LAPIN YLIOPISTO

UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND

Flávia de Moraes Dutra

BETWEEN KNOWING AND BECOMING:
EVALUATION AS SERVICE
IN COOPERATIVE FINANCIAL ECOSYSTEMS

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DEDICATION

To all the ones that protect me. *Axé.*

To my parents, who gave me everything. It is an honour to be Flávia, daughter of Ivan and Muriel.
To my brother Tico, who walked beside me through the hardest corridors, literally and in every other sense. To my sister Maria, who carries Victory in her name and fights like she means it. She argues with the world to defend what she loves and has never once failed to love me.

To Mimi, Toguinha, Lucca, Martí, and Mia: you are the first ones my heart reaches for from this side of the ocean.

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation systems have become increasingly central to how organizations guide and legitimize their innovation, governance, and sustainability practices. However, a fundamental question remains insufficiently addressed: to what extent are these systems capable not only of measuring performance, but of enabling the organizational transformation they are designed to support? This study examines this question within the Brazilian credit cooperative system, focusing on the Gestão Estratégica de Propósito (GEP — Strategic Purpose Management): a structured program developed by Fenasbac to diagnose and develop the maturity of purpose-driven innovation management in credit cooperatives, operating through integrated stages that include self-assessment, qualified feedback, strategic learning journeys, and structured deepening, within which the Recognition of Innovation with Purpose (RECIP) constitutes the final recognition stage.

Grounded in a service ecosystems perspective and drawing on embedded case study design informed by Research through Design (RtD) and Design Science Research (DSR), this study analyzes a validated dataset of 56 cooperative feedback reports from the 2025 GEP evaluation cycle, complemented by institutional panoramas, documentary analysis, and longitudinal ordinal comparison across prior cycles (2022–2025). The analysis is structured across five evaluative dimensions: participatory governance, inter-cooperative collaboration, capacity development, green finance, and ESG.

Three recurring systemic patterns are identified. First, a persistent gap exists between normative coherence and operational consolidation: cooperative principles and sustainability agendas are widely embedded in governance discourse, but their translation into structured organizational capabilities remains uneven. Second, capability development is asymmetrically distributed across ecosystem levels, with stronger consolidation at the micro-organizational level and increasing fragility in inter-cooperative collaboration and green finance, a pattern further evidenced by a 2.40-point mean differential in Green Finance

maturity between cooperative systems operating under identical evaluative conditions. Third, the ecosystem exhibits high levels of diagnostic reflexivity without equivalent mechanisms for adaptive reinforcement, resulting in episodic rather than cumulative learning. These patterns are synthesized as the sustainability translation gap, a structural condition in which ESG governance commitments are not systematically translated into financial operationalization.

Building on these findings, the study proposes a reconceptualization of the GEP as an Adaptive Service Infrastructure. This redesign integrates three multilevel reinforcement loops — internal adaptive reinforcement (micro), inter-cooperative diffusion (meso), and sustainability–finance integration (macro) — with a progressive capability scaffolding architecture and a redesigned service blueprint. The proposed architecture enables evaluation to move beyond diagnostic recognition toward cumulative institutional capacity building.

This study advances service ecosystem theory by positioning evaluation systems as active institutional mechanisms within ecosystem dynamics, contributes to organizational capability theory by distinguishing between the presence and consolidation of practices, and extends evaluation theory by establishing the limits of diagnostic-only systems and conceptualizing adaptive evaluation as an infrastructure for reinforcement, coordination, and learning. The findings carry practical implications for the governance of cooperative financial ecosystems and for policy frameworks aimed at supporting sustainable and purpose-driven development.

Keywords: evaluation systems; adaptive service infrastructure; cooperative financial ecosystems; innovation with purpose; GEP/RECIP; capability development; sustainability translation gap.

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FRONTMATTER

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Abbreviation	Full Form
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
GEP	Gestão Estratégica de Propósito (Strategic Purpose Management)
RECIP	Reconhecimento de Inovação com Propósito (Recognition of Innovation with Purpose)
RQ	Research Question
RtD	Research through Design
DSR	Design Science Research
SDL	Service-Dominant Logic
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
OCB	Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras
M1–M5	Maturity levels 1 through 5 (GEP framework)
CoV	Coefficient of Variation

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

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1.1 Background and Context

In recent years, evaluation systems have become increasingly central to how organizations understand, guide, and legitimize their innovation, governance, and sustainability practices, particularly in financial systems, where regulatory pressures, stakeholder expectations, and global agendas such as Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have intensified demands for structured mechanisms of assessment, accountability, and impact measurement (Patton, 2011; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). Despite this growing centrality, a fundamental question remains: to what extent are these systems capable not only of measuring performance, but of enabling the organizational transformation they are designed to support?

This shift has been theorized by Patton (2011) as the evolution toward utilization-focused evaluation, a framework in which the primary criterion for evaluation design is the likelihood that findings will actually be used by identifiable stakeholders to improve decisions and programs. Rather than generating knowledge for its own sake, evaluation in this mode is deliberately constructed around its intended uses. However, despite increasingly sophisticated approaches to measurement, benchmarking, and reporting, these systems frequently remain anchored in logics that prioritize visibility, comparison, and compliance, assuming that greater diagnostic clarity will naturally lead to improved performance and transformation (Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

This assumption becomes particularly problematic in complex service ecosystems, where outcomes are not produced by isolated organizations but emerge from the interactions between multiple actors, institutional arrangements, and processes of resource integration (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2013). Value creation in such contexts is inherently distributed, arising from interactions among actors rather than being controlled by single entities. In these environments, innovation and sustainability are not static outcomes to be measured, but ongoing processes that depend on coordination, learning, and change over time.

The Brazilian credit cooperative system represents a particularly relevant setting in which to explore these dynamics. These organizations operate at the intersection of financial services, cooperative governance, and social purpose, combining regulatory demands with principles such as democratic participation, intercooperation, and concern for the community. This hybrid institutional configuration creates a context in which innovation is both normatively driven and operationally complex, requiring alignment across multiple organizational levels and actors within the ecosystem.

Within this landscape, initiatives aimed at recognizing and stimulating innovation aligned with purpose have gained prominence. Among these, the Gestão Estratégica de Propósito (GEP — Strategic Purpose Management), developed by Fenasbac, has emerged as a structured program designed to diagnose, develop, and recognize the maturity of innovation management with purpose in credit cooperatives (Fenasbac, 2026; Oliveira Buta et al., 2021). Within the GEP, the Recognition of Innovation with Purpose (RECIP) constitutes the final recognition stage, in which cooperatives demonstrating greater maturity in purpose-driven innovation management are publicly acknowledged.

At the same time, the expansion of such evaluation frameworks raises important questions regarding their role and effectiveness within complex service environments. To what extent are current evaluation systems capable of supporting not only the identification of gaps, but also the development of the capabilities required to address them? This question becomes particularly relevant in contexts where transformation depends not only on awareness, but on sustained processes of learning, resource integration, and institutional adaptation across interconnected actors.

It is within this broader context that this study is situated, seeking to examine how evaluation systems operate in practice within the Brazilian credit cooperative ecosystem, and how their design and operation may either support or constrain the development of adaptive capabilities within the ecosystem.

1.2 The Brazilian Credit Cooperative System

The Brazilian credit cooperative system has undergone significant expansion over the past decades, consolidating itself as a relevant component of the national financial system. According to data from BureauCoop (2026), the system currently comprises more than 23.8 million members and a credit portfolio exceeding BRL 570 billion, (approximately USD 95 billion), reflecting its growing importance in promoting financial inclusion and regional economic development.

Characterized by its member-owned structure and democratic governance, the system operates according to cooperative principles such as participation, autonomy, intercooperation, and concern for the community. These principles position credit cooperatives as hybrid organizations that combine financial performance with social purpose: a dual orientation that distinguishes them from traditional financial institutions. This hybridity is not merely structural, but also strategic, shaping how cooperatives balance economic sustainability with their role in fostering inclusion, local development, and collective well-being.

The structure of the Brazilian cooperative credit system is inherently multi-level and interconnected. It comprises 748 individual (singular) cooperatives, organized into central cooperatives, confederations, and cooperative banks that provide coordination, scale, and shared services across the system. Major cooperative systems, such as Sicoob, Sicredi, Cresol, and Ailos, operate as integrated networks with different degrees of vertical coordination, enabling local cooperatives to maintain proximity to their communities while benefiting from shared infrastructure, governance mechanisms, and strategic alignment at higher organizational levels.

This multi-level architecture enables both decentralization and coordination. At the local level, cooperatives are embedded in their communities, allowing them to identify context-specific needs and develop tailored financial solutions. At the system level, central organizations provide technological platforms, risk management structures, and strategic direction, supporting the scalability and stability of the network (BureauCoop, 2026; OCB, 2019). However, this configuration also introduces significant complexity, as decision-making, resource

allocation, and innovation processes are distributed across multiple organizational layers and actors.

In this context, innovation cannot be understood as an isolated organizational activity, but as a systemic phenomenon that emerges from interactions within the cooperative ecosystem. The effectiveness of innovation practices depends not only on individual initiatives, but also on the capacity of the system to support coordination, knowledge sharing, and the integration of capabilities across different levels of the network (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; OCB, 2019).

These characteristics make the Brazilian credit cooperative system a particularly relevant empirical setting for examining how evaluation systems operate within complex service environments. In particular, the coexistence of strong normative alignment, grounded in cooperative principles, and high operational diversity across regions, organizational sizes, and levels of integration creates a context in which the relationship between evaluation, learning, and capability development becomes both critical and challenging.

1.3 Innovation with Purpose and the Emergence of RECIP

The notion of innovation with purpose has emerged within the cooperative ecosystem as an operational framing developed through the Recognition of Innovation with Purpose (RECIP) initiative, created within the Brazilian financial cooperative system with institutional support from FENASBAC (Oliveira Buta et al., 2021). Rather than constituting a consolidated concept in the academic literature, it describes innovation practices that generate economic, social, and environmental value simultaneously, defined by Oliveira Buta et al. (2021) as the development of new or significantly improved products, services, and practices that address community needs while encompassing organizational, social, and environmental sustainability.

Within credit cooperative systems, this orientation is deeply connected to the foundational principles of cooperativism, particularly democratic participation, intercooperation, and concern for the community. These principles position cooperatives not only as financial institutions, but as organizations committed to

fostering local development, financial inclusion, and collective well-being. In this context, innovation is not an end in itself, but a means through which cooperatives can fulfill their purpose as community-oriented organizations.

From this perspective, innovation with purpose can be understood as the capacity of cooperatives to develop new products, services, processes, and organizational practices that reinforce their social and economic role while ensuring financial sustainability. This understanding resonates with broader discussions on social innovation, particularly in its emphasis on generating value beyond market outcomes, while being operationalized here within the specific institutional context of the cooperative financial system.

At the same time, translating this purpose-driven orientation into practice presents significant challenges. While cooperative principles provide a strong normative foundation, their operationalization through innovation depends on the development of concrete capabilities, organizational arrangements, and coordination mechanisms (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Vargo, Lusch, & Akaka, 2010). This creates a structural tension between normative alignment, expressed through values and principles, and operational consolidation, reflected in the ability to consistently implement and scale innovation practices within organizations (Oliveira Buta et al., 2021). This tension constitutes a central dynamic within the cooperative innovation ecosystem and is further examined throughout this study.

It is within this context that RECIP emerged as an initiative aimed at strengthening and giving visibility to innovation practices aligned with cooperative principles. By identifying and recognizing initiatives that generate positive social, environmental, and economic impact, RECIP sought to stimulate reflection within organizations and encourage the dissemination of practices aligned with purpose across the cooperative ecosystem.

In doing so, RECIP also contributed to shaping a shared understanding of what constitutes innovation with purpose within the cooperative context. By establishing criteria and highlighting examples of practice, the initiative helped frame innovation not only as a technical or managerial activity, but as a strategic and institutional process connected to the broader mission of cooperatives. As

RECIP gained traction and its scope expanded, however, the limitations of recognition-based approaches became increasingly apparent — pointing to the need for more structured approaches capable of supporting a deeper understanding of innovation practices.

1.4 From RECIP to GEP: Evolution of the Initiative

The development of RECIP reflects an ongoing effort to strengthen innovation practices within the Brazilian credit cooperative system, aligning them with cooperative principles and broader sustainability agendas. Initially conceived as a recognition initiative, RECIP was designed to identify and give visibility to innovative practices that generate social, environmental, and economic impact within credit cooperatives.

While this initial approach contributed to reinforcing a culture of innovation aligned with purpose, its focus on recognition provided limited support for systematically understanding how such practices are developed, sustained, and scaled within organizations. As the initiative evolved, the need emerged for a more structured approach capable of moving beyond visibility toward a deeper understanding of organizational processes, capabilities, and conditions that enable innovation. This led to the development of the GEP as the overarching program within which RECIP became the final recognition stage.

The GEP operates as a continuous program composed of integrated stages, including diagnosis, qualified feedback, strategic evolution journey, structured deepening, and recognition (Fenasbac, 2026). Within this structure, the GEP simultaneously functions as an organizational framework, providing dimensions, criteria, and maturity levels for analysis, and as an ongoing journey through which cooperatives engage in self-assessment, evidence generation, and internal dialogue. RECIP constitutes the final stage of the GEP cycle, in which cooperatives demonstrating the highest maturity in purpose-driven innovation management receive institutional recognition.

This dual nature is central to understanding the role of the GEP within the cooperative ecosystem. As a framework, it enables comparability, consistency, and the identification of cross-organizational patterns. As a journey, it creates the conditions for reflection, coordination, and engagement across different organizational actors. In this sense, the GEP extends beyond a purely technical instrument of evaluation, shaping how organizations interpret, organize, and reflect on their innovation processes.

At the same time, this expanded structure introduces new challenges. While the GEP enhances diagnostic visibility and promotes reflection, the translation of insights into sustained organizational change depends on factors such as internal alignment, resource allocation, coordination across areas, and the integration of learning into ongoing practices.

This evolution from RECIP as a recognition initiative to GEP as a structured evaluative program marks a significant step in the consolidation of innovation with purpose within the cooperative system, establishing the foundations for a more systematic approach to understanding and developing innovation practices across the ecosystem.

[1] *This section draws on institutional materials documenting the evolution of the initiative, including the RECIP Panorama reports and internal Fenasbac documents (e.g., RECIP v17; Fenasbac, 2026), as well as observations derived from the application of the GEP within the cooperative system.*

1.5 Research Problem and Research Questions

In the context of credit cooperatives, the Gestão Estratégica de Propósito (GEP), developed by Fenasbac as a structured program for diagnosing and developing the maturity of innovation management with purpose, has sought to assess and stimulate innovation aligned with cooperative principles and broader ESG and sustainability agendas (Fenasbac, 2026). Within the GEP, RECIP constitutes the stage of public recognition of cooperatives that demonstrate greater maturity.

Despite this growing relevance, a fundamental tension remains insufficiently explored in the literature: the gap between knowing and becoming, that is,

between the capacity of organizations to generate diagnostic visibility about their practices and their ability to translate this knowledge into sustained adaptive capability development.

Existing approaches to evaluation have predominantly emphasized measurement, benchmarking, and accountability. While these functions are essential, they tend to assume that the identification of gaps and the generation of feedback are sufficient to trigger organizational change. This assumption becomes particularly problematic in complex service ecosystems, where capability development depends on distributed coordination, institutional arrangements, and cumulative learning processes across multiple actors.

Evidence observed from the application of the GEP within successive RECIP evaluation cycles, as documented in institutional reports and panoramas (Instituto Fenasbac, 2021; 2022), suggests that diagnostic visibility does not automatically translate into capability development, a pattern that, if confirmed, would reveal a structural limitation in how evaluation systems are currently conceived and designed. This raises important questions about the conditions under which evaluation contributes to adaptive capacity, rather than merely to reflective awareness.

In this context, credit cooperative systems provide a particularly relevant empirical setting. These organizations operate at the intersection of cooperative principles, such as democratic participation, intercooperation, and concern for the community, and the operational demands of financial systems. As a result, they offer a unique opportunity to examine how purpose-driven evaluation frameworks interact with complex institutional environments.

This gap raises a broader theoretical and practical question regarding the role of evaluation systems within service ecosystems: should evaluation be understood merely as a mechanism for assessment, or as a potential infrastructure for enabling learning, coordination, and capability development?

To address this problem, this study advances the proposition that evaluation systems can be redesigned as adaptive service infrastructures. Drawing on the GEP as an empirical case, the study examines how this evaluative framework shapes organizational practices, reveals systemic patterns, and can be repositioned as a systemic mechanism capable of supporting learning, coordination, and capability development within cooperative service ecosystems.

Based on this research problem, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How do cooperative principles translate into innovation practices across the Brazilian credit cooperative ecosystem, and where does this translation break down?

RQ2. What systemic patterns and capability gaps emerge from the empirical application of the GEP evaluation framework?

RQ3. How can evaluation systems evolve from diagnostic instruments into adaptive service infrastructures capable of reinforcing learning and capability development over time?

These questions are hierarchically related: RQ1 establishes the empirical foundation by examining how purpose-driven principles translate — and fail to translate — into organizational practice, upon which RQ2 identifies the systemic patterns and capability gaps that emerge from that translation process, and RQ3 develops design-oriented responses to the structural conditions revealed by both.

1.6 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine how evaluation systems operate within cooperative service ecosystems and to explore how they can be redesigned to support adaptive capability development over time.

More specifically, the study aims to:

(1) Examine how cooperative principles translate into innovation practices within the Brazilian credit cooperative ecosystem, and identify where this translation breaks down.

This objective focuses on understanding the relationship between normative alignment and operational consolidation: that is, the extent to which cooperative principles and ESG agendas are effectively embedded in organizational structures, routines, and capabilities, and where gaps between intention and practice persist. It provides the empirical foundation for identifying the conditions under which purpose-driven innovation is sustained or constrained across different dimensions of maturity.

(2) Identify systemic patterns and capability gaps emerging from the application of the GEP evaluation framework.

Building on the empirical analysis, this objective seeks to uncover cross-dimensional and cross-organizational patterns that reveal structural tensions within the ecosystem — particularly those related to the relationship between normative alignment and operational consolidation, as well as the distribution of capabilities across different ecosystem levels.

(3) Conceptualize how evaluation systems can evolve from diagnostic instruments into adaptive service infrastructures.

This objective moves beyond analysis toward design, proposing a reconceptualization of evaluation as an institutional mechanism capable of reinforcing learning, coordinating resource integration, and supporting cumulative capability development across the ecosystem.

These objectives are sequentially related. The first establishes the empirical basis of the study, the second develops an analytical understanding of systemic dynamics, and the third advances a design-oriented contribution aimed at addressing the structural limitations identified.

Together, they reflect the central ambition of this research: to reposition evaluation systems from tools of measurement toward infrastructures of adaptation within purpose-driven service ecosystems.

1.7 Research Scope and Relevance

This study focuses on the Brazilian credit cooperative system as an empirical setting to examine how evaluation systems operate within complex service ecosystems. More specifically, the research investigates the GEP as a structured evaluative framework operationalized through a multi-stage process of assessment and reflection, applied within credit cooperatives participating in the GEP.

The scope of the study is defined along three main boundaries. First, it focuses on innovation with purpose as understood within the cooperative context, emphasizing the alignment between cooperative principles, ESG agendas, and organizational practices. Second, the analysis is based on the empirical application of the GEP framework across multiple cooperatives, drawing on evaluation data and reports generated within the process. Third, the study adopts a systemic perspective, examining patterns and dynamics that emerge across organizations and dimensions, rather than focusing on isolated cases.

At the same time, the study does not aim to provide an exhaustive evaluation of the performance of individual cooperatives, nor to assess the financial effectiveness of innovation initiatives. Instead, its focus lies on understanding how evaluation systems shape organizational practices, reveal systemic patterns, and influence the development of capabilities within the cooperative ecosystem. Empirically, the analysis is bounded to data generated within a specific GEP evaluation cycle, reflecting the conditions, practices, and organizational configurations observed in that period.

The relevance of this research is threefold. From an academic perspective, it contributes to the literature on evaluation systems, service ecosystems, and innovation by examining the role of evaluation beyond measurement, positioning it as a potential mechanism for enabling learning and capability development. In particular, it advances the discussion on how evaluation systems operate within complex, multi-actor environments characterized by distributed coordination and institutional constraints.

From a practical perspective, the study provides insights for the design and evolution of evaluation frameworks within cooperative systems and other purpose-driven organizations. By identifying structural limitations and opportunities for improvement, it offers a basis for rethinking how evaluation processes can better support organizational learning and long-term capability development.

Finally, from a policy and ecosystem perspective, the research is relevant to institutions involved in supporting and regulating the cooperative financial system. By examining how evaluation systems interact with organizational and institutional dynamics, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on how to strengthen innovation with purpose within the cooperative sector, enhancing its capacity to generate social and economic impact.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into eight chapters, each addressing a specific component of the research.

Chapter 1 introduces the research context, presenting the background, the Brazilian credit cooperative system, the concept of innovation with purpose, and the evolution from RECIP to GEP. It also defines the research problem, research questions, objectives, scope, and relevance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature, covering key theoretical perspectives related to service ecosystems, evaluation systems, innovation, and capability development. This chapter establishes the conceptual foundations that inform the analytical framework of the study.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology. It describes the epistemological stance, methodological approach, data sources, and analytical procedures used to examine the GEP and its application within the cooperative system.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical context and dataset, providing an overview of the cooperatives analyzed and the structure of the evaluation framework applied.

Chapter 5 develops the empirical analysis, presenting findings across the five analytical dimensions: participatory, collaborative, capacity development, green finance, and ESG. It also identifies cross-dimensional patterns and systemic dynamics emerging from the data.

Chapter 6 builds on the empirical findings to propose a redesign of the GEP as an adaptive service infrastructure. It introduces design principles, an adaptive architecture, and a service blueprint aimed at repositioning the evaluation system from a diagnostic instrument toward a continuous mechanism for learning, coordination, and capability development within the cooperative ecosystem.

Chapter 7 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the study, connecting the findings to the literature and outlining contributions to research and practice.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main findings, reflecting on limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

For the Cooperatives

This thesis is written for an academic audience: with citations, theory, and the formal language that universities require, but the subject of this research is you: the cooperatives, the people who work inside them, and the communities they serve. So at the end of each chapter, you will find a short section like this one, written without jargon, that translates the main ideas into plain language. Consider it a side door into the same house.

Chapter 1 asks a simple question: does measuring things actually change them?

The Brazilian credit cooperative system has something that most financial institutions don't: a built-in reason to exist that goes beyond profit. Cooperatives are born from purpose: democratic participation, solidarity, care for the

community. That is not a marketing message. It is the reason cooperatives were invented.

Over the past several years, Fenasbac developed the GEP: a program that evaluates how well cooperatives are actually living that purpose. Cooperatives answer questions, present evidence, go through interviews, and receive scores across five areas: how they involve their members, how they collaborate with other cooperatives, how they develop their teams, how they approach sustainability and ESG, and how they think about green finance.

This is good, knowing where you stand matters.

This thesis starts with a concern: knowing where you stand is not the same as getting better. You can go to the doctor every year, hear that you need to exercise more, nod thoughtfully, and then go home and do nothing. Not because you don't care, but because knowing and doing are two very different things, and the distance between them requires more than a diagnosis.

That is the gap this thesis is about. Not a failure of the cooperatives. Not a failure of the GEP. But a structural gap in how evaluation systems are designed: built to measure, not built to help organizations grow over time.

The question this thesis tries to answer is: what would it look like if evaluation did both?

A practical note on how to read this thesis: Each chapter ends with a section like this one. The academic text does the work of proving, citing, and arguing. These sections do the work of connecting. You don't need to read both to understand the thesis, but if you are a cooperative leader, a team member, or someone who works inside the GEP ecosystem, these sections are written for you.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter develops the theoretical foundation of the study by examining how different streams of literature contribute to understanding the relationship between evaluation, learning, and capability development within complex organizational environments. Building on the research problem outlined in Chapter 1, the review focuses on how evaluation systems operate in contexts characterized by multiple actors, distributed coordination, and purpose-driven objectives.

A central premise guiding this chapter is that evaluation cannot be fully understood in isolation from the broader organizational and systemic conditions in which it is embedded. In particular, the literature suggests that the effectiveness of evaluation systems depends not only on their ability to generate diagnostic knowledge, but also on how such knowledge is interpreted, mobilized, and translated into organizational action over time. This perspective shifts the focus from evaluation as a technical activity toward its role within broader processes of learning, coordination, and capability development. This review adopts a problem-driven and integrative approach, selecting theoretical perspectives based on their relevance to understanding the relationship between evaluation, learning, and capability development in complex organizational settings.

To address this perspective, the chapter integrates insights from multiple bodies of literature. It begins by situating credit cooperatives as hybrid and socioeconomic organizations, whose dual orientation toward financial performance and social purpose creates a distinctive context for innovation and evaluation (Section 2.2). This context is particularly relevant, as the hybrid and multi-level nature of cooperative systems amplifies the challenges associated with translating diagnostic insights into coordinated action. It then examines the role of evaluation systems in supporting organizational learning and capability development, highlighting the limitations of approaches that prioritize measurement over transformation (Section 2.3).

Building on this foundation, the chapter introduces the service ecosystems perspective to conceptualize value creation as a distributed and relational process across multiple actors (Section 2.4). It then explores the concepts of social innovation and ESG as frameworks through which organizations seek to align their activities with broader societal and environmental objectives, while also identifying their limitations in supporting sustained capability development (Sections 2.5 and 2.6).

These discussions lead to the introduction of the concept of innovation with purpose within cooperative finance, positioned as a way of articulating how organizations attempt to operationalize purpose through innovation practices (Section 2.7). The chapter then incorporates systems thinking and service design as complementary perspectives for understanding and intervening in complex organizational systems (Section 2.8).

The chapter concludes by synthesizing these perspectives into an integrated theoretical framework that highlights a structural gap between diagnostic awareness and capability development. This synthesis provides the conceptual basis for the empirical analysis and design-oriented contributions developed in the subsequent chapters, particularly in relation to the reconceptualization of evaluation systems as adaptive service infrastructures.

2.2 Credit Cooperatives as Hybrid and Socioeconomic Organizations

Credit cooperatives have increasingly been recognized as hybrid and socioeconomic organizations that combine financial intermediation with explicit social and community-oriented objectives. Unlike traditional financial institutions, which are primarily driven by shareholder value maximization, credit cooperatives are structured around principles of mutuality, democratic governance, and collective benefit, positioning them as organizations that operate simultaneously within economic and social logics while also playing a broader role in regional development and financial inclusion (Battilana & Lee, 2014; OCB, 2019; Birchall, 2005)

This hybrid and socioeconomic nature introduces a distinctive organizational configuration in which financial performance and social purpose are not treated as competing objectives, but as interdependent dimensions of value creation. In cooperative systems, economic sustainability is a condition for fulfilling social objectives, while social relevance reinforces legitimacy and long-term viability. This dual imperative reflects the dynamics of hybrid organizations, where the integration of multiple institutional logics shapes both strategic priorities and operational practices (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Galera & Borzaga, 2009).

The governance structure of credit cooperatives further reinforces this hybridity. Organized as member-owned institutions, cooperatives are characterized by democratic participation and distributed decision-making processes, grounded in internationally recognized cooperative principles (International Cooperative Alliance, 2015). Within the Brazilian context, these organizations operate through multi-level arrangements involving local cooperatives and higher-level coordination structures, which support alignment and resource sharing while preserving local autonomy (OCB, 2019). This configuration introduces additional layers of complexity, as decision-making and implementation processes must balance system-level coordination with local specificities.

This multi-level and networked structure has important implications for how innovation and change occur within cooperative systems. Unlike centralized organizations, where strategic direction can be imposed top-down, cooperatives rely on processes of alignment, negotiation, and coordination across autonomous and interconnected units. As suggested in the literature on service ecosystems, such processes depend on the integration of resources and the alignment of practices across multiple actors, rather than on centralized control (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

In this context, the hybrid and socioeconomic nature of credit cooperatives creates both opportunities and challenges for innovation. On the one hand, their strong connection to local communities and their embedded social mission position them

as fertile environments for purpose-driven innovation (Oliveira Buta et al., 2021). On the other hand, the coexistence of multiple institutional logics, governance layers, and heterogeneous organizational capacities can generate tensions that complicate the translation of normative alignment into operational enactment (Battilana & Lee, 2014).

These characteristics make cooperative systems particularly relevant for examining the role of evaluation. In such contexts, where action depends on coordination across multiple actors and levels, evaluation cannot be understood solely as an internal managerial tool focused on measurement and control. Instead, it must be capable of supporting learning processes, fostering alignment, and enabling the integration of perspectives across the system (Preskill & Torres, 1999; Patton, 2011).

From this perspective, credit cooperatives offer a distinctive empirical setting in which the challenges of evaluation are amplified by hybridity and systemic complexity. The coexistence of strong normative alignment with social purpose and significant diversity in organizational capabilities creates conditions in which generating diagnostic knowledge is insufficient to ensure its effective enactment. As such, this context provides a particularly fertile ground for examining how evaluation systems can move beyond assessment to support coordination, learning, and capability development in distributed and purpose-driven organizational environments.

2.3 Evaluation Systems, Learning, and Capability Development

Evaluation systems have traditionally been conceptualized as instruments for measurement, accountability, and performance monitoring within organizations and public systems. Early approaches emphasized the systematic collection of data to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of programs and initiatives, supporting strategic decision-making and accountability processes (Patton, 2008;

Preskill & Torres, 1999). In this perspective, evaluation operates primarily as a retrospective activity, focused on assessing results against predefined objectives.

Over time, the field has evolved to incorporate more learning-oriented perspectives. Approaches such as utilization-focused evaluation and developmental evaluation emphasize the role of evaluation as a process that can support reflection, adaptation, and continuous improvement within organizations (Patton, 2011). While these approaches explicitly position learning as a central objective, they often assume that the availability of evaluative insights will translate into improved decision-making and organizational change, an assumption that is not consistently supported in practice.

This limitation becomes particularly evident in complex organizational environments. Even when evaluation systems generate relevant insights, their impact is mediated by organizational routines and established patterns of action that shape how information is interpreted and used. As a result, the relationship between knowledge generation and behavioral change is neither direct nor automatic, revealing a structural gap between evaluative insight and organizational transformation.

The literature on organizational learning provides a critical lens to understand this gap. Argyris and Schön (1978) demonstrate that organizations frequently operate through defensive routines that protect existing practices and inhibit meaningful change, even when new information is available. In this context, learning requires more than the acquisition of knowledge; it involves the capacity to question underlying assumptions and modify established patterns of action; Argyris and Schön (1978) distinguish between single-loop and double-loop learning. While single-loop learning focuses on correcting actions within existing rules, double-loop learning involves questioning and redefining the underlying assumptions that guide those actions.This perspective directly challenges the assumption that evaluative feedback alone is sufficient to produce transformation.

From a capability perspective, this limitation becomes more explicit. Cohen and Levinthal (1990) conceptualize absorptive capacity as an organization's ability to engage with external knowledge, not only accessing it, but recognizing its relevance, assimilating it, and applying it effectively in practice.Without such capacity, information generated through evaluation processes remains underutilized. In parallel, Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) argue that organizations require dynamic capabilities to operate in changing environments, understood as the ongoing ability to build, combine, and reconfigure internal and external competences over time. These processes require sustained and iterative investment in learning and alignment, rather than being triggered by isolated evaluative inputs.

Taken together, these perspectives indicate that the limitations of evaluation systems are not merely technical, but structural. This structural disconnect, we argue, reflects a misalignment between the design of evaluation systems and the processes through which organizations learn and develop capabilities over time.

This misalignment becomes even more pronounced in distributed and multi-actor environments, where organizational outcomes depend on coordination across different units, levels, and actors. In such contexts, the effectiveness of evaluation systems depends not only on the quality of the information they generate, but also on their ability to support alignment and interaction across organizational boundaries, a challenge that is further explored through the lens of service ecosystems in the following section.

These limitations point to the need for a reconceptualization of evaluation systems. Rather than being understood solely as instruments for measurement or episodic learning, evaluation systems are best understood as infrastructures that shape how organizations engage with information, coordinate action, and develop capabilities over time. This perspective shifts the focus from evaluation as a discrete activity toward evaluation as an embedded and ongoing process within organizational and systemic dynamics.

