” [Steven, Owner-manager of Zeta LINK].

Taken together, data illustrates a form of dualistic embeddedness where family firms establish, through their owners and/or successors, commercial and social relations within the cooperative and community spheres (see Table 3).

4.2 Family firm dual embeddedness and the interlinked processes of social value generation, sharing, and replication

The sections that follow explain the way this dualistic embeddedness facilitates social value creation (see also Table 3). Evidence differentiates the processes which family firms go through with other organizations in the community and cooperative spheres to produce social benefits for local communities. These include the processes of generation, sharing, and replication.

4.2.1 Social value generation through community embeddedness

Social value generation is a facet of community embeddedness and involves instances where a family firm creates new social value through collaborations with other organizations of the community, such as local companies, non-profit organizations, and the local government (i.e., the community council). Table 3 offers exemplar social initiatives (indicated in bold font), which were captured and generated locally by case businesses. Data analyzed illustrate a critical role of the owners and/or successors of participating family firms in generating social value for the communities in which their

business is embedded. These actors are social value *generating stewards* since they scan, plan, and establish collaborations with other organizations to implement social initiatives within their rural village. For instance, the Delta LINK family (i.e., owner and his four offspring) conceived and implemented jointly with a community charity, an annual fundraising event in the Delta village:

“Every July, we run a two-day charity event in the memory of a child of this community, who lost his life to an illness. The idea started from our family two years ago. We approached our local charity ‘Faith for living’ for the more practical things concerning the implementation. Since then, we host the event in our outside premises, filling the place with food and sweet stalls and lots of live music to entertain and collect money for the charity” [Paul, Owner-manager of Delta LINK].

Evidence suggests the presence of a process, which is community-embedded, and enables a family firm to generate new social initiatives locally in collaboration with other local organizations. First, family firm stewards sense community gaps through interactions with community actors (e.g., citizens or reps of community organizations, such as community councils or welfare groups). These social gaps are jointly conceived with other local organizations, through discussions, brainstorming, and negotiations, and lead to ideas for specific community initiatives. A folk dance club, an annual fundraising event, and a Grill & Meet annual social event are a few examples of community initiatives, which have been conceived jointly between family firms and local organizations through a sense-making and brainstorming process:

“We exchanged ideas with a community council member when he visited our store on how to strengthen social life in this community. While young people flee to the cities there are also many young couples from other areas, who choose to reside here. So, there are many changes happening in the population of the village at the moment. So, I gave them the idea to co-organize during Easter Monday a ‘grill and meet’ event. The community council then embraced the idea and made it happen” [Tom, Successor of Alfa LINK].

Second, family firm stewards are mobilizing and committing the resources needed for filling community gaps and realizing social initiatives. Data analyzed illustrate that, by being owners or successors of family firms, these stewards are in a better position and more empowered to mobilize the needed resources for enacting socially. For instance, the Delta owner played an important role in the Delta LINK family firm to commit the financial and physical resources needed for running the fundraising event in their community:

“I remember my father gathering us for a meeting. He said, we are going ahead with the fundraising event and we shall give the parking space and the meat for grilling the souvlakia. He also ordered my

brother to look from where we can rent the stall equipment and the bands for the event. This was a critical juncture for going ahead with the initiative” [Susan, Successor of Delta LINK].

Third, continuing the previous steps, family firm stewards implement and run joint social initiatives with community organizations. Retrospectively, a number of family firm research participants referred to such joint initiatives, which have been impactful for their rural communities and are now run recurrently. Thomas, president of Alfa Community Council, reflected on the impact and continuation of the Grill & Meet event, which they jointly run with Alfa LINK family firm:

“It has been such a successful event that we have adopted on a yearly basis. It is such a great experience to see people from the community to mingle together and to see the community spirit to take flesh” [Thomas, Council president of Alfa Village].

4.2.2 Social value sharing through dual embeddedness: From generating to sharing

Social value sharing, in our study, involves the sharing of social initiatives between family firms in the Cooperative. Table 3 offers examples of typical interactions occurring within the Cooperative which facilitate this sharing.

While data analyzed link the sharing of social values closely with the cooperative-embeddedness of family firms, this process cannot be realized in the absence of a social value generating process. LINK family firms, which generate social initiatives in their respective communities, subsequently share their best-practice initiatives with other firms within the LINK cooperative. Thus, value sharing can be better understood as a practice that depends on the firm’s dual embeddedness within community and cooperative, for (first) generating and subsequently sharing initiatives that contribute to social value within communities. For instance, the folk dance club, which Zeta LINK co-established with the community council of the Zeta village, was a best practice, which was subsequently transferred into the cooperative by the owner of Zeta LINK who led the initiative.

“My father is the person behind our community’s dance club. He is an ambassador of this initiative, influencing other colleagues within LINK to do alike as he believes that every community should promote folk dance” [Bob, Successor of Zeta LINK].

Evidence suggests the presence of a process which materializes the sharing of social initiatives between firms. First, LINK family firm stewards who have generated social initiatives in their own communities must recognize that they carry a transferable, impactful social initiative. In this case, it

should become explicit to them that their social initiative can contribute to social good and bring positive change within other communities. The Delta LINK family firm owner referred to the youth centre that his company led in the Delta village:

“It can help a lot if more communities follow this model. It offers a shelter for the youth and helps them in making better use of their time” [Paul, Owner-manager of Delta LINK].

Second, these stewards become alerted to sharing these initiatives with other firms, which are embedded in other communities. Evidence suggests that the sharing process is activated when generating stewards sense social gaps that other LINK family firms experience in their own communities. Official LINK meetings (e.g., a board meeting) or social gatherings where LINK constituents get together act as essential spaces for discussions of where the stewards have sensed such social gaps. For instance, at the wedding of the eldest daughter of the Kapa LINK family, the owner-manager of Lambda LINK openly discussed, at the dinner table, his concern regarding the lack of community initiatives in his village that bring people to socialize together. At the same table were the owner and successor, father and son, from the Alfa LINK family firm, who had been quite involved within community initiatives in their own village and co-organized an annual Grill & Meet event. Taking this opportunity, Alfa LINK family members were excited to share their initiative with the Lambda LINK family firm, assuming that their experience could be relevant.

“It was a discussion during a wedding, like other social discussions, where we end up discussing about work, problems with the business and so on. Whilst discussing about the lack of social events in my village, my colleague Nicolas from the village of Alfa threw their social activity as an example, with the belief that it could be useful for us to do something similar” [John, Co-owner of Lambda LINK].

