Summary and Critical Reflections

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In this final chapter, we summarise the core insights from our case studies and explore whether—and how—these insights can inspire other organisations in their journey towards a stronger commitment to regenerative and distributive business practices. Yes, the cases discussed in this book vary regarding business models, goals, and legal structures. Yet, across this diversity, they share a common characteristic: the firms pursue social or ecological goals alongside meeting essential commercial outcomes. At the heart of this pursuit of regenerative and distributive dynamics are fundamental values and norms that guide the behaviour and actions of these firms. These values and norms reflect a "higher-order purpose that links to moral and ethical obligations" (George et al. 2023: 1842).

Still, for these regenerative and distributive values and norms to be effectively embedded into business structures and processes, they must align with the organisational design traits. The focus here is to ensure that the regenerative and distributive purpose creates an organisation-wide responsibility by anchoring it within the different design traits. The case studies in this book focus on five specific design traits. First, we highlight innovative practices within each and examine the dynamics behind their contribution to an organisation's regenerative and/or distributive purpose. Second, we identify patterns across the design traits that can be observed and critically reflected upon, referencing also to Iris Marion Young's (2006) concept of global responsibility. Finally, we consider the importance of role models for regenerative and distributive business design.

Purpose Design

The Purpose Design case studies focus on how the specific regenerative and/or distributive purpose of the selected enterprises, *WEtell*, *Wildplastic* and *WoodenValley*, is embedded in and enabled by the overall business design. In all three cases, the design of ownership as "steward-ownership" can be seen as central to their purpose, while the legal model corresponds to the more traditional German spectrum of a limited liability company (GmbH) and a not-for-profit limited liability company (gGmbH). *WEtell* pursues the purpose of regenerative and distributive mobile communications, anchored by three types of shares (A-B-C shares). A-shares, for example, are owned by those who actively work in the company, ensuring that only insiders who understand the business make critical decisions. With a staff that has joined the company to pursue its core purpose, this ensures that *WEtell* always prioritises sustainable mobile networks. Linked to this is the financial model, which ensures that profits are reinvested in the business rather than distributed to shareholders. This gives *WEtell* the freedom to use its finances in service of its purpose. *Wildplastic* and *WoodenValley* share the same financial priority of reinvesting profits to advance their purpose.

The legal structure of *WoodenValley* as a not-for-profit limited liability company is an additional aspect that helps safeguard its purpose. At the same time, it assures partners that *WoodenValley* is not motivated by economic gain but by the commitment to advance its purpose of regenerative building, which in turn encourages deeper collaboration. *Wildplastic* which pursues the regenerative purpose of ridding the world of wild plastic, has adopted the stewardship ownership model of the golden share, where the Purpose Foundation holds 1% of the voting shares. While this may seem like a small percentage, the foundation carries significant power: the golden share grants it veto rights over any decisions that could divert the company from its purpose. This structure prevents profit-driven shifts and ensures that the company remains focused on its mission.

Network Design

Within the Network Design trait, several cases stood out, each illustrating different approaches to leveraging networks for impact. For example, the social enterprise *On Purpose* focuses on training and developing managers and leaders who seek to build purpose-driven rather than profit-driven organisations. A defining feature of *On Purpose* is its community-centred network design, which fosters a transformation toward purpose over profit. The organisation relies heavily on the commitment, ideas, and initiatives of its community members, embracing a bottom-up rather than top-down approach.

Furthermore, the network design based on the Economy of Love, used by *Sekem* and *EBDA*, is remarkable and can be characterised by a commitment to the holistic principles of regenerative and distributive development. These organisations have made the values on which their stakeholder relations are based visible in the Economy of Love Standard. This includes the important dimension of culture and the development of a credit system to reward farmers for organic and biodynamically grown food, as well as for their ecosystem services. This is significant given that this organic and biodynamic way of doing agriculture preserves biodiversity and stores

CO_2 due to its treatment of the soil, which helps to regenerate two of the already exceeded planetary boundaries (Biodiversity loss and Climate Change). The way *Sekem* and *EBDA* designed their network structures was based on the principle of fairness from the beginning, as the revenues from all sales of the CO_2 certificates were divided equally between all farmers. In addition, farmers receive additional income through their ecosystem services, allowing organic products to be priced more affordably. This also contributes to a more equitable distribution of, and expanded access to, healthy food.