Building on this understanding, this study conceptualizes evaluation systems as infrastructures for capability development, capable of supporting learning, coordination, and adaptation within complex service environments. This perspective provides the conceptual foundation for analyzing the GEP in Chapter 5 and for proposing its redesign in Chapter 6.

2.4 Service Ecosystems and Distributed Value Creation

The increasing complexity of organizational environments has led to a shift in how value creation is understood within the service-dominant logic and service ecosystems literature. Rather than being produced by isolated firms, value is conceptualized as emerging from interactions among multiple actors within interconnected systems, through processes of resource integration and co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

Within the service-dominant logic framework, service ecosystems are understood as dynamic configurations in which multiple actors interact and integrate resources through shared institutional arrangements in order to co-create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka, Vargo & Lusch, 2013). This perspective highlights that value does not reside within individual organizations, but emerges from coordinated interactions across the system.

A key concept in this perspective is resource integration, referring to how actors mobilize and combine different types of resources, particularly knowledge, skills, and technologies, in the process of value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2016). These processes are distributed and depend on the ability of actors to align their contributions over time. Importantly, these processes are not centrally coordinated, but distributed across actors, depending on their ability to align and mobilize resources over time.

This distributed and interactive nature of value creation implies that outcomes are emergent, arising from ongoing interactions and dynamic feedback processes across actors and levels of the system (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). As a result, no single organization has full control over value creation, and performance cannot be fully explained by internal capabilities alone.

From this perspective, it is suggested that evaluation systems centered on isolated units of analysis are structurally limited in their ability to account for the interdependencies that shape outcomes in such environments. When value creation depends on distributed processes of resource integration, generating insights at the organizational level does not necessarily translate into system-level change.

This limitation is closely related to the challenge of coordination. In service ecosystems, value co-creation depends on the alignment of practices, expectations, and institutional arrangements across actors (Vargo, Lusch, & Akaka, 2010). Without mechanisms that support such alignment, even organizations that generate relevant insights may struggle to translate them into coordinated action, limiting the impact of evaluation processes.

This systemic perspective extends the argument developed in the previous section by showing that the gap between evaluative insight and capability development is not only organizational, but also relational and ecosystem-dependent. We argue that the transformation of insights into action is therefore not confined to internal processes of learning, but depends on how actors interact, align, and integrate resources across the system.

This understanding has important implications for the design of evaluation systems. It suggests that evaluation must be conceived not only as a mechanism for generating information, but also as a process that can support alignment and coordination across actors operating within a shared institutional context.

This is particularly relevant in the context of credit cooperative systems, where value creation depends on structured interactions between local cooperatives, central organizations, and regulatory and support institutions. In such environments, the effectiveness of evaluation systems depends on their ability to engage with the institutional and relational dynamics that shape coordination across levels, rather than focusing exclusively on organizational performance.

2.5 Social Innovation and Purpose-Driven Finance

The concept of social innovation has emerged in response to the recognized limitations of market-based and state-centered approaches in addressing complex societal challenges, particularly those related to inequality, exclusion, and environmental sustainability. Within this context, social innovation provides a framework for understanding how new practices and organizational arrangements can generate value beyond purely economic outcomes (Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010).

Social innovation is commonly defined as the development and implementation of new solutions, including products, services, processes, and organizational models, that address social needs while simultaneously creating new forms of social relationships and collaboration (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). This emphasis on relational and collaborative dynamics aligns closely with the service ecosystems perspective, in which value emerges through interactions and resource integration among multiple actors.

A central characteristic of social innovation is its orientation toward systemic change. Rather than focusing solely on isolated interventions, it seeks to transform the structures and relationships that generate social challenges (Mulgan, 2006). At the same time, the literature recognizes that achieving such systemic transformation is difficult, and that many social innovation initiatives remain localized or limited in scale (Westley et al., 2014). This tension between ambition and implementation reflects broader challenges in translating intent into sustained impact.

In the context of financial institutions, social innovation has gained increasing relevance as organizations are expected to contribute to financial inclusion, community development, and sustainable economic growth. This expectation is particularly evident in hybrid organizational forms that combine social and financial objectives, such as microfinance institutions and cooperative financial organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010).

Credit cooperatives represent a distinctive case within this landscape. As member-owned organizations guided by principles such as democratic governance, intercooperation, and concern for the community, they are structurally oriented toward the generation of collective and societal value. In this sense, the integration of social objectives is not peripheral, but constitutive of their organizational identity (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Galera & Borzaga, 2009).

However, the presence of social purpose does not automatically translate into effective social innovation. Achieving meaningful impact depends on the ability of organizations to operationalize their objectives through concrete practices and structures, including the implementation of initiatives and the coordination of actors across contexts (Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010).

In this sense, social innovation can be understood as a necessary but insufficient condition for addressing complex societal challenges. It defines the orientation and intent of organizational action, but does not, on its own, provide the mechanisms required to systematically translate purpose into sustained organizational and systemic outcomes.

This limitation highlights the need to better understand how purpose-driven innovation can be operationalized within specific institutional contexts, particularly in complex and multi-actor environments such as cooperative financial systems.

2.6 ESG, Sustainability, and Strategic Management

The increasing prominence of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) frameworks reflects a broader shift in how organizations conceptualize their role within society. Rather than focusing exclusively on financial performance, organizations are increasingly expected to account for their environmental impact, social contributions, and governance practices. ESG has thus emerged as a widely adopted framework for structuring how sustainability is integrated into organizational strategy and decision-making (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).

From a strategic management perspective, ESG represents an attempt to align organizational objectives with broader societal and environmental goals. Grounded in the recognition that organizations must account for the interests of multiple stakeholders beyond shareholders (Freeman, 1984), ESG provides a set of principles, metrics, and reporting standards through which organizations assess and communicate their performance beyond traditional financial indicators (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). In this sense, ESG contributes to the institutionalization of sustainability, embedding it within formal structures of governance, accountability, and strategic planning.

This institutionalization has been reinforced by increasing regulatory pressures, investor expectations, and stakeholder demands for transparency and accountability (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). In parallel, the development of standardized reporting frameworks — such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) — has contributed to the comparability and formalization of sustainability-related practices across organizations and sectors.

However, while ESG frameworks have expanded the scope of what organizations measure and report, their ability to drive substantive organizational transformation remains subject to debate. A growing body of literature suggests that ESG practices tend to reinforce logics of visibility, standardization, and compliance, prioritizing reporting over deeper changes in organizational practices (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019; Arvidsson & Dumay, 2021).

This suggests that organizations may achieve high levels of alignment at the level of discourse and reporting, while still facing difficulties in operationalizing sustainability in practice. The availability of metrics and reporting structures does not inherently ensure the development of the capabilities required to translate such information into meaningful organizational change.

From this perspective, the central limitation of ESG frameworks lies in their emphasis on defining what should be measured and reported, without fully addressing how organizations develop the capabilities required to act upon this information in complex and dynamic environments.

This limitation becomes particularly relevant in contexts where social and sustainability objectives are already embedded in the organizational mission, as is the case in cooperative systems (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Galera & Borzaga, 2009). In such environments, the challenge is not only to formalize purpose through indicators and reporting structures, but to ensure its effective enactment across diverse organizational practices and contexts.

This tension highlights a structural challenge inherent to ESG frameworks: while they promote standardization and comparability, they operate within organizational environments characterized by diversity, heterogeneity, and context-specific dynamics. In complex systems such as cooperative finance, this creates a misalignment between standardized evaluative frameworks and the varied conditions under which organizations operate, raising questions about how sustainability can be effectively operationalized across different contexts.

This limitation becomes particularly visible when ESG governance and financial operationalization are examined in tandem, a distinction that, as Chapter 5 will show, reveals a systematic dissociation between how cooperatives embed sustainability at the governance level and how, or whether, they translate it into financial structuring, credit decision-making, and portfolio management. Understanding this gap requires moving beyond the question of whether organizations adopt ESG, toward asking what organizational and institutional conditions enable its translation across capability domains.

2.7 Innovation with Purpose in Cooperative Finance

Building on the previous sections, this study introduces the concept of *innovation with purpose* as an analytical lens to examine how organizations integrate social, environmental, and economic objectives into their innovation practices. Rather than representing a consolidated construct within the academic literature, the concept emerges from the operational context of the RECIP initiative (Oliveira Buta et al., 2021) and is mobilized here as a way of articulating and analyzing purpose-driven innovation within cooperative financial systems.

In contrast to traditional views of innovation, which have historically emphasized efficiency, competitiveness, and economic performance (Schumpeter, 1934; Tidd & Bessant, 2018), innovation with purpose is oriented toward the generation of value that simultaneously addresses organizational objectives and broader societal challenges. In this sense, it aligns with the principles of social innovation while incorporating the strategic and institutional dimensions associated with ESG frameworks.

However, neither social innovation nor ESG frameworks fully resolve the challenge of translating purpose into sustained organizational and systemic outcomes. Social innovation provides a normative orientation toward societal value (Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010), while ESG contributes to its institutionalization through metrics and reporting structures (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). Both, however, remain limited in explaining how organizations develop the capabilities required to operationalize purpose in practice.

This limitation becomes particularly relevant in cooperative financial systems. Credit cooperatives operate within a hybrid institutional logic, combining financial performance with a mission oriented toward the well-being of their members and communities. As such, purpose is not externally imposed, but embedded in their organizational identity and governance structures (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Galera & Borzaga, 2009).

Within this context, innovation with purpose can be understood as the process through which cooperatives seek to operationalize their mission through innovation. This involves not only the development of new products and services, but also the transformation of organizational practices, relational dynamics, and capability structures that enable the consistent enactment of purpose (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This understanding builds on the theoretical model proposed by Oliveira Buta et al. (2021), which conceptualizes innovation with purpose as encompassing both the development of solutions oriented toward community well-being and the organizational and relational capabilities required to sustain its implementation.

Importantly, innovation with purpose is not a static outcome, but an ongoing and systemic process. It depends on the ability of organizations to integrate purpose into decision-making, align actions across different levels, and sustain learning over time. This requires coordination among multiple actors, including internal teams, cooperative networks, and institutional stakeholders, within a broader service ecosystem (Vargo, Lusch, & Akaka, 2010).

From this perspective, a central challenge emerges: while organizations may be normatively aligned with social and sustainability goals, they often face difficulties in translating this alignment into consistent and scalable practices. This reflects the structural gap between diagnostic awareness and capability development identified across the literature reviewed in this chapter.

We argue that innovation with purpose can be understood as a domain of practice that makes visible the limitations of existing approaches to evaluation and sustainability. It reveals that the challenge is not only to define and measure purpose, but to enable its continuous enactment through processes of learning, coordination, and capability development within complex and distributed systems.

By articulating this perspective, innovation with purpose contributes to bridging the gap between normative alignment and operational enactment. It provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how purpose-driven organizations can move beyond intention and measurement toward sustained and coordinated action, particularly within multi-level cooperative systems.

2.8 Systems Thinking and Service Design as Adaptive Approaches to Organizational Design

The growing recognition of complexity in organizational environments has led to the increasing adoption of systems thinking as a key perspective for understanding organizational dynamics. Rather than viewing organizations as bounded and internally controllable entities, systems thinking emphasizes the role of feedback processes, interdependencies, and learning in shaping organizational behavior over time (Senge, 1990). In this view, organizations evolve through the

continuous interaction between actions and their consequences, rather than through linear and predictable cause-and-effect relationships.

This perspective challenges traditional approaches to management and design, which often rely on assumptions of stability, predictability, and centralized control. In complex environments, however, organizational outcomes are shaped by non-linear dynamics, distributed agency, and evolving patterns of interaction (Stacey, 2001; Snowden & Boone, 2007). As a result, effective organizational action depends not only on planning, but on the capacity to navigate uncertainty and adapt to emerging conditions.

A central concept within systems thinking is the role of feedback loops in driving system behavior. As described by Senge (1990), reinforcing and balancing feedback processes influence how organizations grow, stabilize, or transform over time. These feedback mechanisms highlight that change is not a discrete event, but an ongoing process shaped by cumulative interactions and adjustments.

These insights have significant implications for organizational design. Rather than focusing exclusively on formal structures and hierarchies, design must be understood as the configuration of interactions, relationships, and coordination mechanisms that enable organizations to function within complex and evolving systems. This perspective aligns with more dynamic views of organizing, in which structures emerge from ongoing processes of interaction and sensemaking (Weick, 1979; Orlikowski, 2002).

Within this context, service design emerges as a complementary approach that operationalizes many of the principles of systems thinking in practice. While systems thinking provides a lens for understanding complexity, service design offers a set of methods and tools for intervening in complex systems by shaping how actors interact, coordinate, and co-create value over time (Kimbell, 2011; Sangiorgi, 2011).

Service design emphasizes the structuring of interactions across multiple touchpoints, the orchestration of processes over time, and the alignment of stakeholder experiences within a system. Importantly, it operates through iterative and participatory processes, engaging multiple actors in the co-creation and

continuous refinement of services (Stickdorn et al., 2018; Sanders & Stappers, 2008; da Fontoura Vieira et al., 2025). In doing so, it enables organizations to move beyond static solutions toward adaptive and evolving configurations.

From this perspective, design can be understood as a strategic capability for navigating complexity, enabling organizations to structure processes of interaction, learning, and adaptation over time (Boland & Collopy, 2004; Manzini, 2015). Rather than producing fixed outcomes, design shapes the conditions under which organizational practices can evolve.

These insights have direct implications for evaluation systems. If organizations operate within complex and dynamic environments, evaluation cannot be treated as an external or episodic activity. Instead, we argue that evaluation must be embedded within the systems it seeks to influence, functioning as an integral component of ongoing processes of interaction, feedback, and learning (Preskill & Boyle, 2008).

By integrating systems thinking and service design, this study advances a perspective in which evaluation systems can be conceived not merely as instruments of measurement, but as mechanisms of systemic intervention. This combined lens enables the reconceptualization of initiatives such as the GEP as forms of organizational design operating at the ecosystem level, structuring interactions, enabling coordination, and supporting the continuous evolution of capabilities within complex cooperative systems.

2.9 Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework

A central tension consistently identified across the literature reviewed in this chapter lies in the gap between knowing and becoming: that is, between the generation of diagnostic knowledge and the development of the capabilities required to translate that knowledge into sustained organizational change. This tension is consistently identified across multiple streams of literature, including evaluation studies, organizational learning, service ecosystems, social innovation, ESG, and design, each of which highlights different dimensions of this structural limitation.

The theoretical framework developed in this chapter draws on five distinct but complementary bodies of literature, which are integrated around a common analytical concern: understanding why the gap between knowing and becoming persists in complex, purpose-driven organizational systems, and what conditions are required to close it. Rather than treating these frameworks as parallel contributions of equal weight, the study positions service ecosystem theory as the primary analytical frame. The cooperative credit system is conceptualized as a multi-actor service ecosystem governed by institutional arrangements, in which value is co-created through distributed processes of resource integration rather than controlled by any single organization. This framing establishes the scope and logic of the analysis: outcomes depend on coordination across levels, and evaluation must therefore be understood systemically rather than organizationally.

Within this primary frame, the remaining theoretical perspectives function as complementary lenses that illuminate different dimensions of the central problem. Organizational learning theory, particularly the work of Argyris and Schön, Crossan and colleagues, and Garvin, explains why the gap between diagnostic visibility and adaptive reinforcement persists: learning is not automatic, but mediated by governance routines, defensive patterns, and the absence of structured retention mechanisms. Dynamic capabilities and absorptive capacity theory explain what consolidation actually requires: sustained, iterative investment in the ability to assimilate, transform, and apply knowledge over time, rather than isolated evaluative inputs.

Adaptive systems theory provides the evolutionary logic underpinning the redesign proposed in Chapter 6: effective systems must not only generate variation through assessment, but also support selection and institutionalize retention through structured reinforcement. Finally, institutional theory, drawing on Meyer and Rowan, DiMaggio and Powell, and Ostrom, explains the normative dimension of the problem: how shared values and cooperative principles achieve

wide discursive adoption without being systematically embedded in operational routines, and what design conditions are required to bridge that gap. Together, these frameworks converge on the same structural conclusion: that the primary challenge facing purpose-driven ecosystems is not the absence of intent, but the absence of institutional mechanisms capable of translating intent into durable and scalable adaptive capabilities.

Within the evaluation literature, there has been a shift from measurement-oriented approaches toward perspectives that emphasize learning and adaptation, particularly through frameworks such as developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011; Preskill & Torres, 1999). However, these approaches often assume that the generation of insights will naturally lead to changes in organizational behavior. In contrast, the organizational learning literature demonstrates that learning is not automatic, but mediated by deeply embedded routines and cognitive structures. Argyris and Schön (1978) show that meaningful change requires double-loop learning, in which underlying assumptions and norms are questioned, a process that remains difficult to achieve in practice.

This challenge is further reinforced by the literature on capability development. The concept of absorptive capacity highlights that organizations must not only acquire knowledge, but also assimilate, transform, and apply it effectively (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Similarly, the dynamic capabilities perspective emphasizes the need to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to changing environments (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). These processes require sustained and iterative investment over time, rather than isolated interventions.

From the perspective of service ecosystems, value creation is understood as a distributed and relational process, emerging from the integration of resources across multiple actors within a system (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2013). In such contexts, organizational outcomes are not solely determined at the level of individual organizations, but arise from patterns of interaction and coordination. While this implication is not always explicitly addressed in the evaluation literature, it follows that generating insights at the organizational level

does not guarantee systemic change, as the enactment of such insights depends on broader processes of alignment and resource integration across actors.

Research on social innovation highlights the need for organizations to align their practices with broader societal and environmental objectives, particularly in contexts where economic and social value creation are increasingly interconnected (Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010). However, it also highlights that many initiatives remain localized or limited in scale, failing to achieve broader systemic transformation (Westley et al., 2014). In parallel, ESG frameworks contribute to the institutionalization of sustainability through standardized metrics and reporting mechanisms (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019), but may also reinforce logics of measurement and compliance that do not necessarily translate into substantive organizational change (Arvidsson & Dumay, 2021). This challenge is particularly evident in the context of innovation with purpose, where the gap between normative alignment and operational enactment constitutes a central organizational challenge (Oliveira Buta et al., 2021). Together, these perspectives suggest that while purpose and sustainability are increasingly embedded in organizational discourse, their operationalization remains a persistent challenge.

This convergence of perspectives reveals a structural limitation: the growing sophistication of evaluation and sustainability frameworks is not matched by an equivalent capacity to support capability development and coordinated action. This limitation is particularly salient in cooperative financial systems, where strong normative alignment with social purpose coexists with significant diversity in organizational capabilities and operational contexts. In such settings, the challenge is not only to define and measure purpose, but to coordinate its enactment across a distributed and multi-level system.

To address this limitation, systems thinking and service design offer complementary contributions. Systems thinking provides a lens for understanding complexity, interdependence, and feedback processes within organizational and ecosystem dynamics (Senge, 1990; Stacey, 2001). Service design, in turn, offers approaches for structuring interactions, orchestrating processes, and enabling coordination among actors through iterative and participatory mechanisms

(Kimbell, 2011; Sangiorgi, 2011). Together, they enable a shift from viewing organizations as static entities to understanding them as dynamic configurations shaped through ongoing processes of interaction and design.

Building on these perspectives, evaluation can be reconceptualized not merely as a tool for assessment, but as an infrastructure that shapes how organizations engage with information, coordinate actions, and develop capabilities over time. Rather than producing episodic feedback, evaluation systems can be designed to embed continuous learning processes, facilitate resource integration, and support alignment across actors within a service ecosystem.

This study builds on this integrated theoretical foundation to argue that evaluation systems and specifically the GEP can be repositioned and redesigned to function as adaptive service infrastructures. In this role, evaluation moves beyond diagnostic visibility to actively support the development of capabilities, the coordination of distributed actors, and the sustained enactment of purpose within cooperative financial systems.

For the Cooperatives

Chapter 2 is the part of the thesis where it explains what other researchers have already figured out, and why their work matters for the question. Think of it as assembling the toolbox before starting the job.

Here is what the toolbox contains, in plain language: Cooperatives are unusual organizations. They are not just banks with a social conscience. They are structurally different: owned by their members, governed democratically, and accountable to a community rather than to shareholders. This creates both a strength and a tension. The strength is purpose. The tension is that purpose does not run itself. You need institutional conditions to make it real, and those conditions require deliberate investment.

Measuring is not the same as learning. Researchers have known this for decades. When an organization receives a report showing where it is strong and where it is weak, that is awareness. Awareness is necessary but not sufficient. What transforms awareness into change is a structured process of reflection, experimentation, and adjustment over time. Most evaluation systems stop at awareness. This thesis asks what comes next.

No cooperative is an island. Value in cooperative systems is not created by one organization alone. It emerges from the relationships between cooperatives, between cooperatives and their members, between systems and federations. This means that if you want to improve the ecosystem, you cannot just work on individual cooperatives in isolation. You need to design for the whole network.

Talking about sustainability and doing sustainability are two different things. ESG frameworks and cooperative principles give organizations a shared language for purpose. That shared language is genuinely valuable. But language is not the same as capability. Many organizations can articulate what they stand for long before they can operationalize it consistently. The gap between the two is precisely what this thesis calls the sustainability translation gap.

Design can help. Systems thinking and service design offer something that most management frameworks don't: tools for working with complexity, for structuring interactions between people and organizations, and for prototyping change before committing to it. These are not just academic ideas. They are practical approaches that can inform how the GEP evolves.

The synthesis of all these ideas is this: across every body of literature reviewed in this chapter, the same structural problem appears in different forms. Organizations can know exactly what needs to change and still not change it. The knowledge exists. The intent exists. What is missing is the institutional architecture that connects knowing to becoming. That is the problem this thesis is designed to address.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Epistemological Positioning

3.2 Research Strategy: Embedded Case Study in a Service Ecosystem

3.3 Data Sources and Empirical Context

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

3.5 Analytical Strategy: Systemic Pattern Identification and Capability Analysis

3.6 Rigor and Quality Criteria

3.7 Ethical Considerations and Data Access

3.8 Methodological Limitations

3.1 Research Design and Epistemological Positioning

Before elaborating on each source, it is important to distinguish between two instruments that share a similar name but serve distinct functions within this study. The cooperative feedback surveys, structured questionnaires collected from participating cooperatives at the end of each GEP cycle, were not used as direct data sources for the empirical analysis presented in this thesis. Rather, they constitute an institutional learning instrument through which the program collects participant perceptions and uses them to inform iterative redesign decisions, as discussed in Chapter 6. The feedback reports, by contrast, refer to the 56 analytical documents produced by GEP analysts, including the researcher, synthesizing evaluation outcomes per cooperative. These reports constitute one of the four primary data sources of this study and are described in detail below.

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design aimed at understanding how evaluation systems operate within complex service ecosystems and how they shape organizational practices, learning processes, and capability development. Rather than seeking to establish causal relationships or test predefined hypotheses, the research is oriented toward generating an in-depth and contextually grounded understanding of these dynamics. In particular, it recognizes that the patterns identified within the Brazilian credit cooperative system are shaped by specific institutional, organizational, and cultural conditions, and may not be directly generalizable to other contexts.

From an epistemological perspective, the study is grounded in an interpretivist stance, which assumes that organizational realities are socially constructed and continuously shaped through interactions among actors, institutional arrangements, and practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984). In this view, evaluation systems are not neutral or purely technical instruments, but configurations that structure how organizations interpret information, coordinate action, and engage in processes of reflection and change. This perspective is particularly appropriate given the focus of the study on the GEP as both an evaluative structure and a reflective journey embedded within a cooperative ecosystem.

This interpretive orientation is directly aligned with the nature of the research problem, which concerns the gap between diagnostic awareness and capability development in complex, multi-actor environments. Such dynamics involve distributed interactions, evolving practices, and context-dependent processes that cannot be adequately captured through approaches focused solely on measurement or variable-based analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Instead, they require analytical frameworks capable of identifying patterns, relationships, and processes unfolding across multiple levels of the system.

Accordingly, the research design prioritizes depth over breadth, focusing on the detailed examination of processes, patterns, and relationships within a specific empirical setting. The Brazilian credit cooperative system, and more specifically the application of the GEP within this ecosystem, provides a rich context in which to explore these dynamics. This setting enables the analysis of how evaluation systems operate not only as tools for assessment, but as mechanisms that shape organizational behavior, reveal systemic patterns, and influence the development of capabilities over time.

Finally, the study adopts a design-oriented analytical perspective, drawing on principles from Design Science Research (Hevner et al., 2004). Following the prescriptive mode of Design Science Research, the study develops a conceptual artifact, a redesigned evaluative framework, grounded in empirical evidence and theoretical principles, rather than implementing and testing it in practice. In this sense, evaluation systems are approached not only as objects of analysis, but as artifacts that can be conceptually reconfigured to better support learning, coordination, and adaptive capability development. The research is thus positioned at the intersection of analysis and design, contributing both to the understanding of evaluation systems and to their potential evolution within cooperative service ecosystems.

3.2 Research Strategy: Embedded Case Study in a Service Ecosystem

This study adopts an embedded case study strategy to examine how evaluation systems operate within a complex cooperative service ecosystem. A case study approach is adopted to examine phenomena as they unfold within their natural

organizational contexts, particularly in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are deeply interconnected (Yin, 2018). In this research, the phenomenon of interest, the operation and effects of evaluation systems, is inseparable from the dynamics of the Brazilian credit cooperative system, making a case-based approach both suitable and necessary.

The case under investigation is the GEP as an evaluative structure implemented within the Brazilian credit cooperative ecosystem. Rather than being treated as an isolated tool, the GEP is understood as part of a broader system of interactions involving cooperatives, central organizations, institutional actors, and evaluative processes. This systemic understanding necessitates an embedded design capable of capturing interactions across multiple organizational levels and actors within the ecosystem (Yin, 2018), aligning with the service ecosystems perspective adopted in this study.

The study follows an embedded case study design, in which the GEP constitutes the overarching case, and individual credit cooperatives represent embedded units of analysis. These cooperatives participate in the evaluation process and generate data through their engagement with the GEP, providing multiple points of observation within the same systemic context. The empirical base of the study includes dozens of cooperatives participating in the RECIP evaluation cycle, reflected in a broad set of feedback reports and related materials. This design enables the examination of both within-unit dynamics: how evaluation processes unfold within individual organizations, and cross-unit patterns, how similar dynamics emerge across different cooperatives within the ecosystem.

The use of multiple embedded units strengthens the analytical depth of the study by enabling the identification of recurring patterns, variations, and systemic tensions across organizations. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study seeks analytical generalization, in which findings contribute to the refinement of theoretical understanding regarding the role of evaluation systems in supporting learning and capability development (Yin, 2018). In this sense, the embedded case study design supports the identification of mechanisms and

relationships that extend beyond individual cases while remaining grounded in empirical evidence.

This strategy is particularly suited to the research problem addressed in this thesis, which concerns the gap between diagnostic awareness and capability development in complex, multi-actor environments. By examining multiple cooperatives within a shared evaluative framework, the study captures how this gap manifests across different organizational contexts, while cross-unit analysis enables the identification of systemic patterns that are not visible at the level of individual organizations. The design is further supported by the use of multiple sources of evidence — including evaluation reports, national panoramas, and stakeholder interactions — enabling triangulation and reinforcing the robustness of the findings. Together, this approach provides a nuanced understanding of how evaluation systems operate both locally and systemically, forming the empirical foundation for the analytical and design-oriented contributions developed in subsequent chapters.

3.3 Data Sources and Empirical Context

This study draws on multiple sources of empirical evidence to examine the operation of the GEP within the Brazilian credit cooperative system. The empirical context is constituted by the application of the GEP across a set of participating cooperatives within a RECIP evaluation cycle, providing a structured and comparable basis for analysis. While the broader institutional context of the RECIP initiative and the GEP has been introduced in Chapter 1, this section focuses specifically on the empirical materials through which the case study is operationalized.

The primary data source consists of 56 feedback reports generated through the application of the GEP across participating credit cooperatives. These reports are produced as part of the evaluation process and provide detailed assessments across multiple analytical dimensions, including participatory practices, collaborative dynamics, capability development, green finance, and ESG-related initiatives. Each report reflects the outcomes of a structured process involving

self-assessment, evidence submission, and evaluative feedback, offering rich insights into organizational practices and varying levels of maturity.

In addition to the feedback reports, the study incorporates RECIP national panoramas, which synthesize aggregated results and patterns observed across the participating cooperatives. These panoramas provide a system-level perspective, enabling the identification of recurring trends, cross-organizational dynamics, and structural characteristics of the cooperative ecosystem. As such, they complement the granular insights derived from individual reports with a broader analytical lens.

A third source of data consists of the GEP Dialogues, structured capacity-building sessions conducted as part of the evaluative journey, in which cooperatives engage with content related to the five GEP dimensions. These sessions function as moments of institutional learning and reflection, enabling participants to deepen their understanding of innovation with purpose and the evaluative criteria applied across dimensions. For this study, the dialogues provide contextual evidence of how cooperatives interpret and engage with the themes of the evaluation process, complementing the analytical perspective derived from the feedback reports.

A fourth source of data consists of semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher with analysts directly involved in the GEP process at Fenasbac. These interviews were used to deepen the interpretation of patterns identified in the documentary data, providing additional context regarding how evaluation practices are designed, operationalized, and experienced within the system. Rather than serving as a means of validation, the interviews contribute to the interpretive richness of the analysis, offering an informed institutional perspective on the dynamics and operational challenges of the GEP.

The combination of these data sources enables triangulation, strengthening the credibility and robustness of the findings. Feedback reports provide detailed organizational-level evidence, panoramas offer system-level aggregation, dialogues capture interactional and learning dynamics, and interviews contribute interpretive depth. Together, these sources support a comprehensive

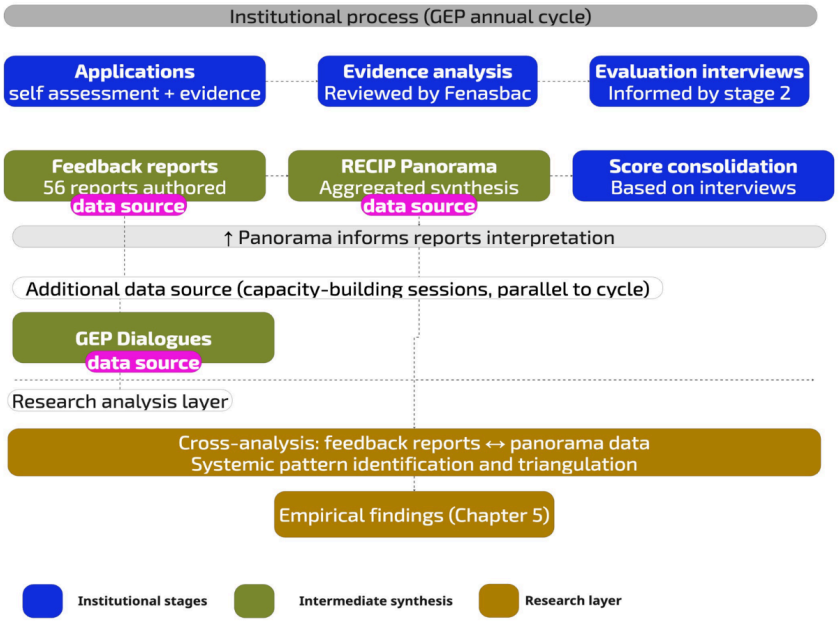
understanding of how evaluation systems operate within a complex, multi-actor cooperative ecosystem, forming the empirical foundation for the analytical strategy developed in the following sections.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process for this study was based on the systematic compilation and organization of documentary and qualitative materials generated through the application of the GEP within the Brazilian credit cooperative system. Rather than involving primary data collection in the form of field interventions, the study relies on materials produced as part of the evaluative and institutional processes associated with the GEP.