Third, in case stewards from other firms find an existing initiative interesting, a dialogue unfolds, which encompasses brainstorming, ideation, and knowledge sharing between generating (i.e., the stewards that generated the initiative) and recipient stewards (i.e., the stewards interested in the initiative) on the way the latter can replicate this initiative in their own community. Continuing from the earlier example, Alfa and Lambda LINK family members, after the latter established interest, engaged in further discussions over and beyond the dinner table.

“We met several times after the wedding. They invited me to attend their event to see first-hand the organizing and reaction from community people. We discussed, they shared their knowledge and experience with us” [John, Co-owner of Lambda LINK].

The sharing processes, are linked to replication processes within communities, which are explained in the following section.

4.2.3 Social value replication through dual embeddedness: From sharing to replicating

Social value replication involves a process through which social value initiatives, which are created elsewhere (i.e., in other communities), are replicated in another community context. Table 3 presents social initiatives (indicated in italics font) which were transferred from other contexts.

Recipient stewards (i.e., family firm owner and/or successors) replicate an initiative in their communities after drawing knowledge and ideas during the value-sharing processes occurring at the cooperative level. Thus, value replication can be understood as a practice that is part of a firm’s dual embeddedness within the cooperative and community. For instance, the Beta LINK family firm established a folk dance club in its community after being exposed to value-sharing practices by Zeta LINK family firm stewards (i.e., the generating stewards) within the cooperative.

“I heard Steven (referring to the owner of Zeta LINK) talking about a dance club during a board meeting at the LINK headquarters. I liked the idea and approached him for more details [...] I ended doing the same here (referring to the Beta village) and I don’t regret it” [David, Owner of Beta LINK].

Evidence suggests the presence of a process leading to the replication of social initiatives within communities. First, family firm recipient stewards interact with organizational actors in their communities (e.g., community council, welfare organizations) to verify the relevance of social initiatives to which they have been exposed during value sharing in the cooperative. During this stage, recipient stewards explore whether such initiatives could be value added and, thus, useful for their communities. Referring to the replication of the Grill & Meet initiative in their community, Lambda LINK business successor indicated:

“Before we proceeded with this event, we first asked the local council if they see favourably such an event. We also asked our co-villagers who visit our grocery about their views. We got a positive feeling and that gave us the ok to proceed” [Jenny, Successor of Lambda LINK].

Second, if relevance is sensed, then recipient LINK family firm stewards seek to establish partnerships around the initiative and mobilize the resources needed for replicating social initiatives.

For instance, the Beta LINK family firm stewards secured the support from their community council to promote the folk dance club, identified a dance instructor, and injected €3000 capital to run the club. That was a practice they imitated after discussing it with the Zeta LINK family firm stewards who had generated the initiative in the first instance.

“There are many things on which we cooperate with the community council, and Beta LINK gives a lot to philanthropic causes. So, when we brought the idea of the dance club to the table, the community council could not do different but to endorse it and adopt it” **[Jerry, Successor of Beta LINK]**.

Third, replicating LINK family firm stewards implement and run joint social initiatives with community-based organizational actors. LINK family firm research participants referred to the success (in terms of community value added) of such replicating initiatives.

“It was a wise choice. Running it once already, and seeing how well this was received by people, I am sure that if we keep running it can definitely benefit the village and its people who seek opportunities to escape from hectic life and socialize more” **[Jenny, Successor of Lambda LINK]**.

4.3 The stewardship attitudes that power social value processes

Data analyzed suggest the presence of three stewardship attitudes, which are critical to the realization of the processes of generating, sharing, and replicating social value. These include family stewardship, business stewardship, and cooperative stewardship.

4.3.1 Family stewardship towards community influencing value generation and replication

Evidence suggests that *family stewardship* emerges in the form of attitudes and behaviours that family members maintain towards the community in which their business is embedded. It is linked to a family tradition of caring about and contributing towards community in economic, material, and social aspects.

“Myself, whatever village events are held, I am volunteering to offer labor or support with money or other resources. My son, Bob, is getting involved in the cultural associations. My daughter, for the last 15 years, is a dancer in the cultural club. When there are theatrical events, my wife is involved, as she is in the theatre. As a family, we all contribute and help” **[Steven, Owner-manager of Zeta LINK]**.

Evidence suggests that family stewardship towards the community in which the family firm is embedded is reinforced through the bonds that the family maintains with community citizens and local stakeholders, and it is also further enhanced when a family has been historically nurtured within the specific community. For instance, the family of Epsilon LINK was born and bred in the community in

which the business was embedded. This created more complex bonds with the locality, emotional connections of family with community, and a natural desire of the family to support the community with any means possible:

“This is the place I grew. My wife is also from this village. So, I believe that it is normal, since we also have a business in the village for our co-villagers to rely on us. People, foundations, the council all come to us for help. This is normal for us, anyway. To support the village, not as part of the job, but as something greater that goes beyond the business” [Max, Owner of Epsilon LINK].

As articulated by research participants, this type of stewardship is a motivating force behind the process of generating and replicating social value. Being a family that historically and traditionally holds strong values for community contribution shapes the family tendency to seek solutions which can add value to the community. Working alongside other community actors to sense social gaps and committing time and resources in pursuing social solutions required great commitment on behalf of the community-embedded family firms. Yet, family stewardship is strong within specific family firms, who wish to go along this way to realize social initiatives for their community. This was reflected by Zeta LINK when establishing the folk dance club in in their village:

“All my family was involved in implementing this project, including my daughter and wife who are not working in the business. It was created out of a family desire to give something to the community” [Steven, Owner-manager of Zeta LINK].

4.3.2 Business and Family Stewardship duality and the generation and replication of value

Evidence suggests the presence of *business stewardship* amongst case businesses, encompassing strong and explicit business values linked to community care, concern, and contribution.

Business stewardship towards community is acknowledged by research participants:

“As a company, we need to contribute to the community. We take from the village and we give; it’s not logical to receive and not to give. This is clear in the minds of all people in the shop. Either the short talks that the cashier will do with the customers or the company’s donations, are important for a company that is concerned for its community” [Chris, Successor of Epsilon LINK].

Data analyzed hint that business stewardship is influenced by the family’s stewardship towards the community. In this sense, the community values and sensitivities held by controlling family members are transferred to the business.

“Because the family is active in the community, the grocery is not an impersonal grocery, like any other large supermarkets. This makes the business to be more sensitive with the issues concerning community

welfare, like what we do in our centre. Because our centre has to do with people from this community. They do support us a lot” [Sally, Social Worker of Beta Welfare].

