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Coordination mechanisms and the role of taskscape in value co-creation: The British 'milkman'

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ABSTRACT

Service-dominant (S-D) logic holds that coordination mechanisms contribute to value cocreation. This research explores everyday social interaction processes in Britain's nocturnal, recurrent milk doorstep-delivery service. It uses ethnographic fieldwork with service providers ('milkmen') and semi-structured customer interviews and online feedback to enrich understandings.

Space-time-culture dimensions are linked with existing S-D logic conceptions of value cocreation. Using Ingold's (1993) perspective, the doorstep becomes a taskscape, with dwelling activities, a temporality of rhythmic interrelations, and patterns of resonance – uniting practices and institutions.

(Interactive) dwelling activities, (reliable) rhythms, and (contextual) romanticization are the central coordination mechanisms in this iconic service, and shape micro-, meso- and macro-level interactions. Their effect on value cocreation is considerable as they derive from mutual projections, reflections, and individual understandings of customers' doorsteps as shared- temporally-located interaction taskscapes. This realizes value cocreation as part of the life of the world, performed amid its material, temporal and social entanglements.

1. Introduction

Coordination mechanisms shape how [and where and when] value cocreation works (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Payne et al., 2008) and are central to extending understandings of service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). These mechanisms are multifarious and exist at meso- and macro levels of aggregation (Alexander et al., 2018). However, they are context-specific, and "are re-interpreted based on new contexts, and new meanings…" (Akaka & Vargo, 2013, p.466). Therefore, individuals' micro-level understandings of day-to-day practices, and the relevance of contextual phenomena are critical, but remain under-researched, specifically, through empirical exploration that addresses these issues more holistically (Becker & Jaakola, 2020; Akaka & Vargo, 2014; Heinonen et al., 2010). Given this, we aim to locate and apply novel perspectives that offer a holistic resolution and demonstrate how to conceptualize interrelationships between the contextual and everyday practices.

By elaborating such an approach, service managers and practitioners are offered an enriched understanding of how value cocreation works, supporting the development of more considered and situationally apposite action. Therefore, this research supports managers'

appreciation of value cocreation *across* micro, meso and macro levels. This is important, as focusing on either context or practices in isolation denudes their interrelated nature and hence leads to decision-making that may, at best, add little to, or more problematically disrupt, value cocreation.

Such holistic examination necessitates a multi-dimensional perspective. This also echoes the intent of continued service research that seeks to integrate understandings of culture, and often implicitly time and space, as contextual dimensions (e.g. Helkkula et al., 2022). The adoption of such an approach also resolves the dislocated consideration of individuals and wider actor groupings, *outside* their context and its inherent workings. This builds on Vargo and Lusch's (2016) argument that institutions facilitate the study of resource integration and service exchange. S-D logic's axiom 5 (foundational premise (FP) 11) codifies this as: value cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements. Institutions are identified as "humanly devised rules, norms, and beliefs that enable and constrain action, and make social life predictable and meaningful" (p.6). Here, Vargo and Lusch underscore the import of the cultural dimension of context, and by implication the temporal and spatial, as well as the social order required to provide structure for value cocreation.

Service research that addresses institutions has advanced considerably (e.g. Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Pop et al., 2018, Razmdoost et al., 2019). The rise of this institutional turn has been mapped and the midrange and metatheoretical application of institutional analysis critically reviewed (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020). This evaluation highlights the tendency toward thin theoretical conceptualizations in some work and the need for altered research approaches – particularly where there is a "focus on practices as carriers or manifestations of underlying institutions…" (p.385). Vargo and Lusch (2016) initially suggested combining practice and institutional theory to support S-D logic research, and in 2017 discuss both (amongst others) as potentially helpful conceptual resources. However, Skålén and Gummerus (2022) propound that these two theories advance incommensurable conceptualizations of action (practices) and social order (institutions). Consequently, there remains a need to locate theoretical approaches that unify actor practices with the multi-dimensional contextual institutions that are of central concern within S-D logic. Therefore, we seek to provide an enriched consideration that creates a substantive and unified outcome to the conceptual amalgamation of practices and institutions.

This conceptualization is drawn from the application of Ingold's (1993, 2017) notion of 'taskscape'. Taskscape, which locates the person-organism in social space, is made evident by three coordination mechanisms: [(interactive) dwelling activities – that foregrounds being in place; (reliable) rhythms – which underscores the connecting temporality of being in place; (contextual) romanticization – that emphasizes the cultural glue that bonds us to the temporality of being in place]. These mechanisms interweave space–time-culture to offer a template that demonstrates these dimensions should not be construed as orthogonal, independent, or uncorrelated. Additionally, each mechanism is composed of multiple strands and these, and the intertwined nature of the mechanisms themselves, affect practices, but are – as importantly – effected by those self-same activities. This template is transferable, though which strands are more evident in each mechanism and the possible prominence of one mechanism over another may change, as might how they manifest and interact.

Taskscape enables consideration of the space–time-culture dimensions of the contextual phenomena and integrates the concept of 'dwelling', which denotes the reciprocal relationship of sensemaking that occurs between actors' day-to-day routines and their context. As such, it is defined as "the pattern of dwelling activities" (Ingold, 1993, p.153) and is an array of practices conducted within the temporal process of inhabiting an environment. Through the application of this notion, insight can be created into the influences of value coordination mechanisms at the micro-level between a service user and provider; the *meso*-level between collective actors (e.g., in a family, company, community, or neighbourhood), and those that occur at a macro-level (e.g. with an industry or set of social norms) (Alexander et al., 2018). As importantly, taskscape views the actor-mechanism relationship as created, dynamic, embodied and political in nature.

The historic British doorstep milk delivery service affords a context with pronounced space–time-culture dimensions, and where actors' day-to-day routines and activities are unmistakable. It works at night, at the boundary of the private and public, and where customer and provider seldom meet, though regularly *see* each other's actions. This presents a richly figured and culturally significant setting. Given service specifics, and the anthropological origins of taskscape, ethnographic methods are used to untangle the interrelationships at play and address two questions:

- What value cocreation coordination mechanisms are revealed through service providers' and users' understandings of their taskscape?
- Where, when and how do these contextual coordination mechanisms shape value cocreation across macro-, meso- and micro-levels of aggregation?

