

Getting rid of the boss for building postcapitalist futures:  
How non-hierarchical work practices of two Quebec-based initiatives impact livelihoods

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## Abstract

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In the aftermaths of the 2008 economic crisis, with rising inequalities and environmental destruction, many people are looking for alternatives to the capitalist economy to nourish sustainable futures. Getting rid of hierarchy in the workplace is an idea that has been defended for over a century in many places to challenge the capitalist economy and its exploitation of human beings and nature. Using participant observations and descriptions based on the *diverse economy* framework developed by JK Gibson-Graham (2006; Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy. 2013), interesting non-hierarchical work practices taking place in two Quebec-based economic initiatives are unveiled and analyzed, exposing how these can impact livelihoods in a perspective of building just and sustainable postcapitalist futures. Without falling into the defence of a rigid model of transformation of the economy for a revolutionary agenda, the analysis exposes how non-hierarchical work practices are part of a plurality of practices, framed by organizational principles, that are negotiated amongst workers in the pursuit of their general well-being and the quality of their livelihoods. The impacts are presented and analyzed in relations to the sense of work, working conditions and inequalities and their articulations in the construction and negotiation of individual livelihoods. With this approach, we go beyond theoretical descriptions of workplace democracy and offer insights and reflections for further work on the actual enactment of the dismantlement of hierarchy at work.

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**N.B.:** In my thesis, I will often define the territories in which I pursued my fieldwork as being part of the province of Quebec. I have done so because the province is a political unit of territory defined by the Canadian Federal State and the Provincial State that is easily recognized by a wider audience. Nevertheless, it is important that I acknowledge that my research has been conducted on unceded Indigenous territories. The Anishinaabe & Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) Nations are recognized as the custodians of these territories, namely Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal and the East of the Ottawa river valley. These territories are now home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. I respect the continued connections with the past, present, and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Province of Quebec.

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## Foreword

Before actually introducing the research project that will be detailed in this thesis, I want to begin by exposing the reasons that pushed me to pursue graduate studies in the perspective of publishing a thesis.

Having started to work as a salaried employee at the age of 13 (for seasonal work at first, then as a part-time worker during high school at the age of 15), I was rapidly introduced to the challenges of being a worker and the issues of workers' rights; starting with short experiences of berry picking and cucumbers picking with temporary immigrant workers and people on social welfare working on the black market to meet up their financial needs, it was not quite clear what was the problem there for me at that time, but I was feeling something was problematic with seeing so many people being treated so poorly and receiving ridiculous pay (I hated working at those jobs). Nevertheless, the pleasure I had of being able to buy myself some stuff and of learning various things motivated me to continue working part-time then on (I only stop salaried work for one year at the age of 16 to participate in group projects in Honduras and Spain).

At the age of 19, when I was not sure exactly what to do with my life, I had one conviction that pushed me to start a bachelor's degree in social work, which I obtained in 2014: I wanted to work to improve people's life. Having felt injustice very often as a low-paid part-time worker and having read and experience a lot about the social issues experienced in my own country and elsewhere in the world, I thought that becoming a social worker would be the best way to obtain a salary to work with people to improve their well-being. However, as I was studying and learning a lot during my bachelor's degree, I often felt we were forgetting to discuss something central to most people's lives when analyzing the various sources of social issues: work. Rarely the idea that the organization of work might be a source of various social problems was discussed; on the contrary, it often seemed that having a job was seen as the expression of having a good "social functioning" for individuals. Certainly, certain courses and teachers brought forward critical perspectives that challenged that idea, but the professional framework that we learned to obtain jobs seemed confined in this idea of "social functioning". At the same time, my degree was requiring every student to pursue a full-year internship to obtain the diploma; I did mine in a community



organization supporting and defending immigrant workers' rights. This experience really helped me to figure out how work could be problematic for people's lives, just like I felt it could.

With this clearer interest in questioning the organization of work, I started asking myself about what I found frustrating at work while reading and researching about various initiatives taking place, or that took place, around the world to organize work differently. Along with that, I started working in an organization that was coordinating projects of youth workers cooperatives in Quebec and New-Brunswick and where some people surrounding this organization were really interested in the idea of organizing coops in *autogestion* (i.e. worker-run without hierarchy). Within that context, I realized something; hierarchy at work is personally frustrating for me, but other people also think it is problematic. So, the idea that dismantling hierarchy might be a way of reorganizing work to improve people's lives then became a true interest of research for me as well as a motive to challenge the status quo in the more common way of organizing work that frustrated me overtime.

From this emergence of interest to the actual writing of this thesis, my vision and perspective on organizing work without hierarchy really evolved and transformed. More than just being a way to reorganize work in a perspective of economic justice and occupational satisfaction, the various initiatives that I read about and with which I worked for the following thesis really showed me that dismantling hierarchy at work is a continuous process of working for equity, self-fulfilment and autonomy as well as being a tool to challenge the capitalist economic system. Hence, the objective of this thesis was to offer a testimony of the practices and the ensuing impacts of two thriving initiatives to nourish a movement of economic initiatives that is questioning the actual status quo and that want to address the injustices of the capitalist system. More than just an academic thesis, it is a paper to expose the difficulties, the amazingness, the contradictions, the transformation, the challenges and all the hope for a more just society that dismantling hierarchy can involve.

Thank you for sharing my work if you think it is worth it.

## **Introduction**

Chatting about the future with friends can be sometimes really daunting nowadays; facing an ecological crisis, we have to deal with continuously rising inequalities between the rich and the poor, the constant threat of financial crises and the rise of racist and intolerant populist movements emerging from the far-right of the political spectrum. The only way that hope is possible to find within all of this is by thinking about creative ways to counter the consequences of these issues and to imagine ways of challenging the status quo. How have we come to this point? To grasp everything at the same time, many would start by examining the economic system in which we are now living, because it affects so many aspects of our lives: the capitalist economy. Let's try it out.

First, we can recall the continuous need of capitalism for growth in production and consumption that has led us to abuse of natural resources and the environment for extensive production, answering the ever-growing needs of the ever-growing population in goods and materials. This never-stopping growth has now created such a degradation of nature that, contrary to capitalist promise of enlarging prosperity for everyone, we are now facing growing impacts on our possible future prosperity (Stanford, 2011 p. 474), and the urgency of acting against climate change often seems unmanageable. Secondly, capitalist economy is now totally dominated by the financial sector and consequently, the incentive for growth is more and more motivated by the sales of stocks than actually responding to the demand for production (Ibid.). In other words, the economy, under the domination of capitalism, is now completely disconnected from the needs of human; humans became separated from nature and individuals from community, thus creating a polarization of wealth (individuals grasping all wealth for themselves) and a complete degradation of the environment (humans forgetting their dependence on nature) (Eisenstein, 2011, pp. 10-92). Interestingly, Karl Polanyi argued more than 70 years ago something similar; led by the self-regulating Market, capitalism separated the economy from the society, as work, money, and land became a simple commodity to be sold out on the market (1944 (2015)). The capitalist economy is now solely motivated by the financial competition of making more money and selling more stuff than actually answering people's needs.

Simultaneously, people work more and more to continue to pay their bills, afford food and afford housing. A lot of people are also feeling more than ever disconnected from the fruits of their labour

as it no longer provides the essential for them to fulfil their needs. In another sense, a lot of people are working so much, that they are no longer working to live, rather they are living to work (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013 p. 19). On the other hand, we also see an increasing number of what David Graeber calls “bullshit jobs”<sup>1</sup>, where people receive a decent and more-than-decent salary to accomplish jobs and tasks with no concrete and significant social utility, but that serves the survival of complex and heavy business structure of large companies. As the interest of the shareholders dictate the decisions managers take to organize the work, people see the environment and their well-being degrading, powerless, as they still need to work to survive. Some authors then argue that there are no multiple crises, but that capitalism is the crisis (Volcano & Shannon, 2012 p. 87). And with the extensive negative impacts incurred by the 2008 financial crisis that have affected numerous people, many are now looking for true economic alternatives to achieve and obtain sustainable lifestyles that are not at the mercy of the fluctuations of the capitalist financial economy.

Facing these different situations and this context of crises, it is hard not to take action. Many people are actually trying things and initiating actions to push for change, but the directions towards change to take are not always so clear. One of the different avenues that seems to be getting more and more popularity in recent years, in Quebec and elsewhere, is to implement, support or integrate local initiatives challenging the mainstream economic model, most often within the field of social economy, with focuses on wealth redistribution, democratic structure, environmental preservation or food sovereignty (*Transform/er Montréal*, March 19-20 2016 and April 29-30 2017; *Sortir du Capitalisme* April 9-10 2016). Seemingly, the idea of “taking back the economy” (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013) to bring it back to something useful for people and the planet is seen as one avenue of solutions to face the various crises affecting us all. One idea (that is not so new) and often discussed among these initiatives, is to redistribute organizing and decisional power to workers or abolish hierarchical division within organizations and enterprises.

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview given in the *Jacobin*, in June 2018 (see <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/06/bullshit-jobs-david-graeber-work-service>), David Graeber explains that “a bullshit job is a job which is so pointless [...], that even the person doing the job secretly believes that it shouldn't exist.” An example of this would be middle management positions in big corporations, where you see supervisors of small teams of 4 or 5 people working under the supervision of a director, who is under the authority of a senior director working for a vice-president working under the authority of a senior vice-president. For these positions, a lot of the job is to make sure that other people are doing the job that they are in fact already doing. Another example could also be the engineer or industrial designer responsible of designing electronics for a minimum durability to increase the sales of those electronics.

Hierarchy in the workplace is common; a typical job generally involves having a boss telling you what to do. When implemented in the organizational structure of a workplace, hierarchy pushes people to only accomplish what the upper strata of the hierarchy asks them to do and prevents the engagement of workers in fruitful initiatives. This is why the well-known British anarchist Collin Ward will say that “hierarchical institutions rob people of initiative and efficiency” (Paskewich, 2014 p. 661). This characteristic of hierarchical organization is also contributing to the sentiment of alienation that workers can often feel, as they cannot express their full potential and control the expression of their work. Moreover, hierarchical organization is based on the belief that a small number of individuals, at the top of the hierarchy (often the proprietors or share-holders of enterprises) have the capacity of holding the entire knowledge, information and competences to make decisions about everything going on within the organization (Castoriadis, 1979). But, as Pyotr Kropotkin was already arguing at the turn of the last century, this is ineffective; the hierarchical authority cannot acquire the vast amount of knowledge, expertise and information collectively held by the people at the base of an organization, which is needed to take the very best decisions (De Geus, 2014 p. 866). Hence, when people think of dismantling hierarchy, the argument for it is that without it, people would express greater initiative within their workplace and obtain a greater control of how things are done. The second argument for the dismantlement of hierarchy is that without it, decisions would not be only motivated by the financial interests of the proprietors and share-holders of enterprises. Instead, a wider selection of considerations and interests would be taken into account; helping to tackle different issues related to work, but also with good and services production. As someone bearing anarchist ideals and personally hating to receive and give orders in every aspect of my life (and especially work), this idea of breaking down hierarchy in the workplace sounds totally worth the try. When work can often be oppressive, stressful and confining, trying to change the way it is organized so that people can have control over it is for sure not to neglect, in a perspective to better people’s lives.

When talking about dismantling hierarchy, most people will think of workers’ cooperatives or of the various fights for workers’ self-management that happened and still continue, the latter especially among scholars and activists. In Quebec, while coops are numerous (Lévesque, 2007) and research on cooperatives is not new, few examples of initiatives dismantling hierarchy at work

have been documented (Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005). Hence, my interest in doing research was not to study coops nor the workers' movement for self-management; I wanted to look into practices themselves, the way they are implemented, how people feel about them, and how they could impact people's lives to offer an original contribution to scholarly literature about working practices possibly contributing to radical<sup>2</sup> change. I wanted to go beyond the common imagery of the absence of hierarchy in the workplace and to see the concrete applications of it. This thesis is the result of the ensuing research project I started almost three years ago.

Looking to contribute to the dissemination of practical knowledge, this thesis is a presentation of the academic work I have done in the last three years with two specific initiatives taking place in Quebec which implemented practices that dismantle hierarchy in the workplace. Using an approach inspired by participatory action research, this research brings some ethnographic and focus groups insights collected during two separate fieldworks around one month and a half each. These fieldworks were conducted with two Quebec-based economic initiatives presenting non-hierarchical elements and militant connections with social movements looking to transform society: the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*, a cooperative farm involved in community-supported organic agriculture, and *Koumbit*, a non-profit organization offering IT services to various organizations and engaged in the movement for technology and Internet accessibility.

But before getting into the core of this work, it is important to go back in what people have already said about dismantling hierarchy in the workplace but also the context in which such kind of initiatives may take place in Quebec. Hence, the following sections will present a review of the literature on those topics, while addressing some interesting conceptual and theoretical contributions related to the implementation of non-hierarchical practices. I will then present my research project by addressing my research question, exposing the methodology and then presenting two case studies on which this research relies on. The ensuing analysis and discussion will afterwards offer the interesting elements for a better understanding, hence closing my thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> In my work, I use the term "radical" according the Latin origin of the word coming from *radix*, meaning "root". "Radical", in my writings, relates to or acts on the origins, the root, of a situation or issue. Here, "radical change" therefore means "change acting on the origins" of people's drudge and oppression at work.

## 1. Literature review

When I started researching about dismantling hierarchy at work, I rapidly fell onto papers, articles and other scholarly works discussing anarchism and anarchist ideas, the workers' movement, unionism and revolution. Since my primary interest in doing research was influenced by this literature, it was no surprise it was going to offer interesting contributions, which I will use to initiate the review of literature. Linked to that stream, many authors, groups, and activists address more specifically workplace democracy through *autogestion* (or workers' self-management) (Gagnon & Rioux, 1988; Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005; Shukaitis, 2010; *Association Autogestion*, 2015) as the principal approach to dismantle hierarchy in the workplace. These written works will also be covered as an addition to the anarchist ideas on the dismantlement of hierarchy.

Another body of literature slightly distant from the workers' movements or the revolutionary struggles, is the approach of social economy (or social and solidarity economy), also prominent in the last decades in the province of Quebec and within French-speaking literature (Lévesque, 2007; Utting (ed.), 2015). This literature, addressing a wider variety of practices transforming the workplace and the purposes of enterprises, will also be reviewed as an important source in which I forged my research project. To complete this review, I will also address an emerging current in management literature, which I will not focus a lot on since only emerging, but where the diminution (or absence) of hierarchy is argued as being an advantage for an engagement at work and bringing efficiency in organizations (Barker & Martin, 2011; Laloux, 2014; Bernstein & al., 2016).

### 1.1 Anarchism and social movements as spaces of emergence for non-hierarchical work practices

Unsurprisingly, the ideas and perspectives arguing to dismantle hierarchy can be traced down to the writings of early anarchist thinkers. One of the most famous from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, was already advocating for the collective appropriation by workers of the products of their labour from the firm owners when he criticized and problematized "property" (Baillargeon, 2004; McKay, 2012; Strong, 2014). Proudhon proposed that idea as an answer to resolve the injustices produced by the capitalist firms and the problem of work alienation. Not

alone in his critiques of the capitalist enterprise and the private property, many fellow anarchists, socialists and rank and file workers participated in the creation of the Paris Commune<sup>3</sup>, in 1871, which can be considered one of the first modern experience of worker-run space (Gluckstein in Ness & Azzellini (Eds), 2011 pp. 34-36; Canivenc, 2012 p.17; Spannos, 2012 p.44). In the following years of that period, the critiques of capitalist private property, initiated by thinkers like Proudhon, or the more commonly known Karl Marx, lead to dispersion of ideas amongst Europeans workers' unions defending the appropriation of the "means of production" by the workers (i.e. the factory, the machinery and the tools), seeding the perspective of workers' council and worker-owned factories for revolutionary movements and revolutionary unions (Spannos, 2012).

Emerging in the same period, many developed critiques of capitalist hierarchical organization became arguments to fight for the workers' control of the workplace, with some of them notably expressed in the work of another well-known anarchist thinker, the mutualist Pyotr (Peter) Kropotkin (De Geus, 2014). The latter articulated two important critiques of hierarchical organization and bureaucracy: because workers only obey to the orders of the upper level to do their work, they become "mere servants" of their bosses, and start to degenerate intellectually as they cannot express their full potential and capacities (De Geus, 2014 p. 866); and that hierarchical authority is ineffective since it cannot hold the expertise and information collectively owned by the base of an organization or enterprise (ibid.). Relying on these perspectives and ideas of the late 19th century and early 20th century, the history of the workers' movements has then seen multiple experiences of workers' councils until the Second World War, from the Soviets in revolutionary Russia to the collectivization during the Spanish revolution (Ness & Azzellini (Eds), 2011 pp. 83-170; Spannos, 2012; Association Autogestion, 2015).

While there is not much written work (in English or French) witnessing experiences after the Second World War and until the 1960s, experiences of worker-managed factories, potentially

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<sup>3</sup> The Paris Commune is seen as one of the first space where workers took control of their workplace because it is within its barricades that the first known workers' councils in Europe was created by workers themselves. The Paris Commune was created by former militiamen, armed to defend Paris from the Prussian invasion, who were first and foremost working-class people that spontaneously organized themselves through direct democracy after the defeat of Emperor Napoleon III against the Prussians. To assure their means of subsistence, they took control of the workshops and sustain a new radical and democratic organisation until it was repressed in blood by the State forces, after the signature of a peace treaty with Prussia. (Gluckstein in Ness & Azzellini, 2011 pp. 34-36).

influenced by the former socialist and anarchist struggles for worker appropriation of their workplace, happened within the former Yugoslavian communist state in the 1950s, as the heads of the state decided to implement “workers’ self-management” of the nationalized factories (Music in Ness & Azzellini, 2011 pp.173-176). At the same time, socialists and workers’ movements in the West started to develop a strong critique of communist Russia, the common representation of *real socialism* or the *actually existing socialism* (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2014) and more specifically Stalinism and the heavy hierarchical bureaucracy. It was in that that period that the so-called “New Left” was emerging, and new critiques of hierarchy became central to many left-wing social movements. Potentially influenced by what happened in Yugoslavia, it is in that period that activists and socially engaged thinkers, such as Cornelius Castoriadis in Greece and France, Murray Bookchin in the USA or Collin Ward in the United-Kingdom, developed their ideas about dismantling hierarchy. While not going exactly in the same direction in terms of ideals and perspectives, Castoriadis and Bookchin developed a shared diagnosis of modern society. Both described society as being utterly hierarchical and based on order and command, but that non-hierarchical societies also existed (Castoriadis, 1979; Bookchin, 2005). They also defended that the hierarchical society, and dynamics of domination for Bookchin, could be traced back a long time ago (Bookchin, 2005). While Castoriadis developed his critiques of hierarchy by examining it in the workplace and by arguing against bureaucracy to defend the idea of a “*société autogérée*” (self-managed society) (1979), Bookchin developed his perspective of creating an “ecological society” (2005), which was a more deepened proposition to dismantled hierarchy in the various spheres of human lives. As for Colin Ward, while still anchored in a socialist libertarian intellectual current, his ideas were more centred around the organization, as a unit of human social life, where hierarchy and mainstream management were problematic and should be dismantled, but that spaces of anarchism, self-determination and non-hierarchical organization were already everywhere and that the focus should be on expanding and joining those organizations to build a more just and equitable society (Paskewich, 2014).

Over time, and evolving from those ideas and perspectives, different “projects” (if I could say it that way) and initiatives to dismantle hierarchy have been imagined and experimented in commitment to revolutionary and anarchist movements (Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005; Ness & Azzellini, 2011; Association Autogestion, 2015). While they are not necessarily numerous and have been often marginal, these experimentations and conceptualizations within left-wing social



movements have been able to foster the idea of workers ruling their own workplace. In the 1990s, the American economist Robin Hahnel and the activist and editor Michael Albert, still inspired by those ideas, imagined and described a whole new economic system based solely on the coordination of workers to align production to needs, and hence evacuating the need for the capitalist free market to allocate resources (Lebrun, 2014). From all these thoughts, one particular prevailing interpretation of the old anarchist ideal of workers' control over their workplace is the concept of *autogestion* (workers' self-management), which derived from the experiences of the Yugoslavian workers in the 1950s (Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005).

## 1.2 Autogestion as a concrete configuration to dismantle hierarchy

*Autogestion*, or in English “workers’ self-management” is the expression, and the perspective, that is frequently put forward to talk about a true implementation of non-hierarchical work practices. Being the literal French translation of the Serbian work “*samoupravvlje*”, the idea of *autogestion* is originally derived from the state-supported experiences of self-managed factories in the 1950s Yugoslavia, even though it now encompasses a wider variety of experiences of direct democracy because of the various experiences and ideas that referred to it (Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005). Usually put forward as an ideal and as a revolutionary perspective since the 1960s (mainly in France), few written works addressed the practical side of implementing *autogestion* in the workplace (Canivenc, 2012). Nevertheless, interesting testimonies of the implementation of *autogestion* have been published and offer interesting perspectives on this avenue to transform our lives. In Argentina, since the economic crisis of the early 2000s, a movement of factory take-overs initiated a wide implementation in many workplaces in the country (Sitrin, 2006; Vieta, 2010; Kabat in Ness & Azzellini (Eds.), 2011). In her book *HORIZONTALISM*, Marina Sitrin gives the voice to the Argentine people involved in the different initiatives to let themselves explain how this organization of the work is an answer to a dysfunctional system (2006). Vieta, on his side, offers interesting analyses on how the practices implemented in Argentine recuperated factories were a creative and intuitive response to the crisis people were facing as well as some important challenges, in terms of equity and power distribution within *autogestion* (2010). A similar kind of work has been done also by Marina Kabat in the collective publication *OURS TO MASTER AND TO OWN* (Ness & Azzellini, 2011 pp. 365-381). Outside of that, the few written works addressing

*autogestion* or workers' self-management outside of Argentina generally present overviews of the practices and the challenges faced by the people involved or its revolutionary potential without getting into details or analyses, when they are not simply used and presented as a new managerial strategy to promote "responsible autonomy" or flexibility (Shukaitis, 2010 p. 59).

In some other works, new configurations of workers' self-management are sometimes discussed, such as the idea of workers' self-directed enterprise defended by Richard Wolff (2012), a theorized interpretation of how non-hierarchical workplace should be organized. One questionable aspect of that work is that it does not build on empirical experiences, but tries to settle an original model of organization inspired by theory and other written works on self-management. But, other insightful contributions, such as one by Michel Lulek, a member of a collective enterprise in France which has been functioning through *autogestion* since its beginning, offers a different approach to the analyses of non-hierarchical work practices (2009). In his book, Lulek exposes how the organization of work of the collective enterprise without formal hierarchy and through collective decision-making has been able to transform the way the workers involved live, offer them more liberty to learn, to share moments with others and to ensure a more sustainable lifestyle (Ibid.). Inspired by this work, I designed my research project in order to offer a testimony of how these types practices can impact livelihoods with a more analytical and comprehensive approach. Hence, my contribution would be adding to what Lulek's book exposes as an empirical testimony of working within a non-hierarchical workplace.

In Quebec, more specifically, the idea of *autogestion* has been discussed in a more or less continuous manner by academics and activists since the 1980s, even though only a few experiences have been documented. In 1988, Marcel Rioux and Gabriel Gagnon, two sociologists from the province, published joint essays supporting the idea that the Province had specific economic and political landscape that could lead to an implementation of *autogestion* in different aspects of our lives. To support their argument, they present symbolic experiences community self-determination (*Cooperative de développement du JAL*) and workers' self-management (*Tricofil*) that have marked the decade (Rioux & Gagnon, 1988). In this work, *autogestion* and the ensuing practices were analyzed and documented as a positive transformative process but without looking specifically at the impacts. Afterwards, works presenting the different initiatives that happened in Quebec

(Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005; Canivenc, 2012) have been published, but the questions of the impacts of those practices are yet to be deepened.

### 1.3 Social economy as a contemporary space of actualization of non-hierarchical practices

As mentioned above, another important stream of thoughts where non-hierarchical work practices are discussed is included in the literature around the contemporary field of economic practices that is the social economy. Derived from the cooperative movement that emerged in the mid-19th century in Europe as a mean for some workers and artisans to enhance their capacity to have a somewhat decent work, social economy is a wider field of practices encompassing every economic practices that serve social, collective or mutual purposes or interests (Laville in Utting (Ed.), 2015 pp. 47-48). Hence, the revolutionary perspective of workers' self-management is also part of the notion of social economy. What is interesting about the stream of thoughts around the social economy is that it widens the possibilities of configuration for worker's appropriation of their means of production; it offers a different lens to look into it. As one of the roots of the contemporary social economy, cooperatives are obviously often presented as the main organization structure to implement workers' control. In Quebec, this reflex is even stronger, as the cooperative movement has a long and well-institutionalized history which is reflected in the acclaimed and prominent sector of the social economy in the province (Lévesque, 2007 and Utting, 2015 p. 25). But what is somewhat problematic with the perspective of the social economy (at least in the more mainstream perspectives), is that it is often only presented as a third sector of the economy, complementing the private and public sectors of the economy to fulfil people's needs, and not as a mean to deeply transform the economy and society (Lévesque, 2007; Laville in Utting (Ed.), 2015). Yet, cooperative organization and the other organization structures encompassed by the notion of social economy are still valued as leverage to implement workplace democracy (Kokkinidis, 2012; Krishna, 2013). The fact that there is a place for workers (when workers are also members) to at least vote and discuss the organization of their work and have a decision power over their working conditions is seen as a primal impact of the ensuing deliberative practices of cooperatives (Krishna, 2013). Nonetheless, as George Kokkinidis explains, because cooperative and "democratic" workplaces are more often designed under representative democratic principles, hierarchy often prevails in the daily activities and rapidly the organization can become oligarchic, if not

bureaucratic, where the board and directors become the ruling worker-members (2012). So rarely cooperatives are presented or studied in terms of a tool to dismantle hierarchy, but more as a business structure with the capacity of empowering workers.