Consequently, it appears that business stewardship complements family stewardship behaviours towards community, and these types of stewardship jointly generate and replicate social value. Research participants from Lambda LINK described what can be conceived as a blend of family and business stewardship behaviours towards community when elaborating on what had driven them to run their own Grill & Meet event, following the example of Alfa LINK family firm.

“It [referring to the Grill & Meet idea] was first discussed in a family circle, before taking any actions. This is something we do frequently. We realized that it matched our style and beliefs, both as a family and a business. The way we wish to donate to the community” [Jenny, Successor of Lambda LINK].

4.3.3 Cooperative stewardship influencing value sharing

Cooperative stewardship is a third type of stewardship that emerged from our data. This type of stewardship involves altruistic attitudes and behaviours within the Cooperative, which are shared by diverse family firm stewards. Research participants from LINK family firms expressed their care towards the cooperative and their willingness to give up time, resources, and money to support its cause:

“I don’t see competition when my customer says that they went to another LINK grocery to shop. I view this as a gain for the LINK Cooperative. The cooperative wins and all companies in the cooperative also survive. It’s irrelevant that they did not shop from me, where I would also have gain here as well, the cooperative will survive, because they did not go from A or B they shopped from the cooperative, this is how I see it” [Max, Owner of Epsilon LINK].

As emerged from the data, cooperative stewardship is strong on its own to motivate the sharing of social value initiatives between family firm stewards. Driven by values that focus on altruistic contributions and care towards the cooperative, family firm generating stewards feel obliged to support their colleagues in other LINK family firms to replicate successful social initiatives in their own communities. Thus, the alertness and willingness to share social initiatives with others is a feature of cooperative embeddedness. This was echoed by family members generating initiatives in their own communities.

“The climate within LINK is ideal. There is respect and harmony, which helps in expressing opinions, sharing information, and exchanging ideas. People may say what they have done and I will go and see for myself to see if it’s a good idea to adopt. It may involve a simple change in store layout but even

something more special such as a food bank to help fellow-villagers in need” [Mario, Successor of Delta LINK].

Evidence suggests that cooperative stewardship can establish a sharing culture across companies within the cooperative. Yet, in some instances, cooperative stewardship can be fragmented, and sharing may take place only between a few companies. Evidence indicates that sharing only with a few may result from the geographical proximity between companies or due to past acquaintances between owners or even strong friendship ties established within the cooperative.

The shops are many, we are talking about 40 shops. With 2-3 of them, we have come very close. I phone them, I ask for advice, I share what I do.

[Steven, Owner-manager of Zeta LINK].

I may speak more with people from Zeta LINK, which is close to us. I am also at the same age with them and I know them from childhood. We can give ideas to each other, there are many times that they may call me or I may call them.

[Max, Owner of Epsilon LINK].

4.4 Facilitators and tensions within social value processes

Evidence suggests that social value processes are facilitated and restricted at the same time in the presence of a number of conditions or tensions.

4.4.1 The reinforcement of value generation through value replication

Research participants who have participated in value replication processes in their own community elaborated that such a process allowed them to acquire important knowledge and experiences, which have been subsequently essential in allowing them to improve their ability to generate impactful social initiatives in their own communities. Research participants mentioned that, as a business, they have been involved in local initiatives and social giving. Yet, they emphasized that going through a process of replication of best social practices that others have conceived locally was a real eye-opener for them. Drawing on the knowledge and guidance of their business counterparts in the LINK Cooperative (i.e., generating stewards), they could get a better grasp on how to properly design and execute their own initiatives when an opportunity would arise. This was true in the case of the Beta LINK family firm, which had replicated in their community the folk dance club initiative of Zeta LINK. Beta family firm stewards (i.e., parents and two offspring), who had led the replication

initiative in their own community, emphasized that this experience gave them the capacity to plan initiatives which were more impactful (than before), and thus added value for their communities.

“You get to understand better how things work when you do them. Before, we were giving money to whoever was coming here with a health problem or for philanthropic events, without a plan or something more solid behind it. But when we came to organize from scratch a whole community dance school, well, we understood that we can do a lot of other things. Recently, my children are going ahead with an idea to transform a shed we don’t use anymore into a self-service coffee place where customers and other citizens of this village can make their coffee and pass their time socializing” [Jerry, Successor of Beta LINK].

4.4.2 “Deep” vs. “Shallow” embeddedness and stewardship

This was a condition which was apparent in the data and provides additional understanding of the linkages between value generation and replication processes. The findings illustrate that certain families from LINK family firms were more heavily involved in their communities than others, exemplifying more altruistic attitudes towards their locality and a “deep” community embeddedness. These families demonstrated higher community stewardship attitudes and behaviours, triggering a desire from these families and their businesses to enhance social impact for their communities. Evidence suggests that, under deep embeddedness, family and business stewardship behaviours become one and are associated with a higher frequency of value-added initiatives from the business towards the community. Alfa LINK family firm, for instance, encompassed a very active family, which was deeply embedded within their community. The business, in turn, was frequently engaged in value generating initiatives:

“We are active citizens, as a family, in this village. Our help is considered granted. What we do, we do not do it to get recognition, we do it because we like it, we like to be involved with the community. Besides sponsoring community festivals, our business runs its own Grill & Meet event. Also, the cultural group of the village is managed primarily by my family and resources from our business [...]. A year back, there was a village event and they were awarding people. As I was grilling for the event, I heard my name called out. Mr Nicolas from Alfa LINK to take off his apron and come and receive his award. I was not expecting it but I was very honored” [Nicolas, Owner-manager of Alfa LINK].

Further, data analyzed also illustrate that family firms characterized by deep embeddedness would also more frequently replicate social initiatives of their LINK business counterparts. Alfa LINK business stewards, for instance, liked to mingle with their counterparts to discuss social ideas implemented elsewhere with the intention to replicate initiatives:

“I am from these areas. I saw how the village has been developing, altogether, one for all and all for one. It is in my blood to help. Thus, whenever I hear a good idea, especially from colleagues in this

cooperative, I strive to find more and if I like it, I implement it. [...] Recently, I liked a concept in another LINK shop in the Giota village. They put 3 nicely decorated food bank trolleys at the exit of their supermarket and I did the same” [Tom, Successor of Alfa LINK].

On the contrary, a number of other family firms are not that immersed in their communities, exemplifying a type of “shallow” embeddedness. This was observed within family firms where the younger generation was not that close to community life and maintained different views (from the senior generation) on how family and business should feature in the community. Further, evidence suggests that, in certain cases where the younger generation took or was about to take over the business, there were more tensions and disagreements between senior and junior family members, where the latter argued for a separation of family and business contribution towards community.

