



Deusto University

**PhD Programme in Business and Territorial Competitiveness,
Innovation and Sustainability**

**FROM VALUES TO VALUE: SUSTAINABILITY-ORIENTED
COOPETITION FOR A NEW VALUE AND MARKET CREATION**

PhD Dissertation

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*“A specialty coffee is crafted with heart,
from the seed the farmer plants
to the cup the barista brews;
and, as such,
it is appreciated by the customer.”*

(Alba, Café Torres’ owner).

Acknowledgment

Abbreviations

Research dissemination

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Acknowledgment

This dissertation started long before I thought of it as research. In fact, it began as a collaborative innovation project that transformed a region. In 2016, my consulting firm 7Q collaborated with the Technological University of Pereira (UTP) on a study of specialty coffee consumption in the Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia (CCLC). When we presented the results in February 2017, we recognized an opportunity to take it further. Therefore, I was invited to facilitate a process with the owners of coffee shops in the region. From those initial meetings, the owners started to organize, share ideas, and work together. Soon, they formed an independent group with a clear goal: to promote the culture of the world's best mild coffee as the main value of the Coffee Cultural Landscape, a region recognized as a World Heritage site.

By 2018, over 25 specialty coffee shops in both rural and urban areas had become part of what was known as *Red Tiendas Café Especial*. These passionate owners, who are also coffee lovers, created attractive sensory experiences around every cup, so that customers could taste not only coffee, but also the heritage and traditions of the region. The goal was simple but powerful: to increase local consumption of specialty coffee and to recognize its social, cultural, and emotional values. In this way, consumers and coffee lovers could connect directly with the coffee-growing families of the region.

The *Red Tiendas Café Especial* was built on authentic and unique experiences that delight the senses. I saw how the baristas could transform the beauty of the bean into exquisite cups of coffee. This inspiring story touched me, and I felt compelled to share it with the world. That is why I decided to bring it to academia, and that is how this dissertation was born. So, to those coffee lovers, who have been the protagonists of this story: *thank you!*

Abbreviations

Coopetition-based business model (C/BM)

Values-based network and business model (V/NBM)

Congruence analysis small-N research design (CON)

Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia (CCLC)

Resources-Based View (RBV)

Stakeholder Theory (ST)

Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Red Tiendas Café Especial en Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano (La Red)

Research dissemination

Part of the theoretical and methodological foundations in this research have been previously published in Rodríguez, A., Alcalde-Heras, H., & Iñigo, E. A. (2024). Exploring coopetition and Value-Based networks in business models for sustainability, A case study of the specialty coffee industry in Colombia. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 33(7), 7305–7320.

Also, this dissertation has been progressively developed, discussed, and validated in international conferences, ensuring its scientific relevance for both scholars and practitioners. These events provided an opportunity to test early conceptual ideas, refine theoretical frameworks, contrast empirical findings, and validate the integrative analytical model proposed. The following paragraphs summarize the key conferences where parts of this work were presented and highlight the specific research gaps addressed in each case.

International Conference on Regional Science (Granada, 20-10-2022)

I presented “*Co-creation of Sustainable Value by Local Competitors*,” where I introduced the initial idea that competitors can collectively respond to industry-specific socio-environmental challenges. The feedback helped sharpen the research motivation and validate GAP 1 (drivers), confirming the relevance of studying sustainability challenges as a driver for coopetition.

8th International Conference on New Business Models (Maastricht, 23-06-2023)

I presented “*Coopetition-based Business Model & Values-based Business Models for Sustainability Network*,” which allowed me to test the complementarity between the

coopetition-based business model (C/BM) and the values-based network and business model (V/NBM). Discussions in Maastricht were key for refining the theoretical foundations that address GAP 2 (governance structures) and GAP 3 (collaborative value creation dynamics), strengthening the expectations later used in the congruence analysis.

ISDRS 2024 Conference (Kathmandu, 13-06-2024)

I presented “*Collaborative Value Creation in the Specialty Coffee Industry*,” sharing the first empirical findings from La Red. This conference provided a platform to validate the process of new customer value and market creation, which directly contributes to addressing GAP 4 (outcomes).

R&D Management Conference 2024 (Stockholm, 18-06-2024)

I presented “*Leveraging Coopetition and Values-Based Networks in Industry Transformation*,” focusing on the preliminary results of the congruence analysis. This presentation offered the opportunity to contrast the explanatory power of the frameworks with empirical data, validating both GAP 1 (drivers) and GAP 4 (new market emergence).

WINIR Conference 2025 (Prague, 09-09-2025)

Finally, at WINIR, I presented “*Institutional Innovation through Collective Coopetition: A Governance Perspective on Market Category Creation*.” This session was dedicated to presenting the integrative analytical framework developed in the dissertation, thereby validating GAP 5 (integrative framework bridging normative and strategic approaches) and reinforcing the main theoretical contribution of Chapter 5.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research motivation

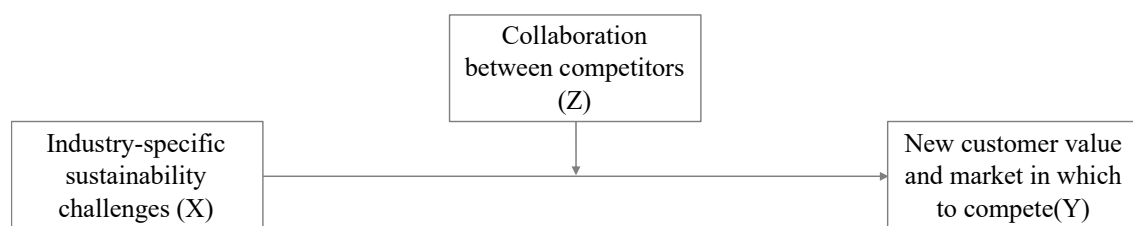
Social, economic, and environmental issues that concern an industry represent shared challenges for its firms. Addressing these challenges requires firms to innovate their products, services, processes, or business models (Hansen et al., 2009). Unlike the first three, which enhance existing customer value, business model innovation creates entirely new value for customers and opens novel opportunities for firms to capture value (Ritala et al., 2014). However, transitioning from a traditional business model to a business model for sustainability demands resources, such as specialized knowledge and broad market information, which certain firms may lack, limiting their ability to enter a new market. (Amankwah-Amoah & Syllias, 2020; Halme & Korpela, 2014; Kiefer et al., 2019; Klewitz & Hansen, 2014).

In this context, *coopetition*—collaboration between competitors (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Bengtsson & Kock, 2019, 2000)—becomes particularly relevant. Because competitors operate within the same industry, they often face similar challenges, depend on comparable resources, and aim to reach overlapping customer bases (Park et al., 2014; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Volschenk et al., 2016). Coopetition, therefore, represents a promising mechanism to collectively address shared industry-specific sustainability challenges: by pooling complementary knowledge and resources, competitors may collaboratively innovate their business models and create new customer value to be captured. Moreover, when multiple competitors jointly adopt the same innovation, prior research indicates that they might set the stage for the emergence of a

new market in which to compete. (Ritala et al., 2014; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Corbo et al., 2023).

Building on this theoretical proposition, this dissertation seeks to understand and explain *how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges.*

Figure 1. Research Question



1.2 Theoretical approach and research gaps overview

To explore this phenomenon, this dissertation positions itself within the *literature on business model innovation for sustainability* (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Schneider & Clauß, 2020; Engwall et al., 2021), as well as *coopetition in business networks* (Bengtsson & Kock, 2019, 2000; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Ritala et al., 2014; Corbo et al., 2023). Throughout the dissertation, these bodies of literature are collectively referred to as the “*coopetition and sustainability literature*” to facilitate a concise discussion. Additionally, the dissertation focuses on *industry-specific sustainability challenges* as the driver of coopetition, and on creating *new customer value and a market in which to compete* as the outcomes¹.

¹ This phenomenon—competitors creating new customer value to be captured and a new market over which to compete—will also be referred to as “new value and market creation”, “creation of new value and a new market”, “new customer value and market creation”, and “value creation and market emergence”.

The coopetition and sustainability literature primarily build on both normative and strategic theoretical foundations. From a normative approach, grounded in Stakeholder Theory (ST) (Freeman, 1984), research has examined governance structures to manage a coooperative relationship, highlighting the role of shared goals and values in engaging competitors in a collaborative relationship (Rusko, 2011; Granata, 2018; Felzensztein et al, 2018; Xu et al., 2024; Crick & Crick, 2023). From a strategic approach, grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991), studies focus on collaborative value-creation dynamics between competitors, emphasizing the role of leveraging complementary resources to increase their business opportunities (Bengtsson & Kock, 2019, 2000; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). Nevertheless, from the normative approach, there is limited understanding of the role of *industry-specific sustainability challenges* in driving a coooperative relationship (Mione, 2009; Choi et al., 2010; Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Mathias et al., 2018; Chim-Miki et al., 2024). Furthermore, it remains unclear which type of *governance structure* facilitates coooperation, when driven by such industry-specific sustainability challenges, in ways that lead to new customer value and a market in which to compete (Narayan & Tidström, 2020; Harala et al., 2023; Nascimento et al., 2023; Woolley et al., 2022).

From a strategic perspective, the coooperative *value creation dynamics* that enable business model innovation for sustainability, and thus the creation of entirely *new customer value and a new market* in which to compete, remain underexplored (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Corbo et al., 2023). This gap is particularly significant in contexts where coooperation is driven by shared ecological, social, and economic issues at the industry level (Crick & Crick, 2023; Rusko, 2011; Granata, 2018; Felzensztein et al., 2018; Volschenk et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2024).

These gaps identified in the literature are structured into four analytical dimensions—*industry-specific sustainability challenges, governance structures, value-creation dynamics, and new customer value and market creation*—which serve as conceptual anchors for interpretation, analysis, and contributions throughout the dissertation.

To address these gaps, the dissertation incorporates two alternative frameworks: On the one hand, the *values-based network and business model framework* (V/NBM) (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017) explains how shared values and normative orientations can extend beyond individual organizations, shaping the formation of sustainability-oriented business networks. On the other hand, the *coopetition-based business model framework* (C/BM) (Ritala et al., 2014) describes how collaborative interactions between competitors can lead to new customer value and market creation.

Although V/NBM and C/BM frameworks provide valuable but separate contributions to the coopetition and sustainability literature, their insights have rarely been integrated to offer a comprehensive answer to the research question. This gap highlights the need for empirical research that assesses the explanatory strength of both the literature and the alternative frameworks. Thus, by empirically assessing and integrating insights from both the coopetition and sustainability literature and the V/NBM and C/BM frameworks, this dissertation offers an integrative framework that explains how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges.

*(GAP 1) Limited understanding of the **industry-specific sustainability challenges** as a driver of coopetition for new value and market creation.*

(GAP 2) Limited understanding of **the governance structure** that facilitates engaging competitors in a collaborative relationship, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive coopetition.

(GAP 3) Limited explanation of the collaborative **value creation dynamics** between competitors in the context of business model innovation, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive coopetition.

(GAP 4) Underexplored potential of coopetition **to create new customer value and a new market** in which to compete, in response to shared industry-specific sustainability challenges.

(GAP 5) Lack of an **integrative framework** that explains how normative and strategic approaches interact in practice, specifically when competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a new market in which to compete, in response to shared industry-specific sustainability challenges

1.3 Methods overview

To address the identified theoretical gaps and research questions, this dissertation adopts a qualitative single case study design (Yin, 2009). Specifically, it follows a *congruence analysis approach* (CON), a small-N design developed by Blatter and Haverland (2012). This method compares *empirical observations* from the case with *theoretical expectations* derived from the coopetition and sustainability literature and from the alternative analytical frameworks. Its purpose is to determine how and to what extent the different theoretical approaches explain the observed phenomenon.

The case selected for this purpose is “*Red Tiendas Café Especial en Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano*” (La Red). It provides an empirical context to examine how,

through collective efforts driven by competitors, some sustainability challenges in an established industry, such as Colombian coffee, are overturned to create new customer value and, ultimately, a new market to compete in. Data were collected through an insider–outsider perspective (Gioia et al., 2010), complemented with archival documents for triangulation (Spradley, 2016). Data analysis used inductive open coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), followed by the coding framework suggested by Gioia et al. (2013). An abductive approach connected the empirical data with research on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks, to identify the key components of the sustainability-oriented cooperation process (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

In the final step, the theoretical expectations are systematically compared with the empirical observations to assess their degree of congruence. This comparison highlights the extent to which the different theoretical approaches account for the mechanisms observed in La Red, as well as their respective explanatory strengths and limitations. These insights ultimately support the development of an integrative analytical framework that explains how competitors can collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges.

1.4 Research objectives

This dissertation aims to contribute to the literature on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks by introducing an integrative analytical framework that explains how competitors can collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. To accomplish this goal, it is guided by one main research

question and a set of related sub-questions, which together structure the sub-objectives and chapters of the study. (see Table 1).

Main Research Question:

How can competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges?

Sub-question 1 — Theoretical expectations. How do the cooperation and sustainability literature, as well as the alternative frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), contribute to answering the main research question?

Objectives

1. To systematically review the literature on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks, with particular emphasis on industry-specific sustainability challenges and new customer value and market creation, in order to deduce theoretical expectations relevant to answering the main research question.
2. To introduce the cooperation-based business model (C/BM) and the values-based network and business model (V/NBM) as alternative frameworks, and to derive their theoretical expectations for addressing the main research question.

Sub-question 2 — Empirical observations. How do empirical observations from a case study contribute to answering the main research question?

Objective

3. To explore the case study of “Red Tiendas Café Especial en el Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano” (La Red) to identify empirical evidence that describes how

competitors collaborated to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges.

Sub-question 3 — Congruence analysis. To what extent can the theoretical expectations from coopetition and sustainability literature and the analytical frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), when compared with empirical evidence from the case study, explain how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges?

Objective

4. To assess the explanatory strengths and limitations of the coopetition and sustainability literature, as well as the alternative frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), in accounting for the mechanisms through which competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges.

Sub-question 4 — Integrative framework. How can theoretical expectations and empirical observations be integrated to provide a comprehensive explanation of how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges?

Objective

5. To develop an integrative analytical framework that offers a comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms through which competitors can collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges.

1.5 Overall contribution

This dissertation offers interrelated contributions to the literature on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks by explaining how competitors can collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. Building on the congruence analysis (Chapter 5) and the integrative framework (Chapter 6), the dissertation develops a set of interrelated theoretical, conceptual, empirically grounded, and methodological contributions.

Main theoretical contribution: an integrative framework (Gap 5). The dissertation develops an integrative analytical framework that systematically combines the normative approach (Stakeholder Theory) and the strategic approach (Resource-Based View) across four analytical dimensions: drivers, governance structure, value-creation dynamics, and outcomes. Drawing on insights from the cooperation and sustainability literature (e.g., Kumar et al., 2021; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020; Scandellius & Cohen, 2016), the V/NBM framework (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017; Mione, 2009; Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Xu et al., 2024), and the C/BM framework (Ritala et al., 2014; Bouncken & Fredrich, 2016; Mirzabeiki et al., 2022), the interaction between normative and strategic approaches provides an integrated explanation of how competitors collectively respond to industry-specific sustainability challenges by creating new customer value and a new market category. In doing so, the framework directly answers the main research question and addresses Gap 5, concerning the lack of an integrative explanation of sustainability-oriented cooperation.

Drivers: industry-specific sustainability challenges as endogenous drivers of coopetition (Gap 1). This dissertation contributes to the coopetition and sustainability literature by conceptualizing industry-specific sustainability challenges as endogenous drivers of sustainability-oriented coopetition, rather than as exogenous pressures or firm-level constraints (Kumar et al., 2021; Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016; Crick & Crick, 2020; Crick et al., 2023). While empirical findings show that actors reframe sustainability challenges as shared industry concerns, the theoretical contribution incorporates this reframing into the integrative analytical framework. This contribution extends existing literature by clarifying how sustainability challenges rooted in supply-, competition-, and demand-side conditions can proactively motivate collective action among competitors (Greenwood et al., 2002; Woolley et al., 2022).

Governance structure: temporary meta-organizational governance (Gap 2). Building on an explanatory gap revealed through the congruence analysis, the dissertation offers a conceptual contribution by theorizing temporary meta-organizational governance as a distinct governance structure in sustainability-oriented coopetition (Pinnington et al., 2021; Ritala et al., 2009; Rouyre & Fernandez, 2019; Smiljic, 2020; Harala et al., 2023). This contribution extends the normative orientation of the V/NBM framework by explaining how shared values are institutionalized into formalized rules, membership criteria, and coordination mechanisms (Berkowitz et al., 2022). At the same time, it complements the C/BM framework by specifying the organizational infrastructure that enables collaborative value creation (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017). The integrative framework thus advances understanding of governance beyond intermediaries or informal arrangements, showing how competitors collectively organize and govern sustainability-oriented collaboration.

Value-creation dynamics: reconceptualizing value creation as category-creation mechanisms (Gap 3). The dissertation makes a theoretical contribution by reconceptualizing value-creation dynamics as category-creation mechanisms. Based on explanatory gaps identified ex post through the congruence analysis, the findings demonstrate that collaborative business model innovation unfolds through concept, product, and consumption category creation, rather than through incremental value improvements (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Schaltegger et al., 2016; Dyer & Singh, 1998; Das & Teng, 2000; Faccin et al., 2022). This reconceptualization extends the coopetition literature and the C/BM framework by shifting the analytical focus from firm-level value creation to category-level transformation. Integrated into the broader framework, this contribution explains how sustainability-oriented coopetition enables competitors to collectively reshape meanings, practices, and value propositions under industry-specific sustainability challenges.

Outcomes: reconceptualizing new market creation as market category emergence and legitimation (Gap 4). Finally, the dissertation extends existing explanations of coopetition outcomes in the literature by reconceptualizing new market creation as the emergence and legitimation of a market category (Bankel & Govik, 2024; Woolley et al., 2022). Addressing an explanatory gap not anticipated by the coopetition and sustainability literature nor by the V/NBM and C/BM frameworks, this contribution integrates market category legitimation into explanations of collaborative market creation. The findings show how category-related identity emerges (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Durand et al., 2017; Blackburn et al., 2023) and how category meanings are stabilized among competitors, the value chain, and customers (Granqvist et al., 2013;

Greenwood et al., 2002). Within the integrative analytical framework, this reconceptualization demonstrates that sustainability-oriented cooperation leads to systemic industry transformation, rather than merely to the creation of a new market over which to compete.

Methodological contribution: extending the congruence analysis design. The dissertation adapts congruence analysis (Blatter & Haverland, 2012) to compare normative and strategic perspectives, identify theoretical gaps (ex ante) and explanatory gaps (ex post), and generate an integrated framework grounded in longitudinal empirical evidence. This demonstrates that congruence analysis can be used not only to assess the relative strength of theoretical perspectives but also to develop integrative theoretical explanations when multiple partial frameworks coexist.

1.6 Dissertation structure

As a summary of the structured overview, Table 1 outlines how the question, objectives, and chapters are logically connected throughout the thesis. It highlights the contribution of the congruence analysis method, and gaps evolution at each stage of the investigation.

Table 1. Thesis Roadmap

| Thesis Chapter | Main Question /Sub-question | General / Specific Objective | Congruence analysis research method - role: | Research gap - role: |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Introduction | Main question: How can competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges? | General Objective: To contribute to the literature on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks by introducing an integrative analytical framework that explains how competitors can collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. | Contextualizing the research motivation and scope | |
| Literature Background | Sub-question 1: How do the cooperation and sustainability literature, as well as the alternative frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), contribute to answering the main research question? | Specific Objective 1: To systematically review the literature on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks, with particular emphasis on industry-specific sustainability challenges and new customer value and market creation, in order to deduce theoretical expectations relevant to answering the main research question. Specific Objective 2: To introduce the cooperation-based business model (C/BM) and the values-based network and business model (V/NBM) as alternative frameworks, and to derive their theoretical expectations for addressing the main research question. | Deducing theoretical expectations from the literature Deducing expectations from alternative frameworks | Identifying theoretical gaps in existing research (Gaps 1–4) Identifying limitations of alternative frameworks (Gap 5) |

| <i>Thesis Chapter</i> | <i>Main Question /Sub-question</i> | <i>General / Specific Objective</i> | <i>Congruence analysis research method - role:</i> | <i>Research gap - role:</i> |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Findings | Sub-question 2: How do empirical observations from a case study contribute to answering the main research question? | Specific Objective 3: To explore the case study of “Red Tiendas Café Especial en el Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano” (La Red) to identify empirical evidence that describes how competitors collaborated to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. | Identifying empirical observations from the case | Providing empirical insights into the mechanisms that remain insufficiently explained by existing theoretical approaches |
| Results | Sub-question 3: To what extent can the theoretical expectations from cooperation and sustainability literature and the analytical frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), when compared with empirical evidence from the case study, explain how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges? | Specific Objective 4: To assess the explanatory strengths and limitations of the cooperation and sustainability literature, as well as the alternative frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), in accounting for the mechanisms through which competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. | Comparing theoretical expectations and empirical observations | Refining the gaps and clarifying which mechanisms remain insufficiently explained (explanatory gaps) |

| <i>Thesis Chapter</i> | <i>Main Question /Sub-question</i> | <i>General / Specific Objective</i> | <i>Congruence analysis research method - role:</i> | <i>Research gap - role:</i> |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Discussion | Sub-question 4: How can theoretical expectations and empirical observations be integrated to provide a comprehensive explanation of how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges? | Specific Objective 5: To develop an integrative analytical framework that offers a comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms through which competitors can collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. | Developing theoretical innovation | Filling the gaps through integration |

2 LITERATURE BACKGROUND

2.1 Conceptual framework

To address the research question, this dissertation draws on concepts of *business model innovation for sustainability* and *coopetition in business networks* in the context of *sustainability challenges*, as well as *new value and market creation* as outcomes (see Figure 2).

A *business model* is a conceptual tool that describes how a firm creates and captures value for its customers and itself (Chesbrough, 2010; Teece, 2010; Zott et al., 2011; Freudenreich et al., 2020). The term *sustainability-oriented* refers to an integrated view of environmental, social, and economic well-being (Hansen et al., 2009). Thus, while conventional business model frameworks emphasize value creation for customers and the focal firm, sustainability-oriented business model frameworks incorporate ecological and social contribution that benefits broader stakeholder groups (Bocken et al., 2014; Lüdeke-Freund & Dembek, 2017; Schaltegger et al., 2016). The transition from a traditional to a sustainability-oriented model represents a form of *business model innovation for sustainability* (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Schneider & Clauß, 2020; Engwall et al., 2021).

A *business network* describes how value is created through the interconnected activities of multiple stakeholders (Freudenreich et al., 2020). Firms engage in such networks when the sharing of complementary resources enhances their capacity to create value beyond what could be achieved independently (Das & Teng, 2000; Madhok & Tallman, 1998). When applied to sustainability challenges, this network perspective highlights the role of shared values and normative orientations in motivating the formation of business

networks (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017). This approach enables firms to collectively address issues, such as industry-specific sustainability challenges, that individual firms or business models cannot tackle alone, while enhancing their ability to create new value for both network members and wider society (e.g., Woolley et al., 2022).