This does not detract from the fact that important critiques of that supposed capacity were developed over the years in Quebec. The most important critiques come from the fact that the official recognition of social economy as being part of the whole economic arrangement in Quebec, in the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, came when neoliberal ideas within the State pushed for “third-partyization” (i.e. privatization) of the provision of social and health community services (Couillard & Côté, 2000 pp.47-50; Sévigny, 2003 pp.37-43; Shragge, 2013 pp. 40-43). As community initiatives and organizations were already well established and pretty dynamic in various communities all across the province, there was already a great movement supporting social economy. Led by women’s organizations, this movement organized for many years to obtain official recognition of community organizations (i.e. social economy) as a true sector of the economy in the province and also to access greater funding from the State to support good employment and service provision in parallel with the public sector (Côté, 2011). Yet, when the community sector became recognized by the State as part of a “social economy”, the public sector was already in transformation and the State apparatus saw the social economy (mainly what was then the community organizations) as the preferred sector to create employment while reducing the weight of the public sector for service provisions (Ibid.; Couillard & Côté, 2000 pp. 2-3). The result was then the slow transformation of militant and confrontational community organizations into subsidized (poorly for many) enterprises with professionalized service providers aligning their activities to the calls of projects from the State for funding (Shragge, 2013 pp. 40-50). Some analyses and arguments concluded that the development of the social economy in the province was supported as a State’s strategy to establish neoliberal public policies (Côté, 2011). Hence, at the mercy of the State funding, the changes in public policies, and the criteria of various funding partners, it is very hard, for many social economy enterprises, to achieve or access the autonomy needed to break free from hierarchical organization of work and implement working conditions that do not interfere with the funders’ demands.

Emerging within the field of social economy, another sub-stream of literature, especially strong in Quebec with recent works from research groups such as the CRISES (Research centre on social innovations), really focuses on the different practices of the various social economy enterprises in terms of “social innovations”, including *autogestion* and the dismantlement of hierarchy in the workplace as a form of it (Canivenc, 2012; and we can also see that influence in the work of Vieta, 2010). But the focus on social innovations, while maybe grasping some elements corresponding to non-hierarchical work practices, can be problematic as it easily becomes a catch-all term that does little to differentiate radical transformative practices from mere modification in governance structure engaging more people in the organizational processes (Richez-Battesti & al., 2012). Even though it shed lights on interesting practices in organizations, the notion of social innovation is very often analysed and documented in terms of collective actions between actors to implement new practices and the possibilities they offer, but tend to leave out the actual impact and possibilities of social change that could result from those practices (Ibid.). Consequently, the notion of social innovation seems to be excessively used in contexts where no profound transformation or change can be seen, and also tend to become an end in itself, as being innovating is something valued in the mainstream economic market. In the end, capitalist institutions and enterprises could easily refer to social innovations when transforming their governance practices or their collaboration with civil society organization, while maintaining their hierarchical and exploitative nature, or being, at best, just altered capitalist firms. The notion of social innovations then seems too wide in its sense and use to be useful in a study on the impacts of dismantling hierarchy in the workplace.

#### 1.4 Critical management perspective and its critique of hierarchy

A final element in the literature sustaining the interest of studying the impact of non-hierarchical work practices is the few recent works in management and organizational study criticizing hierarchy and supporting anarchy (or anarchist-oriented perspective) as a basis for organization. A first important contribution is the issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Ephemera* titled *Management Business Anarchism*, where the works of Colin Ward and Peter Kropotkin are used to expose the flaws, weaknesses, and problems with hierarchical organizations, which prevails in modern Western societies (De Geus, 2014; Paskewich, 2014). Similarly, by advocating for anarchy in the

“boardroom”, Barrington-Bush argues that organization should use practices of the social movements and also offers an interesting critique of hierarchy as being a misunderstanding of how people are as “it assumes the worst of them” (McGregor, 1960, in Barrington-Bush, 2013 p.65).

In similar perspectives of weighting the important flaws of hierarchy in enterprises, Frédéric Laloux decided to publish a book exposing the various non-hierarchical practices he observed in various organizations and how those practices changed the significance of “management”; he titled this book *REINVENTING ORGANIZATIONS* (2014). In this book, Laloux presents non-hierarchical organizations as a new type of enterprise in the evolution of management; *Evolutionary Teal organizations*. With this concept, the author wants to conceptualize organizations capable of better adapting to change, take a distance from the imperative of profit generation, and better answer workers’ needs via a decentralization of power. Essentially, it is one of the few works that seeks to expose how transforming organizations by dismantling hierarchy can impact society at large. While his work provides powerful insights, a good description of practices and some impacts, the case studies the author used are for a majority still relying on profit-driven structures or large-scale productions, where continuous growth is needed and head management teams still prevail in the decision-making process. Hence, Laloux’s book offers a good attempt in looking at the impacts of non-hierarchical workplaces without putting too much detail on how this impacts the people involved and how it suggests a transformation in our economic relations. My work, through this thesis, would be to deepen the understanding of the impacts of such practices, seeing how people’s livelihoods can be transformed, not only on how their daily work is changed, but how this transforms their lives. My work will try to take a distance from that literature and focus on more grassroots initiatives where management is assumed by the productive forces. *REINVENTING ORGANIZATIONS* is nevertheless an interesting attempt to put forward the impact of non-hierarchical work practices that inspire others to pursue such kind of study.

A related rising trend in small or medium-size businesses, which is included in what Laloux refers as *Teal organizations*, is the *Holacracy* (a registered trademark) organizational model, developed by the USA-based entrepreneur Brian Robertson (Laloux, 2014). This new model, defended by its positive impacts in businesses, is really interesting to understand how power can

be redistributed within an organization. Based upon sociocracy, *Holacracy* proposes the concept of “circles” as units of decision-making and work. In this model, organizations are a collection a various interconnected circles of people working together for a shared purpose (Laloux, 2014; Bernstein & al., 2016). But, very often (if not always), its impacts are only presented in a “business-minded” sense, where productivity, efficiency and the purpose of the organization is central. Looking to go beyond that analysis, my contribution in this thesis will try to expose how dismantling hierarchy in the workplace can impact livelihoods in a wider sense.

Although, as practices inspired by models such as *Holacracy* and Laloux’s *Teal organizations* become more popular within young entrepreneur circles, it is important, for a purpose of social transformation, to keep a perspective of where these practices have to be put in place to enhance people’s livelihoods and well-being. Otherwise, it can be easy to only use them as tools to develop an advantage over other enterprises in a capitalist market. For the moment, no work ensuing from this trend has really shown the impacts of dismantling hierarchy for the well-being and quality of livelihoods of the people involved in such organizational project. On the other hand, somewhat recent quantitative research projects about participation and independence in enterprise exposed a positive impact to higher participation of the workers in the decision-making process for their level of happiness and engagement in their work (Benz & Frey, 2008; Barker & Martin, 2011); pointing out the interest of deepening our understanding of the impact on non-hierarchical work practices to transform our lives, at least on the level of happiness and self-fulfilment.

My intent was and remains to insert this research project where rarely management studies go; studying practices in a perspective for radical social change. Not only we can “reinvent organization” (in Frederic Laloux’s words) to offer more satisfying occupations for people and more “conscious” enterprises, but we also could think of revolutionizing organizations in a perspective of radical social transformation, where the workplace could contribute to build better livelihoods, where general well-being of people can be conjugated with environmental and social justice.

## 2. Research question and conceptual framework

As highlighted in the literature, thinking of organizing work without hierarchy has been commonly presented as a revolutionary strategy to overthrow capitalism, or simply as a way to temper the effect of the private capitalist market on certain social layers. Still, very few times the daily impacts of the absence (or reduction) of hierarchy has been exposed or thought about. Moreover, while there are some historical reviews and analyses of experiences of *autogestion* in the province of Québec, such as *Tricofil* or *Café Touski* (Simard, 1978; Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005; Leblanc, Noiseux & Silvestro, 2005; Canivenc, 2012), there is no significant published work that investigate the daily impacts on the people and/or the specific practices ensuing from the diminution or absence of hierarchy in economic initiatives (i.e. organizations offering products or services to others).

Hence, because I wanted to know more about the significance of getting rid of hierarchy in the workplace and its pertinence in the perspective of post-capitalist futures, I have specifically investigated the impact of non-hierarchical practices in alternative economic practices in this province. But talking of non-hierarchical practices is very encompassing and can include many things; hierarchy is something that can be applied to various aspects of social life: hierarchy of age, hierarchy of positions; hierarchy of professions, hierarchy of gender, organizational hierarchy, hierarchy of knowledge, etc. Moreover, hierarchy can be also experienced in an informal way, as people with more knowledge or more experience can have a stronger voice than others. So, for the purpose of my research, and to facilitate the following work of analysis, I had to focus on a particular form of hierarchy (or non-hierarchy in this case). In that sense, and because this expression has the potential to encompass many elements related to the organization of work, I decided to specify my research object as being “non-hierarchical work practices”. This expression, contrarily to other concepts that have been used in the past such as “worker-owned” or “*autogestion*”, which are more specific models of workplace organization, opens the possibility to include a wide variety of practices that could be neglected because they would not be part of the specific model or workplace organization. Moreover, by specifying that I will focus on “work practices”, it indicates that I will focus on a specific application of hierarchy that takes place at work; the hierarchy of command (Castoriadis, 1979).



With my research object more clearly defined, it is then easier to label the research question that led my research; how do non-hierarchical work practices implemented in alternative economic initiatives impact the livelihoods of the people involved in them? This could then be broken down in some sub-questions that target specifically the daily life of the people involved in those practices: how these practices transform the sense of work; how these practices address/solve issues related to inequalities within the organization's ecosystem (i.e.: workers, partners, community)?; What working conditions are derived from these practices?; and how, and to what extent, these practices support a transformation of human activity in the social and political spheres? But still, some conceptual elements of my research question need to be defined, namely "livelihoods" and "alternative economic initiatives", to really narrow the extent of my research and to frame the empirical work I have done to study non-hierarchical work practices. The following section details the conceptual elements I have used to pursue my research project.

## 2.1 Diverse economies

One of the principal conceptual contributions that has guided my reflections and analyses during my whole research process is the work of the duo scholars' working under the name of J.K. Gibson-Graham. Presented in their book *A Postcapitalist politics* (Gibson-Graham, 2006), the concepts of economic diversity or diverse economies (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003; Bergeron & Healy, 2015) and their work of building of a language of economic diversity (Gibson-Graham, 2006) are the two principal conceptual contributions shaping the empirical lenses I will use to observe and analyze the initiatives I have documented. This concept is premised by the idea that the more commonly used economic language is profoundly capitalocentric (ibid.); meaning that the way we talk about and critique our economies is always by using the standards of the capitalist economy (using GDP, speaking of wages, employment, etc.). Hence, many economic practices, productions, and activities are ignored, as they do not correspond to the language of capitalist economy. To get out of our capitalocentric mindset, J.K. Gibson-Graham drew from their feminist backgrounds and perspective the idea that we have to build a new language to demonstrate the economic diversity that actually exists, like first feminists did to expose realities ignored and hidden by the patriarchal society, such as care work and a bit later, gender diversity. This perspective of looking beyond capitalism by challenging our capitalocentric language is the reason why the duo of authors talks

of a “postcapitalist politics”; developing this new economic language unleashes political possibilities of unveiling and also building economies and initiatives that challenges capitalist domination (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Hence, “postcapitalist” does not mean “after capitalism”, but designates the fact that we are moving beyond capitalocentrism and that we are no longer confined in capitalist interpretations of economic relations (ibid.). Thus, in my research, when I refer to “postcapitalist economies”, I mean economies that are no longer constrained in the limits of capitalocentrism to articulate their configurations.

In the attempt of developing a language of economic diversity to expose the diverse economies, Gibson-Graham defined five coordinates, Labour, Enterprise, Transactions, Property, and Finance, to dissect the economy and expose elements that are ignored by the capitalocentric economic language; (2006; Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013).

**Table 1: The Diverse Economy**  
(based on the table by Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013 p. 13)

<b>LABOUR</b>	<b>ENTERPRISE</b>	<b>TRANSACTIONS</b>	<b>PROPERTY</b>	<b>FINANCE</b>
Waged	Capitalist	Market	Private	Mainstream Market
Alternative Paid e.g.: In-kind payments	Alter-Capitalist e.g.: Socially responsible enterprise	Alternative Market e.g.: Fair-trade market	Alternative Private e.g.: State-owned land	Alternative Market e.g.: Credit unions
Unpaid e.g.: Volunteering	Non-capitalist e.g.: Workers Coop	Nonmarket e.g.: Community-supported agriculture	Open Access e.g.: International waters or Freeware	Nonmarket e.g.: Interest-free loans

In this framework, each coordinate is divided in three categories of practices; in the table, the upper row encompasses the practices represented by the more commonly used economic language for the related coordinate, the middle row the alternative practices in relation to the upper category, and

finally, the lower one is the practices that are left invisible by the capitalocentric economic language.

For each coordinate, they defined conceptual questions to expose the existing practices and activities humans are involved in that are part of each coordinate by contrasting them to the capitalist language of economics. The *labour* coordinate first tackles the ways people engage with work to provide for their needs. The *enterprise* coordinate is concerned by how the surplus coming from the production of goods or services is distributed and who is deciding for it. On the side of the *transactions* coordinate, the focus is more about unveiling the various forms of exchange humans are involved in by looking at how we encounter or connect with others in livelihoods. The *property* coordinate is then useful to go beyond the “yours or mine” determination of belongings and initiate the reflections around the notion of commons. The final coordinate, *Finance*, is introduced by the diverse economies framework to look at the various ways we can invest for better futures. An important characteristic of the diverse economies framework to acknowledge is that it is not based on value-judgement; every practice, either extremely oppressive practices (e.g. slavery work) or emancipating ones can be unveiled. Hence, non-capitalist articulation of property can be exploitative in a non-capitalist manner, just like feudal estate (which is not “property” in the capitalist term) exploit peasants through lifelong servitude; but feudal estate can still be in place in some regions of the world, making it a hidden articulation of the property coordinate of an economy. For the sake of this research, the framework is still useful because it can unveil emancipating practices that are shaded by a capitalocentric interpretation of what should be liberating (e.g. abolishing private property). Therefore, I use this framework to distance myself from a capitalocentric perspective of emancipation.

In my research project, as I am looking at work practices in collective enterprises, the two conceptual questions, linked to the two first ethical coordinates, that have guided my observation are the followings: 1) How do we [they] survive well? (Labour); and 2) How do we [they] distribute surplus? (Enterprise) (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). By the notion of “surviving well”, JK Gibson-Graham mean the state of achieving a mix of five different types of well-being: *material well-being*, coming from the capacity to meet basic needs in material resources; *occupational well-being*, coming from the sense of enjoyment of the daily-life; *social well-being*,

coming from having a good social network and positive inter-personal relationships; *community well-being*, coming from the involvement in community activities; and, *physical well-being*, coming from good physical health and safe and healthy environment (ibid., pp. 21-22). Hence, my first conceptual question directly targets the various states of well-being coming from the work practices I studied. The second conceptual question inevitably brought me to investigate the decision-making processes, as enterprises are also organizations where work and production are literally “organized” by decision-making processes. As this conceptual framework has been developed to think beyond capitalism, it has been really helpful to grasp the non-hierarchical practices I have observed and will help me expose how they contribute to post-capitalist futures, since hierarchy is inherent to the capitalist enterprises starting from the proprietor-worker’s relationship, to the complex hierarchical structures of corporate businesses. Moreover, as the diverse economy conceptual framework involves questions about the various spheres of human life (political, environmental and social), it is really interesting to use in order to place my research question within a broader perspective.

### 2.1.1 The difficulties of not being capitalocentric

Working with the diverse economies framework is really useful to observe economic practices beyond capitalocentric lenses veiling a multitude of already existing alternative and emancipating practices. In my thesis, it helps me to be able to describe and expose the diversity of practices existing in the initiatives I studied. But not being capitalocentric in a scholarly context while sourcing my research interests in my anti-capitalist perspectives is quite difficult; capitalism is not a hegemony, but it is the dominant economic system and it holds serious hegemonic tendencies. The capitalist system is flexible, innovative and perpetually changing, and is often presented as being “the economy” by various economists (Stanford, 2011). Moreover, it holds a strong power in my western-world culture (or minority world, in JK Gibson-Graham’s words) since it is what is now part of the way we are educated and socialized at school and even within our households; rapidly we learn that we need waged work to survive, that we will have to listen to our boss, that we must invest in the stock-markets our savings to ensure our future, etc. Hence, because I want to see and expose what is not capitalist, because I want to contribute to the knowledge production supporting the fight against capitalist oppression and because capitalocentrism is part of my daily

language, I might use capitalocentric language or make capitalocentric statements. Even though it might be a weakness of my analysis, I think it is important to put that possibility forward and acknowledge it. Moving from a capitalocentric perspective is a tool I used for research purpose, but it is not something I can claim to have achieved for intellectual interpretations and analysis in all contexts.

## 2.2 Alternative economic initiatives and livelihoods: key concepts at the heart of my research question

As I mentioned earlier in my research question, the object of my research is non-hierarchical work practices implemented in “alternative economic initiatives” and their impact on “livelihoods”. While those elements of my research question are general categories used in a variety of interpretations in other research projects, the way I have used and applied them throughout my research process came from specific and applied definitions that corresponded to the intent of my research. It is through various readings connected to my research project that I came to develop these specific definitions, offering me the possibility to better narrow the object of my research.

What do I really mean when adding “alternative” to “economic initiative”? Essentially, I want to indicate that they are something alternative compared to what we are used to seeing as economic initiatives. Furthermore, I also mean something more specific that a group of scholars defined in the Routledge Companion to Alternative organization (Parkers & al., 2014). When defining what is an “alternative organization”, Parkers & al. first suggest that what makes the organization alternative is its constant concern to never separate the ends from the means (ibid., pp.34-34). Because when only the ends prevail over the means, old mechanisms, tendencies, and reflexes coming from the capitalist-oriented organizations can come back; and when the means prevail over the ends, the means can lead to nowhere and become useless (ibid.). As a second suggestion, Parkers & al. go a little further to define how the “alternative organization” becomes “alternative” (ibid.). Anchoring their proposition in a critique of the mainstream capitalist organization, the authors suggest 3 principles ensuring a shift (an alternative) to build organization: 1) An alternative organization protects fairly conventional notions of individual autonomy; 2) it considers cooperation, solidarity, equality and community as central to being human, since humans are

vulnerable and powerless when left alone; and 3) it must have responsibility to the future (Parkers & al., 2014 p. 38). In that sense, when I use the expression “alternative economic initiatives”, I talk about economic initiatives that are alternative because they continuously consider both ends and means jointly, but also where individual autonomy, equality, and solidarity are central to processes of cooperation, and responsibility and accountability for the community and the future are held central to their activities and objectives. Inevitably, this concept also guided the selection of initiatives I looked into before designing the research process.

Implementing alternative economic initiatives is a way to transform organizations and the organization of work. Something that is sometimes forgotten when discussing those kinds of initiatives is the way their practices not only transform the organization, but also how they transform the way people live and enjoy their living; it can change their livelihoods. “Livelihood” is a notion that is often used in a narrow sense; the means of subsistence or the means of making a living, or even simply a way of earning money to live (Merriam-Webster, 2017; IFRC, 2017). But, as the Merriam-Webster dictionary mentions, an obsolete signification of the word once prevailed, and during that period, “livelihood” meant “the quality or state of being lively” (2017). Moreover, we can find in the Oxford English Dictionary that the origin of the word is from the old English word *līflād*, which meant “the way of life” (2010). Hence, from its original signification, the word “livelihood” meant really more than just “a way to earn money or produce something for a living”. Ethan Miller, in a paper discussing regional development in the state of Maine in the USA, explains that very often some livelihood practices were marginalized because they could not be integrated into a competitive framework of what “life-constituting activities” should offer to a region (2013; pp. 2740-2743). He would then explain that there is a force of “economization” that tends to narrow the possibilities of what can contribute to sustain human daily life (*ibid.*, pp.2744-2746). For him, talking about livelihoods and using this word to address regional development is a way to move beyond that economization. In my research, I decided to take in consideration both the origins of the word and the proposition of Ethan Miller to use it to expose “more than market-based” life-sustaining activities. Livelihood, in my perspective, encompasses the means AND the way of being “lively”; it means the daily practices of sustaining someone’s own life, but also their physical, mental and emotional capacity to “survive well”, as J.K. Gibson-Graham would say (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). Hence, livelihoods, as an element of my research question, will

target the emotional, physical, mental and material means for someone's to pursue their own life. Therefore, my research question helped me to try to go beyond simply looking at the improvement of the working conditions with non-hierarchical work practices, and also how the general conditions and means of existence of the people involved is transformed by those practices.

### 3. Methodological approach

Simply said, the empirical work of my research consisted of observing and questioning the impact of non-hierarchical work practices in two different alternative economic initiatives on the livelihoods of the individuals engaged in those initiatives. Taking a stance towards the construction of post-capitalist futures, I focused my attention on the transformative impacts of those practices on livelihoods, namely how those practices transform the sense of work, articulate questions of inequality, transform human daily activity and transform working conditions. Relatively, my observations and the ensuing analyses had the intent to contribute to the development and imaginations of strategies in the making of a just and equitable society.

Looking to produce knowledge from “what is out there” in the daily activities of the two initiatives I worked with, I had to develop or adopt an approach giving me the possibilities of developing in-depth, detailed and contextualized understandings of what is going on in these initiatives. In that regard, Ortner (1995, in Urla & Helepolei, 2014 p.434) sees ethnography as not only an adequate qualitative method, but as a “mode of analysis” giving the possibility to develop a “richly detailed, textured and contextualized” understandings of a subject’s “life worlds and cultural practices” (Urla & Helepolei, 2014 p. 434). In a similar perspective, J.K. Gibson-Graham argue that ethnography is perfectly suited to “describe the different regimes of value that people juggle and move into and out of throughout their daily life” (2014 p. S151). Hence, ethnography seemed to be the best-suited approach to support my objectives of research. In the following subsection, I will present how ethnographic methods has been used throughout my research, first through the production of *thick description* (Gibson-Graham, 2014), then in relation with the perspective of *theory elaboration* (Vaughan, 1992) using the approach of *weak theory* (Gibson-Graham, 2014). I will then expose how participatory and collaborative research practices also shape my research project.

#### 3.1 Ethnography for producing “Thick description”

Ethnography, as an approach to research, has a long tradition of methods most specifically designed for the field of anthropology and, to a possible lesser extent, sociology. Nowadays, this approach



towards research has been introduced in various fields of social science research, as one of the main qualitative approaches to produce empirical knowledge. Even though more than just methods of data-gathering, like mentioned earlier, ethnography is very often characterized by three manners of collecting data: participant observation, nonparticipant observation and interviews (Tope & al., 2005 p.473). I did use these data collection during my fieldwork, but this does not justify my reliance on ethnography to structure my research project; what made ethnography relevant and more beneficial than other approaches for my research is the possibility it offers to build “thick description” (Geertz, 1973 in Gibson-Graham, 2014; Urla & Helepolei, 2014). Thick description, as defended by Geertz in 1973, can be considered as a sub-approach to ethnography which focuses on exposing heterogeneity of practices, nuances, internal conflicts, various codes of meaning, and so on (Gibson-Graham, 2014; Urla & Helepolei, 2014). Relying exclusively on ethnographic data collection, thick description gives the opportunity to the researcher to develop interpretations that move beyond mainstream, dominant and homogenous narratives to address particular practices. It is doing so because the interpretations ensuing from thick description are constructed within the array of details collected during fieldwork with the social groups studied, contrarily to more mainstream research developing them through strong theoretical narratives (Gibson-Graham, 2014). Nevertheless, my research project does not aspire to produce “ethnographies” of non-hierarchical work practices, which would have required long-term participant fieldwork with the two initiatives. Hence, I used ethnographic methods and approach to develop two case studies in which these methods gave me the tools to depict the needed details and practical knowledge needed to address my research question.

Since I focus on alternative economic practices in a perspective of social transformation for post-capitalist economies, my intent is to build theoretical interpretations more from “what it is” than “what it could be”; meaning that empirical information and details would prevail over the pre-existing theoretical framework to expose new knowledge, in order to address potential social transformations built from alternative economic practices. This is exactly what thick description offers; numerous details, including nuances, conflicts, contradictions heterogeneity of practices that research relying on a specific theoretical framework might ignore (Gibson-Graham, 2014; Urla & Helepolei, 2014). Hence, using thick description has been a useful tool in my attempt to grasp contradicting economic practices, systems of values and labour practices, instead of a more deeply

theorized framework, probably relying solely on capitalist vocabulary, references and understandings of the economy (capitalocentrism) could not interpret (Gibson-Graham, 2014). Moreover, as thick description is a sub-approach to ethnography, it requires the researcher to be present and active (for participant observation) in the research setting, creating the capacity to obtain first-hand experience and observations to discern dynamics, processes, and practices that members of the groups studied are not consciously aware (Tope & al., 2005). This is exactly what I was working to do during my fieldwork. Nevertheless, in order to work with thick description, a certain level of theoretical support and frame of meaning is still needed to achieve a structured and reflexive documentation and organized analysis of the data collected (Geertz, 1973 in Gibson-Graham, 2014 p. S148), and to achieve more than a mere description of practices; hence the need for what J.K Gibson-Graham call “weak theory” (2014).

### 3.2 Weak theory to work with Thick description: engaging in “theory elaboration”

The idea of “weak theory” may be understood as an opposition to the use of “strong theory”: powerful discourse behind great narratives that predicts trajectories when looking at an issue, events or practices (Gibson-Graham, 2014 p. S148). Moreover, as J.K. Gibson-Graham explains, strong theory always relies on dominant logic and systems, therefore most of the time influenced by colonialism, imperialism and western perspectives (ibid.). Hence using strong theory could hold the researcher in a capitalocentric mindset (ibid.), as capitalism is the dominant logic to interpret economies in the West, restraining the possibility to unveil and interpret practices that a capitalist logic would ignore or misunderstand. Weak theory, on the other hand, does not assume any trajectory for change or for “the” outcome of a particular issue; it offers theoretical elements to dissect and interpret phenomena and let the researcher stay alert towards the differences between cases (Gibson-Graham, 2014 p. S151). Hence, in order to do thick description (looking for nuances, particular details and heterogeneity), using weak theory becomes the preferable approach to work with the conceptual framework that structured my analyses, because it helps to keep the preferable mindset to explore the various possibilities that the practices I studied could inspire in the building of post-capitalist futures.

Another element that working with weak theory and thick description will help me to accomplish is to engage in what Geertz calls “theory building” (1997 in Gibson-Graham, 2014 p. S151) and that Diane Vaughan developed as a complementary approach to case studies that she named “theory elaboration” (1992). The first characteristic of that approach is that it requires the researcher to use theory and theoretical elements in a loose fashion (Vaughan, 1992, p. 175), in order not to replicate strong narratives to describe the phenomena observed within the case study, just like when using weak theory, so that elements from the case study are really taken from their empirical origins to build up new theoretical understandings of the case, while refusing to expand these new theoretical findings to all other similar cases. Hence, by working with weak theory and thick description, my goal is to engage in theory building from the observations and analysis of the two case studies I developed, in order to build on the conceptual framework of “diverse economies”, developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006), altering and improving their work (Vaughan, 1992 p.174) to enhance the power of their conceptual frame to understand and analyze the pertinence of non-hierarchical work practices within economic initiatives in the making of post-capitalist futures.