“If the business is an active member of the community, then it is, but it has to be separated from what the family does. My father thinks differently. I disagree” [Chris, Successor of Epsilon LINK].

A number of successors expressed the need for such separation, suggesting that the business should act more professionally and treat community contribution as an overall strategy that can provide economic benefits to the firm:

“Because it is a community, the fellow villager will not come to the company to receive help, they will come and find my father. ... The business should act more strategically, have a CSR in place for these things. To know that it will invest in a programme for the community that will improve the image of the business and bring more customers to the business, which is good for us” [Lisa, Successor of Gamma LINK].

Evidence illustrates that such tensions were leading to less frequent or rare community value creating initiatives on behalf of a family firm. Gamma LINK family firm exemplified such conditions:

“After my daughter came to the business, we are more careful how the business is featured in the community. We offer, donate, volunteer as a family or individuals, but when it comes to the business we try to find the few best opportunities through which both the community and business can gain” [Peter, Owner-manager of Gamma LINK].

Additionally, data analyzed suggest links between the depth of embeddedness and the sharing of social value initiatives. Evidence shows that meetings where multiple people would discuss a successful social initiative would more often involve senior family members exhibiting strong community values and deep embeddedness within their respective communities. On the contrary, whilst successors of LINK family firms were also present in Cooperative meetings, they were less

likely to get involved in discussions on social initiatives generated in other communities, especially if their views would not be aligned with community ideals.

“As a business, we sit on the board of the Cooperative. Either myself or my father need to attend board meetings once in a while. A couple of young people are attending and the rest are from the older generation. I am not mingling much with the older people who different views and values. In contrast to my father, I will attend the meeting and then return back to the job. I will not sit there to socialize and discuss issues ranging from politics to village affairs, which is what my father likes. Thus, I am often not much aware what is going on in other LINK businesses and villages” [Bob, Successor of Zeta LINK].

The section that follows provides a conceptualization and discussion of the findings.

5. Discussion

Our study joins a new stream of literature on the community-specific social impact of embedded interorganizational relationships (Ordonez-Ponce, Clarke, & Colbert, 2020; Siemieniako et al., 2021).

Our findings are novel in that they provide the first evidence on the micro-processes and mechanisms through which interorganizational relationships between a cooperative and a community allow firms to operate on a continuum comprised of social value generation, sharing and replication practices.

Generating social value has been identified in our study as a departing point in allowing family firms to engage in interorganizational socially impactful activities in rural communities. The findings suggest a social value creation process, which is affected by community-embedded interorganizational relationships (Gassenheimer, Houston, & Davis, 1998). Embeddedness enables family firms in rural communities to interact with local organizations to sense social gaps, mobilize resources, and implement social initiatives to benefit communities. Our findings support evidence that locally embedded family firms are more alerted to the social issues of their immediate communities, and therefore, they are more likely to interact with local organizations (Basco & Suwala, 2020) to access the needed resources (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Zahra et al., 2014) to generate community-specific social value (Cunningham & Seaman, 2021).

Yet, our findings shed light on sequential micro-processes and specific mechanisms that facilitate or obstruct value generation through interorganizational relationships, which have been latent in family firm and social impact literatures so far. Specifically, our study highlights that in the presence of deep community embeddedness, family firms encompass stronger family and business stewardship attitudes

towards community and are more willing to engage in local interorganizational relationships to generate social value. On the contrary, a shallow community embeddedness may lead to weaker stewardship, which can disrupt social value generation through interorganizational relations. Stewardship has been extensively researched in relation to family firm behavior (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2009; Madison et al., 2016). However, it has not been sufficiently considered from an embeddedness angle (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020; Lehrer & Segal, 2020) nor as a mechanism facilitating or impeding interorganizational relations for generating social value. Our findings illustrate that embeddedness and stewardship can exert a strong motive for engaging in interorganizational relations for social impact in rural communities. Such a motive, so far, has only been examined in the context of formal corporate social responsibility and marketing strategies, which incentivize firms to collaborate to pursue social value generation as a commercial strategy (Lindorff, Jonson, & McGuire, 2012; McWilliams & Siegel, 2011).

Sharing social value has emerged in our study as a practice following the generation of social value by family firms through community-embedded interorganizational relationships. Our findings illustrate the role of cooperative embeddedness in enabling different family firms to share social value initiatives across communities. Family firms, which lead the generation of social initiatives in their respective communities, capitalize on the shared space provided by the cooperative organization to share their initiatives with other cooperative-embedded family firms. These findings support evidence that family firms, which are embedded in cooperatives, exchange knowledge and best practices with other member firms (Block & Spiegel, 2013; Hadjielias & Poutziouris, 2015).

Family firms' interorganizational relations in cooperatives have been examined in relation to economic value creation through joined entrepreneurship (Block & Spiegel, 2013), and at the same time, the broader literature on cooperatives highlights the merits of cooperatives in terms of producing value in rural areas through the collective actions of cooperative-member firms (Staatz, 1987; Tregear & Cooper, 2016). Our study fills a literature gap on the way firms engage in the sharing of social value through interorganizational relationships.

Our findings offer novel understanding of the sequential processes and facilitating mechanisms enabling family firms to share social value with other cooperative-embedded family firms. Specifically, our study illustrates that, when cooperative-embedded family firms sense they carry a transferable social initiative, which can fill social gaps in other communities, they are willing to share their social impact engagement experience with others, offering their support to implement such activities elsewhere. This sharing can occur in the presence of deep embeddedness and cooperative stewardship attitudes, which make member-firms willing to share knowledge and support one another in the cooperative.

Embeddedness and stewardship have been identified to facilitate the collective actions of business families within rural communities (Baù et al., 2019; Greenberg, Farja, & Gimmon, 2018). Our study is the first to address their sharing merits within cooperatives and their role in facilitating the sharing of social value between community-embedded family firms. Such findings also extend prior notions of the interorganizational spaces that family firms may rely on to share important knowledge (Nordqvist, 2012), but also hint that family members act as a network of stewards of a cooperative (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020) through procuring an alignment of practices that improves the well-being of associated members and their communities.