The simultaneous collaboration and competition between firms within a business network, adopting the same innovation to collectively create customer value while competing to capture it individually (Bengtsson & Kock, 2019, 2000; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009), leads to the emergence of a new market where they compete (Corbo et al., 2023; Ritala et al., 2014). This outcome is referred to in this dissertation as "*new value and market creation*."

2.2 Literature review: Method, scope, and structure

This dissertation adopts a systematic literature review methodology (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019; Sauer & Seuring, 2023). It explores studies that conceptualize *coopetition* as a relationship between competing and collaborating firms in a *business network*, aiming to *innovate their business models for sustainability to create new customer value and a new market*. Accordingly, the review examines key concepts derived from the research motivation. (Table 2). For instance, terms such as "*competitor*," "*coopetition*," and "*co-opetition*" were included to capture studies focusing on collaborative competition. Terms like "*network*," "*alliance*," "*cooperation*," "*collaboration*," "*partner*," "*ecosystem*," "*cluster*," and "*stakeholders*" were used to identify literature on coopetition as a business network strategy and partnerships. Additionally, to ensure the inclusion of studies that explore how business models integrate sustainability values, the review included terms such as "*sustainable*,"

“*sustainability*,” “*green*,” “*ecological*,” “*environmental*,” “*social*,” “*ethic*,” “*fair*,” “*responsible*,” and “*values-based*.” These terms were chosen to encompass the broader context of sustainability challenges. Finally, terms such as “*business model*”, “*value creation*”, “*value capture*”, “*new value*”, “*niche creation*”, “*market category creation*”, “*market creation*”, and “*blue ocean*” were included to capture studies in which new customer value and market were the expected outcomes.

These keywords ensured coverage of relevant literature exploring the intersections of the key concepts for this research (see table 2).

TS=((sustainab* OR green OR ecologic* OR environmental OR social* OR ethic* OR fair OR responsib* OR “values-based”) AND (network* OR alliance* OR cooperation OR collaborat* OR partner* OR ecosystem* OR cluster OR stakeholders) AND (competitor* OR coopetition OR co-opetition) AND (“business model*” OR “value creation” OR “value capture”) OR (“new value” OR “niche creation” OR “market category creation” OR “market creation” OR “blue ocean”)))

The final search was conducted on 13 January 2025 in two major academic databases: Web of Science and Scopus. Studies were selected based on rigorous inclusion criteria, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles in English that addressed the key topics; therefore, non-peer-reviewed and non-English publications were excluded. In addition, conference papers, editorial notes, master’s and doctoral theses, and unpublished working papers were excluded to ensure the reliability and maturity of the selected literature.

The selection process used a structured approach involving identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of articles. (Moher et al., 2009). Initial search results were gathered, duplicates were removed, and the remaining articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts. Full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility, and those meeting the inclusion criteria were incorporated into the final review (see Table 3).

The systematic search yielded a total of 257 articles: 81 from Web of Science, 151 from Scopus, and 25 identified through complementary sources (e.g., backward and forward citation tracking). After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria and considering the specific focus of this dissertation, 44 articles were found to partially align with the research motivation. Among these, only 13 articles provide explicit theoretical attention to the intersection of business model innovation for sustainability and competition in business networks, with a relative approach on new customer value and market creation. The final set of studies was categorized according to their theoretical and empirical contribution to the research focus (see Table 2 and Table 3). The categorization highlights whether each study provides explicit theoretical attention to the intersection of business model innovation for sustainability and competition in business networks, with a relative focus on new customer value and market creation. Three categories were defined: (1) Core Sample: Articles included in the main analysis of the systematic literature review. This group comprises the 13 studies that explicitly address the intersection of business model innovation, sustainability, and competition in business networks. These studies constitute the empirical and theoretical core of the dissertation's review. (2) Seminal: Publications considered seminal or theoretically influential, which provide the conceptual foundations for the study. These works are used to frame the theoretical background and conceptual discussion, but do not necessarily form part of the main analytical set of the systematic literature review (Section 2.2). (3) Partially Related: Studies that are partially related to the research motivation, offering contextual insights or tangential contributions, but without explicitly addressing the intersection of business model innovation, sustainability, and competition. While they are not part of the core analytical sample, they are referenced selectively to enrich contextual understanding and support interpretation.

Table 2. Literature review structure and findings: Synthesis from research motivation to analytical dimensions

| <i>Research Motivation: Collaboration between competitors, to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges</i> | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| <i>Concepts</i> | <i>Search string</i> | <i>Guiding questions</i> | <i>Dominant theoretical approaches</i> | <i>Insights from the Literature</i> | <i>Analytical dimensions (GAPS)</i> | <i>Authors, core sample</i> |
| Sustainability | TS= AND (sustainab* OR green OR ecologic* OR environmental OR social* OR ethic* OR fair OR responsib* OR “values-based”) | <i>What industry-specific sustainability challenges motivate competitors to engage in cooperation aimed at creating new customer value and a new market?</i> | Stakeholder Theory (ST) a normative approach | Government and influential customers Achieving sustainability performance Socio-environmental issues faced by communities Sustainability challenges faced by the industry | <i>Drivers: industry-specific sustainability challenges</i> | Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018; Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2021 Mori & Zhang, 2024; Nascimento, da Costa Junior, Salazar, & Chim-Miki, 2023; |
| Network | TS=AND (network* OR alliance* OR cooperation OR collaborat* OR partner* OR ecosystem* OR cluster OR stakeholders) | <i>How do competitors collectively organize their relationship to transform industry-specific sustainability challenges into shared new market opportunities?</i> | Stakeholder Theory (ST) a normative approach | Critical success factors Tensions & risks Governance mechanisms | <i>Governance Structure</i> | Da Silva & Cardoso, 2024; Harala, Aarikka-Stenroos, & Ritala, 2023 Knight, De Angelis, Telg, & Morgan, 2025 Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2021 Narayan & Tidström, 2020; Nascimento, da Costa Junior, Salazar, & Chim-Miki, 2023; |

Research Motivation: Collaboration between competitors, to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges

| <i>Concepts</i> | <i>Search string</i> | <i>Guiding questions</i> | <i>Dominant theoretical approaches</i> | <i>Insights from the Literature</i> | <i>Analytical dimensions (GAPS)</i> | <i>Authors, core sample</i> |
|----------------------------------|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| Coopetition | TS=AND (competitor* OR coopetition OR co-opetition) | <i>What collaborative mechanisms enable business model innovation for sustainability between competitors, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive coopetition?</i> | Resource-Based View (RBV) a strategic approach | Leveraging complementary resources, improving skills, and exchanging knowledge | <i>Value creation dynamics</i> | Bouncken, Kumar, Connell, Bhattacharyya, & He, 2024 Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2021 Nascimento, da Costa Junior, Salazar, & Chim-Miki, 2023; |
| Business Models | TS=AND (“business model*” OR “value creation” OR “value capture”) | | | A strong balance between competition and collaboration to achieve sustainability performance | | |
| New customer and market creation | TS= AND (“new value” OR “niche creation” OR "market category creation" OR "market creation" OR "blue ocean") | <i>What new customer value and market emerge from addressing industry-specific sustainability challenges through coopetition?</i> | Resource-Based View (RBV) a strategic approach | Value creation - to be captured by coopetition | <i>Outcomes: new customer value creation and a market to compete</i> | Bankel & Govik, 2024; Rodríguez, Alcalde-Heras, & Iñigo, 2024; Volschenk, Ungerer, & Smit, 2016; Woolley, Pozner, & DeSoucey, 2022; |

Table 3. List of selected peer-reviewed articles

| Relevance category | Database | Authors | Year | Title | Journal | Document Type | DOI |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------|---|--|----------------------|---|
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Bankel, Amanda; Govik, Lisa | 2024 | Networked business models on a nascent market for sustainable innovation | Supply Chain Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1108/SCM-10-2023-0496 |
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Bouncken, Ricarda; Kumar, Amit; Connell, Julia; Bhattacharyya, Asit; He, Kai | 2024 | Coopetition for corporate responsibility and sustainability: does it influence firm performance? | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2024.11.010 |
| Core sample | Web of Science | Da Silva, Agostinho; Cardoso, Antonio J. Marques | 2024 | Coopetition Networks for Small and Medium Enterprises: A Lifecycle Model Grounded in Service-Dominant Logic | Systems | Article | https://doi.org/10.3390/systems12110461 |
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Diaz-Correa, Jennifer E.; Lopez-Navarro, Miguel A. | 2018 | Managing sustainable hybrid organisations: A case study in the agricultural sector | Sustainability (Switzerland) | Article | https://doi.org/10.3390/su10093010 |
| Core sample | Scopus | Harala L.; Aarikka-Stenroos L.; Ritala P. | 2023 | Coopetition for a circular economy: Horizontal initiatives in resolving collective environmental challenges | Stakeholder Engagement in a Sustainable Circular Economy: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives | Book chapter | https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31937-2_10 |
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Knight, Helena H.; De Angelis, Roberta; Telg, Nina; Morgan, Robert E. | 2025 | Towards the Coopetitive Circular Business Model: Theoretical foundations, conceptual envisioning, and future research imperatives | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2024.11.005 |
| Core sample | additional | Kumar, A., Connell, J., & Bhattacharyya, A. | 2020 | Co-opetition for corporate social responsibility and sustainability: drivers and success factors | Sustainability Accounting | Article | https://doi.org/10.1108/SAMPJ-03-2020-0063 |

| <i>Relevance category</i> | <i>Database</i> | <i>Authors</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Journal</i> | <i>Document Type</i> | <i>DOI</i> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------|--|---|----------------------|---|
| Core sample | Web of Science | Mori, Akihisa; Zhang, Keyue | 2024 | Networked sustainable business model innovation and sustainable energy transitions: A case study of incumbent Chinese manufacturers in 2010-2022 | Environmental innovation and societal transitions | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2024.100911 |
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Narayan, Rummy; Tidstrom, Annika | 2020 | Tokenizing coopetition in a blockchain for a transition to circular economy | Journal of Cleaner Production | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.121437 |
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Nascimento, Leandro da Silva; da Costa Junior, Julio Cesar; Salazar, Viviane Santos; Chim-Miki, Adriana Fumi | 2023 | Coopetition in social entrepreneurship: a strategy for social value devolution | International Journal of Emerging Markets | Article | https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOEM-09-2020-1062 |
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Rodríguez Angélica.; Alcalde-Heras H.; Iñigo E.A. | 2024 | Exploring coopetition and value-based networks in business models for sustainability-A case study of the specialty coffee industry in Colombia | Business Strategy and the Environment | Article | https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.3878 |
| Core sample | Web of Science / Scopus | Volschenk, Jako; Ungerer, Marius; Smit, Eon | 2016 | Creation and appropriation of socio-environmental value in coopetition | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.05.026 |
| Core sample | additional | Woolley, J. L., Pozner, J. E., & DeSoucey, M. | 2022 | Raising the bar: Values-driven niche creation in US bean-to-bar chocolate | Strategy Science | Article | https://doi.org/10.1287/stsc.2021.0147 |
| Partially Related | Scopus | Berti G.; Mulligan C.; Yap H. | 2017 | Digital food hubs as disruptive business models based on coopetition and "shared value" for sustainability in the agri-food sector | Global Opportunities for Entrepreneurial Growth: Coopetition and Knowledge Dynamics within and across Firms | Book chapter | https://doi.org/10.1018/978-1-78714-501-620171023 |

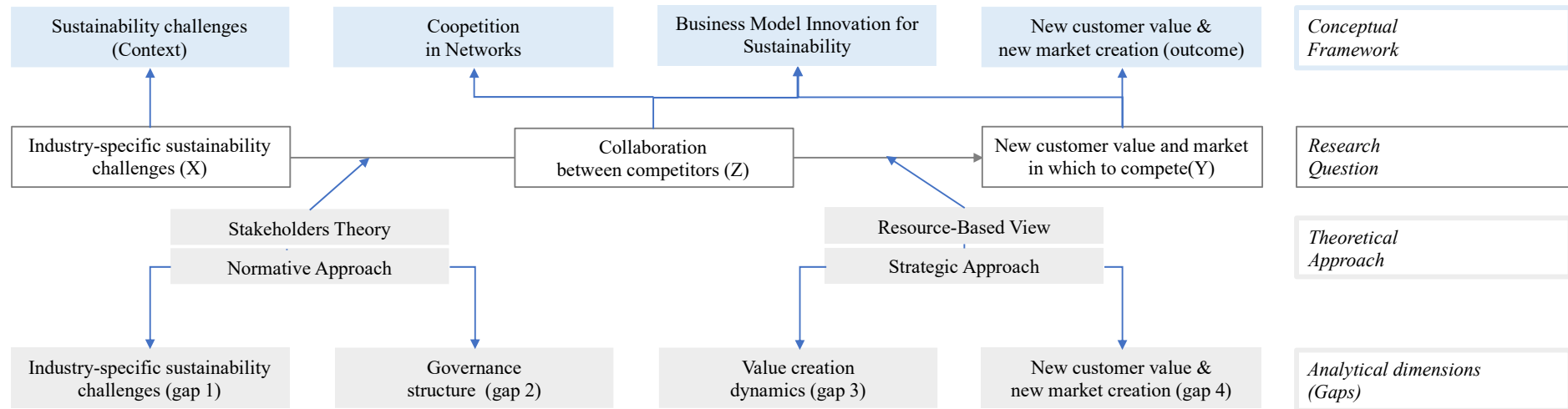
| <i>Relevance category</i> | <i>Database</i> | <i>Authors</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Journal</i> | <i>Document Type</i> | <i>DOI</i> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------|---|---|----------------------|---|
| Partially Related | Web of Science | Bouncken, Ricarda B.; Fredrich, Viktor | 2025 | Coopetition: A vehicle for business model distinctiveness | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2024.11.010 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science / Scopus | Cortese, Damiano; Giacosa, Elisa; Cantino, Valter | 2021 | Knowledge sharing for coopetition in tourist destinations: the difficult path to the network | Review of Managerial Science | Article | https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-018-0322-z |
| Partially Related | additional | Crick, J. M. | 2019 | Incorporating coopetition into the entrepreneurial marketing literature: Directions for future research | Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship | Article | https://doi.org/10.1108/JRME-01-2018-0001 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science / Scopus | Fuentes-Fernandez, Rosana; Gilinsky, Armand, Jr. | 2022 | Coopetition as improvisation: an exploratory comparative case study investigation into Spain's natural wine industry | International Journal of Wine Business Research | Article | https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWBR-12-2020-0062 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science | Gatignon, Aline; Capron, Laurence | 2023 | The firm as an architect of polycentric governance: Building open institutional infrastructure in emerging markets | Strategic Management Journal | Article | https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3124 |
| Partially Related | Scopus | Ghezzi A. | 2022 | Competitive empathy: sharing values and strategies with rivals | Journal of Business Strategy | Article | https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-05-2021-0088 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science | Monticelli, Jefferson Marlon; Verschoore, Jorge Renato; Garrido, Ivan Lapuente | 2023 | The emergence of coopetition in highly regulated industries: A study on the Brazilian private healthcare market | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.11.007 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science / Scopus | Ogutu M.O.; Akor J.; Mulindwa M.S.; Heshima O.; Nsengimana C. | 2023 | Implementing circular economy and sustainability policies in Rwanda: Experiences of Rwandan manufacturers with the plastic ban policy | Frontiers in Sustainability | Article | https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2023.1092107 |

| <i>Relevance category</i> | <i>Database</i> | <i>Authors</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Journal</i> | <i>Document Type</i> | <i>DOI</i> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|-------------|--|--|----------------------|---|
| Partially Related | Web of Science | Planko, Julia; Cramer, Jacqueline M.; Chappin, Maryse M. H.; Hekkert, Marko P. | 2016 | Strategic collective system building to commercialize sustainability innovations | Journal Of Cleaner Production | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.09.108 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science | Ricciardi, Francesca; Zardini, Alessandro; Czakon, Wojciech; Rossignoli, Cecilia; Kraus, Sascha | 2022 | Revisiting the cooperation-competition paradox: A configurational approach to short- and long-term coopetition performance in business networks | European Management Journal | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2021.07.002 |
| Partially Related | additional | Scandeliuss, C., & Cohen, G. | 2016 | Sustainability program brands: Platforms for collaboration and co-creation | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.02.001 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science / Scopus | Spitzeck, Heiko; Boechat, Claudio; Leao, Sergio Franca | 2013 | Sustainability as a driver for innovation - towards a model of corporate social entrepreneurship at Odebrecht in Brazil | Corporate Governance (Bingley) | Article | https://doi.org/10.1088/CG-06-2013-0080 |
| Partially Related | Web of Science | Wadin, Jessica Lagerstedt; Ahlgren, Kajsa; Bengtsson, Lars | 2017 | Joint business model innovation for sustainable transformation of industries - A large multinational utility in alliance with a small solar energy company | Journal of Cleaner Production | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.03.151 |
| Seminal | additional | Bengtsson, M., & Kock, S. | 2000 | ” Coopetition” in business Networks, to cooperate and compete simultaneously | Industrial marketing management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-8501(99)00067-X |
| Seminal | additional | Bengtsson, M., & Kock, S. | 1999 | Cooperation and competition in relationships between competitors in business networks | Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing | Article | https://doi.org/10.1088/08858629910272184 |
| Seminal | additional | Bocken, N. M., Short, S. W., Rana, P., & Evans, S. | 2014 | A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes | Journal of Cleaner Production | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2013.11.039 |

| <i>Relevance category</i> | <i>Database</i> | <i>Authors</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Journal</i> | <i>Document Type</i> | <i>DOI</i> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------|--|---|----------------------|---|
| Seminal | additional | Boons, F., & Lüdeke-Freund, F. | 2013 | Business models for sustainable innovation: state-of-the-art and steps towards a research agenda | Journal of Cleaner production | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2012.07.007 |
| Seminal | additional | Breuer, H., & Lüdeke-Freund, F. | 2017 | Values-based network and business model innovation | International Journal of Innovation Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1142/S1363919617500281 |
| Seminal | additional | Czakon, W., & Czernek, K. | 2016 | The role of trust-building mechanisms in entering into network coopetition: The case of tourism networks in Poland | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.05.010 |
| Seminal | Scopus | Dagnino G.B. | 2009 | Coopetition strategy: A new kind of interfirm dynamics for value creation | Coopetition Strategy: Theory, experiments and cases | Book chapter | https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203874301-11 |
| Seminal | Web of Science / Scopus | Hearn, Greg; Pace, Cassandra | 2006 | Value-creating ecologies: understanding next generation business systems | Foresight | Article | https://doi.org/10.1080/14636680610647147 |
| Seminal | additional | Mathias, B. D., Huyghe, A., Frid, C. J., & Galloway, T. L. | 2018 | An identity perspective on coopetition in the craft beer industry | Strategic Management Journal | Article | https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2734 |
| Seminal | additional | Neesham, C., Dembek, K., & Benkert, J. | 2023 | Defining value in sustainable business models | Business & Society | Article | https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503221147902 |
| Seminal | additional | Ritala, P., & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, P. | 2009 | What's in it for me? Creating and appropriating value in innovation-related coopetition | Technovation | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2009.07.002 |
| Seminal | additional | Ritala, P., Golnam, A., & Wegmann, A. | 2014 | Coopetition-based business models: The case of Amazon.com | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2013.11.005 |

| <i>Relevance category</i> | <i>Database</i> | <i>Authors</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Title</i> | <i>Journal</i> | <i>Document Type</i> | <i>DOI</i> |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---|-------------|---|---------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Seminal | additional | Rusko, R. | 2011 | Exploring the concept of coopetition: A typology for the strategic moves of the Finnish forest industry | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2010.10.002 |
| Seminal | additional | Schaltegger, S., Hansen, E. G., & Lüdeke-Freund, F. | 2016 | Business models for sustainability: Origins, present research, and future avenues | Organization & Environment | Article | https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026615599806 |
| Seminal | additional | Schneider, S., & Clauß, T. | 2020 | Business models for sustainability: Choices and consequences | Organization & Environment | Article | https://doi.org/10.1177/10860266198542 |
| Seminal | additional | Stubbs, W., & Cocklin, C. | 2008 | Conceptualizing a “sustainability business model” | Organization & Environment | Article | https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026608318042 |
| Seminal | additional | Velu, C. | 2016 | Evolutionary or revolutionary business model innovation through coopetition? The role of dominance in network markets | Industrial Marketing Management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.11.007 |
| Seminal | additional | Zott, C., Amit, R., & Massa, L. | 2011 | The business model: recent developments and future research | Journal of management | Article | https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311406265 |

Figure 2. Theoretical framework and related gaps



(GAP 1) Limited understanding of the *industry-specific sustainability challenges* as a driver of competition for new value and market creation.

(GAP 2) Limited understanding of the *governance structure* that facilitates engaging competitors in a collaborative relationship, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive competition.

(GAP 3) Limited explanation of the collaborative *value creation dynamics* between competitors in the context of business model innovation, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive competition.

(GAP 4) Underexplored potential of competition to *create new customer value and a new market in which to compete*, in response to shared industry-specific sustainability challenges.

(GAP 5) Lack of an *integrative framework* that explains how normative and strategic approaches interact in practice, specifically when competitors collaborate to create *new customer value and, consequently, a new market in which to compete*, in response to shared industry-specific sustainability challenges

2.3 Theoretical approaches in the existing literature

Existing research on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks predominantly builds on two theoretical foundations: Stakeholder Theory (ST) (Freeman, 1984) and the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991). On the one hand, the ST provides a normative approach by describing the firm as a network of relationships among individuals or groups who affect or are affected by its business activities (Freeman, 1984). From this normative perspective, competitors, like other stakeholders, are also responsible for supporting sustainable performance (Harala et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2021; Volschenk et al., 2016). This reframes the traditional rivals' relationship among competitors, positioning them as strategic partners capable of collectively promoting sustainable practices and enhancing the social and environmental impact of the industry (Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018; Woolley et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the RBV provides a strategic approach, suggesting that firms can gain a competitive advantage by sharing and complementing resources, thereby generating collective value that would be otherwise unattainable individually (Das & Teng, 2000; Dyer & Singh, 1998; Lavie, 2006). In sustainability contexts, this strategic logic explains why competitors pool resources and knowledge in collaborative networks to address complex socio-environmental challenges that require both innovation and resource optimization (Narayan & Tidström, 2020; Nascimento et al., 2023; Woolley et al., 2022). From this perspective, competitors are seen not only as rivals but also as valuable collaborators in joint value creation (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009).

Accordingly, this section is structured around these two theoretical approaches, normative and strategic, and their respective guiding questions. Each approach concludes with a reflection on its explanatory power, assessing to what extent it addresses the

research motivation of this dissertation, and identifies the specific gaps that remain unresolved.

2.3.1 Normative approach

The normative approach, grounded in ST, studies the governance structures that facilitate engagement among competitors in a cooperative relationship for sustainability. The analysis of the normative approach from the literature review considers its two guiding questions: (1) *What sustainability challenges motivate competitors to engage in cooperation aimed at creating a new customer value and market?* (2) *How do competitors collectively organize their relationship to transform industry-specific sustainability challenges into shared new market opportunities?*

2.3.1.1 Industry-specific sustainability challenges: What sustainability challenges motivate competitors to engage in cooperation aimed at creating a new customer value and market?