More than simply being an approach to case studies, theory building additionally offers some intellectual advantages and tools to contribute to knowledge and research. As Diane Vaughan explains, when presenting this approach, working in theory building helps to keep a level of awareness of the observations and the information collected during the research that makes it possible to raise other questions on the go (1992, p.176); hence maintaining a high level of reflexivity for the researcher to adapt the research process and sustaining the capacity to look for answers to important questions that might have been not thought of beforehand. Moreover, because of this level of reflexivity and the capacity this approach provides for altering and improving theoretical works, adding the approach of theory building to the use and production of weak theory offered me the possibility, like Diane Vaughan argued, to adapt, or even evolve or transform, the theoretical constructs I used and referred to for the analysis of my research data. Doing so, I hope to contribute to theoretical understandings of the reliance of non-hierarchical work practices in alternative economic initiatives at the same time as documenting their pertinence and contribution in the making of post-capitalist futures.

### 3.3 Documenting and theorizing practical knowledge of others: the importance of participatory and collaborative practices in my research

As I engaged in solitary reflections and analysis for a large part of my ongoing research work, I had a strong commitment to ensure that my project reflects the reality of the people engaged in the practices I have documented. My intent was to additionally refrain from using the practical knowledge of others without engaging in a sort of reciprocal exchange. Moreover, my intent in doing research is to put forward the practices and ideas already implemented by people in the field and possibly contribute to the dissemination of their knowledge and to the reflections and questions they have regarding their own practices. Added to that, I recognize that the two organizations I have worked with emerged from a strong activist milieu and they are putting ideas forward in the perspective of making social change and transforming their lives. Therefore, I have to assume clearly that I am a sympathizer to these people and to the ideas they put forward; I have this particular standpoint and it obviously impacts the way I conducted this research project and the direction the resulting analyses took.

In that perspective, as a sympathizer to the practices and with my concerns to “give back” for the knowledge I will use and acquire, it was clear in the first place that I would follow a participatory structure to my research. For Randy Stoecker (1999), participatory research is a type of research that seeks to increase participation in the research process, as well as to contribute to social change (p. 841). For this author, participatory research is performed by legitimizing forms of knowledge most often seen as invalid and by the participation of the people often described as “research subjects” (Stoecker, 1999 p. 841). Because I wanted to get the people I have researched with to be engaged in the research process, recognizing that it is their knowledge that will put my research forward, my research intents really correspond to this definition of participatory research. I want to unshadow non-hierarchical work practices in a perspective of contributing to the rise of more just and emancipatory initiatives for postcapitalist future; hence my research work could contribute to the movements in which the people I have done my research with are engaged, and this is another reason why participatory research was the only way for me to undergo this research project. But, as Gillan and Pickerill mentions, “[...] research does not always really help movements that much”

(2012 p. 136). Then, even though I want to contribute to the rise of emancipatory post-capitalist initiatives, I have to keep in mind that being a researcher, even more when being an outsider to the organizations I have worked with, my contribution might only be minimal. This is the major reason why I decided to stick to simple “participatory research”, which includes various articulation of participation in the research, and not looking to do “participatory action research” (Morissette, 2013; Chesnay, 2016), as I did not own the legitimacy to claim for the pursuit of an “action” benefiting the participants with a research project I decided to launch and undertake. A particular action could ensue from this research project, but this would only be the result of the mobilization of the participants of the research project and not from my personal intention to take that direction.

So, then what are the objectives of making that participatory research project, in terms of contribution to the groups I have work with and to the rise of emancipatory initiatives for post-capitalist futures? The response to that question became clearer for me through the reading of Uri Gordon’s chapter *Practising Anarchist Theory* (2007), and again, in the paper by Randy Stoecker *Are Academics Irrelevant?* (1999). In the latter, the author argues that the researcher can adopt three different approaches and four roles in a participatory framework; the initiator, consultant or collaborator approaches by taking animator, organizer, popular educator or participatory researcher roles. In my case, working with actual instituted organizations and looking to understand the practical knowledge of these groups, my posture was to take a collaborator approach to theorise the organizations’ knowledge through a participatory researcher role, as I have integrated the organizations for research purposes without taking a particular role within the organization for the research project. It is evident that during the whole process I adopted some of the other roles, as researchers navigate between them during the research (Stoecker, 1999), but these never make them central enough to the research process to adopt a difference stance in my research. Hence, we could characterize my research approach simply as a “collaborative research”, like discussed by Joëlle Morissette when she described participatory research project, where the intent is to bring research to do the practice by combining common interest in a question between the researcher and practitioners (i.e. activists or workers) (2013, pp.41-43). But this does not concretely explain what was to be a “collaborator” taking the role of a “participatory researcher”.

For Randy Stoecker, an important and relevant objective that a participatory research should pursue is simply to document the issue and to “[...] spread the word about what is going on” (1999, p.853). This is exactly what I worked for. But in practice, and in a participatory and collaborative manner, it means a little bit more than simply saying “documenting”. In *Practicing Anarchist Theory*, Uri Gordon goes into a little more detail of what is the job of an anarchist/activist/philosopher when doing participatory research (2007). One of the central elements is that “generating anarchist theory” has to be dialogical; meaning here that the researcher has to enter in dialogue with the people whose practical knowledge and ideas are examined to generate theoretical constructs and theoretical interpretations of what is going on (Gordon, 2007 p. 280). But, for him, the researcher is the one formulating theory (ibid.); the participants of the research are there to validate, question and critique the theoretical formulations of the researcher until the latter comes with a formulation that really interprets and translate their practical knowledge into theoretical constructs. Hence, the researcher has to bring theory to the participants at the same time as the participants are exposing and detailing their practices and ideas. Gordon summarizes this by explaining that the researcher has to be an observer but also an enabler and facilitator while the participants have to be co-philosophers in the production of theoretical knowledge (p. 282). This is exactly what a collaborative research is, as the participants do not share the role of researchers with the “main researcher” (i.e. me as a graduate student) (Morissette, 2013).

In short, my research needed to be participatory first because I needed the knowledge and the perspectives of the participants of my research to produce meaningful, relevant and adequate theoretical knowledge on their practices and ideas, but also because I needed to get involved in their daily work to access their knowledge, be able to engage in dialogue with them and contribute to their activities and actions. In that sense, my research is participatory, because I interacted with the participants to build knowledge, but it is more collaborative, as an approach, since the participants never took positions of “co-researchers” and never shared with me the responsibility of the research (ibid.)

## 4. Research process and fieldwork

### 4.1 Choices of the partner collective enterprises

As a concerned citizen about the future of the land where I live and because I want to contribute to social change within the territory I love and care for, it was clear for me that my research would have to look into initiatives taking place in the territory now known as Québec; the land where I was born, raised and still live today, and also because it is a recognized and defined jurisdictional territory. Hence, a first criterion to select collective enterprises to work with was that they were actually taking place in Québec. This criterion, definitely not based on methodological concerns or theoretical pertinence, is also reflecting my first interest in engaging in graduate studies, as I wanted to know more about the different economic alternatives taking place in my surrounding. Moreover, I was really interested in focusing locally (in my perspective) on those kinds of practices, as the literature on non-hierarchical work practices that I went through, by personal interest and for research purpose, focus a lot more on initiatives and experiences taking place elsewhere in the world, such as Argentina, Spain, the United-States, France or Italy (see Baillargeon, 2004; Ness & Azzellini (Eds.), 2011; *Association Autogestion*, 2015). Still, interesting and fruitful contributions on anti-authoritarian groups by the Collective de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective (CRAC, <http://www.crac-kebec.org/bibliotheque>) have exposed the active presence of various groups in Montréal and elsewhere in Québec defending and functioning under non-hierarchical principles (Sarrasin et al., 2016). Therefore, it seemed obvious for me that some people and groups, geographically close to me, should be involved in such economic initiatives.

The second, and most important criterion, was that the collective enterprises I will work with would be engaged in non-hierarchical work practices, in the sense that I defined earlier in my conceptual framework, as elements of the daily work as alternative economic initiatives. Described in that way, this criterion did not mean a total absence of hierarchy within the collective enterprise, but that the enterprise would organize their work around non-hierarchical principles with a greater purpose than just producing stuff or service to sell. Hence, I had researched in my networks and with my supervisor about initiatives putting in place non-hierarchical practices and with “alternative” mission statements. With this, I have then been able to define a list of interesting

initiatives to work with. The last element of criteria to choose the enterprises I would be working with is that I wanted to develop my research with initiatives that are engaged in different geographical spaces and economic sectors of activities, so that the results of my research would not be influenced by those elements but more strictly about the practices themselves. To make this differentiation more drastic, I decided to choose one initiative taking place in a rural setting, and the other in an urban setting.

With all those criteria in mind, and with the help of my thesis supervisor, I decided to contact the Montreal-based collective enterprise *Réseau Koumbit*, an anti-capitalist worker-run non-profit organization offering web and hosting services to various civil society groups, organizations, and businesses, and a workers' cooperative farm established in the rural municipality of Brownsburg-Chatham, in the Laurentides region of Quebec, the *Ferme Coop Aux Champs qui Chantent*, a cooperative organic farm which produces organic food and distributes it through a community-supported agriculture (CSA) system. An important characteristic of both organizations is their links with ongoing social movements in the province, with some Koumbit workers engaged in anti-capitalist organizing and individuals at the farm involved in the defence of LGBTQ+ rights. Hence, compared to other initiatives that could be distant from those movements, these two initiatives would also provide an interesting input on how non-hierarchical work practices can be implemented to support the livelihoods of people involved in social movements. Both collective enterprises accepted to participate in my research project.

#### 4.1.1 *Koumbit*

*Koumbit* is a Montreal-based non-profit organization created in 2004, in the aftermath of community and social movements mobilization around the development of independent IT and communication platforms that emerged in the context of the struggles against the Summit of the Americas of 2001 in Quebec City. The principal activities of *Koumbit* are website development and design, and services of hosting and IT systems' administration. The mission statement of the organization is the following: To create a space of mutual aid and resources sharing for IT workers socially engaged in their community; and, to foster the appropriation open source and free software and technological autonomy of Quebec's social groups by developing collective IT platform and



ensuring support for the use of open source software (*Koumbit*, 2017, freely translated from French).

As any other registered non-profit organization, *Koumbit* had to develop a membership to assure the organization's governance around the assembly of members. The particularity of *Koumbit* is that the majority of its membership is composed of its workers, both salaried and freelancers working under contracts. Nevertheless, two other organizations, supporters from the community and customers are also members and participate principally in the annual general assembly. But because the majority of the membership is composed of the workers, the workers are able to assure a better control of their work and of the decision-making impacting the direction and the management of the organization. In order to maintain a democracy within the workplace and between workers, people at *Koumbit* created the *Conseil de Travail* (CT) composed of all regular salaried workers. It is with this unit of decision-making that *Koumbit* has been able to be run as a *collectif autogéré* (self-managed collective) where decisions are taken by consensus. And it is also because of this element that people at *Koumbit* describe their management system as being in the legacy of the movement for *autogestion*. It is this particular element that motivated my interest for *Koumbit* as a case study for my thesis.

#### 4.1.2 *La Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*

The *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* is an organic farm organized and registered as a workers' coop operating in the Argenteuil county, in the Laurentides region at midpoint between Montreal and Ottawa in the Ottawa river valley. Created in 2012, its mission is "to contribute to the development of local food sovereignty through ecologically sound production of a wide variety of farm products" (cited from [fermecoopauxchampsquichantent.com](http://fermecoopauxchampsquichantent.com)). Selling its production through a community-supported agriculture system, the farm relies on direct interactions and transactions with their partners-customers to ensure its functioning and existence on the long-run, but also to maintain a community around the act of producing food locally ([fermecoopauxchampsquichantent.com](http://fermecoopauxchampsquichantent.com), 2018). The main activities of the farm are centred on organic vegetable production, poultry for both eggs production and meat and organic pig breeding also for the production of meat. A small production of cow milk is also part of the production

activities of the farm for the own consumption the members of the coop, their families and the other people working on the farm.

More than just a small coop enterprise, the farm is also a small ecosystem of 114 acres where coop workers, their family members, seasonal workers, animals (both wild and owned by the farm) and a wide variety of cultivated and wild plants cohabit. The farm also consists of a built environment where a house, farm infrastructure, machinery and tiny houses occupy the space to host workers and the facilitate the work. Moreover, and in accordance with the mission, the farm also hosts community events and activities with organizations and people from the surroundings. Their major community project to be the host and facilitator of a community garden in partnership with a community organization from the nearby city.

Even though it is a workers' coop, the farm employs and integrates more than just the members (of a number of three when I stopped researching there) to pursue its activities: seasonal workers are employed as salaried interns (of a number of two when I was there), WWOOFers<sup>4</sup>, volunteers (either friends, neighbours or partners-customers). Moreover, another employee, not a member of the coop, is working part-time to help with community activities, communication and parts of the harvest work. Inherently, a formal hierarchy tends to exist within the coop between coop members and the other workers; hence, the interest I had for the sake of my research was then to see how the spirit of the workers' coop "non-hierarchy" was able to be transferred in the daily work with the other workers, and also to see how non-hierarchical work practices could be differentiated from the actual structure of the enterprise and even have impacts on the works. Added to that, as a comparison with *Koumbit*, the farm also offers a very different context to observe practices and appreciate the possible impacts.

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<sup>4</sup> The expression "WWOOFers" refers to people involved in WWOOF, which means "World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms". This expression is pretty common in English-speaking countries within the organic farming community to define seasonal organic farm workers looking for farming experience with payments in lodging and food accommodations directly on the farm.

#### 4.2 Data collection: participant observation and group interviews

Looking to detail a broad range of impacts of non-hierarchical work practices within two cases of collective enterprises, the research project I undertook is clearly of a qualitative nature; descriptive experiences, practical knowledge and “in the field” analyses and thoughts would be at the basis of this project. Typically, observation, participant observation, and interviews are the main tools to collect data for scholars who practice qualitative research (Tope & al., 2005 p. 472). As for my own research, I did not disrupt from that tradition; participant observation and group interviews have been the essence of my data collection.

As I rely on thick description, as described by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2014), and theory elaboration (Vaughan, 1992) to develop theoretical knowledge on non-hierarchic work practices, participant observation becomes not only a possible method but a necessity as it provides to capacity to produce rich descriptions (Tope & al., 2005 p. 473), but also heavily detailed observation offering the needed number of elements for theory building. In that perspective, I negotiated to offer some labour time with both partner collective enterprises as part of my reciprocal work, but also as the main space to collect “data”. Hence, I got involved for 6 weeks, 3 days per week with the *Ferme coops aux champs qui chantent* in September and October 2017, and 5 weeks at *Koumbit*, still 3 days per week, in December 2017 and January 2018. It is during these two periods of fieldwork that I maintained a fieldwork journal of my observations and reflections. But, since I did not engage in long-term ethnographic research relying on extended participant experience, I also decided to set up group interviews with some members of both collective enterprises to deepen my understandings and obtain some particular details that solely my observations could not offer me. These group interviews, except for the introductory ones, brought me to engage in discussion with some workers to address a wide variety of aspects based on the observations I have made during my participations in the activities of the two organizations. Moreover, since I was looking to engage the people I have been working with in my research and intellectual process, the group interviews also served as a space to discuss analyses and possible research conclusions to refine the final analyses and our collective understandings of the impacts of non-hierarchical practices. In that sense, some group interviews incorporated elements of a focus group, where I, as the student-

researcher, put aside my interviewer role to shift to a facilitator position, where debates and discussions emerged between participants.

Essentially, the data collection process was as follows: 1) participant observation during the entire data collection period; 2) an introductory interview<sup>5</sup> at the beginning with each collective enterprise to better understand the organization and its history; 3) a group interview/focus group<sup>6</sup> in the middle of my participant observation period to address some observations and themes; and 4) two final interviews with one worker from each collective enterprise (even though the initial plan was to do this in groups) after the fieldwork was completed to gather new knowledge, but also to address my first analyses and some potential conclusions<sup>7</sup>. In order to facilitate the collaborative process for this data collection, I, beforehand, asked the two collective enterprises to designate groups of their members that would have the responsibility to participate in the interviews. At *Koumbit*, two workers were officially designated, but at the farm, the organization of the interviews just happened according to what was possible when a date was set. The idea, at the beginning of the research, was to allow the workers from each of the collective enterprises to choose to participate or not in the interviews and to ensure a level of flexibility that would not constrain them. What happened, in the end, was that all workers were invited, but only some chose to participate. This process ended up being more fluid and less imposing to the people in the two collective enterprises. Nevertheless, it still offered the possibility to engage in a collaborative and participatory process.

#### 4.3 Ethical concerns and considerations for this research

Doing research of whatever type always involves important ethical considerations, and I think even more when doing it with real people in real contexts. Moreover, questioning the ethics of research involves not only the process and the production of results, but also involves pre-emptive work of thinking in preparation of the research questioning the intent, the choices of research questions and the choices we will make during the research process about what data we report or not (Gillan & Pickerill, 2012). So, questioning ethics of a research project involves the “How?” it is done, but

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix A

<sup>6</sup> See appendix B

<sup>7</sup> See appendix C (Consent form) for more details on the research process

also the “Why?” of the research, the “What?” is researched on and the “for and by Who?” this research will be done.

In my own personal process of questioning the ethics of my research, I first started to address my own stance vis-à-vis my research topic; non-hierarchical work practices in economic alternative initiatives. And I think in the context of the actual research proposal, it is also the first element to discuss. So, when I decided to pursue research on non-hierarchical work practices, this was already targeting the question of “What?”. Essentially, I developed a strong critique of hierarchical organizing and hierarchical structure as unjust, unfair and very often time-consuming, and I wanted to know more about the ways to be “non-hierarchical” at work. So just by deciding to do this research, I had already a perspective that will invoke a positive bias towards my research topic.

While I do not consider myself as an “anarchist” per se, because I am not a totally immersed and engaged in anarchist social struggles and political actions, I am a strong anarchist sympathizer and social movements ally as I adhere to anarchist ideals and values of self-determination, anti-capitalism, autonomy, social justice, participative democracy, and liberty. Hence, when preparing a research on non-hierarchical work practices, I had to recognize my sympathy towards the practices and the collective enterprises I did research with, and that I have a positive bias in favour of non-hierarchical work practices. I decided to do research on those practices because I am interested in knowing more about them. But that also meant for me that I had also the need to contribute to promoting those practices and if possible contribute to the emergence of these practices in a perspective of social change for a more just society. So that consideration first answers partly to the “Why?” question of doing that research; I wanted to do this research to put forward work practices I believe are more just and fair, to maybe help people engaged in those practices to think about them, and to contribute to the emergence of forms of economic practices aiming to social change. But as a matter of ethics, this also meant that I had a standpoint during my research, and that affected the data I gathered and especially the ensuing analyses in ways that I could not totally predict. This is also why I decided to follow a collaborative and participatory approach to my research; it corresponded to my sympathizer standpoint to the initiatives I studied and to make my research pertinent for people willing to implement realistic practices to transform their lives.

This, then, brings me to the ethical question of “for and by Who?” this research project will be done for. At the first, this question can be seen easy to answer; by the researcher and for the common knowledge. But, for me, and also for other scholars, the knowledge production in social sciences is done by the dialogic relation between the researcher and people involved in the research, where the researcher articulates, with the help of theoretical knowledge, the ideas, concepts and practices exposed, shared or transmitted by the participants (Gordon, 2007; Chesters, 2012; Gillan & Pickerill, 2012). Hence, the research is not done solely by the researcher. Therefore, the researcher must think of how the retribution of doing that research can be shared or compensated to the other people that got involved in it. Because of the difficulty of really contributing to the groups or movement researchers can work it (Stoecker, 1999), the idea of developing reciprocity agreements with the groups involved in the research become an interesting compromise to “repay”, in some way, the contribution of the participants to the researcher’s success and possible retribution coming from it (Gillan & Pickerill, 2012). For my part, as I did not launch my research project by looking to answer specific needs from the groups with whom I have worked with, I decided to give labour time to both organizations. Because of the difficulty for them to integrate me in their daily work, one of two collective enterprises asked me to prepare and do two public presentations, with a general public audience, about the pertinence of creating and working within revolutionary self-managed collective enterprises, which I accepted to do as my reciprocal counterpart.

Finally, the most evident ethical questions that I had to consider is the “How?” I will be doing that research. This concerns directly the practical methods of my research project; namely the data collection, the use and storage of data and the analysis method to produce research results. Essentially, this is what we most often think when we hear “research ethics”. Like I described earlier, my research process mainly consisted of participant observation, group interviews and group discussions with the people engaged in the two collective enterprises that will be the cases of my study. Many elements from these steps of my research have been recorded and noted, and ideas and opinions have been shared with me; hence raising the question of confidentiality for the research’s participants and the possible related risks they face by participating in the research. As the participants are involved in other activist organizations, sometimes acting at the edges of legality, and because they could have shared sensitive opinions and perspectives for the research’s

purpose, being identified could result in unwanted consequences. With this consideration in mind, I have decided that no names or identifiable descriptive elements, including gender, would be noted during the data collection nor used for the ensuing published works. As for respecting gender confidentiality, I decided to use gender-neutral vocabulary in every dissertation or publications following this research project, which will also be the case for the following sections of this thesis. Nevertheless, like you may have seen, I agreed with members of the two collective enterprises to mention solely the names of their organizations in my thesis and further works.

A final ethical consideration to the “How?” I developed this research project is related to my position as a researcher trying to go “native” (Gordon, 2007 p.281) to the collective enterprises I have studied to acquire more insightful knowledges. Even though I am familiar with the structure and culture of organizations of the two collective enterprises, I am not one of “them”; I am a graduate student looking to produce research that could contribute to the support, spreading and development of their economic practices (Graeber, 2004 in Gordon, 2007 p. 278). Therefore, I have stayed as some sort of “outsider” or an “in-betweener” of the outsider and insider statuses during the research process (Minkler, 2004; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Kerstetter, 2012; Miligan, 2016), meaning that I had to negotiate and acknowledge my relation of trust with participants, power imbalances between me and the participants and my capacity to understand and analyze elements of my observation, again, all along the research process. This has been a continuous challenge and have possibly affected the results of it.

In the next section, I will first present the “thick” descriptive portraits of the two collective enterprises before actually presenting the analysis coming from that description.

## 5. Diverse economic practices at *Koumbit & Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*: two descriptive portraits

Before going into the description and analysis of observations made and the information I collected, I want to acknowledge a perspective that I developed while doing my participant observation with the two organizations. In their book *TAKE BACK THE ECONOMY*, when J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy (the authors) start addressing work, they first begin by asking “What is work” (2013, p.17). For me, “work” is the daily activities of human existence that answer our need to live and to survive. More than just answering our need, I also think that it is the daily experience where we can express our creativity and ingenuity and interact with others, which I share with the authors of *Take back the Economy*. But, I also think that it is through that daily experience that we are confronted with ecological and political issues; how do we relate to the world that we live in?; how are we involved in the decisions that affect our lives? It is through work that we adapt and we interact with our environment and it is mainly through work that we negotiate our living conditions. Using Gibson-Graham framework to engage in thick description, I think that is through questioning work that we can initiate a reflection on the organization of the economy; when questioning work, we also question the market, the business (enterprise/organization), the concept of property and the concept of finance (how do we invest in futures?). Hence, by starting with my observations and reflections around “work”, I open questions towards other coordinates that J.K. Gibson-Graham developed to articulate non-capitalist (or alter-capitalist) economies. So, the following elements of thick description will introduce to the rest of my analysis.

### 5.1 Portrait of the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*

#### 5.1.1 Work

A major descriptive capacity that the diverse economies framework offers is to be able to dissect economic activities into each ethical coordinate and to categorize them mainstream (capitalist), alternate-mainstream (alter-capitalist) or non-mainstream (non-capitalist). When looking at the work coordinate, the capitalist form of work, or more adequately the dominant form, is waged or



salaried employment (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). The alter and non-mainstream forms are then defined by opposition to the dominant (mainly capitalist) forms; meaning that you are invited to focus on practices that shift the notion of work from the mainstream form of salaried paid employment, or to just move beyond it to grasp other-than-capitalist economic practices through the observation of work. You are then able to discover alternative forms of paid labour (self-employed, in-kind paid work, reciprocal work) and unpaid forms of work (volunteer work, housework, self-provisioning work). So, when I started observing work in both the *Ferme coopérative aux champs qui chantent* and *Koumbit*, I had to be aware of the various forms by looking at who was doing the work and how the various forms of work were balanced between one another.

At the farm the people working are divided among four main groups of workers; the coop members, the employees (which included two interns), the WWOOFers (in which I could include myself) and various volunteers. Since the activities of the farm are primarily to grow vegetables and fruits and to raise pigs for organic pork meat, the majority of the work involves outside work of seeding, planting, caring the fields, harvest and feeding the animals. Nevertheless, important work of maintenance of the installations, book-keeping, administration and communication was assumed mainly by coop members. Hence, coop members assume more responsibilities and tasks than other workers on the farm; which in fact induces an assumed and formal hierarchy between coop workers and the other workers, especially with the decision-making process involving installations, finance and the survival of the coop in the long-run.

Another thing that divides the workers at the farm is mainly the form of work in which they are involved: the coop members are permanent workers paid according to surplus from revenues and their time-based contribution to the coop (alternative paid form of work); the employees were seasonal workers paid on an hourly basis (capitalist/mainstream form of work); the woofers were receiving in-kind payments (food and housing) for their work and were also asked to work a bit less than employees (alternative paid form of work); and volunteers were working for learning purposes or simply to give a hand. Also, some volunteers were obtaining reduced prices on the products of the farm (while still receiving forms of in-kind payments like food at lunch or portions

of free food), which I identify as reciprocal work, an alternatively paid form of work (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, Healy, 2013 p. 30).

Interestingly, some parts of the housework, mainly preparing food or taking care of the house, is shared through rotation among coop members, employees (the ones living on the farm) and WWOOFers and included in their weekly work schedule. This also includes the preparation of food for the children of two of the coop members. In a nutshell, work at the farm is an articulation of productive, administrative and reproductive work that is shared and distributed according to workers' statuses and involvement in the coop.