The application of taskscape to frame the response to the initial question ensures that space–time-culture dimensions are interwoven in each mechanism, and that the reciprocal nature of actor-mechanism relations is embedded. This enables the second question to be addressed, as the ways these mechanisms shape value cocreation at all levels of aggregation are explicated for the actors involved. This realizes value cocreation as part of the life of the world. Taskscape, therefore, is a cohesive conceptual device from which to explore the contextual coordination mechanisms enfolded in actors' lifeworlds and everyday activities in this industry. As such, it unifies action and social order and understands them as simultaneously resulting from, and contributing to, a multi-dimensional context. This offers a theoretical alternative that acknowledges the intertwined relationship between practices and institutions, without separating the social life of the world from its temporal and spatial dimensions.

These outcomes additionally reinforce the requirement for managers to reframe conceptions of value cocreation. In so doing, the wider and dynamic value processes that lie beyond organizational borders are illuminated and managers can integrate such understandings within the competitive positions fashioned.

2. The British 'milkman' – Anachronism or opportunity?

The British 'milkman' (irrespective of gender) was once a ubiquitous part of the nation's domestic life, delivering milk daily to household doorsteps. They now service just 3% of milk consumption, down from 45% in 1995 (Uberoi, 2021). However, customer numbers increased by 21% in 2020 above 2019 levels (Stannard, 2021), despite 52% of consumers previously stating that doorstep delivery was 'too expensive' (Mintel, 2019).

Phelps (2010) highlights that the milkman is a historic British icon suffused with social history and wrapped in emotive and nostalgic meaning. Alongside milk in variety, contemporary milkmen sell other dairy-based products and those related to 'breakfast' (e.g. morning goods, juice). Other articles serve occasional needs or regular consumption and some seasonal requirements (e.g. linked to Christmas, Easter, or gardening). All these goods carry manifold contextual elements and hence represent an element of 'service' in an everyday sense and are vehicles for enabling value cocreation.

Consequentially, the milkman serves milk, feeds various other daily supply needs, and caters to emerging societal desires –for example, locally sourced and regional products. Additionally, contemporary milkmen carry a panoptic, subjectively enriched, value interpretation (e. g. hallmark for established quality; commitment to their neighbourhoods; 'giving a hand' to those needing support), which facilitates competitive positioning. The significant rise in grocery home-delivery through online buying (13.4% of the total United Kingdom (UK) market), and a rise in smaller basket on-demand grocery deliveries (McKevitt, 2021) has opened a further opportunity for milkmen's shops on wheels.

This is underscored by the milkman being viewed as a social institution, given its longstanding traditions and cultural heritage. In Britain, the practice of 'having a milkman' has roots in the 17th century and has been strongly linked to subsequent social developments, such as increasing post-Industrial Revolution urbanization, reliable food supply during both World Wars, and recent public calls for sustainability in food provision (Ward, 2016). Through this, the once dubious character, often known for selling diluted milk in the 17th century, became synonymous with reliability, responsibility, and community care; although, in the 20th century, the latter association stretched to sexual innuendo in both public consciousness and the media (Phelps, 2010). The milkman's positive societal role was, however, emphasized in Parliament by the Earl of Kinnoull (1984) "…[they] offer a vital service. … are inevitably cheerful, helpful people, who work very unsocial hours, and they are often very kind to the elderly. Along with postmen [sic], they have a very special place in our society […]" (as quoted in Ward, 2016, p.252).

As this statement indicates, the milkman is more than just a delivery person, it is a cultural concept composed of various multifaceted layers. Contemporary milkmen perform a varied set of roles (Ward, 2016), making the recurring interactions in this service a rich site for exploring contextual value cocreation coordination mechanisms.

3. Theoretical considerations

3.1. Iterative interactions

Irrespective of the theoretical turns over the last fifteen years (see, for instance, Vargo & Lusch, 2017, 2016, 2008; Chandler & Vargo, 2011), the foundations of Vargo and Lusch's (2004) conceptualization remain: value is cocreated through iterative interactions between actors within a network based on the exchange of service. Sustained research has sought to unpack this notion and enumerate constructs to delineate *how* interaction takes place and *when* and *where* value cocreation occurs. Nevertheless, calls for supplementary understandings persist (e.g. Alves et al., 2016, Helkkula et al., 2018, Helkkula et al., 2022).

S-D logic contends that actors' interactions rely on continual integration of operant resources (knowledge, skills and competencies that produce effects) and operand resources (those upon which action is taken) from multiple sources (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). Hence, actors can (re)act and further positively and negatively influence each other, generating value cocreation or co-destruction (Prior & Marcos Cuevas, 2016; Kashif & Zarkada, 2015). Interaction, therefore, encompasses assorted characteristics and has numerous facets that shape value cocreation. Consequently, the nature of interactions within the service provided by the milkman, and its particularities, offer an intriguing research opportunity.

Actors' interactions are potentially varied and largely recognizable, though they remain scarcely measurable, as value is created in concert with, rather than for, customers within each, and every, relational context (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Hence value is both subjectively experienced and intersubjectively realized (Helkkula et al., 2018). Therefore, resources, and their integration, may, or may not, hold value to a specific actor depending on the context (Alves et al., 2016; Helkkula et al., 2018; Helkkula et al., 2022).

Consequentially, those exchanges can only be observed and researched within their specific circumstances to uncover the degree of context-related connectivity that is inherent (Yazdanparast et al., 2010; Ballantyne & Varey, 2006; Ramirez, 1999). However, the need for additional work recognizing the contextual perspective in S-D logic has been noted (Akaka et al., 2015, Helkkula et al., 2022). By considering a situation that is loaded with social history, that has previously seen decreasing consumer use and more recently a significant rise in engagement, the potential to elucidate the role of context is amplified.

Furthermore, iterative interactions and concomitant resource integration, extend beyond the immediate concerns of specific value creation, as they are guided by social structures and constellations of institutional arrangements that influence actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This requires actors' interactions to be understood not only at the micro level of the individual (subjective), but also between collective actors (intersubjective) that constitute the *meso*-level, and those wider concerns that exist at a macro-level, such as in an industry or social norms (Alexander et al., 2018). How this might be effectively conceptualized is a central concern in contemporary reviews of the institutional turn in S-D logic (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020).

3.2. Coordination mechanisms

Many discrete contextual factors are recognized and examined in S-D logic research as institutions or institutional arrangements or (implicit and explicit) coordination mechanisms (e.g. Akaka et al., 2014, Vargo & Lusch, 2011, Löbler, 2011). However, there is theoretical divergence and inconsistency of approach in how to investigate such mechanisms.