The data collection process unfolded sequentially across stages that are both institutionally structured and analytically cumulative. In the first stage, cooperatives submitted their self-assessments and supporting evidence, which were systematically analyzed prior to the evaluation interviews. This preliminary analysis structured the interpretive lens brought into each interview, ensuring that the dialogical interactions were grounded in documented organizational practices rather than self-reported accounts alone. Following the interviews, scores were consolidated and the RECIP national panorama was produced, synthesizing aggregated patterns across cooperatives. This panorama was therefore not collected as an independent data source, but generated at an intermediate stage that integrated insights from both the evidence analysis and the interviews. The feedback reports were subsequently authored with reference to this broader systemic picture, embedding organizational-level assessments within an ecosystem-level understanding. As a final analytical layer, this study examined the relationships between the feedback reports and the panorama data, treating this cross-referencing as a means of triangulation and systemic pattern identification.

Figure 3.1 — Data collection process and analytical stages



The primary dataset consists of 56 feedback reports generated during a RECIP evaluation cycle. These reports were produced through institutional collaboration with Fenasbac and accessed for research purposes under the same institutional arrangement. All reports were compiled into a structured database, enabling systematic comparison across cooperatives and analytical dimensions. The dataset corresponds to the full set of participating cooperatives within the cycle, rather than a sampled subset, reinforcing its comprehensiveness.

In addition to the feedback reports, RECIP national panoramas were collected as complementary sources of aggregated data. These documents were obtained from institutional records and include synthesized analyses of patterns observed across cooperatives. Their inclusion supports the identification of system-level dynamics and provides a broader contextual layer to the analysis.

Data from the GEP Dialogues were incorporated through materials and records associated with the capacity-building sessions conducted during the evaluation process. These materials include presentations, discussion prompts, and documented reflections generated during the sessions. They serve primarily as contextual evidence, enriching the interpretation of patterns identified through the feedback reports.

It is important to clarify the nature of the interview data present in this study. The 56 interviews analyzed were conducted by the researcher in the capacity of GEP analyst rather than as an external investigator, constituting integral components of the evaluative process itself. Following each interview, the researcher participated in informal analytical debriefs with fellow GEP analysts, during which initial interpretations and emerging observations were shared and compared. While not constituting a formal data source, these exchanges contributed to the interpretive process by providing a collegial check on the researcher's readings — a relevant consideration given the dual role of analyst and researcher that is further addressed in Section 3.7.

A total of 56 validation interviews were conducted as part of the GEP evaluative process itself, involving analysts from Fenasbac and representatives from each

participating cooperative. The researcher participated in these interviews in the capacity of GEP analyst and subsequently authored all 56 feedback reports, providing a level of direct and sustained engagement with the empirical material that constitutes a form of privileged analytical access. This dual position — as both researcher and institutional actor — is acknowledged as a relevant methodological consideration and is addressed further in Section 3.7, where the researcher's positionality and its implications for data interpretation are discussed.

The data collection process involved iterative organization and familiarization with the material, including repeated reading of reports, cross-referencing of sources, and the development of an initial analytical structure aligned with the five GEP dimensions. This process enabled the preparation of the dataset for subsequent analysis, ensuring consistency and comparability across sources, while preserving the contextual richness of each cooperative's experience.

3.5 Analytical Strategy: Systemic Pattern Identification and Capability Analysis

Building on the structured dataset composed of 56 feedback reports, complemented by RECIP national panoramas, GEP Dialogues, and the researcher's direct participation in the evaluation interviews and authorship of all 56 feedback reports, the analytical strategy adopted in this study seeks to identify systemic patterns and capability dynamics emerging from the application of the GEP within the Brazilian credit cooperative ecosystem.

Rather than focusing on isolated cases or individual organizational performance, the analysis is oriented toward uncovering recurrent structures, relationships, and tensions that characterize how innovation with purpose is operationalized across the system. This approach is consistent with the embedded case study design, in which individual cooperatives constitute units of analysis within a broader systemic context.

The analysis is guided by an abductive approach, as described by Timmermans and Tavory (2012), which involves an ongoing dialogue between empirical observations and theoretical frameworks. Rather than deriving patterns directly from the data or strictly applying predefined theories, the analysis develops through iterative

refinement, in which emerging insights are continuously confronted with and informed by existing concepts.

The first stage of the analysis consists of within-unit examination of the 56 feedback reports. This stage involved iterative interpretive analysis of the material, focusing on how each cooperative articulates and operationalizes innovation practices across the five analytical dimensions of the GEP. Attention was given to organizational practices, capability configurations, and recurring challenges, as well as to how cooperatives interpret evaluative criteria and structure their responses. Given the researcher's authorship of all reports and direct involvement in the evaluation process, this stage benefits from a high degree of contextual familiarity, enabling a nuanced interpretation of both explicit and implicit patterns within each unit.

The second stage involves cross-unit analysis, through which patterns are identified across cooperatives. Consistent with the embedded case study design, this stage compares findings across the 56 reports in order to uncover recurrent dynamics, shared constraints, and variations in capability development. This comparative process enables the identification of systemic regularities that transcend individual organizations, revealing how the cooperative ecosystem structures and constrains the operationalization of innovation with purpose.

Building on these stages, the analysis advances toward systemic pattern identification, moving beyond descriptive aggregation toward the identification of relational and interdependent dynamics across dimensions. Rather than treating the five GEP dimensions as independent categories, the analysis examines how they interact in practice, identifying asymmetries, complementarities, and structural imbalances. This relational perspective allows the identification of patterns that reflect deeper systemic conditions, rather than isolated performance outcomes.

To support this process, the study adopts a capability-oriented analytical lens, informed by the literature on organizational learning, absorptive capacity, and dynamic capabilities. From this perspective, capability gaps are understood not merely as deficiencies in performance, but as structural limitations in how

organizations learn, coordinate, and integrate resources over time. Particular attention is given to the gap between diagnostic awareness and capability development, directly addressing the central problem identified in this study.

The analysis is further strengthened through methodological triangulation across multiple data sources. Feedback reports provide detailed organizational-level evidence, RECIP national panoramas support system-level pattern identification, GEP Dialogues offer insights into interactional and learning dynamics, and the researcher's involvement in the evaluation process contributes to interpretive depth and contextual understanding. This combination enables a multi-level analysis that captures both structural patterns and processual dynamics within the ecosystem.

Finally, the analytical strategy is oriented not only toward explanation, but also toward conceptual and design-oriented development. The identification of systemic patterns and capability gaps provides the empirical and analytical foundation for the reconceptualization of evaluation systems as adaptive service infrastructures. In this sense, the analysis operates at the intersection of interpretation and prescription, generating insights that inform the redesign of the GEP presented in Chapter 6.

3.6 Rigor and Quality Criteria

Given the interpretive and qualitative nature of this study, rigor is addressed through criteria aligned with naturalistic inquiry, emphasizing credibility, transferability, dependability, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria provide an alternative to positivist notions of validity and reliability, ensuring that the study produces trustworthy and analytically robust insights.

Credibility is supported through prolonged engagement with the empirical material and the researcher's direct involvement in the GEP evaluation process. The authorship of all 56 feedback reports and participation in the evaluation interviews provided sustained exposure to the field, enabling a deep and contextually informed understanding of organizational practices and dynamics. In addition, methodological triangulation across multiple data sources — including feedback

reports, RECIP national panoramas, GEP Dialogues, and interviews — strengthens the credibility of the findings by allowing patterns to be examined from different analytical perspectives.

Transferability is addressed through a thick description of the empirical context, including the structure of the Brazilian credit cooperative system and the design and operation of the GEP. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study provides sufficient contextual detail to enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts. The focus on systemic patterns and capability dynamics further supports analytical generalization, allowing insights to inform broader theoretical discussions on evaluation systems and service ecosystems.

Dependability is ensured through the transparency and consistency of the research process. The study provides a clear account of data sources, data collection procedures, and analytical steps, enabling the logic of the research to be followed and assessed. The use of a structured analytical framework, based on the five GEP dimensions and informed by theoretical constructs from Chapter 2, contributes to the consistency of the analysis across units and stages.

Reflexivity is a central component of rigor in this study, given the researcher's dual role as both analyst within the GEP process and academic investigator. This positionality provides privileged access to the empirical context, but also requires critical reflection on potential biases and assumptions. Rather than being treated as a limitation, this dual position is explicitly acknowledged and managed through continuous reflexive engagement, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in empirical material while remaining analytically critical. This aspect is further discussed in Section 3.7.

Together, these criteria ensure that the study's findings are not only analytically rigorous but also transparently grounded, supporting their contribution to both theoretical discussions and design-oriented practice within cooperative service ecosystems.

3.7 Ethical Considerations and Data Access

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles related to confidentiality, responsible data use, and transparency of the research process. The empirical material analyzed, including feedback reports, RECIP national panoramas, GEP Dialogues, and evaluation interviews, was accessed through institutional collaboration with Fenasbac, ensuring authorized use for academic research purposes. Access to the empirical materials was formally authorized by Fenasbac as part of an institutional research collaboration, with the understanding that findings would be used for academic purposes and that individual cooperatives would remain anonymous throughout.

All data were treated with confidentiality, and individual cooperatives are not identified in the analysis. The study does not aim to evaluate or compare the performance of specific organizations, but rather to identify systemic patterns and dynamics across the cooperative ecosystem. This approach minimizes potential risks associated with reputational exposure and reinforces the analytical focus of the research.

A central ethical and methodological consideration in this study relates to the researcher's positionality. The researcher was directly involved in the GEP process as an analyst, participating in evaluation interviews and authoring all 56 feedback reports that constitute the primary dataset of the study. This dual role provides a form of privileged access to the empirical context, enabling a deep and contextually informed understanding of organizational practices, evaluation dynamics, and institutional processes.

At the same time, this proximity to the field introduces potential risks related to bias, selective interpretation, and over-identification with institutional perspectives. These risks are addressed through explicit reflexive practices throughout the research process. Rather than assuming neutrality, the study acknowledges the researcher's position as situated within the field and adopts a critical stance toward both empirical material and institutional assumptions.

This reflexive approach involves continuous interrogation of interpretations, cross-referencing of data sources, and the use of theoretical frameworks to

challenge and structure empirical insights. The combination of multiple data sources and the adoption of an abductive analytical logic further contribute to mitigating the risks associated with positionality, ensuring that findings are grounded in systematic analysis rather than individual perspective.

Finally, the researcher's dual role is not treated solely as a limitation, but also as a source of analytical depth. The sustained engagement with the GEP process allows access to dimensions of organizational practice and interaction that would be difficult to capture through external observation alone.

In practice, this reflexive management involved a deliberate analytical separation between the interpretive work performed during the evaluation process, aimed at providing developmental feedback to cooperatives, and the analytical work performed for this study, aimed at identifying systemic patterns across the dataset. To support this separation, the academic analysis was grounded primarily in the validated dimension-level scores and cross-dimensional statistical patterns, which constitute an independent layer of evidence distinct from the narrative interpretations embedded in the feedback reports themselves.

The RECIP national panoramas and GEP Dialogues served as additional verification anchors, enabling the researcher to contrast individual-report-level interpretations against system-level aggregations produced through separate institutional processes. Where convergence was observed across these sources, confidence in the identified patterns was strengthened; where divergence emerged, interpretations were revisited and qualified accordingly. By explicitly acknowledging and critically managing this positionality, the study seeks to balance proximity and analytical distance, ensuring both depth and rigor in the interpretation of findings.

3.8 Methodological Limitations

This study presents several methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research is based on a single empirical context, the Brazilian credit cooperative system, which limits the direct transferability of findings to other institutional settings. While the study aims for analytical rather than statistical generalization, the specific characteristics of the

cooperative ecosystem and the GEP framework shape the conditions under which the observed patterns emerge.

Second, the study relies primarily on documentary data generated within the GEP evaluation process, including feedback reports, panoramas, and associated materials. Although these sources provide rich and structured insights, they are inherently shaped by the evaluative framework through which they are produced. As such, the analysis reflects both organizational practices and the lens of the evaluation system itself. This means that the patterns identified may partly reflect how the GEP frames and categorizes innovation practices, rather than solely how organizations experience them independently of the evaluation framework.

Third, the researcher's dual role as both analyst within the GEP process and academic investigator introduces potential risks related to bias and interpretive subjectivity. While this position provides privileged access and depth of understanding, it also requires careful reflexive management, as discussed in the previous sections.

Finally, the study does not include the implementation or empirical testing of the proposed redesign of the GEP. The design-oriented contribution developed in Chapter 6 is conceptual and grounded in empirical and theoretical insights, but its practical effectiveness remains to be validated in future research.

These limitations do not undermine the value of the study, but rather define the scope within which its contributions should be understood. They also point to opportunities for future research, particularly in applying and testing adaptive evaluation frameworks in different contexts and institutional settings.

For the Cooperatives

Chapter 3 explains how this research was done. In academic language, this is called methodology. In plain language, it is the answer to the question: how do

we know what we know? This matters because research is only as trustworthy as the way it was conducted. So here is the honest version of how this study worked.

The researcher was inside the process. This thesis was not written by someone who looked at cooperatives from the outside. The researcher is part of the Fenasbac team that runs the GEP, wrote the 56 feedback reports that form the core of the dataset, and conducted the validation interviews with cooperatives. This creates an unusual situation: the person analyzing the data also helped produce it.

This is both a strength and a risk. The strength is access and depth. No external researcher could have produced 56 nuanced feedback reports with the level of institutional knowledge required. The risk is that the interpretations could be influenced by the same perspective that shaped the evaluation in the first place. The thesis addresses this risk directly: by grounding the analysis in validated scores rather than narrative judgments, by cross-checking individual findings against national panoramas, and by being transparent about this dual role throughout.

The data comes from 56 cooperatives. These are real cooperatives that participated in the 2025 GEP evaluation cycle. Their names are anonymized in this thesis to protect their privacy, but their data, their self-assessments, their interviews, and the feedback they received form the empirical foundation of everything that follows in Chapters 5 and 6.

The analysis went back and forth between data and theory. This study did not start with a hypothesis and then look for evidence to confirm it. Instead, the researcher moved between the data and the literature repeatedly, letting patterns in the data suggest theoretical connections, and then returning to the data to test whether those connections held. Academics call this abductive

reasoning. In practice, it means the findings were genuinely discovered, not predetermined.

The study has real limits. This research covers one ecosystem, one country, one evaluation cycle. The patterns it identifies are real and empirically grounded, but they may not look exactly the same in other cooperative systems or other countries. The thesis is honest about this throughout, and Chapter 7 addresses it explicitly.

The most important thing to take from this chapter is this: the research was conducted with care, with transparency about its constraints, and with a genuine commitment to letting the evidence speak rather than confirming what was already believed.

CHAPTER 4 - GEP AS AN INSTITUTIONAL SERVICE SYSTEM: AN AS-IS MODEL

4.1 GEP as an Institutional Service

This chapter develops an analytical representation of the GEP as it currently operates, conceptualizing it as an institutional service within the Brazilian credit cooperative ecosystem. Rather than merely describing its components, the chapter reconstructs its structure, interactions, and dynamics, forming an AS-IS model that serves as the basis for the redesign proposed in Chapter 6.

In this context, the GEP can be understood not simply as an evaluation tool, but as an institutionalized service that structures how cooperatives engage with innovation with purpose. It provides a shared framework through which organizations assess their practices, generate knowledge about their activities, and interact with other actors in the ecosystem. As such, the GEP operates at the intersection of evaluation, learning, and coordination.

From a service ecosystem perspective, the GEP functions as a mechanism that enables resource integration among multiple actors, including cooperatives, evaluators, institutional coordinators, and the broader cooperative network (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2013). Through its processes and interactions, the GEP facilitates the circulation of knowledge, the alignment of expectations, and the articulation of practices across organizational and institutional levels.

This service is enacted through a series of structured interactions that extend beyond the application of a questionnaire. These include self-assessment processes within cooperatives, evaluation interviews, analytical feedback, and collective learning activities such as GEP Dialogues. Each of these elements contributes to shaping how the evaluation is experienced and how insights are generated and interpreted within the system.

At the same time, the GEP establishes a set of categories, criteria, and evaluative dimensions that frame how innovation with purpose is defined and assessed. In doing so, it does not merely observe organizational practices, but actively participates in their interpretation and, to some extent, their configuration. This reinforces its role as an institutional mechanism that both reflects and shapes the dynamics of the cooperative ecosystem.

In its current configuration, the GEP encompasses the full evaluative journey, while RECIP constitutes the recognition stage within this broader process. The distinction between the two is therefore functional rather than conceptual: RECIP represents the moment of visibility and acknowledgment, whereas the GEP structures the processes through which evaluation, reflection, and learning take place.

Understanding the GEP as an institutional service allows for a more precise analysis of its role within the ecosystem. It makes visible how evaluation is enacted through specific interactions, how different actors participate in and shape the process, and how insights are produced, interpreted, and circulated across organizational levels. This perspective enables the identification of structural patterns, coordination dynamics, and capability gaps that would remain obscured if the GEP were approached solely as a measurement instrument. These elements are examined in detail in the following sections.

4.2 Actors and Stakeholders

The operation of the GEP as an institutional service involves the participation of multiple actors who contribute, in different ways, to the evaluation process and to the broader dynamics of innovation with purpose within the cooperative ecosystem. Rather than being centralized within a single organizational unit, the GEP is enacted through a distributed configuration of stakeholders whose interactions shape how the evaluation unfolds in practice.

At the core of the process are the participating credit cooperatives, which constitute the primary units of analysis within the GEP. Within each cooperative, the evaluation is not conducted by a single individual, but typically involves multidisciplinary teams composed of representatives from different areas of the organization. These may include managers, technical staff, innovation leaders, and, in some cases, executive leadership such as directors or presidents. This internal configuration reflects the cross-functional nature of innovation with purpose and influences how the evaluation is interpreted and operationalized within each organization.

A second key group of actors consists of the GEP analysts affiliated with Fenasbac, who play a central role in mediating the evaluation process. These analysts are responsible for conducting evaluation interviews, interpreting the information provided by cooperatives, and producing the feedback reports that synthesize the results across the five analytical dimensions. In this role, analysts do not merely collect data, but actively shape the evaluative narrative, influencing how organizational practices are framed, categorized, and assessed.

In addition to analysts and cooperatives, institutional actors contribute to the design and governance of the GEP. These include Fenasbac, which coordinates the initiative and is responsible for its design, operation, and evolution; the Banco Central do Brasil, The Brazilian Central Bank,, which provides regulatory support and institutional legitimacy through its partnership with Fenasbac; and the GEP Consultative Council, composed of leaders and specialists from the cooperative sector, which offers strategic guidance and sector-level perspective.

At the system level, major cooperative networks, including Sicoob, Sicredi, Ailos, Unicred, Credisis, and Cresol, participate through their affiliated singular cooperatives, contributing to the breadth and diversity of the evaluation corpus (Fenasbac, 2026; OCB, 2019)

Another relevant set of stakeholders emerges through the GEP Dialogues, which involve participants from multiple cooperatives engaging collectively in capacity-building sessions. These interactions extend the scope of the evaluation beyond individual organizations, creating spaces for shared reflection, knowledge exchange, and the diffusion of practices across the cooperative network. In this sense, the dialogues contribute to the formation of relational ties and collective learning dynamics within the ecosystem.

These different actors are connected through a series of interactions that occur throughout the evaluative journey, forming a network of relationships that underpins the operation of the GEP. From a service ecosystem perspective, value is not created by any single actor, but emerges from the integration of resources, knowledge, and practices across this network (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). The roles of actors are therefore interdependent, and the effectiveness of the evaluation

process depends on how these interactions are coordinated and sustained over time.

Understanding the configuration of actors and stakeholders is essential for analyzing the GEP as an institutional service. It reveals that evaluation is not a neutral or purely technical process, but a socially constructed and relational activity shaped by the perspectives, roles, and interactions of those involved. This multi-actor configuration also highlights the distributed nature of capability development, reinforcing the need to examine not only individual organizational practices, but also the dynamics of coordination and learning across the ecosystem. These dynamics are further explored in the following sections through the analysis of dimensions, journeys, and service structures.

4.3 Analytical Dimensions of the GEP

The GEP is structured around five analytical dimensions that together define how innovation with purpose is assessed within the cooperative ecosystem. These dimensions provide a shared evaluative framework through which organizational practices are categorized, interpreted, and compared across cooperatives. At the same time, they operate not only as descriptive categories, but as analytical lenses that shape how innovation is understood and enacted within the system.

The five dimensions: participatory, collaborative, capacity development, green finance, and ESG; are formally defined within the GEP regulatory framework (Fenasbac, 2026) and reflect different but interconnected aspects of innovation with purpose. Each dimension captures a specific domain of organizational practice, while also contributing to a broader systemic understanding of how cooperatives integrate social, environmental, and economic objectives into their operations.

While these dimensions were introduced in Chapter 1 as components of the GEP framework, they are examined here from a different angle. Rather than functioning solely as evaluation categories, the dimensions operate as interpretive lenses; they do not merely describe what cooperatives do, but actively shape what becomes visible, comparable, and actionable within the evaluation process.

Understanding this constitutive role is essential before examining how the dimensions perform empirically in Chapter 5.

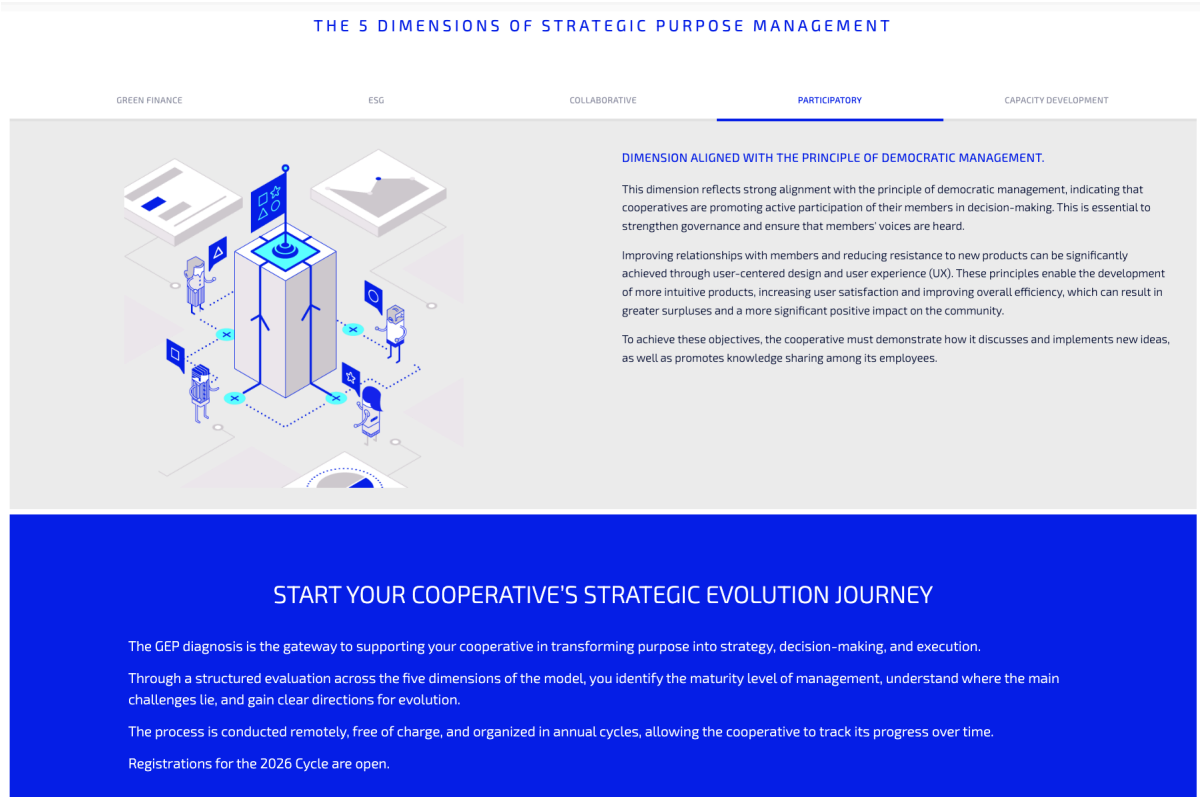


Figure 4.1. The five analytical dimensions of the GEP as presented in the program's official platform. Source: Fenasbac (2026). GEP — Gestão Estratégica de Propósito. Retrieved from https://gep.fenasbac.io/

The participatory dimension focuses on how cooperatives engage their members and internal stakeholders in decision-making processes related to innovation. It encompasses practices associated with democratic governance, user-centered approaches, and mechanisms that enable the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the design and implementation of initiatives. In this sense, it reflects the extent to which innovation processes are aligned with the cooperative principle of democratic participation.

The collaborative dimension addresses the relationships established between cooperatives and external actors, including other cooperatives, institutions, and ecosystem partners. It captures practices related to intercooperation, partnerships, and the co-creation of solutions across organizational boundaries.

This dimension highlights the extent to which innovation is developed through relational and network-based dynamics, rather than through isolated organizational efforts.

The capacity development dimension examines how cooperatives build and sustain the capabilities required to support innovation over time. It includes aspects such as training, knowledge management, internal structures, and the development of routines that enable learning and continuous improvement. This dimension is particularly relevant for understanding how innovation moves from isolated initiatives to sustained organizational practices.

The green finance dimension focuses on the incorporation of environmental considerations into financial products, services, and internal operations. It captures the extent to which cooperatives develop and implement initiatives aligned with environmental sustainability, including the promotion of green credit, internal environmental practices, and alignment with broader sustainability agendas.

Finally, the ESG dimension addresses the integration of environmental, social, and governance criteria into organizational strategies, processes, and reporting practices. It reflects how cooperatives align their activities with broader frameworks of accountability and sustainability, including the adoption of indicators, policies, and governance structures related to ESG principles.

While analytically distinct, these dimensions are inherently interdependent. Practices associated with one dimension often influence and depend on developments in others, reflecting the systemic nature of innovation with purpose. For example, collaborative initiatives may require specific organizational capabilities, while participatory processes can shape how ESG principles are interpreted and implemented within the organization. Similarly, the development of green finance initiatives often depends on both the internal capabilities to structure financial products and the external collaborations necessary to implement them effectively, illustrating how multiple dimensions converge in practice.

In this sense, the dimensions should not be understood as isolated categories, but as components of an integrated evaluative system that structures how innovation is observed and interpreted. They provide a common language through which different actors engage with the evaluation process, while also shaping the types of practices that become visible and valued within the system.

For the purposes of this study, these dimensions serve as the primary analytical structure through which empirical data is examined. They enable the identification of patterns within and across cooperatives, as well as the analysis of relationships between different domains of practice. The empirical findings presented in Chapter 5 are organized according to these dimensions, allowing for a systematic exploration of how innovation with purpose is operationalized within the cooperative ecosystem.

4.4 The Cooperative Journey

The operation of the GEP as an institutional service unfolds through a structured sequence of activities that together form what can be described as the cooperative journey. This journey represents the process through which participating cooperatives engage with the evaluation, from initial mobilization to recognition, encompassing multiple stages of interaction, reflection, and analysis.

The journey typically begins with an internal mobilization phase within each cooperative, in which a multidisciplinary team is formed to coordinate the evaluation process. This team is responsible for gathering information, engaging relevant organizational areas, and collectively responding to the GEP questionnaire. This stage is critical in shaping how the evaluation is approached, as it determines the degree of internal alignment and the diversity of perspectives incorporated into the process.

Following this initial phase, cooperatives engage in the self-assessment process, in which they provide structured responses across the five analytical dimensions of the GEP. This process requires the articulation of organizational practices, evidence, and examples that illustrate how innovation with purpose is operationalized within the cooperative. At this stage, the evaluation functions as a

mechanism for internal reflection, prompting organizations to examine their practices in a more systematic and integrated manner.

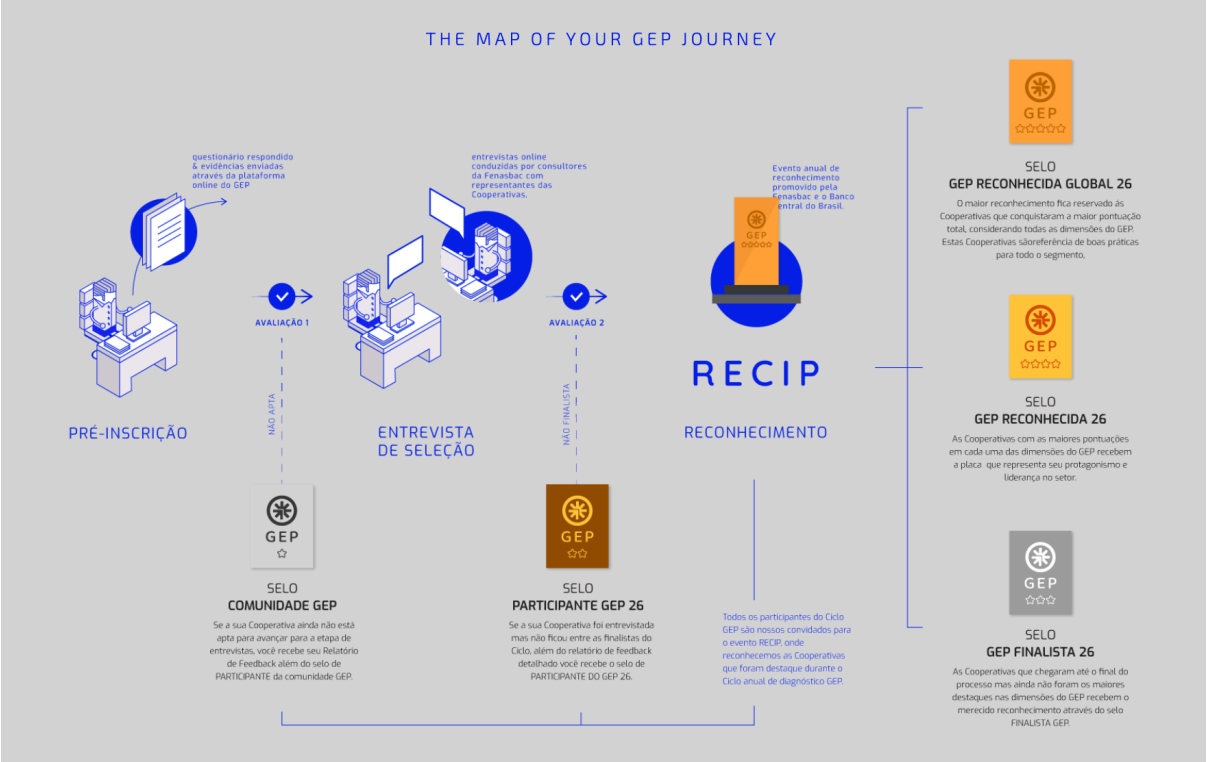


Figure 4.2. The Map of the GEP Journey, illustrating the sequential stages of cooperative participation and the associated recognition seals. Source: Fenasbac (2026). GEP — Gestão Estratégica de Propósito. Retrieved from https://gep.fenasbac.io/

The next stage involves evaluation interviews conducted by GEP analysts, in which the information provided by cooperatives is discussed, clarified, and further developed. These interviews constitute a central moment of interaction between cooperatives and the evaluative framework, as they allow for the interpretation and contextualization of practices. Through this interaction, the evaluation moves beyond a purely documentary exercise, becoming a dialogical process in which meanings are negotiated and refined.

Based on the information gathered through self-assessment and interviews, analysts produce feedback reports that synthesize the evaluation across dimensions. These reports provide a structured analysis of strengths, gaps, and

opportunities for development, offering cooperatives a consolidated view of their practices. At this stage, the GEP generates diagnostic visibility, making patterns and inconsistencies more explicit.

In parallel to these activities, cooperatives participate in the GEP Dialogues, which function as collective learning spaces within the ecosystem. These sessions provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, exposure to different practices, and engagement with the conceptual foundations of innovation with purpose. As such, they complement the evaluative process by reinforcing its learning dimension and fostering connections across organizations.

The journey culminates in the RECIP recognition stage, in which selected initiatives are acknowledged for their alignment with innovation with purpose. This moment provides visibility and symbolic reinforcement, highlighting examples of practice within the ecosystem. However, as discussed in previous chapters, recognition represents only one stage within the broader evaluative process structured by the GEP.

Taken together, these stages form a cyclical and iterative process rather than a strictly linear sequence. Insights generated through feedback and dialogue may influence subsequent cycles of evaluation, shaping how cooperatives approach innovation in the future.