#### 5.1.1.1 Division and distribution of Work

An important element impacting work at the farm is the environment and the vagaries of nature. Harvest is done during the summer until mid-fall, seeding and preparation of seedlings are done from early spring to mid-summer, and winter rhymes with a more relax rhythm of work, where no seasonal workers are involved. Hence, the work is seasonal and is also fluctuating, which means that there is not always enough work for everyone involved, but there are also moments where there is so much work to do so that the farm has to ask for help. Accordingly, the coop members are working all year long, but with more intense working week from the spring to early fall (while one member is actually part-time), the interns start working in the spring for the harvest season, WWOOFers come and go all along the harvest season, and the other workers (mainly volunteers) are working according to the needs of the farm or their own availability. Recently, to support in the achievement of some administrative tasks, a salaried part-time worker (not yet a member of the coop) started helping out for communications and a few other things at the farm and is now working all year long, with a more intensive schedule during the harvest season helping in the field and with the community garden situated on the farm's land. During my stay at the farm, that person was only working seasonally to facilitate the community garden and help out two days a week for harvest.

On the day-to-day basis, responsibilities are mainly assumed by the two coop members working full-time, but some important tasks are the responsibility of interns, according to their knowledge, comfort and ability to take in charge those tasks. One of the best examples of that during my stay

was the management and watering of sunflower sprouts that was led by one of the two interns, as they were really experienced in doing that, maybe even more than the coop members; showing a fluidity in leadership. During the harvest season of 2017, coop members more or less shared collectively the management and organization of the harvest, while responsibilities and tasks with the animals were assumed by one specific member, the responsibilities for machinery and infrastructures was assumed by another, and the third one, being part-time, assumed more responsibilities with administrative tasks.

In 2018, as I was able to learn in a third interview with one member how they decided to redefine the division of roles:

*[...] what I think has worked for us all this year, was a really clear... how we separated our roles this year, with [the other coop member] focusing just on animals and me focusing on the vegetables, there's not a lot of overlap between them, where the overlap comes is when... the larger equipment is needed with the animals, and I come in with the animals a little bit; like delivering pigs to the slaughterhouse for example.*

A Farm's Coop Member, Summer 2018

Throughout that interview, this coop member was also able to explain how with these clearly divided roles, they were able to work a little more closely with the seasonal workers (interns and WWOOFers), and that it was easier to delegate a bit of the leadership to the interns, as one of them this year became the “packing leader”; a “role”, as they name it, consisting of dividing the harvest in portions for the basket, leading the operations of washing the veggies and calling the right portions to the harvester.

So, what the farm is presenting, in the sense of division of the work, is a fluid, somewhat hierarchic, but continuously adapting distribution of responsibilities, tasks and even roles between coop members, primarily, but also with the other workers, namely interns, WWOOFers and volunteers. Being constrained by the vagaries of Mother Nature and the other living beings on the farm, this adaptive work division and distribution is a clear response to the farming context, but also an interesting characteristic of the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*: using mainstream

(capitalist), alternative paid and unpaid forms of work to better answer to the collective enterprise's needs and adapt to the fluctuating demand of productive work.

#### 5.1.1.2 Working conditions and working environment

When thinking about work and its impact on people, we always think of the working conditions; this is an element that we often refer to when we describe our work/employment. At the farm, the existing working conditions have been defined by various things, and they also vary from a type or worker to another. A first aspect to point out is that coop members had, and still have, the capacity to negotiate collectively and democratically their own working conditions, even though they are strongly influenced by organisational and economic factors such as the market prices for veggies, the amount of work and the various vagaries of farming that cannot be controlled. Consequently, the members at the farm decided to define their salaries according to the surplus coming from their revenues (after production, interns' wages and some parts of the housing costs) and their time-based ratio of involvement in the work of the coop; the surplus are then distributed in salary to the coop members following their proportional shares of their collective workload. But this does not really mean a "good" salary: one of the coop members mentioned, during an interview, that earnings for the whole year for a full-time coop member is around \$20,000, which is lower than what the provincial minimum wage offers for a full-time worker, if we consider their average 50 hours per week. Interestingly, though, some parts of these hours of work include some house work, mainly preparing food for everybody else (a task that is shared on a rotative basis amongst all workers) or taking care of the main house, which in a more traditional blue-collar employment setting would be undertaken within the "reproductive sphere" of unpaid labour by a non-employed member of the household (mainly women), or sometimes by workers themselves on their own free time.

On the side of the seasonal workers, two arrangements of working conditions are present at the farm: the conditions for the salaried interns and the ones for the WWOOFers. While coop members have a say on their own working conditions, interns and WWOOFers cannot really negotiate their weekly schedule and their salary: the interns are waged through a subsidy that the farm receives due to its "social economy enterprise" status, which requires them to work 40 hours per week at provincial minimum wage. The WWOOFers are asked by the coop members to work 30 hours per

week in exchange for housing and food (but also for their learning opportunity) as it is a common practice the WWOOFing universe. It is also important to recognize that food and housing is offered to all the workers working on a regular multi-day schedule during the harvest season (i.e. WWOOFers, interns and coop members), and at least a meal or in-kind payments in food from the farm is often provided for volunteers coming on a more or less regular basis. This last working condition is totally a non-capitalist form of practice, as strictly capitalist economies often leave the burden on of the individual workers to provide for their needs in goods and food.

Another important element of working conditions present at the farm is the space and time given to learning and training. Space for learning is even integrated as an element of the workload, as two of the salaried employees are actually integrated as interns being trained into organic farming; As a coop member explained: “*Pour nous, illes viennent apprendre et voient plein de choses, et s’illes peuvent avoir envie de faire aussi leurs propres fermes, de faire différemment [...] tant mieux*” [For us, they come to learn and to see various things, and, if they can develop the desire of creating their own farms, to do it alternatively [...] all the better] (September 19th, 2017). Interns are employed as workers in process of learning (hence exposing another expression of reciprocal labour on the farm). Hence, the learning process goes beyond the limits of the organization but is also seen as a way to propagate the kind of work the farm is doing; for them, enlarging the movement of small-sized organic farms is one way of ensuring an ecologically sound future, a way to contribute to a social transformation. Moreover, as I was working as a WWOOFer, I was able to learn various things, since coop members and salaried employees showed me different things from growing sprouts to welding metal pieces together to create useful tools and machinery for the farm. And more than just with the interns and WWOOFers, learning is also seen as an integral part of the process of working: “When you work in a community [i.e. collective], you are going to learn more, expand your knowledge and that is more “profitable” to me, in economics and efficiency. The idea that we’re building something together, and creating connections with each other, for me is what is important and fulfilling” (A coop member, October 4<sup>th</sup> 2017). Hence, coop members also offer themselves space for learning, by participating in the name of the farm to workshops and conferences proposed by other organizations they are connected to.

Finally, something that is often unacknowledged as part of working conditions is the workplace ambiance resulting from the way people work together. At the farm, the first thing to note is that there is no sense of competition between workers, like we could see in capitalist workplaces where competition is seen as the fuel to reinforce productivity and obedience, nor is there a continuous sense of being evaluated by your peers or a superior. Nevertheless, some shared emotions can easily influence the ambiance, such as stress: “*Une ferme, c’est stressant; il y a toujours des choses qui brisent, des légumes qui ne poussent pas, trop d’eau ou pas assez d’eau, etc. Peu importe les systèmes en place, ça reste pareil à ce niveau. Il faut juste être capable de se dire que ça fait partie de la job*” [A farm, it’s stressful; there are always things breaking, veggies that don’t grow, too much water or not enough water, etc. Whatever system in place, it stays the same. You only need to be able to remind yourself that it is part of the job]. (A coop member, September 19th, 2017). Hence, stress and some form of pressure can be felt or transmitted between workers, but at the farm, you are still never pushed or forced to do something you are uncomfortable to do. True practical cooperation and mutual aid is often seen as the solution to face collective issues or problems happening in the workplace. This is where the practice of daily meetings and collective eating time works to strengthen the sense of belonging and the social bonds between the different levels of workers at the farm: “[...] having these times of lunch and suppers for most of the week that we all eat together, it allows for a space for people to... communicate and get together, and it’s why it’s so important.” (A farm coop member, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017). Hence, the workplace ambiance is both something intangible, that comes in because of the way people tend to act together, but that is also maintained or even constructed by some practices that are often ignored in capitalist conception of economies.

### 5.1.2 Organization (enterprise)

By first describing how work unfolds at the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*, I have been able to portray what kind of activities the farm’s workers are involved in and how it integrates their daily lives. But this configuration of workplace would not even exist without the organization (in our case, the collective enterprise) that frames the activities of livelihoods existing at the farm. And this is even more true when one of the very first goals of the farm was actually to provide work for people, as one coop member explained in a group interview: “one of the big goals of this coop, at

the beginning, was to create work for its members, and that has always been our goal and we are still trying, I think, to create fulfilling employment for the coop members” (October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017). Hence, we can see that, for the farm, the two ethical coordinates developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham and their colleagues “Work” and “Enterprise” are mutually dependent as the necessity for work led to the creation of the farm, which cannot exist without the work of the people involved. The organization (or enterprise) was created to offer an opportunity for people to live well through the work needed for the farm. Interestingly, though, the mission statement of the farm differs from that objective and is defined as the following:

*Our mission is to contribute to the development of local food sovereignty through the ecologically sound production of a wide diversity of farm products. We strive to foster direct and meaningful connections between producer and consumer, transforming the act of eating into a deep expression of community.*

(Quoted from the farm’s website, February 2018)

Nevertheless, it still exposes that the organization aims to do something more than just producing goods and to transform production relations.

Similar to the work coordinate, the “enterprise” coordinate, for which I prefer using “organization” since it encompasses a wider variety of initiatives and offers to look beyond a capitalocentric perspective, helps us to dissect the economic practices between the capitalist practices, the alter-capitalists and the non-capitalists. The question that it asks is “who decides?” when managing the surplus value and where is that surplus assigned. The capitalist form of organization is that only the proprietors (or shareholders) of an enterprise, but not the workers, decide the assignation of the surplus value. But more than that, the capitalist economic mindset also pushes the proprietors and shareholders to assign the surplus to the increase of production and their personal benefits, as the research of continuous growth in wealth is what drives capitalist proprietors to invest. So, when thinking of alter-capitalist forms of organization, we could think of enterprises led by their proprietors who decide to assign the majority of the surplus value to the development of a local school or for a wider social use or to share a part of decision-making power with workers or other stakeholders; state-run enterprises are a good example of this. The non-capitalist forms of

organization then encompass all the other forms of enterprises and organizations where the people who decides about the surplus value are not simply proprietors in the capitalist sense, where the surplus value distribution is not dependent of the decisions of the ones who owns the most of the enterprise, and where production is not only dependent on waged work: cooperatives, self-employed, collective enterprises, slave enterprises, feudal estate, etc. It is important to understand that non-capitalist does not mean “non-exploitative”; a non-capitalist enterprise can be even more exploitative that a capitalist one. Non-capitalist enterprise means that the surplus is not managed according to the rules of capitalist property relations.

A first element describing the farm’s organization and at the same time pointing out its non-capitalist form is the legal structure of the farm: a workers’ coop. What it means, in the sense of being non-capitalist, is that it is strictly the worker-members of the coop who own the formal, legal and final power to take decisions on the surplus value produced by their organization and that they decide to distribute surplus for social and environmental ends. According to the diverse economy framework, it is actually this combination of decisions taken with “other than profit” ends (i.e. social and environmental) with inclusions of more than just the proprietors or share-holders (here workers) in the decision-making process that makes the organization “non-capitalist”. Even though the worker-members could be leading the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* like pure bosses cashing in the surplus from the production of veggies and deciding everything without consulting other workers, the organizational practices in place are quite different than that possibility.

The main element of practice that includes other workers in a cooperative process at the farm are the various meetings that are taking place to coordinate the work. To do so, short daily meetings are taking place in the morning, where all the workers present discuss the objectives of the day (in either harvest, animal care or farm maintenance). While most of the time led by one of the coop members, these meetings work with consensual decision-making including WWOOFers, interns, coop members and volunteers’ input to assign the various tasks of the day. Normally, the objectives of harvest would have been pre-established by coop members according to the number of baskets to fill-in, but some discussion often happened to get the input from other workers about the state of the vegetables in the fields. Other than these first main objectives, these meetings also serve to prepare the day by looking at how everybody is doing and what people are willing/able to do so



that the work is dispatched according to the number of workers present during the day (coop members, interns, salaried employees, WWOOFers or volunteers).

Interestingly, these meetings do not have specific procedures or format and their objectives are pretty simple and straightforward; no minutes are taken, they are pretty short and the only focus is about the planning of the day. Moreover, it is important to mention that other moments during the day (at lunch, at the washing station where everyone meet during the day or simply in the field) are used to adapt and adjust the decision taken in the morning or even take new decisions (it happened more often during the lunch, while I was working there, as the decisions on who will be responsible for preparing dinner and the following lunch were almost always made during lunch). These moments, however, happen really informally, as the different situations may require. In addition to these daily meetings, weekly meetings were also implemented in the routine for the WWOOFers, interns, and coop members, as they all stay or live on the farm's land, to address issues and elements related to house life and cohabitation. The format taken was similar to the daily meetings while sometimes they could be incorporated to the lunch break. The objectives of those meetings are to address interpersonal relations, house care, or any other subjects that could affect the life on the farm inside and outside of work. Again, no facilitator nor coordinator is designated for these; it is more a specific moment to have particular discussions and be sure everyone has the time to express what they need to.

Even though daily and weekly meetings give an important input in structuring the organization, the farm still needs some sort pre-determined and defined structure to assure the coordination of the various things that have to be done to maintain everything together. Hence, responsibilities and tasks are often assigned according to a determined structure collectively elaborated by the coop members; but the latter has changed a couple of times over the years and is still constantly adapting to the farm's needs and realities; showing a collective continuous capacity to evolve and avoid the tendency to develop rigid reflexes and practices that could turn out to be obstacles for the continuation of the coop. Since there are different levels of engagement within the organization according to the type of work undertaken (seasonal, volunteer, salaried or coop members), the formal system put in place to divide responsibilities was only applied to coop members, who collectively assume the survival of the organization all year long.

During my stay at the farm in 2017, the different tasks and responsibilities were divided into numerous “departments” (such as “the wash station”, “fruit harvest”, or “mechanics”) which were then assigned, by consensual decision-making, to each coop members. Those then become official leaders of their departments and must assume the coordination with other workers involved in the tasks related. While this does not include other workers, the latter were nevertheless assuming certain responsibilities and leadership over time, which is informally negotiated among the workers according to the needs of the farm and the skills held by these workers (who are mainly seasonal). But, in the following season, the coop members decided to bring back a system of “roles” that was in place in the early years of the coop, where each role has the responsibility of various departments (encompassing a multitude of tasks), that were then attributed to coop members. The system consists of a role for animal work, a role for tools and machinery, a role for field and harvest coordination and a role for administration. Within each role, coop members then have the possibility to work with others in the way they prefer; so, it led one of the coop members to actually give up some responsibilities to an intern over the summer, so they can take a whole week of vacation (something really uncommon in the farming world). But this progressive delegation of responsibilities has to be redone every as the seasonal workers rarely come back the following season; leading to the coop members having to take back the totality of their roles when seasonal workers leave.

### 5.1.3 Transactions, Property and Finance

Like I mentioned earlier, the diverse economies concept developed by Gibson-Graham and their colleagues asks us to question five ethical coordinates to address our economies. But, as I explained, my focus will be mainly on two of those, “work” and “enterprise” (organization). Nonetheless, elements related to the three others are still interesting to point out, as all elements are somewhat intertwined with one another; initiatives can solely exist as specific and fluid arrangements of elements engaging all coordinates. Hence, this section aims to expose descriptive elements related to the “Transactions”, “Property” and “Finance” coordinates for the farm.

Transactions, for the diverse economy framework, requires us to ask the question “how do we encounter others?” to get goods/services that we are not producing ourselves (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013 p. 89). In the dominant perspective on the economy, this happens by financial transactions of buying stuff in the capitalist market, where the rules of the best price direct our transactions. In a diverse economy, transactions can happen through various ways, where alter-capitalist ways would involve money -based transaction on markets with buying criteria different than just “the best price offered” and non-capitalist ways would not even involve financial markets and financial transactions between two parties. At the farm, most of the transactions are conducted through reciprocity; the process of the farm’s “partners” who finance the farming activity by buying their portions of vegetables all in advance. Hence, the consumers (partners) are not paying for the specific products, but for the whole process of supporting the farming and assuming the risk of poor harvest with the farmers by paying a price for the whole production instead of paying for the quantity of the products. Hence, the farm is mainly involved in alter-capitalist transactions to sell its products. With suppliers, the type of transactions is a bit different.

An important thing to know is that the farm is a member of the *Coopérative pour l’Agriculture de Proximité Écologique* (CAPÉ), with which they are able to access workshops and various expertise with other farmers, participate in collective purchases for packing supplies, organic seeds and marketing supplies. But also, the CAPÉ becomes an intermediary helping farms to sell eggs and winter baskets during the winter, when each farm is no longer able to produce enough on their own, or but also during the whole year for other smaller farms that don’t have the resources to do their own distribution and marketing (this sell program of the CAPÉ is called the Bio Locaux). Hence, the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* is involved in an alter-market practice where an intermediary controlled by all the farm-members is easing the process of buying and selling certain products. Otherwise, the farm relies on capitalist and alter-capitalist methods of transactions of buying supplies on the regular money-based markets with the available suppliers for farm infrastructure or food for the animals, with a preference for organic suppliers, exposing an ethical consideration in the choice of transactions. A last important element to point out is that there is a lot of recycling and reuse that is done at the farm, mainly for the maintenance and construction of infrastructure and machinery.

On the side of “property” coordinate, the farm exposes a specific articulation of property than is not usually seen in capitalist enterprises. First, by being a coop, the enterprise itself is not a subject of property in the private and capitalist sense; under Quebec’s provincial law, a cooperative is itself a moral person, and it is the association of members that represents that moral person. Second, because they did not create a secondary trademarked company name for their marketing, the farm’s reputation and consumers’ bases (which are part of added value) cannot be sold or acquired. Nobody can decide to acquire *La ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* because its legal status evacuates this possibility; hence the intellectual, cultural and social value that comes with the organization cannot be acquired or sold like it could be done with businesses with capitalist legal structures. One of the coop members at the farm uses the story of *Ben & Jerry’s* ice cream to show how this process happens. They explained that when *Unilever*, a gigantic multinational, bought this small company with a more artisanal approach to production, they then gained access to another niche of consumers and to the reputation of the *Ben & Jerry’s* brand as an added value for its commercial activities. At the farm, this is not possible, as only physical assets owned by the coop can be sold, which is mainly machinery.

Another important element in relation to property at the farm is that the land, the main house, and the main farm buildings are the private property of two of the coop members (out of three when I was there, but out of four just before my arrival), as one of them used personal inheritance money to acquire the farm that became the coop. However, the main house is used as the common living space for the workers on the farm, transforming the private house to a communal space for all workers, with designated private rooms distributed among people living on the farm. This practice of opening private property to a collective management is actually an example of “commoning” (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013 pp. 125-168), which means to open the access, the use, the benefits, the care and the responsibility to a wider community. A “commons” is essentially something (a piece of land, a building, a practice, a knowledge or regular property) that is shared by a community (ibid., p. 130). At the farm, the use, access, the care and the responsibility of the land, the house and the farm building are transferred to the coop, which include workers, volunteers and even the wider community with the community garden that is operated on the land. Hence, the land and physical property owned by two coop members is being commoned, as the wider community is involved in its use, care, access, the responsibility for it, and even some benefits (like

having housing), even though the benefits of selling the property and the legal responsibility and care will come back to the two coop owners who bought the land.

For the final ethical coordinates developed for the concept of diverse economies, “finance”, J.K. Gibson-Graham and their colleagues insist on the fact that it should go beyond that what we most commonly understand as “finance”, which is basically only money-based and private interest-motivated finance. They ask us to think about how we “invest in futures” (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). For this coordinate, I could say that the very existence of the farm, their mission, is directly linked to investing in futures; the farm is taking care of a land and feeding people by producing organic, and healthy food while consistently trying to reduce the environmental impact of producing food for people. They help people have access to better food while acting to have a minimal impact on the natural environment. In that sense, I could go on a lot more to describe how the farm is investing in futures, but for the matter of the objectives of my thesis and to stay concise, I would not go beyond that simple description, since discussing the question of investing in futures involves more than just looking at one or two specific initiatives.

## 5.2 Portrait of Koumbit

### 5.2.1 Work

At *Koumbit*, the work is organized a bit differently than what I have exposed at the farm. As an organization working in the information technologies, their workload fluctuates according to the numbers and types of contracts they obtain. To answer to those fluctuations, there are principally two groups of workers; the regular working team/salaried employees (regrouped under the *Collectif de travail* – CT), working on a regular schedule, and the freelancers, who work on specific contracts according to the workload. Both of these groups are paid through an hourly wage, but only salaried employees receive benefits. And then, for the members of the CT, the workload is divided between three teams: system administration (*SysAdmin*), working with the hardware and the whole technological infrastructure; web development (*WebDev*), working for the construction and maintenance of websites of clients; and book-keeping and billing (*Comptabilité*), who are responsible for all financial matters (billing clients, managing payroll, accounting). The freelancers

then join either the *SysAdmin* team or *WebDev* team to help with specific contracts. While this covers the majority of the work done within *Koumbit*, some of the work is also divided amongst different committees that are created within the CT. Accordingly, administrative work related to working conditions, training, care, and hiring is done by the HR committee; a legal committee is assigned to address legal issues, another committee is responsible for associative life (as *Koumbit* is a non-profit organization with a volunteer board); there is also a sales committee (*Comité ventes*), which takes charge of the follow up with clients and manages the sales' process; and the last committee, called "*Communication-Communauté*" (*Comm-Comm* committee), is responsible for outreach and relations with the external communities. Finally, work for the maintenance of their space is assigned by tasks to every member of CT on a rotational basis.

As it may seem, the division of work at *Koumbit* is a bit more "specialized" than at the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*, but the greater number of people working at *Koumbit*, may explain this level of complexity in the division of work. But still, unlike at the farm, the amount of work done is all encompassed into only two forms of work: freelance work and wage work. Nevertheless, from time to time, and also when projects are cumulating, there are various forms of volunteer or reciprocal work going on when people work with *Koumbit* for internships (reciprocal for training purposes), or when people give time for side projects that are not related to regular work, like one of the workers mentioned during a focus group: "*oui, des fois, il y a des camarades, des stagiaires, d'autre monde qui ont besoin de faire des stages, ou du monde qui veulent apprendre à faire un truc*. [Yes, sometimes, there are some comrades, interns, other people who need to do internships, or people who want to learn to do a thing]." But like it is transmitted through the tone of the citation, this does not happen on a regular basis. When bringing back the abovementioned forms of work to the diverse economies framework, what we see is mainly wage labor (capitalist), with some parts of the workload being attributed in the form of freelance work (alternative paid work) and rarely through the form of reciprocal (alternative paid form of work) or volunteer work (unpaid form of work). So, differently that what I have exposed earlier for the farm, *Koumbit* relies more on a unified configuration of work around wage work.

### 5.2.1.1 Distribution and division of work

As I briefly explained earlier, work at *Koumbit* is divided between the workers according to their working team on a scheduled basis, where every worker has their own regular schedule (from 5 hours per week to around 30 hours per week, depending on their availability). And then, depending on the different ongoing contracts and the amount of work required from the team, contracted freelancers will add up to work on specific contracts and projects according to needs. But, as some freelancers used to be regular workers and are now living abroad, they somewhat work on a regular basis with *Koumbit*, while not integrating the CT. In that manner, *Koumbit* is able to offer regular work not only to every member of the CT, but also to other people who are connected to the organization. During my participatory observation at *Koumbit*, there were 10 workers part of the CT and two freelance workers working on contract-based relationship with the organization.

What makes *Koumbit* really original and quite unique in the matter of distributing work is its *Collectif de Travail* and the way the different working teams work “independently together”, as I would express it. This is the principal characteristic structuring the *autogestion* on which *Koumbit* relies for its management. Like I mentioned earlier, the work at *Koumbit* is mainly divided amongst the three working teams (*SysAdmin*, *WebDev* and *Comptabilité*), which are working like little autonomous units within the organization but also all report to the CT. Hence, all workers are making together the major decisions affecting the whole organization, but the day-to-day decisions and management of the work concerning strictly the working teams themselves are managed internally through informal conversations or smaller meetings. When a new contract comes in, it is immediately directed to the working team corresponding to the contract’s request; if a client contacts *Koumbit* to develop a website, the client will be directly referred to the first available worker of the *WebDev* team, but if the client is only asking for virtual space on a server, a worker from the *SysAdmin* team will take charge of the request. Hence the work is really specialized; each team having their own field of specialization and their specific responsibilities. Interestingly, one worker was working for both the *WebDev* and the *SysAdmin* when I partially joined *Koumbit* for my research. But this also exposes the continuous and needed collaboration between the working teams that happened outside of meetings and the more administrative tasks of collaboration that exist.

Moreover, it is important to note that the *Comptabilité* team is only involved with responsibilities and tasks that support the production of services while not being involved in the latter; again, showing the specialization that takes place in *Koumbit*. Interestingly, there were no cisgendered men working in the *Comptabilité* team, but there were in the two other working team (especially in the *SysAdmin* team), showing a certain gender-based division of the work that was acknowledged and even criticized by the workers themselves. The other tasks and responsibilities not linked to accounting nor the production of services are assumed by the different committees put in place, which regroup people from different working teams. Another important element is that the work related to the maintenance of the working space (i.e. house-keeping, repairs, caring of the plants) is collectively assumed by all members of the CT and is attributed by rotation; the workers at *Koumbit* actually use a wheel that is turned every week to attribute the tasks and make sure that it is not always the same person doing the same boring or annoying but essential tasks. These tasks are included in the waged paid labour and are part of the all the workers' weekly schedule.

Even though working independently, the working teams and the committees always report to the CT so that everybody is in the know and the needed collaboration between the teams is also exposed and discussed. Hence, there are no nominated leaders or boss that decides the distribution and division of work; it is done according to the defined mandates of the working teams and with a consensus-based decision making. Hence, while mainly presenting the mainstream capitalist form of waged work, the actual distribution and coordination of the work is done really differently than what is done in mainstream capitalist hierarchic enterprises. Collectively defined procedures, mandates and responsibilities are used to give back the management of the work to the workers themselves.

#### 5.2.1.2 Working Conditions

Before actually going into details about the working conditions at *Koumbit*, it is important to mention that because they rely on *autogestion* to ensure their functioning, the members of the CT themselves, which make up the majority of *Koumbit*'s workforce, have determined their working conditions over the years. This is an important distinction to make with the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*, where only the coop members, who represent a minority of workers, have the power to determine the working conditions of everybody.