To advance considerations, Koskela-Huotari et al. (2020) propose that the investigation of four aspects will help build a more nuanced understanding of institutions as: 1. inhabited by actors, 2. ongoing processes, 3. emotionally driven and embodied and 4. inherently political. The first aspect seeks to redress the relationship between actors and institutions by acknowledging that institutions are created and reshaped through groups of actors, rather than external to these groups. This foregrounds the dynamism of institutions and their temporality, which, as aspect two identifies, are better viewed as processes rather than static objects. The third aspect underlines the neglected import of the emotional and embodied aspects of institutional dynamics. Koskela-Huotari et al. suggest that: "There is a critical gap in the knowledge of service research with regard to the interconnection between physical materials or enactments and the aspects of institutions that are invisible or taken for granted." (p.383), which encompasses material, temporal and social entanglements. The fourth aspect challenges researchers to recognize institutions as being riven with power, politics and bias rather than simply construed as neutral heuristics.

The call to advance the examination of institutions in this manner further underscores a need to revisit understandings of service contexts as sites for the interplay between individual practices and social order. What has yet to emerge, however, is a fully developed theoretical basis to facilitate this (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020). Therefore, drawing on understandings from beyond S-D logic may be profitable and consideration of anthropology and philosophy offer fruitful ways forward. For example, Habermas' (1985, 1985b) notions help to understand explicit coordination mechanisms, which he defined as part of the 'lifeworld's background'. That background includes the overall value system of a society, or a collective understanding based on rituals and traditions such as 'Christmas' or 'having a milkman'. Such notions draw upon the spatial (where), temporal (when) and cultural (how) dimensions of the lifeworld. They also offer a position from which to better understand contextual value-cocreation coordination mechanisms as created, dynamic, embodied, emotional and political.

Table 1: Spatial, temporal and cultural notions – selected treatments compared.

Table 1 highlights that deliberations in anthropology typically embed space–time-culture dimensions and notions of social life. This affords a powerful basis to construe contextual value-cocreation coordination mechanisms in service research. Anthropological treatments consistently foreground life in action, practices, performance, presence, and the individual as part of a social group, itself immersed in space––time-culture. Anthropology also reflects the range of micro- meso- and macro-level interactions and relationships at play, providing a more holistic perspective than typically found in S-D logic to date. However, a cohesive facilitating conceptualization needs to be selected.

3.3. Taskscape

Ingold's (1993; 2017) notion of taskscape and the dwelling perspective (Gruppuso, 2020), used in social anthropology, provide such a unified approach. Ingold (1993) proposed that there is an association between temporality and landscape that emerges in the unfolding of life in action, which is captured in the notion of taskscape. The taskscape is not merely, therefore, the scenery or backdrop in which life takes place, "but is a temporal phenomenon entangled with the dwelling of its [human and non-human] inhabitants" (Gruppuso, 2020, p.588). The taskscape emerges out of dwelling; it is inherently social, as it develops through relationships – to others and engagement with [living and non-living] surroundings – it requires attention to others and their activities but simultaneously defines the nature of those relationships.

This interpretation reflects Ingold's (2017) more recent revisiting of taskscape as the life of the world seen from a dwelling perspective. This resolves the tension of seeing 'social life' as set against the 'material world'. Ingold (2014) argues: "the spaces of dwelling are not already given, in the layout of the building [or landscape] but are created in

Table 1
Spatial, temporal and cultural notions – selected treatments compared.

Notions	Marketing	Example research	Anthropology	Example material
Atmosphere/ environment	Services and retail marketing, focus on the provider *designing* a physical or virtual, spatially-bound, service environment to create desired effects – both emotional and associated to purchase – in service users (customers). This includes consideration of architecture, colour, product and store layout, lighting, temperature, sound, music, aroma, ergonomic and social factors, such as the presence of service personnel and the apprehension of these elements through the senses. Strongly influenced by the stimulus-organism-response framework. Significant overlap to the concept of servicescape. In broader treatments, particularly in consumer research, atmosphere is seen as "those affects, emotions and sensations flowing between bodies within places" (Steadman, 2021, p.136) and draws on the notion of embodied experiences.	Vieira, 2013; Grewal et al., 2003, Kotler,1973	Böhme (1993, pp.117–118) proposes that atmosphere is an "indeterminate spatially extended quality of feeling". It is neither subjective nor objective – but lies between the two, as it arises from the coming together of sensing beings and objects in the world. Through this, spaces become 'tinctured' affective environments – the interplay of sensing being and objects in the world creating a 'mood'. Such notions are expounded in more recent conceptualizations that suggest there is little need to separate bodily, emotional and mental responses or engagements with surroundings, as these aspects entangle, to create understandings that are fluid and evolve over time.	Sumartojo & Pink, 2018; Ingold, 2014
Servicescape	Considers how perception of the built environment (ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality; signs, symbols and artefacts) influence service provider employees and customers to create cognitive, emotional and physiological responses. That results in service-based (social) interaction processes and approach and avoidance behaviours. Strongly influenced by the stimulus-organism-response framework in its original formation. It has also been used in work more closely aligned with consumer behaviour that explores consumers' lived experiences in service providers' built environments and beyond.	Mari & Poggesi, 2013; Booms & Bitner, 1981	Not used in an extended manner in work core to the domain, except in considerations at the intersection between the business/marketing research and social anthropology.	
Sphere(s)	Spheres refer to the entire contextual landscape for service, in which service providers and service users [inter]act – often classified as 'the service provider', 'the service user' and 'the joint' sphere. The latter has been of specific interest as it sets the frame for the value that is finally co-created in the service user sphere during usage. Implicit consideration of spheres is threaded into much work in the broader service arena, and in marketing and consumer research more generally – although not always expressed through this terminology. See as an early example, Price and Arnould (1999).	Alves et al., 2016; Nilsson & Ballantyne, 2014	Often used as a basic principle that represents the operationalization of various aspects of a society's capacity to self-organize and generate its own conditions for action – a form of common space that may be metatopical. The notion is attached to specific forms of sphere – for instance, the social sphere refers to "a cultural landscape on which various forms of performance and public drama are staged, and through which social bonds are created and collective experiences [and sentiments] articulated" (Lii, 1998, p.116). This creates a social fabric that enables operational activities but also an ethical relation can occur. Other notions, such as the public sphere (see Habamas), are commonly used.	McKee, 2005
Space	Used in a sense similar to that of social anthropology – but even more often reduced to a physical and ambient dimension, such as distance, location, or topography – the locale of social life, often attached to the notion of 'public space' and sometimes moving into notions of 'social space'. Used alongside place – and, at times, interchangeably.	Steadman et al., 2021; Bradford & Sherry, 2018;	Considered one of the three dimensions (space–time-culture) within which human life is immersed. It is both universal and variously conceived by different cultures. Engaged with and experienced both as a physical and ambient dimension, as distance, location, or topography, space was often defined by an abstract scientific, mathematical, or measurable conception. This leads to considerable fragmentation in its treatment. More recently, space is considered as an important cultural medium, an idiom through which individuals can think and that can be culturally organized to produce spatial practices that are social, aesthetic, political, religious or economic. This is supported by theoretical concepts from other disciplines, including sociology and philosophy.	McKenzie Aucoin, 2017; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003;
Place	Seen often from the place-as-container perspective, a setting that embraces a collection of relatively constant contents. This view underscores much work on place marketing, which centres on notions of 'distinctiveness' between places. In service marketing, space is often viewed as the setting for social interaction. Within consumer research, place is viewed more as the site of human existence and defined from within through identification or attachment. This accords with the position adopted in contemporary social anthropology. The focus is on individuals' views and subjective experiences,	Maasey 2019; Bradford & Sherry, 2018; Chatzidakis et al., 2018; Rosenbaum, 2006	Place is a "'framed space that is meaningful to a person or group over time' (Thornton, 2008, p.10); a *presence* that comes into being through human experience, dreaming, perception, imaginings, and sensation, and within which a sense of being in the world can develop. It involves culturally meaningful sites whose significance rests in lived experience: with naming, local events and conflicts, the attachment of stories, experiences of affect, and the affixation of meanings and memory to locations, landscapes, built environments, and places of the body" (McKenzie Aucoin, 2017, pp.396–397, emphasis added).	McKenzie Aucoin, 2017; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003