Replicating social value has emerged in our study as a practice succeeding value sharing within the Cooperative. Our findings illustrate that during this stage, family firms are equipped with the knowledge to replicate social value initiatives in their own communities. The replication of social value through interorganizational relationships has not been addressed so far in the literature and constitutes a novel finding, which extends literature on the social impact of business relationships. The closest findings are found within the knowledge spillover (Plummer & Acs, 2014), knowledge transfer (Roper, Vahter, & Love, 2013), and knowledge exploitation (Cao et al., 2018; Powell, Koput, & Smith-Doerr, 1996) literatures, where organizations exploit knowledge externalities from other firms, which are embedded in the same sector or region, to generate similar products or services (Cao et al., 2018). Yet,

this line of work concerns the replication of economic value. Our findings provide the first evidence on the replication of social value initiatives through interorganizational relationships.

Specifically, our study explains the micro-processes and mechanisms through which family firms replicate social value within local communities. After obtaining knowledge on social initiatives created in other communities (through sharing social value practices within the cooperative), family firms interact with local organizations in their own communities to materialize this knowledge into community-specific social initiatives. However, social value replication is more likely in the presence of deep embeddedness and, therefore, stronger strong family and business stewardship attitudes towards community. Such conditions motivate family firms to seek the replication of successful social initiatives to support their own communities. Figure 2 offers a schematic representation of the findings across the generation, sharing, and replication dimensions of interorganizational socially impactful activities of family firms.

[Insert Figure 2, about here]

5.1 Theoretical contributions

Our study contributes theoretically to the literatures on interorganizational relationships, stewardship, and embeddedness in three key ways. First, our study advances the emerging body of research on the social impact of interorganizational relationships by developing a process-understanding of the way interorganizational relationships are employed to create positive social change within rural communities. Past research highlights the types and importance of interorganizational relationships for social impact through, for instance, joint corporate social sustainability initiatives by supply chain partners (Sodhi & Tang, 2018; Miemczyk et al., 2012) or multi-stakeholder partnerships that tackle grand health and environmental challenges (Bäckstrand, 2006; Bramanti et al., 2020). Yet, the processes underlying the social impact of interorganizational relationships received scant attention (Sharma, 2020; Siemieniako et al., 2021). Our study fills this theoretical gap by elucidating the micro-processes and mechanisms through which interorganizational

relationships influence the way social value activities are generated, shared, and replicated by rural family firms linked together through a cooperative.

Figure 2 illustrates a conceptual model to understand the social impact in rural settings through interorganizational relationships between family firms, a community, and a cooperative. The model departs from the generation of social impact activities based on the level of embeddedness of family members within a rural community. This illustrates that the process is affected by the interorganizational relationships between family firm and community members. Interactions between fellow family firms in the cooperative allow interorganizational stewards to share socially impactful practices based on shared community values and the underpinning motivations of family members in a rural setting. The sharing processes occurring at the cooperative level allow recipient stewards to replicate social value initiatives in their communities through interactions with local organizational actors. The model suggests the generation, sharing, and replication of social impact activities based on the multiple interorganizational interactions. It delineates the boundary conditions under which interorganizational relationships may shape socially impactful activities by a cooperative composed of family firms.

Second, by examining an embedded form of stewardship, our study contributes to stewardship theorizing (Davis et al., 1997). Our study, contextualized in a cooperative composed of family firms embedded in rural communities, provides understanding of how an embeddedness view of stewardship allows us to shift our focus to socially impactful activities of firms within communities (Discua Cruz, 2020). Managing multiple interorganizational relationships extend our view about how individual family members, as stewards, navigate relationships within their family, community institutions, and associated cooperative members (Hadjielias & Poutziouris, 2015). Our findings reinforce the notion that, by relying on multiple interorganizational interactions (Fitzgerald et al., 2010), family members may behave as stewards (Davis et al., 2010) not only by safeguarding the survival of their firm but also by generating and replicating social impact activities. Findings show that family firm stewards share their approach and rationale to social impact initiatives based on their level of embeddedness.

In addition, the findings offer an embeddedness view of stewardship by family firms in cooperative associations. Prior work suggested that being embedded within a cooperative offers a context for interactions between member firms, where discussions around social impact activities may occur (Hadjielias & Poutziouris, 2015). This study provides evidence that cooperative members use such context as an interorganizational milieu to act as stewards. They do so by sharing and discussing their social impact engagement experience with others, offering their support to implement such activities elsewhere. Such findings extend prior notions of the interorganizational spaces that family firms may rely on to discuss important matters (Nordqvist, 2012), but they also hint that family members act as stewards of a cooperative and as a network (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020) through procuring an alignment of practices that improves the well-being of associated members and their communities.

Third, this study extends theory on local or community embeddedness by showing how multiple embeddedness within community and cooperative underpins processes and behaviors leading to social impact through interorganizational relationships (Dessaigne & Pardo, 2020). Shared views about looking after a community amongst family firm leaders, associated with a cooperative, aligned motivations to engage, share, and replicate socially responsible initiatives over time. Embeddedness plays an important role in explaining the engagement of family firms in socially impactful activities. First, family firms are custodians of diverse local social and business cultures by being part of local institutions (Spielmann et al., 2019). Second, by engaging in an embeddedness pattern, they become relevant links in diverse networks, through which information about social impact activities may become available and acted upon (Cao et al., 2018). Finally, they could leverage other proximity dimensions, such as organizational, social, and cognitive resources, with other actors through interorganizational relationships (Basco & Suwala, 2020) to develop autonomous ways to generate social impact. Yet their degree of embeddedness will affect whether they act in a way that aligns common objectives amongst diverse actors or pursue their own objectives in the engagement of social impact activities.

5.2 Practical implications

For practitioners in business organizations, this study underscores that interorganizational relationships influence the social impact activities engaged by firms embedded in a community. There is an implicit relationship between the rural community and family firms based on mutual trust, which is a guiding mechanism of stewardship. It contains a quid pro quo provision: a rural community may provide permission for the business to exist and operate, and in return, the family firm must “look after” the interests of their community. Engaging in social impact activities may allow a family firm in a rural community to be deliberate about their underlying motivations to address societal concerns. A failure to engage in such activities could be considered contradictory to the expectations of businesses associated with a larger organization (e.g., a cooperative). For cooperatives, the social impact that every associated business in a rural community has is unavoidable. Relationships between associated firm leaders and community members can shape the generation, sharing, and replication of social impact activities that cater for family and business expectations.