The first element to discuss on working conditions at *Koumbit* is the salary. All workers at *Koumbit*, either freelancers or members of the CT, are paid a unique wage of \$21 per hour. No one can obtain a higher salary due to seniority or specific knowledge; everyone's labour is equally valued for their contribution to the organization. The only thing that is affected by seniority are the number of weeks of paid vacations; the number of weeks of paid vacations cap at 8 weeks after 15 years of continuous work (*Koumbit, Droits et Devoirs*). Because the organization also offers paid vacations (a minimum of two for workers of less than a year of seniority), paid sick days (a maximum of 6 per year), paid "social days off" for events related to personal life (i.e. wedding, relocation, fatality), and respect at least the minimum legally required for an employer for the paid statutory holidays. Interestingly, the CT can also decide to define specific days as holidays (example: International Workers's Day on May 1st, which is not a holiday in Quebec) if no worker is against it.

Other than that, the regular working schedule for CT members is situated between 10 and 35 hours per week officially on *Koumbit's Droits et Devoirs* (Rights & Duties) chart, but there was a worker working 5 hours per week during my short presence in the organization. This flexibility in the regular working hours per week was explained to me by a worker during an interview (January 8th 2018) as being a way to answer the various and different needs and availabilities of all workers for waged work. Moreover, it is also important to note that the collective enterprise pays overtime hours with a 50% extra pay for each hour worked over the regular schedule. Hence, when a worker with a regular schedule of 20 hours per week works 25 hours in the week, this worker gets paid 5 hours 1.5 times higher than the \$21 regular hourly wage (which means \$31.50 per hour for the 5 extra hours). Interestingly, also, there were no workers who decided to work more than 30 hours per week while I was there; meaning that no worker was doing the Quebec's legal full-time schedule of 40 hours per week.

Similarly, to what I have experienced at the farm, there is also an important space and also time that is attributed for learning at *Koumbit*. Even though I was in a reciprocal relation for the work I was doing (I was not paid for the work, but I could do research and interviews while doing it), it was accepted that I could make some mistakes while doing my work and one of the workers really

took the time to lead me in the tasks I had to do before leaving me on my own, even though my tasks did not need extensive learning. There, learning is considered as an integral part of the process of “working”. Hence, when a new worker arrives at *Koumbit*, training is for sure ensured by other team members, but it is also acknowledged and assumed that this new worker will need time to learn and also will make mistakes.

Coming with that openness and space for learning, the working ambiance at *Koumbit* expresses an absence of competition between workers, which is often valued in capitalist enterprises, and exposes a true cooperation between one another, like I have experienced at the farm. Moreover, mainly because there is literally no boss at *Koumbit*, there is no feeling of being constantly evaluated or inquisitively being observed, like workers might experience in hierarchical capitalist enterprises. This characteristic is again echoing with what I have seen at the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*. Individual autonomy is encouraged and respected at *Koumbit*, as everyone knows their tasks and responsibilities. But this also comes with the fact that the work can become a bit more solitary, at least for my own experience, which can be surprising for a place where work is collectively managed. This might be explained mainly because of the nature of the work which is done mainly on the computer. Also, this observation may come from the fact that I experienced more direct human-to-human contacts while working at the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* and in other work experiences. Nevertheless, all the members of the CT physically come to *Koumbit*'s space to work almost all the time. This space is widely open and the desks are organized in a way that the different working teams are regrouped without physically being separate from one another. There are no cubicles or closed offices. Hence, even though I felt more on my own working there, people are still together to work and direct contacts with colleagues can easily be done. Finally, it is also important to mention that the lunch break is very often a moment that all workers take together to have collective time to share together that is not related to their workplace; it is even encouraged by many workers, showing concerns of the people there about creating meaningful relations between each other.

### 5.2.2 Organization

Like I mentioned earlier, *Koumbit*, even though seemingly organized as a workers' coop and sometimes presented as one, is registered as a non-profit organization, with a membership composed of people from the community, and formal board of directors of elected volunteer members that are not part of the working team. Like it is common in many non-profit organizations in Quebec, and because it is required by the law, *Koumbit* has developed a membership open to people and organizations supporting the founding principles of the *Koumbit* and that are willing to contribute its vitality. Essentially, the membership of *Koumbit* is composed of the workers of *Koumbit* and of members of the wider community and organizations which benefits from *Koumbit*'s services or that simply support what *Koumbit* does. Also, legally, *Koumbit* needs to have an elected board of directors that should offer support to the working team and ensure that the organization is pursuing its mission. Consequently, to meet legal requirements, and also to benefit from the support of the wider community, it was decided at *Koumbit* that the board of directors will only play an external advisory role in order to open the possibility for workers of *Koumbit* to get involved in the *autogestion* of the organization. In 2017, there were 17 members of *Koumbit* in total, including two organizational members and the 10 worker-members. As for the board of directors, the numbers of people involved could vary according to the willingness of the volunteer members to participate. Moreover, as there are no "owners" of *Koumbit* and because it is formally the workers-members (even though once a year, during the general assembly, all the members) that decide for the distribution and use of the surplus value produce by the organization, *Koumbit* fits as a non-capitalist organization under the diverse economy framework, just like a typical workers' coop would be (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy 2013). As a non-capitalist organization, *Koumbit*'s workers have adopted and implemented various practices and procedures to ensure its existence on the long-run.

One of the first important elements to achieve the collective management of the organization is the adoption of *autogestion* as the guiding principle for the organization structure. A first element of practice supporting that are the various meetings and collective instances to make decisions and discuss issues that *Koumbit* has. First of all, the Collective de Travail meets every week to coordinate the work, discuss collective issues, share information and the evolution of the work in

the different teams or express specific needs that the collective should take care of to continue with the work. These weekly meetings of the CT can be open to freelancers working on contracts, while the latter do not have power in the decision-making process going on in the meetings, but still can have a say or comment on the different topics subject to decisions. Sometimes lasting a couple hours, they are nevertheless well organized: on a rotation basis, someone is previously designated to be the meeting coordinator (a designation that happens during the previous meeting) who organize the meeting and the agenda in correspondence to the decisions and minutes of the last meeting; and during the meeting, someone is designated to facilitate the meeting according to their adopted rules of assembly and another person (or two) is designated to be the secretary for the meeting and is also responsible for sharing the minutes on the organization's wiki (their collective web tool used as the organization's database of all information). Before a meeting of the CT, workers and working teams simply inform the meeting coordinator of the elements they want to discuss; this can be simply done by adding directly to the agenda in preparation, which is accessible to anyone, or by communication with that person. At the beginning of the meeting, members of the CT can also add some points to the agenda or modify it, if they feel a need for it.

An important characteristic of the functioning of the CT is that all decisions have to be consensual; meaning here that if someone feels the need to block a decision, they can do so. Hence, to make a decision, the members of the CT have to elaborate propositions that fit everyone's requirements. This practice of consensus-based decision making makes sure democratic and just decisions are taken. But it is also important to mention that when people are not concerned by a decision or when they don't have a specific position for a decision, they can simply decide to abstain to participate in this decision. Normally, a proposition that nobody feels concerned about or that no amendment permits its adoption, the proposition will then simply be "deposited" (*mis en dépôt* in French) to be discussed in another CT meeting when the setting or the moment will be favourable to take a decision.

A second instance where decisions are taken more on a day-to-day basis are the regular meetings happening within the different working teams (*WebDev*, *SysAdmin*, *Accounting*) and committees according to needs and the ongoing projects. Again, consensus-based decision making prevails. Otherwise, communication remains constant between the workers at *Koumbit* through their

different channels of internet chat to which everyone (including the freelancers) have access. In person, direct communication is also very common, as most of the workers work in *Koumbit*'s physical space. Interestingly, this space serves also as a connection for *Koumbit* with the wider community, has the workers keep its doors open for the common public to come in and learn about their work.

Nonetheless, the specific moments of meeting and deliberation could not totally function if there were no mechanisms to distribute responsibilities and task among the workers. Like I have been able to witness at the farm, responsibilities at *Koumbit* are shared amongst workers; some are assigned to specific working groups or committees and others are specifically assumed by individual workers. Like it was described in the “work” coordinate section, the work and responsibilities are mostly divided according to the working teams (*SysAdmin*, *Accounting*, *WebDev*) or the corresponding committees (*HR*, *Legal committee*, *Comm-Comm*, etc.). It is within those working groups that the responsibilities and tasks are sometimes distributed to individual workers or assumed collectively, depending on the decisions taken internally. Otherwise, when specific situations come in or when the organization has to make decisions about new projects and how to manage the surplus produce by the organization, these issues are always discussed and managed through the CT, where workers can make decisions with the inputs of from the different teams of workers.

### 5.2.3 Transactions, Property & Finance

Like I mentioned in the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*'s portrait, addressing transactions through the diverse economy framework is questioning the way we encounter others in getting what we need/want but are not producing ourselves at *Koumbit*, these encounters happen mainly through conventional markets through negotiated contracts respecting certain guidelines (i.e. hourly rates, fixed service prices, etc.). Where *Koumbit* exposes a shift from capitalist transactions in their regular transactions is through their practice of adjusting prices according to the client's capacity to pay, sometimes simply offering free services to more marginalized organizations: “*On a des comptes solidaires, on héberge gratuitement des collectifs qui ne peuvent pas se payer un hébergement. On fait vraiment l'effort d'agrémenter du monde qui autrement penserait entre les*

*mailles du filet*”[We have solidarity accounts, we host without charge collectives which cannot afford Web site hosting service. We truly do the effort of benefiting others who otherwise would fall between the cracks] (A worker at *Koumbit*, January 8th 2018). Hence, because some transactions in which *Koumbit* is involved rely on gifting or the buyers’ capacity to pay, instead of the market price, transactions at *Koumbit* are a mix of mainly capitalist trades with non-capitalist transactions of gifting and alternative transactions influenced by solidarity.

On the matter of the “property” coordinate, it is clear that *Koumbit* is involved in commoning, meaning here, according to the diverse economy framework, diversifying the conception of property. The first thing to point out is that by working with open source softwares and platforms and making them accessible to the general public, *Koumbit* is involved in the expansion of the IT commons as the organization opens the access, the use, the benefit, the care, the responsibility and the property (which is already open) to a wider community of people. Moreover, as *Koumbit* in itself is a non-profit organization, all the surplus value the organization creates is not subject to private property, as the organization itself is a collective structure that nobody can own, similarly to a coop (like the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*). Even though the material and the physical assets that the organization owns can be sold by the organization, it remains a collectively owned property that cannot be divided, which is not the case in capitalist interpretation of property. Moreover, the physical space used for work and for the hardware used to provide services to clients is rented by the organization from other private owners, hence offering to *Koumbit* the capacity to open private space to other members of the organization or even the community. In short, *Koumbit* is deeply involved in the diversification of the economic practices around the notion property by commoning many things that are subject to enclosure in the dominant capitalist economy.

For the last coordinate of the diverse economy framework that is “finance”, which asks the question “how do we invest in futures” I will not go into a lot of details. To do that, it would require a lot of discussion and would need a larger scope than just focussing on two initiatives, like I mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, some interesting practices of *Koumbit* in that sense are worth mentions. Basically, *Koumbit* is involved a wide variety of finance practices going from alternative money-based finance offered through social economy support programs offered by the State or *Caisse Solidaire* (cooperative bank), to donations or simply personal work time investment (ie. Sweat

equity; Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). But more than that, as I mentioned earlier, *Koumbit* works in the development of open-source web tools; in doing so, they also work to make them accessible to various organizations, helping them to access useful technology for their survival, hence investing their work to ensure better availability of technology for the future of these organizations (i.e. invest in the future). Also, an interesting fact is that workers at *Koumbit* decided not to have collective insurance protection or retirement funds because they did not want to put money in capitalist institutions using workers money to enrich financial elites. But this element is maybe related to the collective culture existing within *Koumbit* and of which I will discuss later on in the analysis section.

## **6. ANALYSIS: The construction of collective cultures framing the enactment of diverse economies**

When starting my research, I had four main questions in mind, which were related to my principal research questions on the impacts of non-hierarchical work practices. They are the following: 1) How these practices transform the sense of work?; 2) How these practices address/solve issues related to inequalities within the organization ecosystem (i.e. workers, partners, community)?; 3) What working conditions are derived from those practices?; and 4) How, and to what extent, these practices support a transformation of human activity through the social and political spheres of human life? During my participation in the daily activities of both organizations and during the interviews and focus groups, these questions were used to guide the knowledge and information collection for my research, but I also let my work and what participants had to say direct this step in my research. Hence, the following analysis will not offer in-depth and precise answers to those questions, but will instead offer interesting avenues to answer them and other interesting reflections in relations to the impacts of the non-hierarchical practices I was able to expose. To initiate that analysis, I will first present some of the differences between the two organizations that expose how non-hierarchical work practices and elements of diverse economies have to be negotiated and adapted to the different contexts in which they are implemented. Secondly, I will present the elements of practices shared by the two organizations that supports the dismantling of hierarchy in the workplace. Then, I will discuss on how these elements of practices impact livelihoods in the two organizations. Another section after this one, more centred on discussion, will address some challenges faced by the two organization, the limits of my contribution and how the elements of practices exposed could contribute to wider social movements for social transformation and transition to a more just society.

### 6.1 Ethical negotiations to implement non-hierarchical work practices: exposing the essential differences between *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*

At first glance, the two collective enterprises seem very different as they are involved in two different universes: organic farming for one and IT for the other. Where they find common ground is, like I have shown, through the diversification of the economy by adopting alternative practices



and through their shared concern for a more democratic workplace. Nevertheless, their differences are important to point out and are also interesting for the comprehension of the process of implementing diverse economic practices.

A first major difference between the two is their respective legal structure; a workers' coop for the farm and a non-profit organization for *Koumbit*. Interestingly, both of those legal structure fit in what the diverse economies framework categorize as “non-capitalist” form of enterprise (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). At the farm, the “workers' coop” structure fit well with the organization at its beginning, as three people wanted to collectively create a community-supported farm with no capitalist interests in shares and profit: a democratically shared power in decision-making, no need for profit over the business' payments and the institutional support for social economy enterprise in Quebec corresponded to their needs for the creation of the farm. At *Koumbit*, even though creating a workers' coop was one of the main objectives in the pursuit of *autogestion* at the foundation of the organization, the non-for-profit organization structure was then seen as easier to set up for the first members, and so things turned out to better correspond that organization format (Introductory interview at *Koumbit*, December 13th 2017). Interestingly, the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* may now seem less organized as the conceptual image of a workers' coop than at *Koumbit*; the way the work is divided and distributed at the farm is more hierarchical than the concept of a workers' coop would make us believe.

It is also the way that work is distributed and organized that mostly differentiates the two collective enterprises. The farm, which is smaller than *Koumbit*, exposes many forms of work at play (wage work – revenue based and hourly based, reciprocal work, volunteer work, housework), but also shows a higher turnover rate of workers because of the seasonal fluctuation, leading to the reliance on many seasonal workers. *Koumbit*, on the other hand, is a bigger collective enterprise where work is mostly limited to two forms of work (wage work and freelance work), while still relying from time to time on reciprocal work and volunteer work. But this latter major difference also reflects the different settings and contexts in which the two organizations are involved; farming work is really dependent on nature and follows the cycle of the seasons, while IT work needs more constant work related to updates and maintenance, and is required in various domains of the industry, leading to a more stable, or even growing need of labour to support the demand of service.

Another major point of difference is the working conditions offered. First, housing and food are offered to all types of workers at the farm, while *Koumbit* cannot actually offer that to the workers. Hence, like I explained earlier, there is an in-kind form of payment that is offered to workers at the farm that can compensate the lower wages that the farm offers. At *Koumbit*, where capitalist markets offer the possibility of greater earnings for the organization, the wages are never “high” in comparison to what we can find elsewhere in the IT sector of industry. Because *Koumbit* is involved in a sector with a lot of demand from other enterprises and with a growing need for capitalist enterprises to stay competitive, clients are really willing to pay the price for the service and hence workers at *Koumbit* are able to negotiate the just amount of revenues to ensure their liveable wage and capacity to offer work to their members. But time is freed up for other forms of work that take place outside of the respective activities for the two organizations, something that is rarely seen in capitalist organizations: *Koumbit* asks workers to work less than 35 hours per week, giving time for other things like community work, activism or self-provisioning for food; and at the farm, some housework (i.e. cooking, cleaning) is integrated into the working schedule for all workers, and space for some care work is offered during working schedule when needed (when a worker is sick, when kids need more time or are sick, etc.).

Hence, the two organizations may seem to be really different from one another. But these differences seem to become less significant when looking at how the two organizations really function; both have their own ways of dealing with hierarchy and ensuring the participation of workers in the decision-making concerning the workplace. Moreover, the two organizations seem apart from one another when considering the working conditions. But again, when acknowledging that they both simply offer two different arrangements of working conditions and considering the comments coming from the workers themselves, it becomes evident that the differences in the working conditions between the two organizations cannot be compared or simply discussed at the descriptive level. More than just the material conditions, that we are used to focus upon in our more capitalocentric way of speaking of work, working conditions involves many elements that target your interest in your work, your possibility of engagement and your capacity of maintaining a healthy and sustainable livelihood; your capacity of surviving well.

So how come two initiatives looking to implement alternatives to capitalist economies happen to seem so different? This, according to the work of Gibson-Graham and their colleagues, can be explained by an informal practice (or social exercise) of “ethical negotiations” to design the way the work is distributed and assigned that happens in both organizations (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013). The idea of “ethical negotiations” essentially describes the ethical process of literally negotiating the design of our economic activities by putting our interdependence with each other and the environment at the centre of the process (Ibid, p. 13). At both *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coopérative aux champs qui chantent*, the need for working people, the need for people to have well-paid employment and/or fruitful occupations, the need for the organization and the varying external inputs and outputs in the organizations were all considered to define how the work would be divided, assigned and organized. And even today, their respective articulations of their economic activities are still continuously negotiated, so the organizations are able to maintain their existence. But because these varied a lot between the two organizations (and very often varies between every organization), the resulting distributions and organizations of work differ and ended up offering different working conditions where non-hierarchical work practices could nevertheless be implemented. Hence, even though *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* are working to dismantle oppressive hierarchy in their workplace, the way things are done and negotiated according to their respective contexts and the people in place results in two different types of organization. Nevertheless, important elements of practices are shared between *Koumbit* and the farm and offer an excellent starting point to define what are some fundamental non-hierarchical work practices and how they impact the livelihoods of the people involved with them.

## 6.2 Working to dismantle hierarchy: shared elements of practices observed at both the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* & *Koumbit*

The short-term fieldwork I did with both *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* allowed me to discover how two organizations claiming workers’ coop inspired structures can evolve really differently, but also how they could develop and integrate similar and shared elements of practices. While they cannot be necessarily defined as “practices” per se, they are central to how the work is performed and organized.

A first element that my fieldwork brought me to observe and even feel is a strong ambient sentiment of trust between all the workers for their collective and towards the individual capacity of everyone to achieve the work needed in both organizations. This trust was also evident, during my fieldwork, as people were easily appreciated for their particular expertise or knowledge to lead certain tasks or projects. A good example of this happened at the farm when we had to harvest rhubarb and that a volunteer had already done that task; without even discussing it, workers directly went to this volunteer to ask for help and advice on how to do the work. At *Koumbit*, I myself felt that trust in my work as I was building a shelf for the organization; even though I was totally new and not familiar with the people, after a short briefing and discussion with one of the workers, I started building that shelf on my own with *Koumbit*'s resources and one of the workers' tools. People had already given their trust in my capacity to do that task, or maybe at least, to learn by doing it. But, as trust is given also in the collective capacity of achieving the organization's goals, mutual aid is also something very central to both organizations, supporting individual autonomy by opening the possibility to collaborate and support each other; in other words, autonomy is also expressed by workers possibility to ask for help or to give a hand to a colleague when needed. One worker at *Koumbit* better expresses that idea: "*à tout moment on est libre de 'back down' et de dire 'fais-le', de dire 'je vais t'aider' et de se passer la tâche à quelqu'un d'autre*" [at any moment, we are free to 'back down', and to say 'you do it', or to say 'I will help you', and to let ourselves pass the task to someone else](January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018). Maybe more than just trust supported by mutual aid, I felt it was also the recognition that everyone makes mistakes and that these can be a learning moment for those involved. The same kind of collective trust and support was also taking place at the farm. For both organizations, the belief in the capacity of everyone to be good workers is constantly present, because even though time is given to teaching others, rapidly people in the organizations let you work by yourself where you can develop your abilities and your own way of doing the work. Nevertheless, both organizations will engage in a hiring process that looks for people with a specific fit with regards to beliefs, willingness and values to integrate their respective working teams. At *Koumbit*, especially, there is the belief that it is better to hire someone that shares the values and the willingness to work in *autogestion* (or have some experience of it). This shared belief that you can become the required worker while working really differentiates from many other work environments where it is believed that you have to integrate the workplace already with the required skills and abilities, as education from high schools, colleges and universities is seen by

many enterprises as a training ground for their workforce. At *Koumbit* and at the farm, there is this sentiment that people believe in the capacity of everyone to bring in their skills and learn new ones to contribute to the organization, but this also comes with the need for autonomy from workers that is present in both organizations.

For both *Koumbit* and the farm, the existing practices, structures and mechanisms defining their organization also rely on elements of organizational culture, of which some that are shared between the two have been easy to observe while working there. The first one is the centrality of the question of autonomy in relation to responsibility in both organizations. It was well expressed by a coop member at the farm:

*Dans ce système [talking of the division of work by department] on a même mis un 3e responsable avec les wwoofers et les stagiaires, pour aussi laisser une certaine autonomie aux autres employés, [...] on veut vraiment aider les gens à devenir plus autonome [In this system [of the division of work by department] we have even put a third person in charge within WOOFers and interns, in order to let a certain autonomy to the other employees, [...] we truly want to help people become more autonomous].*

(Coop member, September 19th 2017)

At *Koumbit*, a worker explained a similar perspective:

*Selon moi, ce qui promeut les relations non-hiérarchiques c'est qu'on exige vraiment beaucoup, beaucoup d'autonomie. Je ne veux pas dire "trop", mais je crois que l'autonomie des membres [travailleurs et travailleuses] est essentielle; ils comprennent qu'ils doivent concourir à faire aller le collectif. Puis, ils ont pas à être assujettis à recevoir des commandes de d'autres membres de faire des affaires [In my opinion, what promotes non-hierarchical relationships is that we truly require a lot of autonomy. I don't want to say "too much", but I believe that members [workers]' autonomy is essential; they understand that they must contribute to carry the collective forward. Then, they don't have to be subjected to receive orders from other members to do stuff].*

(*Koumbit* worker-member, January 8th 2018)

This need and promotion of autonomy was also really present in my own experience with the two organizations: even as a researcher, I was invited and supported to take initiatives and to adapt my work to be more at ease, and I was never observed or checked on in an inquisitive manner like we can often experience in various kinds of employment. But like I mentioned earlier, this need for autonomy also came with some form of responsibility, as the products of my work were needed and expected for the well-being and the running of both organizations.

Coming with the need of autonomy and responsibility is the clear definition of “roles”, where “roles” are a set of tasks, duties and responsibilities that are attributed or taken on by an individual or a group of people contributing to activities of the wider organizations. I use the term “roles” because it was with this word that the division of tasks and duties was described by coop members at the farm. At *Koumbit*, while the notion of “roles” did not exist, the clear definition of working teams and committees correspond to the notion of roles, even though they were almost all assumed collectively in small units composed of groups of workers. Defining roles is seen essential, as it helps people to manage the limits of their work and to know when to ask for help or to delegate work to another team or a colleague:

*[...] having these clear roles... seems to work pretty well with a non-hierarchical structure.  
[...] when we try to share our roles too much, then... You know, I think it is a little harder to go with the decisions. [...] the better the roles were defined, the better it seemed to work.*

(A coop member at the farm, July 2018)

Moreover, a clear distribution of roles, in whatever form it takes, is also something that is important, as a coop member at the farm explains: “It always breaks down when there is a role that nobody wants to be responsible for. And even when we say we are shared-responsible of one, it is easy to let... to put the blame on the other party” (July, 2018). For that reason, *Koumbit* decided to attribute maintenance and housekeeping tasks on a rotating basis, using a wheel of tasks, so that it would not be always the same person doing all the drudgery tasks (which are often traditionally assumed by women).

Another shared element of practices that I have been able to observe in both organizations is connected to one of the most important critiques of hierarchical organization. In strict hierarchical organizations, the control of information is held by the upper levels of the organization, creating important power imbalances with the lower level of the hierarchy, which often consists of the mass of workers (Castoriadis, 1979 p.5). At both *Koumbit* and at the farm, an important element of practices exists to counterbalance, intentionally or not, this characteristic of hierarchy; the use of various instances, tools and habits of communication that are easily observed by the existence of dedicated moments for meetings, with a somewhat more formal format at *Koumbit* than at the farm. Like I mentioned in the previous section, meetings are part of the daily work where workers of the same team at *Koumbit*, or the whole team at the farm, will come together to discuss issues and make decisions for the work to come during the day. But meetings are not only used to organize the days of work, but also to coordinate the shared space, make decisions that affect the organization as a whole and where everyone's input is needed. *Koumbit* uses the *Collectif de Travail* meetings on a weekly basis in that sense, while it is divided in different formats of meetings for the farm involving different types of workers depending of the objectives of the meetings. Added to that, tools for communication, such as the IRC (Internet Relay Chat) at *Koumbit* for continuous open communication between all workers or chalk board and displayed listing of tasks or duties for harvest at the farm, are often used to maintain a high level of communication between every type of workers in both organizations. Essentially, communication, even totally informal in the form of simple discussions between two persons, is always ongoing for both *Koumbit* and the farm in ways that it become central to the organizations' functioning. As a worker at *Koumbit* explained:

*La job est structurée en fonction de partager de l'information. [...] Oui, il y a une autonomie [...], mais, en même temps tu vas te le faire dire si jamais tu ne documentes pas ou que tu ne laisses pas de traces de ce que tu as fait, parce qu'après ça les autres ne pourront pas savoir pourquoi ça marche [The job is structured in order to share information. [...] Yes, there is autonomy [...], but at the same time people will be after you if you don't document or leave traces of what you did, because after that, the others won't know why it is working].*

(January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

In short, I have been able to observe in both collective enterprises a set of shared elements of practices that seems to contribute to the continuous work of dismantling hierarchy. The first element being an important culture of trust between the people in their capacity to be good workers, but also in their willingness to work at their best. The second element, quite connected to the first, is the essential need for autonomy conjugated with the need to take charge of a share of the responsibility in the work. The third, coming as a structuring practice in both organizations, is the reliance on clear definition of the roles in the organization, so people are able to navigate within certain limits for their work while taking on responsibilities and autonomy for their attributed tasks. The fourth element that comes in is the reliance on regular and differentiated meetings to ensure strong communication and the sharing of information within the organization so everyone is informed and able to make some on-the-go decisions, but also meetings to make collective and consensus-based decisions. Along with that, both organizations shared this practice of informal and continuous communication through in-person conversation between colleagues and teammates. The two final shared elements of practices, maybe also connected with the culture of trust, is the space, time and resources given to training and learning the work and the continuous reliance on mutual aid and true cooperation at work; both at *Koumbit* and at the farm people recognize that we have to learn to better do our work and so the time and energy collectively needed to train people and let people learn by doing the work is accepted and supported. Moreover, as the flow and intensity of work vary a lot and that the survival of the two organizations ensuring work for people is collectively assumed (solely by the coop members at the farm), mutual aid and cooperation becomes a natural reflex to be sure things are getting done and that nobody is left alone to achieve a task that is collectively needed for the well-being of the organizations.