Government and influential customers. According to Kumar, Connell, and Bhattacharyya (2021), firms often need to collaborate on sustainable initiatives due to pressure from external stakeholders, such as governments and influential customers. This pressure is further strengthened by public policies and regulations that promote collaboration across industries to address environmental and social issues. Moreover, collaboration is essential to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which require collective efforts from all sectors. The rise of the sharing economy

also encourages new forms of cooperation among competitors, allowing them to develop more effective and sustainable solutions together.

Achieving sustainability performance. Sustainability is both a responsibility and an opportunity to secure the future of businesses and society (Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016). However, achieving this goal requires partnerships and broad collaborations, such as collaboration with competing firms (Kumar et al., 2021). Working together enables companies to integrate advanced technologies, improve internal capabilities, and embed sustainability into their corporate structures. These collaborations help firms to improve their sustainable performance and meet fundamental sustainability standards. Joint efforts become even more critical during crises to ensure an effective response (Crick & Crick, 2020; Crick et al., 2023). Ideally, coopetition can lead to collective industry or cluster-level benefits in terms of marketing, quality and safety standards, dealing with grand industry and societal challenges, and product and service innovation (Mione, 2009; Choi et al., 2010; Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Mathias et al., 2018; Chim-Miki et al., 2024).

Socio-environmental issues faced by communities. By addressing socio-environmental challenges such as poverty, marginalization, and pollution, companies can act as agents of change, adopting business models that ensure profitability while benefiting society (Yunus et al., 2010). Social enterprises are good examples of this approach, as they increase the value of their products by effectively tackling sustainability issues, making them more attractive to consumers (Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2023). Innovation plays a crucial role in the coopetition for sustainability. However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often face limited resources and strategic capabilities, which hinder their ability to innovate. To overcome these challenges,

companies must form strategic partnerships with others, including their competitors (Engwall et al., 2021; Stål et al., 2023).

Sustainability challenges faced by the industry. Sustainability challenges are common across industries and affect all firms that operate within them. While some firms are adapting their models to address these sustainability concerns (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Bocken et al., 2014; Schaltegger et al., 2016), others need to collaborate with competitors due to a lack of resources or expertise to drive sustainable innovations (Mori et al., 2024; Knight et al., 2025; Volschenk et al., 2016). By working together, firms can create new markets and opportunities and generate environmental and social value through improvements driven by co-competition initiatives (Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018; Volschenk et al., 2016). Such joint agenda is further highlighted in regional clusters and other geographically close settings where firms have a common interest in collaboration to improve their local conditions, innovation, and ultimately performance (Rusko, 2011; Granata, 2018; Felzensztein et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2024; Crick & Crick, 2023).

In light of the literature reviewed, while existing studies offer relevant explanations for why competitors engage in sustainability-oriented co-competition, most contributions emphasize external stakeholder pressures or meet fundamental sustainability standards (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016; Crick & Crick, 2020; Crick et al., 2023). Although some studies refer to sustainability challenges faced by the industry (Rusko, 2011; Granata, 2018; Felzensztein et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2024; Crick & Crick, 2023), these are often addressed in general terms and are not explicitly examined as a legitimate and distinctive driver of co-competition. As a result, the literature offers a limited understanding of industry-

specific sustainability challenges as a legitimate driver of sustainability-oriented cooptation aimed at creating new customer value and a new market in which to compete.

*(GAP 1) There is a limited understanding of the **industry-specific sustainability challenges** as a driver of cooptation for new value and market creation.*

2.3.1.2 Governance Structure: How do competitors collectively organize and govern their relationship to transform industry-specific sustainability challenges into shared market opportunities?

Critical success factors. Kumar, Connell, and Bhattacharyya (2021) examined the critical success factors of cooptative relationships in CSR and sustainability. They identified three factors associated with governance, public policy, and relationship principles in CSR and sustainability. Governance refers to developing the right mindset among all the partners on the issue of sustainability, followed by building a cultural environment or corporate culture that supports such mindsets, and finally providing training to the employees on such critical issues (Klimas, 2016). Public policy is the regulation that provides guidelines for efficient, environmentally friendly equipment. It enables groups to work on safety issues and set industry standards. Finally, relationship principles refer to a trustworthy partner in collaboration and a desire to maintain the relationship for future ongoing CSR and sustainability activities. Kumar, Connell, and Bhattacharyya (2021) suggest that the interaction of these critical factors resulted in successful cooptative relationships in CSR and sustainability, providing a clear understanding between competitors of how collaboration for sustainability creates opportunities to secure the future of businesses and society (Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016; Christ et al.,2017).

Tensions & risks. In their 2023 study, Harala, Aarikka-Stenroos, and Ritala summarized the risks associated with cooperative relationships. These risks include opportunistic behavior (Hahn & Pinkse, 2014) and the fact that trust-building mechanisms in cooperative arrangements vary depending on the number of participants and their commitment to collective activities (Czakon & Czernek, 2016). As the number of participants increases, it becomes more challenging to maintain a balance between cooperation and competition (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018). Furthermore, close collaboration between competing firms, which involves sharing information and pooling resources, introduces additional risks, such as knowledge leakage, intra-firm goal conflict, loss of control, power imbalance, and insufficient returns (Planko et al., 2019; Chou & Zolkiewski, 2018).

Governance mechanisms. Moreover, Harala, Aarikka-Stenroos, and Ritala (2023) suggest that to mitigate risks derived from cooperation initiatives, various governance structures can be used, such as a neutral intermediary or orchestrating actor (Pinnington et al., 2021; Ritala et al., 2009) which is particularly helpful to intermediate interactions among competing firms (Rouyre & Fernandez, 2019; Smiljic, 2020). However, the appropriate governance model will vary across cases. For some projects, a digital platform solution might help to scale up the CE impact, while for others, the focus might be on the looser development of industry norms and practices.

In the case of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), cooperation governance tends to evolve through distinct life-cycle stages, from formation and formalization to consolidation and renewal, each marked by routines and indicators that stabilize expectations and reduce tensions between rivals (Da Silva & Cardoso, 2024).

Concerning how a digital platform solution might help scale up the CE impact, Narayan and Tidström (2020) suggest that managing coopetition through product biographies and tokens on the blockchain could benefit firms transitioning to CE models, and effectively coordinating networks of actors. A blockchain could free up managerial resources by securely recording information while providing mechanisms for coordinating and transacting such information. This approach would allow blockchain to facilitate the social interactions critical to network creation and consensus-building necessary to promote CE business models (Narayan & Tidström, 2020).

Beyond the transactional support offered by digital platforms, the Coopetitive Circular Business Model provides architectures of complementarity, roles, interfaces, and rules, that anchor rival collaboration and direct business model innovation toward measurable circular outcomes (Knight et al., 2025). Indeed, Harala, Aarikka-Stenroos, and Ritala (2023) emphasize that considering trade secrets and regulations, reducing tension between competitors, fostering peer pressure to commit to initiatives, and building trust among platform users are essential to engaging competitors in collaboration to advance a CE.

Concerning the role of neutral third-party facilitation or coordination in coopetition for sustainability networks comes from social entrepreneurship (Nascimento et al., 2023) and values-based networks (Rodríguez et al., 2024; Woolley et al., 2022). Nascimento, da Costa Júnior, Salazar, and Chim-Miki (2021) found that coopetition is a strategic approach indirectly influenced by an incubator's social environment. The coworking space in which social enterprises interact is a channel for networks. The incubation process encourages social enterprises to recognize social needs as opportunities for innovation and partnership development. Besides, the incubator nurtures a collective mindset of altruism that can minimize the tensions of value appropriation or competition

process. Rodríguez et al. (2024) and Woolley et al. (2022) found that to manage a sustainability-oriented network that includes competitors, these competitors should embrace the network's shared values and norms. A key aspect of this process is setting up a governance structure that balances the various power dynamics, tensions, and organizational practices among its members (Berkowitz et al., 2022). These findings are supported by research on supply chain operations; Mirzabeiki, He, and Sarpong (2022) highlight the important role of neutral third-party organizations in initiating and facilitating cooperation to improve sustainability performance “Meetings facilitated by the third-party bridged the gap in understanding and reduced the perceived barriers of cooperation” (Mirzabeiki et al., 2022, p. 4842).

In light of the literature reviewed, while existing studies offer valuable insights into mechanisms that may facilitate collaboration between competitors, such as neutral intermediaries, orchestrating actors, digital platforms, and shared industry norms (Harala et al., 2023; Narayan & Tidström, 2020; Woolley et al., 2022), these contributions often describe governance structures in operational terms, without establishing a clear link to the drivers that initiate cooperation. In particular, it remains unclear which type of governance structure effectively facilitates a collaborative relationship between competitors, when driven by industry-specific sustainability challenges, to create new customer value and a new market in which to compete.

*(GAP 2) There is a limited understanding of the **governance structure** that facilitates engaging competitors in a collaborative relationship, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive cooperation.*

2.3.2 *Strategic approach*

The strategic approach, grounded in RBV, studies the value creation mechanism between competitors that enables their business model innovation for sustainability. The analysis of the strategic approach from the literature review considers its two guiding questions: (3) *What collaborative mechanisms enable business model innovation for sustainability between competitors, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive cooperation?* (4) *What new customer value and market emerge from addressing industry-specific sustainability challenges through cooperation?*

2.3.2.1 *Value creation dynamics: What collaborative mechanisms enable business model innovation for sustainability between competitors, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive cooperation?*

Leveraging complementary resources, improving skills, and exchanging knowledge.

Individual firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often struggle to address sustainability challenges in their business models due to a lack of resources or specific knowledge (Halme & Korpela, 2014; Kiefer et al., 2019; Klewitz & Hansen, 2014). Hence, creating sustainability-oriented value often requires firms to form strategic partnerships with other organizations “who possess complementary capabilities that directly contribute to firm value and performance” (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2021, p. 1217).

Volschenk et al. (2016) built upon the work of Ritala (2009), Ritala and Hurmelinna-Laukkanen (2009), and Park et al. (2014) to demonstrate that collaborating with

competitors is distinct from cooperating with other stakeholders. Since competitors often face similar market challenges and rely on similar resources to address these issues, this shared dependency on resources makes competitors highly effective partners for value creation. Competitors generate organizational learning by complementing resources, exchanging information, and enhancing skills (Bouncken & Fredrich, 2016; Mirzabeiki et al., 2022). The knowledge that competitors gain from each other is highly relevant and can help to create new offerings, even new markets (Ritala et al., 2014).

For example, the circular economy (CE) offers businesses a way to conceptualize sustainable economic activity while addressing environmental and societal well-being (Narayan & Tidström, 2020). Incorporating CE practices requires skills and resources to deliver a product's value proposition, and often, individual firms do not possess all of them (Geissdoerfer et al., 2018). At this point, a coopetition strategy to promote value creation and appropriation could make the transition to CE practical. Initiatives where horizontal collaboration among competitors drives collective action, the voluntary and intentional effort of a group trying to benefit from its shared interest to reach a common goal, are instrumental in advancing CE (Ostrom, 1990, 2010; Patala et al., 2022). This is vital for addressing challenges and achieving system-level outcomes, both critical for a circular transition (Bowen et al., 2018; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020; 2023).

A strong balance between competition and collaboration to achieve sustainability performance. Nascimento et al. (2021) and Kumar et al. (2021) discuss the balance between competition and collaboration to achieve sustainability performance, which means economic, environmental, and social performance simultaneously. They align with Bengtsson and Kock's (2000) cooperative typology, which consists of three phases: cooperation-dominated, competition-dominated, and balanced competition-cooperation-

dominated relationship. Moreover, their findings reinforce the framework of Lindstrom and Polsa (2016), which assumes that any activity between competitors can be cooperative, balanced, or dominated by competition, either close or far from the customers.

On the one hand, Nascimento et al. (2021) analyzed the configuration of coopetition strategies in social enterprises and how these strategies can improve social value devolution. They found that coopetition in social entrepreneurship begins with cooperative behavior; in phase 1; value generation, the social mission of the enterprises allows them to come together to create common market solutions. However, competition starts to coexist with cooperation when social enterprise relationships evolve; thus, in phase 2; value appropriation, social enterprises start competing to appropriate the value generated jointly. Finally, phase 3; value devolution is focused on devolving social value to the public served. This agreement with the communities served balances the competitive relationship with similar levels of cooperation and competition.

On the other hand, furthermore on the phases outlined by Nascimento et al. (2021), Kumar et al. (2021) extend the discussion by introducing a typology of coopetition for CSR and sustainability. The proposed typology of coopetition in CSR and sustainability by Kumar et al. (2021) argues that when competition dominates in collaboration with competitors, it may lead to improved economic performance (Kemper et al., 2013; Wirl et al., 2013). Conversely, dominant collaboration improves social-environmental performance. However, the third form of coopetition for sustainability is “balanced-strong coopetition,” where strong competition pressures economic performance, and at the same time, strong cooperation provides a basis for knowledge sharing and resource exchange, and both are necessary for effective social-environmental performance (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2021, p. 1221).

While Bengtsson and Kock (2000) emphasize the evolution of phases in cooperation dynamics, Kumar et al. (2021) propose a more granular typology tailored specifically to CSR and sustainability, emphasizing the absence of weak cooperation in this domain. Otherwise, the findings from Nascimento et al. (2021) and Kumar et al. (2021) emphasize that achieving socio-environmental impact while improving market performance requires a strong balance of collaboration and cooperation. Moreover, in line with the studies by Kumar et al. (2021) and Nascimento et al. (2021), Volschenk et al. (2016) suggest that, in addition to knowledge and economic value, cooperation facilitates the creation of socio-environmental value. This value is defined as the sum of intrinsic ecological value and benefits that accrue to society because of environmental improvements. Therefore, the sustainability-oriented value creation through achieving a strong balance between collaboration and competition has the potential to generate economic benefits while also delivering positive socio-environmental impacts, ultimately transforming businesses, industries, and societies.

In light of the literature reviewed, while existing studies offer valuable insights into how competitors leverage complementary resources, exchange knowledge, and balance cooperation and competition to improve sustainability performance, most contributions emphasize incremental improvements in products, services, or processes rather than transformative business model innovation (Inigo et al., 2017). As a result, the literature offers a limited explanation of the collaborative value creation mechanism that enables business model innovation for sustainability, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive cooperation, aimed at creating new customer value and, a new market in which to compete.

*(GAP 3) There is a limited explanation of the collaborative **value creation dynamics** between competitors in the context of business model innovation, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive cooperation.*

2.3.2.2 New customer value & market creation: What new customer value and market emerge from addressing industry-specific sustainability challenges through cooperation?

Value creation - to be captured by cooperation. Cooperation initiatives that address sustainability issues enable firms to increase their potential for value capture by directly engaging with customers. Volschenk et al. (2016) study suggests that it is possible to generate economic value from socio-environmental cooperation initiatives; this implies that some initiatives should occur close to customers to raise awareness about the socio-environmental initiative. Volschenk et al. (2016) concur that leveraging competitors' resources and knowledge enables the transformation of overlooked industry socio-environmental values into new value for customers. Firms view competitors as key partners in addressing shared sustainability challenges since they face similar issues and rely on complementary resources, enabling new offerings and markets to be created. The values-based network and cooperation-based business models allow competitors to develop joint value propositions that address sustainability challenges (Woolley et al., 2022), unlocking opportunities for new value creation and capture (Volschenk et al., 2016). Hence, socio-environmental cooperation initiatives can generate positive sustainability impacts while creating new markets for responsible products. Complementary to these findings, recent evidence shows that networked business models can orchestrate nascent markets for sustainable innovation by aligning value propositions

and interaction rules across multiple firms, thereby enabling the emergence of new market categories oriented toward sustainability (Bankel & Govik, 2024). Finally, Bouncken et al. (2024) align with Volschenk et al. (2016); their research findings confirm that coopetition in CRS can lead to improved firm performance, both in terms of financial and social performance. This study demonstrates that enhanced firm performance may be achieved through the promotion of CRS initiatives when a coooperative approach is adopted, particularly when an understanding of stakeholder attributes is also evident.

In light of the literature reviewed, while existing studies highlight how coopetition can enhance firm performance and generate socio-environmental value, they rarely explore its potential to create entirely new customer value and markets (Volschenk et al., 2016; Nascimento et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2021; Bouncken et al., 2024). Consequently, the potential of coopetition to create a new customer value to be captured and, as a result, establish a new market in which to compete, particularly when driven by industry-specific sustainability challenges, remains underexplored.

(GAP 4) Underexplored potential of coopetition *to create new customer value and a market in which to compete*, particularly when industry-specific sustainability challenges drive coopetition.

2.3.3 Integrative framework gap

Based on the literature review, this dissertation identifies the normative and strategic approaches as critical mechanisms for facilitating sustainability-oriented coopetition (Harala et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2021; Narayan & Tidström, 2020). However, each approach addresses only part of the phenomenon: while the normative approach emphasizes shared values and governance structures, it lacks an explanation of how value

is created; conversely, the strategic approach offers insights into value creation dynamics but overlooks the normative conditions required to initiate and sustain collaboration. In this sense, each represents a necessary but not sufficient condition to explain how competitors, driven by industry-specific sustainability challenges, create new customer value and a new market. Despite their respective contributions, the interaction between these mechanisms remains largely unexplored in the literature (Kumar et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2025).

*GAP 5) Lack of an **integrative framework** that explains how normative and strategic approaches interact in practice, specifically when competitors collaborate to create new customer value and, consequently, a new market in which to compete, in response to shared industry-specific sustainability challenges.*

The current literature provides valuable yet fragmented insights into sustainability and competition discourse; it reveals theoretical limitations to address the research motivation. This dissertation reframes these gaps into four analytical dimensions that capture the core aspects of the phenomenon that require further exploration, namely; *industry-specific sustainability challenges (gap 1), the governance structures (gap 2), the value creation dynamics (gap 3), and the new customer value and, thereby, a new market in which to compete (gap 4)*. Consequently, there is a need to explore alternative frameworks that can operationalize these analytical dimensions and provide a structured connection with the core components of the research motivation.

2.4 Alternative analytical framework

To address these theoretical gaps, two complementary analytical frameworks are introduced: the values-based network and business model framework (V/NBM) (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017) and the coopetition-based business model framework (C/BM) (Ritala et al., 2014). While each framework responds to different aspects of the phenomenon under study, together they offer a promising basis for bridging the normative and strategic perspectives. Specifically, the V/NBM is particularly suited to address Gap 1, by explaining how industry-specific sustainability challenges can serve as a legitimate driver of collaborative business model innovation, and Gap 2, by offering insights into the governance structure required to manage collaborative relationships in sustainability initiatives. Meanwhile, the C/BM is well-positioned to address Gap 3 by describing the dynamics of collaborative value creation, specifically between competitors, and Gap 4 by theorizing how coopetition can result in the creation of new customer value and market. However, neither framework alone resolves Gap 5, which relates to the absence of an integrative explanation of how normative and strategic mechanisms interact in practice. This limitation justifies the need to empirically evaluate and compare the explanatory power of both frameworks, as developed in the next chapters.

2.4.1 *Coopetition-based business model analytical framework (C/BM)*

Ritala, Golnam, and Wegmann (2014) propose the coopetition-based business model framework to describe how coopetition-related plans are executed. They suggest that, unlike other forms of collaboration, *competitors positioned as collaborative partners for value creation may help firms leverage their complementary resources more effectively*

to create new offerings in new markets. Moreover, having a large base of competing offerings that provide the same solution often helps firms create competitive and appealing end markets from the customer's perspective (see Figure 2.1). Thus, these innovations, adopted collectively, lead to the emergence of new markets in which to compete (e.g. Wang & Xie, 2011). Hence, it can be proposed that cooperation may encourage multiple firms to collectively adopt the same sustainable solution by enhancing shared resources that enable the transformation of their business models and the creation of new customer value to be captured. If competitors widely embrace this innovation, it could lead to the establishment of a new market in which to compete (Felzensztein et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2024; Crick & Crick, 2023). However, as discussed below, this proposition lacks the normative foundation necessary to guide sustainability-oriented cooperation initiatives. Therefore, on its own, this approach cannot fully address the motivation behind the research.

2.4.2 Values-based network analytical framework (V/NBM)

In this regard, Breuer and Lüdeke-Freund (2017) propose a framework of values-based networks and business models. They argue that achieving *innovation in sustainability-oriented business model networks requires synthesis and careful definition of not only the values and normative orientations of all network stakeholders but also the multiple value propositions offered to them and the valuable outcomes created with and for them.* (see Figure 2.1)

Drawing on Breuer and Lüdeke-Freund (2017) framework, the values-based network and business model approach can help competitors address socio-environmental challenges within their industry. This is achieved by creating a shared vision of sustainability among

competitors and establishing the rules of engagement to collaboratively innovate their business model and creating new value proposition. However, although Breuer and Lüdeke-Freund's framework acknowledges coopetition as a form of network, it does not provide a detailed analysis of how normative and values orientations function in this context. As a result, it fails to offer insights into effectively managing tensions between competitors or evidence of how these factors contribute to the emergence of a new market over which to compete.

Although the C/BM and V/NBM frameworks propose complementary theoretical expectations that could effectively address the research motivation for this study, a gap still exists in understanding the extent to which these expectations can explain sustainability-oriented coopetition for new customer value and market creation, as explained below. The coopetition-based business model was originally developed in non-sustainability contexts (Ritala et al., 2014). Therefore, it is adapted here, acknowledging that its application to sustainability challenges has not been empirically explored. Conversely, the values-based network and business model framework (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017) was developed in sustainability contexts but has not yet been empirically tested in coopetition settings.

Thus, this dissertation contributes by examining both frameworks beyond their original domains and exploring their potential combined explanatory power regarding the phenomenon under study. In doing so, this research not only bridges strategic and normative approaches to coopetition for sustainability but also extends the empirical applicability of both frameworks to a novel context: the creation of a new customer value and market through sustainability-oriented collaboration between competitors.

Table 4 show a comparative overview of the theoretical propositions and gaps identified in both perspectives, the current literature and the two alternative frameworks. This comparison provides the basis for the subsequent empirical assessment, which examines the explanatory power of these perspectives in relation to the four analytical dimensions introduced earlier: *drivers, governance structure, value creation dynamics, and outcomes*. In doing so, this theoretical groundwork, which combines the conceptual propositions and the empirical assessment, establishes the basis for developing an integrative analytical model that brings together normative and strategic mechanisms to explain sustainability-oriented cooptation for new customer value and market creation, in Chapter 5.

