

Case Study: Robinhood.store Berlin

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Purpose: Establishing a new economic model to promote a fair global distribution of wealth.

Design Trade: Ownership

Innovative Practice: Redistributive Ownership Design

Key Facts

The *robinhood.store* in Berlin is a community-driven organic supermarket with over 1,000 members, where all surplus revenue is fully allocated to combating global poverty and climate change. Between 2021 and 2022, a total of €10,275 was redistributed toward these causes.

Established: 2020

Location: Berlin, Germany

Founder: Mattis Steib, Jurek Katz, Noah Barthel

Ownership: Civil Law Partnership (GbR)

Legal Form: Civil Law Partnership (GbR)

Members: more than 1000

Webpage: <https://www.robinhood.store/>

Purpose, Business Model & Objectives

Purpose: “Establishing a new economic model to promote a fair global distribution of wealth.”

Robinhood.store is conceived as a pioneering model that integrates social responsibility into the core of its operations. Its primary objective is to generate a direct positive impact on disadvantaged communities and promote sustainable development

by donating 100% of its profits to charitable organisations dedicated to combating extreme poverty and climate change.

In addition, the model employs a participatory membership system that not only offers price advantages to members but also actively involves them in decision-making processes. This dual pricing system – with different conditions for members and non-members – has been designed to ensure competitiveness against large organic supermarket chains while internalising ecological and social costs associated with food production.

In the long term, *robinhood.store* aims to establish a network of like-minded companies that follow similar ethical principles. The envisioned paradigm shift moves away from traditional profit maximisation toward a system that prioritises collective well-being and environmental sustainability.

Ultimately, *robinhood.store* is not just a supermarket; it is a movement aimed at inspiring individuals and organisations to rethink their roles within the economy and to actively participate in creating a more just and sustainable world. Through its innovative approach, it seeks to serve as a model for other enterprises, demonstrating that it is possible to operate successfully while prioritising social and ecological values over mere profit accumulation. Jurek Katz, Co-Founder of *robinhood.store*, explains:

“Our current focus is on building a kind of umbrella organisation – a structure that enables the creation of its own ecosystem of enterprises which do not operate in the conventional capitalist sense.”

Insights into the Redistributive Ownership Design

Robinhood.store identifies itself as a “social participatory supermarket” that seeks to overcome capitalist structures by redistributing all profits to organisations that fight extreme poverty and climate change worldwide. The organisation not only aims to transform the local market but also to create long-term structures that predominantly benefit the Global South. In addition to the key business figures that are important, there are other decision-making dimensions, such as the resource consumption of products as well as moral and social issues.

Due to the peculiarities of the German legal system – namely, the incompatibility of nonprofit status with profit generation for subsequent donation – *robinhood.store* operates as a civil law partnership (GbR).

“It is still very unclear whether we’ll ever be able to enter a legal not-for-profit structure at all, even though we are definitely not-for-profit.” – Jurek Katz

It is planned to reorganise in the future, possibly in collaboration with the *Purpose Foundation* or through the emerging legal form of steward-ownership, which would contractually exclude both saleability and private profit.

Within the organisation, the ownership concept is understood as “commons”, while a cooperative structure is deliberately avoided. This decision results from legal requirements (e.g., for board elections) and the practical infeasibility of holding members liable.

Figure 1: Robinhood.store – Interior View



Source: Robinhood.store 2025.

Internally, *robinhood.store* adopts the principle of Holacracy, which emphasises the radical decentralisation of decision-making authority and the abandonment of traditional hierarchical structures. Through this participatory approach, both team members and general members can express concerns and influence strategic decisions – such as defining the organisation’s purpose or determining leadership roles.

The prerequisite for initiating a decision lies in the demonstrable responsibility of the individual involved, who typically contributes more than three voluntary hours per month and has successfully completed the onboarding process. This approach enhances transparency and autonomy within the organisation while simultaneously fostering creativity and innovation.

In the organisation, roles are continuously evaluated based on their alignment with the collectively defined purpose. If at any point an individual in a specific role is perceived as no longer serving this purpose effectively, any team member has the opportunity to express concerns. Regularly designated spaces facilitate such discussions. Initial steps may involve raising issues informally, such as pointing out neglected priorities or areas requiring greater focus. However, if a critical aspect of the purpose remains unaddressed and necessary resources are not allocated accordingly, the individual in that role may ultimately be removed from their position.

