

Member Value Management in Housing Co-operatives

Peter Suter, Markus Gmür¹

Using the example of Swiss housing co-operatives, the study shows how the individual member value perception is influenced by the co-operative governance and what other organizational as well as individual factors are relevant in this manner. The strongest effect over all is the age of the co-op: the older a co-op is the better is the economic value for the members but on the same time the lower are the co-operative member values.

1. Member Value Management

The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA, 2015) defines a co-op as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”. Mutuality and collective self-help are core principles – co-ops are not about making profits for the benefits of shareholders but about creating values for its members (Giles, 2015). Co-ops are member-based organizations, not just with regard to their goals but also in the way how they are governed. Unlike for-profit firms that are controlled by their shareholders, co-op management is characterized by democratic member control. Considering the initial definition of co-op, the two last points “jointly owned” and “democratically controlled” have a decisive impact on the organizational structures and the management in general. Members participate actively in setting their policies and making decisions and they have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) (ICA, 2015). Members are the core of every co-op. The way how members get integrated in a co-op is nonetheless very different. Some co-ops are basically grassroots, pure self-help organizations whose members are producers and consumers at the same time whereas there exist co-ops that work similar to professional business enterprises with almost no member participation except for what is prescribed by law. The present study analyzes the co-operative management on the basis of housing co-ops in Switzerland and focuses on the following research questions:

Which economic as well as nonfinancial utility do individual co-op members get from member-controlled management of housing co-ops? Which management measures influence the perceived member value?

It is expected, that not all members have the same expectations towards the co-op and, in some cases, the satisfaction of these expectations would require diametrically opposed

¹ Peter Suter, M.A., Institute for Research on Management of Associations, Foundations and Co-operatives (VMI) University of Fribourg/CH, peter.suter@unifr.ch, Prof. Dr. Markus Gmür is Head of the Institute for Research on Management of Associations, Foundations and Co-operatives (VMI) University of Fribourg/CH, markus.gmuere@unifr.ch.

measures (Suter & Gmür, 2014). Hence, it is one of the main tasks of a co-op to find a balance between the different expectations of its members. As many members of housing co-ops are not aware of the actual value coming from the co-operative, because it cannot be measured in monetary terms, the study focusses on the individual perception of every single member. The study has an exploratory character regarding the theoretical approach and the derived research instruments. In difference to the vast majority of research in the field of housing, the actual study does not focus on a general residential satisfaction or on quality of life but specifically on the values derived of the member based-character of the co-operative management (Cooper & Rodman, 1994; Diaz-Serrano & Stoyanova, 2006; Lu, 1999; Morris et al., 1976). Starting point of this focus is the assumption that the co-operative governance provides a value on its own respectively members of a housing co-op profit from certain benefits that are based on the co-operative form. A similar study within the same area of research and the same dataset looked already at the co-operative management and its potential in optimizing member value, but on aggregated data (Suter & Gmür, 2016, in preparation). The referring study took an organizational perspective by pointing out the key member value factors for a housing co-operative, whereas the actual study focusses on the individual and organizational determinants on the individual member value by using a multilevel methodology.

2. Co-operative Member Values

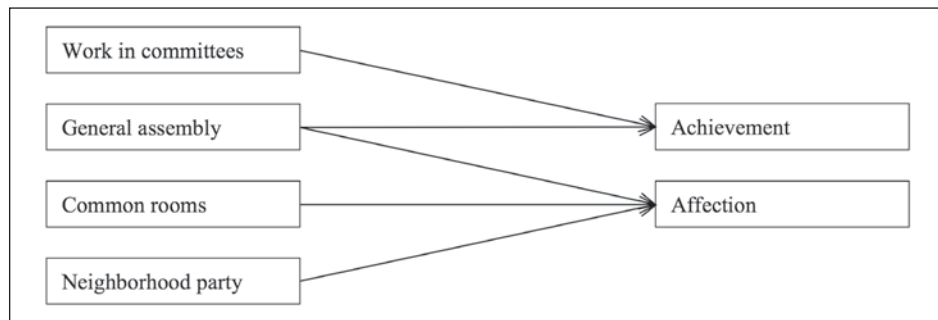
The interdisciplinary member value approach, used in the study, stresses the importance of the match between the co-op and its member characteristics (Suter & Gmür, 2012). The approach shows some similarities with the study of Böttiger (2009), but with a stronger focus on the non-economic aspects. The economic benefits and actual services or goods are very important for members and their satisfaction. However, the latent and non-economic benefits of a co-op (the characteristics of a member-based organization) are the unique features and they are what distinguish them from classical market players. Furthermore, it can be expected that non-economic aspects are crucial for the participation of members in a co-op (Birchall & Simmons, 2004; Inglis & Cleave, 2004).