Importantly, these stages do not always operate in an integrated manner. Reflection, interaction, diagnosis, and recognition are distinct functions that, in the current configuration of the GEP, may remain partially disconnected, a structural characteristic that is further examined in the empirical analysis of Chapter 5.

Understanding the GEP as a cooperative journey highlights that evaluation is enacted through temporally distributed interactions, rather than through a single moment of assessment. This perspective makes visible how different touchpoints contribute to the overall process, setting the foundation for a more detailed analysis of service interactions and artifacts in the following sections.

4.5 Touchpoints and Service Artifacts

The cooperative journey described in the previous section is enacted through a series of touchpoints and service artifacts that structure how actors interact with the GEP. These elements represent the concrete interfaces through which the evaluation process is experienced, shaping how information is generated, interpreted, and circulated within the cooperative ecosystem.

Touchpoints can be understood as the moments of interaction between actors and the GEP, including both organizational and interpersonal exchanges. These interactions occur at different stages of the journey and involve various configurations of participants, such as internal teams within cooperatives, GEP analysts, and institutional actors. Service artifacts, in turn, refer to the material and informational components that support these interactions, including documents, tools, templates, and reports that mediate the evaluation process.

One of the primary touchpoints is the internal mobilization process within cooperatives, which is supported by the GEP questionnaire as a central artifact. This instrument structures the initial engagement with the evaluation, guiding how organizations reflect on their practices across the five analytical dimensions. As an artifact, the questionnaire does not merely collect information, but frames how innovation with purpose is interpreted, influencing what becomes visible and how it is articulated.

A second key touchpoint consists of the evidence submission platform, through which cooperatives upload documentary materials that substantiate their self-assessed responses. This digital interface functions as a critical mediating artifact between the self-assessment and the evaluation interview, transforming qualitative judgments into documented and verifiable claims. The evidence submitted through this platform shapes the subsequent interview interaction, providing the material basis on which analyst interpretations are grounded.

A third key touchpoint is the evaluation interview, which constitutes a dialogical interaction between cooperatives and GEP analysts. This interaction is mediated

by both the questionnaire responses and the evidentiary materials submitted through the platform, as well as by the evaluative criteria embedded in the GEP framework. During these interviews, meanings are negotiated, practices are contextualized, and interpretations are refined, highlighting the role of interaction in shaping the outcomes of the evaluation.

The feedback report represents another central artifact within the system. Produced by analysts, it synthesizes the evaluation results into a structured narrative that identifies strengths, gaps, and opportunities across dimensions. As a service artifact, the report plays a dual role: it provides diagnostic visibility while also influencing how cooperatives interpret their own practices and potential pathways for development.

The GEP Dialogues constitute a collective touchpoint that extends the evaluation beyond individual organizations. These sessions are supported by artifacts such as presentations, frameworks, and discussion materials, which facilitate shared reflection and knowledge exchange. Through these interactions, the evaluation process becomes embedded within a broader learning environment, enabling the diffusion of practices and perspectives across the ecosystem.

Finally, the RECIP recognition stage can be understood as a symbolic touchpoint, supported by artifacts such as selection criteria, communication materials, and recognition events. This stage reinforces certain practices by making them visible and valued within the system, contributing to the construction of shared understandings of innovation with purpose.

Taken together, these touchpoints and artifacts form an interconnected system that structures how the GEP operates in practice. They do not function independently, but are linked through flows of information and interaction that span different stages of the cooperative journey.

Importantly, these elements not only support the evaluation process but also shape it. By defining how interactions occur and how information is structured, touchpoints and artifacts play an active and constitutive role in shaping what can be observed, how it is interpreted, and how it is acted upon. This highlights the

nature of the GEP as a service system that not only reflects organizational practices, but actively participates in their configuration.

Understanding these touchpoints and artifacts provides the foundation for mapping the GEP as a service system. In the following section, these elements are integrated into a service blueprint that makes explicit the relationships between actors, interactions, and processes across the evaluative journey.

4.6 Service Blueprint

Building on the previous sections, this study develops an original service blueprint to represent the GEP as a service system. Constructed by the researcher based on empirical engagement with the evaluation process — including participation in interviews and authorship of the 56 feedback reports — the blueprint maps the relationships between actors, interactions, and processes across the cooperative journey. It provides a structured visualization of how the evaluation is enacted in practice, integrating the configuration of stakeholders (Section 4.2), the sequence of activities (Section 4.4), and the touchpoints and artifacts that mediate interactions (Section 4.5).

The blueprint reveals a multi-layered service structure, distinguishing between frontstage interactions, where cooperatives directly engage with the evaluation process, and backstage and support processes, where analysts and institutional actors design, coordinate, and sustain the operation of the GEP. This layered configuration makes visible the distributed nature of the service, highlighting how evaluation is co-produced across different organizational levels within the cooperative ecosystem.

Figure 4.3 - Generic Structure for reading the AS-IS Service Blueprint

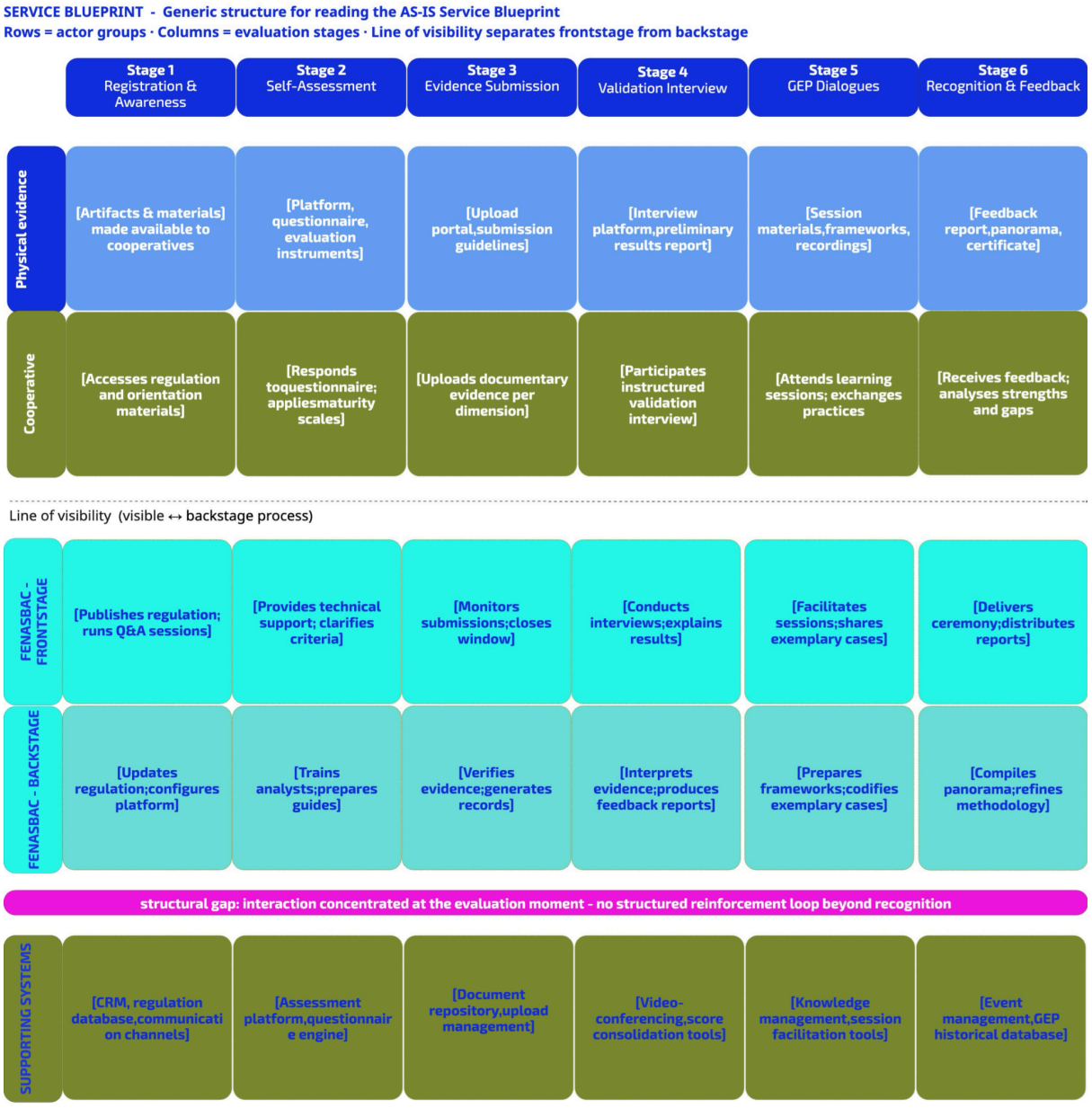


Figure 4.3 presents the generic structure of the blueprint for reference. The fully populated version, reflecting the AS-IS configuration of the GEP, is presented in Figure 4.4.

At the frontstage level, the journey unfolds through a sequence of touchpoints that include internal mobilization, self-assessment, evidence submission, evaluation interviews, participation in GEP Dialogues, and the RECIP recognition stage. These interactions represent the visible dimension of the service, in which cooperatives actively engage with the evaluation, articulate their practices, and respond to the requirements of the framework.

The blueprint also highlights the central role of backstage processes, which include the interpretation of evidence, the production of feedback reports, the consolidation of results, and the coordination of institutional activities such as communication, scheduling, and event organization. These processes are not directly visible to participating cooperatives, yet they are essential in shaping how evaluation outcomes are constructed and how the overall system operates.

In addition to these layers, the blueprint makes explicit the supporting infrastructure that sustains the GEP, including digital platforms, communication channels, documentation systems, and internal coordination mechanisms within Fenasbac. This infrastructure enables the continuity of the process across time, connecting different stages of the journey and supporting the flow of information between actors.

A key contribution of the blueprint is to reveal how the GEP operates as a temporally extended and institutionally coordinated process, rather than as a discrete evaluation event. The journey spans multiple phases over time, involving cycles of preparation, assessment, interpretation, feedback, and recognition, which together constitute the full evaluative experience within the cooperative system.

Importantly, the blueprint also makes visible a structural limitation in the current configuration of the GEP. While the system encompasses multiple functions — including reflection (self-assessment), interaction (interviews and dialogues), diagnosis (feedback reports), and recognition (RECIP) — these functions are distributed across different stages that are not always fully integrated. Transitions between stages often rely on handoffs rather than continuous feedback loops, a characteristic commonly identified in service design literature as a source of fragmentation and loss of value across service processes (Shostack, 1984; Bitner et al., 2008). As a result, insights generated in one phase are not systematically embedded into subsequent phases, limiting the continuity of learning across the evaluative journey.

This fragmentation helps explain the gap identified in previous chapters between diagnostic visibility and capability development. While the GEP is effective in

generating structured insights and promoting reflection, its current service architecture does not fully support the continuous translation of these insights into sustained organizational practices over time.

By making these dynamics explicit, the service blueprint functions not only as a descriptive representation of the GEP, but as an analytical tool for identifying points of disconnection, coordination challenges, and opportunities for redesign. It provides the foundation for the proposal developed in Chapter 6, where the GEP is reconceptualized as an adaptive service infrastructure capable of integrating evaluation, learning, and capability development across the cooperative ecosystem.

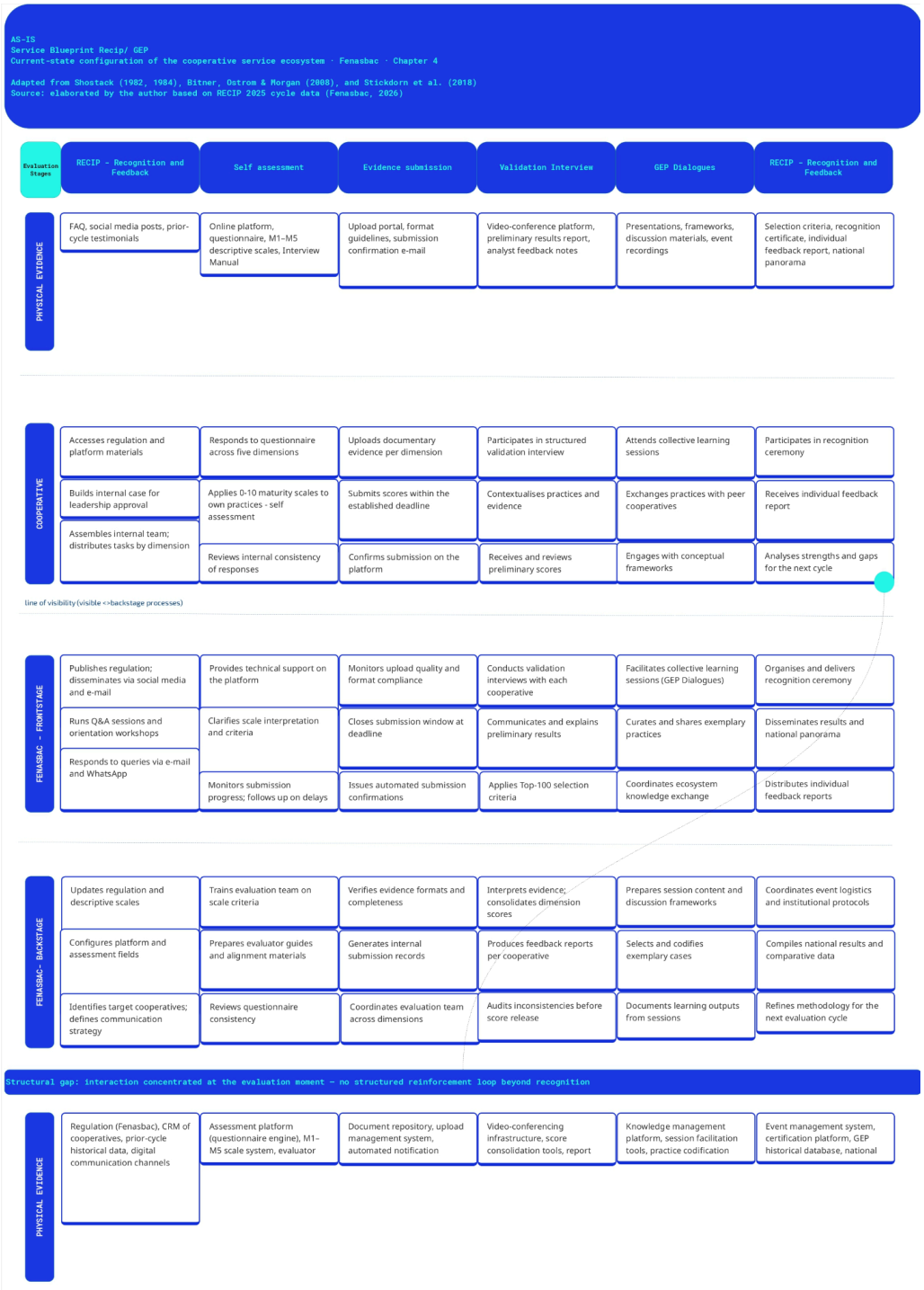


Figure 4.4. AS-IS Service Blueprint — GEP as Institutional Service System (Chapter 4, Section 4.6)

4.7 Temporal Structure and Annual Cycles

The operation of the GEP is not only structured through interactions and processes, but also through a temporal architecture that organizes the evaluation into recurring annual cycles. This temporal structure plays a central role in shaping how cooperatives engage with the evaluation, how activities are coordinated, and how learning processes unfold within the cooperative ecosystem.

Each cycle of the GEP follows a sequence of stages that broadly correspond to the cooperative journey described in Section 4.4, including preparation, self-assessment, evidence submission, evaluation interviews, feedback generation, and recognition through RECIP. These stages are distributed over time and aligned with institutional calendars, deadlines, and coordination mechanisms that define when and how cooperatives participate in the process.

The cyclical nature of the GEP introduces a rhythm to the evaluation, creating recurring moments of engagement that structure organizational attention. Cooperatives mobilize resources, allocate time, and coordinate internal teams in response to the temporal demands of each cycle. In this sense, the evaluation is not continuously present in organizational routines, but becomes more salient at specific moments associated with the evaluation process.

This temporal concentration of activities has important implications for how learning and capability development occur. While each cycle generates opportunities for reflection and diagnosis, the discontinuity between cycles may limit the extent to which insights are sustained and translated into ongoing practices. Learning tends to be episodic, concentrated around evaluation periods,

rather than continuously embedded in organizational processes (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Preskill & Torres, 1999).

Moreover, the transitions between cycles do not always involve systematic mechanisms for revisiting previous insights or tracking the evolution of practices over time. Although feedback reports provide a snapshot of organizational performance at a given moment, there is limited integration between successive cycles that would enable a cumulative understanding of capability development within cooperatives.

This temporal fragmentation reinforces the structural limitation identified in the service blueprint (Section 4.6). Just as interactions across stages are not always fully integrated, the temporal structure of the GEP does not consistently support continuity across cycles. As a result, the evaluation process may generate repeated moments of diagnostic visibility without necessarily fostering sustained trajectories of organizational change.

At the same time, the existence of an established annual cycle provides an important foundation for potential redesign. The recurrence of the process creates predictable points of engagement that could be leveraged to introduce mechanisms for continuity, feedback integration, and longitudinal tracking of capabilities.

Understanding the temporal structure of the GEP highlights that evaluation is not only a matter of interactions and artifacts, but also of timing and rhythm. It reveals how the organization of time influences the effectiveness of evaluation processes and reinforces the need to consider temporal integration as a key dimension in the design of adaptive evaluation systems.

4.8 Summary of the AS-IS Model

This chapter developed an analytical representation of the GEP as it currently operates within the Brazilian credit cooperative ecosystem, conceptualizing it as an institutional service structured through interactions, artifacts, and temporal dynamics. Rather than approaching the GEP as a static evaluation tool, the chapter has shown that it functions as a distributed and multi-layered service system that

shapes how innovation with purpose is understood, assessed, and enacted across the cooperative network.

The analysis began by positioning the GEP as an institutional service (Section 4.1), highlighting its role in structuring interactions and enabling resource integration among multiple actors. It then examined the configuration of stakeholders (Section 4.2), demonstrating that evaluation is enacted through a distributed network involving cooperatives, analysts, and institutional actors, whose interactions actively shape the evaluative process. The analytical dimensions of the GEP (Section 4.3) were presented as both descriptive categories and interpretive lenses, structuring how organizational practices are observed and compared.

Building on this foundation, the chapter reconstructed the cooperative journey (Section 4.4), showing how evaluation unfolds through a sequence of stages that include mobilization, self-assessment, interaction, feedback, and recognition. This process was further decomposed into touchpoints and service artifacts (Section 4.5), revealing the socio-material elements that mediate interactions and shape how information is generated and interpreted. The service blueprint (Section 4.6) integrated these elements into a systemic representation, making visible the relationships between frontstage and backstage processes, as well as the flows of information across the evaluation.

The temporal structure of the GEP (Section 4.7) added a further layer of analysis, demonstrating that the evaluation operates through recurring annual cycles that organize organizational attention and participation. This temporal architecture contributes to shaping how learning occurs within the system, often concentrating reflection and diagnosis within specific moments rather than embedding them continuously in organizational routines.

Taken together, these elements constitute an AS-IS model of the GEP that reveals both its strengths and its structural limitations. On one hand, the system is effective in generating diagnostic visibility, fostering reflection, and promoting engagement across the cooperative ecosystem. On the other hand, the analysis highlights a persistent fragmentation across functions, interactions, and temporal cycles. Reflection, interaction, diagnosis, and recognition are present within the

system, but are not consistently integrated into a continuous process of learning and capability development.

This fragmentation helps explain the gap identified throughout the thesis between diagnostic visibility and adaptive capability development. While the GEP provides a structured framework for understanding organizational practices, it does not fully ensure that the insights generated are systematically translated into sustained changes in those practices over time.

It is also important to recognize that this representation is not independent of the research process itself. The analysis developed in this chapter is informed by the researcher's direct involvement in the GEP as an analyst, including participation in evaluation interviews and the authorship of feedback reports. This position provides privileged access to the empirical material and to the internal dynamics of the system, while also requiring reflexive awareness regarding how interpretations are shaped by this dual role. As discussed in Section 3.7, this positionality is treated not as a limitation to be eliminated, but as an integral component of the interpretive process.

By consolidating these insights, the chapter establishes a comprehensive understanding of how the GEP currently operates, identifying key patterns, tensions, and limitations that characterize its design. This AS-IS model provides the analytical foundation for the empirical analysis presented in Chapter 5, as well as for the redesign proposed in Chapter 6, where the GEP is reconceptualized as an adaptive service infrastructure capable of integrating evaluation, learning, and capability development across the cooperative ecosystem.

For the Cooperatives

Chapter 4 is the chapter where we stop and actually look at the GEP as it exists today, before proposing anything new. Think of it as drawing the floor plan of a house before deciding what to renovate. The main insight of this chapter is this: the GEP is not just a questionnaire, it is a service.

That might sound like a subtle distinction, but it changes everything. A questionnaire is a tool you fill in and submit. A service is a system of interactions between people, organizations, processes, and artifacts that together create an experience and, ideally, value. When you look at the GEP as a service, you start seeing things that are invisible if you only look at the questionnaire itself.

Who is involved? The GEP involves cooperatives, analysts, Fenasbac, central cooperatives, The Brazilian Central Bank, and the broader ecosystem. Each of them plays a role. Each of them brings something to the process. And the quality of the evaluation depends on how well these roles connect, not just on how well any single actor performs.

What the journey looks like from inside a cooperative. From the moment a cooperative decides to participate to the moment it receives its feedback report and attends the RECIP event, there is a sequence of steps, each with its own demands, its own stress points, and its own opportunities for learning. Understanding this journey matters because it reveals where the experience could be richer, more supportive, or more continuous.

What happens backstage? When a cooperative answers the questionnaire and goes through the validation interview, a lot of work happens that they never see: analysts reviewing responses, generating reports, checking scores, coordinating logistics. This invisible work shapes the quality of what cooperatives receive. Making it visible helps us understand where the system's capacity lies and where its limits are.

What the blueprint reveals. The AS-IS service blueprint, which is Figure 4.1 in this thesis, maps all of this onto a single diagram. It shows that the GEP has real strengths: it creates structured reflection, it generates feedback, it connects cooperatives to a community of peers, it produces recognition. But it also shows a structural gap: all the interactions are concentrated in a single annual moment.

After the report is delivered and the event is over, the cooperative is largely on its own until the next cycle begins.

This is not a criticism of the people who designed the GEP. It is an observation about the architecture. The house has good bones. The question is whether a different layout could help people live in it better.

That is what Chapter 6 proposes. But before we can propose anything, Chapter 5 shows us what the data actually reveals about how cooperatives are performing and where the system is struggling. That comes next.

CHAPTER 5 - EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Analytical Framework and Evaluation Method (M1–M5)

5.2 Overview of the Dataset (56 reports – Dec/2025)

5.3 Empirical Findings by Dimension

5.3.1 Participatory Dimension

5.3.2 Collaborative Dimension

5.3.3 Capacity Development

5.3.4 Green Finance

5.3.5 ESG 5.4 Cross-Dimensional Patterns

5.5 Insights from the RECIP National Panoramas

5.6 Synthesis of Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the empirical analysis of the GEP 2025 evaluation cycle, building directly on the AS-IS model developed in Chapter 4. Where Chapter 4 reconstructed the structural configuration of the GEP as an institutional service system — mapping its actors, interactions, touchpoints, and temporal architecture — this chapter examines what that system produces in practice: the patterns of organizational maturity, capability development, and systemic alignment that emerge across the 56 cooperatives that completed the full evaluation cycle.

The empirical findings are interpreted in light of the structural tension identified in Chapter 4 between diagnostic visibility and capability development. Specifically, this chapter asks: what do the evaluation outcomes reveal about the extent to which cooperatives are able to translate the insights generated through the GEP into sustained organizational change? In doing so, it moves from the architecture of the service system to the evidence of its effects, providing the empirical foundation for the redesign proposed in Chapter 6.

5.1 Analytical Lens: A Service Ecosystem Perspective

This chapter examines the empirical findings of the GEP 2025 cycle through the theoretical lens of Service Ecosystem Theory. Within the SDL framework, Vargo and Lusch (2016) define service ecosystems as "relatively self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and engaged in mutual value creation." This conceptualization emphasizes the distributed and relational nature of value creation, which is central to understanding how the GEP operates within the cooperative financial system. Subsequent developments in service ecosystem research emphasize resilience, innovation dynamics, and institutional coordination as central to ecosystem evolution (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Gummesson, 2017).

Rather than conceptualizing the GEP solely as an evaluation instrument or a recognition program, this research interprets it as an intervention within a complex cooperative service ecosystem. This ecosystem encompasses multiple interdependent actors, member-owners, employees, governance bodies, cooperative federations, regulatory institutions, and broader community

stakeholders, interacting through formal and informal institutional arrangements such as cooperative principles, governance rules, financial regulations, and shared normative commitments.

From this perspective, the five dimensions assessed by the GEP (Participatory, Collaborative, Capacity Development, Green Finance, and ESG) represent not isolated evaluation criteria, but structural components of the cooperative service ecosystem. Each dimension reflects a specific layer of resource integration and value co-creation within the system. Maturity levels identified in the quantitative analysis therefore indicate more than performance variation: they signal different degrees of institutionalization of adaptive capabilities within the ecosystem. Higher maturity levels suggest stronger integration of feedback mechanisms, stakeholder engagement routines, governance structures, and learning processes that enable the ecosystem to self-adjust and evolve. Conversely, lower maturity levels reveal fragilities in the system's adaptive architecture, particularly in the institutionalization of feedback loops, distributed decision-making, and cross-actor collaboration. This perspective is particularly relevant for cooperative financial institutions, whose governance logic and ownership structure position them uniquely within broader financial service ecosystems.

5.2 Data Structure and Analytical Strategy

The empirical basis of this chapter consists of the validated results of 56 credit cooperatives that completed the full GEP 2025 evaluation cycle, including the mandatory validation interview. The freezing of the dataset at N = 56 and the reliance on validated post-interview scores further strengthen internal analytical consistency. The dataset comprises two complementary sources: Quantitative data: validated scores attributed to each cooperative across the five dimensions, following the methodological criteria established in the RECIP 2025 Regulation. These scores reflect the final adjusted evaluation after documentary analysis and validation interviews.

Qualitative data: 56 detailed feedback reports produced at the end of the cycle. Each report consolidates documentary evidence, questionnaire responses (35 structured questions distributed across five dimensions), and insights obtained

during the validation interview process. The reports provide narrative diagnostics of strengths, weaknesses, and improvement opportunities.

The analytical strategy combines descriptive quantitative analysis with structured qualitative synthesis. In addition to the dimensional scores analyzed in this chapter, each cooperative also receives an overall maturity score calculated as a weighted average of the five dimensions. Within the GEP evaluation architecture, dimensions do not contribute equally to the final score: Green Finance receives a weight of 3, reflecting its strategic importance for the transition toward sustainable financial intermediation; ESG receives a weight of 2.5, recognizing its role as a governance and institutional alignment layer; and the remaining three dimensions (Participatory, Collaborative, and Capacity Development) receive a weight of 1 each. The analyses presented in this chapter focus on validated dimension-level scores rather than the weighted global maturity score, as these provide the most reliable basis for cross-cooperative structural comparison.

Quantitatively, the study examines central tendency (mean, median), dispersion (standard deviation and range), and distribution across maturity bands. The correlation analysis presented in Section 5.4.1 uses Pearson coefficients, which are appropriate for interval-level data and provide a basis for assessing the degree of co-evolution between dimensions. Qualitatively, the analysis adopts a pattern-based approach, identifying recurring structural themes across the 56 reports rather than conducting interpretive narrative readings of individual cases.

Researcher positionality and analytical safeguards. It is important to acknowledge that the author participated in the production of the institutional feedback reports generated during the RECIP 2025 cycle. To mitigate potential interpretive bias, the analytical strategy does not rely on narrative case interpretation, but on cross-case structural pattern identification grounded in validated quantitative scores and recurring qualitative regularities. The analysis focuses on systemic patterns rather than individual cooperative evaluation, and structural themes were considered recurrent when consistently identified across multiple maturity bands and confirmed during validation interviews.

5.3 Empirical Findings by Dimension

Tables 5.1 through 5.3 provide the quantitative foundation for the dimensional analysis that follows. Table 5.1 presents descriptive statistics; Table 5.2 defines the five maturity bands; Table 5.3 presents the distribution of cooperatives across bands for each dimension.

Table 5.1 — Descriptive Statistics by Dimension (n = 56)

Dimension	Mean	Median	Std Dev	Min	Max
Capacity Development	6.90	7.20	2.13	1.6	9.8
Participatory	6.81	7.00	2.13	0.8	9.8
ESG	6.45	6.73	1.93	1.8	9.7
Collaborative	6.14	6.40	2.22	1.6	9.8
Green Finance	5.18	5.40	2.20	0.6	9.6
Overall mean of means	6.30	—	—	—	—

Table 5.2 — Maturity Band Definitions

Level	Score Range	Organizational Profile
M1	< 4	Initial stage. Operational demands absorb most organizational resources, leaving limited capacity for purposeful innovation. Practices are largely absent or incipient.
M2	4–6	Early-intermediate stage. Isolated practices begin to emerge, but remain fragmented and poorly integrated into governance or strategic processes.
M3	6–8	Intermediate stage. Represents the minimum expected level of maturity within the GEP framework. Practices are present and recognizable, but their institutionalization, through measurement, feedback loops, and governance embedding, remains incomplete.
M4	8–9	Advanced stage. Practices are structured and integrated into organizational routines, with evidence of strategic alignment, stakeholder engagement, and sustained implementation.

M5	≥ 9	Consolidated stage. Innovation with purpose is consciously and consistently enacted, with well-developed mechanisms for continuous improvement, reflexivity, and systemic diffusion.

Maturity band definitions were established by Fenasbac as part of the GEP evaluation framework design and are operationalized through the program's official assessment criteria (Fenasbac, 2026).

Table 5.3 — Maturity Band Distribution by Dimension (n = 56)

Dimension	M1 (<4)	M2 (4–6)	M3 (6–8)	M4 (8–9)	M5 (≥9)
Capacity Development	4 (7.1%)	14 (25.0%)	17 (30.4%)	11 (19.6%)	10 (17.9%)
Participatory	6 (10.7%)	11 (19.6%)	16 (28.6%)	12 (21.4%)	11 (19.6%)
ESG	6 (10.7%)	17 (30.4%)	20 (35.7%)	8 (14.3%)	5 (8.9%)
Collaborative	12 (21.4%)	10 (17.9%)	22 (39.3%)	5 (8.9%)	7 (12.5%)
Green Finance	18 (32.1%)	18 (32.1%)	13 (23.2%)	2 (3.6%)	5 (8.9%)

Source: Author's own analysis based on 56 validated GEP 2025 feedback reports.

5.3.1 Participatory Dimension

The Participatory Dimension represents the micro-foundational layer of the cooperative service ecosystem. Participation functions as a primary feedback infrastructure through which member-owners influence resource integration, governance processes, and value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This dimension is grounded in the cooperative principle of Democratic Member Participation and was evaluated through five structured questions addressing: (1) member-centered product and service design; (2) communication and engagement mechanisms; (3) financial education and preparation for product use; (4) youth engagement and generational renewal; and (5) institutionalization of participatory governance processes.

Quantitative structure. The dimension presents an overall mean score of 6.81 (median 6.8), indicating moderate-to-advanced consolidation across the ecosystem. Scores range from 0.8 to 9.8, revealing structural dispersion. The distribution across maturity bands shows 41.1% of cooperatives above M3, 28.6%

at M3, and 30.4% below M3. Democratic participation is formally embedded across most cooperatives, but participatory mechanisms are often present without being fully institutionalized as adaptive organizational capabilities.