Figure 2.1. Analytical Frameworks

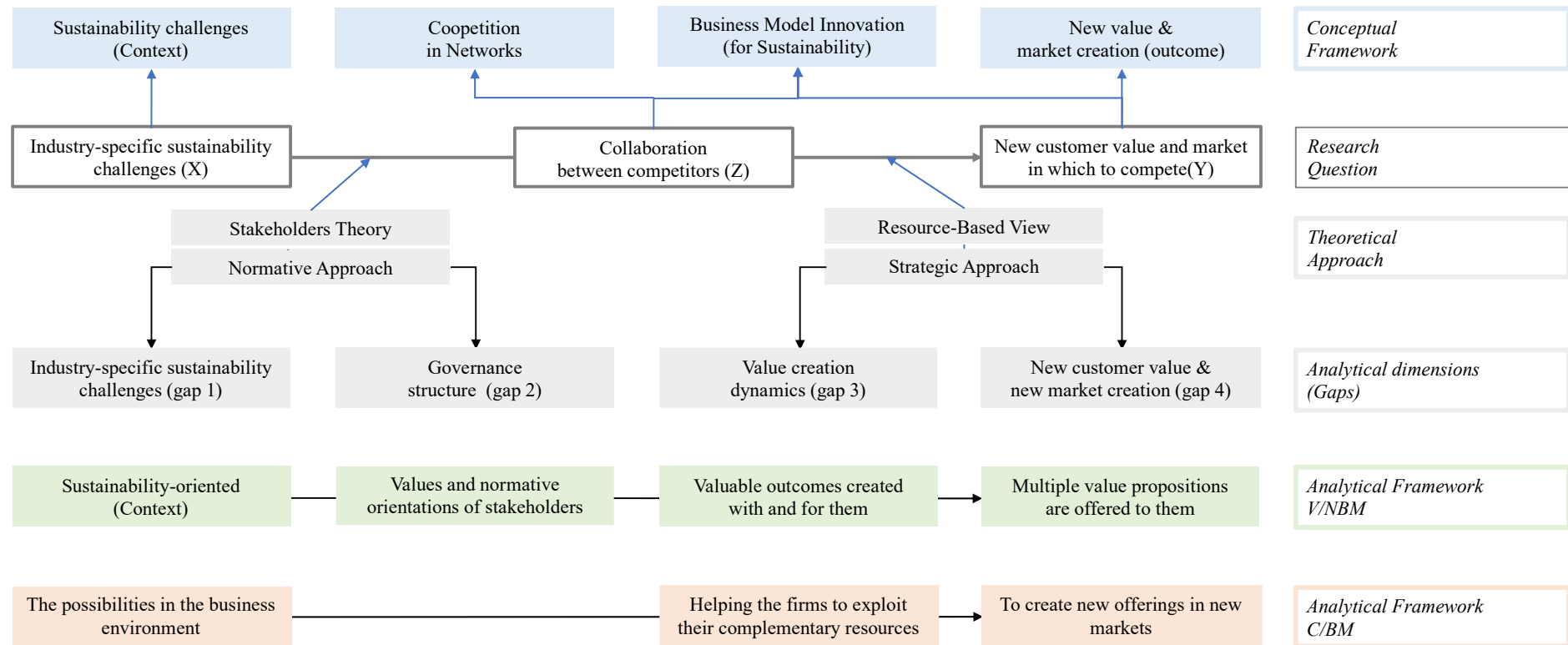


Table 4. Theoretical gaps in the literature and analytical frameworks

| | <i>Drivers</i> | <i>Governance Structure</i> | <i>Value creation dynamics</i> | <i>Outcome</i> |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| Description derived from literature review | <i>Drivers of collaboration between competitors for sustainability-oriented cooperation initiatives.</i> | <i>The set of shared values and normative orientations through which competitors coordinate to manage tensions and risks in sustainability-oriented cooperation initiatives.</i> | <i>The collaborative value creation mechanism for innovating the business model for sustainability with competitors.</i> | <i>A potential new customer value created by competitors and to be captured by each firm.</i> |
| Gap in the literature review | <i>The industry-specific sustainability challenges as drivers of collaboration between competitors for a new value and market creation remain underexplored.</i> | <i>The governance mechanism required to facilitate collaboration among competitors for creating a new customer value and market by addressing industry-specific sustainability challenges is not clearly specified.</i> | <i>The value creation mechanism to address industry-specific sustainability challenges by creating a new customer value and market remains insufficiently examined.</i> | <i>The emergence of a new customer value to be captured and a new market as outcomes of sustainability-oriented cooperation is not explicitly addressed.</i> |
| Proposition derived from Values-based framework | <i>Values-based networks consisting of viable and sustainability-oriented business models.</i> | <i>Values and normative orientations of all network stakeholders.</i> | <i>Valuable outcomes created with and for them.</i> | <i>The multiple value propositions offered to them.</i> |

| | <i>Drivers</i> | <i>Governance Structure</i> | <i>Value creation dynamics</i> | <i>Outcome</i> |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gap in the Values-based framework | Does not explicitly consider collaboration among competitors, focusing instead on networks of aligned actors in general. | Assumes normative alignment but does not define the formal governance structures needed to manage coopetitive tensions. | Focuses on value creation but not explicitly on innovation of the entire business model in competitive contexts. | Does not establish how new value propositions translate into market creation when adopted collectively by competitors. |
| Proposition derived from Coopetition-based framework | <i>The possibilities in the business environment can motivate firms to collaborate.</i> | , (No explicit normative mechanism defined in the original framework). | <i>Knowledge similarity possessed by competitors on current markets can help firms to exploit their complementary resources.</i> | <i>To create new offerings in new markets.</i> |
| Gap in the Coopetition-based framework | Does not consider <i>industry-specific sustainability challenges</i> as potential drivers of collaboration. | Lacks normative considerations, including governance structures or ethical alignment mechanisms. | Emphasizes business model innovation but does not incorporate sustainability as a central goal. | Does not account for the <i>sustainability-driven</i> nature of new market emergence. |
| Key References/ Core sample | (Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018) (Harala et al., 2023) (Knight et al., 2025) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Mori & Zhang, 2024) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Volschenk et al., 2016) (Woolley et al., 2022) | (Harala et al., 2023) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Narayan & Tidström, 2020) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Woolley et al., 2022) | (Harala et al., 2023) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Volschenk et al., 2016) | (Bankel & Govik, 2024) (Bouncken et al., 2024) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Volschenk et al., 2016) (Woolley et al., 2022) |

3 METHODS

3.1 Congruence analysis research design

To address the theoretical gaps identified in the literature review and respond to the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, this dissertation adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a single case study. Specifically, it employs the congruence analysis approach (CON), a small-N research design (Blatter & Haverland, 2012) that enables a systematic comparison between theoretical expectations deduced from the literature and from alternative frameworks, and the empirical observations drawn from the case study, with the aim of assessing their explanatory relevance or relative strength.

This dissertation applies CON, which is particularly suitable given that neither the current coopetition and sustainability literature nor the alternative frameworks, the values-based network framework (V/NBM) and the coopetition-based business model framework (C/BM), are sufficient on their own to explain how competitors can collaboratively create a new value and market, while collectively addressing industry-specific sustainability challenges. Accordingly, the case study provides a means of empirically testing whether expectations derived from these perspectives are confirmed, contradicted, or require refinement. In doing so, this methodological choice addresses the five theoretical gaps outlined in Chapter 2 and contributes to the overall research objective.

The deduced expectations were derived in two stages. First, a systematic literature review (Sauer & Seuring, 2023) examined studies on coopetition as a relationship in which competitors simultaneously collaborate and compete (Bengtsson & Kock, 2019, 2000), with particular emphasis on business model innovation for sustainability (Schaltegger et

al., 2016) and the creation of a new value and market (Ritala et al., 2014). This review revealed two dominant theories: Stakeholder Theory (ST), which provides a normative approach, and the Resource-Based View (RBV), which offers a strategic approach. While both approaches contribute relevant insights, they leave unresolved five major gaps: (1) limited understanding of industry-specific sustainability challenges as a driver of coopetition (Kumar et al., 2021; Scandelius & Cohen, 2016; Crick & Crick, 2020; Crick et al., 2023), (2) limited understanding of governance structures that facilitate coopetition (Narayan & Tidström, 2020; Nascimento et al., 2023; Harala et al., 2023; Knight et al., 2025), (3) limited explanation of collaborative value creation mechanisms (Kumar et al., 2021; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020; Scandelius & Cohen, 2016), (4) underexplored potential of coopetition for creating a new value and market (Planko et al., 2016; Scandelius & Cohen, 2016; Volschenk et al., 2016), and (5) lack of an integrative framework bridging normative and strategic perspectives (Kumar et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2025).

Second, to advance this understanding, two alternative frameworks were introduced: the coopetition-based business model framework (C/BM) (Ritala et al., 2014) and the values-based network and business model framework (V/NBM) (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017). Although neither was originally developed for the context of sustainability-oriented coopetition, both offer promising explanatory potential. Accordingly, expectations deduced from these frameworks were formulated separately, alongside those from the literature, and subsequently operationalized for empirical assessment in the case study.

The congruence analysis proper, presented in 4.2 section (Findings chapter), follows four steps: (1) Comparing empirical observations with expectations derived from the

literature. (2) Comparing empirical observations with expectations derived from the values-based network and business model framework. (3) Comparing empirical observations with expectations derived from the cooperation-based business model framework. (4) Evaluating the explanatory strength of the three perspectives in light of the empirical evidence.

Finally, in Chapter 6 (Discussion), the results of the congruence analysis are employed to develop a more comprehensive framework that bridges strategic and normative approaches, validating the role and relevance of both the literature and the alternative frameworks within the new theoretical discourse. Thus, this dissertation introduces sustainability-oriented cooperation for a new value and market creation as a theoretical contribution that bridges normative and strategic approaches, showing how competitors can collaboratively create new customer value and a market in which to compete, while collectively addressing industry-specific sustainability challenges.

3.2 Deduced expectations from literature review and alternative frameworks

The approaches identified in the literature review, as well as the alternative frameworks introduced as complementary perspectives, are located at a high level of abstraction within the theoretical discourse on sustainability-oriented cooperation for new market creation. Following the congruence analysis approach (CON) (Blatter & Haverland, 2012), this dissertation derives concrete expectations from these approaches and frameworks, translating them into lower levels of abstraction to enable empirical observation.

By evaluating these expectations through congruence analysis, this study seeks to assess the extent to which the selected frameworks, originally developed in different theoretical domains, along with the insights identified in the cooperation and sustainability literature, can explain the phenomenon under study. The results of this empirical comparison will support the development of a new explanatory and integrative framework.

In line with the logic of congruence analysis, this study does not assume in advance that the selected approaches and frameworks are fully compatible or integrable. Instead, it aims to examine their empirical complementarity and relative strength in explaining the case under analysis, and later, their relevance within the broader theoretical discourse.

The following section outlines the expectations deduced from both the literature and the alternative frameworks. These expectations are organized according to four analytical dimensions identified in the literature review: drivers, governance structure, value creation dynamics, and outcomes. Due to their analytical and conceptual convergence, these analytical dimensions function as anchor points for framing expectations derived from the literature and frameworks. In each case, the expected empirical observations are also introduced to guide the comparative analysis with the case study.

3.2.1 Drivers, deduced expectations

Regarding the drivers of sustainability-oriented cooperation, the literature highlights external pressures and internal interests as key triggers for collaboration among firms. These drivers are often linked to compliance, reputation management, or competitive advantage (Kumar et al., 2021; Nascimento et al., 2023; Volschenk et al., 2016; Rodríguez et al., 2024). The values-based network framework introduces a different angle, emphasizing that shared recognition of a sustainability challenge within an

industry can serve as an internal driver for collaboration. However, this framework does not explicitly address the dynamics of collaboration between competitors. In contrast, the coopetition-based business model framework highlights pursuing market opportunities as the primary driver of collaboration between competitors. Yet, it does not explicitly consider how industry-specific sustainability challenges might create or shape such opportunities. Accordingly, the expected empirical observation is that industry-specific sustainability challenges function as key drivers of collaboration between competitors for new value and market creation.

3.2.2 Governance structure, deduced expectations.

Concerning the normative dimension, the literature review indicates that the tensions and risks naturally arising from collaborative relationships between competitors can be managed through appropriate governance structures that facilitate the relationship among firms to achieve common sustainability goals (Kumar et al., 2021; Harala et al., 2023; Narayan & Tidström, 2020). In line with this, the values-based network framework emphasizes that collaboration among firms to address sustainability issues and innovate their business models should be facilitated by shared norms and values that network members agree upon and establish. In contrast, the coopetition-based business model framework overlooks normative dimensions. It primarily emphasizes strategic collaboration and value creation, neglecting how ethical alignment and governance structures are established. Therefore, the expected empirical observation is that a governance structure plays a central role in enabling competitors to address industry-specific sustainability challenges and, in doing so, create new customer value and a new market.

3.2.3 Value creation dynamics, deduced expectations.

With regard to the strategic approach, the central concept linking the literature review with the values-based and cooperation-based frameworks is firm collaboration for business model innovation. This collaboration occurs by integrating complementary and supplementary resources that facilitate value creation. The values-based framework conceptualizes this process as collaborative innovation, guided by aligned sustainability values across firms, regardless of whether they are direct competitors. In contrast, the cooperation-based framework focuses on collaboration among competitors, arguing that pre-existing similarities in knowledge and business logic enhance mutual absorptive capacity and facilitate innovation (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009). Hence, the expected empirical observation is that the value creation mechanism, through collaboration among competitors, enables responses to industry-specific sustainability challenges via a new customer value and market creation.

3.2.4 Outcomes, deduced expectations.

Finally, in terms of outcomes, the creation of new customer value and, consequently, the emergence of a new market are concepts that have not been sufficiently explored in the cooperation and sustainability literature. Therefore, they represent one of the most significant contributions of the frameworks by Ritala et al. (2014) and Breuer and Lüdeke-Freund (2017) to strategic and normative approaches. Both frameworks agree that one of the expected outcomes of firm collaboration is the creation of new "customer value," in Ritala et al. (2014) terms, or a new "value proposition," as referred to by Breuer

and Lüdeke-Freund (2017). Although both frameworks use different terminology for the same concept, they refer to the same underlying meaning: "the willingness of end customers to pay," consistent with Garcia-Castro and Aguilera (2015) definition of value. Hence, value proposition and customer value are used interchangeably in this research.

In both frameworks, the newly created customer value represents a potential source of value capture for each firm. However, the coopetition-based framework goes further by suggesting that the collective adoption by multiple competitors of the newly created customer value is a necessary condition for the formation of a new market. Therefore, the expected empirical observation is that sustainability-oriented coopetition leads to the creation of new customer value and, as a result, the emergence of a new market in which to compete.

As a result, the four analytical dimensions offer a structured basis for organizing the expectations derived from the literature and the alternative frameworks. The Table. 5 below summarizes these expectations enabling a systematic comparison across theoretical propositions without assuming prior integrability. These deduced expectations, aligned with the analytical dimensions, serve as the basis for the upcoming congruence analysis. In Chapter 4, each expectation will be compared with the empirical evidence from the case study to assess the explanatory power of the selected frameworks.

Table 5. Theoretical expectations; literature and alternative frameworks

| | <i>Drivers</i> | <i>Governance Structure</i> | <i>Value creation dynamics</i> | <i>Outcome</i> |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Key References/ Core sample</i> | (Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018) (Harala et al., 2023) (Knight et al., 2025) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Mori & Zhang, 2024) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Volschenk et al., 2016) (Woolley et al., 2022) | (Harala et al., 2023) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Narayan & Tidström, 2020) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Woolley et al., 2022) | (Harala et al., 2023) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Volschenk et al., 2016) | (Bankel & Govik, 2024) (Bouncken et al., 2024) (Kumar, Connell, & Bhattacharyya, 2020) (Nascimento et al., 2023) (Rodríguez et al., 2024) (Volschenk et al., 2016) (Woolley et al., 2022) |
| <i>Expected empirical observation</i> | <i>The industry-specific sustainability challenges as drivers of collaboration between competitors for a new value and market creation</i> | <i>The governance mechanism to facilitate competitors creates a new value and market by addressing the industry-specific sustainability challenges</i> | <i>The value creation mechanism to address the industry-specific sustainability challenges by creating a new customer value to be captured and a market on which to compete</i> | <i>A new customer value to be captured and a new market over which to compete as outcomes of sustainability-oriented cooperation</i> |

| | <i>Drivers</i> | <i>Governance Structure</i> | <i>Value creation dynamics</i> | <i>Outcome</i> |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <i>Expectations derived from the literature review</i> | Collaboration among competitors for sustainability is more likely to be initiated in response to external stakeholder pressures, such as regulatory demands and customer expectations, and internal motivations related to competitive advantage | To manage the risks and tensions inherent in sustainability-oriented collaboration among competitors, the literature expects the implementation of appropriate governance structures, although it does not specify whether these should be formal, normative, or both. | Sustainability-oriented coopetition is expected to enhance value creation through innovations in products, services, or processes that improve sustainability performance, primarily based on the existing customer value rather than the creation of entirely new value propositions. | While sustainability-oriented coopetition may generate economic benefits and increase consumer awareness of environmental practices, the literature does not explicitly connect such collaborations to the creation of new customer value or the emergence of new markets. |
| <i>Expectations derived from the Values-based framework</i> | The formation of sustainability-oriented coopetitive networks is more likely when competitors share normative orientations and collectively recognize industry-specific sustainability challenges as a common concern. | Collaboration among competitors is more likely to be effectively governed when it is grounded in shared values and normative orientations, which guide collective responses to industry-specific sustainability challenges. | Business model innovation in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges is more likely to occur when competitors are strategically aligned through shared values and long-term collective goals. | In response to industry-specific sustainability challenges, new customer value is more likely to emerge when competitors co-create value propositions that are grounded in shared values and oriented toward long-term societal and environmental benefits. |
| <i>Expectations derived from the Coopetition-based framework</i> | Collaboration among competitors is more likely to emerge when they perceive industry-specific sustainability challenges as strategic opportunities within the business environment that can be jointly exploited. | | Business model innovation in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges is more likely to emerge when competitors possess complementary resources and similar knowledge bases that enhance mutual absorptive capacity. | In response to industry-specific sustainability challenges, a new market is more likely to emerge when competing firms collaboratively create and collectively adopt a new customer value proposition. |

3.3 Case context

The case selected for this dissertation is “Red Tiendas Café Especial en el Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano” (La Red), within Colombia’s specialty coffee industry, located in the Coffee Cultural Landscape (CCLC), a UNESCO World Heritage site. This case provides a compelling empirical setting for several reasons: (1) it constitutes a clearly defined network of competitors, (2) it operates in an industry where sustainability challenges are highly salient, and (3) competitors has lead initiatives with the potential to generate a new value and market. We applied a longitudinal case study approach to understand the development of the core phenomenon over time (Yin, 2009). By focusing on La Red, this dissertation examines how competitors collectively addressed sustainability challenges in an established industry and, through cooperation, enabled the emergence of a new value and market.

Specialty Coffee is defined as “a coffee or coffee experience recognized for its distinctive attributes, and because of these attributes, has significantly extra value in the marketplace” (Specialty Coffee Association, 2021, p. 10). The concept emerged as a response to consumer awareness regarding quality and sustainability, initially in non-producer countries (Boaventura et al., 2018). Its introduction transformed coffee from a commodity traded through traditional supply chains into a broader value network in which producers, roasters, and coffee shops collectively ensure traceability and quality for customers (Morland, 2018; Goldstein, 2013; Ramirez-Gomez et al., 2022).

Colombia has long been recognized as one of the world’s largest coffee producers (International Coffee Organization, 2024). The unique combination of climatic conditions, altitude, and terrain across 51 municipalities enables the cultivation of high-

quality beans (Rodríguez et al., 2022). In 2011, UNESCO declared the CCLC a World Heritage site, highlighting that “for over 100 years, peasant families have built up knowledge of how to adapt their crops, cultivated on small plots, to the harsh conditions of the environment, thereby developing a strong cultural identity” (UNESCO, 2012, p. 45). Despite the international appreciation of Colombian coffee (UNESCO, 2013), coffee remained a commodity category (Ghosh et al., 2021), leaving individual Colombian producers with limited bargaining power and restricting their potential capture of the economic value of their high-quality product (Rodríguez et al., 2025). Furthermore, although the market, mainly international, was developing a new and independent demand for specialty coffee (Boaventura et al., 2018), Colombian producers were ill-equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to access this market (Rodríguez et al., 2025). Consequently, the environmental and socio-cultural factors contributing to Colombian coffee quality have not been entirely appropriated by local customers; as a result, the specialty coffee concept was not developed in the local market (Fontur, 2014). (See Appendix 1.)

Against this background, local coffee shop start-ups in the CCLC region identified an opportunity to establish a new market for specialty coffee (see Table 6 for timeline and details). Although operating as independent firms, they collectively formed a business network called “Red Tiendas Café Especial en Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano” (La Red). This dissertation focuses on the period between February 2017 and August 2018, when La Red actively facilitated the creation of a new value and market for specialty coffee. During this time, members of La Red implemented initiatives with positive impacts across the value chain. Members of La Red established alliances with local producers to implement best production practices, ensuring access to high-quality

raw materials for coffee shops and enabling producers to reach local markets, thereby increasing their revenue. Traceability and product customization reinforced market differentiation and generated innovative business models throughout the value chain. The exchange of knowledge between competitors within La Red reduced the risks of entering new markets, enhanced their performance, and increased each member's potential to capture value. Furthermore, La Red implemented educational strategies for local consumers, which increased the visibility of the new customer value and the recognition of coffee shops in the local market. As a result, local demand for specialty coffee grew significantly, increasing market and sales growth for La Red's members. In conclusion, La Red illustrates how sustainability-oriented cooperation enabled competitors in the CCLC to transform industry-specific sustainability challenges into a new customer value and market.