The starting point of the member value approach is the set of individual needs and preferences. It understands members as whole beings and is based on the assumption that actual value is generated when members' needs meet corresponding benefits provided by the co-op, or the other way around. Member value is thus not a static construct and cannot be generated solely by the co-op. Member value depends on matching members' preferences and economic value to the co-op's ability to provide latent and manifest benefits. Co-ops provide benefits not only in the form of products and services but also in form of their specific characteristics and structures. Therefore, the comprehensive range of benefits offered by co-ops is not restricted to the fixed activities in the articles of association or program but includes other characteristics such as the culture and community feeling, too. Briefly, the better the provided benefits of a co-op match members' latent preferences and economic value, the bigger is the resulting member value. Hence, the management of a co-op has to know its members' needs in order to be able to provide the appropriate benefits to satisfy them.

The theoretical foundation of the member value approach is based on four need and motivation theories: Maslow (1943, 2010), McClelland (2010), Maderthaner (1995) and Max-

Neef (1991). The member value approach differentiates 12 basic human needs: subsistence; protection; idleness; freedom; aesthetics; understanding; creation; achievement; participation; affection; identity and power. These 12 human needs do not follow a strict order nor hierarchy but are interrelated. Additionally, it has to be differentiated between needs and satisfiers. For example, food and shelter should not be seen as needs but as satisfiers of the need for subsistence. Graphic 1 illustrates the relationship of needs and satisfiers. On the one hand, a general assembly can satisfy both, the need for achievement (opportunities to vote and raise one's voice) and the need for affection (seeing other members and having a good time together). On the other hand, both needs are satisfied by several satisfiers.

There is no one-to-one correspondence between certain needs and satisfiers, but needs can be satisfied by many satisfiers and on satisfier can satisfy several needs at the same time (Max-Neef, 1991). This argumentation fits with Maslow (1943), who sees acts typically motivated by more than one human need.



Graphic 1: Needs and satisfiers

Accordingly, a co-operative management itself cannot satisfy all of the 12 basic needs. A lot of the needs are mainly satisfied by specific services and can be characterized as consumer values, benefits out of a one-way relationship from a service provider to a consumer (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). The structure of co-operatives, however, is characterized by a two-way relationship between the organization and the member, hence, represents the inter-personal needs that always require an “effort” from both sides (Schilling, 2000, 2004). The need for affection for example bases on a relationship between two or more people and is nothing somebody can just “consume”. Members are not mere consumers but an integral part of the organization as a whole. Since the focus of this study is not to analyze the member value of co-operative housing as a whole, but solely the values derived out of the member based-character of a co-op, the paper focusses on the three co-op specific values *identity*, *affection* and *achievement*. Dülfer (1966) described a co-op as a voluntarily built group consisting of people that (a) are aware of their own interests (*identity*); (b) have a dynamic mentality (*achievement*) and (c) show a social behavior (*affection*). These three values are thus an important prerequisite for a co-op and at the same time are member values. Furthermore, they make the difference between a pure organization-client relationship and an organization-member relationship. Identification with the co-op includes shared values, a “we-feeling” and a common vision (Bonus, 1994) or, in other words, co-op members share a part of the corporate identity (Sommerville, 2007). The second value *achievement* refers

to the opportunities for personal achievements as well as being able to initiate changes in the organization. Therefore, it is closely linked to participation and a feeling of self-efficacy (Driscoll, 1978). Finally, the value of *affection* focusses on the interpersonal relationships in the co-op. Conviviality and companionship are big issues for co-ops and other member-based organizations, living together instead of living side by side (Wicker & Breuer, 2013).