Table 1 (*continued*)

Notions	Marketing	Example research	Anthropology	Example material
	influenced by their encounters gained throughout childhood, education or events linked to that location. Individuals' views can also be charged with societally defined meanings. Those meanings are often derived from repetitive activities and everyday life routines. In this context, there has been a specific stream of work on third places – social surroundings that are neither 'home' nor workplace.			
Rhythm	In marketing, rhythm is narrowly associated with music (see atmosphere and servicescape). Additionally considered in relation to 'cyclical time' as a 'contextual variable'. When used as a specific central concept, more evident since the 1990 s and early 2000 s, it is aligned with Lefebvre's suggestions that rhythm comes into being through the repeated interactions between a place, a time and the expenditure of energy, that are subject to interferences from linear (modern capitalist) processes (originating from human activity/social practices) and cyclical processes (originating in nature/the cosmos).	Maasey, 2019; McEachern et al., 2012	Rhythm constructs and forms the flow of action, and at the same time constitutes part of that action. It is the organizational repetition of sequences that establish a particular rhythm – that signifies a repeated configuration of energy in particular forms, experienced in the body by changes in direction, speed, duration, and intensity (Goodridge, 1999). Through these habitual interactional practices, a sense of group timing regulates the occurrence of actions to accomplish agreed objectives.	Gruppuso, 2020; Goodridge, 1999
Rituals	A rich stream of consideration has been developed, often in consumer culture theory research, where understandings draw on foundational work in sociology on interaction rituals (e.g. Durkheim, Collins, Goffman, Moore and Meyerhoff). Most simply put, viewing rituals as routinized interactions between two or more actors that are vested with some symbolic significance. Rituals can be stylized, symbolic, informal, or task-oriented and are often characterized as having three key elements: (i) social interaction; (ii) a common focus of attention; (iii) and a common emotional mood.	Otnes & Lowrey 2004	Ritual is central to many considerations, often allied with other concepts such as myth and rites of passage. Rituals are viewed as dynamic moments of performance in social groups' creative practices in which symbolic creations are adjusted to internal or external pressures for change. The symbols that structure rituals provide junctions and enable compromises between collectivity and control and individual expression.	Bell, 1992

movement" (p.85). Gruppuso and Whitehouse (2020) propose that Ingold's (2017) position means "dwelling is the basic condition of existence; by performing their daily activities and tasks, living beings create and transform the environments they inhabit and are in turn created and transformed themselves: consequently, the environment is built, the landscape *shaped*." (p.590, original emphasis). This includes acknowledging the tensions and conflicts that the intertwining of varied actors' activities and tasks brings, without losing sight of the shared patterns and rhythms of their interrelationships and practices.

Taskscape and dwelling provide a fertile resource to thread together the contextual issues that surround the iterative (social) interactions that form the basis for value cocreation and to appreciate the contextual coordination mechanisms present. This perspective additionally unites consideration of actors, activities, movement, relationships, rhythms and rituals, shared patterns of resonance, and the (social) landscape. The latter three elements serve to expand the individual (micro-level) focus to the *meso*-level institutions and macro-level institutional arrangements that abound. Equally, the inclusion of the environment (spaces of dwelling) inherently locates interactions, acknowledging that value cocreation is part of 'the life of the world'.

3.4. The doorstep as taskscape

In the British retail world, the service provided by the milkman is distinct from many others, as providers and customers rarely meet and interact in person. This asynchrony at the customers' doorsteps, predominantly a private domain (potentially loaded with individuals' interpretations), occurs largely at night (a time potentially laden with mystery [Melbin, 1978]) and makes for a complex setting. This symbolically charged and atypical service context enables assessment of the potential of taskscape to generate insights surrounding the value cocreation coordination mechanisms that shape this aspect of dwelling.

Dwelling must be researched in the field to understand the *specific*

meaning and information sent to a *specific* addressee, who speaks and understands the same contextual language. An in-depth understanding of the contextual language used on Britain's doorsteps is needed for research to contribute to the understanding of these actors' iterative interactions. The goal is to discern and then abstract from the individual observations to the more general contextual coordination mechanisms (the when, where and how) that shape iterative individual interactions.

To support this endeavour, we developed an initial conceptual device (Fig. 1) to depict the issues at play – albeit in a simplified manner. The representation flattens and regularizes what is a three-dimensional (non-orthogonal, sporadic) domain, with all the inherent limitations of doing so. The intent is to simultaneously illustrate central notions within S-D logic (for example, actors, iterative interactions, value cocreation relationships) and further the consideration of context which, as Akaka et al. (2015) and others note, is required. The device also identifies how taskscape and dwelling may serve to resolve Koskela-Huotari et al.'s (2020) proposition that investigation of coordination mechanisms needs to respond to their created, dynamic, embodied, emotional and political nature.