While these elements of practice would suggest an active dismantlement of hierarchy in the workplace, we have to know how hierarchy is instituted in human relations before evaluating how it can really be dismantled in the workplace. Coming from my observation and interpretation of the practices I have seen at *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*, the next section will discuss the actual possibility and the dynamics of dismantling hierarchy in the workplace.



### 6.3 Non-hierarchical work practices and hierarchy: the practical enactment of ideals vs the utopian goal

To first be able to discern how work practices can really be “non-hierarchical”, we must understand what is hierarchy in human relations. Briefly, we could explain that hierarchy puts some people at a prevailing position towards others. And when it gets more complex, different levels are created to assign those positions. As it may seem, hierarchy can be implemented upon a variety of criteria or premises and in various situations of human life. For the matter of my research, the focus is mainly on hierarchy in organizations, even though some related hierarchies affecting social life will inevitably be part of the analysis. It is important to recall that hierarchical organizations have pre-existed all major civilizations and can be traced back to prehistory (Bookchin, 2005 pp. 130-158). According to Bookchin, the first form of hierarchy in organization was established when elders obtained privileged positions of authority in social groups as the latter became more complex (ibid.). Rooted as far back in our history, it is comprehensible that hierarchy is often presented as the natural way of organizing social groups.

Nowadays, in capitalist enterprises and in the vast majority of organizations, the hierarchy of command is the standard for structuring the organization, where a unique individual chief is structurally and institutionally recognized as a supreme decider and with various levels of other deciders acting under the top leader’s authority. Its most salient expression is what we commonly know as bureaucracy (Castoriadis, 1979; De Geus, 2014). More specifically to capitalist enterprises, it is the relations of property combined with the hierarchy of command that design the hierarchy; it is the owner (one the one with more shares) that has the greatest power and that dictates the other levels of the hierarchy how to act (or work, in this example). Accordingly, the political objectives against hierarchy at work of the early anarchists, such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, were supported by the fact that hierarchy was central for the survival of capitalism, working as the pillar of capitalist oppression (McKay, 2012; Strong, 2014). Hence, when talking about non-hierarchical workplace, we often think in relation to ownership, but as hierarchy can be expressed in various forms (hierarchy of command, hierarchy of gender, hierarchy of knowledge, hierarchy of race, etc.), it is not the only way that non-hierarchical practices can be implemented.

When discussing the implementation of non-hierarchical work practices, it is easy to fall in the perspective that we can dismantle all forms of hierarchy at the same time; but hierarchies coexist in a really complex articulation. Hence, even though getting rid of hierarchy can be central to an initiative, some hierarchies can prevail and be sometimes defended as needed to maintain the organization alive. Therefore, it is important to note that the organizations in which I studied non-hierarchical work practices are not concrete example of the utopian goal of getting rid of all hierarchies, but they are practical enactments of how hierarchy can be dismantled within work relations in an ongoing and never-ending attempt to abolish hierarchy in the workplace that is maintained through a continuous process of negotiation. The example of the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*, engaging seasonal workers and part-time volunteers, is the most salient demonstration of that difficulty between the two organizations, as one coop member from there explained:

*Parce qu'il y vraiment une hiérarchie entre les membres de la coop et les employéEs; il y a vraiment une grosse distinction. Je te dirais qu'il y a moins de distinction entre les WWOOFers et les employéEs. C'est sûr, il y a [une distinction dans] leurs payes, mais dans leur implication dans les décisions, c'est similaire [because there is truly a hierarchy between members of the coop and the employees; there is truly a big distinction. I would say to you that there is less distinction between WWOOFers and employees. Inevitably, there is a [difference with in] their pays, but in their involvement, it's similar].*

(September 19th, 2018)

To adapt to the varying needs in workforce, the farm cannot employ everyone on a long-term basis, and to respect the engagement, the experience and the knowledge of the coop members in the farm, a certain level of hierarchy is induced by the coop's structure and sometimes maintained by the coop members, but interestingly also by the seasonal workers looking for leaders and sometimes trainers among the coop members. In another manner, the workers at *Koumbit* expressed that hierarchy sometimes can continue to exist in their workplace, where experienced workers can feel a greater ease to address issues and share their opinion, and some form of hierarchy reproduced in the wider society continues to affect their organization, such as hierarchy of gender and hierarchy of race, since cisgendered men always have been more numerous to permanently integrate the

organization and that the integration of racialized people is often more difficult relatively to the access of their internal collective culture. Therefore, it is important to recognize the two organizations I have been working with as practical enactments of a continuous dismantlement of hierarchy in the workplace instead of a romanticized actualization of an utopian anarchist goal.

In the following sections, the analysis and interpretation I will do of the impact of the practices I have observed will consider that they are not completely dismantling hierarchy, but that they are used as part of a continuous process of dismantling it. Focusing on the dismantlement of the hierarchy of command in organizations, I will hit on some of the other forms of hierarchy, but the intent of my analysis will constrict itself to expose how the oppression coming from this specific form of hierarchy can be challenged by the enumerated practices.

#### 6.4 How is the sense of work transformed?

Very often, we simply see work as the activity of giving labour time to an employer to get a salary to pay bills and be able to fulfil our material needs; work often becomes synonym to employment. While employment can be something fulfilling for certain people, it can also be a total drudge; repetitive, low-paid and dangerous (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013 p. 17). And it can be even more dull and alienating when you only have to execute orders and simple repetitive rote gestures to achieve your tasks. Moreover, even though people can find their work (i.e.: employment) interesting and fulfilling, they can become very exhausted and spend the vast majority of their lifetime working. Then, we can question what is really the sense of work? What is work? Why do we work?

At first glance, when we observe the work done in both the farm and *Koumbit*, we could think that both organizations are just proposing a different form of employment for people. And we could also easily think the same when hearing a coop-member from the farm saying “one of the big goals of this coop, at the beginning, was to create work for its members” (October 4th, 2017). It is true; both *Koumbit* and the farm are offering jobs. But like I exposed earlier, the fact that various forms of work are taking place to “produce” either food or IT services in both organizations already challenges that assumptions.

When questioning the notion of work, J.K. Gibson-Graham and their colleagues started by asking “how do we survive well?” (2013). This question directly brings us to think about what we do to fulfil our needs, and predominantly, our material needs. From then on, we are able to unveil all the different forms of work that people rely on to fulfil their various material needs: volunteer work, in-kind paid work, housework, reciprocal work, etc. But the idea of “surviving well” means more than just fulfilling our material needs; as the author of *Take back the Economy* recall, general well-being is the result of the interaction of the various forms of well-being I mentioned earlier (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013 p. 21). And it is especially by targeting the element of “occupational well-being”, related to the enjoyment we have from what we do each day (Ibid.), that some practices of both *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* partially transform the sense of work.

#### 6.4.1 Giving space to learn, to try and to make mistakes: the actualization of autonomy at work

The first element of practice that is changing the sense of work is the importance and space given for training and learning. In both organizations, learning is seen as something central to work; work is becoming a process of learn: “When you work in a community [collective], you are going to learn more, expand your knowledge and that is more “profitable” to me ” (Farm’s Coop member, October 4th, 2017). Coming with that importance of learning, the space and acceptance of mistakes, along with the practice of mutual aid, is helping to frame a work environment where trying new tasks and “learning by doing” is encouraged. The effect that this has on people can be better expressed by one intern at the farm: “*Je sens que, même si je reste en situation d’apprentissage, je sens que j’ai plus de responsabilités [...] je me sens un peu plus valoriséE, je sens un peu plus comme les autres*” [I feel that, even though I stay in a position of learning, I feel that I have more responsibilities (...) I feel more valued, I feel a bit more like the others] (October 4th, 2017). In a more detailed manner, a worker at *Koumbit* explains how these practices (or maybe a mix of practice of training and values of learning and solidarity) are actually offering liberty to their work:

*[...] on se donne les outils et on se libère individuellement et collectivement d’essayer de faire des affaires qu’on ne ferait pas autrement; quand il y des clients qui demandent des*

*trucs particuliers qu'on ne sait pas si on sait comment faire, ou quand il y a des problèmes quand même complexes, ça nous donne vraiment une liberté [...] [(...) we provide ourselves with the tools and we free ourselves individually and collectively by trying to do stuff that we wouldn't do otherwise; when there are clients asking specific things that we don't know if we know how to do, or when there are somewhat complex problems, it truly gives us a liberty (...)].*

(January 8th, 2018)

And, with that space for learning comes a strong need of autonomy, which I actually consider as a shared “non-hierarchical work practice” between the two organizations. It is through the mix of space for learning and training and of autonomy that workers (of any types, especially for the people at the farm) are able to try things, express a certain level creativity and, in the end, being able to express a greater portion of their own self and potential at work. This is quite the contrary of what typical hierarchical organization would permit (Ward, 2008 in Paskewich, 2014 p. 661. The sense of liberty, that was mentioned by one of the workers at *Koumbit*, actually comes from that possibility to try things, make mistakes and adapt your own work while doing it. Work then becomes an activity that is done to sustain one's life while also offering the possibility for that person to perform their abilities, creativity and potential. And it is at that point that the occupational well-being is nourished. As one the coop member at the farm said: “[...] we are still trying, I think, to create fulfilling employment for the coop members, and so, it is a level of non-hierarchy within the coop that everybody is trying to find that fulfilling job” (October 4th, 2017). While occupational well-being is surely affected by the very nature of the work, as some people will prefer gardening than working on computers, or the contrary, the collective work practices of ensuring space and worktime for training and learning and of reliance on autonomy actually affect occupational well-being in a way that it changes the sense of “work” for people involved in the two organizations.

#### 6.4.2 The consensus-based decision making: including workers in the ethical negotiations of their livelihoods

Another important practice that is put in place is the democratic decision-making processes (even though different and implemented at different levels) that are put in place in both organizations. Because workers are engaged in meetings to discuss work but also the way work is organized, they are able to negotiate their participation in this work (Note: This particular element of practice is more transversal for all workers at *Koumbit*); they can negotiate how the particular form of work they are engaged with the organization will integrate their whole livelihood. The first example of this is well expressed by one *Koumbit* worker:

*Je trouve qu'on est vraiment une belle team, genre 'à chacun selon ses moyens et à chacun selon ses besoins'. Il y a plein de monde qui sont dévoués au poste, tight, toujours là, c'est vraiment le fun. Malgré que tout le monde a des réalités vraiment différentes et complexes; du monde qui font du théâtre, qui partent pendant 1 mois"* [ I find that we are truly a beautiful team, like 'each according to their means and each according to their needs'. There is a lot of people who are dedicated to their job, tight [on their commitment], always there, it is truly enjoyable. Even though everyone has truly different and complex realities; people doing theatre, who leave for a month].

(January 8th, 2018)

At the farm, the situation is really similar for coop-members, as the specific situation of one coop member shows:

*On avait dit que à temps plein c'est 40 à 50 heures par semaine, en été... j'avais dit que je pouvais faire 5% de ça. Peut-être suis-je à 10%... Pour moi, ça ne me dérange pas de faire moins d'argent, car je suis bien rémunéréE ailleurs et la ferme m'apporte beaucoup d'autres avantages* [we decided that full time is 40 to 50 hours per week, in summer... I said that I could do 5% of this. Maybe I am at 10%... For me, I don't bother making less money, because I am well paid elsewhere and the farm is bringing me a lot of other advantages].

(September 19th, 2017)

Interestingly, what we can see here is that people working in both organizations are engaged in what Gibson-Graham and their colleagues would call ethical negotiations (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013) in the determination of their livelihoods, where they negotiate with others and the organizations in which they work their engagement so they could be able to give time and energy to other important activities and other forms of work they are involved in. Hence, workers in both organizations then gain the possibility to negotiate their occupational work schedule and new ways to free up time to address other forms of their wellbeing. In doing so, they are able to give time and energy building and nourishing their social relations with others (social well-being), ensuring a continuous connection and engagement with their wider community (community well-being), such as long-term commitment in militant activities for social justice that was expressed by many workers at *Koumbit*, and to take time for themselves to prepare food or do sports (physical well-being), or simply enjoy some good things that life has to offer to relax and take care of themselves.

A related element, that is quite specific to the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*, is the recognition of some parts of the “care work”, such as preparing food, as an integral part of the collective work of the coop. As defended by one coop member: “*For me, it was really critical to be in a space where there could be sharing of childcare, sharing of household labour; the feminine invisible labour that could be recognized, that could be shared, that could be explicitly talked about*” (September 19th, 2017). While it is maybe related to the internal culture and values carried by the coop, it exposes the recognition of interdependency of people in their livelihoods, something which a feminist perspective on economy will explain by a breakdown of the private-public divide of the forms of work. Hence, specifically at the farm, the sense of work is also transformed as it no longer only means “the activity that you do outside the household to make a living”; it becomes the combination of the various activities of production and reproduction (care, housework, learning) needed to “survive well”.

In short, by integrating democratic decision-making processes and opening space for everyone to try stuff and learn, *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* relieve the workplace from elements of oppressive hierarchy. In doing so, it transforms and broadens the sense of what

it means “to work” by making it something more fruitful for self-development and self-expression, and by making it a tool for the experimentation of individual liberty in our daily lives. Work is also no longer just the expression of people selling their time to meet their material needs, but it also becomes an activity combining production, learning and experimentation at the same time.

#### 6.5 The working conditions resulting of the non-hierarchical practices of *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*

Being able to achieve a certain level of well-being in the various spheres of our lives (material, physical, mental, community, social & occupational) may require a redefinition of the sense of work, but the social and economic context in which *Koumbit* and the farm operate induces some needs (monetary, social and or familial) that only changing the sense of work might not answer. Hence, questioning well-being and the quality of livelihood ensuing from working in initiatives such as the ones I studied also requires observing typical working conditions.

As I mentioned in the previous section, workers in both organizations (almost all of them at *Koumbit*) are involved in ethical negotiations to determine how their work in the organization will be integrated in their livelihoods; meaning that they are involved in democratic processes for the definition of their jobs. And they are actually engaged in the same kind of ethical process to define their working conditions, as they have to negotiate their working conditions with their capacity to sustain their lives and the existence of the organizations. As one worker at *Koumbit* said, the organization exists to provide themselves a way to sustain their life that is decent:

*Faut essayer de garder en vie ce truc qu'on exploite collectivement pour qu'on puisse continuer à travailler ici. Si jamais un jour on se rend compte que c'est pas viable, on peut seulement exploiter ce truc en niant tous nos droits en tant qu'employés, il faut lâcher au bout d'un moment, je pense. [We need to try to keep this thing that we exploit collectively alive in order to continue working here. If ever one day we realize that it is not viable, that we can only exploit this thing only by denying our rights as employees, we need to relinquish at a certain point, I think.]*

(January 8th, 2018)



Because of the difference in the nature of the work, their different settings and the greater dependence on nature of the farm, the two organizations are offering totally different working conditions. Work is really more intense and demanding at the farm from March to November (even more between May to September) when other workers come in, while it is more or less stable all year long at *Koumbit*, where the numbers of workers involved stays stable. Moreover, the farm is not totally able to offer the equivalent of full-time minimum wage salary to coop members for the whole year, while at *Koumbit* offering better than minimum wage conditions is considered essential. Nevertheless, in both organizations there are some working conditions that are the result of having implemented non-hierarchical work practices.

At the farm, the main working condition that is directly related to non-hierarchical practices is the in-kind payment, offered in food (for all workers) and housing (for interns, WWOOFers and coop members). Even though the land is privately owned, and that food is produced mainly to be distributed to partners (consumers paying before harvest season for their portion of the upcoming harvest), the fact that housework is integrated in the productive work of farming and shared on a rotation basis, it offers the possibility for all workers to benefit from “free” (meaning here that no payment in money is involved) food and housing. Everybody is involved in the maintenance of the main house and in the work of cooking; the ethical decision that was made by coop members is that all workers should benefit from this collective work, not only the owners of the land and house. But more than that, offering food and housing for workers relieves the burden of paying for it outside of the workplace for all workers, then contributing collectively to everyone’s material well-being in offering housing, with the appliances that comes with it, and physical well-being, ensuring good and healthy food produced at the farm or collectively bought on the market.

At *Koumbit*, the working conditions are all negotiated and adopted by consensus by all the workers members of the *Collectif de travail*. Hence, because the existence of the CT is actually a non-hierarchical work practice that they implemented, all their working conditions are in some way the result of non-hierarchical work practices. As I already mentioned, workers have *Koumbit* maintain the practice of offering a unique wage of \$21 per hour to everyone and putting the standard working week between a total of 10 to 35 hours (Even though a member of the CT was working 5 hours per

week). This is defended as offering a liveable wage to everyone, in a province where the minimum wage is \$12 per hour, and to ensure the flexibility for every worker to have a schedule that answers their needs for work and a balance with the other things of their personal lives. But the question of salary can become less important for workers when their work offers the liberty they need to obtain what they are looking for as livelihoods, like a worker at Koumbit frankly expressed: “*pour moi, entre 35\$ ou bien 20\$, je m’en câlisse; je ne vais pas me construire une maison avec des billets de banque. Moi, mon but, c’est d’être capable de militer à côté*” [for me, between \$35 or \$20, I don’t give a damn; I will not build myself a house with bank notes. Me, my goal, is to be able to engage in activism on the side] (December 13th, 2017). That comment clearly shows that what workers at *Koumbit* have negotiated as working conditions, especially in terms of salary and working schedule, are an arrangement that is flexible and decent enough so that every worker can have the liberty to negotiate their own respective livelihood in relation to the other sphere of their lives; namely community well-being for the example given in this quotation.

Finally, in both organizations stress and some form of pressure can be felt or transmitted between workers (clearly expressed at the farm, maybe due to the nature of the work relying on external incontrollable factors such as weather). But in either organization, you are never pushed to do something you are not comfortable doing; this is an important working condition that comes with the place that is giving to care and autonomy at the farm and at *Koumbit*. Like a coop member mentioned at the farm: “*I feel that what is really important for us is, and I believe it, that if people are happy they’ll work better, and harder [...] I think the morale of people around you help the whole community to work better.*” (October 4th, 2017).

## 6.6 Inequalities and non-hierarchical organizing of work

The economic alternatives that are *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* do not totally get rid of hierarchy, they are practically trying to remove its intrusion in the organizing of work. So even though working to fight them, inequalities and some forms of hierarchy are still present in the two organizations I have studied.

As the organization of work and the practices ensuing are the result of ethical negotiations, the formal structure of an organization does not dictate the practices. Hence, at the farm, there is a strong trust that is given to the ability of all types of workers to perform new tasks without oppressive supervision. This then brings the coop members, the more “powerful” or “upper status” workers to perform the same tasks as the others, and therefore making the work distribution more equitable (or symbolically more equitable) between the different kinds of worker. So even though inequalities could be seen from an outside perspective (coop members being more privileged than other workers), the reality is quite different. Hence, the fact that the coop maintains a formal distinction between employees and coop members, it creates a formal division of class within the organization. Here, the daily practices become really important to counterbalance the effect of a formal class hierarchy within the coop.

Differently, at *Koumbit*, there is formally and clearly no differentiation of class. Every worker is paid the same hourly wage: “*Puis... le salaire. C’est fondamental; tout le monde a le même salaire. Je pense que ça ça joue beaucoup contre la hiérarchie*” [Then... the salary. It’s fundamental; everyone has the same wage. I think it plays a lot against hierarchy] (A worker, January 8th, 2018). And moreover, the need and importance of not having people making decisions for others was verbally expressed by one worker-member: “*Essentiellement, moi je suis un petit peu anarchiste, parce que je pense que tout le monde est intelligent et je ne veux surtout pas qu’il y ait un cave en haut et 100 personnes intelligentes en bas qui écoutent le gros cave en haut*” [Essentially, I am a little bit anarchist, because I believe everyone is intelligent and I especially don’t want a schmuck above everyone else and 100 intelligent people below listening this big schmuck above] (A worker, January 8th, 2018). Easily, we could conclude that there are no visible inequalities between workers at *Koumbit*. Nevertheless, experience and personal attitudes tend to give one more “power” or “influence” within the organization:

*C’est sûr que tu peux toujours penser qu’il a des hiérarchies, des gens que ça fait plus longtemps qui sont là. Pas nécessairement qu’ils ont plus de pouvoir, mais dépendant de leurs personnalités on va peut-être les écouter plus et tout, en général c’est pas mal égalitaire.* [It is sure that you can always think that there are hierarchies, people who have

been involved for a longer period. Not necessarily that they have more power, but depending on their personalities, we might listen to them more... in general it is mainly egalitarian.]

(A worker-member, January 8th, 2018)

The same was also expressed at the farm, where experience, but also engagement in the long-run, often delegate more power to the sayings and ideas of some members/workers:

*When I first started in the coop, I started with someone with a lot of farming experience, and so there is this natural... There is some hierarchy there, because there always can be hierarchy of experience... Maybe the long-term commitment to the business. If someone more committed in staying in the business longer, they have a more hierarchical decision-making status, then someone who's going to be leaving in a year, or something.*

(Coop member, October 4th, 2017)

So, even though hierarchy is dismantled organizationally or through the decision-making practices, some other forms of hierarchy continue to exist. And they are sometimes defended, because not used in an oppressive manner, but in order to maintain justice for workers who commit on the long-term or to respect the experience and knowledge that some workers bring to the collective work (sweat equity). This justification of some form of hierarchy was clearly verbalized by an Intern during my stay at the farm:

*I came to work here with a more 'learning' mindset. [...] So, I was more in a mood of 'you guys have the experience and you guys have been here for more than a year so tell me what I have to do and I'll do it'. I really appreciate what I am learning here and I am in that position of being told what to do and do it, and it is fine.*

(October, 2017)

With regards to hierarchy in gender, the issue was not discussed or addressed at the farm; but the actual existence of the farm is also a statement against gender hierarchy; it is a working coop composed of “non-cisgendered-men” people (meaning here identifying as other than cisgendered men). So basically, patriarchal domination seemed visually not present at the farm. Even though I

made this observation, it never came up as a central characteristic of the farm, mostly like it was just the accepted way things were. At *Koumbit*, this issue was somewhat predominant, as workers were sensitive to the question:

*Pour moi, le genre ça me... ça m'a jamais vraiment frappé beaucoup. Évidemment, Koumbit est super genré; le comité Infra, c'est que des mecs, en tout cas, qui se présentent plutôt masculin. C'est représentatif du milieu technologique je pense. Là, en ce moment, c'est nice de voir plus de personnes qui s'identifient 'femmes' dans le collectif. [...] C'est encore une fois l'équipe Web qui les a embauchées.*” [For me, gender... it never really struck me a lot. Obviously, *Koumbit* is super gendered; the Infra committee, it's only guys, or at least that present themselves as masculine. It represents the technology milieu I think. [...] it's nice to see more people self-identifying as 'women' in the collective. But, it is clear that now, it is again the Web team that hired them.]

(A *Koumbit* worker, January 8th 2018)

It is true that in the IT sector, there is a lot of cis-gendered men involved, so it is for *Koumbit*. But like another worker mentioned:

*Je ne pense pas que ça a commencé à se régler, mais il y a des technologies qui sont plus genrées que d'autres. En général, les mecs aiment bien gros être sur le terminal... Des fois, on a des façons de fonctionner où on met pas vraiment du monde qui sont moins technologiquement avancés, en leur offrant différents [moyens] de communications. [It began to... I don't believe that it began to change, but there are technologies that are more gendered than others. In general, guys will really like to be on the terminal.... Sometimes, we have ways of doing things where we don't really put people that are less technologically advanced, by offering them different means of communications.]*

(January 8th 2018)

So, even though gender-based hierarchy is recognized as being somewhat present at *Koumbit*, the way the work is organized and the practices implemented are not tackling directly that issue like they do for hierarchy of class. Interestingly, while it is not something that is openly discussed as

being part of their practices, the work at the farm was not really affected by a gender-based hierarchy as no division of labour was intentionally or unintentionally based on gender. Essentially, what it means, is to initiate the dismantlement of gender-based hierarchy in the workplace, we must consider contextual and gender-based issues affecting people even before integrating them in a working environment; privileges borne by people because of their gender identity can still prevail even in non-hierarchical workplaces if no means are put in place to counter-balance the effects of those privileges. This notion could also be extended to the notion of race. But this question coming from the existence of different forms of oppression and privileges tackles the notion of intersectionality in the workplace, which in itself would require an entire dedicated work, if not a literature to address. I then have to let this topic of discussion open for others to take on, since it goes way beyond the possibility of analysis of this thesis.

Implementing non-hierarchical work practices, or more precisely elements of work practices fostering the dismantlement of hierarchy, does not equate with getting rid of hierarchy in the wider sense. As inequalities may subsist and some form of hierarchy can sometimes be defended, it really means more to work against oppressive hierarchical organizing, most likely connected to the hierarchy of command, in order to offer people a workplace where they can learn, express their potential and achieve a quality of livelihood that ensure them to survive well.

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1 Non-hierarchical work practices: an evolving process emerging out of a collective culture

Since I designed my research with the combination of J.K. Gibson-Graham's weak theory/thick description approach and Diane Vaughan's Theory elaboration approach to social science research, my intent was to let my observations and the two cases I studied talk by themselves about social theory. The previous section was a step in that process offering me analysis to "elaborate" (using Diane Vaughan's word) on the practices and human activities I witnessed during my research with a small input of already existing theory; in other words, using weak theory to develop some theoretical propositions. Starting with the concept of "alternative initiatives" and "non-hierarchical work practices" to define my object of research, I, overtime, let this so-called "object" talk by itself and adjust my theoretical perspective to better translate the human experiences and activities I have witnessed. Hence, even though I started with the intent of exposing the impacts of "non-hierarchical work practices" in "alternative initiatives", I have now to redefine what is framing the "non-hierarchy" in the two initiatives I studied.