Recurring structural patterns. The qualitative synthesis of the 56 feedback reports reveals five recurring themes. (1) Participation as compliance rather than strategic resource: feedback consolidation mechanisms are fragmented; data collected from members is rarely systematized into structured decision-making processes — feedback exists, but its integration into adaptive governance routines remains limited. (2) Fragmented listening and weak data institutionalization: listening mechanisms are not consistently linked to strategic planning cycles, innovation roadmaps, formal indicators, or performance dashboards. Participation is practiced but not measured as an organizational capability. (3) Underutilization of user-centered design logic: although cooperative identity is inherently member-oriented, formal service design methodologies (journey mapping, prototyping, behavioral analysis) remain unevenly institutionalized (Yu & Sangiorgi, 2018; da Fontoura Vieira et al., 2025). The ecosystem exhibits normative alignment with user-centricity but limited methodological operationalization. (4) Financial literacy as adaptive infrastructure: higher-maturity cooperatives demonstrate structured financial education programs (digital banking, PIX adoption, credit literacy), while lower-maturity cases show sporadic, campaign-based actions disconnected from broader governance strategies. (5) Youth engagement and generational renewal fragility: while youth-related initiatives appear in all 56 reports (as a mandatory evaluation item), only 6 cooperatives (11%) demonstrate structured, sustained generational renewal programs. This fragility represents a long-term risk to adaptive continuity.

Analytical interpretation. The primary systemic gap is not the absence of participatory mechanisms, but the limited transformation of participation into institutionalized feedback loops capable of informing innovation, strategic decision-making, and continuous learning. The ecosystem exhibits a partially stabilized feedback architecture: advanced cooperatives demonstrate integrated

loops between listening, strategy, and execution; intermediate and lower-maturity cooperatives exhibit fragmented or episodic feedback cycles.

5.3.2 Collaborative Dimension

The Collaborative Dimension represents the meso-level architecture of the cooperative service ecosystem, reflecting horizontal and vertical integration across institutional layers. This dimension is grounded in the sixth cooperative principle — Intercooperation — which can be interpreted not only as a normative principle but also as an institutional capability that enables the circulation of knowledge, practices, and innovations across the ecosystem (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009; Powell, 1990; Provan & Kenis, 2008). The dimension was evaluated through five core areas: strategic intercooperation initiatives; scalability and replication capacity; strategic use of Open Finance; institutional communication with central cooperatives; and engagement in open innovation processes.

Quantitative structure. The dimension presents a mean score of 6.14 (median 6.4, std dev 2.22), with 30.4% of cooperatives below M3 — nearly twice the proportion observed in the Participatory Dimension. This contrast suggests that while democratic participation is relatively institutionalized within individual cooperatives, interorganizational collaboration remains uneven and less structurally stabilized. Micro-level feedback mechanisms (member–cooperative) appear more stabilized than meso-level coordination loops (cooperative–cooperative; cooperative–central; cooperative–external actors).

Recurring structural patterns. (1) Superficial intercooperation: many initiatives are episodic or symbolic (joint campaigns, local events, shared social actions) without co-investment mechanisms, shared governance structures, defined impact metrics, or strategic alignment. (2) Absence of scalability and replication logic: even when projects demonstrate local success, cooperatives rarely present documented methodologies, standardized implementation frameworks, or mechanisms for inter-cooperative knowledge transfer. (3) Underdeveloped strategic use of Open Finance: most cooperatives demonstrate compliance-oriented adoption with limited integration of shared data into product

design or personalization. (4) Vertical communication asymmetry: information flows predominantly top-down, with limited upward innovation proposals or proactive contribution from singular cooperatives to system-level strategy — coordination exists, but not fully distributed intelligence. (5) Open innovation as rhetoric rather than capability: participation in events without sustained programs, absence of structured innovation pipelines, and lack of impact measurement (Chesbrough, 2003).

Analytical interpretation. The higher dispersion and greater proportion of low-maturity cases in the Collaborative Dimension compared to the Participatory Dimension indicate that interorganizational adaptive capacity is less consolidated than internal participatory mechanisms — the adaptive tension inherent in multi-layered federative systems.

5.3.3 Capacity Development Dimension

The Capacity Development Dimension evaluates how credit cooperatives invest in the continuous development of organizational competencies, leadership capabilities, innovation skills, and institutional learning processes — aligned with the cooperative principle of Education, Training, and Information. In the RECIP/GEP framework, capacity development is operationalized not merely as training participation, but as the structured cultivation of strategic, technical, and adaptive capabilities.

Quantitative structure. The dimension presents the highest mean score of the five (6.90, median 7.2), with 37.5% of cooperatives above M3. Approximately 23.2% scored below 5.0, indicating significant fragility in institutional learning structures. This distribution suggests that while capability development initiatives are widely present, their consolidation as systemic and adaptive infrastructures remains uneven.

Recurring structural patterns. (1) Structural polarization: a minority of highly advanced cooperatives coexist with a substantial proportion displaying fragile or fragmented learning structures, suggesting that system-level educational offerings do not automatically translate into institutional capability consolidation.

(2) Absence of institutional learning architecture: many cooperatives lack a defined competency framework or learning roadmap; training initiatives are not embedded in an articulated long-term development strategy, limiting cumulative learning effects, contrasting with foundational learning organization literature (Garvin, 1993; Crossan, Lane & White, 1999). (3) Weak feedback loops between training and performance: training outcomes are rarely connected to performance indicators, innovation results, or strategic objectives. Learning remains largely disconnected from measurable organizational transformation. (4) Leadership and succession gaps: leadership development structures are inconsistently formalized; in lower-maturity cooperatives, leadership transition depends on informal mentoring rather than structured succession planning (Day, 2000). (5) Disconnection from ESG and Green Finance agendas: capacity development frequently operates independently from emerging strategic domains such as sustainability reporting or green finance instruments, reducing organizational readiness to respond to regulatory and market transformations.

Analytical interpretation. While educational activities are present across most institutions, only a minority have transformed training into an adaptive and strategic capability infrastructure. The current GEP configuration effectively identifies learning gaps but does not fully support iterative capability reinforcement over time — pointing toward the need for progressive learning loops and structured capability pathways developed in Chapter 6.

5.3.4 Green Finance Dimension

The Green Finance Dimension evaluates how credit cooperatives incorporate environmental criteria into their financial operations, credit policies, and investment strategies. Unlike the ESG dimension, which encompasses broader governance and social structures, Green Finance specifically examines whether sustainability is translated into financial decision-making, risk assessment, product design, and capital allocation practices. This dimension is particularly relevant in the Brazilian context, where the Central Bank has progressively reinforced climate risk disclosure and socio-environmental responsibility norms for financial institutions.

Quantitative structure. The dimension presents the lowest consolidation level among all five dimensions: mean 5.18, median 5.4, std dev 2.20, and coefficient of variation of 44.7%, substantially above other dimensions, indicating not only lower maturity but greater heterogeneity. Nearly 64.3% of cooperatives scored below M3, and only 12.5% reached advanced maturity (M4–M5).

Recurring structural patterns. (1) Green products without institutional embedding: green credit lines exist (e.g., solar energy financing, rural sustainability lines), often offered through national development programs, but are externally induced rather than internally strategized, rarely embedded into a broader sustainable finance roadmap, and commercial teams lack structured training to position these products strategically. (2) The sustainability translation gap: validation interviews repeatedly reveal that cooperatives recognize the importance of sustainability and green products are technically available, but operational translation into frontline practice remains limited. Credit officers lack structured tools to identify environmentally differentiated client profiles; sustainability criteria are not integrated into commercial scripts; environmental criteria are rarely embedded into decision-making routines beyond compliance documentation. The fragility is not primarily the absence of sustainable instruments, but their limited institutional embedding. (3) Absence of commercial translation mechanisms: only 18% of reports explicitly mention the need for specialized commercial team training; none of the 56 reports identify formalized commercial scripts, advisory protocols, or decision-support tools for green financial products, providing strong empirical support for the sustainability translation gap. (4) Compliance-oriented risk management: environmental criteria are frequently compliance-based; climate risk integration is rare in credit decision analytics. (5) Conceptual confusion between ESG and Green Finance: many cooperatives interpret green finance as "being environmentally responsible" rather than "designing differentiated financial solutions aligned with environmental transition."

The M3 ceiling. Among the 56 evaluated cooperatives, 36 (64.3%) are concentrated at M1–M2, 13 (23.2%) at M3, and only 7 (12.5%) at M4–M5. Crucially, 65% of cooperatives that reach the M3 maturity band do not progress to advanced levels,

indicating that initial adoption of green financial products is relatively achievable, but advancing beyond this stage requires deeper institutional embedding: integration of environmental criteria into credit risk models, portfolio-level sustainability monitoring, measurable environmental performance indicators, and alignment between sustainability objectives and commercial strategy. This M3 ceiling corresponds to what Chapter 6 describes as "variation without stabilized retention" (Section 6.2.1).

Analytical interpretation. Green Finance does not reveal an absence of sustainability awareness. Rather, it exposes a capability translation gap: cooperatives demonstrate cultural alignment with sustainability values, emerging ESG discourse, and availability of green financial instruments, but struggle to embed sustainability into commercial routines, equip frontline teams with structured advisory tools, and reinforce sustainable credit as a strategic capability. Sustainability commitment precedes structured organizational capability.

5.3.5 ESG Dimension

The ESG Dimension evaluates the extent to which credit cooperatives integrate Environmental, Social, and Governance principles into strategic planning, operational processes, and accountability mechanisms. Within the RECIP/GEP framework, ESG is understood not merely as compliance with regulatory expectations, but as the structured incorporation of sustainability criteria into governance models, risk management systems, and long-term value creation strategies.

Quantitative structure. The dimension presents a mean score of 6.45 (median 6.73), indicating moderate but uneven consolidation. Approximately 37.5% of cooperatives fall within the lower-intermediate band (5–6.9), suggesting partial or emerging ESG structuring. Only 8.9% achieved advanced maturity (≥9), while 21.4% scored below 5.

Recurring structural patterns. Across lower- and intermediate-maturity cooperatives, ESG practices are frequently described in terms of isolated sustainability initiatives, social projects, governance transparency measures, and

internal environmental programs. Validation interviews indicate that ESG integration into risk management, strategic planning cycles, and measurable performance indicators is frequently incomplete: formal ESG committees, integrated sustainability reporting, defined impact indicators, and cross-departmental coordination mechanisms are absent in many cases. In contrast, advanced cooperatives exhibit structured ESG governance frameworks, formalized sustainability policies, integration of ESG criteria into credit and risk assessment, and measurable reporting structures. Key recurring problems include: ESG as narrative rather than structure (institutional decoupling between discursive alignment and operational embedding; see Christensen, Morsing & Thyssen, 2013); fragmented governance integration; limited measurement and reporting mechanisms; and disconnection between ESG and financial structuring.

Analytical interpretation. ESG occupies an intermediate stage of institutionalization. While conceptual recognition is widespread, full structural integration remains restricted to a minority of cooperatives. Comparing ESG (mean 6.45) and Green Finance (mean 5.18) reveals an important asymmetry: ESG exhibits broader conceptual adoption but similar limitations in advanced institutional maturity. From a systems perspective, ESG represents a transitional layer between participatory governance and financial structuring — its institutional architecture is a prerequisite for, but not a sufficient condition of, Green Finance capability.

5.4 Cross-Dimensional Analysis

The five evaluated dimensions do not operate independently. Cross-dimensional analysis reveals systemic interdependencies, structural asymmetries, and recurring institutional gaps that extend beyond individual performance indicators and reflect architectural characteristics of the current GEP configuration and the cooperative ecosystem it assesses. This section first establishes the quantitative foundation through correlation analysis, then identifies the structural patterns that emerge from cross-case comparison, and concludes with the most analytically consequential finding: the system-level diffusion asymmetry revealed by cooperative system affiliation.

For analytical clarity in cross-dimensional comparison, maturity levels are aggregated into broader bands: Below M3 (<6), At M3 (6–8), and Above M3 (>8). Table 5.5 presents this aggregated overview alongside standard deviations.

Table 5.4 — Cross-Dimensional Summary (n = 56)

Dimension	Mean	% Below M3	% At M3	% Above M3	Std Dev
Capacity Development	6.90	32.1%	30.4%	37.5%	2.13
Participatory	6.81	30.4%	28.6%	41.1%	2.13
ESG	6.45	41.1%	35.7%	23.2%	1.93
Collaborative	6.14	39.3%	39.3%	21.4%	2.22
Green Finance	5.18	64.3%	23.2%	12.5%	2.20

Source: Author's own analysis.

5.4.1 Quantitative Structure and Interdimensional Correlations

To understand how dimensions co-evolve within the cooperative ecosystem, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted using the validated sample (n = 56). Table 5.6 presents the full correlation matrix.

Table 5.5 — Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Dimensions (n = 56)

	Participatory	Collaborative	Capacity Dev.	Green Finance	ESG
Participatory	1.000	0.822	0.863	0.688	0.848
Collaborative	—	1.000	0.836	0.721	0.856
Capacity Development	—	—	1.000	0.629	0.879
Green Finance	—	—	—	1.000	0.777
ESG	—	—	—	—	1.000

The results reveal a consistent pattern of high positive correlations across all dimensions (r = 0.629–0.879), indicating that cooperatives performing well in one dimension tend to perform well across others, suggesting a generalised maturity effect within the dataset. However, a structural nuance is critical. Green Finance systematically presents the lowest correlation coefficients with all other dimensions (r = 0.629–0.721), while the remaining four dimensions exhibit stronger interdependencies, with several correlations above 0.85. This pattern indicates that while Participatory, Collaborative, Capacity Development, and ESG dimensions tend to co-evolve as part of a broader organisational capability system, Green Finance behaves as a partially distinct capability domain requiring additional layers of institutionalization, technical knowledge, and strategic alignment.

The practical implication is significant: advances in governance, participation, and internal capacity do not automatically translate into the development of sustainable financial practices. Green Finance is not merely a more demanding version of the capabilities assessed in other dimensions, but a qualitatively distinct capability requiring the integration of sustainability principles into financial decision-making structures, credit analytical processes, and commercial advisory routines — domains governed by different professional logics and accountability structures. At the same time, the fact that all correlations remain moderately to strongly positive confirms that Green Finance depends on foundational capabilities developed in other dimensions, even if it requires additional mechanisms for consolidation and scaling. This dual pattern — generalised co-evolution combined with partial decoupling — directly informs the architecture of Loop 3 in the redesigned GEP (Section 6.4.4).

5.4.2 Internal Governance More Consolidated Than External Integration

The most consistent cross-dimensional asymmetry concerns the relationship between internal institutionalization and external coordination. The Participatory (mean 6.81) and Capacity Development (mean 6.90) dimensions demonstrate higher consolidation than Collaborative (6.14), ESG (6.45), and particularly Green Finance (5.18). The inter-dimensional gap between Capacity Development and Green Finance (1.72 points) is the largest average maturity differential in the dataset.

This indicates that internal governance routines, educational practices, and member engagement mechanisms are more stabilized than interorganizational collaboration, sustainable financial structuring, and ecosystem-level coordination. In Service Ecosystem terms, micro-level feedback loops (member–cooperative) are more mature than meso- and macro-level integration loops. The ecosystem is internally participatory but externally under-integrated. The M3 ceiling in Green Finance represents the clearest expression of this asymmetry: 65% of cooperatives that reach the M3 maturity band in Green Finance do not advance to M4, suggesting that initial adoption of sustainable practices is achievable but deeper institutionalization requires mechanisms that the current GEP configuration does not systematically provide.

5.4.3 Values Stronger Than Operationalization

Across dimensions, a recurring structural asymmetry emerges between normative alignment and institutional implementation. Participatory governance is culturally embedded; intercooperation is rhetorically recognized; sustainability is conceptually adopted; education is institutionally valued. However, when examining portfolio-level sustainable finance integration, measurable ESG indicators, scalable collaborative architectures, and institutionalized innovation pipelines, operational depth decreases substantially. The ecosystem demonstrates moral coherence yet partial operational architecture.

The most frequent recommendation across the 56 feedback reports — present in 54 of 56 (96%) — concerns the absence of measurable environmental impact

indicators. Additional recurrent recommendations include the need for technical partnerships (89%), improved communication and dissemination strategies (84%), and structured green portfolios (62%). In contrast, only 7% of reports explicitly recommend integration of Green Finance into strategic planning processes. This asymmetry reveals that the feedback architecture itself reproduces the limitations identified in this study: it privileges incremental operational adjustments over structural capability transformation.

5.4.4 Fragmented Feedback Loops and Maturity Polarization

One of the most consistent cross-dimensional fragilities concerns the institutionalization of feedback loops. Across all five dimensions, recurrent patterns include: member listening not systematically connected to strategy; training not linked to performance indicators; collaborative projects without replication frameworks; ESG initiatives without measurable impact metrics; and green financial products without portfolio-level analytics. Information circulates, but is not consistently reintegrated into strategic decision-making. In Service Ecosystem terms, resource integration occurs, but reflexive adaptation remains incomplete: the system learns episodically, not cumulatively (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990; Garvin, 1993).

All five dimensions simultaneously reveal maturity polarization. A minority of cooperatives achieve advanced maturity (≥9), characterized by integrated governance routines, measurable sustainability indicators, structured innovation pipelines, and cross-dimensional alignment. Simultaneously, a significant proportion remains at lower-intermediate or low maturity levels. High-performing cooperatives operate as isolated adaptive nodes rather than as distributed learning hubs, and the absence of scalable knowledge-transfer structures reinforces this asymmetry. The ecosystem contains adaptive excellence, but lacks structured pathways for widespread capability diffusion.

5.4.5 The Sustainability–Finance Gap: Structural Disconnect and Illustrative Cases

Three cooperatives are examined as illustrative cases throughout this chapter. To protect institutional confidentiality while preserving analytical clarity, these organizations are referred to by anonymized names. All three are located in southern Brazil and operate within the Brazilian credit cooperative system, though they differ meaningfully in terms of size, operational scope, and institutional network affiliation. Table 5.6 provides a brief characterization of each case.

Table 5.6 — Anonymized Cooperative Profiles

Anonymized name	Size tier	Region	Operational scope	Cooperative network
Cred Boreal	Large	Southern Brazil	Broad sub-regional reach	System A
Cred Estelar	Medium	Southern Brazil	Sub-regional	System A
Cred Horizonte	Small	Southern Brazil	Local	System B

Cred Boreal and Cred Estelar belong to the same cooperative network (System A), a circumstance that is analytically relevant to understanding their capacity for cross-dimensional integration, as discussed in Section 5.4.6. Cred Horizonte is affiliated with a distinct institutional network (System B), which shapes the organizational conditions under which its ESG–Green Finance dissociation is interpreted in Section 5.4.5.

The comparative analysis between ESG (mean 6.45) and Green Finance (mean 5.18) reveals a structurally critical gap. While ESG discourse is moderately institutionalized, financial sustainability integration remains fragile. This disconnect does not primarily reflect the absence of financial instruments, but fragility in the institutional embedding of sustainability into everyday financial

routines: the ecosystem demonstrates awareness and product availability, yet lacks structured reinforcement mechanisms capable of stabilizing sustainability as a distributed organizational capability (Section 5.3.4).

Structurally, this gap has two dimensions. First, at the product level: green financial instruments exist but are externally induced, under-positioned commercially, and disconnected from portfolio analytics. Second, at the capability level: credit officers lack structured tools, sustainability criteria are not integrated into commercial scripts, and ESG governance frameworks do not automatically generate the routines required for differentiated credit structuring. ESG as institutional architecture and Green Finance as operational financial practice constitute distinct capability systems despite their conceptual proximity.

Two illustrative cases provide empirical precision to this structural pattern. Cred Horizonte (anonymized) presents the largest ESG–Green Finance differential in the validated dataset: ESG 7.13 (M3 — consolidated) against Green Finance 2.80 (M1 — initial), a gap of 4.33 points. Its validated feedback report identifies robust ESG institutional foundations — structured ethics and anti-harassment policies, advanced fiscal transparency, solid cybersecurity governance, consistent community engagement — while simultaneously revealing only two active green financial instruments without associated metrics, structured commercial positioning, or advisory protocols. Table 5.7 presents the analytical dimensions of this case.

Table 5.7 — Illustrative Case: ESG–Green Finance Dissociation (Cred Horizonte)

Cooperative (anonymized)	Cred Horizonte
ESG maturity score	7.13 (M3 — consolidated governance practices)
Green Finance maturity score	2.80 (M1 — early-stage operationalization)
Observed gap	4.33 points between ESG governance maturity and Green Finance operational maturity

Interpretation	The case illustrates a structural dissociation between sustainability governance and the operationalization of sustainability within financial practices.
Institutional implication	ESG maturity reflects governance commitments, transparency mechanisms, and social responsibility structures, while Green Finance requires integration of sustainability criteria into financial decision-making, including credit structuring, portfolio monitoring, and environmental risk assessment.
Relevance for Chapter 6	This empirical pattern supports the argument that sustainability must be institutionally embedded rather than merely symbolically adopted (see Section 6.4.4).

Conversely, Cred Boreal and Cred Estelar — both members of the same regional cooperative system, are the only cooperatives in the dataset that simultaneously achieve high maturity across all five dimensions, including advanced Green Finance positioning (7.60 and 7.80, respectively). Within a dataset in which 64.3% of cooperatives are at M1–M2 in Green Finance, these institutions stand out as empirical proof of concept. Table 5.8 presents their cross-dimensional profiles.

Table 5.8 — Cross-Dimensional Integration: Cred Boreal and Cred Estelar

Cooperative	Green Finance	Participatory	Capacity Dev.	Analytical Interpretation
Cred Boreal	7.6	High	High	Integrated sustainability capabilities across all dimensions
Cred Estelar	7.8	High	High	Institutional alignment across dimensions; territorial development logic embedded in financial offer

The validated feedback reports for both cooperatives describe financial offers like sustainable agriculture credit lines, clean energy financing, water and energy efficiency instruments, support for small sustainable businesses; not as a parallel sustainability track, but as an expression of the cooperative's core territorial mission. Green finance is embedded in the same strategic and governance architecture that sustains participatory engagement and collaborative practices. These cases demonstrate that the structural gap identified in this section is not inherent to cooperative institutions but reflects a capability translation challenge that can be resolved when sustainability is embedded as a governance logic rather than appended as a product category. Their trajectory provides empirical support for the adaptive pathway proposed in Chapter 6 (Section 6.5) for the hypothetical cooperative Aurora.

5.4.6 System-Level Diffusion Asymmetry: The S1–S2 Divergence

The most analytically consequential pattern in the dataset emerges when cooperatives are disaggregated by cooperative system affiliation. The 56 validated cooperatives belong to multiple cooperative systems; among them, two concentrate the majority of the sample: S1-affiliated cooperatives (n = 12) and S2-affiliated cooperatives (n = 32), representing 78.6% of the validated dataset.

The remaining 12 cooperatives belong to smaller or heterogeneous systems and were excluded from this comparative analysis to avoid statistical distortion from small subgroup sizes.

When Green Finance scores are analyzed by system affiliation, a structural divergence of exceptional magnitude becomes visible. S1-affiliated cooperatives present a Green Finance mean of 7.07, with 10 of 12 institutions (83.3%) reaching M3 or above. S2-affiliated cooperatives present a Green Finance mean of 4.67, with 26 of 32 institutions (81.2%) concentrated at M1 or M2. The mean differential between the two systems is 2.40 points, larger than the mean differential between any two dimensions in the full dataset, and the directional contrast is near-total.

Importantly, this divergence is not exclusive to Green Finance: S1-affiliated cooperatives demonstrate consistently higher scores across all five dimensions, indicating a broader pattern of systemic maturity advantage rather than an isolated dimensional effect. However, Green Finance presents a particularly distinctive pattern: beyond its higher absolute gap, the distribution of scores reveals strong intra-system clustering, with S1 cooperatives concentrated at higher maturity levels while S2 cooperatives remain predominantly in lower maturity bands. Both systems participate in the same GEP evaluation framework, operate under the same cooperative regulatory environment, and are exposed to the same diagnostic instruments. If the divergence were attributable primarily to external factors (territorial composition, socioeconomic context, asset size), it would be expected to manifest uniformly across all dimensions. The data suggest that systemic differences in coordination, knowledge circulation, and institutional reinforcement may play a central role.

The data thus provide naturalistic evidence that inter-cooperative learning mechanisms already operate informally within more institutionally cohesive cooperative systems. Within the S1 ecosystem, practices related to green financial product structuring, environmental credit criteria, and sustainability commercial positioning appear to circulate across affiliated cooperatives with greater consistency, not because individual cooperatives are inherently more capable, but because systemic coordination structures create conditions under which capability

diffusion occurs. Within the S2 ecosystem, the absence of equivalent diffusion dynamics results in persistent fragmentation, even among cooperatives demonstrating advanced maturity in internal governance dimensions. This finding provides one of the most direct empirical justifications for the architectural intervention proposed in Chapter 6: the inter-cooperative diffusion loop described in Section 6.4.3 does not introduce a mechanism without precedent in the ecosystem — it proposes the formalization and structural extension of a diffusion logic that demonstrably functions within systems with stronger institutional coherence. The S1–S2 divergence constitutes, in this sense, a naturalistic experiment: it reveals what becomes possible when diffusion conditions are structurally enabled, and what persists when they are not.

Figure 5.1. Scatter plot of Collaborative Dimension and Green Finance scores across 59 cooperatives (GEP 2025 cycle). S1-affiliated cooperatives cluster in the upper-right quadrant (mean Green Finance = 7.07), while S2-affiliated cooperatives concentrate in lower maturity bands (mean = 4.67), yielding a mean differential of 2.40 points. Cred Boreal and Cred Estelar (S3 system) occupy the upper-right frontier of the distribution, representing the only cooperatives to simultaneously achieve advanced Green Finance maturity alongside high collaborative and participatory governance consolidation. Dashed crosshairs indicate system cluster means for S1 and S2. Source: elaborated by the author based on GEP 2025 dataset (Fenasbac, 2026).

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5.5 Institutional Narratives and Ecosystem Reflexivity

The previous sections analyzed the validated empirical data of 56 cooperatives through a Service Ecosystem lens. However, the cooperative ecosystem simultaneously produces interpretative narratives about itself through institutional publications, including the RECIP Panoramas (2022–2025 cycles) and the broader national report of the Recognition of Innovation with Purpose. These documents are treated as institutional records through a documentary research lens (Scott, 1990), analyzing official publications as qualitative sources revealing organizational narratives and strategic framing. They represent a reflexive layer of the ecosystem — a discursive and institutional self-interpretation of innovation, purpose, sustainability, and systemic transformation. Examining the alignment and misalignment between institutional discourse and validated empirical findings offers insight into the ecosystem's adaptive maturity.

Table 5.9 — Longitudinal Ordinal Positioning of Dimensions (2022–2025)

Cycle	Participatory	Green Finance	Capacity Dev.	Modal Level	Source
2022	Rank 1 (88 pts)	Rank 5 (55 pts)	n/a	M3	Panorama RECIP 2022
2024	High tier	Lowest	High tier	M3	Panorama RECIP 2024
2025	Rank 2 (mean 6.81)	Rank 5 (mean 5.18)	Rank 1 (mean 6.90)	M3	Author (n = 56)

Note: Methodological differences between RECIP cycles prevent direct cardinal score comparison; table presents ordinal dimensional positioning across cycles. Sources: Panorama RECIP 2022, Panorama RECIP 2024, and author's own analysis (n = 56).

Although methodological differences between RECIP cycles prevent direct cardinal comparison, the ordinal positioning reveals a remarkably stable structural hierarchy: Green Finance consistently occupies the lowest maturity position across all three cycles, while Participatory Governance and Capacity Development remain among the most consolidated dimensions. The modal maturity level observed across cycles remains M3. This stability suggests that the asymmetries identified in the present dataset reflect structural characteristics of the cooperative ecosystem rather than artefacts of measurement methodology.

5.5.1 The Emergence of a Systemic Narrative

A clear systemic narrative emerges across the Panorama publications. Innovation is framed not as isolated technological advancement, but as innovation with purpose, embedded in cooperative principles, social inclusion, environmental responsibility, and participatory governance. Recurring themes include: the positioning of cooperativism as a human-centered financial model; the integration of ESG and Green Finance as natural extensions of cooperative identity; the importance of intercooperation and ecosystem coordination; the strategic relevance of Open Finance, digital transformation, and regulatory alignment; and the need for structured innovation management practices. The Panoramas consistently articulate a systemic vision in which the five GEP dimensions are interconnected components of a broader cooperative ecosystem, emphasizing thinking systemically rather than recognizing isolated initiatives. The ecosystem demonstrates reflexive awareness, recognizing the need for structured innovation, sustainability integration, and institutional learning. The discourse itself signals a transition from fragmented innovation toward systemic innovation management. However, reflexive awareness does not automatically imply institutional consolidation.

5.5.2 Convergences Between Narrative and Empirical Findings

There are important areas of convergence between the institutional narratives and the validated data. The strong emphasis on participatory governance in the Panoramas aligns with the relatively higher maturity observed in the Participatory Dimension (mean 6.81): member engagement, inclusive communication, and financial education are deeply embedded in cooperative culture, and this cultural embeddedness is reflected in empirical consolidation. The recurrent emphasis on education and leadership development resonates with moderate consolidation of the Capacity Development Dimension (mean 6.90). The central place of ESG discourse in the Panoramas aligns with widespread conceptual adoption (mean 6.45). These convergences suggest that institutional narratives are not detached from practice; they reflect real structural movements within the ecosystem. The cooperative field is not merely rhetorically aligned with sustainability and participation — these themes are partially embedded in operational routines.

5.5.3 Structural Tensions Between Discourse and Institutionalization

Despite narrative coherence, the empirical analysis reveals three structural tensions indicating an adaptive gap between discourse and institutional architecture.

1. Sustainability discourse versus financial structuring. Green Finance occupies a prominent position in Panorama narratives, often associated with climate responsibility and regulatory alignment. However, the validated data show that Green Finance is the least consolidated dimension (mean 5.18), with 64.3% of cooperatives below M3. The sustainability translation gap (Section 5.3.4), where environmental values are not yet embedded into capital allocation logic, is nowhere more visible than in this contrast. The ecosystem appears to be transitioning from moral sustainability to operational sustainability, but has not stabilized financial sustainability as a systemic capability.

2. Intercooperation as principle versus collaboration as capability. The Panoramas highlight ecosystem collaboration and systemic integration as core strengths of the model. Empirically, however, the Collaborative Dimension

presents significant dispersion (mean 6.14), with nearly one-third of cooperatives at low maturity levels. Qualitative analysis reveals superficial intercooperation, weak scalability mechanisms, and underdeveloped open innovation structures. Cooperative identity valorizes collaboration, but collaboration as a scalable, data-integrated, strategically coordinated architecture remains uneven.

3. Systemic innovation narrative versus fragmented feedback loops. The Panoramas describe the GEP as a framework that promotes systemic thinking and cumulative improvement. However, across all five dimensions, learning processes remain episodic rather than cumulative: participation without structured data governance; training without performance integration; collaboration without replication architecture; ESG discourse without impact measurement; green products without portfolio analytics. The ecosystem demonstrates self-awareness while lacking fully stabilized adaptive pathways.

5.5.4 Ecosystem Reflexivity Without Evolutionary Stabilization

Taken together, the Panoramas and the validated empirical data reveal an ecosystem in a transitional phase. On one hand: strong normative alignment around purpose, institutional commitment to systemic innovation, growing ESG awareness, recognition of the need for structured management models, and public articulation of adaptive ambition. On the other hand: polarization of maturity, uneven institutionalization of capabilities, structural gaps between sustainability discourse and financial structuring, limited cumulative learning mechanisms, and weak cross-cooperative diffusion of advanced practices.

In systemic terms, the cooperative ecosystem has developed reflexivity, the ability to observe and narrate itself. However, this reflexivity has not fully translated into evolutionary stabilization, understood as the consistent reinforcement of adaptive routines across institutional layers. The GEP successfully generates visibility, diagnostic clarity, and symbolic recognition. It catalyzes reflection and encourages self-assessment. However, it does not fully operate as a progressive learning infrastructure capable of scaffolding long-term capability consolidation across maturity levels. An ecosystem capable of

observing and narrating its own transformation is not necessarily structurally equipped to convert that reflexivity into stabilized systemic advancement (Levinthal & March, 1993; Folke, 2006).

5.6 Synthesis and Empirical Bridge to Chapter 6

The empirical analysis conducted in this chapter examined the validated results of 56 credit cooperatives across five dimensions of innovation with purpose through a Service Ecosystem lens. Rather than summarizing the findings dimension by dimension, already developed in Sections 5.3 and 5.4, this synthesis identifies the systemic configuration that emerges from their interaction and articulates its implications for the architectural redesign proposed in Chapter 6.