As such, the conceptual device depicts the actors and their iterative interactions within dwelling (their everyday activities – here played out at the doorstep). These actions are believed to foster value cocreation, relationships, rhythms and rituals, resonance and the (social) landscape. These aspects then frame the pattern of dwelling activities that is the taskscape. However, this is a reciprocal relationship – these emerging aspects equally shape everyday activities. A similar link is evident between the space–time-culture dimensions – which, through the lifeworld – affect the taskscape and dwelling, but equally, these dimensions are affected and (re)shaped by the patterns of dwelling activities (and ultimately everyday activities). The resulting material, temporal and social entanglements frame the contextual coordination mechanisms – whose influence is manifest across the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of aggregation.
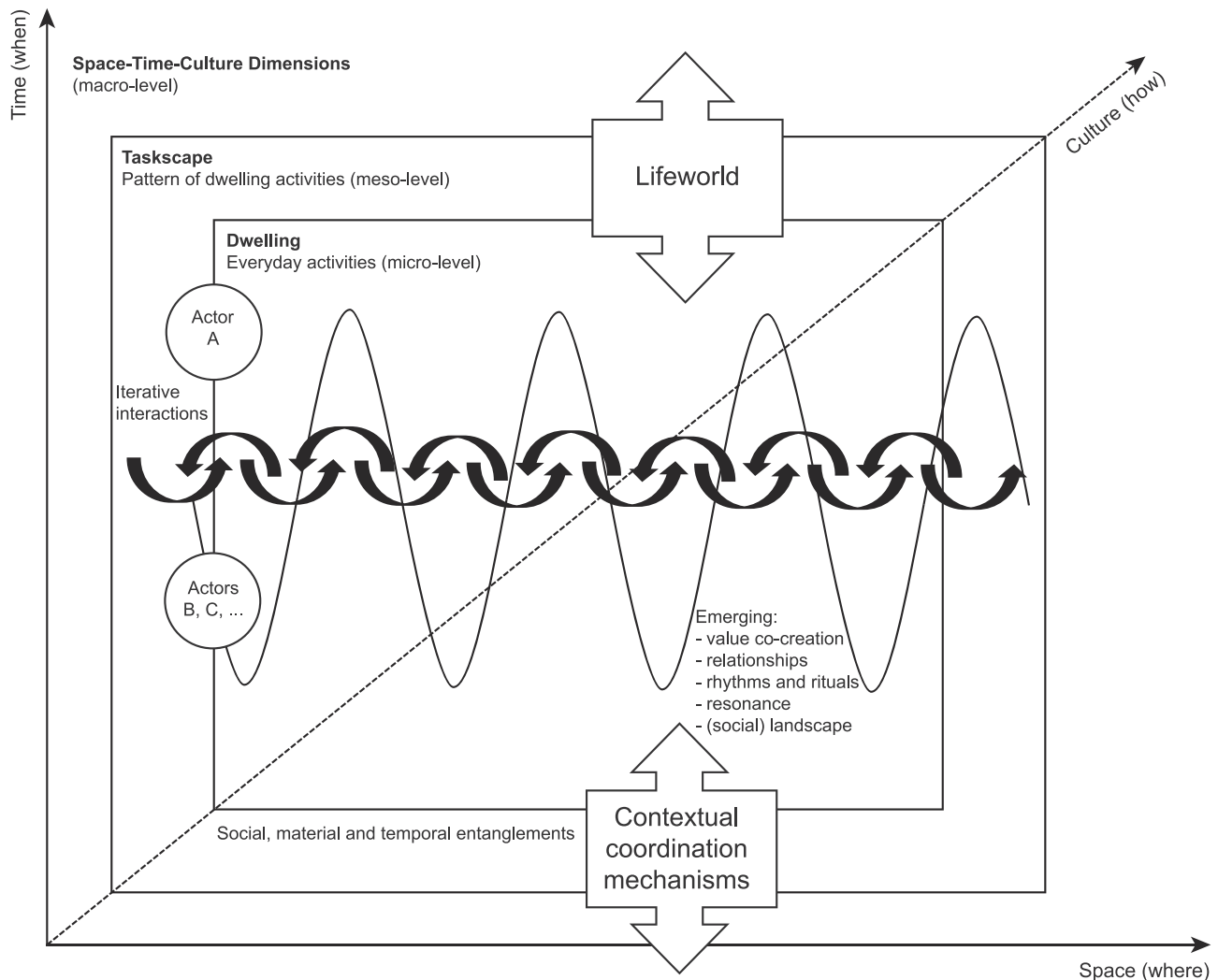
Fig. 1. Taskscape – an initial conceptual device.

4. Research approach

To respond to the research questions posed (first to reveal value cocreation coordination mechanisms through service providers' and users' understandings of their taskscape and, second, to understand where, when and how these contextual coordination mechanisms shape value cocreation across levels of aggregation) people's behaviours and their interactions in the field must be studied, for that is where the taskscape resides. This research aims to create relevant knowledge by 'talk and actions' (van Maanen, 2010, p.95). This requires reliance on a lesser-used methodological approach that focuses on the joint sphere and the observable, but under-researched, processes of (social inter) action (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015).

4.1. Ethnographic methods

To examine daily activities and tasks at the doorstep, as it were, we used ethnographic fieldwork – primarily participant observation and interviews. This made it possible to see "interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these, act on them, and so on" (Mason, 2002, p.85) and try to unfold the "complex layers of order of the living together of humans…[their] timetables and spatial arrangements…. rituals and ceremonials" (Atkinson, 2017, p.12).

To understand the service providers, and to gain access to the site of interaction where service recipients are *not* simultaneously physically

present, but evident in their myriad manifestations, participant observation constituted the best means of accessing and depicting the mechanisms at play. There is no other approach that enables the context to be 'seen', and as importantly includes the when, where and how of value cocreation. In such observations, meanings are created by iterative interactions, negotiations and the compromises of all parties, including the researcher, "to render manageable everyday life and work" (Atkinson, 2017, p.52). As the fieldwork with milkmen primarily offered understandings of service providers, we also sought insights from the corresponding actor group – customers. This was largely done through interviews (as living with customers was not a workable option).

The observations and interviews enable us to identify a recognizable temporal (when) dimension, created as a rhythm in any group, organization or business (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). For instance, many people have a similar contextual understanding and interpretation of specific times (Lefebvre, 2004). Sunrise, encountered during the observations, is a time that "has a miraculous charm" (Lefebvre, 2004, p.73). But it is not only the point in time that is relevant to ethnography or this study. There are other temporal dimensions that matter, such as observable repetition (sunrise, or doorstep delivery each day), the distinctive tempo of different activities (the time of sunrise changing across the year, affecting waking) (Atkinson, 2017; Lefebvre, 2004), or the duration and frequency of certain routines (breakfast) (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Time is, therefore, important, as it is a "social product" (Lefebvre, 2004, p.73) and methods to consider this, such as

participant observation and interviews, are essential.