3. Methods and Research Design

By mean of research, cooperation with the “Wohnbaugenossenschaften Schweiz” (WBG) – the national umbrella association of charitable housing organizations – around 850 German-speaking charitable housing co-ops were contacted directly to fill out the online management survey.² The study included two surveys: one with the management of the housing co-op and one with its members. 120 of the 303 received management datasets could be associated with a specific housing co-op.³

In order to match the management data with the member survey results, the management survey was not anonymous. This was one reason for the low response rate (approx. 14%) and the fact that some data could not be used because of missing co-operative specification. Another reason was the big heterogeneity between the different kinds of housing co-ops. Whereas some housing co-ops are highly engaged in integrating their members and strongly live the co-operative idea, others are better characterized as commercial renting companies that had no interest in participating in the survey. The participating housing co-ops in turn were requested to invite their members to join the member value survey and to fill out the individual questionnaire. All together 2,865 individual questionnaires were completed of which 1,561 were usable, i.e. around 20% of the inquired members joined the survey.⁴

The management survey focused on co-operative characteristics such as size, age, level of self-government (proportion of the management done by volunteers) as well as a set of management factors: (1) *active integration*; (2) *passive integration*; (3) *acting governance*; (4) *reacting governance*; (5) *establish values* and (6) *maintain values* (see Suter & Gmür, 2016, in preparation).

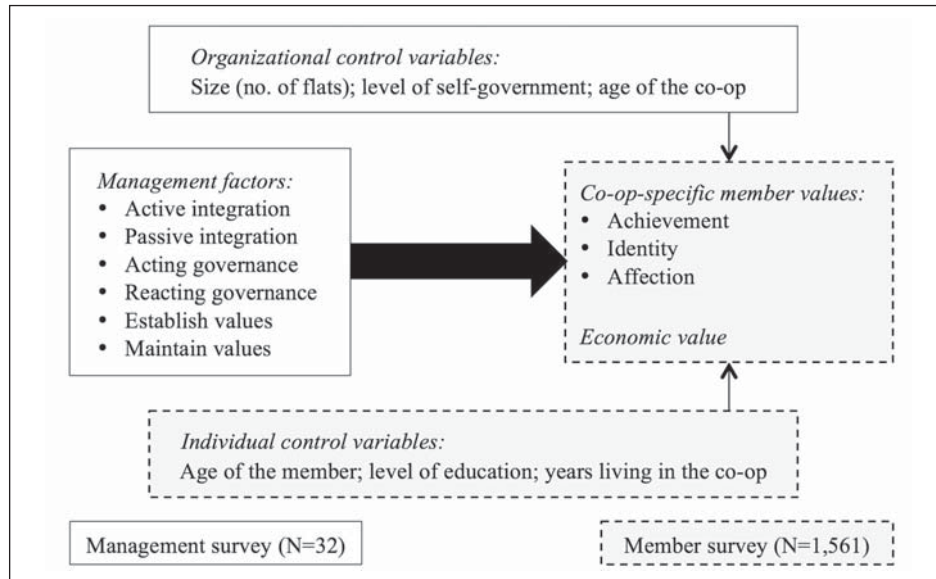
The member value survey was structured along the member value approach. The three co-op-specific member values *identity* (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.708$), *achievement* ($\alpha=0.897$) and *affection* (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.815$), were measured with 15 items according to a reliability analysis. Additionally to the three co-operative member values, the *economic value* (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.878$) of the members were measured. These three values and the *economic value* formed

² An exact number of housing co-operatives does not exist because the legal form of the WBG members is not recorded. WBG Switzerland is the umbrella association of 902 charitable housing organizations whereas about 50 are not co-operatives but organized as foundations, limited companies or other legal forms.

³ The online survey tool (Lime Survey) created a dataset even if somebody just clicked through the questionnaire to get an idea of the survey itself. Therefore, a person who started the questionnaire several times created also several datasets. Furthermore, in some housing co-ops different people of the management answered the survey. These duplicates were eliminated as well.

⁴ The high dropout number can be explained by the automatically generated datasets because of the online survey tool analogically to the management survey. In addition to the cases with more than nine – one quarter of all items – missing and a variance lower than 0.5 in the member value items have been deleted. This measure was taken in order to eliminate dubious and undifferentiated cases.

the dependent variables in the research model (see Graphic 2). In addition to the member value items, the questionnaire included the member's control variables age, years living in the housing co-op and level of education. The research model in Graphic 2 shows the independent and dependent variables as well as where each set of variables comes from.



Graphic 2: Research model

In order to answer the research questions, the management and the member survey were linked. Each of the 1,561 members was matched to one of the 120 housing co-ops. Furthermore, all housing co-ops with less than ten member surveys were excluded to guarantee a reliable database for multilevel analysis. In this part of the data preparation 298 member and 88 management questionnaires had to be deleted due to missing data; either there were insufficient member data or no management data. Housing co-ops with less than four member datasets were excluded in order to reduce distorted means because of outliers. At the end of the data preparation, 32 management and 1,263 member cases remained for the analyses. As a result of the deletion of co-operatives with less than ten member surveys, small housing co-ops with less than 30 apartments are not represented anymore in the dataset. Apart from this slight distortion the co-ops are equally divided regarding age and level of self-government.