In the previous section, I have been able to expose how some shared elements of practices are used in both *Koumbit* and the farm that contribute to dismantling hierarchy and how they impact people's livelihoods. But, like I mentioned in that section, I discovered that there are few shared practices *per se* implemented in both collective enterprises, such as the use of a collective schedule or a specific meeting process. What I have been able to observe, according to the analysis I have made, are elements of practices, or more accurately organizing principles, that frame the work practices that actually are non-hierarchical. What brought me to develop that interpretation is the social process ongoing in various economic initiatives that JK Gibson-Graham observed and consequently defined as ethical negotiations. Because people constantly enter in negotiation to develop, implement and adapt their practices in their economic activities (still used here in the wider sense including traditionally invisible feminine work), practices are always changing and evolving according to context and the needs of the people involved; explaining also the differences between *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent*. As one of the workers of *Koumbit*

reminded me, the type organization that are the two initiatives come from a more dynamic or evolutive than just people collectively deciding on a certain way to work together:

*[...] ça s'inscrit dans un processus... C'est un processus « écologique »; c'est des individus qui essaient d'être libres dans une société qui n'est pas libre. Alors, comment qu'ils essaient de se structurer ces gens-là. Et c'est quoi les solutions, et tout ça c'est de l'immanent. Ça émane de la volonté de s'organiser collectivement. [it is part of a process... It's an ecological process; it's individuals trying to be free in an unfree society. Then, how they try to structure themselves, these people. And what are the solutions, and all of this is immanent. This emanates from the willingness to get organized, together]*

(A worker-member at *Koumbit* , June 13th 2018)

So, a first interpretation coming from my research is that the practices in place are the result of a process of continual ethical negotiations, which is framed by values and ambitions coming from a collective culture taking roots outside and inside the organization (sometimes coming from a shared ideology). Accordingly, it is not the practices alone that positively impact livelihoods, but also the continuous ethical negotiations process defining those practices. What is shared by *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* are organizational principles resonating with their respective collective culture claiming to dismantle hierarchy on different levels. It is those principles that frame the continuous process of negotiating the work practices. The principles are the following: regular and varied (in purposes) team meetings, the reliance on both autonomy and mutual aid, concrete cooperation in the daily work, consensus-oriented decision-making, clear defined roles, continuous training and space for learning-by-doing, and, a trust culture between everyone.

Hence, while some elements of practices, namely what I called the organizational principles, are constant, the non-hierarchical work practices are always evolving; changing and adapting to the context and to the people composing the organization. So, the dismantlement of hierarchy within the workplace in both organizations is never completely done and always in process; it is the organizational principles that ensure and frame this pursuit of hierarchy dismantlement in the workplace. As a *Koumbit* worker-member explained to me: “*Koumbit c'est devenu ce que c'est à*



*cause de réflexions collectives; il y a plus de 15 ans de réflexions et d'accumulation de pratiques*” [Koumbit became what it is because of collective reflections; there are more than 15 years of reflections and accumulation of practices] (June 13th, 2018). Although it is the history of the organization that has moulded the practices and the principles, the molding is ongoing and is never over.

But this process does not necessarily come by itself; as I already mentioned, this research aimed to look at non-hierarchical work practices in alternative economic initiatives. By “alternative”, I recall, I was looking at initiatives that were based on three elements, defined in the *Routledge Companion for alternative organizations* (Parkers & al., 2014): 1) Protects fairly conventional notions of individual autonomy; 2) Considers cooperation, solidarity, equality and community as central to human, since humans are vulnerable and powerless left alone; and 3) must have responsibility to the future. Because the two organizations can be defined as “alternatives”, according to this definition, and that was also a fact even before the research, it could be argued that they share this evolutionary process of continuously negotiating practices because they are alternative initiatives in the first place. And that might be the case. But since my research was not looking into that possible relation, I cannot adjudicate on that conclusion. It is clear though, that because they are alternative initiatives in the first place, trying to dismantle hierarchy in the workplace is a way for both *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* to correspond to their alternative nature. Hence, the evolutive process in which they are both involved, that supports the dismantlement of hierarchy of command, can be also shared by various other alternative organizations and initiatives. When an organization considers solidarity, cooperation, equality, community and individual autonomy all at the same time, trying to dismantle hierarchy is an interesting way to answer to these considerations in the everyday life. This interpretation of a shared evolutive process echoes with the conclusion brought forward by members of the *Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective* (CRAC) on the existence of a shared political culture amongst anti-authoritarian groups and collectives (Sarrasin & al., 2016). As I mentioned earlier, in both *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* people have relational or direct connections with militant organizations or specific social movements. It is then interesting to acknowledge the more potential link between the anti-authoritarian political culture of self-organization and the collective cultures I observed in both collective enterprises.

However, the conclusion that I make that dismantling hierarchy in the workplace constitutes an evolutionary process really echoes with Frédéric Laloux's description of Evolutionary Teal organizations, where he describes how these organizations listen to an evolutionary purpose (2014, pp. 193-222). While I refer to a collective evolutionary process nourishing and adapting the practices within the frame of organizational principles, Laloux's ideas talk about people listening to the organization's evolutionary purpose to adapt, transform and change their work within an organization (ibid.). Even though different, these two ideas about how organizations dismantling hierarchy at work point out something really important and that should stay central to any human organization looking for true social transformation and meaningful contributions to society: to stay in an evolutionary process, where status-quo is always questioned to concretely answer to the needs of the people in a constantly changing context. But, talking only of "purpose" might be problematic; when the purpose of an organization is to produce or offer something that might become useless for people or problematic for environmental conservation, such as brand-new fuel-powered car engines, only working for the purpose of the organization might push the people to develop strategies to maintain the pertinence of brand-new fuel-powered car engines on the market. This is the reason why Frédéric Laloux will talk of "evolutionary purpose" organization (2014). But, what is also interesting to add to his contribution, is to point out the necessity of an alternative nature of the organization to maintain the continuous evolution of the "purpose" to continuously redefine the pertinence of the organization in a perspective of social transformation for better futures and social justice; otherwise, the organization can, for its own survival, continue to be involved in an activity that is no longer needed or simply causing harm to the environment and risking the quality of the future. But more discussion, research and debate is necessary to address that issue and to really provide an interesting contribution to the centrality of the purpose of an organization.

## 7.2 Dismantling hierarchy in the workplace; not a finality but a tool to fight oppression and liberate work

For many people, and even more so within activist circles, the idea of dismantling hierarchy often relates to the various revolutionary attempts of workers' movements to take over their workplace

from their bosses. Accordingly, this idea is often seen as a revolutionary goal for the movements to liberate workers from capitalist exploitation. Hence, attempts from the past are often seen as models to replicate to achieve revolution. Nevertheless, in my research, even though non-hierarchical workplaces are still presented as a desirable revolutionary goal, it seems that it is more of a tool to fight capitalist exploitation than being a result of removing it; the following elements will detail how I make this conclusion.

The first element is really simple; you can still be driven for profit and exploit others even though organized without hierarchy. As one coop member at the farm reminded us during a group discussion:

*I think we should be careful in mixing up the drive to make a profit with non-hierarchy. I don't think those things are mutually exclusive. I think you can put a group of bankers together, and create a coop, and make a lot of money. If those members had a similar drive and the direction of the business was to make money and to make a profit. I think you can be non-hierarchical and drive for profit.*

(Coop member 1, October 4th 2017)

What this coop member was reminding us is that removing hierarchy does not eliminate capitalist reflexes and interests by itself. Even though the hierarchy of command is the typical capitalist form of organizing a business, a non-hierarchical organization not trying to fight against the injustices and failures of the capitalist economy could easily replicate capitalist practices in other aspects of its activities; lacking the critical perspective to address inequalities, injustices and oppression inside and outside the organization. It is then possible to imagine a non-hierarchical organization still asking its workers to work extended hours and exploit external workers working for a supplier. Relatively, dismantling hierarchy cannot be seen as a revolutionary goal by itself. What the two organizations I have studied showed is that dismantling hierarchy in the workplace offers the possibility for workers to initiate ethical negotiations to liberate their work, tackling the question of their own wellbeing (in the different forms I listed earlier), but also address the situation of others connected to the organization. This is the primal impact of implementing non-hierarchical organizational principles in the workplace coming from my analysis. But this possibility does not

come from nowhere; it comes from their respective collective cultures framed by their shared organizational principles.

But how does it concretely contribute to a more just future and/or to social struggles against capitalist exploitation? Like I already mentioned, it helps to liberate work for individuals and gives them the possibility to liberate time for other things meaningful to bring in social transformation. For individuals, work is liberated first because the practices coming from the organizational principles permit a redefinition of work as it is negotiated by the people consisting the collective inside the organization; individuals, collectively, have the power to draw the lines of their work and includes elements of work that is often ignored in the capitalist definition of work (defining work as being more than just productive waged labour). Working conditions, also being part of the definition of work, are democratically negotiated, also offering individuals a way to better define the frame of their work. Moreover, because autonomy and responsibility are central to dismantle hierarchy, every individual takes power over the control of their own work and its purpose. Collectively, then, the sense of work is also transformed because it becomes an activity of learning, of development of skills, and of expression of everyone's true capacities; workers together, in cooperation and through mutual aid, ensure the achievement of all the tasks and duties needed to be completed and are able to support the needs for training and teaching that can become required. Consequently, the sense of competition between colleagues is extensively diminished, transforming work into an activity where self-completion and success is possible without fighting with others, but also resulting from a collective process of solidarity and cooperation.

Good examples of how workers can enter in negotiations to address other issues and use their workplace to contribute to more than producing services or goods would be the practice of creating solidarity baskets at the farm, to bring accessibility to organic food to people with limited financial resources, or the practice of *Koumbit* of reducing service fees (or even gratuity) for community organizations with little resources. Moreover, because workers can negotiate their schedule for work according to their needs, more literally at *Koumbit* and by choosing their worker statuses at the farm, they become able to allocate some of their livelihood time to other forms of work, where they can contribute to social movements or solidarity activities outside of their workplace. Hence, the workplace is not transforming the society just by existing, but a workplace like *Koumbit* or the

farm is helping people have the time, resources, energy and capacities to contribute to social movements and community well-being both inside and outside of their work environment.

As a result, it becomes clearer that dismantling hierarchy is not a revolutionary goal; it is a tool, or an important step to contribute to social transformation for justice. With collective enterprises offering workers the possibility to negotiate not only working conditions but also their life conditions, workers become able to integrate community engagement and activist work in their livelihood and hence are able to contribute to the wider struggle for social change. Whether is it for environmental justice, food justice, access to technology or more directly to fight against capitalism, workers at both *Koumbit* and at the farm are able to use their workplace as tools to work in that sense because they have the possibility to enter in ethical negotiations to define their livelihoods. Hence, without being the sole avenue for alternatives to capitalist organizations, non-hierarchical organizational principles and practices are parts of a whole set of tools that can be used to contribute to a wider social transformation.

### 7.3 Formal structure vs fluidity: how to ensure the capacity of the organization to continuously dismantle hierarchy?

Yes, dismantling hierarchy can really contribute to workers' liberation and social transformation for justice; but it is also important to point out some elements of question that still prevail and that could inspire future work. One of the elements that stayed a question, or better said a "tension", all along my research process is the need, or not, for formal and solid structure within the initiative to be sure that hierarchy is being continuously dismantled. This tension became really evident as worker-members at *Koumbit* always insisted on the clarity and respect of their methods and procedures while it was something never really presented and discussed at the farm. Fluidity and spontaneity were even advocated by one coop member at the farm when we discussed the rotation basis for food preparation. I want to present the two perspectives and some reflections I developed overtime.

For *Koumbit* workers, implementing clear and formalized rules and processes is seen as essential to ensure a continuation of their non-hierarchical organizing within the collective enterprise as it

prevents authoritarian people from controlling decision within the collective enterprise and taking on illegitimate leadership. As it was explained to me, Koumbit did not always have these procedures and rules; it was some of its worker-members over time that pushed for the implementation of these rules and procedures (Group Interview 2, June 13th, 2018). Those people pushed for the implementation of these to prevent some patterns of power (and hierarchy) to become too prevalent (Privileged men informally taking more space and power in the organization) and to prevent difficulties when facing conflict; because *Koumbit* has seen periods of conflicts and it did not always turn out well for workers (Ibid.). Moreover, the structure that resulted from these rules and procedures is now appreciated by many worker-members as it reassures them in their capacity of following the progress of the organization and the history behind decisions, practices and the actual existence of *Koumbit* and its actual form.

Differently, at the farm, fluidity, spontaneity and informal processes were sometimes privileged to ensure more flexibility and lighter process to decide. Because respecting rules, codes of decisions and procedures can be (but are not certainly) time-consuming and exhausting, spontaneity and on-the-go collective decisions were really frequent at the farm. Nevertheless, according to my experience at the farm, people were able to address important issues, to own their right to speak, and to point out their concern without having someone taking all the place and dominating the discussions. But, it is also important to mention that not everyone was included in all decision-making, as not everyone had the same engagement and status within the coop (either coop member, salaried worker, volunteer or WWOOFer), which is a major difference with *Koumbit*'s workers composition.

Then comes the question; which of the two ways of ensuring internal functioning is best to continuously dismantle hierarchy? Spoiler alert: there will be no answer to that question in this thesis. But, the discussions, observations and some interpretations I have made during my research can offer some elements of response. As some radical scholars and thinkers have proposed in the past, what we might need to develop emancipatory organizations is to let the possibility of a wide variety of democratic organizing (*plural democracy*) take place at the same time (Mouffe, 2000 pp. 17-35). In resonance, the examples of *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* expose that with two different settings, contexts and histories, two organizations creating

emancipation can adopt different organizing tools and methods. At *Koumbit*, the experience of the workers, the different conflicts in the past and the minimal variety of worker statuses brought them to integrate various procedures, specific sets of rules and important structuring practices to put everyone on the same page and ensure the total capacity of everyone to navigate within the organization. Differently, at the farm, where various types of workers come in, with different types of engagements and contribution, flexibility, spontaneity and looser set of rules of organizing were employed, possibly to correspond with the continuously changing composition of the team and to ensure an easier integration of temporary workers not looking for long-time involvement. Hence, it seems that there are no real answers the question, as the empirical experiments coming from *Koumbit* and the farm points toward two different directions because of their respective settings and contexts. However, it does not mean to ignore well-thought out and defining organizing principles and structure for emancipatory initiatives; my research actually exposes that some organizational principles are actually shared and needed to ensure the capacity of two collective enterprises to continuously dismantle hierarchy. Hence, what my research suggests to deepen on that question is how organizations come to set themselves within the spontaneity/flexibility-rigidity spectrum of their organizational practices and on what criteria such definition of organizational practices came to be. Without pointing this out, *Koumbit* and the farm showed me that their respective contexts pushed the two collective enterprises to lean towards a side of this spectrum to assure their continuity and their capacity to make people work together.

#### 7.4 Challenges of implementing non-hierarchical work practices

Implementing practices that challenge dominant organizing of the workplace is not something that can be done without facing difficulties, adaptation and some inevitable challenges. My observation of the work at both *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* brought me to seize some challenges that both of them have to face and deal with. While there are no solutions coming from my research for those challenges, it is interesting to name and discuss them to really understand how the elements of work practices I have observed impact the workplace.

#### 7.4.1 Accessibility to non-hierarchical workplace

A first challenge that was brought up during early conversations, especially with workers at Koumbit, was the accessibility to non-hierarchical practices or non-hierarchical workplaces. Dismantling hierarchy in the workplace asks workers to give their full potential to their daily activities because it asks for autonomy, a sense of responsibility towards the organization and willingness to learn and cooperate with others. Sometimes, elements of individual life can counter one's capacity and willingness to contribute to such an extent in their workplace. Moreover, if someone comes from an environment where obedience is required and initiative are never required, or where only individual (and monetary) success is valued, it can be hard to integrate a non-hierarchical workplace and enter into a culture shift to feel comfortable at work. A worker-member at Koumbit explained how this challenge sometimes comes in with external pressure from mainstream society:

*C'est juste qu'on est dans une société occidentale où est-ce que le monde se juge inter-individuellement et que du monde se font traiter de « hippies » pendant 30 ans, puis qu'après elles se tannent et finissent par entrer dans le moule. Puis ça, c'est une pression de la société sur les individus qui est comme externe au collectif, mais qui nous affecte en tant que collectif. [It's just that we are in a Western society where people judge each-other and that some people are called 'hippies' for 30 years, then after they get tired of it and end up integrating the mainstream. Then this, it's a pressure from the society on individuals that is external to the collective, but that affects us as a collective.]*

(Worker-member 1, June 13<sup>th</sup> 2018)

At the farm, this challenge was experienced in how family and individual life, even though connected to the farm work, was sometimes interfering with it. One coop member explained this challenge:

*But because the farming never stops, I almost feel that I have less ability to be with my kids than if I was a school teacher maybe, or a bank manager, or just those random jobs where there is a lot of redundancy within the organizational structure, so when you call in the*



*morning and say 'Hey, I can't come in', well things can go on usually without too much a hiccup.*

(Coop Member 1, October 4<sup>th</sup> 2017).

Another related difficulty, but that is more specific to the farm, and that was pointed out by one coop member, is how the imbrication of intimate personal life and family life with the farming can become hard to manage. At *Koumbit*, since the work environment is not also the place workers sleep and raise their children, the imbrication of the spheres of “work” and “intimacy” was not impacting on the capacity of everyone to integrate the collective enterprise. On the other hand, this mix of family life with the farming life at the farm created an interesting inclusion of some housework to the collective work of the organization, then diminishing the burden of housework by sharing it with others.

So, when a culture shift and the capacity for autonomy and responsibility is not possible for some individuals (for a variety of reason), it can become impossible or too hard for some to integrate non-hierarchical workplaces. It brings back here the affirmation I made earlier that building non-hierarchical workplaces cannot be a set as a goal for social transformation, but more as a tool for it. But then, how to manage hierarchical oppression at work when not everyone is able to dismantle hierarchy in the collective side of their livelihood? The possible avenue that my research suggests is to stick on the process of ethical negotiation where people could negotiate not to participate in certain spheres of the collective life of their work organization. The way that the work is dispatched among various types of works at the farm is an interesting example of how this could then be managed; recognizing the superior engagement of some individuals and their rights to decide on certain issues and accepting the lesser contribution of others when they cannot participate at the same extent, while maintaining the possibility and capacity of everyone to engage in ethical negotiations for the elements that affects their own lives. On that matter, the idea of sweat equity, is an important element to further discuss on the question of the accessibility of non-hierarchical workplaces.

#### 7.4.2 Stress management, external stressors and risks of self-exploitation

A second important challenge that was brought out by both workers at *Koumbit* and workers at the farm is the difficulty, both individually and collectively, to manage stress and stressful external factors affecting work. This challenge appears because the responsibility of the collective enterprise is shared collectively. It is not because you feel like stopping that you can stop working; the organization continues to exist and needs constant and continuous care and work. This is even more striking at the farm, since nature does not stop impacting your work when you take a day off; you have to face the vagaries of nature. It is sure that working collectively dissipates the burden of the whole organization; people can help each other. But the stress can become also very contagious between workers. At the farm, while this responsibility is distributed unevenly between the different type of workers, this still affects a majority of them, since the failures of the farm affect the capacity to offer food to its workers. Nevertheless, it is mainly the coop members, altogether, that have to face this challenge. Moreover, this challenge creates a risk of self-exploitation, then preventing the liberation of work that this kind of initiatives often look for. A worker-member at *Koumbit* explained it that way :

*D'une autre façon, je pense que le risque d'autogestion, c'est de s'exploiter soi-même. Je pense que c'est un risque que l'on a souvent; de dépasser nos limites, de dépasser même les normes de travail, parce qu'on travaille pour le collectif, parce qu'on a les trois chapeaux, ou les deux chapeaux, d'être comme employéE-employeurE et le collectif en même temps.* [On the other hand, I think that the risk of *autogestion*, it's self-exploitation. I think it's a risk that we often have; to go beyond our limits, to even bypass labour standards, because we work for the collective, because we wear three hats, or two, we are like employee-employer and the collective at the same time.]

While my research did not bring true solutions to eradicate that risk and to confront that challenge, it helped unveil the important distinction to make between “self-exploitation” and “self-discipline”. As explained by a worker member at *Koumbit*, self-discipline is inherent to the liberty you get in non-hierarchical workplace. But this self-discipline comes with your own interest in the success of the organization, which is essential to ensure the quality of livelihood when you integrate an

organization. But at a certain point, when you surpass your interests and your energy to ensure that your work is well-done, it is easy to fall into self-exploitation; a moment where you don't just ask yourself to do your best, but forget the other important things in your life (self-care, rest, physical activity, family work, etc.) and try to perform to an unattainable level of individual productivity. When you get to self-exploitation, the organization comes first; before your own well-being and quality of livelihood. But self-discipline is achieved when you find the balance between your own well-being and quality of livelihood and your contribution to the organization; when you are able to give your best to the organization and to shoulder your responsibilities, but you still respect your needs and energy in other aspects of your life. But looking at how we can prevent self-exploitation when dismantling hierarchy would merit another whole research project.

The two main challenges I have presented here were shared by the collective enterprises I studied. Hence, I felt important to discuss them because they could easily be shared with other similar initiatives or experienced by people actually trying to implement non-hierarchical principles in their organizations. Nonetheless, both *Koumbit* and the farm had their respective and specific challenges to face in relation to dismantling hierarchy in the workplace, but they seem less relevant to expose in this thesis developing on more general knowledge about non-hierarchical organization. Challenges and difficulties are inevitable when trying to implement change and so, it is central to implementing non-hierarchical work practices and must be seen as elements of development and continuous amelioration rather than failures of such kind of organizations. As I said earlier, dismantling hierarchy in the workplace is a continuous process; facing difficulties is part of that process.

## **8. Theoretical consideration for further research**

One of the intents of my thesis is to contribute to anti-capitalist and revolutionary reflections on strategies and ideas to overcome capitalism and enact social transformation in the daily practices. Using JK Gibson-Graham framework of diverse economies and the language (or vocabulary) that comes with it have been really helpful to move out of a defeatist perspective where capitalism is hegemonic and everywhere; following them, we are encouraged to change our economic language to acknowledge the economic diversity that exists and use this as a lever to implement community economies detaching our dependence to the capitalist economy to better answer our needs for more just and sustainable futures. Nevertheless, it became really difficult to maintain a solid and important critique and opposition to the capitalist economy as a hegemonic force while the framework asks us to stop using capitalism as a reference for the study of economic practices: when removing capitalism from your economic language, you blur the lines between what is capitalist and what is not. Also, because no enterprises are strictly capitalist in practice, exploitative and destructive enterprises and initiatives can easily integrate their framework as being “alternatives” simply because they use surplus for other things than profit or because productive work is not “salaried work”. Hence, when erasing references to the capitalist practices or capitalism in general to enter in ethical negotiations to create community economies, there is still a risk of losing the target of social and revolutionary struggles for social transformation and letting oppressive and destructive capitalist interests to recuperate our initiatives without seeing it coming.

In every strong movement against an oppressive system, there is a constant focus put on the problematic system that operates; you could not imagine a strong feminist movement that never analyses the imbrication of patriarchy in our social life or a strong anti-racist movement that is not taking about white supremacy. So, when trying to discuss initiatives challenging the capitalist system, you have to be able to point how the practices are not supporting capitalism or capitalist oppressive and destructive practices. Hence, there is a certain level of reference to capitalism that is needed to work with JK Gibson-Graham’s framework if we want to maintain an anticapitalistic perspective to our initiatives. In my thesis, I think that maintaining such a language was a bit hard to do and might be considered a weakness of my analysis. I tried to expose how the non-hierarchical organizing principles I unveiled are transformative and suggest a shift beyond and out of capitalism

and to maintain a level of criticism and engagement against capitalism, but using JK Gibson-Graham's framework makes it harder than simply using the more common capitalocentric language that easily points out where capitalist reflexes and practices are replicated in various initiatives.

However, I think that working with the diverse economy framework is not vain and still serves its purpose of pulling out revolutionary or transformative initiatives from the vast amount of new economic initiatives and should be used in further works. As Ethan Miller argues, we can be both anti-capitalist and post-capitalist (i.e. defending diverse economies) (2015), but the articulation of the two perspectives, I believe, still needs to be deepened, debated and developed to make it more sound, accessible and useful for social movements and anti-capitalist struggles. Fortunately, there are already other scholars engaged in that process, such as the *Collectif de Recherche sur les Économies de Communauté* (CREC) in Quebec, and in which I took part. Such as dismantling hierarchy, dismantling capitalist exploitation and destruction will be a continuous process, and developing new understandings of the economy by deepening the work of others is part of it. I hope that my own work will also contribute to that endeavour.

## Conclusion

*Vamos caminando... vamos dibujando el camino.*

[We go forward walking... we go forward drawing the way]

- *Calle 13*, a Puerto-Rican Hip-Hop band

Experiments of non-hierarchical workplaces or simply ideations of them are not new and the examples of *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* are not the only ones actually taking place in Quebec (crac-kebec.org; *Transform/er Montreal* 2016 & 2018 Conferences; *Beyond Capitalism* Conference in Montreal, 2016). From the first moment of the Industrial Revolution in Europe to the 1960s, the workers' movements in Europe, Asia and the Americas have been a fecund milieu for the revolutionary ideas and experimentations of non-hierarchical initiatives to transform the workplace (Baillargeon, 2004 ; Drapeau & Kruzynski, 2005; Dario & Azzelini, 2012; Association Autogestion, 2015). Nowadays, while being strongly defended within radical social and ecologist movements, thinking about dismantling hierarchy in the workplace is emerging from a wider spectrum of milieus as we are now facing increasing inequalities and precariousness and an imminent global environmental crisis (Laloux, 2014; Bernstein & al., 2016). In Quebec, the established tradition of social economy and the institutionalized promoters of it offer a specific and facilitating legal and logistical frame to launch such initiatives.