While certain leadership-like roles exist within different organisational areas—for instance, in strategic direction and resource allocation within designated circles—these positions remain subject to collective oversight. The individual holding a role has autonomous decision-making authority within their scope; however, if their decisions are deemed misaligned with the organisation's purpose, they can be replaced. The focus is on modifying roles rather than overriding specific decisions, ensuring that leadership remains purpose-driven and adaptable.

Membership Model: The membership model enables active contributions to the shaping of the supermarket. In addition to operational tasks such as stocking shelves or handling the cash register, members have the opportunity to gain deeper insights into the organisation's management through various roles. This model not only incentivises participation but also creates a sense of ownership among members, who contribute to the store's mission and benefit from its success. The dual pricing strategy, which offers 15% off the full price for members compared to non-members, further emphasises the store's commitment to inclusivity while maintaining financial viability.

Robinhood.store aims to make all tasks accessible to members, allowing them to choose their own shifts. Most shifts involve managing daily operations, such as stocking shelves, operating the cargo bike, or handling cashier duties. More advanced responsibilities depend significantly on individual interests, skill sets, and ideas.

For members who can only commit limited time (less than three hours per month), primarily routine tasks are designated, whereas more intensive involvement leads to extended participation in decision-making. Whether contributing regularly in-store or deeply engaging in organisational work, all members collectively contribute to the growth of a movement that seeks to collaborate in addressing global challenges through shared economic efforts.

In the long term, the organisation aims to investigate and implement additional tools for collective decision-making, particularly concerning critical issues such as the allocation of donations. For instance, participatory mechanisms such as upvot-

ing could be explored to facilitate decision-making regarding the distribution of a portion of donation funds and, in the future, investment funds.

The option to become more deeply involved in the work of *robinhood.store*, and thus participate in more significant decision-making, is open to everyone through an onboarding process. However, if a values-based alignment is not met, participation may be declined.

At present, *robinhood.store* consists of six individuals who are fully committed to the cause, alongside two part-time employees with more conventional roles and less involvement. The core team, comprising these six individuals, has gradually expanded over time. Prior to integrating new members, extensive discussions were held regarding the organisation's values and objectives. Currently, efforts are underway to formally document these principles and subsequently conduct a consensus-based review to verify that all members share the same values and goals. Should consensus not be achieved, the group will be restructured accordingly.

Figure 2: Robinhood.store Community



Source: Robinhood.store 2025.

Also, regular member council meetings, as held in the summer and fall of 2021, serve as a direct consultation process between members and the organisational team. Each council consisted of 10 randomly selected community members who met once to discuss questions, suggestions, requests, and concerns with represen-

tatives from the organisational team. The random selection of 10 members for each meeting was intended to ensure a broad range of perspectives. For every council meeting, a new group of 10 members was randomly selected to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. Although this specific initiative has been paused, it may be revived or replaced by a new approach in the future.

Focus on Redistribution: Active participation in steering the organisation requires a commitment to its core values and objectives. A fundamental principle within this framework is the adherence to self-imposed financial limitations, ensuring that individuals do not exceed a fair share of global resources in terms of both income and wealth.

The ownership structure is designed to prevent private capital accumulation. Instead of generating profits for individual shareholders, any surplus generated by the store is reinvested into the community or donated to organisations that address global poverty and climate change. As of January 2024, the *robinhood.store* allocates one-third of its donations to GiveDirectly, one-third to Cool Earth, and the remaining third to NGOs selected by the community. The selection of the first two NGOs was guided by the criteria established by organisations such as GiveWell and Effective Altruism, focusing on addressing the world's most urgent problems through the most measurably effective interventions. So far, no technical solution has been found which is why the community-selected third portion has not yet been technically implemented but is expected to be integrated into the online platform in the near future.

How the Redistributive Ownership Design Enables Regenerative and Distributive Dynamics

Increased Justice through Redistribution

The store's model embodies the economic theory of redistribution, which posits that wealth and resources should be allocated in a manner that reduces social inequalities. By redistributing profits to support social causes, *robinhood.store* aligns with the principles of distributive justice, which advocate for a fair distribution of resources based on need and contribution.

Moreover, the store emphasises the internalisation of external costs associated with production and consumption. External costs, such as environmental degradation and social inequities, are often not reflected in market prices, leading to market failures. By incorporating these costs into its pricing strategy, *robinhood.store* promotes a more equitable economic system that encourages consumers and producers to consider the broader social and environmental impacts of their choices.

The ownership structure of *robinhood.store* also challenges business models that prioritise profit maximisation over social welfare. By redistributing profits to combat poverty and climate change, the store embodies a commitment to social justice, advocating for the rights and dignity of all individuals, particularly those who are marginalised or disadvantaged. This focus on equity not only addresses immediate needs but also contributes to long-term systemic change.