For practitioners in non-profit organizations in rural regions, such as community councils, welfare organizations, charities, and cultural institutions, this study underscores the importance of cooperating with other organizations, especially for-profit entities, for facilitating positive social change through the co-creation of social value. Non-profit organizations targeting marginalized groups, such as the poor or ethnic minorities, are ideally positioned to gather information on social problems and gaps in their respective rural communities. By engaging in relationships with business organizations, they can access the resources they need, particularly financial capital and expertise, for filling community gaps and to materialize the resources into entrepreneurial outcomes. Drawing on our findings, managers of non-profit organizations can acknowledge their importance and role in interorganizational relationships, which are established for generating social impact in rural areas. Managers of non-profit organizations should seek collaborations with for-profit organizations that sustain values and ideals linked to rural communities. Family firms are ideal candidates for such collaborations, given that business families are often deeply embedded within the communities in

which their firms operate. Consequently, through collaboration with family firms, non-profit organizations can be in a stronger position to realize their social goals and facilitate positive social change in their communities.

For policy makers, our study highlights the intersection between regional economics and economic geography of family firms (Basco and Suwala, 2020). The findings suggest that, without official government support, it is unlikely that social impact initiatives will be encouraged or become a norm for family firms in rural settings or in cooperatives. Support for cooperatives is important, as interorganizational processes suggested in this study may position the cooperative as an appropriate milieu to generate a spectrum of social impact activities that members may consider over time and that may have applicability across regions.

5.3 Limitations and future research

There are several caveats associated with this study, and therefore, its findings must be interpreted with caution. First, whilst relying on a multiple case study provides a comprehensive understanding of social impacts in a particular setting, it also limits the generalization of the results beyond the cases being studied (Yin, 2018). Future work can test our conceptual model (see Figure 2) using survey data to determine its validity and verify the presence and accuracy of the proposed relationships.

Second, the present study supports the view that findings are dependent on the firms studied and the context in which business activities are carried out (McAdam et al., 2014). Moreover, in this study, most firms were homogenous in terms of size, location and business sector, whilst the study was conducted in a single country (i.e., Cyprus), and therefore it may be difficult to infer similar results in other countries. Considering these limitations, future research can benefit from cross-national comparative work on interorganizational relationships in cooperatives composed of family firms, particularly in countries where the cooperative movement has become widespread in rural and urban settings (Ajates, 2020). Future quantitative and qualitative studies could look into emerging and

transition economies (James et al., 2020). Multiple case studies in contrasting regions may support, expand, or challenge findings presented here (Reay & Zhang, 2014) to explore further the nuances of interorganizational relationships in the development of social impact activities by family firms in rural settings. Further, future studies could explore to what extent the variability of social impact engagement by family firms in rural communities is influenced by cultural expectations, compare how social impact initiatives unfold in diverse types of family firms (Westhead and Howorth, 2007), and reveal if such diversity adds to the discussion presented here.

Third, whilst our study included follow-up interviews, it did not use a genuinely longitudinal approach (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010), which is better suited for exploring process-specific dynamics linked to organizational phenomena (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Slotte–Kock & Coviello, 2010). Thus, future studies drawing on longitudinal research designs, such as ethnography (Brewer, 2000), can be in a better position to examine and address the unfolding dynamics, changes, and processes through which interorganizational relationships contribute to social impact. Longitudinal studies can also be in a better position to provide a temporal account of how interorganizational relationships contribute to social impact and, in this way, to address a literature gap concerning the lack of a time-based understanding of this phenomenon.

6. Conclusion

Interorganizational relationships matter for the development of socially impactful activities. Our study advances understanding of social impact through interorganizational relationships, seen through an embeddedness view of stewardship. An embedded stewardship perspective suggests that family firm stewards interact with multiple organizational actors within their community and cooperative to generate, share, and replicate social impact activities. Opportunities to engage in embedded stewardship are perhaps not open or valuable to everyone unless there is an attempt to become embedded in a community and develop a stewardship relationship of duty of care towards others.

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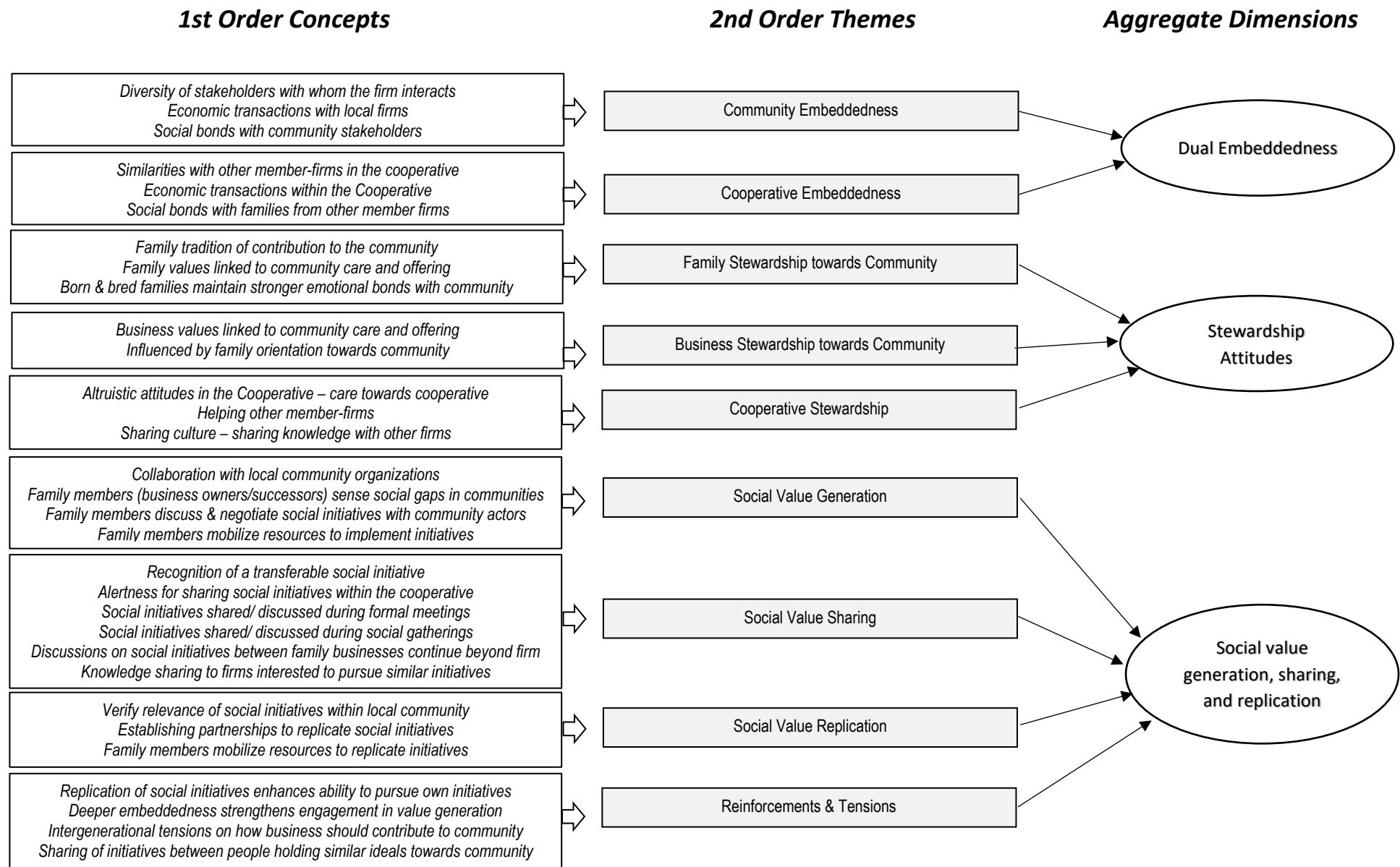
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Figure 1. Data structure