5.6.1 The Ecosystem Is Normatively Coherent but Architecturally Uneven

The empirical findings consistently distinguish between normative alignment and institutional consolidation. Across all dimensions, cooperatives demonstrate strong adherence to cooperative principles: democratic participation is culturally embedded, intercooperation is rhetorically valued, sustainability is morally endorsed, and education is institutionally recognized. This normative coherence reflects the historical strength of the cooperative identity and provides a genuine foundation for adaptive development.

However, empirical dispersion reveals uneven structural consolidation. The primary adaptive challenge facing the ecosystem is not the absence of sustainability commitment or collaborative intent, but the absence of institutional mechanisms capable of stabilizing and diffusing innovation across organizational boundaries and time. The near-universal absence of measurable environmental impact indicators, present in 54 of 56 feedback reports (96%), is the clearest expression of this condition: the ecosystem does not merely struggle to measure environmental impact; it has not constructed the measurement infrastructure through which such impact could be systematically observed, governed, or improved. This absence is not incidental — it is the structural expression of a

system that is normatively aligned with sustainability but lacks the institutional mechanisms that would make that alignment operationally legible.

5.6.2 Sustainability Transition and the Institutional Embedding Gap

The most structurally significant synthetic finding concerns the relationship between ESG and Green Finance. The correlation analysis (Table 5.6) reveals that Green Finance operates as a partially distinct capability domain ($r = 0.629–0.721$ with other dimensions, versus 0.836–0.879 among the other four). This is not simply a gap in financial engineering sophistication. It reflects a broader institutional embedding challenge: the ecosystem demonstrates normative sustainability alignment and product availability, but lacks structured commercial translation mechanisms, frontline capability integration, reinforcement loops linking sustainability to performance metrics, and institutional routines embedding environmental criteria into everyday financial practice.

The Cred Horizonte case (ESG 7.13, Green Finance 2.80) illustrates the architectural dimension of this gap: governance-level sustainability does not automatically generate the organizational routines required for differentiated credit structuring. The Cred Boreal and Cred Estelar cases demonstrate that this gap is not inherent to cooperative institutions, it is a capability translation challenge that is resolved when sustainability is embedded as a governance logic throughout the institutional architecture rather than appended as a product category. The S1–S2 divergence (mean differential of 2.40 points in Green Finance) further demonstrates that diffusion mechanisms are the decisive variable: cooperatives within more institutionally cohesive systems achieve higher Green Finance maturity not primarily because of individual organizational superiority, but because of systemic conditions enabling capability circulation.

5.6.3 The GEP as Diagnostic Catalyst in a Transitional Ecosystem

The synthesis of findings clarifies the functional role of the GEP in its current configuration. The evaluation framework successfully maps structural asymmetries, encourages institutional reflection, promotes systemic discourse, and generates visibility for advanced practices. However, it operates

predominantly as a diagnostic catalyst rather than as a cumulative adaptive infrastructure. It identifies variation but does not scaffold progressive learning loops, capability reinforcement mechanisms, or structured diffusion architectures. In systemic terms, the GEP activates variation and partially activates selection — but retention mechanisms remain structurally weak (Campbell, 1960; Holland, 1992; Levinthal & March, 1993).

This finding does not indicate failure of the GEP. Rather, it reveals its current evolutionary stage: a diagnostic and recognition-oriented framework with high potential to become a learning-oriented adaptive service architecture. The empirical evidence suggests that the transition required is not primarily conceptual, but architectural: the challenge is to transform diagnostic awareness into structured reinforcement mechanisms capable of supporting cumulative capability development over time. This constitutes the central empirical motivation for the redesign proposed in Chapter 6.

5.6.4 Empirical Contributions to the Redesign Proposed in Chapter 6

The empirical findings analyzed in this chapter are not merely descriptive. Each major structural pattern identified provides direct empirical grounding for specific elements of the TO-BE architecture developed in Chapter 6. Table 5.10 presents the five most consequential empirical contributions and their specific architectural implications.

Table 5.10 — Empirical Contributions Linking Chapter 5 and Chapter 6

#	Empirical Contribution	Ch. 5 Placement	Contribution to Ch. 6
1	Cross-dimensional integration as proof of concept (Cred Boreal GF = 7.6; Cred Estelar GF = 7.8)	Section 5.4.5	Section 6.5 — empirical feasibility of Aurora trajectory

2	ESG–Green Finance dissociation (Cred Horizonte: ESG 7.13 vs GF 2.80)	Section 5.4.5	Section 6.3 — Principle 5: institutional embedding of sustainability
3	Aurora as statistically representative institutional type (M3 band n = 18; 9 structural matches)	Section 5.2	Section 6.5 — Aurora as representative rather than exceptional
4	System-level diffusion asymmetry (S1 vs S2 in Green Finance; gap = 2.40 pts)	Section 5.4.6	Section 6.4.3 — Loop 2: inter-cooperative diffusion
5	M3 ceiling in Green Finance (65% of cooperatives reaching M3 do not advance to M4)	Section 5.4.2	Section 6.2.1 — variation without stabilized retention

The hypothetical trajectory of Cooperative Aurora (Chapter 6, Section 6.5) is grounded in these empirical patterns. Among the 56 evaluated cooperatives, 18 are positioned in the M3 band at the overall level. The statistical portrait of this sub-group reveals a dimensional configuration closely matching Aurora's narrative description: mean Participatory score of 7.61, mean Capacity Development of 7.73, mean ESG of 7.08, all consolidated at M3, against a mean Green Finance score of 5.58, the weakest dimension and the one exhibiting the highest internal variance (std dev 1.50). Table 5.4 presents this statistical profile.

Table 5.11 — Statistical Profile of Cooperatives in the M3 Band (n = 18)

Dimension	Mean (M3 sub-group)	Std Dev	Profile
Participatory	7.61	0.92	Consolidated
Collaborative	6.72	0.88	Intermediate

Capacity Development	7.73	1.10	Consolidated
Green Finance	5.58	1.50	Fragile / most heterogeneous
ESG	7.08	0.78	Intermediate

Furthermore, 9 of the 56 cooperatives match Aurora's structural signature more precisely: overall M3 positioning combined with Participatory scores at or above 6.0 and Green Finance below 6.0. This sub-group, representing 16.1% of the validated dataset, confirms that Aurora represents not an exceptional configuration but a recurring institutional pattern within the ecosystem. The architectural redesign proposed in Chapter 6 is therefore calibrated to address a capability gap that affects a statistically significant portion of the cooperative system.

Ultimately, the empirical findings and institutional narratives analyzed in this chapter do not merely describe the present state of innovation maturity, they illuminate the structural conditions under which the cooperative ecosystem can evolve from reflective awareness to adaptive consolidation. It is precisely within this transition, from recognition to reinforcement, from discourse to architecture, that the strategic contribution of this research is situated.

For the Cooperatives

Chapter 5 is where the data speaks that 56 cooperatives were analyzed across five dimensions of innovation with purpose: how members are involved in decisions, how collaboration happens with other cooperatives, how people and capabilities are developed, how green finance is approached, and how ESG is embedded into governance. Each cooperative received a score from 0 to 10 in each dimension, placing them in one of five maturity levels: M1 through M5.

Here is what the data shows: The good news first! Cooperatives are genuinely committed to their purpose. Across all 56, the values are present, the language is right, and the intent is real. Participation and capacity development are the strongest dimensions, which makes sense: cooperatives are built around democratic governance and education. These principles are alive.

The harder news. Having the right values is not the same as having the right structures. Across almost every dimension, the same pattern appears: cooperatives know what they should be doing, they want to do it, and they have started doing it, but the organizational routines, measurement systems, and governance structures that would make those practices durable and scalable are not yet in place.

Think of it this way: A decision to eat healthier can be made. Vegetables can be bought. But if shopping habits, cooking routines, and kitchen organization do not change, the vegetables will keep going bad in the fridge; intent without infrastructure does not stick.

Green Finance is the most urgent area. This is where the gap is largest. Nearly two thirds of cooperatives are below the minimum expected maturity level in green finance. This is not because cooperatives do not care about sustainability. Many care deeply, and their ESG scores show it. The problem is that caring about sustainability at the governance level is very different from actually embedding sustainability into credit decisions, portfolio management, and financial products. That second step requires skills, tools, and processes that most cooperatives have not yet developed. This is what the thesis calls the sustainability translation gap.

The ecosystem is polarized. A small group of cooperatives are performing at very high levels across all dimensions. A larger group is stuck in the middle, making progress but not breaking through. And some are still at the beginning. This polarization matters because the cooperatives at the top could be helping the ones in the middle, and the ones in the middle could be helping the ones at

the start. But right now, that learning is not flowing systematically through the ecosystem.

The GEP sees all of this clearly. That is its great strength. The diagnostic is good. The scores are meaningful. The feedback reports are substantive. But seeing a problem is only the first step. The data shows that cooperatives participating in multiple GEP cycles are not consistently improving at the rate you would expect if the evaluation were actively developing their capabilities.

That is the structural problem this chapter documents. And that is what motivates everything that comes next.

CHAPTER 6 - REDESIGNING GEP AS AN ADAPTIVE SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE

6.1 Research through Design and Institutional Prototyping

6.2 Limitations of the AS-IS Diagnostic Configuration

6.3 Design Principles

6.4 The TO-BE Adaptive Architecture

6.5 Illustrative Application: Cooperative Aurora

6.6 Strategic and Policy Implications

6.1 Research through Design and Institutional Prototyping

The redesign of the GEP presented in this chapter was developed through a Research through Design (RtD) logic rather than as a prescriptive policy proposal. Research through Design positions the act of designing not merely as problem-solving, but as a method for generating knowledge through the construction of artefacts (Frayling, 1993; Koskinen et al., 2011). In this tradition, design operates as a form of argumentation applied to complex and indeterminate situations, what Buchanan (1992) characterizes as "wicked problems," in which goals, constraints, and institutional contexts are interdependent and evolving. In such contexts, design does not merely generate solutions but reframes systems of action and coordination.

The redesign of the GEP operates within this tradition: it does not solve a bounded technical flaw, but reconfigures an institutional architecture in response to systemic learning asymmetries identified empirically. The blueprint introduced in Section 6.4 should therefore not be interpreted as an operational manual, but as an architectural prototype, a structured hypothesis about how adaptive reinforcement, capability scaffolding, and sustainability integration could be institutionally embedded within the cooperative ecosystem.

The design process unfolded iteratively across three interconnected movements. First, empirical grounding(Chapter 5): cross-dimensional asymmetries and retention gaps identified in the validated dataset (n = 56) revealed structural limitations in the AS-IS configuration. Second, theoretical integration (Chapters 2–4): adaptive systems theory (Campbell, 1960; Holland, 1992; Levinthal & March, 1993), organizational learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978), institutional design (Ostrom, 2005), and service ecosystem logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) provided generative principles for architectural reconfiguration. Third, architectural synthesis (this chapter): these empirical and theoretical elements were consolidated into a redesigned service blueprint structured around variation, selection, retention, diffusion, and governance-aligned sustainability embedding mechanisms.

This iterative movement between empirical diagnosis and architectural synthesis reflects constructive design research logic, in which artefacts are developed to explore, stabilise, and test theoretical propositions (Koskinen et al., 2011). The redesign is speculative but grounded: it does not represent a tested implementation, but a theoretically informed and empirically anchored architectural hypothesis whose validity rests on conceptual coherence, systemic alignment with empirical findings, and consistency with established adaptive and institutional design theory. This RtD orientation is distinct from, yet complementary to, the Design Science Research (DSR) positioning articulated in Chapter 3 (Hevner et al., 2004): whereas DSR provides the epistemological foundation legitimizing the production of a conceptual artefact as a form of knowledge contribution, RtD governs the generative logic of the design process itself. To stress-test the architectural logic, Section 6.5 introduces a scenario-based application (Cooperative Aurora), which functions as conceptual prototyping, allowing the reinforcement loops and governance embedding mechanisms to be examined dynamically across time without requiring immediate field implementation.

6.2 Limitations of the AS-IS Diagnostic Configuration

Chapter 5 demonstrated that the GEP 2025 cycle successfully generated diagnostic visibility across five structural dimensions of innovation with purpose: Participatory, Collaborative, Capacity Development, Green Finance, and ESG. The validated dataset of 56 cooperatives revealed recurring cross-dimensional patterns: internal governance mechanisms are more consolidated than interorganizational integration; sustainability discourse is more mature than its institutional embedding into financial and commercial practice; feedback loops are fragmented; and maturity polarization persists across the ecosystem.

These findings do not indicate methodological weakness in the GEP, on the contrary, the framework effectively identifies structural asymmetries and stimulates institutional reflection. However, the empirical evidence suggests that the current configuration operates predominantly as a diagnostic catalyst rather

than as a cumulative adaptive infrastructure. As the AS-IS service blueprint illustrates (see Figure 4.1, Chapter 4), this distinction is not semantic but architectural: interaction is concentrated at the evaluation moment, with no structured reinforcement loop beyond recognition.

Three structural findings from Chapter 5 are particularly decisive for the redesign. First, the Green Finance maturity ceiling: a majority of cooperatives remain concentrated at M1–M2 levels, indicating difficulty in stabilizing sustainability capabilities beyond early experimentation. Second, the asymmetric diffusion pattern across cooperative systems, where certain federated networks demonstrate stronger capacity to circulate and stabilize advanced practices. Third, the structural gap between ESG discourse and operational financial integration, suggesting that sustainability commitment has not yet been fully embedded into financial routines and governance cycles. Together, these findings indicate that the limitation of the GEP is not diagnostic visibility but the absence of structured mechanisms capable of reinforcing learning and diffusing capabilities across the ecosystem.

6.2.1 Variation Without Stabilized Retention

From an adaptive systems perspective, systemic evolution depends on three interrelated mechanisms: variation, selection, and retention (Campbell, 1960; Holland, 1992; Levinthal & March, 1993). The GEP demonstrably activates variation and partially activates selection: cooperatives experiment with participatory models, ESG governance structures, collaborative initiatives, and green financial products, and through validation interviews and maturity scoring, certain practices are identified as more structured or advanced. However, the empirical findings from Chapter 5 indicate that retention mechanisms remain structurally weak. Advanced cooperatives do not systematically function as diffusion hubs. Feedback is not consistently reintegrated into progressive capability pathways. Cross-cooperative learning loops are not institutionally scaffolded. The system generates variation and visibility, but does not stabilize evolutionary pathways.

6.2.2 Architectural, Not Methodological, Limitation

The central limitation of the AS-IS GEP configuration is architectural rather than methodological — it concerns the design of institutional arrangements that govern how information flows, how learning is reinforced, and how capabilities are progressively scaffolded (Ostrom, 2005). The current configuration maps maturity, generates reflection, encourages recognition, and signals strategic priorities. However, it does not systematically reinforce adaptive feedback loops, scaffold capability progression, institutionalize inter-cooperative knowledge diffusion, or integrate cross-dimensional learning architectures. The limitation resides in how the evaluation architecture connects — or fails to connect — diagnosis with structured reinforcement.

This architectural gap corresponds to the difference between single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978). The GEP currently stimulates predominantly single-loop learning: cooperatives identify weaknesses and implement localized improvements within existing structures. Advancing toward ecosystem-level transformation requires double-loop transformation at ecosystem scale. Within service-dominant logic, this requires redesigning the institutional arrangements governing evaluation so that they incorporate reinforcement and diffusion mechanisms capable of converting reflexivity into cumulative adaptive capacity (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka, Vargo & Lusch, 2013; Levinthal & March, 1993; Folke, 2006).

6.2.3 Design Implications Emerging from the AS-IS

The empirical and theoretical analysis of the AS-IS configuration suggests that redesign must address five structural objectives: (1) reinforcing adaptive feedback loops; (2) scaffolding progressive capability development across maturity levels; (3) institutionalizing inter-cooperative diffusion mechanisms so that advanced cooperatives function as structured learning hubs; (4) embedding sustainability as institutional capability, translating ESG discourse into structured organizational routines and measurable decision-support mechanisms; and (5) embedding cross-dimensional integration so that the five GEP dimensions operate as mutually

reinforcing components of a coherent adaptive architecture rather than parallel tracks. These objectives do not imply replacing the GEP, but evolving it from a recognition-oriented diagnostic framework into an Adaptive Service Infrastructure designed to strengthen cumulative ecosystem capability.

6.3 Design Principles for Adaptive Evaluation Systems

Five design principles guide the architectural transformation proposed in this chapter. They derive from the empirical asymmetries identified in Chapter 5 and from adaptive systems theory (Campbell, 1960; Holland, 1992; Levinthal & March, 1993), organizational learning theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Crossan, Lane & White, 1999), institutional design theory (Ostrom, 2005), service ecosystem logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016), and evaluation-as-learning frameworks (Patton, 2008; Preskill & Torres, 1999). Table 6.1 presents each principle alongside the specific architectural mechanism and verification indicator through which it is operationalized in the redesigned GEP.

Table 6.1 — Mapping Design Principles to Architectural Mechanisms

Design Principle	Architectural Mechanism	Verification Indicator
Evaluation must activate retention (not only variation)	Loop 1 – Internal Adaptive Reinforcement	Repeated capability improvement across evaluation cycles
Feedback must be embedded in governance loops	Governance integration layer (Layer 2)	Evidence of evaluation outputs incorporated into planning and budgeting
Capability development must be scaffolded across maturity levels	Strategic Evolution Journey (Transitional Layer)	Progression of cooperatives across maturity bands

Institutional design shapes adaptive capacity	Loop 2 – Inter-cooperative diffusion (Layer 3)	Reduction in maturity polarization across systems
Sustainability must be embedded as adaptive capability	Loop 3 – Sustainability–finance integration (Layer 4)	Integration of ESG metrics into portfolio monitoring and credit routines

Taken together, these principles reconceptualize evaluation not as a measurement device but as an institutional infrastructure within a service ecosystem. When structurally embedded within institutional arrangements, evaluation can function as a distributed learning architecture that generates variation, supports selection, institutionalizes retention, embeds feedback into governance, scaffolds capability progression, and aligns sustainability with financial structuring (Akaka, Vargo & Lusch, 2013). The following section operationalizes these principles through the redesigned GEP architecture.

6.4 The TO-BE Adaptive Architecture

The redesign transforms the GEP from a diagnostic framework into an adaptive service infrastructure structured around three reinforcement loops — operating at micro, meso, and macro levels — and four interconnected architectural layers. Figure 6.1 presents the TO-BE blueprint. Compared to the AS-IS blueprint (Figure 4.1), the same evaluation process now anchors a multilevel reinforcement architecture operating across annual, biennial, and multi-year cycles.

Figure 6.1 — GEP TO-BE Adaptive Service Blueprint: To-be configuration of the cooperative service ecosystem · Fenasbac · Chapter 6. Adapted from Shostack (1982, 1984), Bitner, Ostrom & Morgan (2008), and Stickdorn et al. (2018). Source: elaborated by the author based on RECIP 2025 cycle data (Fenasbac, 2026).

The three loops correspond to distinct systemic levels of learning stabilization: Loop 1 (organizational retention, micro), Loop 2 (inter-organizational diffusion, meso), and Loop 3 (institutional embedding, macro). They operate within four architectural layers: Layer 1 (cooperative interaction, frontstage), Layer 2 (governance integration, backstage–organizational), Layer 3 (ecosystem diffusion, backstage–network), and Layer 4 (institutional alignment, macro). These layers are described bottom-up in the text; the TO-BE blueprint presents the same architecture top-down, from macro strategic direction through meso infrastructure to micro cooperative engagement and diffusion — reflecting the governance flow in which legitimacy moves downward while innovation moves upward. A transitional developmental layer — the GEP Dialogues, operationalized as the Strategic Evolution Journey — connects Loop 1 and Loop 2. Table 6.2 presents the primary actors, activation moments, and monitoring mechanisms for each loop.

The blueprint additionally represents a Framework Evolution band (L6), positioned at the base of the visual. This band is not an operational architectural layer in the same sense as Layers 1–4 — it does not correspond to a service interaction space — but rather to the GEP's own institutional learning cycle: the multi-year process through which the framework's analytical dimensions, indicator structures, and validation criteria are progressively recalibrated based on accumulated cycle findings. This meta-level evolution is coordinated by the RECIP/GEP Team and the Advisory Council within Fenasbac, and constitutes the condition of possibility for the adaptive architecture itself to remain responsive to ecosystem changes over time.

Figure 6.2. Multilevel Adaptive Loop Architecture of the redesigned GEP. The three nested loops represent distinct systemic levels of learning stabilization: Loop 1 (micro) — internal adaptive reinforcement within individual cooperatives; Loop 2 (meso) — inter-cooperative diffusion across the ecosystem; Loop 3 (macro) — sustainability–finance integration at institutional level. The dashed return path (macro → micro) represents the recalibration dynamic through which ecosystem-level insights feed back into organizational reinforcement cycles. Aurora (M3) illustrates the entry position of a representative cooperative at the onset of the adaptive trajectory. Source: elaborated by the author.

Table 6.2 — Operationalization of Adaptive Loops

Loop	Primary Actors	Activation Moment	Monitoring Mechanism
Loop 1 – Internal Reinforcement	Cooperative leadership and governance boards	Post-evaluation strategic review	Governance dashboards and maturity indicators

Loop 2 – Inter-Cooperative Diffusion	GEP coordination + advanced cooperatives	Strategic Evolution Journey encounters	Benchmarking platform and learning hub reporting
Loop 3 – Sustainability –Finance Integration	Cooperative governance + regulatory observation	Biennial sustainability integration review	ESG portfolio metrics and risk analytics

6.4.1 Loop 1 – Internal Adaptive Reinforcement (Micro Level, Layers 1 and 2)

The micro-level loop operates within individual cooperatives and directly addresses the primary structural gap identified in Chapter 5: the absence of systematic retention mechanisms capable of transforming diagnostic insight into institutionalized capability. In the AS-IS configuration, cooperatives receive structured feedback and maturity positioning. However, diagnostic awareness alone does not generate adaptive consolidation. Organizational learning literature consistently demonstrates that feedback must be accompanied by structured support mechanisms to enable institutionalization (Garvin, 1993; Crossan, Lane & White, 1999). Insight without scaffolding risks remaining informational rather than transformational.

The redesigned architecture strengthens Loop 1 through three interconnected mechanisms. First, maturity-based toolkits provide governance templates, implementation checklists, dashboard prototypes, and illustrative cases aligned with maturity positioning across the five GEP dimensions. Drawing conceptually from scaffolding theory — particularly Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development — these toolkits operate as institutional scaffolds that enable cooperatives to develop beyond their current autonomous capacity (Day, 2000). In line with utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2008), they increase the probability that evaluation outputs are actively mobilized. Second, structured strategic reflection within governance arenas ensures that GEP findings function

as institutional direction-setting inputs rather than operational commentary: if diagnostic insight does not enter formal governance cycles — strategic planning, budgeting, board deliberation — it cannot evolve into dynamic capability (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Ostrom, 2005). Third, maturity-based mentorship clusters organize cooperatives into facilitated peer groups aligned with comparable maturity bands, reducing polarization and strengthening contextualized learning (Wenger, 1998; Levinthal & March, 1993; Folke, 2006). Collectively, these mechanisms transform evaluation into a structured internal reinforcement cycle, enabling diagnostic insight to consolidate into durable organizational capability (Campbell, 1960; Holland, 1992; Levinthal & March, 1993).

6.4.2 Transitional Layer – The GEP Dialogues as Strategic Evolution Journey

Between internal retention (Loop 1) and ecosystem diffusion (Loop 2), the architecture introduces a structured transitional layer: the GEP Dialogues, operationalized as the Strategic Evolution Journey. Traditional maturity models classify organizations into stages but often fail to provide structured developmental pathways between them (Fraser et al., 2002). The Strategic Evolution Journey addresses this limitation by positioning development as a sequenced capability pathway embedded within the GEP architecture.

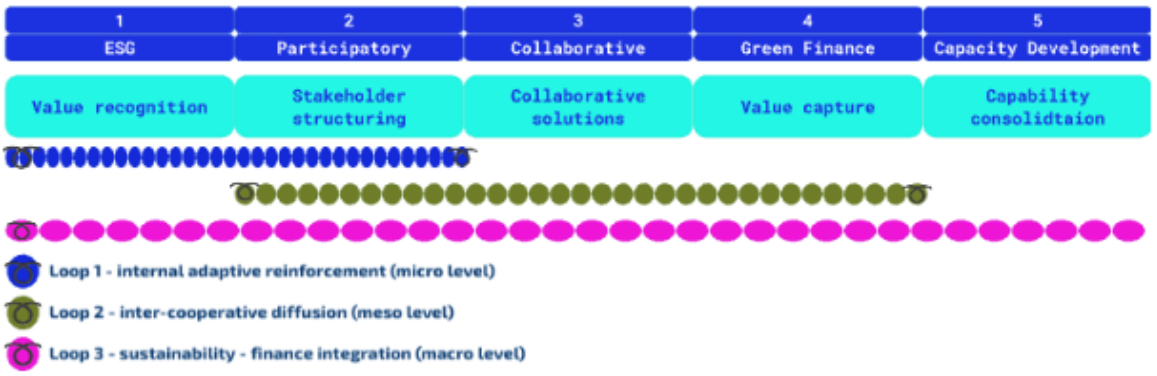


Figure 6.3 — GEP Dialogues: The Strategic Evolution Journey across five thematic encounters. Source: elaborated by the author (Fenasbac, 2026).

As illustrated in Figure 6.3, the Journey consists of five thematic encounters organized sequentially along the five diagnostic dimensions: (1) ESG — value recognition: cooperatives identify and make explicit the social, environmental, and economic value they already generate, reflecting a shift from implicit impact to conscious strategic awareness aligned with service-dominant logic perspectives in which value is relational and co-created; (2) Participatory Governance — stakeholder structuring: structured mechanisms for stakeholder engagement transform dispersed interactions into organized data and actionable insights, enabling feedback loops essential for adaptive learning; (3) Collaborative Practices — collaborative solution development: cooperatives develop the capacity to co-create solutions through interorganizational collaboration, reinforcing the role of interdependence within cooperative ecosystems; (4) Green Finance — value capture: previously identified and co-created value is translated into financial mechanisms, products, and services; and (5) Capacity Development — capability consolidation: organizations develop the internal and external capabilities required to sustain and scale these transformations. This progression closely aligns with dynamic capability theory (Teece, 2007), moving from sensing, to seizing, and ultimately to transforming (Teece, 2007).

Each encounter requires preparatory engagement, provides structured methodological tools, integrates applied case demonstration, and concludes with post-engagement action commitments — reinforcing progression from interpretation to integration and institutionalization (Crossan et al., 1999; Day, 2000; Patrício et al., 2011). Architecturally, the Journey bridges micro-level retention and meso-level circulation, operating as a controlled adaptive transition zone within the multilevel architecture.

6.4.3 Loop 2 – Inter-Cooperative Diffusion (Meso Level, Layer 3)

The meso-level loop addresses the ecosystem polarization identified in Chapter 5. Advanced cooperatives function as structured diffusion anchors through codified best practices, facilitated exchange environments, and maturity-aligned clustering. Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and network learning theory (Levinthal & March, 1993) suggest that structured peer interaction enhances

stabilization of adaptive routines. Rather than indiscriminate replication, diffusion occurs within contextual maturity alignment. From a resilience perspective, distributed reinforcement networks strengthen systemic stability (Folke, 2006). Loop 2 transforms isolated excellence into distributed ecosystem capability, directly addressing the polarization pattern identified in Chapter 5.

6.4.4 Loop 3 – Sustainability–Finance Integration (Macro Level, Layer 4)

The macro-level loop consolidates sustainability as institutional capability rather than discursive commitment. While some cooperative systems already implement ESG dashboards and risk analytics, these mechanisms are often decoupled from evaluation cycles. Loop 3 synchronizes sustainability metrics with governance rhythms, credit routines, and strategic planning cycles. Sustainability becomes adaptive when embedded within institutional time and decision architecture rather than treated as symbolic alignment (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Folke, 2006). This loop directly addresses the sustainability translation gap identified as a recurring cross-dimensional pattern in Chapter 5.

6.4.5 Temporal Architecture

Without temporal structuring, reinforcement remains sporadic (Stickdorn et al., 2018). The redesigned GEP introduces layered temporal structuring across three cycles. In the short term (annual), evaluation, feedback integration, and immediate corrective adjustments stabilize internal governance learning. In the medium term (biennial), maturity reassessment, cross-dimensional integration review, and structured diffusion of best practices reduce polarization and deepen institutional embedding. In the long term (multi-year), progressive embedding of sustainability into financial decision-making and governance–finance integration review ensure structural consolidation rather than rhetorical adoption. Time thereby becomes an architectural variable within the service design: the GEP is not a periodic assessment event but a longitudinal adaptive infrastructure structured around recurring reinforcement cycles. Table 6.3 maps each loop to the architectural layers and service flows it activates; Table 6.4 presents the full reinforcement and scaffolding architecture.

Table 6.3 — Reinforcement Loop Architecture

Loop	Layers Activated	Flow
Loop 1 – Internal Adaptive Loop (Micro)	Layers 1 + 2	Diagnostic Engagement → Strategic Integration → Capability Reinforcement → Re-evaluation
Loop 2 – Inter-Cooperative Diffusion (Meso)	Layer 3	Advanced node identification → Codification → Learning hub activation → Cross-cooperative replication → Benchmarking
Loop 3 – Sustainability–Finance Integration (Macro)	Layer 4	ESG governance → Risk model refinement → ESG-informed portfolio monitoring → Progressive integration of sustainability criteria in credit routines → Structural evolution review

Table 6.4 — Reinforcement and Scaffolding Architecture: Mechanisms, Cycles, and Indicators

Element	What it does	Temporal cycle	Success indicator
Maturity-based toolkits (Loop 1)	Stage-specific developmental support per cooperative	Annual	Cooperatives progress between maturity bands across cycles
Governance embedding (Loop 1)	Integrates feedback outputs into planning and budgeting routines	Annual	Evaluation outputs cited in governance decisions
GEP Dialogues / Strategic Evolution Journey	Structures the pathway from internal consolidation	Biennial	Cooperatives transition from M3 to M4 band

(Transitional layer)	to ecosystem contribution		
Inter-cooperative learning hubs (Loop 2)	Activates advanced cooperatives as diffusion nodes	Annual / Biennial	Reduction in maturity polarization across systems
Sustainability–finance integration (Loop 3)	Embeds ESG criteria into credit, portfolio, and commercial routines	Multi-year	ESG metrics integrated into portfolio monitoring
Temporal structuring (all loops)	Creates rhythm so reinforcement is recurring, not episodic	Short / Medium / Long	Learning revisited before it dissipates

6.4.6 Governance Anchors

The multilevel adaptive architecture does not operate in an institutional vacuum. Its stabilization depends on three categories of governance anchors. First, the GEP itself functions as a focal orchestrator: beyond administering evaluation cycles, it structures interaction, codifies practices, and sequences developmental pathways across the ecosystem (Powell, 1990).