Table 6. Overview of the timeline and description of the supportive secondary data

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Month</i> | <i>Host firm</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Phase</i> | <i>Type of secondary data</i> | <i>Data items</i> |
|-------------|--------------|------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2017 | February | Barista | Socializing marketing research "Consumption specialty coffee in the local market" | Drivers of coopetition | Photos | 4 |
| | | | | | Internal report | 1 |
| 2017 | April | Famosta | Workshop: Challenges in the Specialty Coffee market | Drivers of coopetition | Photos | 9 |
| 2017 | May | UTP | Workshop: Opportunities in the Specialty Coffee market | Drivers of coopetition | Photos | 6 |
| 2017 | June | Soneto | Collaborative innovation: "Fiestas de la cosecha 2017" | Customer category creation | Photos | 10 |
| | | | | | Memo | 1 |
| 2017 | July | Maria Antonia | The decision to adopt a collective identity (LOGO) and name for the network | Temporary meta-organization | Photos | 6 |
| 2017 | August | Barista | Workshop: Definition of the concept and best practices of specialty coffee | Competitive category creation | Photos | 9 |
| 2017 | August | Lucerna | Socializing the concept of the specialty coffee value chain, and social media launch | Competitive category creation | Photos | 11 |
| 2017 | September | Café Torres | Socializing the best practices of specialty coffee, and logo launch | Competitive category creation | Photos | 6 |
| 2017 | October | Roma Café | Workshop: Definition of shared objectives and requirements to be part of the collective | Temporary Meta-Organization | Photos | 7 |
| | | | | | Memo | 1 |
| 2017 | November | San Café | Training of differentiated experiences | Customer category creation | Photos | 7 |
| 2017 | November | Amrita | Establishing the adoption of a coffee producer as a requirement to be part of the collective | Temporary Meta-Organization Governance | Photos | 7 |
| 2017 | December | Maria Antonia | Workshop: Design and establish the label of specialty coffee packaging | Temporary Meta-Organization | Photos | 10 |

| | | | | | | |
|------|----------|-------------------|---|-------------------------------|-----------------|----|
| 2017 | December | Altagracia | Annual meeting | Temporary Meta-Organization | Photos | 21 |
| 2018 | January | Lucerna | Design of the specific training sessions | Competitive category creation | | |
| 2018 | February | Lucerna | Socializing of La Red's corporate video | Temporary Meta-Organization | Photos | 4 |
| 2018 | March | Asocafé Manantial | Socializing of the specific training sessions | Temporary Meta-Organization | Photos | 7 |
| 2018 | March | Comfamiliar | Socializing marketing research "Specialty coffee Shops in the local market" | Temporary Meta-Organization | Photos | 6 |
| | | | | | Internal report | 1 |
| 2018 | April | Arandela | Specific training sessions: The specialty coffee farmer family | Value Chain Category Creation | Photos | 5 |
| 2018 | April | Santuario Café | Collaborative innovation: "Expo Eje Café 2018" | Customer category creation | Photos | 8 |
| 2018 | May | Dos Cosechas | Specific training sessions: Specialty coffee harvesting | Value Chain Category Creation | Photos | 8 |
| 2018 | June | San Café | Specific training sessions: Specialty coffee roasting | Value Chain Category Creation | | |
| 2018 | June | Amrita | Specific training sessions: Specialty coffee brewing | Competitive category creation | Video | 1 |
| 2018 | July | La Lucerna | Specific training sessions: Specialty coffee espresso machine | Competitive category creation | Video | 1 |
| 2018 | July | Koffea | Collaborative innovation: "Fiestas de la cosecha 2018" | Customer Category Creation | Photos | 4 |
| | | | | | Memo | 1 |
| 2018 | July | Maria Antonia | Training of differentiated experiences | Customer Category Creation | Photos | 9 |
| 2018 | August | Veredal | Specific training sessions: The specialty coffee consumer | Customer Category Creation | Photos | 11 |
| 2018 | August | Reserva Natural | Final specific training sessions: Gala | Temporary meta-organization | Photos | 5 |

Table 7. Demographic data of La Red's members

| <i>Firm</i> | <i>Role</i> | <i>Specialty Coffee Concept Adoption</i> | <i>Number of Employees/</i> | <i>Initial Business Model</i> | <i>Business Model Reconfiguration</i> |
|--------------------------|-------------|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| La Lucerna | Manager | 2017 | between 3 and 6 | Cafeteria | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Rincón Santo Café | Owner | 2016 | less than or equal to 2 | Cafeteria | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Café y Pastel | Owner | 2018 | less than or equal to 2 | Cafeteria | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Café Aroma | Owner | 2017 | less than or equal to 2 | Cafeteria | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Café Ambar | Owner | 2015 | less than or equal to 2 | Coffee Producer | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Dos Cosechas | Owner | 2018 | less than or equal to 2 | Coffee Producer | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| María Antonia | Owner | 2015 | less than or equal to 2 | Coffee Producer | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| San Café | Owner | 2013 | less than or equal to 2 | Coffee Producer | Micro-Roastery |
| Aroma y Sabor | Owner | 2015 | less than or equal to 2 | Specialty Coffee Shop | Micro-Roastery |
| Mirador Altagracia | Owner | 2014 | between 3 and 6 | Specialty Coffee Shop | Coffee Producer |
| Arandela | Owner | 2016 | less than or equal to 2 | Specialty Coffee Shop | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Amrita | Owner | 2016 | less than or equal to 2 | Specialty Coffee Shop | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| La Octavia | Owner | 2017 | less than or equal to 2 | Specialty Coffee Shop | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| José López Casa de Cafés | Owner | 2016 | between 3 and 6 | Coffee Producer | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| El Santuario Café | Owner | 2017 | less than or equal to 2 | Barista | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Café Torres | Owner | 2016 | between 3 and 6 | Barista | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Koffea | Owner | 2017 | less than or equal to 2 | Barista | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Tintto Café | Owner | 2008 | less than or equal to 2 | Coffee Producer | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Caído del cielo | Owner | 2016 | between 3 and 6 | Specialty Coffee Shop | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Cafetalex | Owner | 2015 | between 3 and 6 | Cafeteria | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| Bambusa | Owner | 2018 | greater than 6 | Cafeteria | Micro-Roastery |
| Achi Chavari | Owner | 2018 | between 3 and 6 | Cafeteria | Specialty Coffee Shop |
| El Barista | Owner | 2014 | between 3 and 6 | Specialty Coffee Shop | Specialty Coffee Shop |

Table 8. Overview of the interview participants

| <i>Firm**</i> | <i>Role in La Red</i> | <i>1st round interviews: Identity and governance structure</i> | | <i>2nd round interviews: Collective's commitment and survival</i> | | <i>3rd round interviews: Corroboration of the governance structure</i> | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--------------|---|--------------|--|--------------|
| | | <i>Minutes</i> | <i>Pages</i> | <i>Minutes</i> | <i>Pages</i> | <i>Minutes</i> | <i>Pages</i> |
| Rincón Santo Café* | Competitor-side market creation | 146 | 30 | 35 | 6 | | |
| Café y Pastel* | Demand-side market creation | 94 | 17 | 18 | 3 | | |
| Koffea* | Competitor-side market creation | 44 | 6 | 18 | 3 | | |
| Amrita* | Competitor-side market creation | 72 | 14 | 31 | 7 | | |
| Dos Cosechas* | Value Chain- side market creation | 83 | 15 | 17 | 4 | | |
| María Antonia* | Demand-side market creation | 87 | 16 | 22 | 5 | | |
| Aroma y Sabor* | Value Chain- side market creation | 114 | 23 | 20 | 5 | | |
| San Café | Value Chain- side market creation | 27 | 6 | | | | |
| Café Aroma | Demand-side market creation | 113 | 23 | | | | |
| Café Ambar | Competitor-side market creation | 81 | 16 | | | | |
| Mirador Altagracia | Demand-side market creation | 51 | 10 | | | | |
| Arandela | Demand-side market creation | 91 | 19 | | | | |
| La Octavia | Demand-side market creation | 93 | 15 | | | | |
| José López Casa de Cafés | Value Chain- side market creation | 94 | 15 | | | | |
| El Santuario Café | Competitor-side market creation | 54 | 10 | | | | |
| Café Torres | Demand-side market creation | 61 | 13 | | | | |
| La Lucerna | Competitor-side market creation | 83 | 16 | | | | |
| Tintto Café | Value Chain- side market creation | | | | | 18 | 6 |
| Caído del cielo | Competitor-side market creation | | | | | 24 | 11 |
| Cafetalex | Competitor-side market creation | | | | | 22 | 11 |
| Bambusa | Value Chain- side market creation | | | | | 28 | 13 |
| Achi Chavari | Competitor-side market creation | | | | | 15 | 7 |
| El Barista | Value Chain- side market creation | | | | | 21 | 11 |
| | | 1388 | 264 | 161 | 33 | 128 | 59 |

* The informant was interviewed on two occasions by different researchers from the authors' team.

** Total number of interviews is 30, including informants who were interviewed twice.

3.4 Data collection

The primary data source for this study consists of semi-structured interviews with 23 members of La Red, all of whom were owners or managers of participating coffee shops (see Table 7). The interviews were conducted from an insider–outsider perspective (Gioia et al., 2010; Ritala et al., 2023). The doctoral candidate, who had direct involvement with La Red, provided contextual knowledge, facilitated access to participants, and carried out the first interview round. The supervisors, external to the case, supported the design of the interview guide and took part in conducting the second and third interview rounds. This dual role enriched the data while also requiring reflexive awareness of potential bias, which was mitigated through triangulation and supervisor validation. In total, 30 interviews were conducted across three rounds between August 2022 and March 2024, generating more than 28 hours of recordings and 356 pages of transcripts (see Table 8). Interviews were carried out through Google Meet and transcribed using Tactiq Software. As all interviewees agreed to disclose their identity, the real names of coffee shops and their owners are reported in the findings.

The first round of interviews, conducted between August 2022 and February 2023, involved 17 members of La Red. The interview guide was structured around four sets of questions derived from the theoretical analysis, each informed by the values-based network framework (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017) and the coopetition-based business model framework (Ritala et al., 2014) (see Appendix 2). The unit of analysis was the network of specialty coffee shops. The four sets explored: (1) the sustainability challenges of the industry, (2) the mechanisms for adopting common sustainability values, (3) the collaborative value creation dynamics among competitors, and (4) the perceived

outcomes of network participation. This structure ensured that both normative and strategic perspectives were systematically addressed.

Following this first round, two important insights emerged. First, members of La Red collectively decided to create a visual identity (logo) that represented their shared values and served as a quality label. Second, they began to establish a governance structure oriented toward the development of industry norms, supported by a neutral external facilitator. To deepen understanding of these dynamics, a second round of interviews was conducted in May 2023 with seven key informants who had played central roles in the design, creation, and dissemination of the logo, as well as in coordinating La Red's governance (For detailed information, see Table 8).

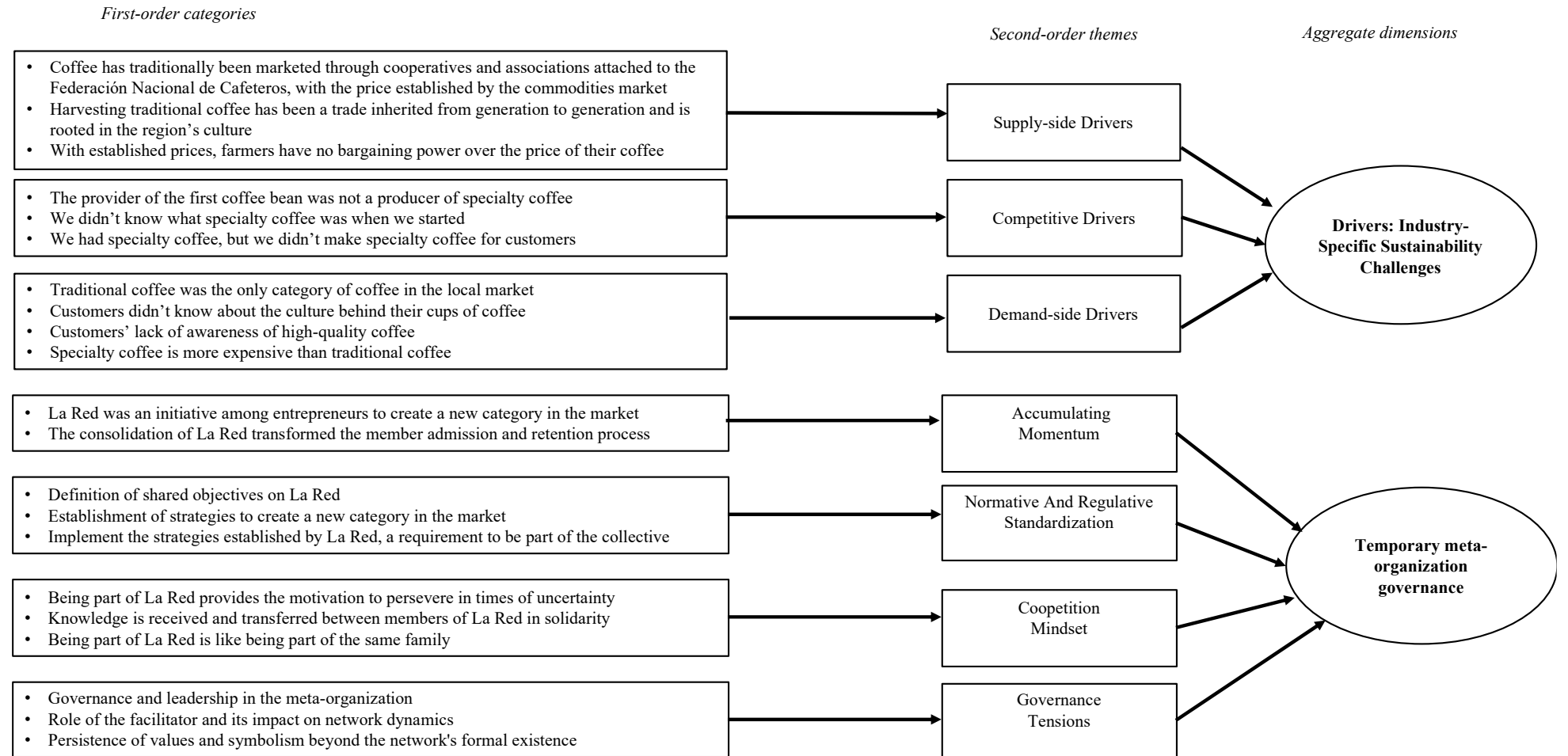
The first and second rounds revealed that tensions became salient during the transition from external facilitation to internal coordination. This motivated a third round of interviews, conducted in March 2024 with the six remaining members who had not participated earlier. These interviews focused on validating how La Red's values and identity were currently mobilized, as well as how governance tensions affected the collective's performance and long-term commitment. The findings confirmed the continuity of earlier insights, enriching rather than contradicting them. Taken together, the three rounds ensured coverage of founding, active, and late-joining members.

To further strengthen the analysis, the interviews were triangulated with archival data (Spradley, 2016), including social media content, press releases, photographs, videos, meeting agendas, and reports (Appendix 3). These materials provided complementary evidence on the coordination of La Red, the dissemination of its values, and the process of new value and market creation, detailed in Table 6.

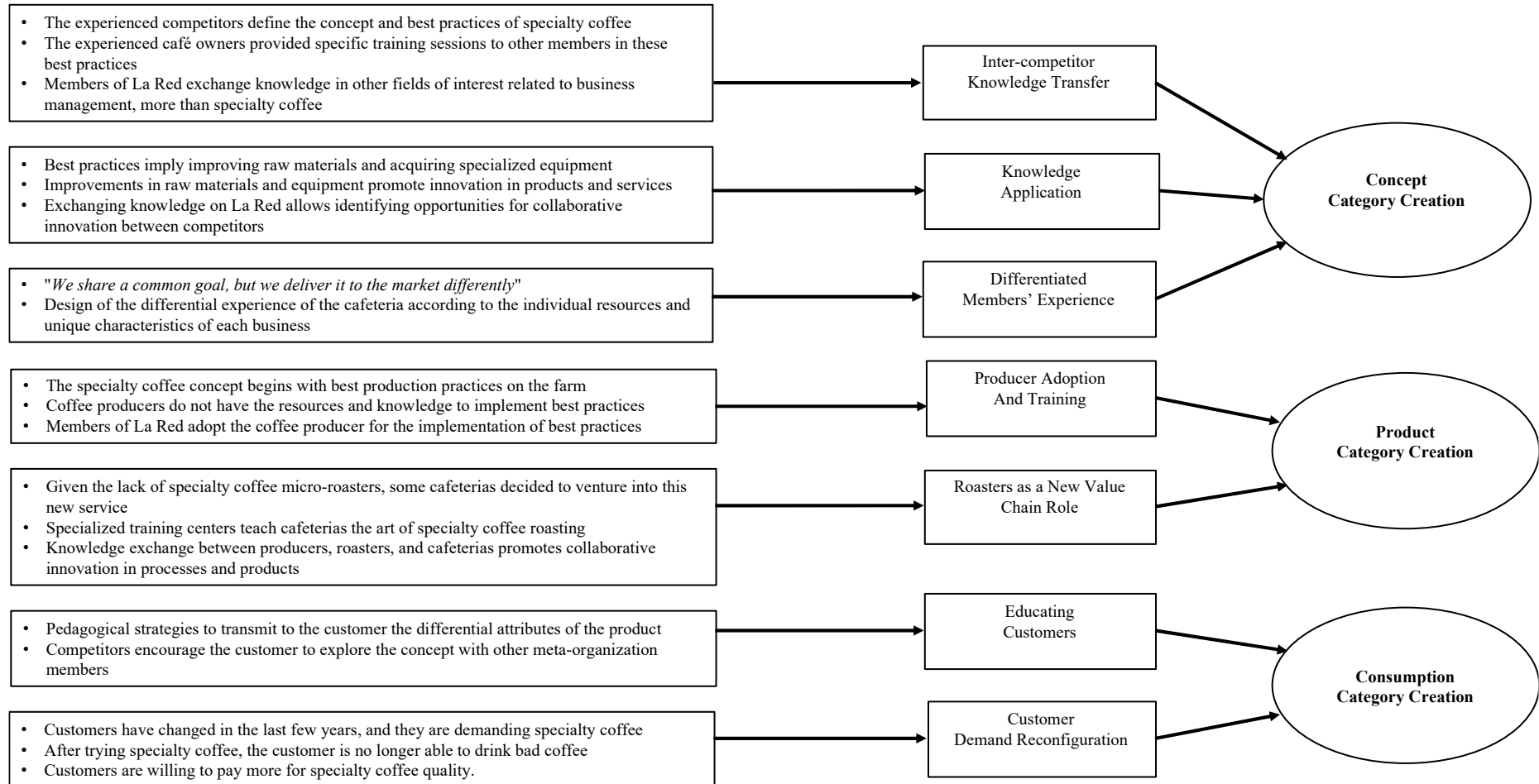
3.5 Data analysis

The analysis of the interview transcripts followed an inductive coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) supported by NVivo software. This process was subsequently structured through the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), which enabled the transformation of empirically grounded first-order codes into broader second-order themes and, ultimately, into aggregate dimensions enriched by theoretical insights. The doctoral candidate conducted the initial coding rounds, identifying key evidence in the narratives of interviewees that illustrated how competitors collectively addressed sustainability challenges and contributed to the emergence of a new value and market. These first-order codes were organized into thematic clusters, providing the basis for a preliminary data structure. This structure was critically reviewed by the dissertation supervisor, who evaluated the structure and reassessed it in light of the interview data and emerging insights. The coding process was iterative, with numerous rounds and meetings that continued until arriving at the final data structure (Figure 3). In this iterative process, the analysis used an abductive approach to connect the six themes from empirical data to four analytical dimensions identified in the theoretical background (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

Figure 3. Data structure



First-order categories



First-order categories

Second-order themes

Aggregate dimensions

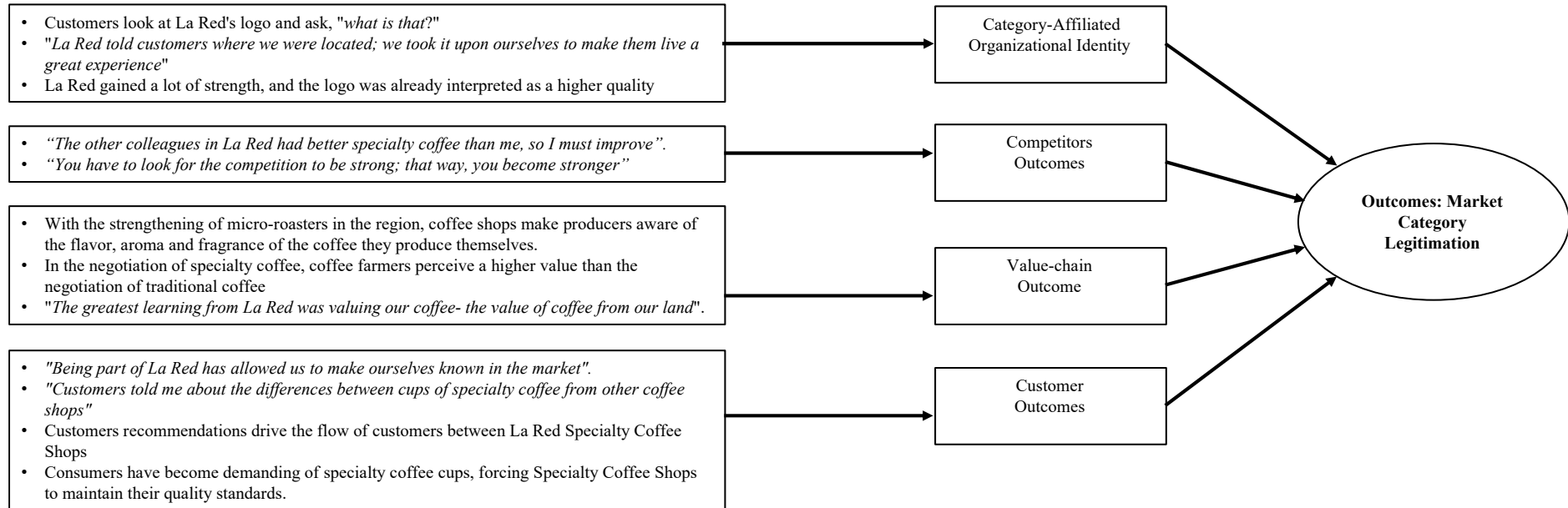
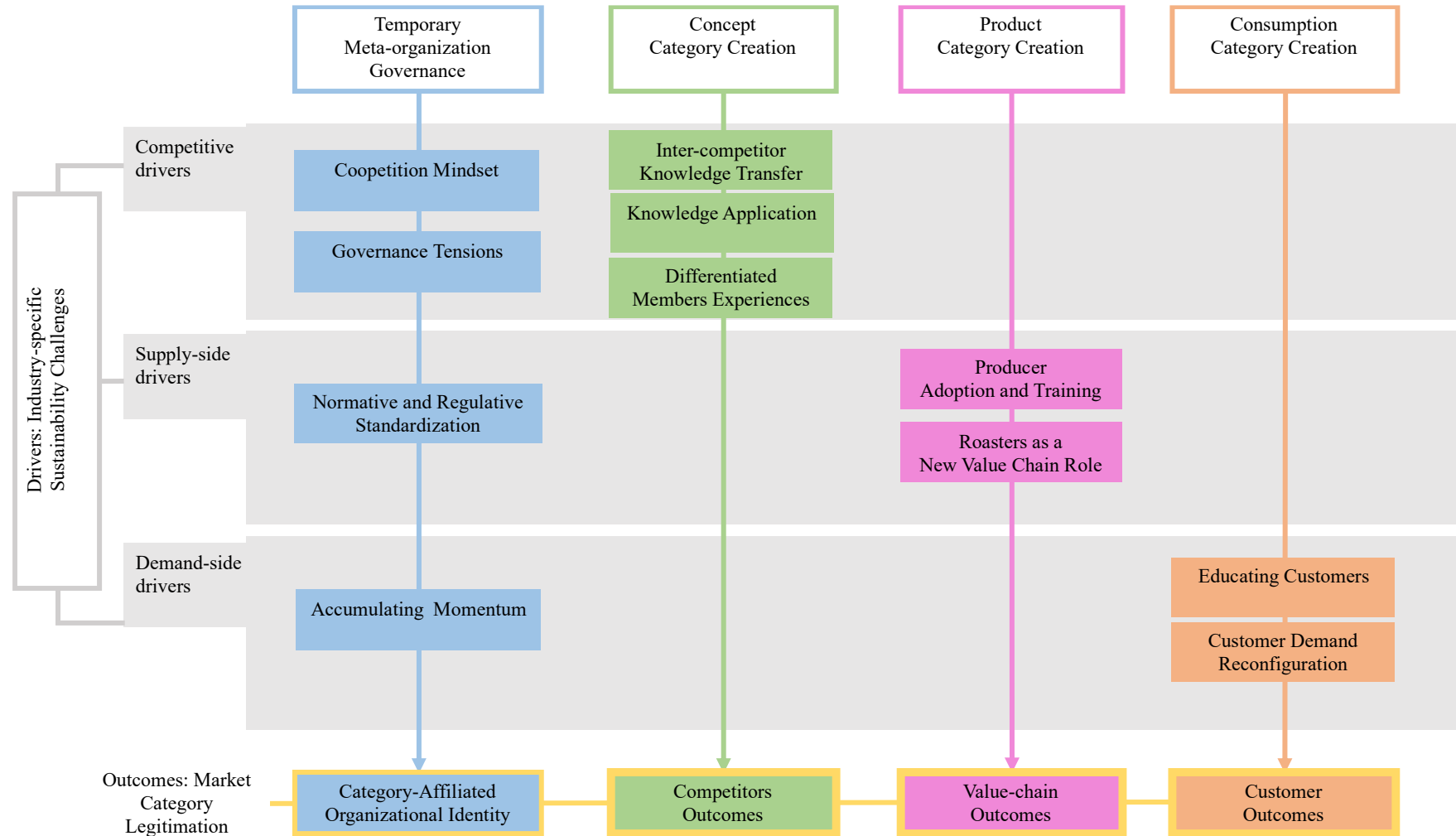


Figure 4. Visual summary of empirical findings



4 FINDINGS

4.1 Empirical observation: the process of sustainability-oriented competition for new market category creation

This section outlines the empirical process observed in the case study, organized in chronological order. Its purpose is to address Objective 3 “*to explore the case study of Red Tiendas Café Especial en el Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano (La Red) to identify empirical evidence of how competitors can transform industry-specific sustainability challenges into opportunities for new value and market creation*” by showing, step by step, how this process unfolded in practice. At this stage, the analysis focuses on empirical observation based on grounded coding (Figure 4).