The other social products present that address the 'how' and 'when' of value cocreation can also be revealed using these approaches. For example, collective memory, which is usually defined culturally and includes socially shared values and understandings, such as tradition, heritage or legacy (Atkinson, 2017), is evident in the context. However, these are not fixed and independent of a situation (the where) and are sometimes contextually (re)interpreted (Akaka & Vargo, 2013), or even fraught with values and understandings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The observations and interviews, therefore, enabled such issues to surface and be understood within the contextual phenomenon that is milk doorstep delivery, and respond to calls for more in-depth and

ethnographic work on institutions in service research (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020).

4.1.1. Ethnographic fieldwork details

One of the UK's largest dairy companies supported the research – facilitating access to its staff and customers. Selection of the milkmen was purposively driven, primarily by length of experience (greater than 10 years) and milk round location. Role tenure was important to ensure understanding of the activities of the milkman to enable reflection on patterns and meaning. The company facilitated selection by asking for voluntary participation from those with extended service in different areas. We felt that diverse understandings of value cocreation might be

Table 2
Ethnographic fieldwork details.

O	Date 2018	Area	Milkman tenure	Gender	Further comments: role of the researcher in the observations and insights these observations helped generate
O1	20 Feb	London (Wimbledon) [Urban]	>30 years	Male	• ***Made researcher a participant [apprentice milkmen to be inducted into the profession – active in all aspects of the round, taking on tasks under instruction].*** Discussed almost all aspects of the business (from back-office to front-end), demonstrated knowledge of the business and its historic and cultural developments, fondly reminisced about his career and has highly developed practice routines. Was engaged in the community as manager of a football league. Cared a good deal about reducing noise on 'his round' and the nature of his actions and the perceived impact this had on 'his customers'. Relationships matter, as do the visible manifestations of these, and being reliable and a 'pillar of his community'.
O2	20 April	Gloucester [Rural]	>15 years	Male	• ***Made researcher an observer [interloper in the world of the milkman – a voyeur that records what is undertaken by the milkman but is not trusted to engage in the tasks at hand].*** Knew the round inside-out and foresaw exactly the time needed for each activity and the requirements of 'his customers' – they belong to him and not the company. Cared a good deal about minimizing light pollution on his round and the nature of his actions and the perceived impact this had on 'his customers'. He 'knows' his customers value him and the service he gives them – he is why they continue with the service; they support him.
O3	9 Aug	London (Erith) [Urban]	>10 years	Male	• ***Made researcher an observer.*** Loved the loneliness and the quietness of working at night. Is economical in his deeds and utterance – these patterns have been honed to enable service delivery in the most consistent manner. The main value proposed to customers was 'reliability no matter what weather'. Connections are made through assumptions he voices about his customers based on the evidence around the doorstep – who they are, how he supports their activities and what matters to them.
O4	15 Aug	Oxford [Rural]	>20 years	Male	• ***Made researcher an observer.*** Highlighted the importance of the product 'milk'. Has established patterns and practice routines that in some aspects verge on the ritualistic. Told several stories of 'how relationships with *his* customers were built' over time and through his actions, even ones they cannot see. Connections are also made through assumptions he voices about his customers, based on the evidence around the doorstep – who they are, how he supports their activities and what matters to them.
O5	4 Oct	Camberley [Rural/ urban mix]	>35 years	Male	• ***Made researcher a participant.*** He is an institution that is embedded in the community he serves, is part of its fabric and has a fund of knowledge to impart. Was surprised that customers did not tell him before leaving the business – takes this personally, and feels a little disappointed, even betrayed – by 'his' customers. Ran marathons and collecting money for disabled children (community care) is a 'pillar of his community'. Relationships with his customers 'matter', customers' activities and their support are of vital import to his view of being a 'milkman'.
O6	9 Oct	Southampton [Urban]	>30 years	Male	• ***Made researcher a participant.*** Awarded 'Milkman of the Year' by the employing company. Had no criticism of headquarters' activities. Seeks relationships with other aspects of the context, outside his customers, for instance, animals encountered on the round and his milk-float. The vehicle is his 'partner' and enables him to service his round. Identifies as one of the last of his kind to serve his customers – sees the historic and cultural requirements for the service as being challenged.
O7	30 Oct	Yardley [Urban]	>15 years	Male	• ***Made researcher a participant at some points and an observer at others.*** Believed that the current times must combine the best of the past and the present. He stressed his routines were different from those of most of his friends as he works during the night. Is mindful to 'respect' his customers' spaces, even if this is detrimental to his activities or the time he needs to invest. Communication is key to establishing and maintaining relationships with his customers – so ensuring customers have his number, the provision of personal correspondence, and expressing his thanks are key.

apparent in distinct locations and communities. For instance, public transport in certain areas may restrict opportunities for some customers to travel to supermarkets, or limited internet access may curtail the use of other home delivery providers. For those people, having their daily food supply delivered may, partly, constitute value. Once volunteers were identified, selection sought to balance location type and ensure geographic spread. Consequentially, the lead researcher participated in seven milk rounds across Britain in 2018 (Table 2).

The rounds began at around midnight and lasted until dawn. The longest was about nine hours, while the shortest was finished in around four, including round preparation in the depot and associated activities after returning.

This variation stemmed primarily from the distance between round and depot and the round-specific conditions. If a milkman delivers to a more urban area, potentially 250–300 customers are served as they are topographically proximate. Therefore, driving time between doorsteps is shorter and the round quicker. Equally, given decreasing customer numbers over the last decades (and thereby a lower density of customers), the neighbourhoods served can be up to 60 miles from depots.

Hence, a round, consisting of about 350–400 gallons of milk, can generally be delivered in about six hours. Other contributing factors governing round duration relate to the milkmen's experience and customers' shopping behaviours.

During the rounds, photographs and notes were taken using a smartphone. After each round, these supported the compiling of fuller fieldnotes for data analysis. All aspects of the observation were included: preparatory depot-based activity, all aspects of the round and the actions that took place on return to base. However, particular attention was paid to what occurred at doorsteps on the round.