4. Results

Although the questions for importance and agreement were separated in the questionnaire, the individual ratings are in most cases close to each other. The reason for this close connection between the member's needs and the perceived benefits by the co-op can be explained either with a fit between members and co-ops – people choose specifically a co-op that matches their wants – or with habituation – people get used to their co-op and do not ask for

more than what they get. As can be seen in Table 1, needs are mostly higher than the actual satisfaction by the co-op (both dimensions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale). The only exception is *achievement*; here the satisfaction is slightly higher than the expectation.

	Need	Satisfaction	Difference
Economic value	6.19	5.80	-0.39
Affection	5.63	5.26	-0.37
Identity	5.31	5.13	-0.17
Achievement	4.38	4.42	0.05

Table 1: Member values, needs and satisfaction (N=1,253)

A t-test of four member values shows significant differences between all of them, regarding the satisfaction as well as the needs. With 6.19 on a scale from 1-7, economic value is the most important aspect for the members. This result is not surprising regarding the high rents in Swiss cities and the tendency that the traditional co-operative character is decreasing in some housing co-ops. After the economic value, *affection* and *identity* show a medium importance for the members whereas *achievement* seems to be less important.

For housing co-ops, it is crucial to know what is important to their members and on the other hand, how they are able to influence the member value in the different dimensions. For each member value, a multilevel analysis was conducted with the six management factors and two sets of control variables: organizational control variables (size [no. of flats]; level of self-government; age of the co-op) and individual control variables (age of the member; level of education; years living in the co-op). As distinct from a classic regression analysis, the multilevel analysis allows to examine the influence of individual and organizational variables not on the co-operative level but on the member level.

Looking at the economic value (see Table 2) it is derivable from the analysis that the main explanatory factors lie in the age of the housing co-op and the level of education of the member. The explanation for the effect of age of the co-op seems clear, the continuous repayment of the mortgage over years leads to low interest rates that allow the co-ops to reduce the rents. Furthermore, better educated people tend to have a higher income, hence are not as sensitive about rents and do not get as big benefits from lower rents as members with lower education. Regarding the management factors, it can be seen that *active integration* has the strongest positive effect on the economic value whereas *maintain values* shows a significant negative effect.

The comparison of the three co-op-specific member values shows significant effects for the individual as well as the organizational control variables (see Table 3 and 4). The age of the member has a significant positive effect on the perception of all three member values. Accordingly, older people get a higher value from the co-operative characteristics than younger members. Older people, hence, attach more importance to these elements and are also more satisfied with the co-op concerning these matters. The positive effect of age is linked with the positive effect of the years a member lives in the housing co-operative. The longer somebody lives in the same co-operative the more value she/he gets regarding the need for *achievement* and *affection*. Surprisingly, the time living in the co-op has no influence on *identity*. It seems that the ties between the members are getting stronger over the years but not between the members and the co-op, but instead, they learn how to operate within the

	Economic Value			Achievement		
	M0	M1	M2	M0	M1	M2
Intercept	5.42 *** (0.14)	5.51 *** (0.11)	5.47 *** (0.11)	3.75 *** (0.10)	3.79 *** (0.09)	3.77 *** (0.10)
<i>Organizational control variables</i>						
Size (no. of flats)		-0.04 (0.16)	0.01 (0.15)		0.25 * (0.13)	0.25 * (0.13)
Self-government		0.03 (0.12)	0.03 (0.12)		-0.06 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.11)
Age of the co-op		0.42 *** (0.10)	0.44 *** (0.10)		-0.32 *** (0.09)	-0.33 *** (0.09)
<i>Individual control variables</i>						
Age of the member		-0.04 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.05)		0.16 *** (0.05)	0.11 ** (0.05)
Level of education		-0.14 ** (0.05)	-0.13 *** (0.05)		-0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)
Years in the co-op		0.07 (0.06)	0.10 * (0.06)		0.05 (0.05)	0.14 ** (0.05)
<i>Management factors</i>						
Active integration			0.24 (0.17)			-0.04 (0.15)
Passive integration			-0.01 (0.17)			0.19 (0.15)
Acting governance			0.04 (0.17)			-0.03 (0.15)
Reacting governance			0.17 (0.17)			0.05 (0.15)
Establish values			0.00 (0.14)			-0.04 (0.12)
Maintain values			-0.24 * (0.12)			-0.03 (0.11)
<i>Random effects</i>						
Residuum (σ^2)	1.62 *** (0.07)	1.67 *** (0.08)	1.66 *** (0.08)	1.51 *** (0.06)	1.40 *** (0.06)	1.39 *** (0.06)
Intercept (τ_{00})	0.56 *** (0.17)	0.21 ** (0.10)	0.18 ** (0.09)	0.23 *** (0.08)	0.13 ** (0.05)	0.14 ** (0.07)
<i>Model fit</i>						
R ²	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.14	0.16	0.16
-2LL	4240.76	3346.09	3346.26	4125.40	3168.39	3174.35
AIC	4244.76	3350.09	3350.26	4129.40	3172.39	3178.35