Figure 4 offers a visual summary of these empirical findings. Each colored box represents a second-order theme emerging from the data structure, whereas boxes with only an outline represent the aggregate dimensions. The grey boxes indicate the overarching process, illustrating how sustainability-oriented competition unfolds as a multi-actor, multi-mechanism process. The model is read from left to right, beginning with the industry-specific sustainability challenges (drivers), followed by the establishment of a temporary meta-organization as the core governance structure, and continuing through three complementary mechanisms of category creation, concept, product, and consumption, until reaching the outcomes at the bottom, which represent the collective legitimation of the new market category. In this way, the figure highlights key turning points in the process. Also, it provides a roadmap for the subsection (4.2) that compares

this empirical evidence against the theoretical expectations outlined in Chapter 3 through the congruence analysis presented in Section 4.2.

4.1.1 Drivers: Industry-specific sustainability challenges



4.1.1.1 Supply-side drivers

Harvesting traditional coffee is deeply rooted in familial and community traditions that are passed down from one generation to the next, specifically in the Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia (CCLC). This intergenerational transmission underscores the cultural significance of coffee cultivation, creating a longstanding connection between

the agricultural practice and the heritage of coffee-producing communities. Traditionally, coffee in Colombia has been marketed through cooperatives and associations affiliated with the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros. The price of traditional coffee is established through a mechanism tied to the commodities market. This implies that external factors beyond the control of individual farmers influence the economic returns they receive for their coffee. With coffee prices established through centralized mechanisms, individual farmers often find themselves with limited bargaining power. This lack of negotiating capacity is a notable aspect of the traditional coffee market, impacting the sustainable agency of individual farmers.

4.1.1.2 Competitive drivers

The traditional supply chain model, in which coffee beans went through intermediaries before reaching the coffee shops, resulted in little attention to quality or traceability. Coffee shop owners often lacked an understanding of the criteria that define specialty coffee and were more focused on offering regular-quality coffee at competitive prices. This challenge provided a feasible opportunity to explore collective – and cooperative – activities.

4.1.1.3 Demand-side drivers

The local market was primarily dominated by regular-quality coffee, with consumers mainly driven by price. Specialty coffee was perceived as expensive and disconnected from its sustainable, cultural, and quality aspects. Therefore, there was a market opportunity to establish a new understanding of specialty coffee in customers' minds.

4.1.2 Temporary meta-organization governance



Local coffee shops identify supply-side, competitive, and demand-side drivers as business opportunities, leading them to collaborate in transforming these sustainability challenges into new customer value through a temporary meta-organization “La Red”; a governance structure that had not been explicitly anticipated in the existing cooperation and sustainability literature. A meta-organization is understood as an “organization of organizations” with clearly defined memberships and simultaneous collective and individual goals (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Berkowitz et al., 2022).

While the normative approach highlights the role of shared values and collective norms, and the strategic approach highlights coordination mechanisms to manage competitive tensions, the empirical evidence showed that competitors established a meta-organization, La Red, as the primary governance structure. This finding is a key insight because it connects the normative dimension of values-based business networks with the strategic dimension of governance among competitors, illustrating how shared values can be institutionalized and operationalized through a meta-organizational structure.

4.1.2.1 Accumulating momentum

La Red, the meta-organization made up of coffee shops competitors, provided a platform for collaboration and achievement of their shared interest in introducing the Specialty Coffee into the local market: “*La Red was the first collaboration initiative between competitors to promote Specialty Coffee into the Region*” (Luz Beatriz, Café & Pastel’s owner). Together, they establish the values and norms that guided their collective strategy, which can create new demand and new forms of value within the coffee industry (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017; Granata et al., 2018). During the establishment phase, La Red attracted new members by extending invitations to specific and selected competitors. Once La Red solidified its market presence, interested coffee shop owners were admitted by submitting membership applications.

4.1.2.2 Normative and regulative standardization

La Red members embraced the purpose of introducing specialty coffee as a product with high sociocultural and quality values, which should be communicated to customers as a new form of value. To ensure consistency, they committed to offering coffee that met the international SCA Coffee Quality Standard (Specialty Coffee Association, 2023), and this commitment required “*each member must establish a partnership with at least one coffee farmer as a supplier and ally with a roaster to ensure the quality traceability of its product*” (Jennifer, La Lucerna’s manager). This led to the introduction and establishment of two important institutional aspects – normative shared expectations of what is right and formalized rules that are collectively enforced (Scott, 2008). In this way, La Red illustrates how normative values were translated into operational standards, demonstrating a concrete mechanism of governance that extended beyond voluntary collaboration.

4.1.2.3 Coopetition mindset

In a collective coopetition facilitated by a meta-organization, we found that competitors adopted behaviors that characterized their entrepreneurial mindset, combining “friendly competition” (Mathias et al., 2018) with “rivalrous spirits” (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). Members openly shared practical knowledge and market information to achieve their collective goal, while still competing with one another in delivering differentiated customer experiences (Nascimento et al., 2023). As one member put it, “*being part of La Red, we did not perceive ourselves as competitors but as family*” (Alba, Café Torres’ owner). The owners also were able to see the big picture of the coopetition where markets were growing (Crick, 2019), and there would be more value to be captured for all in the future, including new entrants: “*as coffee shops received insights from experienced competitors, we embraced the philosophy of multiplying best practices to newer coffee shops*” (Carlos, Arandela’s owner).

4.1.2.4 Governance Tensions

The governance structure of La Red was based on the democratic participation of members in the making decision process. The common challenge described by members about the governance structure was related to the leadership and momentum; the change from external facilitator to other attempts of internal coordination, after establishing the specialty coffee category in the Market, led to the loss of the routines among the members and their commitment to La Red. This revealed the temporary nature of the governance structure between competitors, which lacked stable mechanisms for long-term coordination. Nevertheless, this evidence shows that although the network’s activity has been toned down, the meta-organization values are still present today and guide the business activity and the value-creation operations of individual coffee shop owners: “*We*

still feel part of La Red because we were there, the coffee shops are still there, and the colleagues are still there. We continue to offer the value-added and demonstrate that coffee is a specialty coffee. We continue to teach people why it is important to drink good coffee, and we are always promoting that". (Carolina, Dos Cosechas's owner)

4.1.3 Concept category creation



When competitors collectively addressed industry-specific sustainability challenges, value creation extended beyond the competitors' business network members to include coffee producers and micro-roasters as co-protagonists. This expansion resulted not necessarily in the emergence of a completely new market, as anticipate by competition literature, the creation of a new customer value by coepetition, results in a new market (Ritala et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2024), but rather in the institutionalization of a new market category (Durand et al., 2017; Woolley et al., 2022; Navis & Glynn, 2010) within an established industry: specialty coffee in the local coffee landscape. This finding represents a theoretical extension of the notion of new market creation by showing that, under sustainability-oriented coepetition, the outcome is a category-level change that

reconfigures relationships across the value chain and stabilizes shared norms, practices, and meanings (e.g. Woolley et al., 2022).

This dissertation found that sustainability-oriented coopetition materialized through three complementary and mutually reinforcing mechanisms of category creation, concept, product, and consumption, that together articulate the collaborative value-creation dynamics among competitors and reflect the process of business model innovation for sustainability (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Schaltegger et al., 2016).

This section examines concept category creation, which focuses on the collective understanding and diffusion of the specialty coffee concept among competitors. The following sections discuss product category creation, and consumption category creation.

4.1.3.1 Inter-competitor knowledge transfer

Experienced Coffee shops conceptualized and trained La Red's members in the best practices across the specialty coffee value chain, ensuring the effective understanding and application of the concept created by the network. It is important to highlight that, as *“La Red included members with expertise in diverse areas of business management, it enabled them to exchange knowledge and complement other fields of interest more than specialty coffee”*. (Monica La Octavia's owner)

4.1.3.2 Knowledge application

After acquiring the necessary knowledge from competitors, coffee shops implemented it in their business activities; this included coffee shops improving their raw materials according to the quality standards demanded by La Red and acquiring higher-quality technology to make specialty coffee. Accordingly, each member was able to expand their product portfolio: *“After we learned how to select the best coffee beans, we worked with*

our coffee shops to improve our sensory experience” (Mónica, Aroma’s owner). In turn, the knowledge exchanges between competitors created opportunities for the joint design of coffee-making methods and for exchanging information about suppliers.

4.1.3.3 Differentiated members experiences

Finally, each member of the La Red entered the market through differentiated experiences according to the abilities and specific resources of each coffee shop while still sharing a common foundation: *“Our businesses have designed different customer experiences, but our common approach is specialty coffee”* (Ana Isabel, Amrita’s owner). Therefore, coffee shop owners embraced the simultaneously collaborative and competitive approach, delivering the product to the customer with differentiated resources and competing against one another for the new value created. For example, *“the coffee shops’ architecture, the bean’s origin, the distinctive coffee-making method, or the segment-oriented were the distinctive factors between members to deliver differentiated experiences and compete against one another”* (Ana Isabel, Amrita’s owner). This collective yet rivalrous and differentiated approach corresponds to what cooptition scholars suggest to be the core logic of cooptition: collaboration to create value while competing to divide it up (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009), or joint value creation while still incorporating rivalrous approach to improve the firm-specific value creation (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018).

4.1.4 Product category creation.



The second complementary mechanism of category creation is value chain category creation, which involves creating a new product and introduces new roles to deliver a differentiated and traceable product, that leads to the emergence of a new value chain.

4.1.4.1 Producer adoption and training

Versed in regular-quality coffee production, coffee growers were unfamiliar with the specific practices required for specialty coffee and lacked the resources and expertise to make the transition independently: *“Coffee farmers do not have sufficient resources to transform their production from regular to specialty coffee, so coffee shops have accompanied the producers in this process”* (Daniel, Jose Lopez’s owner). Therefore, to ensure traceability and quality as set by La Red, members trained producers in the best specialty coffee production practices and formed alliances with them as raw material suppliers to guarantee product availability and fair prices.

4.1.4.2 Roasters as a new value chain role

“When La Red began to form, the number of specialty coffee roasters in the region was minimal. For this reason, some coffee shops took the initiative to train at technical education centers” (Gustavo, San Café’s owner). , the first cohort in the region. Later, these Coffee shops acquired coffee roasting machines, and the roasting services were offered to other members. This dual role , coffee shops and roasters, led to innovation in the specialty coffee process, introducing a new value chain in the market.

4.1.5 Consumption category creation



Finally, the third complementary mechanism of category creation, customer category creation, which educates and reconfigures consumer demand to support the emerging category.

4.1.5.1 Educating customers

Competitors implement joint strategies to encourage customers to recognize the specialty coffee concept and the La Red members’ brands, consume the product, and eventually be willing to pay premium prices. La Red’s members employed pedagogical activities to

introduce specialty coffee to customers as a collective strategy, but with differentiated resources. *"The aim was to highlight the sensory and quality differences between specialty and regular-quality coffee and its socio-cultural attributes"* (Alejandro, Aroma y Sabor's Owner). Additionally, *"Coffee shop owners recommended other coffee shops, members of La Red, to increase consumer exposure to the specialty coffee concept"* (Catalina, Café Mirador Altagracia's Owner). These findings align with those of Crick (2018), who demonstrated that a group of competing brands could benefit from running joint promotional events like trade shows, increasing customer awareness, and potentially improving the sales of all the organizations involved.

4.1.5.2 Customer demand reconfiguration

Beyond becoming knowledgeable about specialty coffee, coffee shops also found that promoting specialty coffee consumption via La Red increased their visibility. *"After exploring different coffee shops, customers shared their comparative experiences with coffee shop owners. As a result, customer feedback pushed La Red members to maintain and elevate their differentiated experiences"* (Catalina, Café Mirador Altagracia's Owner). Thus, customer category creation pushes meta-organization members to strengthen their differentiated experiences to compete in the market continuously (Lindström & Polsa, 2016; McGrath et al., 2019).

Figure 5. Logo of “Red Tiendas Café Especial en Paisaje Cultural Cafetero” and its member firms



4.1.6 Outcomes: Market category legitimation

The legitimacy of a new market category is demonstrated by the dynamic interaction between meta-organization members, new competitors, the value chain, and consumers' perspectives, all engaging in collective action toward establishing the new market category (Navis & Glynn, 2010). In this regard, and as illustrated in Figure 4, the four previously discussed aspects (meta-organization governance and three category creation types) all contribute to consolidating shared values and quality standards across the value chain, thereby contributing to the legitimation of a new market category, as discussed in the following.

4.1.6.1 Category-affiliated organizational identity

Meta-organization members adopted a collective logo that communicated the values associated with the new category (Figure 5). *“La Red members designed a logo that identifies their coffee shops and assures the traceability of best practices”* (Lina, Tinto's owner). The logo's symbolic value was demonstrated because it prompted customers to inquire about its significance and eventually became recognized: *“La Red gained a lot of strength, and the logo was already interpreted as a higher category for the coffee shops* (Jonatan, El Santuario's owner). Customers' understanding of the quality and sociocultural values upheld by La Red enabled them to distinguish members that are affiliated with the meta-organization, which is shown to be an important factor in making the meta-organization distinctive and eventually legitimate (see e.g., Blackburn et al., 2023). The organizational identity of the meta-organization (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Laviolette et al., 2022) was highly tied to the emerging category of specialty coffee, as also demonstrated in the coupling of the category (specialty coffee) and the name and the

visual label of meta-organization La Red (which included the notion of “Café Especial; see Figure 3).

4.1.6.2 Competitors outcome

Competitors recognized the concept established by the meta-organization as the "rules of the game" to play in the new market (Granqvist et al., 2013; Durand et al., 2017). New coffee shops interested in joining the new market category encountered competitors with higher quality standards, and “...*this compelled them to improve their coffee beans, introduce appropriate preparation methods, and design authentic experiences around their cups*” (Luz Beatriz, Café & Pastel’s owner). This finding resonates with the suggestions that co-competition can at best accelerate, rather than tame rivalrous aspirations (Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). The adherence to the best practices and the unique experiences offered by each coffee shop served as implicit pressure mechanisms among competitors to strengthen the concepts provided by La Red: “*You have to look for the competition to be strong; that way, you become stronger*” (Carlos, Arandela’s owner). In the end, the increased aspiration to compete and differentiate while at the same time being affiliated as part of the same specialty coffee movement led to a market behavior described as Competitors outcome.

4.1.6.3 Value-chain outcome

Value chain actors take on the co-protagonist role in creating a standardized product for the category (Greenwood et al., 2002), and therefore, they are compensated with a higher market price. La Red’s approach to partnering with local coffee producers and micro-roasters positioned these actors as key players in co-creating specialty coffee, recognizing specifically the coffee farmer as a co-protagonist and rewarding their work with fair trade:

“The greatest learning from La Red was valuing our coffee- the value of coffee from our land” (Carolina, Dos Cosechas’ owner). As a result, the sociocultural values and added quality in each specialty coffee value chain stage could be transferred to the local market as a new value created for customers, leading to an overall process of Value-chain outcome of the new market category.

4.1.6.4 Customer outcome

Finally, customers differentiate the concept and demand product standards. *“As consumers gained more knowledge about specialty coffee, they were able to distinguish its unique sensory characteristics”* (Ana Isabel, Amrita’s owner). This understanding made them more discerning in their coffee quality and preparation demands: *“After trying specialty coffee, the customer is no longer able to drink bad coffee.* (Alejandro, Aroma & Sabor’s owner). They also recommended the La Red experience to others. In the end, *“customers’ appreciation for the coffee’s quality and sociocultural value made them more willing to pay higher prices.”* (Sebastián, El Barista’s owner). Finally, the markets witnessed the emergence of a norms-driven customer community, which contributed to the normative legitimation (Suchman, 1995) of the specialty coffee category via stabilizing customers’ expectations and behavior in a particular type of coffee consumption.

5 RESULTS

5.1 The congruence analysis proper

Following the congruence analysis design (Blatter & Haverland, 2012), this section systematically compares the empirical evidence from La Red with the theoretical expectations derived from three perspectives: (1) the cooptation and sustainability literature; (2) the Values-based Network & Business Model (V/NBM) framework; and (3) the Cooptation-based Business Model (C/BM) framework. The comparison assesses the explanatory relevance and relative strength of each perspective across the analytical dimensions defined in Chapter 2: drivers, governance structure, value-creation dynamics, and outcomes. This chapter distinguishes between: theoretical gaps (*ex ante*): conceptual limitations identified in Chapter 2; and explanatory gaps (*ex post*): limitations revealed when empirical evidence exceeds what each framework predicts. The congruence analysis thus reveals which framework explains which part of the process, and where the empirical case introduces dynamics not anticipated by existing approaches.

5.1.1 Drivers, congruence assessment

Within the cooptation and sustainability literature, the prevailing assumption is that sustainability-oriented cooptation is primarily activated when external pressures, such as regulation, influential customers, or societal expectations, induce firms to respond collectively (Kumar et al., 2021; Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2023). If competitors perceive these external pressures as mandatory or strategically significant, then collaboration becomes a rational response to reduce risks and share costs

(Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020). However, this literature gives limited attention to shared industry-specific sustainability challenges as endogenous drivers emerging from within the competitive field itself.

By contrast, the V/NBM framework assumes that collaboration becomes more likely when competitors share core values and interpret sustainability issues as collective concerns (Rusko, 2011; Granata, 2018; Felzensztein et al, 2018; Xu et al., 2024; Crick & Crick, 2023). If actors converge normatively around what is “right,” “fair,” or “necessary,” then sustainability challenges are reframed as a shared responsibility rather than as isolated firm-level issues (Mione, 2009; Choi et al., 2010; Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Mathias et al., 2018; Chim-Miki et al., 2024). The expectation here is that the alignment of values shapes a collective willingness to address common challenges.

The C/BM framework, grounded in strategic reasoning, anticipates a different mechanism. It suggests that if competitors recognize sustainability challenges as strategic opportunities embedded in their business environment, they will be motivated to collaborate when such collaboration provides access to complementary resources and improves their business model innovation potential. (Ritala et al., 2014; Bouncken & Fredrich, 2016; Mirzabeiki et al., 2022).

Empirically, La Red shows that competitors did not wait for external regulators or consumers to pressure them, nor did they limit their reasoning to the prospect of capturing strategic opportunities. Instead, they collectively reinterpreted supply-, competition-, and demand-side challenges—such as producer vulnerability, lack of quality standards, and low consumer awareness—as challenges that could impact the future sustainability of the entire industry. This shared interpretation, driven by both values and pragmatism, activated collective action before any formal incentive structure existed.

The comparison reveals different degrees of congruence. The literature's expectation is exceeded, as the case demonstrates that industry-specific sustainability challenges can be proactive triggers, not mere reactions to external forces. The V/NBM framework aligns strongly with the empirical material, as shared normative orientations were essential in reframing challenges into collective opportunities. The C/BM framework is partially supported: competitors did identify strategic opportunities, but the empirical process exceeded strategic reasoning toward a more deeply values-driven and societal-oriented understanding of challenges. *In conclusion, the analytical dimension Drivers is best explained by the V/NBM, because values-based interpretations activated collective action more strongly than external pressures or strategic motivations.*

5.1.2 Governance structure, congruence assessment

In the normative literature, governance structures in cooperation are expected to emerge as mechanisms for mitigating tensions and supporting collaborative sustainability initiatives. The assumption is that if competitors face risks associated with collaboration, then some form of governance, whether intermediaries, shared norms, or informal agreements, must exist to maintain stability (Pinnington et al., 2021; Ritala et al., 2009; Rouyre & Fernandez, 2019; Smiljic, 2020). Yet, the literature rarely specifies the nature, formalization, or temporality of such governance when competitors aim to create new value and a market.

The V/NBM framework goes further by emphasizing that shared values and normative orientations provide the foundation for effective governance. If values are held collectively, governance is likely to depend significantly on normative commitments,

informal coordination, and shared understandings that transcend transactional arrangements (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017).

The C/BM framework, however, provides no explicit expectations regarding governance structures that enable sustainability-oriented cooperation. Its emphasis is more on value creation than on the mechanisms for managing the collaboration.

Empirical evidence from La Red extends all three perspectives. Competitors voluntarily formed a temporary meta-organization, which became the primary governance structure. This meta-organization codified values into rules, established membership criteria, defined quality standards, and coordinated activities across competitors, producers, and roasters. This hybrid governance structure, neither fully formal nor purely informal, combined normative foundations with regulative elements and procedural routines. Its temporal and structural features enabled coordination, conflict management, and the articulation of shared goals.

The degree of congruence is therefore asymmetrical. The literature highlights the need for governance but under-specifies its form to create new value and market, meaning the empirical case moves beyond its expectations. The V/NBM framework partially anticipates the emergence of governance rooted in shared values but does not expect the institutional complexity or the meta-organizational form that emerged. The C/BM framework, lacking explicit governance mechanisms, is exceeded entirely by the empirical findings. *In conclusion, the analytical dimension “Governance” introduces an explanatory gap; Temporary meta-organizational governance is not theorized in any framework.*

5.1.3 Value-creation dynamics, congruence assessment

The coopetition and sustainability literature tend to associate sustainability-oriented collaboration with incremental improvements in products, services, or processes. If firms collaborate, then sustainability performance is expected to improve due to shared learning or increased efficiency (Kumar et al., 2021; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020; Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016). However, this literature rarely theorizes coopetitive business model innovation capable of co-creating entirely new customer value over which to compete (Planko et al., 2016; Scandeliuss & Cohen, 2016; Volschenk et al., 2016).