4.1.2. Customer interviews and online feedback

We followed Fernandez (2003) who stated: "It is not enough to watch activity in space … It is also important by means of direct inquiry with participants to determine qualitative changes in state, the emergent qualities that result from activity in that space" (p.199). Therefore, nine customers (identification again supported by the company based on selection criteria) were interviewed. Care was taken to maximize participant diversity – in terms of location (rural/urban), tenure of

Table 3
Semi-structured interview details.

I	Date 2018	Location	Type of round	'Had a milkman' for X years	Age cluster	Gender	Further comments: summary of insights generated
I1	24 July	Aldershot	Rural, North of London	>20	45–60	Male	• Reflected upon various elements of the business. • Identified the milkman as a pillar of the community. • Saw milkmen as the last of a 'type', a traditional emblem of the past and national norms. • Placed considerable trust in the role and was willing to disclose 'personal information' to this familiar stranger.
I2	28 Sept	London (Hanworth)	Rural, South of London	>10	30–45	Female	• Stopped ordering with the business three weeks after interviewing due to 'pure service' issues. • Had a strong nostalgic relationship with having a milkman – related it to childhood practices. • Imbued the milkman with 'magic'-like qualities, present, but unseen, familiar in their role yet unknown as an individual.
I3	28 Sept	London (Hanworth)	Urban, London	>20	45–60	Female	• Was satisfied and appreciated the small gestures, such as closing gates. Had a strong nostalgic relationship with having a milkman – related it to childhood practices. • Saw the milkman as 'out there in the dark' looking out for their customers and their 'neighbourhoods'. • Viewed 'their milkman' as recognizable through his actions if not his person.
I4	2 Oct	Aldershot	Rural, South of London	>20	>60	Male	• Had ordered with various milkmen for decades, and this followed parental practices from his childhood. • Enjoyed exploring and trying new product offers. • Saw the milkman as occupying a benevolent and trusted role, looking out for their customers and their 'neighbourhoods'. • Imbued the milkman with 'magic'-like qualities, conjuring up products on their doorstep in the morning.
I5	5 Oct	London (Hanworth)	Rural, North of London	>10	45–60	Male	• Loved the 'breakfast routine' on weekends with the family. • Saw milkmen as a traditional emblem of the past and national norms – a historically and culturally important figure. • Viewed 'their milkman' as recognizable through his actions if not his person.
I6	5 Oct	London (Hanworth)	Urban, London	>10	30–45	Female	• Also used other home delivery services but loved the 'surprise' element of the milkmen's deliveries, conjuring up products on their doorstep in the morning. • Know the milkman's name – but would not recognize him. • Placed considerable trust in the role, this enabled the individual in the role to 'be' at the doorstep without causing consternation.
I7	5 Oct	London (Hanworth)	Rural, South of London	>5	30–45	Male	• Was focused on the home-delivery service and less interested in any nostalgic or traditional elements of the business of the milkmen. • Enjoyed that the service facilitated his routines. • Trusted the company behind the milkman to ensure deliveries were made.
I8	18 Oct	Aldershot	Urban, London	>20	45–60	Male	• Longstanding customer and has recently started working as a milkman and consequentially respected the physicality of the job and its historical and cultural significance. • Saw the milkman as a traditional emblem of trust, responsibility, and supreme reliability – no matter what.
I9	19 Dec	Aldershot	Rural, South of London	>35	>60	Male	• Loved the concept of 'standing orders.' • Had a strong nostalgic relationship with having a milkman. • Valued having a milkman that had been in the role for some time and the 'familiarity' this generated. • Saw the milkman as occupying a benevolent and trusted role, looking out for their customers and their 'neighbourhoods'.

having a milkman (5-year minimum), age and gender (Table 3). Interviews took place at the company's premises, specifically two locations in the south of England, to support participant and researcher safety.

The customer interviews lasted between 45 and 75 min and were recorded. An interviewing guide derived from the underlying theoretical framework was used; topics addressed included interaction, dwelling and coordination mechanisms. These broad areas served as an aid to exploration, not as a set of prescribed questions. Care was also taken to ensure that the tone and language were simple and direct but allowed for discovery – for instance, 'What comes to your mind if we talk about 'the milkman'?' and 'How would you describe the relationship you have with your milkman?'.

4.2. Customers' online feedback

Additionally, 95 customer written statements, captured through the online review platform Trustpilot (https://uk.trustpilot.com), and spanning a month of standard business operation, were used to augment

the interviews. These customer perceptions of the business were assessed to provide supplementary insights, as the interviews were rich but may not offer a critical perspective. This was important as customer voices that the company may overlook, or that had ceased their relationship, needed to be included.