Significances: *** > 0.001; ** > 0.01; * > 0.05; + > 0.1

Table 2: Multilevel models for economic value and achievement

co-operative structure and get a higher *achievement* value. The level of education, however, shows a slightly negative effect on all three member values.

On the organizational level, especially the age of the co-op has a negative impact on all three values, whereas the size of the co-op shows positive effect. These two effects are remarkable since both variables correlate with each other. It is therefore to assume that the positive effect of the organizational size is, at least partly, an effect of the multilevel model structure. The negative effect of the age of the housing co-operative makes sense in the way that the co-operative structures become stiffer with the age and do not offer too many opportunities anymore regarding the implementation of new ideas. Furthermore, neighborly relations tend to weaken as the result of the continuous moves of the habitants. This in turn lowers the identification with the housing co-op. Over all it can be stated that the effect of age is more important than the effect of size. Moreover, older housing co-operatives have got more difficulties to satisfy their members' needs for *achievement*, *identity* and *affection* respectively the members do not pay much attention to the co-op-specific values anymore. Regarding the fact that very small housing co-operatives are missing in the database, the models indicate higher member values for big and professionally managed co-operatives.

Concerning the management factors, the multilevel models show only weak effects on the member values. *Active integration* helps reducing costs for co-operatives, but does not provide any co-op-specific member values. *Passive integration*, however, shows positive effects on *achievement* and *identity*. Providing platforms for interaction and encouraging a democratic and participatory attitude among members is particularly important for the feeling of *achievement* and *identity*. In view of the inexistent effect of *active integration* for the co-op member values, it is likely that integration of the members is a good thing on a voluntary basis

	Identity			Affection		
	M0	M1	M2	M0	M1	M2
Intercept	4.63 *** (0.08)	4.69 *** (0.08)	4.67 *** (0.08)	4.95 *** (0.08)	4.98 *** (0.08)	4.97 *** (0.06)
<i>Organizational control variables</i>						
Size (no. of flats)		0.22 * (0.12)	0.24 ** (0.11)		0.12 (0.12)	0.14 (0.09)
Self-government		-0.06 (0.09)	-0.12 (0.09)		-0.06 (0.09)	-0.12 (0.08)
Age of the co-op		-0.22 ** (0.08)	-0.26 *** (0.08)		-0.20 ** (0.08)	-0.23 *** (0.07)
<i>Individual control variables</i>						
Age of the member		0.33 *** (0.05)	0.27 *** (0.05)		0.14 ** (0.05)	0.11 ** (0.05)
Level of education		-0.09 ** (0.04)	-0.08 * (0.04)		-0.05 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
Years in the co-op		-0.04 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)		0.07 (0.05)	0.10 * (0.05)
<i>Management factors</i>						
Active integration			-0.04 (0.12)			0.00 (0.11)
Passive integration			0.12 (0.13)			0.03 (0.11)
Acting governance			0.07 (0.13)			0.15 (0.11)
Reacting governance			0.13 (0.12)			0.07 (0.11)
Establish values			-0.13 (0.10)			-0.12 (0.09)
Maintain values			0.05 (0.09)			0.13 (0.08)
<i>Random effects</i>						
Residuum (σ^2)	1.53 *** (0.06)	1.38 *** (0.06)	1.38 *** (0.06)	1.75 *** (0.07)	1.60 *** (0.07)	1.59 *** (0.07)
Intercept (τ_{00})	0.16 *** (0.05)	0.11 ** (0.04)	0.08 * (0.04)	0.13 ** (0.05)	0.10 ** (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)
<i>Model fit</i>						
R ²	0.11	0.17	0.16	0.08	0.10	0.10
-2LL	4136.99	3149.18	3157.87	4298.09	3290.89	3291.10
AIC	4140.99	3153.18	3161.87	4302.09	3294.89	3295.10