The V/NBM framework suggests that business model innovation becomes more likely when actors share values and long-term orientations. If competitors are normatively aligned, their collaborative efforts should lead to transformations in how they create and deliver value. However, the framework does not explicitly theorize competitors collectively driving multi-domain category creation around a shared customer value proposition.

The C/BM framework is the one that most directly anticipates the type of mechanisms observed in La Red. It argues that if competitors bring together complementary resources and similar knowledge bases, then collaborative business model innovation becomes feasible, potentially leading to new customer value creation and new market emergence. The empirical process strongly reinforces the C/BM expectation but extends it in important ways. In La Red, value creation unfolded through three complementary mechanisms: concept, product, and consumption category creation. Competitors jointly redefined the meaning of specialty coffee (concept), developed a new product and value-chain logic (product), and reconfigured consumer expectations and practices (consumption). These mechanisms were not incremental adjustments but constituted a collective transformation of the business model architecture across the industry.

The V/NBM expectation is partially supported: shared values enabled collaboration, but the scale and multiplicity of value creation mechanisms exceed what the framework predicts. The literature's expectation is exceeded, as the case reveals transformative, rather than incremental, forms of value creation. *As a conclusion, the analytical dimension Value-creation dynamics is best explained by the C/BM, although the empirical case exceeds the framework by extending business model innovation into category creation.*

5.1.4 Outcomes, congruence assessment

The coopetition and sustainability literature have not explicitly theorized the co-creation of new customer value to be captured, which leads to establishing a new market over which to compete. Most contributions expect improvements in performance or increased consumer awareness, but rarely articulate how competitors may lead to the emergence of a new market category (Bankel & Govik, 2024; Woolley et al., 2022).

The V/NBM framework proposes that multiple forms of customer value are more likely to emerge when shared values guide collective action. If actors co-create value propositions grounded in shared norms, then customers may begin to perceive new forms of value aligned with these principles (Volschenk et al., 2016; Nascimento et al., 2023).

The C/BM framework suggests that if competitors collaboratively create and adopt a similar value proposition, then a new market may emerge as a consequence of shared strategic innovation (Mathias et al., 2018). Although the C/BM offers a partial explanation for the emergence of a new market, it remains insufficient to account for the institutional trajectory leading to a new market category.

Empirically, La Red shows an outcome that extends beyond the predictive scope of all examined frameworks: competitors not only created a new customer value and a market over which to compete, but also contributed to the emergence and legitimation of a new market category; a more complex institutional outcome than anticipated by the literature. The competition under shared rules and values (competitor outcomes), the institutionalization of new roles and improved practices across the value chain (value-chain outcomes), and the development of a customer community oriented around shared values and quality standards (customer outcomes) together demonstrate a deep institutional transformation rather than a mere market expansion.

Thus, while the V/NBM and C/BM frameworks each capture partial mechanisms, value alignment, and strategic collaboration, neither predicts the whole institutional trajectory observed. The coopetition and sustainability literature is also significantly limited. *In conclusion, the analytical dimension Outcomes introduces an explanatory gap: the emergence and legitimation of a new market category.*

5.2 Summarizing the explanatory relevance and relative strength of each theoretical perspective in explaining empirical observations

The congruence analysis shows that although the coopetition and sustainability literature, V/NBM, and C/BM frameworks each provide valuable insights, none individually offers a complete explanation of the empirical process observed in La Red. The V/NBM framework, rooted in the normative approach, aligns strongly with how competitors interpret sustainability challenges and ground collective governance in shared values. The C/BM framework, rooted in the strategic approach, aligns most closely with the value creation dynamics that enable collaborative business model innovation. However, the

empirical evidence extends beyond both frameworks in demonstrating the *formation of a temporary meta-organization* and the *emergence and legitimation of a new market category*. On the one hand, the meta-organizational governance acts as the central coordinating mechanism that enables competitors to transform industry-specific sustainability challenges into new value and market opportunities. On the other hand, market category legitimation represents the outcome of sustainability-oriented cooperation, extending beyond business model innovation into institutional transformation.

These explanatory gaps—(1) temporary meta-organization governance and (2) the legitimation of a new market category—highlight a set of institutional dynamics that extend beyond the scope of the current frameworks. These findings call for an integrative explanation that bridges normative and strategic approaches and considers meta-organizational governance and market category emergence as key components. The next section builds on these insights to develop such an integrated framework.

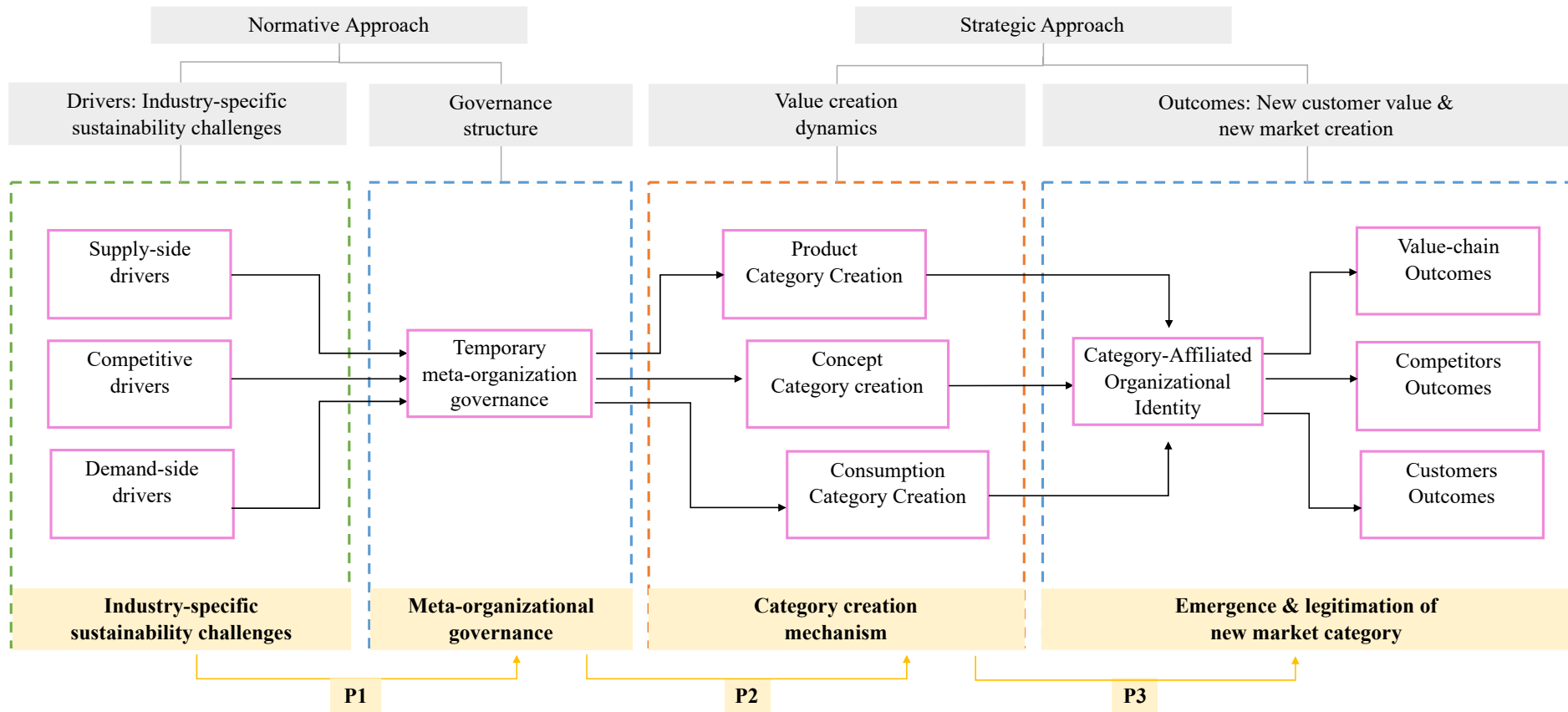
Tabla 9. Congruence Analysis

| <i>Analytical Dimension</i> | <i>Theoretical Source</i> | <i>Theoretical Expectation</i> | <i>Empirical Observation (La Red)</i> | <i>Degree of Congruence</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>Drivers</i> | Coopetition & Sustainability Literature | Collaboration is expected to emerge primarily in response to external pressures (regulators, customers, societal expectations) or firm-level strategic needs. | Competitors collectively reframed supply-, competition-, and demand-side sustainability challenges as shared concerns endangering the long-term viability of the industry. Collaboration emerged proactively, not reactively. | Low |
| | Values-based Network & Business Model (V/NBM) | Collaboration becomes more likely when competitors share values and interpret sustainability issues as collective concerns grounded in normative alignment. | Competitors shared values regarding fairness, quality, territorial identity, and long-term sustainability, using these to reinterpret challenges as shared responsibilities. | High |
| | Coopetition-based Business Model (C/BM) | Competitors collaborate when they perceive challenges as strategic opportunities for complementarities and business model innovation. | Strategic opportunities were identified, but only after a collective values-driven reframing of challenges; initial impetus was normative, not strategic. | Medium |
| <i>Governance</i> | Coopetition & Sustainability Literature | Governance structures are expected to emerge to mitigate risks and manage tensions, but the literature offers little specification on form, structure, or temporality. | Competitors voluntarily created a temporary meta-organization that codified values into rules, standards, and routines, coordinating across competitors, producers, and roasters. | Medium |

| <i>Analytical Dimension</i> | <i>Theoretical Source</i> | <i>Theoretical Expectation</i> | <i>Empirical Observation (La Red)</i> | <i>Degree of Congruence</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|-----------------------------|
| | Values-based Network & Business Model (V/NBM) | Shared values are expected to underpin governance through informal coordination, normative commitments, and mutual understanding. | Governance was values-anchored but also institutionalized into regulative mechanisms, membership criteria, and operational routines, exceeding the framework's informal expectations. | Medium |
| | Coopetition-based Business Model (C/BM) | The framework does not specify governance mechanisms for sustainability-oriented coopetition. | The emergence of a meta-organization highlights the absence of governance theorization in the C/BM framework. | Low |
| <i>Value Creation Dynamics</i> | Coopetition & Sustainability Literature | Collaboration is expected to enhance sustainability through incremental improvements in products, services, or processes. | La Red generated transformative multi-domain value creation: redefinition of concept, new product and value-chain logic, and consumer reconfiguration—far beyond incremental adjustments. | Low |
| | Values-based Network & Business Model (V/NBM) | Business model innovation is facilitated by shared values and long-term orientations, but the framework does not articulate multi-domain category creation. | Shared values supported collaboration, but the scale, multiplicity, and orchestration of concept–product–consumption mechanisms exceeded the framework's scope. | Medium |
| | Coopetition-based Business Model (C/BM) | Collaborative business model innovation is expected when competitors combine complementary resources and knowledge; then, a new customer value to be captured may emerge. | The case strongly aligns: complementarities, shared learning, and innovation dynamics were central, but the process extended into category creation, not just business model redesign. | High |

| <i>Analytical Dimension</i> | <i>Theoretical Source</i> | <i>Theoretical Expectation</i> | <i>Empirical Observation (La Red)</i> | <i>Degree of Congruence</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>Outcomes</i> | Coopetition & Sustainability Literature | Sustainability-oriented collaboration may improve performance or consumer awareness, but literature rarely predicts new market creation. | La Red created new customer value, a new competitive market, and ultimately contributed to the legitimation of a new market category. | Low |
| | Values-based Network & Business Model (V/NBM) | Collective action guided by values may create multiple value propositions, but the framework does not theorize the emergence of a new market. | Value propositions aligned with shared norms, but the process extended toward category identity formation and sociocultural institutionalization. | Low |
| | Coopetition-based Business Model (C/BM) | New markets over which to compete may emerge when competitors collectively design and adopt the same innovation or the new value propositions. | Although new value and a new market emerged, the case also created a new legitimized market category, a more complex institutional outcome. | Medium |

Figure 6. Integrative analytical framework: Sustainability-oriented cooperation for a new value and market creation



6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Theoretical innovation: Sustainability-oriented competition for a new value and market creation, the integrative analytical framework.

Building on the findings of the congruence analysis, this section develops the integrative framework (Figure 6) that provide a comprehensive understanding of competitors collaborating to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. This framework directly fills the identified theoretical gaps (ex ante) from Chapter 2 and the explanatory gaps (ex post) found in the congruence analysis, such as meta-organizational governance and market category emergence.

To guide the interpretation of Figure 6, the grey boxes at the top of the integrative model represent the normative and strategic approaches across their analytical dimensions introduced in Chapter 2: drivers, governance structure, value-creation dynamics, and outcomes. The green dotted line identifies the dimension best explained by the V/NBM framework; the orange dotted line identifies the dimension best explained by the C/BM framework; and the blue dotted line highlights empirical contributions that extend beyond both frameworks, resulting in theoretically grounded extensions and suggesting promising avenues for future research. Within these dotted lines, the purple boxes indicate the empirical evidence drawn from the La Red case study, and the transversal black arrow connecting these elements represents each actor's path longitudinally across all stages. Finally, the yellow boxes at the bottom of Figure 6 represent the reconfiguration of the

four analytical dimensions that allows for filling both the theoretical (ex ante) and explanatory (ex post) gaps and answering the main research question.

6.1.1 Industry-specific sustainability challenges

Related to drivers, the process begins with three interconnected drivers, supply-side, competitive, and demand-side, that represent the industry-specific sustainability challenges motivating competitors to collaborate (Kumar et al., 2021; Wadin et al., 2017). This collective action is understood here as “the voluntary and intentional effort of a group to achieve shared goals and generate benefits unattainable individually” (Ostrom, 1990, 2010). For instance, on the supply side, the limited bargaining power of farmers and their dependence on fluctuating commodity prices created the need to secure fairer arrangements and guarantee sustainable livelihoods (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Schaltegger et al., 2016; Nascimento et al., 2023). Competitive drivers emerge from the absence of quality and traceability in the traditional supply-chain, encouraging coffee shops to explore cooperative alternatives (Volschenk et al., 2016; Woolley et al., 2022). On the demand side, limited consumer awareness of quality and sociocultural attributes created the opportunity to reposition local specialty coffee in customers’ minds (Yunus et al., 2010; Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018).

In line with the normative approach (Freeman, 1984), the model theorizes these industry-specific challenges as legitimate and distinctive drivers of cooperation rather than as external stakeholder pressure (Kumar et al., 2021) or internal need for incremental sustainable innovation (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016). *By doing so, the model addresses Gap 1 by explaining how supply, competition, and demand-side conditions jointly initiate sustainability-oriented cooperation aimed at new value and market creation.*

6.1.2 Temporary Meta-organizational governance

In response to industry-specific sustainability challenges, competitors established a temporary meta-organization, La Red, which became the innovative governance structure for the initiative. Meta-organizations are “organizations of organizations” and involve their distinctive power dynamics, tensions, and organizing practices (Berkowitz et al., 2022).

This represents another key empirical insight that extends the existing literature: whereas prior research emphasizes neutral intermediaries, shared norms, or digital platforms as governance mechanisms (Harala et al., 2023; Narayan & Tidström, 2020), the case demonstrates that a meta-organization can institutionalize shared values and operationalize coordination through formal membership rules, SCA-based quality standards, supplier–roaster partnerships, and admission routines that balance collective and individual goals. *By linking the identified drivers with a specific governance structure that directs collective action, the model addresses Gap 2, extending the normative orientation to operational governance between competitors.*

6.1.3 Category-creation mechanism

Building on this governance structure, the process unfolds through three complementary category-creation mechanisms: concept, product, and consumption, which articulate the collaborative mechanisms through which competitors innovate their business models for sustainability (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Schaltegger et al., 2016). Concept category creation involves inter-competitor knowledge transfer, training, and the joint

conceptualization of specialty coffee as a distinct category of competitors (Gast et al., 2019). This mechanism addresses the cognitive dimension of sustainability, as competitors collectively redefine what constitutes “specialty coffee,” embedding social and environmental values—such as traceability, fairness, and cultural heritage—into the market concept (Bouncken & Fredrich, 2016; Ritala et al., 2014).

Product category creation extends cooperation upstream by training producers and consolidating roasters as a new role in the value chain, ensuring quality and traceability. This mechanism tackles the socio-environmental dimension of sustainability, as it improves farming practices, guarantees fairer prices for producers, and reduces information asymmetry along the chain, confirming that cooperation enables resource pooling and knowledge sharing that would be unattainable individually (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Das & Teng, 2000; Faccin et al., 2022).

Consumption category creation targets demand reconfiguration through customer education and differentiated experiences that stimulate willingness to pay. This mechanism engages the behavioral and normative dimension of sustainability, as it promotes consumer awareness about the social and ecological implications of coffee consumption and encourages a shift toward responsible consumption patterns, aligning with research that shows that cooperation initiatives close to end customers can enhance market acceptance and accelerate adoption (Crick, 2018; Volschenk et al., 2016).

Although the C/BM framework best explains the value-creation dynamics ex ante, the congruence analysis shows that these dynamics are reconceptualized ex post as category-creation mechanisms; it extends C/BM’s business model innovation logic into multi-domain category creation, addressing Gap 3 and showing how meta-organizational governance orchestrates complementarity across concept, product, and consumption domains.

6.1.4 Emergence & legitimation of a new market category

Regarding outcomes, the convergence between the governance structure and value-creation dynamics results in the emergence of a category-related organizational identity (Durand et al., 2017; Woolley et al., 2022). This identity is symbolized by La Red's collective logo, which communicates the values of the emerging category and differentiates its members in the market.

This identity defines the category's meaning among competitors, the value chain, and customers, demonstrating that "creating new customer value" is closely linked to symbolic and normative grounding that reinforces category emergence and recognition (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Blackburn et al., 2023). Also, the "new market category legitimation" extends the idea of "new market creation over which to compete" expected in Section 1.1, demonstrating that in established industries, rather than creating entirely new markets (Ritala et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2024), cooperation can lead to the institutionalization of a new category through shared values, quality standards, and collective identity (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Granqvist et al., 2013).

From this point, three operationalized outcomes are observed: The first emerges as competitors adhere to shared rules while differentiating through unique customer experiences, intensifying both collaboration and competition (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Granqvist et al., 2013; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018). This outcome refers to the economic dimension of sustainability, as it maintains the viability of the specialty coffee market by encouraging continuous innovation, differentiation, and competitiveness, while preserving the collective norms established by the meta-organization. The second integrates the category into the local market by positioning

producers and roasters as co-protagonists, rewarding them with fairer arrangements and consolidating traceability and quality along the value chain (Greenwood et al., 2002). This outcome highlights the social and cultural dimensions of sustainability, as it guarantees the distribution of benefits from the market category across the entire value chain, enhances producer livelihoods, and preserves the cultural heritage of coffee production in the Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia. The third emerges as consumers internalize the category's values, such as traceability, fairness, and cultural heritage, and adopt purchasing and participation practices aligned with them (e.g., willingness to pay for quality and origin, engagement in educational events, and word-of-mouth advocacy). This outcome strengthens the normative-behavioral dimension of sustainability by stabilizing demand and reinforcing the collective rules and meanings established by the meta-organization (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016; Woolley et al., 2022). *This distinction addresses Gap 4 and clarifies that while new markets arise from strategic innovation, the emergence of a new market category reflects a deeper institutional transformation that redefines meaning, identity, and competitive rules within the industry.* Thus, sustainability-oriented coopetition is a system-wide process that can transform an entire industry. Rather than innovating business models for sustainability through inter-firm collaboration (Bankel et al., 2024; Berti et al., 2017; Bouncken et al., 2025), it leads to the creation and legitimation of a new market category that contributes to economic and socio-environmental well-being across businesses, the industry, and society at large (Mathias et al., 2018; Woolley et al., 2022).

6.2 Propositions derive from the sustainability-oriented coopetition for a new value and market creation framework

Building on the integrative model described above, this section formulates theoretical propositions that articulate, conceptualize, and reconceptualize the analytical dimensions of the framework and provide the answer to the research question: How can competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges?

In addition, they are also building on the explanatory gaps identified in the congruence analysis, the meta-organization, and the new market category emergence.

6.2.1 Proposition 1 (P1): From Industry-specific sustainability challenges, to Temporary Meta-organizational governance

When industry-specific sustainability challenges are recognized as issues that could impact the long-term viability of the entire industry across supply, competition, and demand domains, competitors are encouraged to engage in sustainability-oriented cooperation. In response, they establish a temporary meta-organization that institutionalizes shared values and normative orientations to coordinate collective action, thus enabling the activation of three complementary mechanisms of category creation—concept, product, and consumption—across competitors, the value chain, and consumers.

6.2.2 Proposition 2 (P2): From Temporary Meta-organizational governance, to the Category creation mechanism

When governed by the meta-organization, competitors collectively create new value through three complementary dynamics: (a) Concept category creation, which leads to the cognitive reframing of the product category and embeds quality standards and

sustainability values in its meaning. (b) Product category creation, which improves upstream practices, enhances traceability, and introduces new roles in the value chain, strengthening the socio-environmental dimension of sustainability. (c) Consumption category creation, which reconfigures demand by educating consumers and stimulating their willingness to pay, reinforces the normative and behavioral dimensions of sustainability.

6.2.3 Proposition 3 (P3): Emergence & legitimation of a new market category

The convergence of governance structure and value-creation dynamics leads to the emergence of a category-affiliated organizational identity, whose shared symbols and values differentiate its members. This identity facilitates three mutually reinforcing outcomes: (a) Where competitors adhere to shared rules while differentiating their offerings, sustaining competitive pressure and continuous innovation; (b) Sociocultural institutionalization, which embeds the category into local culture and distributes benefits more equitably across the value chain; (c) Where consumers internalize the category's values, and co-legitimize the new market category. Together, these outcomes create a systemic institutional transformation that legitimizes the new market category, consolidates a market over which competitors can compete, and contributes to economic, social, and environmental well-being.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation explored a main question: *How can competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges?* To address this research, four interconnected sub-questions guided the theoretical development, empirical examination, and analytical reasoning throughout the study. This concluding chapter reflects on how each objective has been achieved and how, together, they contribute to the discourse on coopetition for sustainability.

The first sub-question was: *How do the coopetition and sustainability literature, as well as the alternative frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), contribute to answering the main research question?* (Chapter 2). The dissertation reviewed the literature on business model innovation for sustainability and coopetition in business networks. This review identified five key theoretical gaps that limit existing knowledge, particularly in relation to the phenomenon under study, rather than the broader coopetition and sustainability discourse. For instance: the limited recognition of industry-specific sustainability challenges as legitimate drivers of coopetition (Kumar et al., 2021; Scandellius & Cohen, 2016; Crick & Crick, 2020; Crick et al., 2023); the lack of evidence on the governance structures that facilitate collaboration among competitors (Narayan & Tidström, 2020; Harala et al., 2023; Woolley et al., 2022); insufficient insight into the collaborative value creation dynamics that enable business model innovation (Volschenk et al., 2016; Nascimento et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2021; Bouncken et al., 2024); the underexplored potential of coopetition to create a new customer value and, consequently, a new market (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Corbo et al., 2023); and, most notably, the absence of an integrative framework linking normative

and strategic approaches in a coherent explanation of how such transformations occur (Kumar et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2025).