For companies such as *Wildling Shoes*, *Sonnentor* and *Commown*, collaborations and strong partnerships with like-minded organisations play a crucial role in their success. *Wildling Shoes*, in particular, has cultivated a trust-based stakeholder network, fostering exceptionally loyal customer relationships that create interdependencies extending beyond finance. The company prioritises equal profit distribution and reinvests within its network to preserve financial independence, allowing it to stay aligned with its values. *Sonnentor*'s network is notable for its emphasis on direct communication and shared values, leading to enduring partnerships—many of which have lasted for years, if not decades. These relationships are built on mutual respect, fair cooperation, and reciprocity, including through fair wages instead of exploitation and investments in a shared future. Transparency and open dialogue further strengthen these collaborations. *Commown*, which is organised as a not-for-profit cooperative, is driven by the goal of making the electronics sector more sustainable and responsible by promoting a rental-based model instead of traditional sales. To achieve this, the company depends on trusted network partners who align with its mission.

Governance Design

The cases focused on the Governance Design trait highlight the crucial role of self-organisation and the high level of responsibility entrusted to each employee. The innovative practices within the framework of governance design aim at holacracy at *Mein Grundeinkommen* and self-organisation at *Wigwam*, both elements of New Work. For example, *Mein Grundeinkommen* is a not-for-profit organisation that crowdfunds and raffles off unconditional basic incomes. In order to achieve their purpose – 'We want a fair and crisis-proof world, in which everyone can lead a self-determined life' – a governance design that also enables a self-determined life within the organisation is an essential element to create internal and external coherence. One of the most distinctive aspects of *Mein Grundeinkommen*'s organisational design is its dynamic job structure, which enables employees to continuously create and experiment with new roles based on the organisation's evolving needs. The organisation operates under the concept of holacracy, a decentralised governance model that facilitates distributed decision-making. In this model, responsibility for decisions is not allocated to a single manager (as in hierarchical organisational structures) but is instead spread across several roles and people. This enables faster decision-making, which is also carried out by those holding the expertise. Combined with individual budget responsibility, these elements strengthen employees' self-efficacy and enhance their freedom to be co-creators.

Wigwam, a Berlin-based communications agency, follows a similar approach. The organisation stands out for its innovative governance structure, which uniquely blends self-organisation with a cooperative legal form. One of *Wigwam*'s most distinctive governance practices is its use of the resistance inquiry method for organisation-wide decisions. This model is based on the idea that when a team proposes a course of action and invites objections, minimal or no resistance from the broader group is taken as a green light to proceed. This method ensures efficient self-organisation and allows decisions to move forward quickly as long as they do not encounter significant opposition.

Both the *Wigwam* and *Mein Grundeinkommen* cases demonstrate how a dignity-based, human-centred approach to work—characterised by decision-making freedom, leadership through positive role models, and voluntary participation—can foster innovation and creativity while maintaining organisational effectiveness.