Second, a Consultative Advisory Board, composed of senior representatives from major cooperative systems and sector leadership, introduces a governance intermediary layer performing strategic legitimacy signaling, thematic curation and prioritization, and institutional mediation across systems. Rather than symbolic endorsement, the Board operates as an adaptive governance stabilizer within the meso–macro interface (Ostrom, 2005). Third, regulatory observation by the Central Bank introduces systemic legitimacy at the macro level, aligning sustainability integration, risk management evolution, and governance maturation with national financial system expectations (Folke, 2006). In multilevel adaptive systems, legitimacy flows downward while innovation flows upward: the

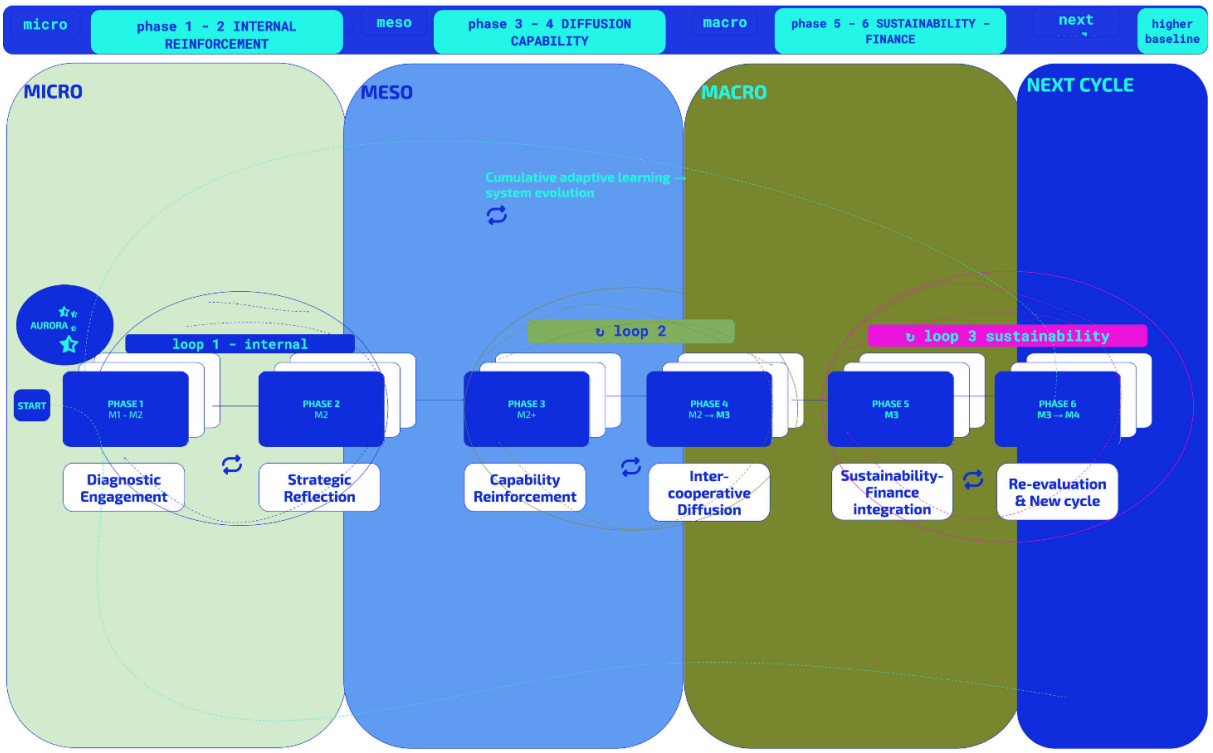
interaction between regulatory alignment and cooperative experimentation contributes to systemic stability without suppressing localized variation.

Taken together, these governance anchors form a multilevel scaffold: micro-level capability development (Loop 1) is reinforced by meso-level thematic curation and peer diffusion (Loop 2), while macro-level legitimacy anchors sustainability integration within broader institutional frameworks (Loop 3).

6.5 Illustrative Application: Cooperative Aurora

To clarify how the redesigned GEP operates as an Adaptive Service Infrastructure, Figure 6.3 presents the hypothetical trajectory of Cooperative Aurora, positioned at M3 (intermediate maturity) in the 2025 evaluation cycle. The trajectory is not derived from a single empirical case observed in the dataset: it represents a conceptual scenario constructed from recurrent structural patterns identified in Chapter 5, illustrating how the proposed reinforcement architecture could operate if the redesigned mechanisms were activated. Aurora's starting profile reflects structural patterns common in the dataset: strong participatory governance (7.8 — consolidated), moderate capacity development (7.6 — consolidating), moderate ESG (7.2), emerging collaboration (5.4), and fragile green finance (3.8).

Figure 6.4 — Cooperative Aurora: Illustrative Adaptive Trajectory
Hypothetical trajectory constructed from recurrent structural patterns in the GEP 2025 dataset (n = 56)
· Chapter 6, Section 6.6.7 · Not derived from a single empirical case



1 DIAGNOSTIC ENGAGEMENT	2 STRATEGY INTEGRATION	3 CAPABILITY REINFORCEMENT	4 ECOSYSTEM DIFFUSION	5 FINANCIAL INTEGRATION	6 RE-EVALUATION & NEW CYCLE
• GEP self-assessment across 5 dimensions • Validation interview with GEP analysts • Consolidated feedback report received • Maturity positioning confirmed at M3 • Structured visibility generated • No reinforcement loop active yet	• GEP results presented to Board • Fragilities aligned with annual planning • Priority 1: ESG criteria in credit risk • Priority 2: Formalize collaboration (×2 coops) • Feedback embedded in decision routines ↻ L1 - loop 1	• Workshop with MS cooperative (green finance) • Environmental risk scoring in credit models • Training linked to ESG performance indicators • Learning → structured capability development • Practices codified & linked to routines ↻ L1 - loop 1	• Shared KPIs established with partner coops • Green credit methodology documented • Learning contributed to ecosystem repository • Experience circulates across the network • Aurora → diffusion node for peer coops ↻ ↻ L2 - loop 2	• ESG criteria in credit committee routines • Sustainability targets in performance dashboards • Commercial teams position green solutions • Sustainability present in governance deliberations • Capital allocation logic begins shifting ↻ ↻ ↻ L3 - loop 3	• Green Finance: M2 → M3 (↑ 2.4 points) over 2 cycles • Collaborative maturity improved via peer practices • Governance dashboards show longitudinal gains • Full adaptive cycle completed • Loops reactivate at higher maturity baseline All loops → higher baseline
	activated	strenghned	active	active	↻ active
			activated	active	↻ active
				↻ activated	↻ active
M2 3.8 — fragile	M2 awareness only	M2→M3 risk scoring piloted	M3 methodology shared	M3 in credit routines	M3 M3 threshold ↑ / consolidating → M4 / ~2 cycles

Loop 1 Internal · Micro
Loop 2 Diffusion · Meso
Loop 3 Finance · Macro
Green Finance maturity signal

Aurora — starting profile (Phase 1)

Participatory 7.8 consolidated | Capacity Development 7.6 consolidated | ESG 7.2 moderate | Collaborative 5.4 emerging | Green Finance 3.8 fragile

Aurora — evolution (Phase 6)

Green Finance 6.2 M3 → M4 ↑
Collaborative 7.1 improved

Δ after one full adaptive cycle - loops reactivate at higher baseline

Figure 6.4 — Cooperative Aurora: Illustrative Adaptive Trajectory. Hypothetical trajectory constructed from recurrent structural patterns in the GEP 2025 dataset (n = 56). Not derived from a single empirical case. Source: elaborated by the author.

Table 6.5 — Cooperative Aurora: Six-Phase Adaptive Trajectory

Phase	Name	Key Activities	Loop Activated
Phase 1	Diagnostic Engagement	GEP self-assessment and validation interview completed. Strong participatory governance, fragile Green Finance, limited collaboration formalized.	No reinforcement loop active yet.
Phase 2	Strategic Integration	GEP results presented to Board. Fragilities aligned with annual planning. Two priorities: ESG criteria in credit risk; formalized collaboration with two cooperatives.	Loop 1 activated. Feedback enters governance structures.
Phase 3	Capability Reinforcement	Workshop with M5 cooperative (green finance). Maturity-stage guidance on environmental risk scoring. Training linked	Loop 1 retention strengthened. Practices codified.

		to ESG performance indicators.	
Phase 4	Ecosystem Diffusion	Shared KPIs with partner cooperatives. Green credit methodology documented. Learning contributed to ecosystem knowledge repository.	Loop 2 activated. Practices circulate beyond originating cooperative.
Phase 5	Financial Integration	ESG criteria embedded in credit committee routines. Sustainability targets in performance dashboards. Commercial teams position green solutions.	Loop 3 activated. Capital allocation and ESG governance reinforce each other.
Phase 6	Re-evaluation & New Cycle	Aurora: Green Finance M3 → M4 (+2.4 pts). Collaborative maturity improved. Governance dashboards show longitudinal gains.	All loops reactivate at higher institutional baseline.

By the third evaluation cycle, Aurora advances from M3 to M4 in Green Finance (approximately +2.4 points over two cycles). Collaborative maturity improves through structured inter-cooperative practices, and governance dashboards demonstrate longitudinal improvement in ESG integration. The system completes one full adaptive cycle: Diagnosis → Integration → Reinforcement →

Diffusion → Financial Embedding → Reassessment. Crucially, the process does not terminate with re-evaluation: it reactivates all adaptive loops at a higher baseline of institutional maturity. Pathways for future empirical validation could involve piloting selected reinforcement mechanisms within a subset of cooperatives across one or two evaluation cycles, assessing whether structured governance embedding increases retention of practices, whether diffusion mechanisms reduce maturity polarization, and whether sustainability integration shifts from discursive commitment to measurable financial embedding. The present blueprint thus constitutes a testable architectural hypothesis rather than a normative prescription.

6.6 Strategic and Policy Implications

The redesigned GEP, conceptualized as an Adaptive Service Infrastructure, extends beyond a methodological refinement of evaluation processes. It represents a structural reconfiguration of how learning, capability development, and sustainability integration can be coordinated within cooperative financial ecosystems. This shift carries important strategic and policy implications across micro, meso, and macro levels.

6.6.1 Implications for Cooperative Strategy (Micro Level)

At the micro level, the redesigned architecture transforms the role of evaluation within individual cooperatives. Rather than functioning as a periodic diagnostic exercise, evaluation becomes embedded within governance routines, strategic planning processes, and capability development pathways. The activation of Loop 1 implies that cooperatives must transition from reactive improvement toward structured learning cycles, developing internal absorptive capacity — understood as the organizational ability to engage with external knowledge and translate it into actionable practice (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). The maturity scaffolding logic reframes capability development as a continuous trajectory rather than a categorical position, positioning cooperatives within structured developmental pathways. As illustrated in the trajectory of Cooperative Aurora (Section 6.5),

strategic alignment, experimentation, and progressive embedding of sustainability practices become interdependent stages within a cumulative learning process.

6.6.2 Implications for Ecosystem Coordination (Meso Level)

At the meso level, Loop 2 (Inter-Cooperative Diffusion) transforms the ecosystem from a collection of isolated actors into a structured learning network, repositioning advanced cooperatives as diffusion anchors and introducing structured mechanisms for knowledge codification, peer learning, and capability transfer. This implies a shift in ecosystem coordination from passive coexistence toward active orchestration. The GEP, as a focal orchestrator, assumes a central role in designing interaction arenas, sequencing learning encounters, and enabling cross-cooperative alignment. Through this mechanism, capability development becomes both individualized and collective, reducing maturity polarization and accelerating convergence across the ecosystem.

6.6.3 Implications for Governance and Public Policy (Macro Level)

At the macro level, Loop 3 (Sustainability–Finance Integration) enables the progressive embedding of sustainability within financial decision-making, governance routines, and risk management practices. Rather than relying solely on compliance-based approaches, evaluation systems such as the GEP can function as soft governance infrastructures that guide systemic transformation through learning, coordination, and gradual institutionalization. It is also worth noting a structural tension in the current GEP weighting architecture: Green Finance carries the highest weight (weight = 3), followed by ESG (weight = 2.5), reflecting their strategic priority. However, the empirical findings demonstrate that these are precisely the dimensions with the lowest average maturity across the validated dataset. High weighting without corresponding developmental scaffolding may produce evaluative pressure without capability advancement. The redesigned GEP addresses this tension directly: the dimensions carrying the highest strategic weight also receive the most structured capability reinforcement across Loops 1, 2, and 3.

6.6.4 Concluding Synthesis

This chapter proposed a redesign of the GEP as an Adaptive Service Infrastructure, grounded in empirical findings, theoretical integration, and design-based architectural synthesis. By articulating the limitations of the AS-IS configuration, defining five design principles, and developing a multilevel adaptive architecture operationalized through a service blueprint, the research advances a systemic approach to evaluation. The introduction of reinforcement loops, capability scaffolding mechanisms, and institutional embedding structures enables the transition from diagnostic recognition toward cumulative adaptive capacity. The illustrative trajectory of Cooperative Aurora demonstrates how these mechanisms interact dynamically over time, highlighting the co-evolution between individual cooperatives and the broader ecosystem. Ultimately, the redesigned GEP exemplifies how evaluation systems can function as adaptive service infrastructures that stabilize learning, enable capability development, and support sustainability integration within complex cooperative systems. The following chapter builds upon these insights to discuss the broader theoretical contributions, limitations, and future research directions of this thesis.

For the Cooperative

Chapter 6 is where the thesis stops describing what exists and starts imagining what could exist instead.

The starting point is honest: the GEP, as currently designed, is very good at one thing and limited in another. It is very good at generating a clear picture of where a cooperative stands. It is limited in its ability to help that cooperative actually move forward between cycles. This is not a criticism of the people who built it. A camera takes excellent pictures. But a picture of a problem is not the same as a solution to it.

So what would it look like if the GEP were redesigned not just to photograph, but to accompany?

Three loops instead of one annual moment. The redesign proposes that the GEP operate across three interconnected levels, running simultaneously rather than once a year.

The first loop is internal. After receiving the feedback report, each cooperative would follow a structured process of translating that feedback into governance decisions: what to prioritize, who is responsible, what progress looks like in six months. The evaluation becomes the beginning of a cycle, not the end of one.

The second loop connects cooperatives to each other. The cooperatives performing at the highest levels become learning hubs for the ones still developing. Instead of each cooperative figuring things out alone, knowledge and experience flow through the ecosystem systematically. The cooperative that solved a problem two years ago becomes a resource for the one facing that same problem today.

The third loop addresses the sustainability translation gap directly. It creates structured pathways for cooperatives to move from talking about sustainability to embedding it into financial decisions: credit criteria, portfolio monitoring, product development. This loop recognizes that ESG governance and green finance are not the same capability and require different kinds of support.

What the TO-BE blueprint actually shows. The redesigned blueprint is Figure 6.2 in this thesis. It is a map of how the redesigned GEP would work in practice, organized across four layers and three time cycles.

The first layer is what cooperatives see and do directly: submitting the self-assessment, going through the validation interview, receiving feedback, participating in structured reflection workshops, and joining inter-cooperative learning forums. In the current GEP, most of this happens once a year and then stops. In the redesigned version, these interactions become recurring and embedded in the cooperative's governance calendar.

The second layer is what happens inside the cooperative after the evaluation: integrating the feedback into strategic planning, aligning it with the budget, embedding ESG targets into leadership goals, creating sustainability monitoring dashboards. This is where evaluation stops being informational and starts being structural.

The third layer is what happens between cooperatives: advanced cooperatives codify their practices, share them through structured exchange mechanisms, and become reference points for cooperatives that are still developing. Maturity gaps shrink not because every cooperative figures things out alone, but because the ecosystem is designed to circulate what works.

The fourth layer is the long game: progressively integrating sustainability into financial decisions at the system level, aligning credit criteria with ESG governance, and building the kind of institutional infrastructure that makes green finance possible at scale.

Crossing these four layers are three time cycles. An annual cycle handles evaluation, immediate feedback, and short-term adjustments. A biennial cycle assesses capability consolidation and activates diffusion between cooperatives. A multi-year cycle tracks whether sustainability is being embedded into financial architecture or remaining at the level of policy and intention.

The Cooperative Aurora. To make all of this concrete, the chapter follows a fictional cooperative called Aurora through three evaluation cycles under the redesigned system. Aurora starts at M3, receives feedback, activates the internal loop, connects with a more advanced cooperative through the meso loop, and gradually integrates sustainability into its financial operations. By the third cycle, Aurora is not just scoring higher. It is operating differently.

The point of Aurora is not to promise that every cooperative will follow this exact path. It is to show that the path exists, and that it becomes visible when the system is designed to illuminate it.

The simplest way to say what Chapter 6 proposes: The GEP already has the right ingredients: good questions, structured interviews, substantive feedback, a community of cooperatives, and institutional commitment. What the redesign adds is architecture that connects those ingredients into something that compounds over time, rather than restarting from zero every year. The evaluation does not change. What changes is what happens after it.

CHAPTER 7 - DISCUSSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

7.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study in relation to the research problem and questions introduced in Chapter 1, integrating the empirical analysis (Chapter 5) and the design-oriented contributions (Chapter 6). The central objective is to interpret how the GEP operates within the cooperative credit ecosystem and to articulate its implications for theory, practice, and future research.

The study was guided by three interrelated research concerns: (1) how innovation with purpose is currently structured and operationalized within Brazilian credit cooperatives; (2) what systemic patterns and capability gaps emerge from the empirical application of the GEP framework; and (3) how evaluation systems can evolve from diagnostic instruments into adaptive service infrastructures capable of reinforcing learning and capability development over time. These questions were not merely descriptive; they opened onto a set of structural tensions that existing frameworks had not fully theorized.

The findings reveal that the GEP generates significant diagnostic visibility across five dimensions of innovation maturity — but this capacity is not matched by equivalent mechanisms for adaptive reinforcement. This condition provides the central analytical lens for the discussion that follows.

Building on this insight, the chapter develops three interconnected analytical movements. First, Section 7.1 discusses the key empirical findings through a set of cross-cutting structural tensions that characterize the current configuration of the cooperative service ecosystem. Second, Section 7.2 articulates the theoretical contributions of the study, positioning the findings within the literature on service ecosystems, organizational capabilities, sustainability, and evaluation systems. Third, Section 7.3 examines the practical implications of the research for the design and governance of evaluation frameworks such as the GEP. The chapter then reflects on the limitations of the study (Section 7.4) and outlines directions for future research (Section 7.5). The chapter concludes with a brief synthesis (Section 7.6) that prepares the transition to the final conclusion.

7.1 Discussion of Key Findings

This section synthesizes the empirical findings through three interconnected structural tensions that characterize the current configuration of the cooperative service ecosystem. Rather than presenting isolated results, the analysis identifies recurring systemic patterns that explain how capabilities are distributed, consolidated, and reinforced across the ecosystem.

7.1.0 Cross-cutting Structural Tension

While cooperative institutions demonstrate strong adherence to foundational principles — including democratic participation, intercooperation, education, and social responsibility — and increasing alignment with ESG and sustainability agendas, these elements do not consistently translate into consolidated, measurable, and scalable organizational capabilities. Participatory mechanisms often operate without structured integration into decision-making processes. Capacity development initiatives are widely implemented, yet frequently disconnected from performance measurement and long-term capability pathways. Collaborative practices remain present but insufficiently institutionalized as scalable interorganizational learning systems. ESG commitments are broadly articulated, yet unevenly embedded into governance routines and impact measurement structures. Most critically, sustainability awareness does not consistently translate into financial operationalization, as evidenced by the structural fragility of the Green Finance dimension.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the cooperative ecosystem has achieved a significant level of normative and discursive maturity, but remains in transition with respect to institutional consolidation and operational embedding. The system demonstrates clarity regarding its values and strategic direction, yet lacks the mechanisms required to systematically reinforce, scale, and durably structure these capabilities across organizational levels.

This cross-cutting tension can therefore be interpreted as a gap between institutional intention and adaptive infrastructure. Values, principles, and strategic narratives provide directionality, but do not automatically generate the feedback

loops, measurement systems, governance routines, and capability scaffolding mechanisms required for cumulative adaptive evolution. As a result, the ecosystem is capable of identifying its own limitations, yet less capable of systematically resolving them.

From a Service Ecosystem perspective, this pattern reflects an imbalance between resource integration and reflexive institutionalization. Interactions, learning processes, and innovation initiatives are widely present, yet the mechanisms required to reintegrate these experiences into durable institutional arrangements remain uneven. Consequently, learning tends to be episodic rather than cumulative, and innovation remains localized rather than systemically diffused. The three thematic blocks developed in Sections 7.1.1 to 7.1.3 should be understood as distinct expressions of this underlying systemic condition.

7.1.1 Normative Coherence Without Operational Consolidation

One of the most consistent patterns emerging from the empirical analysis is the coexistence of strong normative coherence with uneven operational consolidation across the cooperative service ecosystem. This pattern reflects a structural condition in which shared values, principles, and strategic orientations are widely diffused, yet the institutional mechanisms required to translate these orientations into durable organizational capabilities remain only partially developed.

At the normative level, the ecosystem demonstrates a high degree of alignment. Cooperative principles — particularly democratic participation, intercooperation, education, and concern for the community — are not only formally embedded in governance structures but also actively reinforced through institutional discourse, strategic documents, and evaluation frameworks such as the GEP. This alignment is further strengthened by the growing incorporation of ESG and sustainability narratives, which are increasingly articulated as natural extensions of cooperative identity. As a result, the ecosystem exhibits a strong sense of purpose-driven coherence, in which values are shared, recognized, and broadly legitimized across organizational levels.

This pattern suggests the presence of normative diffusion without equivalent capability consolidation. Values circulate effectively across the ecosystem, but the routines, tools, and institutional arrangements required to operationalize them do not diffuse with the same intensity or consistency. Cooperative principles therefore function as strong directional anchors, but not, in themselves, sufficient to generate operational infrastructures.

A critical mechanism underlying this condition is what can be described as institutional comfort. The widespread presence of shared values and strong normative alignment may reduce the perceived urgency to invest in the more complex and resource-intensive processes required for operational consolidation. This dynamic is consistent with institutional theory's analysis of decoupling between formal structures and actual organizational practices: organizations may adopt legitimizing frameworks at the level of discourse and visible structures while internal processes remain loosely coupled to those frameworks (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the cooperative context, this decoupling is not strategic concealment, but a structural condition in which normative coherence functions as a substitute signal of maturity — reducing the perceived gap between intention and execution, even when underlying capability systems remain underdeveloped.

This dynamic helps explain why, in the empirical findings, practices associated with cooperative principles are widely present but unevenly institutionalized. Participatory mechanisms, for instance, are frequently implemented as part of governance routines, but often lack structured integration into decision-making systems, data governance, and performance metrics. Similarly, sustainability commitments are broadly articulated, but their translation into measurable financial practices and operational routines remains partial. These examples illustrate not the absence of action, but the absence of capability architectures capable of sustaining and scaling that action over time.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding challenges assumptions frequently present in both cooperative studies and sustainability literature, where alignment with values is often implicitly associated with effective implementation. The

empirical evidence suggests that normative alignment and operational capability are analytically distinct and do not evolve automatically in tandem. The presence of shared principles and strategic intent does not guarantee the existence of feedback loops, measurement systems, governance routines, and capability pathways required for their sustained enactment.

Within the Service Ecosystem framework, this pattern reflects a misalignment between institutional arrangements and resource integration practices. Shared meanings and norms are relatively stable, but their translation into routinized interactions and self-reinforcing capability structures remains uneven. Consequently, value co-creation processes are supported by strong cultural foundations but constrained by limited operational scaffolding.

This tension between normative coherence and operational consolidation constitutes a foundational condition shaping the adaptive trajectory of the cooperative ecosystem. It helps explain why progress is observable across all five dimensions, but remains uneven, non-linear, and difficult to consolidate at higher levels of maturity. It also clarifies why evaluation mechanisms such as the GEP are effective in reinforcing awareness and alignment, but less effective in producing cumulative capability development in the absence of complementary reinforcement structures.

7.1.2 Asymmetric Capability Consolidation Across Ecosystem Levels

A second structural pattern emerging from the empirical analysis concerns the asymmetric consolidation of capabilities across different levels of the cooperative service ecosystem. While certain capabilities are relatively well developed at the micro-organizational level, their consolidation becomes progressively weaker as one moves toward meso- and macro-level interactions.

At the micro level — particularly within individual cooperatives — capabilities related to participation, internal governance, and organizational learning demonstrate comparatively higher levels of consolidation. Mechanisms for member engagement, internal communication, and training initiatives are widely present and, in many cases, embedded within routine organizational practices.

These capabilities benefit from proximity, direct accountability structures, and lower coordination complexity, which facilitate their institutionalization.

However, this consolidation does not extend evenly across the ecosystem. At the meso level — involving inter-cooperative collaboration, relationships with central organizations, and network-level coordination — capabilities become significantly more uneven. Collaborative practices are frequently present but remain fragmented, episodic, and difficult to scale. Mechanisms for knowledge transfer, joint innovation, and coordinated strategy are often underdeveloped or weakly institutionalized, limiting the diffusion of learning across organizational boundaries.

This asymmetry becomes even more pronounced at the macro level, particularly in relation to the integration of sustainability into financial practices. While ESG principles are increasingly incorporated into governance discourse, their translation into financial structuring, credit allocation, and portfolio management — as captured by the Green Finance dimension — remains structurally fragile. These higher-order capabilities require cross-functional integration, technical expertise, and alignment between governance and financial logic, making them significantly more demanding to consolidate.

This pattern constitutes a condition of capability stratification across ecosystem levels, in which proximity to the organizational core determines the depth of institutionalization. Capabilities closest to internal routines and governance structures tend to be more consolidated, while those requiring inter-organizational coordination or financial system integration remain comparatively fragile. This stratification reflects not only differences in organizational complexity, but also differences in coordination requirements: micro-level capabilities rely primarily on internal alignment and routine execution, whereas meso- and macro-level capabilities depend on distributed coordination, shared standards, and inter-organizational trust.

From a Service Ecosystem perspective, this pattern reveals a misalignment between levels of resource integration and levels of institutional support. While interactions occur across all levels of the ecosystem, the institutional mechanisms

required to stabilize and reinforce these interactions are unevenly distributed. Internal processes benefit from clearer governance structures and more immediate feedback loops, whereas inter-organizational and system-level processes lack equivalent scaffolding.

This structural imbalance has important implications for adaptive capacity. Because higher-order capabilities depend on the integration of multiple actors, knowledge domains, and institutional layers, their fragility limits the system's ability to evolve in a coordinated and cumulative manner. Even when individual cooperatives develop advanced practices, the absence of structured diffusion mechanisms prevents these practices from becoming shared ecosystem capabilities.

The empirical evidence presented in Chapter 5, particularly the divergence observed between cooperative systems and the clustering patterns in Green Finance maturity, reinforces this interpretation. Differences in capability consolidation are not solely attributable to individual organizational performance, but are strongly influenced by the presence or absence of system-level coordination and diffusion mechanisms. This results in an ecosystem that operates as a partially connected network of locally consolidated capabilities, in which innovation emerges in specific nodes but is not consistently translated into system-wide transformation.

7.1.3 Diagnostic Reflexivity Without Adaptive Reinforcement

A third structural pattern emerging from the analysis concerns the relationship between diagnostic capability and adaptive evolution within the cooperative service ecosystem. The findings indicate that while the GEP framework effectively enhances the system's capacity for self-observation and reflection, it does not yet provide the mechanisms required to systematically translate this reflexivity into cumulative capability development.

This condition can be described as diagnostic reflexivity without adaptive reinforcement. The ecosystem is able to generate detailed assessments of its own practices, identify capability gaps, and articulate areas for improvement across

multiple dimensions. The evaluation process produces structured feedback, comparative benchmarks, and increasingly sophisticated narratives about innovation, sustainability, and governance. In this sense, the system demonstrates a high degree of reflexive awareness — it knows where it stands and, to a significant extent, where it needs to evolve.

However, this reflexive capacity is not matched by equivalent mechanisms for reinforcement. The empirical evidence shows that, although evaluation outputs provide clarity and direction, they are not consistently connected to structured processes of capability development, iterative learning, or long-term institutional transformation. Feedback is generated, but not systematically reintegrated into organizational routines. Gaps are identified, but not consistently followed by structured pathways for resolution.

A key manifestation of this pattern is the prevalence of episodic learning rather than cumulative learning. The GEP cycle generates moments of reflection — particularly during self-assessment and validation interviews — but these moments are not always embedded within continuous learning architectures. As a result, insights tend to remain temporally bounded to the evaluation cycle, rather than becoming part of ongoing processes of organizational adaptation.

This limitation is reinforced by the absence of progressive reinforcement mechanisms. The current configuration does not systematically connect maturity levels across cycles through staged capability pathways, nor does it provide structured follow-up mechanisms or institutionalized processes for translating diagnostic insights into actionable development trajectories. Without such mechanisms, the system is able to generate variation — in the form of diverse practices and initiatives — but struggles to stabilize and scale successful patterns across the ecosystem.

From a theoretical perspective, this condition reflects a disconnection between reflexivity and retention within the adaptive dynamics of the system. While the ecosystem is capable of generating variation and reflection, the processes required to retain, reinforce, and diffuse successful adaptations remain underdeveloped. This dynamic aligns with evolutionary and learning theories,

which emphasize that adaptation depends not only on variation and selection, but on the stabilization of effective routines over time.

Within the Service Ecosystem framework, this pattern can be understood as an imbalance between institutional reflexivity and institutional reinforcement. The GEP contributes significantly to the former, by enhancing visibility, alignment, and shared understanding. However, it does not fully operate as an infrastructure capable of reinforcing feedback loops, coordinating learning across actors, or embedding adaptive practices into durable institutional arrangements.

This structural limitation helps explain why, despite increasing awareness and alignment, the ecosystem exhibits persistent patterns of intermediate maturity and limited progression toward higher levels of capability consolidation — particularly in more complex domains such as Green Finance and inter-organizational collaboration. The system evolves, but does so incrementally and unevenly, without consistent mechanisms to accelerate or stabilize this evolution.

Importantly, this analysis does not suggest that the GEP is ineffective. On the contrary, its diagnostic function represents a critical precondition for adaptive development. However, the findings indicate that diagnostic capability alone is insufficient to drive systemic transformation. Without complementary mechanisms of reinforcement, evaluation risks becoming a reflective exercise rather than a generative one. This insight leads directly to the central proposition of this thesis: that evaluation systems, when designed as adaptive service infrastructures, can move beyond diagnostic reflexivity to actively support capability development, learning diffusion, and systemic evolution.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study generate five interrelated theoretical contributions that collectively reframe how evaluation systems can be understood within service ecosystem theory — moving from instruments of measurement toward active components of institutional adaptation.

C1 — Evaluation Systems as Ecosystem Interventions

This study reconceptualizes evaluation systems not as neutral measurement tools, but as institutional interventions within service ecosystems. Rather than passively assessing organizational performance, evaluation frameworks such as the GEP actively shape how actors interpret, prioritize, and organize innovation-related practices.

The empirical findings demonstrate that the GEP contributes to the formation of shared meanings, reinforces normative alignment, and structures how cooperatives understand concepts such as participation, collaboration, ESG, and sustainability. In this sense, evaluation operates as an institutional mechanism that influences resource integration and value co-creation processes across the ecosystem.

This perspective extends existing evaluation literature, which has traditionally emphasized measurement accuracy, accountability, and performance management, by highlighting the constitutive role of evaluation in shaping system behavior. It also contributes to service ecosystem theory by positioning evaluation frameworks as active components of institutional arrangement formation and transformation.

This constitutive role, however, operates primarily at the level of meaning formation and normative alignment, rather than at the level of operational reinforcement — a distinction that underlies the limitations identified in Section 7.1.3. Evaluation systems can shape how actors understand what should be done without necessarily providing the mechanisms required to ensure that such understanding translates into sustained capability development.

C2 — Adaptive Capacity Is Not Equivalent to the Presence of Practices

A second contribution challenges the implicit assumption that the presence of practices implies the existence of adaptive capability. The empirical analysis shows that participatory mechanisms, training initiatives, collaborative activities, and sustainability actions are widely present across cooperatives, but their institutional consolidation as self-reinforcing capabilities remains uneven.

This leads to the conceptual distinction between practice adoption and capability consolidation. Organizations may implement practices aligned with desired principles without developing the underlying structures required to sustain, scale, and integrate those practices over time.

This finding contributes to multiple strands of organizational theory. First, it extends the dynamic capabilities perspective (Teece, 2007) by demonstrating that sensing and seizing activities may be present without the transformation and reconfiguration processes required for long-term capability embedding. Second, it resonates with Cohen and Levinthal's absorptive capacity framework, suggesting that exposure to knowledge and practices does not guarantee their internalization and application. Third, it aligns with the literature on organizational routines (Nelson & Winter, 1982), highlighting that capabilities become durable only when practices are stabilized into repeatable and institutionally supported routines.

This finding also resonates with Zollo and Winter's (2002) account of how dynamic capabilities evolve through deliberate learning mechanisms — including experience accumulation, knowledge articulation, and codification — suggesting that the transition from practice adoption to capability consolidation depends on sustained, intentional learning processes rather than passive exposure to evaluation feedback.