Significances: *** > 0.001; ** > 0.01; * > 0.05; + > 0.1

Table 3: Multilevel models for identity and affection

but it is not much use, to push them for participation, although it provides some financial benefits. Likewise, over all, the governance dimension shows slightly better effects of a reacting than an acting approach. Therefore, the co-op should focus much more on the adaptation to its members' needs and should rather stick to its traditional goals than having visionary plans for the future or following actual trends in the environment. Surprisingly, this is not true for *affection*. An active and innovative management brings a positive dynamic into the neighborhood. Management factors considering the value aspect show an inconsistent pattern for the three member values. For *achievement*, both value dimensions have very small negative effects. Fostering shared values reduces the opportunities to change something in the co-op what would give the members a feeling of *achievement* and success. For *affection*, in turn, *maintain values* has a positive and establishing values a negative effect, whereby *establish values* only has a negative effect on *identity*. The attempt to establish (new) common values among the members and to introduce them actively in the co-operatives' way of life has negative effects on all three co-op-specific values. The generally low effects of the management factors imply that the way, housing co-operatives are managed, has just a marginal influence on the individual member value perception of its inhabitants.

5. Discussion and management implications

The results allow some suggestions for the management of housing co-ops. In order to maximize the member values, the management should focus rather on maintaining the actual living conditions and avoid too innovative measures. Only for *affection* and, on a low level,

for *identity*, *acting governance* provides a higher member value. Integrating the members actively in the management of housing co-ops provides economic value but shows no effects on the member values. So it seems much more important to provide platforms for participation than trying to integrate the member in the co-operative structures itself. Interestingly, *passive integration* is the only factor with a positive effect on *achievement*; all other management dimensions are irrelevant for this member value. In view of the fact that *achievement* is already “over-satisfied”, the results imply that a higher engagement of the member is hardly achievable solely by management measures.

Regarding the shared values similar patterns can be seen: It is advisable to hold up co-operative values as long as they do not restrict individual ideas and are a part of the lived culture. However, it should be avoided to *establish values* by the management itself that have a moral rule-like character. In more general terms, the data implies that a housing co-op should grant its members autonomy and offer platforms to participate without obligation to use them. Furthermore, the shared values should be anchored in the member’s heads and not just in the mind of the managers that try to spread their ideas. Taking account of the strong negative effects of the age of a housing co-op on the three co-operative member values completes the picture of successful young and dynamic housing co-ops in which everybody plays the same tune. Andreas Wirz (2014), executive board member of WBG Zurich, said in the expert interview that it is very important which ideas are implemented in a housing co-op during the foundation phase since establishing new participation behavior and co-operative values subsequently is very difficult. Probably it also necessary to differentiate between the first generation of members in a co-op – the founders themselves – and successors who join already “fixed” structures. Reminding the original research question of the individual member values out of a co-operative management it has to be stated, that the potential improvements are generally low. Chances to influence the member value perception solely by management factors are thus weak. The multilevel approach discloses a deeper understanding for the individual member value, but at the same time it shows the reduced explanatory power for the organizational aspects. The member value perception varies individually quite strong what makes it hard to define a co-operative management style that fits them all.

Regarding the organizational control variables, it seems that especially older housing co-ops have more difficulties to guarantee a dynamic management character, offering attractive platforms for participation and to maintain an open culture of shared values. On the contrary, they are better able to satisfy the members’ need for economic benefits, which is the most important member value of all four. Comparing the economic value with the other three member values, it is clear that it is not possible to fulfill all member needs in the same proportion.

	Economic Value	Achievement	Identity
Achievement	-.312		
Identity	-.116	.750**	
Affection	-.359*	.560**	.815**

Significances: ** > 0.01 level (2-tailed); * > 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4: Pearson correlation matrix of the dependent variables ($n=32$)⁵

⁵ The correlation matrix is based on aggregated data (means) for each housing co-operative.

In addition, the correlation matrix (see Table 4) of the dependent variables show significant positive correlations between the three co-op-specific member values and negative correlation between economic value and all of the other variables. In this respect, the management of a housing co-op always must find a balance between different expectations of its members.

This study hence does not give a specific result where the focus of a housing co-op should lie on but gives insights in the relation between management factors and different member values. The setting of priorities for certain member values is a question of the strategic orientation and would be an interesting field to analyze in further studies. Furthermore, the study makes clear that co-op-specific member values can hardly be influenced solely by management measures.

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