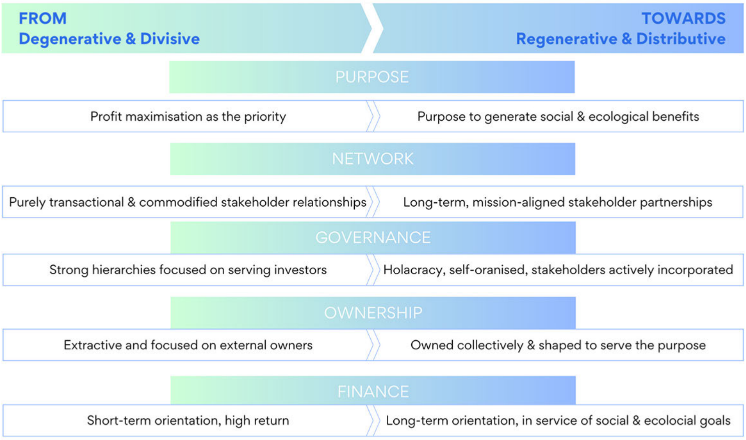
Ownership Design

Like *robinhood.store* in Berlin, *FoodHub* in Munich operates on the principles of cooperativism as a bio-supermarket. *Robinhood.store*'s innovative ownership structure makes it an outstanding case within the Ownership Design framework. The store is established as a civil law partnership (GbR) and pursues the purpose of achieving a fair distribution of prosperity worldwide. The store operates on a membership basis, where members receive discounts and actively participate in the community. This model fosters engagement, a sense of ownership, and long-term commitment among members. Its ownership structure is explicitly designed to prevent private capital accumulation. Instead of generating profits for individual shareholders, any surplus is redistributed globally – through donations to organisations addressing global poverty and climate change – or reinvested in the community.

Similarly, *FoodHub* as the first cooperatively organised supermarket in Munich is collectively owned and managed by its members, with a small team of employees handling daily operations. The purpose of the *FoodHub*, 'to bring producers and consumers closer together', is enabled by this cooperative structure. A defining feature of this model is its emphasis on co-ownership, participatory decision-making, and a high level of transparency, ensuring that members have a direct influence on the organisation's direction and values. Anyone can purchase a cooperative share of the supermarket. This share brings obligations, such as working 3 hours a month, as well as rights, including a say in what products are sold. The overall aim is to create a regional organic supply structure.

Finance Design

Figure 1: From Degenerative & Divisive to Regenerative & Distributive Business Design



Source: Own illustration.

Its citizen-led joint-stock cooperative structure makes *Regionalwert AG Franken* a compelling example of designing the finance of a business to pursue a social and ecological purpose. *Regionalwert AG Franken* aims to 'change the structures of food supply chains towards regional, ecological and fair production and processing from field to fork'. It functions as a citizens' stock corporation in which any citizen can buy shares to support precisely this regenerative and distributive corporate goal. *Regionalwert AG Franken* invests two-thirds of its capital in regional regenerative and distributive projects that would otherwise have little chance of receiving funding through official bank loans, such as organic farms or a greenhouse for solidarity farming. *Regionalwert AG Franken* provides up to 30% of a project's funding to support as many projects in the region as possible and to help them establish equity capital, making them eligible for additional bank financing. Many local shareholders do not seek financial return on their investment; instead, they prefer that *Regionalwert AG Franken* reinvests their money in further projects in their region. This form of financing enables regenerative agricultural projects to be implemented in the region and transforms local food production.

Similarly, *The Generation Forest*, structured as a cooperative, has developed a financial model based on a long-term investment horizon. This makes it another exemplary case within the finance design framework. The purpose of *The Generation Forest* is long-term reforestation. It enables the creation of mixed forests in Panama, with intact ecosystems, biodiversity, CO_2 sequestration, water regulation and restoration of soil fertility over a 20-year horizon. At the same time, it creates permanent jobs for local communities who maintain and preserve these forests. The patient capital approach generates expected returns of 4.5%, which consciously prioritises the organisation's regenerative value over short-term profits. *The Generation Forest*'s cooperative form of ownership, where new cooperative shares can be issued to anyone at any time, is the basis for this long-term form of investment.

In both cases, it is essential that shareholders adopt a long-term perspective on their investment rather than focusing on short-term profit maximisation. The examples of *Regionalwert AG Franken* and *The Generation Forest* illustrate how a long-term investment horizon can support sustainable long-term strategies while integrating ecological and social considerations into core business strategies. Figure 1 illustrates what it means to move from a degenerative and divisive to a regenerative and distributive business design.