From this perspective, adaptive capacity depends not on the mere presence of practices, but on their institutional embedding through feedback loops, performance metrics, and reinforcement mechanisms. This reframes maturity models as indicators of capability depth rather than practice accumulation.

C3 — The Sustainability Translation Gap

A third contribution is the identification of a sustainability translation gap between ESG governance and the operationalization of sustainability within financial practices. While ESG principles are widely recognized and increasingly embedded in governance discourse, their translation into financial structuring, credit decision-making, and portfolio management remains limited.

This gap demonstrates that sustainability operates across distinct but interconnected capability domains: governance-level commitment and financial-level execution. The empirical findings show that progress in one domain does not automatically generate progress in the other.

This contribution extends sustainability research by moving beyond the established distinction between symbolic and substantive adoption (Hawn & Ioannou, 2016), which typically characterizes organizations as either genuinely embedding ESG or merely signalling commitment without operational change. The empirical findings reveal a more structurally complex condition: organizations may achieve substantive adoption at the governance level — through formal policies, transparency mechanisms, and institutional commitments — while remaining at a symbolic or incipient stage at the financial operationalization level. This multi-layered configuration cannot be adequately captured by binary distinctions between symbolic and substantive, as it involves organizations that are simultaneously substantive in one domain and symbolic in another. The sustainability translation gap therefore describes a cross-domain capability dissociation rather than an organizational disposition toward compliance-only behaviour.

Structurally, this gap emerges from differences in capability requirements and organizational translation mechanisms. ESG governance relies on policy frameworks, reporting structures, and institutional commitments, which can be centralized and formalized. In contrast, Green Finance requires distributed capabilities, including frontline advisory skills, credit assessment tools, portfolio analytics, and incentive alignment within commercial operations.

Furthermore, the empirical analysis reveals that the sustainability translation gap is not merely a matter of degree but of kind. The Pearson correlation matrix across the five GEP dimensions ($n = 56$) demonstrates that Green Finance is systematically less coupled with the remaining four dimensions than those dimensions are with each other. While Participatory, Collaborative, Capacity Development, and ESG exhibit intercorrelations ranging from 0.822 to 0.879 — suggesting that they co-evolve as part of a broader organizational capability

system — Green Finance correlates with those same dimensions at substantially lower levels, ranging from 0.629 to 0.721. This structural decoupling indicates that Green Finance does not simply represent a more advanced stage of the same institutional trajectory that generates ESG governance maturity. Rather, it constitutes a partially distinct capability system, one that requires qualitatively different development pathways, including the integration of sustainability criteria into credit risk models, portfolio monitoring structures, and frontline advisory routines. This finding extends the sustainability translation gap beyond a descriptive observation: it suggests that maturity frameworks which treat ESG and Green Finance as points on a single sustainability continuum may systematically misdiagnose where organizations actually struggle — and therefore misallocate the developmental support they need.

The absence of mechanisms that connect these layers — such as training systems, decision-support tools, and performance indicators — results in a persistent disconnect between intention and execution. This perspective reframes sustainability not as a single organizational attribute, but as a process of capability translation across institutional layers, requiring specific mechanisms to bridge governance commitments and financial practice.

C4 — The Limits of Diagnostic-Only Systems

The study also contributes to evaluation and learning literature by identifying the limitations of systems that operate primarily as diagnostic mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that the GEP effectively generates diagnostic reflexivity, enabling organizations to identify gaps and reflect on their practices. However, this reflexivity is not sufficient to produce cumulative capability development in the absence of reinforcement mechanisms.

This leads to the distinction between diagnostic systems and adaptive systems. Diagnostic systems enhance visibility and awareness, while adaptive systems additionally provide mechanisms for reinforcement, retention, and diffusion of learning.

This contribution builds on and extends evaluation theory (Patton, 2008; Preskill & Torres, 1999) by arguing that evaluation must be understood as part of a broader adaptive architecture, rather than as a standalone measurement process. It also connects with organizational learning theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990) by emphasizing the importance of moving from episodic reflection to cumulative learning through structured reinforcement loops.

C5 — Cooperative Credit Systems as Hybrid Service Ecosystems

Finally, this study contributes an empirically grounded characterization of credit cooperatives as hybrid service ecosystems governed simultaneously by market logic and cooperative principles. This setting remains underexplored within service ecosystem literature, which has predominantly focused on either market-based or public-sector contexts.

The findings show that cooperative principles — such as democratic participation and intercooperation — function as institutional constraints and enablers that shape how capabilities are developed, coordinated, and diffused. At the same time, these organizations operate within financial markets that impose regulatory, competitive, and operational demands.

This duality creates a distinct configuration in which normative coherence coexists with operational complexity, influencing both the strengths and limitations of the ecosystem's adaptive capacity. By empirically analyzing this context, the study expands the applicability of service ecosystem theory to cooperative financial systems and highlights the importance of institutional hybridity in shaping capability development dynamics.

Taken together, these five contributions converge on a central theoretical claim: evaluation systems embedded within purpose-driven service ecosystems are not merely analytical instruments, but institutional actors whose design determines whether reflexivity translates into adaptation. The cooperative credit context (C5) makes these dynamics particularly visible, due to the interaction between normative commitments and operational complexity, and together the

contributions reposition evaluation systems as central components of adaptive governance architectures.

7.3 Practical Contributions

The findings of this study generate a set of practical contributions that extend beyond the analytical domain, offering implications for the design, governance, and evolution of evaluation systems within cooperative financial ecosystems. Rather than presenting prescriptive recommendations, these contributions are formulated as analytical implications derived from the observed structural patterns of the ecosystem.

7.3.1 Reframing Evaluation as an Adaptive Capability Infrastructure

A first implication concerns the need to reinterpret evaluation systems not as episodic diagnostic tools, but as adaptive infrastructures capable of sustaining capability development over time.

The empirical findings demonstrate that the GEP generates significant diagnostic visibility across cooperatives, enabling organizations to identify gaps, reflect on their practices, and align with broader institutional expectations. However, this diagnostic capacity is not consistently accompanied by mechanisms that ensure the progressive consolidation of capabilities across evaluation cycles. The absence of structured follow-up mechanisms, iterative feedback integration across cycles, and institutional routines that translate maturity assessments into developmental trajectories results in a system where insight is generated but not systematically reinforced.

From a practical standpoint, evaluation systems acquire strategic relevance when they operate as continuous learning architectures — in which feedback is not only collected, but reintegrated into organizational routines, planning processes, and performance structures. In this sense, evaluation becomes part of the organizational infrastructure that enables learning to accumulate rather than remain episodic.

7.3.2 Structuring Progressive Capability Pathways

A second implication concerns the role of evaluation systems in structuring developmental trajectories across maturity levels.

The empirical analysis reveals a consistent pattern in which cooperatives achieve intermediate maturity — particularly within the M3 band — yet encounter difficulties in progressing toward more advanced levels. This suggests that evaluation outputs, while effective in diagnosing current positioning, do not always provide sufficient guidance regarding the pathways required for capability progression.

This pattern indicates that maturity levels function more as classificatory categories than as developmental sequences. Without explicit articulation of how capabilities evolve across stages, organizations may recognize their position without being able to translate this awareness into structured advancement. Evaluation frameworks gain practical effectiveness when they embed stage-sensitive guidance, in which each level is associated not only with a descriptive profile, but with indications of the capabilities required for progression. In this configuration, maturity models become navigational devices that support cumulative development, not only diagnostic instruments.

7.3.3 Enabling Inter-Cooperative Learning and Diffusion

A third implication emerges at the inter-organizational level and concerns the circulation of knowledge and practices across the cooperative ecosystem.

The empirical findings reveal significant variation in maturity levels across cooperatives, alongside evidence that advanced practices are not systematically diffused. High-performing organizations demonstrate integrated and structured capabilities, yet these configurations remain largely localized rather than functioning as distributed sources of learning for the broader system. The absence of structured mechanisms for replication, adaptation, and knowledge transfer limits the potential for cumulative learning across the cooperative network.

This implies that the effectiveness of evaluation systems depends not only on their capacity to assess individual organizations, but also on their ability to mediate learning between them. When evaluation results are embedded within architectures that enable horizontal diffusion, advanced practices can function as catalysts for system-wide capability development rather than remaining isolated cases of excellence.

7.3.4 Bridging the Sustainability–Finance Integration Gap

A fourth implication concerns the operationalization of sustainability within financial practices, particularly the structural gap identified between ESG governance and Green Finance.

The empirical findings indicate that sustainability is widely institutionalized at the level of governance, discourse, and organizational commitment, but its translation into financial routines remains uneven. This asymmetry reflects the absence of institutional mechanisms that enable the translation of sustainability principles into financial practice — not insufficient awareness or lack of commitment.

Operationalizing sustainability in financial contexts requires distributed capabilities that differ fundamentally from those associated with governance structures: the ability to incorporate environmental criteria into credit analysis, to structure advisory interactions that account for sustainability considerations, and to monitor portfolio-level environmental performance. Such capabilities depend on the alignment between training systems, decision-support tools, incentive structures, and performance indicators. When these mechanisms are absent, sustainability remains decoupled from financial decision-making even in organizations that demonstrate strong ESG alignment.

7.3.5 Implications for System-Level Governance and Policy

A fifth implication concerns the role of system-level actors — including cooperative federations, central organizations, and regulatory institutions — in shaping the conditions under which capabilities develop across the ecosystem.

The findings demonstrate that capability development is not solely an organizational phenomenon, but is significantly influenced by system-level coordination structures, institutional arrangements, and diffusion mechanisms. The observed divergence between cooperative systems suggests that differences in how learning circulates and how practices are reinforced can produce substantial variation in maturity outcomes.

This indicates that evaluation systems, when embedded within broader institutional architectures, can function as tools for system-level coordination and capability alignment, rather than merely as instruments of individual assessment. In this context, federations and central organizations play a key role in structuring the environments in which learning is shared, adapted, and reinforced. Regulatory institutions, including central banks, also emerge as relevant actors, particularly in shaping incentives and expectations related to sustainability and innovation.

The empirical evidence from Section 5.4.9 — specifically the 2.40-point Green Finance maturity differential between two cooperative systems (S1 and S2) operating under identical regulatory conditions and evaluation frameworks — provides the most direct empirical support for this governance argument. This divergence functions as a naturalistic experiment: it demonstrates that the presence or absence of intra-system coordination and knowledge diffusion mechanisms produces structurally distinct capability trajectories, even when all external conditions are held constant. This finding implies that strengthening the capacity of central cooperatives and federations to design and sustain inter-cooperative learning environments may be as consequential for ecosystem maturity as any improvement to individual evaluation processes.

7.3.6 Rethinking Evaluation Weighting: From Aspiration to Reinforcement

A sixth practical implication concerns the design logic of weighting architectures within maturity-based evaluation systems. Within the GEP framework, Green Finance carries the highest dimensional weight (3) and ESG the second highest (2.5), reflecting their strategic priority within the cooperative sustainability agenda. Yet the empirical findings demonstrate that these are precisely the dimensions with the lowest average maturity across the validated dataset —

Green Finance at 5.18 and ESG at 6.45, compared to Capacity Development at 6.90 and Participatory at 6.81.

This configuration reveals a structural tension that has not been previously theorized in evaluation design literature: the distinction between weighting as aspiration and weighting as reinforcement. Aspirational weighting assigns greater evaluative prominence to dimensions where systemic development is most needed, operating as a signal of strategic intent and directing organizational attention toward priority domains. Reinforcement weighting, by contrast, embeds developmental support mechanisms — scaffolding, guidance, peer learning, and feedback loops — that enable organizations to actually progress within those prioritized dimensions.

When aspirational weighting is applied without corresponding reinforcement mechanisms, evaluation systems generate pressure without scaffolding — an imbalance that may produce awareness of gaps without enabling their resolution. The empirical pattern observed in this study, in which Green Finance remains structurally underdeveloped despite carrying the highest evaluative weight across multiple consecutive cycles, illustrates precisely this dynamic. For practitioners designing or evolving maturity-based evaluation systems, this implies that weighting decisions cannot be decoupled from developmental architecture decisions: dimensions assigned higher strategic weight must also receive proportionally stronger reinforcement investment.

7.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides a theoretically and empirically grounded analysis of evaluation systems within cooperative financial ecosystems, its findings should be interpreted in light of a set of methodological and boundary limitations. These limitations do not invalidate the contributions presented, but rather delineate the scope within which the results can be interpreted and extended.

7.4.1 Methodological Limitations

The empirical analysis is based on a dataset of 56 validated feedback reports produced within the GEP 2025 evaluation cycle. Although these reports combine questionnaire responses, documentary evidence, and validation interviews, the study does not employ formal inter-rater reliability metrics. While the validation interview process functions as a consistency mechanism between self-reported data and documentary verification, the absence of independent coding procedures introduces a degree of interpretive dependency that cannot be fully eliminated. To partially address this, the analytical strategy prioritized the identification of cross-dimensional and cross-case structural patterns, reducing reliance on the interpretation of individual observations.

A related limitation concerns the researcher's positionality. The author participated in the production of the institutional feedback reports that constitute the primary qualitative dataset. Although the analytical strategy was explicitly designed to mitigate bias — prioritizing cross-case pattern identification over case-specific interpretation — the proximity between researcher and data generation process may introduce interpretive influences that should be acknowledged.

Additionally, the study relies partially on self-reported data generated through structured questionnaires. While these responses are subsequently validated through interviews and documentary analysis, self-assessment processes may be subject to overestimation or variation in interpretation across organizations. Finally, the analytical approach prioritizes structural pattern identification across cases rather than in-depth case-based interpretation, which enhances comparability but may limit the granularity of insight regarding context-specific dynamics within individual cooperatives.

7.4.2 Boundary Limitations

The analysis is situated within a single national context — the Brazilian credit cooperative system. While this context provides a rich and relevant setting for examining innovation with purpose and cooperative governance, institutional,

regulatory, and cultural specificities may limit the direct transferability of findings to other countries or financial systems.

The study focuses on a single evaluation framework within a specific institutional configuration. While this depth of focus enables a theoretically rich analysis of the GEP's design and dynamics, it limits direct comparison with alternative evaluation architectures and constrains the generalizability of design-specific findings.

The dataset is cross-sectional, capturing a single evaluation cycle (2025). Although longitudinal insights are partially incorporated through the analysis of RECIP Panoramas (2022–2025), the study does not track capability development trajectories over time at the organizational level. Finally, the study focuses on validated cooperatives that completed the full evaluation cycle, including the mandatory interview process. This may introduce a selection effect, as organizations that engage more deeply with the evaluation process may differ systematically from those that do not complete it.

Taken together, these limitations suggest that the findings of this study should be interpreted as analytically robust within their empirical context, but not universally generalizable without further investigation. Rather than weakening the study, these constraints clarify its position: an empirically grounded and theoretically informed contribution that advances understanding within a defined context while opening pathways for broader theoretical and empirical development.

7.5 Directions for Future Research

The limitations identified in this study, together with the theoretical contributions developed in Section 7.2, open a set of promising directions for future research. These directions are not independent extensions, but rather interconnected research avenues aimed at advancing the understanding of evaluation systems as adaptive infrastructures within service ecosystems. Each corresponds to a theoretical contribution developed in Section 7.2, extending from the analytical findings toward empirically testable questions.

7.5.1 Longitudinal Analysis of Adaptive Capability Development

A first direction concerns the need for longitudinal studies that examine how adaptive capabilities evolve across evaluation cycles. The present study is based on a cross-sectional dataset, which limits the ability to observe how organizations transition between maturity levels over time. Future research could track cooperatives across multiple evaluation cycles to investigate whether diagnostic visibility leads to sustained capability development, or whether organizations remain at similar maturity levels despite repeated evaluation. Such studies would enable the examination of capability trajectories, including progression, stagnation, and regression dynamics, providing empirical grounding for understanding whether evaluation systems contribute to cumulative learning or primarily generate episodic reflection.

7.5.2 Reinforcement Mechanisms and the Evolution of Adaptive Evaluation Architectures

A second direction emerges directly from the distinction between diagnostic and adaptive systems, as well as from the reconceptualization of evaluation as an ecosystem intervention. Future research could investigate which types of reinforcement mechanisms are most effective in translating evaluation into capability consolidation, while simultaneously examining how evaluation frameworks evolve structurally from diagnostic instruments into adaptive architectures. This includes analyzing the role of structured follow-up processes, capability pathways, and iterative feedback integration in supporting organizational learning, as well as exploring how these elements interact with governance structures and inter-organizational coordination mechanisms. Empirical designs such as quasi-experimental approaches or comparative studies across different evaluation configurations could provide insight into how specific design features influence the stabilization and diffusion of adaptive capabilities.

7.5.3 Closing the Sustainability Translation Gap

A third direction concerns the mechanisms required to bridge the gap between ESG governance and financial operationalization. Future studies could explore how

organizations successfully translate sustainability commitments into financial practices, examining the role of internal capabilities, organizational structures, and decision-making processes. Comparative analyses between organizations that achieve high alignment between ESG and Green Finance and those that do not could provide insight into the conditions that enable successful translation. This research agenda could also investigate how evaluation systems can be designed to support this process, identifying whether specific indicators, feedback mechanisms, or capability-building interventions facilitate the integration of sustainability into financial routines.

7.5.4 Cooperative Systems as Hybrid Service Ecosystems: Comparative Perspectives

A fourth direction concerns the expansion of the empirical and theoretical scope of the study. Future research could explore cooperative financial systems in different national contexts, examining how variations in regulatory environments, institutional arrangements, and cultural factors influence the development of adaptive capabilities. Comparative studies between Brazilian cooperatives and those in other regions — such as Europe or North America — would provide valuable insight into the generalizability of the patterns identified in this study, contributing to a deeper understanding of cooperative systems as hybrid service ecosystems and advancing theory on how institutional hybridity shapes capability development and system evolution.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has synthesized the empirical findings and design-oriented insights of the study through three interconnected structural tensions: the coexistence of strong normative coherence with uneven capability embedding; the stratified distribution of capabilities across ecosystem levels; and the presence of reflexive evaluation mechanisms without corresponding reinforcement architectures. Together, these findings support the central argument that the primary challenge facing the ecosystem is not the absence of purpose or strategic intent, but the absence of institutional mechanisms capable of translating these elements into

durable and scalable adaptive capabilities. The theoretical and practical contributions advanced in Sections 7.2 and 7.3 reposition evaluation systems as active components of adaptive governance architectures — a proposition that the following chapter consolidates into the overall conclusions of the thesis.

For the Cooperatives

Chapter 7 is the chapter where the thesis pauses and asks: okay, so what?

The data is in. The redesign has been sketched. But what did all of this actually teach us? Here are the three things that matter most, in plain language.

One: it is not the cooperatives' fault.

When the same problem shows up in 56 different organizations, in different states, different sizes, different systems, you stop blaming the organizations. Something bigger is going on.

What we found is that cooperatives across the board have strong values, genuine commitment, and real intent. What they often lack is not motivation. It is the organizational plumbing that turns good intentions into consistent habits. The structures, the routines, the feedback loops, the tools that make a practice stick beyond the moment when someone decided it was important.

This is not a people problem. It is a design problem. And design problems can be fixed.

Two: talking about sustainability and doing sustainability are not the same thing.

This one surprised us a little, even though in retrospect it makes sense.

Many cooperatives score well on ESG. They have governance policies. They report on social and environmental impact. They talk about sustainability in their strategy. And then you look at their green finance scores and the picture is

completely different. Very few have actually integrated sustainability into how they make credit decisions, what products they offer, or how they manage their portfolio.

Why? Because these are two completely different skills. Approving a sustainability policy in a board meeting is one thing. Training your credit team to assess environmental risk in a loan application is another. One lives in governance. The other lives in daily operations. You can be excellent at the first and barely started on the second.

So if your cooperative has strong ESG scores and low green finance scores, do not be discouraged. It does not mean you are failing. It means you have finished one mountain and the next one is in front of you.

Three: being seen is not the same as being helped.

The GEP does something genuinely valuable: it gives cooperatives a clear picture of where they are. That clarity is real and should not be taken for granted. Many organizations go years without this kind of honest reflection.

But a picture of where you are is not a path to where you want to go. And the data shows that cooperatives coming back for their second or third GEP cycle are not consistently making the progress you would expect from organizations that are being evaluated and receiving feedback every year.

Something is getting lost between the moment the report arrives and the moment the next cycle begins.

That is the core finding of this thesis. Not that the GEP is broken. But that it was built to see, and what cooperatives also need is a system built to accompany.

CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Revisiting the Research Problem

8.2 Summary of Key Findings

8.3 Theoretical Contributions

8.4 Practical and Policy Implications

8.5 Final Reflection: Evaluation as Adaptive Infrastructure

8.1 Revisiting the Research Problem

This study set out to examine a fundamental but underexplored tension in the design of evaluation systems within cooperative service ecosystems: the gap between diagnostic visibility and adaptive capability development. While evaluation frameworks are widely used to assess performance, guide strategy, and reinforce accountability, their role in enabling sustained organizational learning and capability consolidation remains insufficiently understood.

Focusing on the Brazilian credit cooperative system and the GEP framework, this research investigated whether evaluation systems contribute not only to making practices visible, but also to strengthening the institutional conditions required for adaptive evolution. The central question guiding the study was therefore not simply how evaluation measures performance, but how it shapes the capacity of organizations and ecosystems to evolve over time.

The findings demonstrate that evaluation systems can significantly enhance reflexive awareness, normative alignment, and shared understanding across organizations. However, they also reveal a structural limitation: diagnostic visibility does not automatically translate into adaptive reinforcement. This gap highlights the need to reconceptualize evaluation not as a standalone measurement process, but as an infrastructure for learning, coordination, and capability development.

8.2 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of this study provide clear answers to the three research questions guiding the investigation, revealing how evaluation systems operate within cooperative service ecosystems and where their current limitations lie.

In response to RQ1, the findings reveal that the translation of cooperative principles into innovation practices is both widespread and structurally incomplete. Principles such as democratic participation, intercooperation, and concern for the community are actively embedded in governance discourse, strategic positioning, and evaluative frameworks — demonstrating strong normative diffusion across the ecosystem. However, this translation breaks down

at the level of operational consolidation: practices are frequently implemented without being integrated into self-reinforcing capability systems, feedback loops, or governance routines capable of sustaining them over time. The breakdown is not uniform — it is more pronounced in dimensions that require cross-organizational coordination and the integration of sustainability into financial practice, and less visible in dimensions rooted in internal governance. Innovation with purpose is therefore not absent, but partially institutionalized: widely articulated, unevenly enacted, and structurally constrained by the absence of mechanisms capable of bridging normative intent and operational capability.

In response to RQ2, the findings demonstrate that the application of the GEP reveals three recurring systemic patterns. First, there is a persistent gap between normative coherence and operational consolidation, in which shared values and strategic intent are not consistently translated into durable organizational capabilities. Second, capability development is asymmetrically distributed across ecosystem levels, with stronger consolidation at the micro-organizational level and increasing fragility at meso- and macro-levels, particularly in inter-cooperative collaboration and green finance. Third, the system exhibits high levels of diagnostic reflexivity without equivalent mechanisms for adaptive reinforcement, resulting in episodic rather than cumulative learning. Together, these patterns indicate that the ecosystem is capable of identifying its own limitations, but lacks the institutional mechanisms required to systematically resolve them, a condition that this study characterizes as the primary structural barrier to adaptive evolution in cooperative ecosystems.

In response to RQ3, the findings demonstrate that evaluation systems can evolve beyond diagnostic instruments by incorporating mechanisms that support reinforcement, coordination, and capability development over time. The analysis shows that the effectiveness of evaluation depends not only on its ability to generate visibility, but on its capacity to connect feedback to learning processes, structure capability progression, and enable the diffusion of practices across the ecosystem. This leads to the reconceptualization of evaluation as an adaptive service infrastructure, in which diagnostic functions are integrated with multilevel reinforcement mechanisms — including internal retention, inter-organizational

diffusion, and the translation of sustainability into financial practice. In this configuration, evaluation becomes not only a tool for assessment, but a central component of adaptive governance.

8.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study advances the understanding of evaluation systems by repositioning them within the broader theoretical landscape of service ecosystems, organizational capabilities, and sustainability transitions. Rather than treating evaluation as a neutral instrument of measurement, the findings demonstrate that evaluation systems function as institutional mechanisms that shape how learning, coordination, and capability development unfold over time.

First, the study advances service ecosystem theory by conceptualizing evaluation systems as active components of institutional arrangements. In doing so, it extends existing perspectives on resource integration and value co-creation by showing that evaluation frameworks do not merely assess interactions, but actively structure how actors interpret priorities, align practices, and organize innovation. This shifts the role of evaluation from observation to intervention within ecosystem dynamics.

Second, the study contributes to organizational capability theory by establishing a clear distinction between the presence of practices and the consolidation of capabilities. While prior literature has emphasized the importance of routines, learning processes, and dynamic capabilities, this research demonstrates that practices aligned with desired principles can be widely adopted without being institutionally embedded. Adaptive capacity, therefore, depends not on the existence of practices alone, but on the mechanisms that stabilize, reinforce, and scale them over time.

Third, the study advances sustainability research by identifying the sustainability translation gap as a structural condition between ESG governance and financial operationalization. Moving beyond the distinction between symbolic and substantive adoption, the findings show that sustainability requires cross-domain capability integration, in which governance commitments must be translated into

distributed financial practices. This reframes sustainability as a process of capability translation across institutional layers, rather than as a static organizational attribute.

Fourth, the study contributes to evaluation and learning theory by establishing the limitations of diagnostic-only systems. While existing approaches emphasize measurement, feedback, and reflective learning, the findings demonstrate that diagnostic visibility is insufficient to generate cumulative adaptation in the absence of reinforcement mechanisms. This leads to the conceptual distinction between diagnostic and adaptive evaluation systems, highlighting the need to embed evaluation within architectures that support retention, diffusion, and institutionalization of learning.

Finally, the study extends the empirical scope of service ecosystem theory by characterizing credit cooperative systems as hybrid service ecosystems governed by both market logic and cooperative principles. This context reveals how institutional hybridity shapes capability development dynamics, producing configurations in which normative coherence coexists with operational complexity. By grounding its analysis in this setting, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how institutional logics influence adaptive capacity.

Taken together, these contributions converge on a central theoretical claim: evaluation systems embedded within purpose-driven service ecosystems are not merely analytical tools, but institutional actors whose design determines whether reflexivity translates into adaptation. This reframing positions evaluation as a core component of adaptive governance, with implications that extend beyond cooperative finance to other complex organizational and institutional settings.

8.4 Practical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications for the design and governance of evaluation systems within cooperative financial ecosystems, particularly for system-level actors such as federations, central organizations, and regulatory institutions.

First, the study suggests that evaluation systems should be designed not only to generate diagnostic visibility, but to enable adaptive reinforcement over time. This implies a shift from periodic assessment toward continuous learning architectures, in which feedback is systematically reintegrated into organizational routines, planning processes, and performance management structures. For system designers, this means that the value of evaluation lies not in its ability to measure, but in its capacity to structure how learning accumulates across cycles.

Second, the findings highlight the need to institutionalize mechanisms of inter-organizational learning and capability diffusion. The observed asymmetry in capability consolidation indicates that advanced practices developed within individual cooperatives do not automatically translate into system-wide capabilities. This suggests that federative structures and central organizations play a critical role in enabling the circulation, adaptation, and reinforcement of knowledge across the ecosystem. Without such mechanisms, innovation remains localized, limiting the potential for coordinated system-level transformation.

Third, the study points to the importance of integrating sustainability into the core architecture of financial practices. The persistence of the sustainability translation gap indicates that ESG alignment at the governance level is insufficient without corresponding operational capabilities in credit processes, advisory activities, and portfolio management. For both practitioners and regulators, this implies that advancing sustainability requires not only new policies or commitments, but the development of distributed capabilities that embed environmental and social considerations into everyday financial decision-making.

The most direct empirical evidence for this argument emerges from the system-level diffusion asymmetry identified in Chapter 5: two cooperative systems participating in the same evaluation framework under identical regulatory conditions exhibit a 2.40-point differential in Green Finance maturity — the largest dimensional gap in the dataset. This finding indicates that inter-cooperative learning infrastructure is not a secondary policy consideration, but a primary driver of capability development in sustainable finance. Federations and central organizations that invest in codifying and circulating advanced

practices are therefore not merely coordinating bodies but capability infrastructure designers.

Taken together, these implications suggest that the evolution of cooperative financial systems depends on the ability to move from evaluation as measurement toward evaluation as a mechanism for coordinating learning, reinforcing capabilities, and enabling systemic adaptation. This shift has relevance not only for cooperative networks, but also for broader policy debates on how financial systems can support sustainable and purpose-driven development.

8.5 Final Reflection

This thesis began with a simple but consequential question: what if evaluation systems do more than measure, what if they shape how organizations learn, evolve, and adapt?

The answer that emerged surprised me in its consistency. Across 56 cooperatives, five dimensions, and four evaluation cycles, the same pattern kept appearing: organizations that knew what they needed to do but lacked the institutional conditions to actually do it, at scale, over time. The problem was never purpose. Cooperative systems have purpose in abundance. The problem was the gap between knowing and becoming.

That gap is not a failure of will or strategy. It is an architectural condition. And architectural conditions require architectural responses.

Reframing evaluation as an adaptive service infrastructure is exactly that kind of response. It means accepting that awareness does not automatically produce change, that alignment does not guarantee execution, and that good intentions do not scale without mechanisms that stabilize and diffuse them across organizational boundaries. It means treating evaluation not as a photograph of where organizations stand, but as scaffolding for where they can go.

This matters more in cooperative systems than almost anywhere else. Cooperatives carry a genuine social mandate: participation, solidarity, community,

long-term value creation. These are not marketing words; they are structural commitments. But structural commitments require structural support. The future of innovation with purpose depends not only on what cooperatives aspire to be, but on whether they can build the conditions that allow those aspirations to endure.

I did not expect this thesis to end up being, at its core, about institutional design. But that is where the evidence led. And perhaps that is the most honest thing I can say about it: the research went somewhere I did not fully anticipate, and what it found there felt worth saying.

Whether evaluation systems can genuinely become engines of systemic transformation rather than sophisticated mirrors of current performance remains to be seen. But the possibility is real. And mapping the conditions under which it might happen seems, to me, like work worth doing.

For the Cooperatives

Chapter 8 is the last chapter. It is short by design. No new data, no new proposals. Just an honest look at what this whole journey found, and why it matters.

The thesis started with a simple concern: evaluation systems are getting more sophisticated, but cooperatives are not necessarily getting better at the rate that sophistication would suggest. Something is being lost between the moment of diagnosis and the moment of transformation. The question was: what?

The answer, after analyzing 56 cooperatives across five dimensions and four years of data, is this: the gap is not in the values. The gap is in the architecture.

Cooperatives know what they stand for. The cooperative movement has one of the most coherent normative frameworks of any institutional form in the world. Democratic participation. Intercooperation. Concern for the community.

Education and training. These are not empty words. They are the reason people chose to build cooperatives instead of banks.

But values do not automatically produce capabilities. Believing in sustainability does not automatically produce a green finance portfolio. Valuing participation does not automatically produce structured member engagement routines. Caring about collaboration does not automatically produce inter-cooperative learning systems. Each of these transitions requires deliberate investment in the organizational infrastructure that turns intention into practice.

What the data shows is that this infrastructure is unevenly developed across the ecosystem. And what the thesis argues is that evaluation systems, if redesigned well, could help build it.

Not by telling cooperatives what to do. Not by adding more complexity to an already demanding process. But by shifting from a system that photographs where cooperatives are, to one that accompanies where they are going.

That is the core idea. Evaluation as accompaniment, not just assessment. Learning infrastructure, not just diagnostic tool.

And here is the thing about cooperatives specifically: this matters more for you than for almost any other kind of organization. Because the cooperative model was never designed to produce winners and losers. It was designed to build something together, over time, for people who would not have been able to build it alone.

An evaluation system that reflects that spirit does not just measure who is ahead. It helps everyone move forward.

That is what this thesis is trying to say. And it is dedicated to the cooperatives that showed up, answered the hard questions honestly, and kept going

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