Adapted from Gioia et al., 2013

Figure 2: Generating, sharing, and replicating social value through interorganizational relationships within community and cooperative

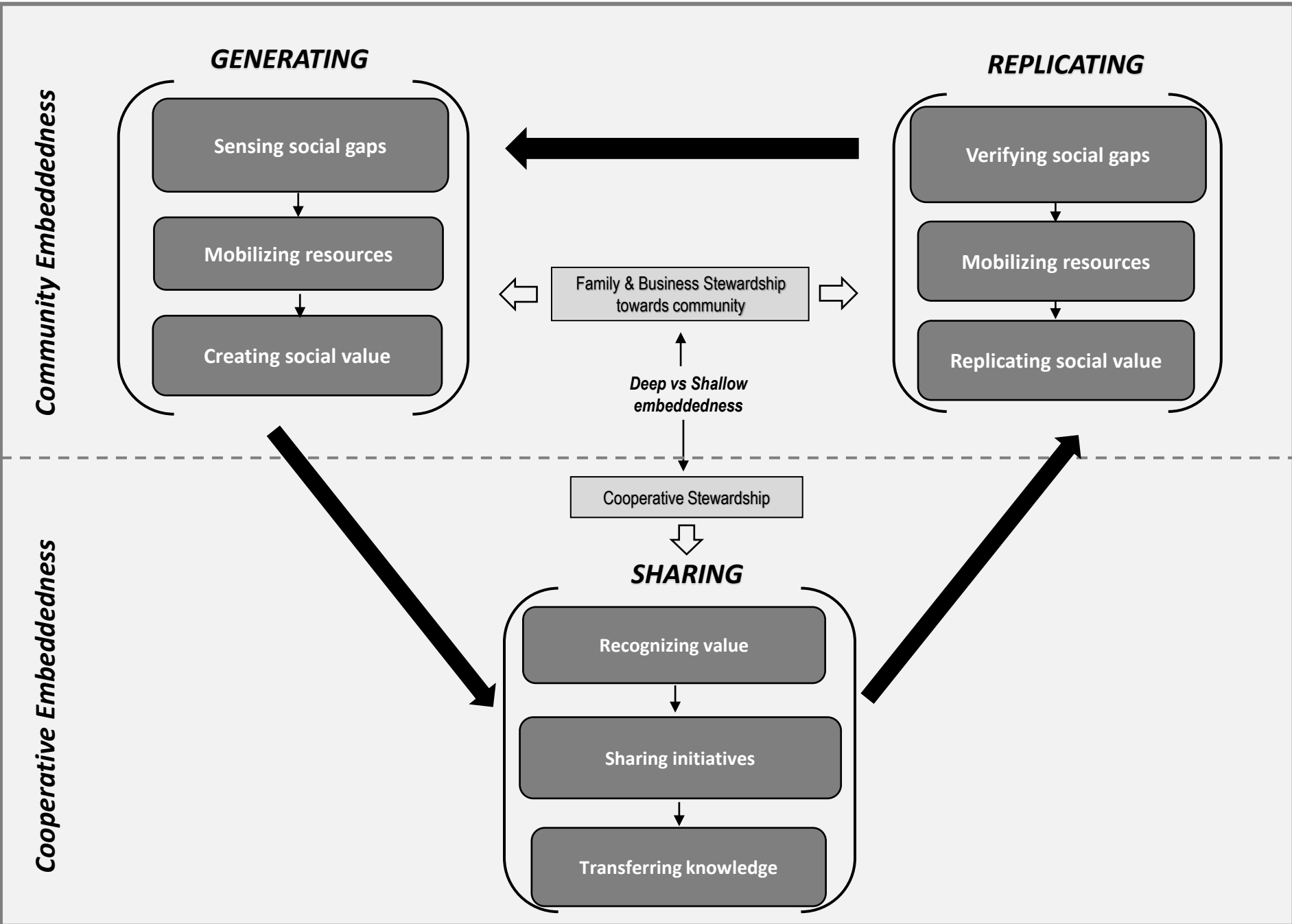


Table 1. Profiles of cooperative and case businesses

| Name¹ | Details |
|-------------------------|---|
| LINK Cooperative | Food Cooperative established in 1996 and comprised of 40 small (less than 50 employees) grocery stores in the south-east rural areas of Cyprus. |
| Alfa LINK | Est in 1979; 15 employees; Owner-managed, second and third generation working together; 4 family members in the business |
| Beta LINK | Est in 1962; 22 employees; Owner-managed, first and second generation working together; 4 family members in the business |
| Gamma LINK | Est in 1977; 10 employees; Owner-managed, first and second generation working together; 3 family members in the business |
| Delta LINK | Est in 1982; 12 employees; Owner-managed, second and third generation working together; 4 family members in the business |
| Epsilon LINK | Est in 1983; 15 employees; Owner-managed, first and second generation working together; 6 family members in the business |
| Zeta LINK | Est in 1997; 10 employees; Owner-managed, first and second generation working together; 3 family members in the business |
| Lambda LINK | Est in 1996; 8 employees; Owner-managed, first and second generation working together; 3 family members in the business |