Furthermore, the redistribution of resources through the ownership model aligns with sustainability goals. By directing profits towards social and environmental initiatives, *robinhood.store* contributes to the creation of sustainable systems that benefit both current and future generations. This long-term perspective is essential for addressing the root causes of inequality and injustice, promoting a holistic approach to economic development that considers social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

Creation of Sustainable Business Practices

The creation of sustainable business practices at *robinhood.store* encompasses a holistic approach that integrates environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability. This commitment is reflected in several key areas.

To begin with, the store emphasises sustainable sourcing by selecting products from environmentally friendly and fair suppliers, which not only reduces the carbon footprint but also strengthens local communities.

To achieve that, the *robinhood.store* has strategically accepted certain compromises. For instance, the retail outlet deliberately offers non-regional products, such as bananas, in order to remain competitive and attract a sufficiently large customer base. This approach helps the store incrementally facilitate societal transformation. Consequently, the organisation has deliberately phased its objectives, recognising that achieving significant market power is a prerequisite for effecting substantial changes, such as displacing bananas from conventional supermarkets in Germany. Without attaining a critical mass, such actions might merely result in a loss of customers rather than fostering a broader impact.

At the same time, *robinhood.store* acknowledges that there are inherent limits to its compromises. In cases where decisions involve trade-offs – such as accepting a temporary deterioration in environmental metrics in exchange for the potential to achieve significant long-term impacts – the organisation prioritises strategies that maximise overall effectiveness. This approach, although not universally accepted among stakeholders, has been consistently communicated as the foundational principle guiding the organisation's initiatives.

Another key aspect is waste reduction, where strategies are implemented to minimise food waste, such as donating unsold products to local food banks. Additionally, energy efficiency is promoted through the use of energy-efficient

appliances and renewable energy sources, providing both ecological and economic benefits.

Another crucial aspect is active community engagement through workshops and educational programs to raise awareness of sustainable practices. Furthermore, social equity is prioritised by ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions for all employees and suppliers. The *robinhood.store* operates with a salary cap based on the level of wealth an individual can have globally without living at the expense of others. Preliminary calculations, which require further professional refinement, estimate this cap at €1,500 net per month, adjusted for purchasing power parity which is also the number that the *robinhood.store* uses.

Challenges Arising from Designing Ownership Around Redistribution

Inadequate Legal Forms

Innovative business models like that of *robinhood.store* face the challenge that existing legal structures in Germany and comparable European countries are primarily designed either for for-profit corporations or for not-for-profit organisations. This dichotomy makes it difficult to establish a hybrid model that integrates both objectives as well as their social and environmental missions.

“What has definitely caused considerable difficulties along the way is precisely this separation between legal facts and internal practice. By now, I think we have made significant progress in this regard, though I would not call it perfect yet. It is likely that even at this stage, finding a legal form that genuinely corresponds to our approach would still lead to further improvement.” – Jurek Katz

Navigating the legal landscape can also be complex and burdensome for innovative organisations. The lack of tailored legal forms can lead to confusion regarding compliance with regulations, tax obligations, and governance structures, making it difficult for these businesses to operate effectively and sustainably.

There is a growing recognition of the need for hybrid legal structures that can accommodate businesses with social and environmental missions. These models, such as benefit corporations or social enterprises, are designed to allow for profit generation while ensuring that social goals can still be prioritised. However, the absence of widespread legal recognition for such structures can hinder the growth and scalability of innovative enterprises.

The lack of recognition for hybrid legal forms also negatively affects financing, as investors tend to prefer classical, clearly defined corporate structures. This can stifle innovation and prevent these organisations from achieving their full potential.

Limited Experience and Data

Another challenge that must be highlighted is making informed decisions and developing effective strategies despite a lack of empirical evidence and practical knowledge in the specific operational context.

Organisations like *robinhood.store* often operate under new and unconventional business models that blend social impact with commercial activities. As these models are relatively novel, there is limited historical data or case studies available to guide decision-making, making it difficult to predict outcomes or assess best practices. This absence of standardised metrics for measuring social impact, sustainability, and community engagement complicates the evaluation of performance and effectiveness. Without established benchmarks, organisations may struggle to quantify their impact, making it challenging to communicate their value to stakeholders, including customers, investors, and partners.