The two cases I have presented in this thesis really helped me to put forward interesting principles that supports the dismantling of hierarchy in the workplace to better the livelihoods of the people. More than simple practices, these principles could help organizations willing to transform their work environment to frame their practices to work into that sense and develop a collective culture looking for social transformation. As I have shown, dismantling hierarchy in the workplace becomes possible when the internal culture relies on the capacity of every worker to participate in a democratic process of "ethical negotiations" of their livelihoods, to use J.K. Gibson-Graham's concept in inter-personal relationships within economic initiatives. With this process, workers are able to gain control over their own work, as they participate in its definition within the organization and are able to widen its sense to better balance their livelihoods. Doing so, they develop the collective capacity of alleviating some inequities, distribute power within the organization and reaffirm control over their own livelihoods. But it is with the organizational principles I have

exposed that both *Koumbit* and the *Ferme coop aux champs qui chantent* achieve to maintain this capacity of workers to enter this democratic process of ethical negotiations. Of a number of six, the elements of practices that I have defined as organizational principle are the following: regular and varied meetings; consensus-based decision-making process; reliance on individual autonomy and shared responsibility; true cooperation and mutual aid in the daily work; clear and well-defined roles; and space and support for training and learning -by-doing.

Working with these two collective enterprises, I have been able to observe and address with workers some of the impacts of the non-hierarchical work practices ensuing from their shared organizational principles. The first major impact, as I already said, is the transformation of the sense of work within these two workplaces. It is first transformed because its sense is widened; not only the productive (in the sense of goods or services production) work is recognized, but some elements of care, housework and collective life is integrated in their respective definition of the work in the organizations. Moreover, work can become more than just a mundane drudge to have the money to pay your bills and offer a better occupational well-being. With space to learn, to try out new things or to bring new ideas and experience them, workers feel they are needed, responsible and able to do more than what other workplaces ask them to. I would argue that it offers the capacity to workers to express a greater portion of their full capacities, on the contrary of traditional hierarchical workplace (De Geus, 2014). A second impact that I have been exposed is the collective capacity of workers to fight inequalities. The first way this impact comes in is through the possibilities of workers to contribute to the definition of their working conditions. But more than that, inequalities are also tackled by the way surpluses are managed within those two collective enterprises; because workers have space and time to address most issues collectively, they are able to develop practices or implement conditions that answer to issues of inequality. At *Koumbit*, the most salient example of it is their decision of using a unique hourly wage to compensate everyone for their work. At the farm, their practice of offering solidarity veggie baskets to low-income people and to offer food and training to volunteers and seasonal workers is also a good example. Finally, the last major impact is the possibility that these kinds of workplaces offer to workers to negotiate their community life in their livelihoods; as workers are able to negotiate their conditions and the definition of their work, they can also negotiate the time and energy they give to community issues that go beyond the limits of their working organizations. At *Koumbit*, time for militant and activist

work for social justice is respected and sometimes integrated in the weekly work schedule. Workers can easily negotiate their schedule to do so and the needs and means of each worker are respected. At the farm, social relations with the wider community are at the centre of their activity as they ask their partner-clients to participate in the farming work once in a while and they maintain continuous communication with them about healthy food, sustainability and farming life.

While these impacts are interesting to point out, an important contribution of my work is to expose that the organizing principles framing the non-hierarchical practices is the result of an evolutive collective culture where dismantling hierarchy is central. Before even being just practical, like we can see in some cooperatives, applying the non-hierarchical organizing principles serves to maintain, over time and across the ever-changing context, the capacity of every worker to participate in the continuous care and pursuit of their organization's purpose as well as being able to negotiate their livelihoods with the needs of the organization. Hence, the practices in both organizations are never fixed or strictly determined; workers and members, when needed, will suggest change, adopt new practices, modify their conditions while the principles will be maintained to ensure this capacity of continuously evolving, and so with their internal collective culture. But more engrained in the DNA of the two collective enterprises studied here is their shared alternative nature; individual autonomy is respected, significant considerations for cooperation, solidarity, equality and community is shared by both, and considerations for better futures is part of their mission statement, which all correspond to the definition of an alternative organization Parkers & al. defined in the *Routledge Companion for Alternative Organizations* (2014). So, the evolutive collective cultures existing in both organizations, while genuine and distinctive, are first and foremost emerging from the alternative nature of the two collective enterprises. Hence, it is not only their continuous and evolving process of dismantling hierarchy that is important to consider to put them as interesting examples of initiatives, but also the fact that they are profoundly alternative to mainstream capitalist enterprises, which are still constrained in competitive, financially profit-driven and exploitative patterns that are actually contributing social injustices and environmental disasters. Briefly, what it means, is that it is not only trying to dismantle hierarchy by adopting the principles exposed in this study that can make an initiative contributive for social transformation; making it alternative is primal.



As a contribution to wider social movements for social transformation and people interested in adopting more just practices in their workplace, it is important to retain that dismantling hierarchy in the workplace is not an objective, even though desirable for many, but more of a strategy. It is more useful and significant as a tool to release time and energy for workers to be able to balance their livelihoods and then use their new time and energy to contribute to social transformation. Dismantling hierarchy in a workplace alone cannot contribute to the dissemination of concrete alternative to capitalist economies; but it offers people willing to change the world the work environment to experiment liberated work, and democratically and collectively build the conditions to widen social mobilization for justice in the various spheres of human lives. One of the main contemporary anarchist ideas is that we have to make revolution anywhere and everywhere, here and now, practice prefiguration of the lifestyles and livelihoods that should come after the defeat of capitalism (Springer, 2018; Sarrasin et al., 2016). I agree with that idea; and implementing non-hierarchical work practices is a step into this strategy of action. But as I exposed, practices alone and, I repeat, dismantling hierarchy in the workplace is not enough. As the environment is being destroyed, gender equity being far from being attained, the uprising of new racist movements, and continuously growing economic inequalities, it is not only by liberating work that the society will turn better. Experimenting non-hierarchical practices at work can change people and foster cooperation & mutual aid. But it is with framing principles, and the values that come with it, such as solidarity, democracy, transparency, honesty, humility and cooperation, that a culture shift would happen and support true change and social transformation for a just society and a safe environment.

To conclude, I hope that my present contribution will be an interesting one for people struggling with the ways work can be liberated and hierarchy dismantled. I will certainly not defend the idea that my research produces a strict and universal theorization of non-hierarchical work practices, so I hope others will build upon and critique my work to extend the knowledge in that sense. Similarly to other scholars or militants, I strongly believe that we can learn a lot from others and this was the main goal of that thesis; exposing and making visible the practices of some, so that others could learn from them. Many other initiatives working to dismantle hierarchy exists and their experience is for sure also relevant. In Quebec, there is not a lot of empirical work being done on that topic and I believe the urgency of developing new alternatives should invite other Quebec scholars to do

so, in a way that we could learn more by discovering the diversity of practices in place. It is important to disseminate alternative practices and I hope I have done a good job in that sense. Moreover, I also want to invite other people to continue to question and study hierarchy, not only the hierarchy of command that exists in organizations, but also the other forms of hierarchy that oppress people everywhere in the world. To build a world free of oppression, we should continuously reaffirm our comprehension of the hierarchies that affect us. My contribution is modest in that sense, but I hope it helped to understand and expose how hierarchy is never completely dismantled and that the work in that sense is never finished. Losing sight of what we fought against and the understanding of it can become problematic; the recent return of fascist and racist ideas on the public sphere is just one example of the consequences of not doing it.

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## Appendices

### a. Introductory interview guide

(To be adjusted according to findings from the entreprises' documentation)

1. Depuis quand votre organisation existe-t-elle?
  - a. Quelles furent les raisons de sa creation? Les objectifs?
  - b. Depuis quand y travaillez-vous personnellement?
2. Y a-t-il eu des changements majeurs au sein de l'organisation depuis ses débuts?
  - a. Lesquels?
3. Comment définiriez-vous la mission de votre organisation?
  - a. A-t-elle change au fil du temps?
  - b. Est-ce que les changements préalablement mentionnés ont eu un effet sur cette mission?
4. Quelles sont les principales activités menées par votre organisation?
  - a. Sont-elles toutes "payantes" pour les personnes externes à l'organisation?
  - b. Y-a-il d'autres activités qui se joignent à celle-ci?
  - c. Ont-elles change au fil du temps? Pourquoi?
5. Comment définiriez-vous les valeurs portés par votre organisation? Votre collectif?
  - a. Est-ce que cela se marie bien? (If not the same for the two main questions)
  - b. Est-ce que les valeurs de votre organisation ont change au fil du temps?
6. Comment définissez-vous et expliquez-vous l'organisation du travail au sein de votre organisation?
  - a. Depuis quand est-ce que le travail s'organise et se coordonne de cette façon? Quelles ont été les premières "structures" d'organisation mises en place par le passé?
  - b. Y a-t-il eu des difficultés à instaurer ce système d'organisation du travail?
  - c. Quelles sont les principaux taches à accomplir de manière régulière? Comment sont-elles distribuées?
  - d. Combien de personnes travaillent au sein de l'organisation en tout? Est-ce que ces personnes ont toutes le même statut par rapport à l'organisation?
  - e. Y a-t-il des bénévoles qui contribuent aux activités de votre organisation?
  - f. Comment gérez-vous les relations entre les travailleuses et travailleurs et les différentes personnes impliquées dans vos activités?

## **b. Group interviews guide**

(To be upgraded along the research process)

### Central themes to address during interviews

- Quality of livelihoods (material and emotional)
- Alienation of work and disalienation
- Collective/individual vision of work
- The sense of “work” in non-hierarchical enterprise
- Inequities and problems with traditional/capitalist organization
- The idea of transition and the possibilities of alternative and non-hierarchical organizations
  - o Ecological
  - o Social
  - o Political

### Open-ended questions to ask

1. What would you define as non-hierarchical in your organization/collective enterprise?
  - a. The daily practices? The division of work/tasks? The structure of the organization?
  - b. How is this non-hierarchical?
2. Why being “non-hierarchical”?
  - a. Is it in reaction to inequalities? Inequities?
  - b. Does it has something to deal with your appreciation of work or sense of fulfillment?
  - c. Is it related to a particular shared ideology?
  - d. Does it bring something more (or less) in the workplace?
3. What can you see or define as derivatives of being non-hierarchical/non-hierarchical practices?
  - a. What changes does it bring in the workplace?
  - b. What is better/easy? What is worse/hard?

4. How much you think being non-hierarchical/implementing non-hierarchical practices is transforming people, communities or the society in general?
  - a. On the environmental sphere?
  - b. On the social sphere?
  - c. On the political sphere?
  - d. On the individual sphere (mental and physical health/well-being)
5. Can you imagine implementing non-hierarchical organization in every sector of the economy and human activity in general? Why or why not?

\*\*\*Other questions to be added on the go and along the research process\*\*\*

### c. Consent form



## CONSENTEMENT ÉCLAIRÉ À LA PARTICIPATION À UNE ÉTUDE

### **Titre de l'étude :**

*In transition towards postcapitalist economies in Quebec: How non-hierarchical work practices impact livelihoods?  
/ En transition vers des économies postcapitalistes au Québec: Comment les pratiques de travail non-hiérarchiques impactent les conditions et moyens d'existence?*

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Nous vous invitons à prendre part au projet de recherche susmentionné. Le présent document vous renseigne sur les conditions de participation à l'étude; veuillez le lire attentivement. Au besoin, n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec le chercheur-étudiant pour obtenir des précisions.

### **A. BUT DE LA RECHERCHE**

S'inscrivant dans un projet de recherche plus vaste sur la prolifération de pratiques économiques et politiques diversifiées chapeauté par la professeure Anna Kruzynski et une équipe d'étudiantEs et chercheurEs engagéEs, cette étude a pour but de documenter et de mettre en lumière comment les pratiques de travail non-hiérarchiques ayant lieu dans des initiatives d'alternatives économiques ont un impact significatif sur les conditions générales d'existence (incluant les conditions de travail, le sentiment d'accomplissement, le bien-être, appréciation du temps de loisir, etc.) des personnes prenant part à ces pratiques. Bien que cette étude s'inscrive dans un projet plus large de recherche, l'approche, la méthodologie et l'analyse se constitueront de manière autonome; définissant ainsi l'étude comme un projet de recherche indépendant en soi.

Autrement, l'analyse et les résultats de cette étude, ainsi que les collaborations établies au cours de la recherche, contribueront à la poursuite du projet de recherche mené par Anna Kruzynski et son équipe dans la construction d'une cartographie et d'une analyse des pratiques économiques, politiques, écologiques et culturels contribuant à une transition vers une société post-capitaliste juste dans le territoire aujourd'hui reconnu comme étant le Québec.

## **B. PROCÉDURES DE RECHERCHE**

Puisque cette étude se définit comme une recherche participative, les personnes et les groupes prenant la décision d'y participer sont invitéEs à s'impliquer dans le processus de recherche, notamment pour la validation des informations et observations recueillies, l'analyse et la validation du mémoire de recherche résultant du processus. De plus, les deux groupes (entreprises collectives) participant à la recherche désigneront les personnes (groupe désigné) qui assureront cette implication en plus de celles qui participeront aux entrevues de groupe à l'étape de la cueillette d'information et d'observation.

### **Étape 1 : Observation et cueillette d'informations**

Cette première étape du processus de recherche consistera essentiellement à une consultation des documents écrits et audio-visuels (s'il y en a) de votre entreprise collective et à de l'observation participative (signifiant ici que le chercheur-étudiant participera activement à vos activités) et non-participative de certaines de vos activités.

De plus, les participantEs du groupe désigné par votre collectif/équipe de travail (ce qui peut vous inclure si vous avez été désignéE pour cela) seront rencontréEs pour une entrevue de groupe introductive (un enregistrement audio de l'entrevue sera fait), au moment déterminé par le groupe désigné, où des questions abordant l'organisation du travail au sein du groupe, les valeurs de l'entreprise collective, sa mission, ses activités et sa vision de la transformation sociale seront posées. Suite à cette entrevue, une transcription de l'entrevue sera transmise aux participantEs du groupe désigné pour vérifier et corriger (au besoin) leurs propres propos et les informations recueillies. Ensuite, une analyse d'entrevue (thèmes répertoriés) construite à partir de la transcription révisée sera remise aux participantEs du groupe désigné pour une validation des éléments retenus. Cette validation sera faite en personne, par téléphone, par courriel ou via une plateforme collaborative, à la convenance du groupe désigné.

Par la suite, deux entrevues de groupe (avec enregistrement audio) seront organisées avec les participantEs du groupe désigné, une à mi-chemin de la période d'observation et l'autre à la fin de la période d'observation, afin de discuter des thèmes et éléments répertoriés lors de l'entrevue d'introduction et de l'observation et de nourrir l'analyse des informations recueillies en abordant les thèmes centraux de la recherche. Toutes personnes membres de votre équipe/collectif de travail pourront s'ajouter au groupe désigné pour participer à ces entrevues.

N.B. : Des transcriptions écrites de toutes les entrevues seront transmises aux participantEs du groupe désigné avant la production des analyses d'entrevues afin de leur permettre de modifier, de commenter ou de retirer des informations qu'ils ou elles auraient transmises, au besoin. Les analyses d'entrevues respecteront les possibles modifications effectuées par les participantEs.

### **Étape 2 : Analyse et production du mémoire de recherche**

Suite à l'étape 1, le chercheur-étudiant produira une version préliminaire du chapitre du mémoire abordant l'analyse et les résultats strictement relatifs à votre entreprise collective, qui sera transmise à toute l'équipe/collectif de travail. Un *focus group* (groupe de discussion) avec les personnes désignées (groupe désigné) de l'étape 1, et toutE autre membre de l'équipe/collectif de travail qui désirent y participer, sera ensuite organisé pour commenter cette première version, susciter des discussions et engager des débats. Ceci permettra d'enrichir l'analyse et la détermination des résultats pour la version finale du chapitre. Un va et vient continu entre l'analyse du chercheur-étudiant et des *focus group* sera maintenu jusqu'à ce que le groupe de participantEs à la/aux entrevue(s), en concertation avec le

chercheur-étudiant, décideront que l'analyse, les informations et les résultats retenues seront satisfaisants pour construire le chapitre du mémoire de recherche.

Puisque le projet de recherche s'intéressera à deux cas d'entreprise collective, l'analyse transversale des résultats des deux cas étudiés se feront suite à la deuxième et dernière étude de cas. Pour cette étape, un nouveau *focus group* invitant les participantEs des deux entreprises collectives sera organisé pour aborder les thèmes transversaux aux deux cas étudiés. Un *focus group* subséquent sera organisé au besoin. À partir des nouveaux éléments transversaux soulevés, le chercheur-étudiant produira le chapitre d'analyse transversale qui sera mis à la disposition des participantEs via une plateforme collaborative pour commentaires seulement. La version finale du chapitre d'analyse transversale se construira suite aux commentaires finaux des participantEs.

De plus, avant la soumission du mémoire (*thesis*), une première version complète de celle-ci sera transmise par voie électronique aux participantEs de la recherche afin de donner l'opportunité de la lire et de la commenter. Un laps de temps de 3 semaines sera offert aux participantEs à cet effet, après lequel il sera impossible de faire des modifications. Les commentaires recueillis serviront à peaufiner la version finale du mémoire pour mieux refléter les perspectives des participantEs.

### **Étape 3 : Diffusion et poursuite de la collaboration dans le projet plus vaste**

Suite à la validation des chapitres de résultats, les deux entreprises collectives pourront demander au chercheur-étudiant d'effectuer une/des présentation(s) ou une production écrite détaillant les résultats de l'étude dans leur milieu respectif et via le media privilégié. Un processus de collaboration entre le chercheur et les participantEs sera développé dans cette éventualité.

Autrement, le chercheur-étudiant effectuera des présentations ou des productions écrites académiques au court du processus ou suite à la publication du mémoire.

De plus, comme la description du projet le mentionne, les informations formées, les analyses et les résultats découlant de cette recherche contribueront aussi au projet plus large de construction d'une cartographie et d'analyse des pratiques économiques, politiques, écologiques et culturelles diversifiées sur le territoire reconnu comme le Québec contribuant à la transition vers société postcapitaliste juste. Ainsi, les informations fournies et les résultats de la présente étude serviront aux analyses et à la cartographie du deuxième projet de recherche. Dans cette perspective, vous serez invitéE à signer une autre demande de consentement qui détaillera notamment les manières que les informations seront utilisées.

Finalement, puisque cette étude relève d'un programme de maîtrise universitaire, un mémoire (*thesis*) détaillant toutes les étapes de la recherche ainsi que les résultats sera utilisé comme évaluation finale du chercheur-étudiant et sera déposé en accès libre dans le service *Spectrum* de l'université Concordia. Une présentation orale de ce mémoire pourra être organisée en temps et lieu avec votre collectif de travail, selon votre intérêt et disponibilité à participer à une telle présentation (à vous et vos collègues).

## Résumé de l'engagement des participantEs

<b>Étape 1</b>	Collaborer avec le chercheur-étudiant lors d'observation participative et non-participative
	(Pour les participantEs du groupe désigné) Participer à 1 entrevue de groupe introductive Participer à 2 entrevues de groupe sur les thèmes centraux de la recherche
<b>Étape 2</b>	(Pour les participantEs du groupe désigné) Participer à 1 focus group sur l'analyse de votre entreprise collective Participer à 1 ou 2 focus group sur l'analyse transversale des deux entreprises collectives étudiées
	Commenter le chapitre du mémoire sur l'analyse transversale

## C. RISQUES ET AVANTAGES

La participation à cette recherche peut comporter plusieurs avantages pour votre organisation et possiblement pour vous-même. Le premier avantage notable se trouve dans le processus de recherche qui vous permettra de mettre de l'avant vos pratiques tout en articulant et développant un regard critique et constructif sur celles-ci. De plus, par la publications et productions qui découleront de cette recherche, notamment le mémoire, vos pratiques et vos actions recevront une plus grande visibilité autant au niveau académique qu'au sein de la communauté gravitant autour de la notion d'économie sociale. Finalement, un autre avantage de participer à cette recherche est de pouvoir vous intégrer au projet de recherche ultérieur, mené par Anna Kruzynski et son équipe, où vous pourrez entrer en réseau avec d'autres initiatives partageant votre vision de la transformation sociale et contribuer à la conception de différents outils et à la création de collaborations pouvant soutenir votre organisation et élargir votre impact.

Malgré tout, bien que tous les moyens soient mis en place pour conserver la confidentialité de vos propos, il est possible, de par la singularité de vos pratiques et de la petitesse du milieu dans lequel votre organisation évolue, que vous-même ou vos collègues soient reconnuEs. De plus, puisque la recherche sur approche participative où des enjeux, difficultés et des défis peuvent être mis en lumière, il est possible que vous ressentiez des tensions, des frustrations, de la peine ou de la colère à certains moments du processus.

## D. CONFIDENTIALITÉ

Dans le cadre de cette recherche, toutes les informations obtenues lors des entrevues, des observations par le chercheur-étudiant et de la consultation de vos documents pourront être utilisés pour l'analyse transversale. Toutefois, vos propos demeureront toujours confidentiels. Seul le nom de l'entreprise collective où auront été récupérés vos propos sera divulgué.

Dans le cas de divulgation d'informations indiquant un danger imminent de mort ou de blessures graves pour une personne ou un groupe de personnes identifiables, le chercheur-étudiant sera dans l'obligation soit de prévenir la ou les personnes menacées, soit d'en avertir les autorités compétentes.

En tout temps vous pouvez décider de ne pas répondre à une question, de ne pas divulguer une information, de ne pas donner votre point de vue ou de restreindre l'accès à de la documentation vous concernant au chercheur-étudiant. De plus, vous pouvez aussi à tous moments demander de ne pas noter, divulguer, enregistrer ou utiliser une information que vous avez transmise ou allez transmettre.



Vous pouvez aussi à tous moments demander d'effacer, de rayer ou de détruire toute note ou enregistrement relatif à des propos que vous avez divulgués. Vous être libre de consentir ou non à la publication de vos propos ou des informations que vous avez-vous-même transmises lors du projet. Sachez qu'il sera toutefois impossible d'effacer ou de détruire des informations après publication.

## **E. UTILISATION ET CONSERVATION DES DONNÉES**

**Note :** Il est entendu ici par « données » toutes les notes de terrain, les enregistrements, les transcriptions, les analyses préliminaires et les analyses d'entrevues.

Toutes les données recueillies et les analyses subséquentes découlant de cette recherche pourront être utilisées pour la publication du mémoire suite à la réalisation du projet de recherche, sauf selon les circonstances prescrites dans la section précédente (D). De plus, ces dernières pourront aussi être utilisées pour analyses ultérieures dans le cadre du projet plus large mené par la professeure Anna Kruzynski et son équipe intitulée : *Community economies for social and environmental justice in Québec: mapping diverse economic and political practices proliferating on the margins*. Pour toute autre utilisation, vous serez invitéE à signer un autre formulaire de consentement à cet effet.

Les formulaires de consentements signés, toutes les données et tout autre document contenant des informations personnelles seront conservés dans un endroit sécurisé auquel seul le chercheur-étudiant et la superviseure de ce dernier aura accès. Toutefois, à titre de participantEs au projet, vous avez le droit de consulter toutes données ou documentation vous concernant personnellement.

Tout au long du projet de recherche, certaines données seront partagées avec les participantEs de manière différenciée, selon leur implication ou non au groupe désigné. Ces données seront partagées comme suit :

**Groupe désigné :** 1) Transcriptions d'entrevues pour révision avant l'analyse, si désiré, en version électronique, et les versions corrigées de ces transcriptions; 2) Version préliminaires des analyses d'entrevues à des fins de validation, et les versions finales de ces analyses.

**Pour l'entièreté de l'entreprise collective :** 1) Copies des versions finales des analyses d'entrevues; 2) Versions finales des transcriptions d'entrevues, seulement si les participantEs du groupe désigné y consentent par écrit; 3) les notes prises par le chercheur-étudiant durant le processus de recherche seront accessibles, sur demande, et seront triées par le chercheur-étudiant pour assurer la confidentialité des observations.

De plus, des copies des analyses d'entrevues seront offertes à votre entreprise collective à la fin du projet de recherche, à conserver selon votre désir, puisqu'il s'agira du fruit de vos connaissances pratiques collectives.

Les données, les formulaires de consentements signés et tout autre document contenant des informations personnelles seront détruits 7 ans après la publication du mémoire de maîtrise du chercheur-étudiant.

## **F. CONDITIONS DE PARTICIPATION**

Vous pouvez refuser de participer à la recherche ou vous en retirer à n'importe quel moment, sans préjudice et sans justification. Vous pouvez aussi demander que l'information et les propos que vous avez fournis ne soit pas utilisés; le cas échéant, les propos que vous auriez tenus ou les informations que vous auriez fournies lors des entrevues seront rayés des enregistrements et des transcriptions. Si vous décidez de vous retirer du projet, vous n'avez qu'à aviser verbalement ou par écrit le chercheur-étudiant.

Nous vous informerons de tout nouvel élément d'information susceptible d'affecter votre volonté à poursuivre votre participation à l'étude.

Si vous désirez mettre fin complètement à la participation de votre organisation/entreprise collective en entier à la recherche, une résolution collective de la part de cette dernière devra être transmise par écrit au chercheur-étudiant. De plus, il sera aussi possible, à la suite d'une demande collective des membres de l'organisation/entreprise collective, de détruire toutes les données (notes, enregistrements, formulaires, courriels, transcriptions) recueillies durant l'étude. Une telle demande ne pourra pas être respectée suite à une publication.

## G. CONSENTEMENT DU PARTICIPANT

Je comprends que je suis libre de retirer mon consentement et de discontinuer ma participation en tout temps, et ce, sans préjudice. Je comprends, également, que les résultats de cette étude seront publiés selon les modalités établies dans les sections B, D et E.

Je reconnais par la présente avoir lu et compris le présent document. J'ai eu l'occasion de poser des questions et d'obtenir des réponses. Je consens librement à participer au projet de recherche dans les conditions décrites ci-dessus.

NOM DE L'ENTREPRISE COLLECTIVE (en majuscules)

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NOM DU/DE LA PARTICIPANTe (en majuscules)

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

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SIGNATURE DU CHERCHEUR-ÉTUDIANT

Mathieu Roy, étudiant à la maîtrise  
Programme individualisé (*INDI Program*)  
Université Concordia  
[mathieu\\_roy\\_121@hotmail.com](mailto:mathieu_roy_121@hotmail.com)  
514-462-7470

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DATE

Si vous avez des questions sur l'aspect scientifique ou savant de cette étude, communiquez avec le chercheur-étudiant. Vous trouverez ses coordonnées sur la première page. Vous pouvez aussi communiquer avec sa professeure-superviseure.

Pour toute préoccupation d'ordre éthique relative à ce projet de recherche, veuillez communiquer avec le responsable de l'éthique de la recherche de l'Université Concordia au 514-848-2424, poste 7481, ou à [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

**Un exemplaire du formulaire de consentement signé doit être remis à la/au participantE.**