¹ Pseudonyms are used

Table 2. Interviewee profiles per case

| Case | Name ² | Gender | Age | Role (Organization) | Controlling family generation | Number of interviews |
|--------------|-------------------|--------|-----|---|--|----------------------|
| Alfa LINK | Nicolas | male | 53 | [sole] Owner-Manager (Alfa Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | Tom | male | 24 | Marketing (Alfa Link) | 3 rd | 2 |
| | James | male | 54 | Logistics (Alfa Link) | N/A | 2 |
| | Jack | male | 79 | Deposits (Alfa Link) | 1 st (retired, part time) | 2 |
| | Thomas | male | 64 | President (Alfa Village Council) | N/A | 1 |
| | Robert | male | 77 | Senior Citizen (Alfa Village) | N/A | 1 |
| Beta LINK | David | male | 64 | [sole] Owner-Manager (Beta Link) | 1 st | 2 |
| | Jerry | male | 33 | Logistics (Beta Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | Daisy | female | 57 | Cashier (Beta Link) | N/A | 2 |
| | Edward | male | 28 | Accounts (CSX Firm) | 2 nd (outside the business) | 2 |
| | Daniel | male | 69 | Senior Citizen (Beta Village) | N/A | 1 |
| | Sally | female | 42 | Social Worker (Beta Welfare Office) | N/A | 1 |
| | Helen | female | 53 | Delicatessen (Beta Link) | N/A | 1 |
| Gamma LINK | Peter | male | 67 | [sole] Owner-Manager (Gamma Link) | 1 st | 2 |
| | Lisa | female | 32 | Accounting (Gamma Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | Vanessa | female | 64 | Cashier (Gamma Link) | 1 st | 2 |
| | Jane | female | 44 | Member (Gamma Village Council) | N/A | 1 |
| | Maggie | female | 38 | Assistant (Gamma Link) | N/A | 1 |
| | Charlie | male | 63 | Owner (STT Farms) | N/A | 1 |
| Delta LINK | Paul | male | 64 | [sole] Owner-Manager (Delta Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | Susan | female | 34 | Procurement & Logistics (Delta Link) | 3 rd | 2 |
| | Kate | female | 61 | Accounting (Delta Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | Jeremy | male | 51 | Director (Bright Charity) | N/A | 1 |
| | Amelia | female | 44 | Assistant (Delta Link) | N/A | 1 |
| | Oliver | male | 56 | Owner (PLS Farms) | N/A | 1 |
| Epsilon LINK | Max | male | 61 | [sole] Owner-Manager (Epsilon Link) | 1 st | 2 |
| | Chris | male | 26 | Butcher (Epsilon Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | Harry | male | 32 | Grocer (Epsilon Link) | 2 nd | 1 |
| | Leo | male | 62 | Treasurer (Epsilon Village Church) | N/A | 1 |
| | Agnes | female | 43 | Director (Hope Charity) | N/A | 1 |
| Zeta LINK | Steven | male | 62 | [sole] Owner-Manager (Zeta Link) | 1 st | 2 |
| | Bob | male | 26 | Operations (Zeta Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | William | male | 46 | President (Zeta Village Cultural Group) | N/A | 1 |
| | Ethan | male | 56 | Vice-President (Zeta Village Council) | N/A | 1 |
| | Lucas | male | 62 | Butcher (Zeta Link) | N/A | 1 |
| | Noah | male | 50 | Owner (WRS Farms) | N/A | 1 |
| Lambda LINK | John | male | 65 | Co-Owner-Manager (Lamda Link) | 1 st | 2 |
| | Laura | female | 61 | Co-Owner-Manager (Lamda Link) | 1 st | 2 |
| | Jenny | female | 29 | Operations (Lamda Link) | 2 nd | 2 |
| | Ava | female | 39 | Director (Lamda Welfare Office) | N/A | 1 |
| | Joseph | male | 68 | President (Zeta Village Council) | N/A | 1 |
| | | | | | | 62 |

² Pseudonyms are used

Table 3. Examples of socio-economic interactions and initiatives embedded within community and cooperative

| | ALFA LINK | BETA LINK | GAMMA LINK | DELTA LINK | EPSILON LINK | ZETA LINK | LAMBDA LINK |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| Community embedded interactions & initiatives with local organizations | <p><i>Collaboration with Alfa village council to run an annual Grill & Meet event</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration with Alfa village council and welfare office to run a food bank trolley scheme in the supermarket</i></p> <p>Sponsoring community festivals and events</p> <p>Family members volunteer to support community events</p> <p>Frequent interactions with village council president and members</p> <p>Daily interactions with community citizens at the store</p> <p>Collaborating with local farmers for grocery and fruits</p> | <p><i>Collaboration with Beta village council to establish a folk dance club</i></p> <p>Establishing an ‘open coffee’ place for local residents</p> <p>Donations to local foundations and philanthropic events</p> <p>Financial support to poor families and residents with health problems</p> <p>Daily interactions with community residents at the store</p> <p>Collaborating with local farmers for groceries and fruits</p> | <p>Introduction of a Christmas voucher scheme in collaboration with Beta village council to help poor families</p> <p>Family members volunteer to support community events (e.g., annual folk festivals)</p> <p>Daily interactions with community residents at the store</p> <p>Collaborating with local farmers for grocery, fruits, and dairy products</p> | <p>Running an annual fundraising event with the community charity ‘Faith for Living’</p> <p>Collaboration with Delta village council to establish and run a Youth Centre</p> <p>Collaboration with Delta village’s welfare office to run a food bank in the supermarket</p> <p>Financial support to poor families and residents with health problems</p> <p>Daily interactions with community residents at the store</p> <p>Collaborating with local farmers for fruits</p> | <p><i>Collaboration with Epsilon village council to introduce a voucher scheme for poor families</i></p> <p>Donations to community council and local charities</p> <p>Financial support to poor families</p> <p>Daily interactions with community residents at the store</p> <p>Collaborating with local farmers for fruits and dairy products</p> | <p>Collaboration with Delta village council to establish a folk dance club</p> <p>Family members volunteer to support community events and clubs (e.g., cultural clubs, theatrical events)</p> <p>Frequent interactions with village council president and members</p> <p>Daily interactions with community residents at the store</p> <p>Collaborating with local farmers for grocery and fruits</p> | <p><i>Collaboration with Lambda village council to run an annual Grill & Meet event.</i></p> <p>Collaboration with local producers of dairy and other products</p> <p>Daily interactions with community residents at the store</p> |
| Cooperative-embedded interactions (Common across the Cooperative) | <p>Visits to/from other stores to obtain best business practices and socialize</p> <p>Informal conversations between company owners during board Cooperative-level meetings and social gatherings</p> <p>Telephone conversations between owners to obtain advice on business, exchange ideas, and socialize</p> <p>Formal discussions at Cooperative-level leading to Coop-level decisions on new initiatives (e.g. agreements with new suppliers, Coop expansions, new processes)</p> <p>Social gatherings between families across LINK companies</p> | | | | | | |

Notes:

- ❖ In **bold** font are new social initiatives generated by case firms within their communities
- ❖ In *italics* font are social initiatives transferred/ replicated from other LINK Cooperative companies