To address these gaps, two analytical frameworks were proposed. The values-based network framework (V/NBM) (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017) emphasizes how shared norms and values can motivate firms to engage in collaborative business model innovation for sustainability. Meanwhile, the co-competition-based business model framework (C/BM) (Ritala et al., 2014) highlights how resource complementarities and collaborative innovation among competitors can lead to the creation of new customer value and a market in which to compete. While each framework provided valuable insights, they proved individually insufficient to fully explain the observed dynamics. Their evaluation thus required a comparative, empirically grounded analysis.

The second sub-question focused on: *How do empirical observations from a case study contribute to answering the main research question?* (Chapter 3). This was addressed through a case study of Red Tiendas Café Especial en el Paisaje Cultural Cafetero Colombiano, a business network of competing coffee shops collaboratively innovating their business models in response to sustainability challenges in the Colombian coffee industry. Drawing from an insider–outsider perspective (Gioia et al., 2010; Ritala et al., 2023), as the doctoral candidate acted as facilitator, the study showed that industry-specific sustainability challenges can serve as shared and legitimate drivers of co-competition, which are collectively reframed as opportunities for innovation.

Furthermore, the case revealed the emergence of a temporary governance structure integrating normative, regulative, and identity elements, which facilitated co-competitive business model innovation for sustainability. It also showed the simultaneous articulation of value creation mechanisms across the competitive, value chain, and consumption domains, leading to the creation of a new value. A new market emerged through a

sociocultural legitimation process involving competitors, value chain actors, and customers as co-protagonists in defining shared standards and expectations. The case demonstrates how sustainability-oriented coopetition can become a transformative force, not only for individual business models but for the configuration of the entire industry.

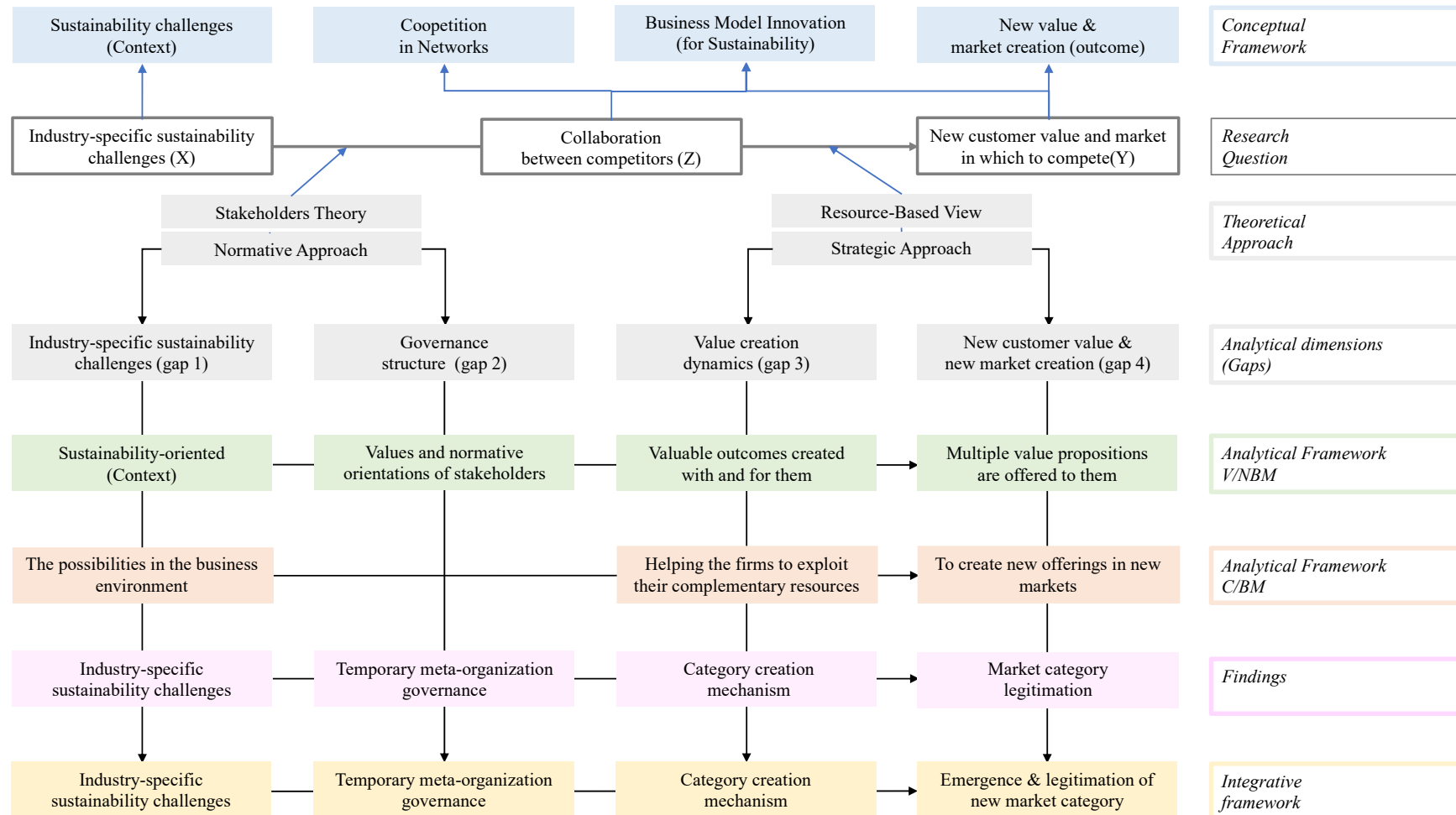
The third sub-question asked: *To what extent can the theoretical expectations from coopetition and sustainability literature and the analytical frameworks (V/NBM and C/BM), when compared with empirical evidence from the case study, explain how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges?* (Chapter 4). A congruence analysis systematically compared empirical observations with expectations derived from the literature and both analytical frameworks (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). The findings revealed that, while each framework captures essential dimensions of the phenomenon, neither could independently explain the complex interaction among normative commitments, strategic coordination, and business model transformation observed in the case (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

On the one hand, the values-based network and business model framework (V/NBM) (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017) offers a compelling explanation for the normative drivers of collaboration, showing how shared sustainability concerns and goals motivate the formation of networks. It also anticipates the importance of governance grounded in shared norms and values. However, it falls short in explaining the strategic mechanisms by which a new market emerges through coopetition and does not fully account for the institutional complexity of the governance structure observed in the case. On the other hand, the coopetition-based business model framework (C/BM) (Ritala et al., 2014) explains how competitors leverage resource complementarities, share knowledge, and engage in business model innovation to create value. These mechanisms were observable

in the case. Yet, this framework pays limited attention to the normative and sociocultural dimensions that sustain collaboration. These findings confirm that both frameworks are necessary but insufficient on their own, highlighting the need for integration. The detailed articulation of this model is presented in Chapter 5, and an earlier version was introduced in a previous publication in *Business Strategy and the Environment* (Rodríguez et al., 2024).

The fourth and final sub-question asked: *How can theoretical expectations and empirical observations be integrated to provide a comprehensive explanation of how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges?* (Chapter 5). Building on the comparative insights from the congruence analysis, this dissertation proposes an integrative analytical model: *sustainability-oriented cooperation for a new value and market creation*. This model describes a dynamic process in which industry-specific sustainability challenges serve as shared drivers legitimizing collective action (Ostrom, 1990, 2010; Patala et al., 2022). Governance structures rooted in shared values and normative orientations facilitate engagement among competitors (Pinnington et al., 2021; Woolley et al., 2022), while collaborative value creation mechanisms based on resource complementarities enable business model innovation (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Corbo et al., 2023). As these mechanisms interact, and as competitors, value chain actors, and customers embrace the shared value proposition, a new market emerges as a collectively legitimized outcome (Durand et al., 2017; Greenwood et al., 2002; Woolley et al., 2022).

Figure 7. Contributions



7.1 Theoretical contribution

This dissertation contributes to the literature on business model innovation for sustainability and cooperation in business networks by developing an integrative framework that explains how competitors collaborate to create new customer value and a new market in which to compete, in response to industry-specific sustainability challenges. This integrative framework constitutes the dissertation's main theoretical contribution, as it brings together normative and strategic mechanisms that had previously been examined separately. Building on this foundation, the dissertation addresses the research gaps identified in Chapter 2 through a set of conceptual, theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions, which are developed in the following sections.

7.1.1 Normative approach, theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contribution

At the normative level, this dissertation conceptualizes the role of industry-specific sustainability challenges as shared and legitimate internal drivers of collaboration between competitors as suggested by Choi et al. (2010), Lindström and Polsa (2016), Czakon and Czernek (2016), Mathias et al. (2018), Felzensztein et al. (2018), and Crick and Crick (2020). Rather than viewing sustainability as an external pressure or a reputational concern (Kumar et al., 2021; Scandellius & Cohen, 2016; Crick & Crick, 2020; Crick et al., 2023), this study shows how shared ecological, social, and economic issues within the industry can motivate collective action when expressed through common values and normative commitments (Greenwood et al., 2002; Woolley et al., 2022).

To support this interpretation, the dissertation introduces the values-based network and business network framework (V/NBM) (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund, 2017), which originates from studies on sustainability-oriented networks and business model innovation but had not been previously applied to cooperation (Schaltegger et al., 2016; Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008; Zott et al., 2011; Bocken et al., 2014; Kiefer et al., 2019; Klewitz & Hansen, 2014; Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013). Its use here enables the operationalization of normative mechanisms, such as shared norms, identity, and value alignment, in the context of collaboration between competitors.

Empirically, the case of La Red illustrates the emergence of a governance structure based on shared values, acting as a temporary meta-organization that integrates normative, regulative, and identity components (Greenwood et al., 2002; Woolley et al., 2022; Durand et al., 2017). Building on this empirical insight, the dissertation conceptualizes temporary meta-organizational governance as a distinct governance structure in sustainability-oriented cooperation. This structure maintained cooperative interactions and facilitated business model innovation despite inherent tensions and asymmetries. (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2013; Stadtler & Van Wassenhove, 2016; Crick, 2020).

Accordingly, this contribution responds to Gap 1 and Gap 2 by revealing how industry-specific sustainability challenges function as legitimate internal drivers of cooperation and by clarifying the role of collective governance structures, grounded in shared values, in enabling collaboration and business model innovation among competitors.

7.1.2 Strategic approach, theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contribution

This dissertation improves the strategic understanding of sustainability-oriented coopetition by proposing a reconceptualization of how competitors can create a new value to be captured and, as a result, a new market to compete in (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Corbo et al., 2023). Existing studies have mostly highlighted how coopetition enables incremental innovation or enhances sustainable performance (Volschenk et al., 2016; Scandellius & Cohen, 2016; Manzhynski & Figge, 2020; Kumar et al., 2021). In contrast, this research conceptualizes coopetition as a process that enables the emergence of entirely new value and a market (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2009; Gnyawali & Ryan Charleton, 2018; Corbo et al., 2023), where shared resource complementarities, mutual learning, and joint experimentation drive business model innovation for sustainability (Bocken et al., 2014; Kiefer et al., 2019; Klewitz & Hansen, 2014).

To support this analysis, the dissertation introduces the coopetition-based business model framework (Ritala et al., 2014), a theoretical construct not originally developed within the sustainability literature. Its application here makes a conceptual and theoretical contribution, as the framework is adapted and extended to explain how strategic collaboration between competitors can lead to sustainability-oriented business model innovation and the creation of new market categories.

Empirically, the case of La Red Tiendas Café Especial demonstrates how competitors engaged in collective innovation to develop a shared value proposition grounded in ethical production, cultural identity, and environmental stewardship. This new customer value, once recognized and adopted by customers, competitors, and value chain actors, catalyzed the emergence of a new market category.

Therefore, *this contribution directly addresses Gap 3 and Gap 4 by explaining the collaborative value creation mechanism that enables business model innovation for*

sustainability and by revealing the underexplored potential of coopetition to create a new customer value and market, particularly when driven by industry-specific sustainability challenges.

7.1.3 Methodological Approach contribution

This dissertation makes a methodological contribution by applying congruence analysis (Blatter & Haverland, 2012), which had not been previously used to systematically compare normative and strategic explanations of sustainability-oriented coopetition, in order to evaluate their explanatory power within a case context (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). Based on a search in Scopus in January 2025, congruence analysis, as designing case studies to approach in small-N Research, has been applied 42 times in the business field (e.g., Dondofema & Grobbelaar, 2018; Konczal et al., 2023; Lombardi & Mazzoni, 2024). However, our research is the first to employ it in the coopetition and sustainability literature. The dissertation adapts and demonstrates the value of this method by conducting a dimension-by-dimension comparison, enabling a structured evaluation of which propositions better align with observed reality in the case of La Red. Rather than forcing an ex-ante integration of theoretical lenses, this method preserves the internal logic of each framework and allows for a rigorous and transparent assessment of their individual and combined explanatory power.

In doing so, this contribution addresses Gap 5 by providing a systematic methodological approach for evaluating the complementary explanatory power of normative and strategic approaches and for grounding the development of a theoretically integrative model. This approach offers a replicable tool for scholars aiming to evaluate competing frameworks in complex, multi-actor sustainability settings.

7.2 Practical implications

The integrative analytical model proposed in this dissertation, sustainability-oriented coopetition for a new value and market creation, offers not only a theoretical framework for understanding how competitors can jointly transform sustainability challenges into strategic opportunities, but also a set of practical insights for those seeking to enact such transformation. These implications emerge from the interaction between empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning and are particularly relevant for four groups of actors: firms, governance intermediaries, regional ecosystems, and societal stakeholders.

7.2.1 *For firms seeking to innovate their business models*

This research shows that coopetition can enable business model innovation beyond incremental improvements, especially when competitors align around shared industry-specific sustainability challenges (Inigo et al., 2017; Mori & Zhang, 2024). Coopetition allows small organizations to better understand environmental risks better, navigate complex sustainability issues, and create mutually beneficial opportunities (Alcalde-Heras & Carrillo-Carrillo, 2025; Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2023). By jointly framing these challenges as opportunities, firms can activate complementary resources, engage in mutual learning, and experiment with new value propositions that none could develop independently (Volschenk et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2021). However, the findings also reveal that this process is not open-ended nor indefinite. The coopetitive relationship tends to dissolve once the jointly created value has been legitimized and a new market category has emerged (Woolley et al., 2022).

Therefore, firms should approach sustainability-oriented cooperation as a strategic, time-bound mechanism, a form of purposeful collaboration that unlocks access to new markets underpinned by shared normative commitments (Bankel & Govik, 2024). Firms aiming to replicate this process should consider the development of a governance structure grounded in shared values, capable of facilitating coordination, mitigating tensions, and generating legitimacy among stakeholders (Rodríguez et al., 2024). Such a structure does not replace competition; rather, it sets the foundation for a new arena in which competition can take place on renewed and more sustainable terms (Bouncken et al., 2024; Bouncken & Fredrich, 2025).

7.2.2 For intermediaries and governance designers

The proposed model highlights the central role of collective governance structures in enabling sustainability-oriented cooperation. These mechanisms, temporary, neutral, and anchored in shared norms, function as scaffolds that support the emergence of trust, identity, and shared purpose among competitors (Harala et al., 2023; Da Silva & Cardoso, 2024). Intermediary actors such as industry associations, public-private partnerships, or non-governmental platforms can play a crucial role in designing and hosting such governance structures (Narayan & Tidström, 2020). Their tasks may include establishing participatory procedures, defining shared principles, and facilitating the resolution of tensions between normative alignment and competitive interests (Rodríguez et al., 2024; Woolley et al., 2022). For these actors, the practical implication is clear: governance must be designed not to constrain competition, but to enable value creation through collaboration (Volschenk et al., 2016). When grounded in the specific sustainability

challenges of a given industry, such governance can serve as an engine of innovation and as a legitimacy-generating infrastructure for emerging markets (Bankel & Govik, 2024).

7.2.3 For regions and territorial ecosystems

This dissertation shows that place-based cooptation can be a strategic tool for territorial development (Díaz-Correa & López-Navarro, 2018). When competitors embedded in the same region activate their shared environmental, social, and cultural concerns as the basis for cooperation, they can co-create a territorialized value proposition that resonates with local identity while meeting global market expectations (Nascimento et al., 2023; Woolley et al., 2022). Regional actors, such as development agencies, local governments, or cooperative institutions, can support these dynamics by recognizing and facilitating temporary meta-organizations that coordinate innovation across the value chain. The Colombian coffee case illustrates how such coordination can mobilize fragmented actors, align their visions, and legitimize a new market category anchored in sustainability (Bankel & Govik, 2024). The practical insight is that regional strategies should go beyond promoting clusters or networks. They should actively encourage cooptation around shared sustainability concerns, positioning the region not just as a site of production, but as a space for collective experimentation and systemic value innovation (Breuer & Lüdeke-Freund., 2017).

7.2.4 For society and consumers

Finally, the model confirms that consumers play an active and constitutive role in the emergence of new markets (Woolley et al., 2022; Bankel & Govik, 2024). The

sociocultural legitimation of a new customer value depends on whether consumers recognize, adopt, and attribute meaning to the collective offering presented by competing firms (Woolley et al., 2022). This implies that communicating shared values consistently across firms, through symbols, narratives, and practices, can shape consumer expectations and enhance trust (Rodríguez et al., 2024). When consumers engage with a product with a coherent collective identity, they reinforce the legitimacy of the value being offered and contribute to the establishment of the new market (Scandellius & Cohen, 2016). Thus, civil society actors, advocacy groups, and consumer organizations can act as amplifiers of sustainability-oriented cooptation by validating shared standards, fostering informed consumption, and demanding accountability in how collective values are translated into business practices (Knight et al., 2025).

7.3 Limitations and future research

7.3.1 Geographical and industrial contexts

This study involves the typical limitations associated with single-case designs. It focuses on the Colombian specialty coffee field, which limits its direct applicability to other regions or industries. While some of the dynamics observed mirror those found in sectors such as craft beer and cocoa (Mathias et al., 2018; Woolley et al., 2022), the case also reveals distinctive nuances related to industry, culture, and geography. Future research should, therefore, examine whether similar cooptation dynamics emerge in other geographical and industrial contexts.

7.3.2 Temporal scope

A notable limitation is the temporal scope of this research, which centers primarily on events between February 2017 and August 2018. This analysis may not capture subsequent developments, including governance tensions or changes within the meta-organization (Da Silva & Cardoso, 2024). This study acknowledges the potential for significant shifts in leadership, dynamics, or outcomes that may occur beyond the study period. Future studies could adopt longitudinal approaches to examine the evolution of sustainability-oriented cooperation strategy over time, particularly once the new customer value and market have been consolidated.

7.3.3 Institutional configurations and governance structures

This research also calls for further integration between cooperation research and institutional theory. The findings suggest that competitive, collaborative, and cooperative dynamics may influence institutional constructs such as legitimacy, market categories, distinctiveness, and organizational identity. In turn, institutional arrangements, such as governance structures or established market logic, may enable or constrain the development of cooperation initiatives. For instance, La Red, the meta-organizational structure observed in the case study, played a central role in facilitating cooperation and coordinating the emergence of a new customer value and market. However, this is only one among many possible institutional configurations through which competitors can collaborate. Future research could explore alternative governance structures as suggested by Harala et al. (2023) and also Narayan and Tidström (2020) that allow cooperation to shape and evolve in different industrial and cultural contexts

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**Appendix 1. Coffee market in Colombia from 2015 to 2023. In million 60-
kilogram bags**

| <i>Years</i> | <i>Production</i> | <i>Import</i> | <i>Export</i> | <i>Consumption</i> | <i>Consumption/ Production</i> | <i>Export/ Production</i> | <i>Import/ Consumption</i> |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2015/16 | 14 | 0,2 | 12,3 | 1,7 | 12% | 88% | 12% |
| 2016/17 | 14,6 | 0,3 | 13,5 | 1,7 | 12% | 92% | 18% |
| 2017/18 | 13,8 | 0,6 | 12,7 | 1,8 | 13% | 92% | 33% |
| 2018/19 | 13,9 | 1,3 | 13,5 | 1,8 | 13% | 97% | 72% |
| 2019/20 | 14,1 | 0,9 | 12,6 | 2,1 | 15% | 89% | 43% |
| 2020/21 | 13,4 | 1,6 | 12,8 | 2 | 15% | 96% | 80% |
| 2021/22 | 11,7 | 2,1 | 11,9 | 2,3 | 20% | 102% | 91% |
| 2022/23 | 10,6 | 2 | 10,3 | 2,2 | 21% | 97% | 91% |

Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia. Informe de gestión (2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019).

Recuperado de <https://federaciondecafeteros.org/app/uploads/2023/11/IG-92-CNC-DIGITAL.pdf>

Appendix 2. Interview Guide

First Interview Guide

- What is specialty coffee, and how is it different from regular Coffee?
- Why is specialty coffee an important industry in the region?
- What are the challenges that this industry faces in the region?
- How has your coffee shop contributed to responding to these challenges?
- Was it necessary to make any changes and adjustments in your coffee shop to respond to these challenges?
What are the main differences between before and after these changes and adjustments?
- Did other actors (including competitors) collaborate to make these changes and adjustments? Who were these actors, and what did their collaboration consist of?
- Were other Cafés interested in collectively responding to these challenges? What was the goal of these Cafés? How were they going to achieve that goal? Which actors participated in this process? What did their participation consist of?
- What is La Red? How did you find out about the existence of this initiative?
- What are the motivations for being (and not being) part of the La Red?
- What characteristics should those who were part of the La Red have?
- Was there collaboration on your part so that other Café could also make changes and adjustments in their organizations and thus respond to the industry challenge?
- What were your main contributions?
- When collaborating with competitors, were there any types of conflicts? Why did these conflicts arise? Were these conflicts resolved (yes? How?), (No, why?)
- After Cafés took the initiative to collaborate to respond to the industry challenge, was there any change in your café's revenue, customers, or competitors? What have been the most relevant changes?
- What have been the most significant results and learnings that have emerged from this collaboration initiative between competitors?

Second Interview Guide

- What has been the evolution of La Red from its creation to the present?
- What is the reason for the La Red logo for Café?

- How was the La Red Logo created?
- Today, do you feel like you belong to La Red?
- Do you still use the visible La Red label or logo?
- How do the ideas promote on La Red impact your current operations?
- Were there conflicts on the La Red network, and how were they resolved?

Third Interview Guide

- How many and which Cafés were there in the region when you decided to become a Café?
- When did the Boom in Cafés start in the region, and what caused it?
- What benefits did belonging to La Red de Tiendas bring to a coffee shop?
- Do you think that with La Red, sales and consumption of specialty coffee in your cafe have improved?
- How were "La Red's" members different from each other if they all offered the same Specialty Coffee product? How did they compete with each other?
- Were there conflicts on the La Red network, and how were they resolved?
- How do the ideas promote on La Red impact your current operations?

Appendix 3. Complementary information about “La Red”

- **La Red’s as network creation**
<https://www.yoamoelcafedecolombia.com>
- **The official logo of La Red Network**
<https://www.eldiario.com.co>
- **Presentation of the first coffees certified with the La Red’s logo**
<https://risaraldahoy.com>
- **La Red’s objectives, values and strategy**
<https://www.eltiempo.com>
- **Anniversary Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia UNESCO Heritage**
<https://www.eldiario.com.co>
- **La Red’s cafés location**
<https://somosvecinos.com.co>