In the face of limited data, *robinhood.store* must rely heavily on intuition, anecdotal evidence, or the personal experiences of team members when making decisions. While this can lead to innovative approaches, it also introduces a level of uncertainty and risk, as decisions may not be based on comprehensive analysis or empirical evidence.

To address these challenges posed by limited experience and data, organisations can benefit from collaboration with academic institutions, research organisations, and other social enterprises as the *robinhood.store* is planning on. By sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices, these collaborations can help build a more comprehensive understanding of effective strategies and approaches in the social enterprise sector. This way organisations like *robinhood.store* can adopt iterative learning processes, where they continuously test, evaluate, and refine their practices based on real-world experiences and feedback. This adaptive approach allows them to learn from successes and failures, gradually building a more informed and effective operational model.

Diverging Interests and Conflicts

The diversity of participants naturally leads to differing views regarding the organisation's priorities and goals. Especially regarding the core team, "There were many conversations about values and goals before new people were brought on board" (Jurek Katz). As unclear decision-making processes can result in tensions.

Organisations that aim to address complex social issues often bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and expertise. While this diversity can foster creativity and innovation, it can also lead to disagreements about priorities, methods, and goals. Different stakeholders may have varying views on what constitutes success or the best approach to achieving the organisation's mission.

Disagreements may stem from fundamental differences in values or beliefs among team members. For instance, some individuals may prioritise social equity, while others may focus on environmental sustainability or economic viability. These conflicting values can create tension and hinder collaboration, making it essential for organisations to establish a shared understanding of their core mission and values.

To this end, *robinhood.store* is developing a strategic blueprint to serve as a standardised framework that can be collaboratively reviewed and subsequently customised to meet individual or departmental requirements. This blueprint is anchored in a clearly articulated purpose, which defines the overarching objectives of the organisation. This clearly defined purpose has tangible operational implications – specifically, it informs decisions regarding recruitment practices, salary distribution, and prioritisation of tasks. This approach ensures that the organisation's strategic intentions are systematically translated into practical and measurable outcomes.

Interaction With Other Design Traits

Governance Design

Interactions with other design elements, or design traits within an organisation like the *robinhood.store* refer to the interconnectedness and mutual influence of various components that shape the organisation's structure, operations, and overall effectiveness.

The ownership structure directly impacts its governance model. In a collaborative environment like *robinhood.store*, where decisions are made collectively, the ownership model must support shared responsibility and accountability.

For example, one could argue that offering capitalist products still positions the organisation within a capitalist framework. At its current stage, operating within the retail sector, the organisation can primarily redistribute its profits through donations. However, in the long term, the aim is to expand this model into other economic sectors, including production. The *robinhood.store* envisions a transition towards a post-capitalist economy, recognising that such a transformation requires gradual development rather than immediate implementation. Each new project that operates through self-organisation in the interest of society rather than capital represents a step toward this objective. This interaction ensures that all stakeholders have a voice in governance, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment to the organisation's mission.

Robinhood.store's ability to build and maintain networks and partnerships is influenced by its governance and ownership structures. Collaborative governance models can facilitate the establishment of strong relationships with external stake-

holders, including other organisations, community groups, and funders. These networks can provide valuable resources, knowledge, and support, enhancing the organisation's capacity to achieve its purpose. Additionally, the organisation's reputation and alignment with its purpose can attract like-minded partners, further strengthening its network.

The interplay between different design elements can drive innovation within the organisation. For example, insights gained from collaborative decision-making processes may lead to new approaches to achieving the organisation's purpose. Similarly, financial constraints may prompt creative problem-solving and resourcefulness.

For example, individuals purchase a 60€ ROBIN credit, which is distributed in twelve monthly instalments of 5€ to their membership card over the course of a year. This mechanism functions as a form of microcredit for the organisation, facilitating financial planning and enabling necessary investments.

Holacracy Principle: Internally, *robinhood.store* adopts the Holacracy model, which emphasises decentralised decision-making and the distribution of authority among all members. This approach contrasts sharply with hierarchical structures typical in conventional businesses, where decision-making power is concentrated at the top. In a Holacratic system, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, but authority is distributed, allowing for more democratic participation in governance. This structure encourages collaboration and collective ownership, fostering a sense of shared purpose among members.

Collective Decision-Making: Decisions within *robinhood.store* are made collaboratively rather than through a top-down approach. This participatory model ensures that all stakeholders, including employees and members, have a voice in decision-making. This collective approach enhances engagement and aligns with the store's mission of promoting social equity and community involvement.

Recommendations for Adopting a Redistributive Ownership Design

The following recommendations can help organisations to effectively implement the model exemplified by *robinhood.store* and benefit from its principles of shared ownership, collaborative governance, and purpose-driven operations.

Launch Pilot Programmes to Test Distributive Ownership Design

Organisations should consider launching pilot programs to test the model in a controlled environment. This allows for experimentation and learning without the risks

associated with a full-scale implementation. Feedback from these pilots can inform broader adoption strategies. Choose teams or departments that are already inclined towards collaboration and innovation to pilot the model. Their enthusiasm can serve as a catalyst for wider acceptance within the organisation.

Use Diverse Approaches to Engage Stakeholders in Decision-Making

During the process, engage all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and community members, in the decision-making process. This can be achieved through workshops, focus groups, and regular feedback sessions to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered. Foster a sense of community among stakeholders by creating forums for discussion and collaboration. This can enhance commitment to the organisation's purpose and values.

Empower Collaborative Leadership through Continuous Training

It is then important to provide continuous training programs focused on collaborative skills, such as facilitation, negotiation, and conflict resolution. This equips stakeholders with the tools needed to navigate the complexities of shared decision-making. Invest in leadership development that emphasises the importance of supportive and participatory leadership styles. Leaders should be trained to guide teams through the transition to a more collaborative model.

Cultivate a Culture of Experimentation and Growth

Lastly, it is also crucial to foster a culture that encourages experimentation and innovation. Allow teams to explore new ideas and approaches within the framework of the model, promoting a sense of ownership and creativity. Recognise and celebrate successes achieved through the model, while also learning from challenges and setbacks. This approach reinforces a growth mindset within the organisation.

Inspiring Redesign Beyond the Business

Building a Cooperative Ecosystem

The founders of *robinhood.store* envision the establishment of a broader ecosystem of businesses that share similar values and operational principles. By creating a network of socially responsible enterprises, the store aims to amplify its impact and promote systemic change within the economic landscape.

At the heart of this ecosystem is the idea of solidarity among local enterprises. By working together, these businesses can leverage their collective strengths to address common challenges, share resources, and enhance their impact on the community. This collaboration can take various forms, such as joint marketing efforts, shared supply chains, and cooperative purchasing agreements, which help reduce costs and increase efficiency.

The *robinhood.store* is sometimes criticised for not going further in proposing an alternative to retail and market-based models. It is correct that at present, the organisation operates within the retail sector and directs its profits toward donations. However, the long-term vision extends beyond this initial scope, aiming to expand these and similar principles into other sectors of the economy, such as production. The approach represents a roadmap toward a post-capitalist economy. Achieving this vision will not happen overnight, particularly when the ultimate destination must first be envisioned and created. Nonetheless, each new project that operates in a self-organised manner and prioritises the interests of humanity over those of capital marks a step closer to this goal.

This idea of a network of like-minded companies also emphasises the importance of inclusivity and participation. By involving community members in decision-making processes, *robinhood.store* ensures that the needs and perspectives of diverse stakeholders are considered. This participatory approach not only empowers individuals but also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the cooperative's goals.

Education and capacity building are essential components of this ecosystem. *Robinhood.store* provides training and resources to help local businesses adopt sustainable practices, improve their operations, and enhance their resilience. By equipping entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and knowledge, the ecosystem can thrive and adapt to changing economic conditions.

Furthermore, the cooperative model encourages transparency and accountability among its members. By sharing information about business practices, financial performance, and social impact, the ecosystem fosters trust and collaboration. This transparency helps to build a strong community of businesses that are aligned in their mission to promote sustainability and social equity.

In addition to supporting local businesses, the cooperative ecosystem also seeks to engage consumers in meaningful ways. By promoting local products and services, *robinhood.store* encourages community members to make conscious purchasing decisions that benefit the local economy. This not only strengthens the cooperative network but also cultivates a culture of sustainability and social responsibility among consumers.

Ultimately, building a cooperative ecosystem at *robinhood.store* aims to create a resilient and sustainable economic framework that prioritises community well-being, environmental stewardship, and social equity. By fostering collaboration, inclu-

sivity, education, and transparency, this ecosystem serves as a model for other communities seeking to develop similar cooperative initiatives. Through these efforts, *robinhood.store* aspires to contribute to a broader transformation of the economic landscape, moving away from extractive retail models, and towards more equitable and sustainable alternatives.

References

Interview

with Jurek Katz, Co-Founder (28/10/2022, 00:54h).

Homepage

Robinhood.store (2025): Community-driven supermarkets fighting capitalism, <https://www.robinhood.store>, [Accessed 2nd April 2025].