4.3. Qualitative text analysis

The three data sets were uploaded to MAXQDA (software) to enable an interplay between data generation and analysis. Once all data were obtained, they were first analysed separately (each element, then data set) and then jointly (across sets) to generate "an in-depth analysis within or across topics" (MacQueen et al., 2008, p.125). This involved the development of codes built through Gioia et al.'s (2013) three-stage process. The intent was to create categories that represented the dimensionality of the data and that were "'rich', 'meaningful', 'distinguishable' or 'disjunctive'" (Kuckartz, 2014, p.39). More than 2,500 text blocks were coded into approximately 50 initial categories drawing on verbatim language. To refine these, we used more expressive clusters
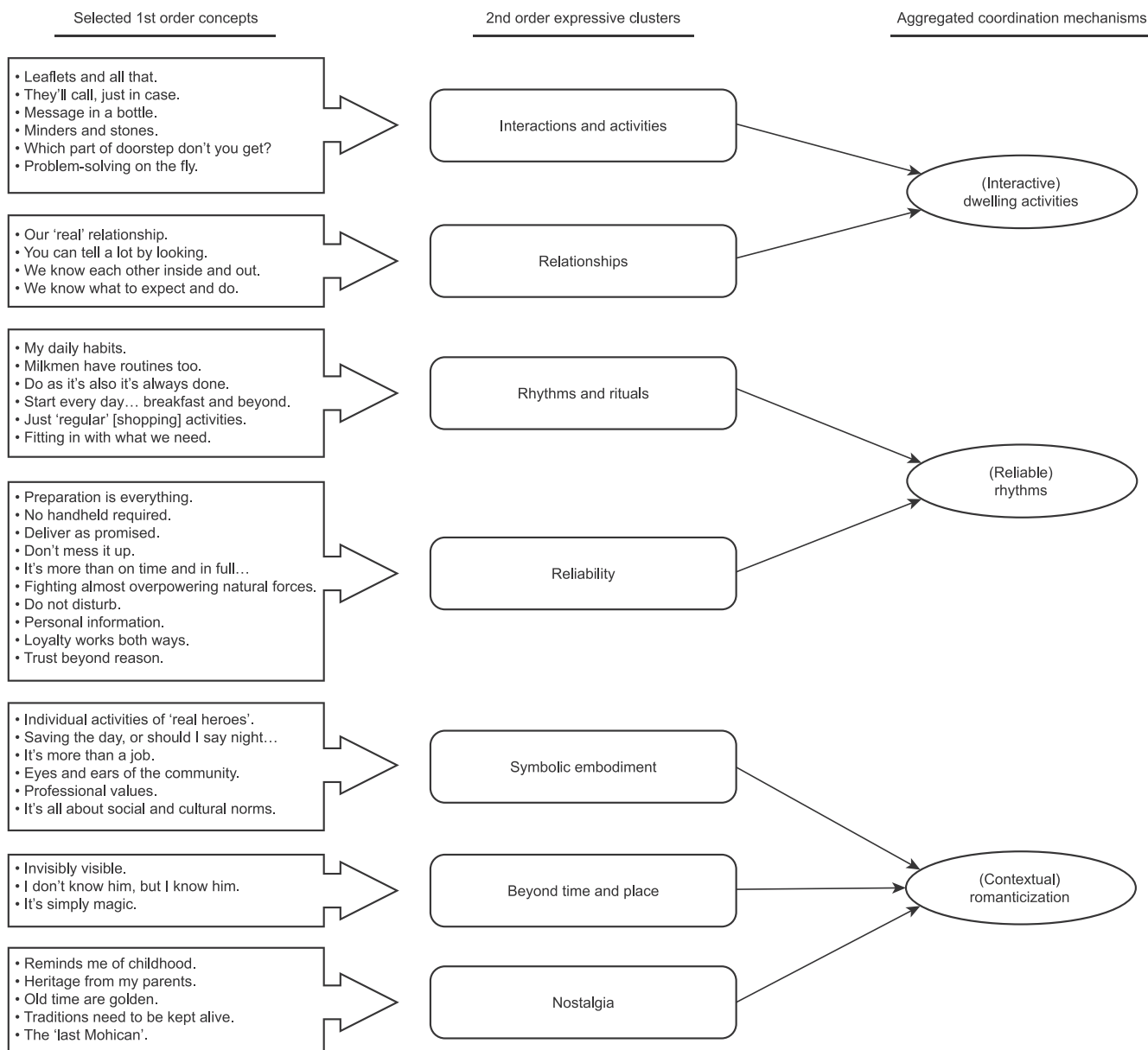
Fig. 2. Data structure based on Gioia et al., 2012.

that represented shared aspects of the initial categories and drew on the initial conceptual device (Fig. 1) to sensitize, without constraining, the process. This led to the aggregation of the superordinate categories (see Fig. 2: Data structure).

Hence, notions surrounding (inter)actions and activities (including communication, and acts of problem solving) and the qualities that indicate relationships (e.g. knowing each other, expectations) were contained within a superordinate coordination mechanism termed *(interactive) dwelling activities*. The intent was to both capture the nature of the mechanism but also unite associated notions from S-D logic and taskscape. Here, the unifying motif centres on actors' activities in dwelling and the patterns this creates. An equivalent practice generated two further mechanisms: *(reliable) rhythms*, which marries concerns surrounding rhythms and rituals (i.e. habitual [everyday] actions) and matters associated to reliability, with its inferred issues of repetition and import (e.g. dependability and trustworthiness); and *(contextual) romanticization*, which combines notions (symbolic embodiment, nostalgia) that are culturally and personally emblematic, and, as such, transcend the 'here and now' to provide a resonance that connects past, present and future.

5. Findings – Coordination mechanisms and the taskscape

The three coordination mechanisms (as outlined above) should not be viewed in isolation. Rather, when considered in concert, the mechanisms frame the pattern of dwelling activities that is the taskscape in which value cocreation takes place at Britain's doorsteps. Each coordination mechanism contains strands of the space–time-culture dimensions. This is manifest in (contextual) romanticization, as evidenced in the description above. If (reliable) rhythms and (interactive) dwelling activities are considered, it is equally evident that both contain material, temporal and social facets. For instance, in the case of the latter, in the means of communication (material), in the capacity to resolve problems at speed and in the moment (temporal), and in the nature of the relationship (social).

Additionally, the identified coordination mechanisms each demonstrate aspects of micro-, meso- and macro-level concerns. To illustrate this, if the (reliable) rhythms coordination mechanism is unpacked, the micro-level can be summarized by *what my milkman does for me* (exemplified in first order constructs such as: 'fitting in with what we need' – see Fig. 2); the meso by *what we milkmen do for them* (e.g. 'preparation is everything' – Fig. 2); and, the macro by *what we know a milkman should do for us* (e.g. 'fighting almost overpowering natural forces' – Fig. 2).

It is also unsurprising, therefore, that the mechanisms interweave; for instance, the communication actions evident in (interactive) dwelling activities elided with notions of routine exemplified in (reliable) rhythms and both are coloured by the nostalgia manifest in (contextual) romanticization (see Fig. 2). Additionally, the relationships evident in (interactive) dwelling activities, for instance 'our 'real' relationship', are figured by the symbolic embodiment evident in (contextual) romanticization, such as 'saving the day, or should I say night', which is then aided by notions of reliability ('trust beyond reason') present in (reliable) rhythms.

However, to offer a parsimonious narrative, each of the mechanisms is treated in turn. Equally, given the mechanisms sit at an abstracted level, we created vignettes, using extracts from across the data sets, to describe the evident material, temporal and social entanglements that are present. Such description lies at the heart of the ethnographic approach.

5.1. Coordination mechanism 1: (Interactive) dwelling activities

Vignette 1: *He has known all his customers for a long time… serving that area for more than 35 years [O5]. During the round, we get at least 10 handwritten notes saying, 'thank you' or giving nuggets of news, such as: 'I*

am off for some days as I must go to hospital' or saying, 'hello to your daughter'. It feels like there is a deep connection between him and his customers. One customer left him a bottle of red wine and a letter [O1]. He tells me that he leaves every customer a handwritten note around Christmas to thank them for the year's support for him and his business – he does not refer to the company at all in those messages [O7].

To show me that he (and not the company) really knows what his customers like, he switches on his mobile and plays a recorded voice message: The woman tells him … that they are not happy with the company (they do not understand the new website, etc.), but they will stay and support [him]. He does a great job, even if the company communicates 'weird stuff' (like when they deliver etc.). The entire voice message takes about two minutes and is mainly pro-milkman and anti-company, ending with an order adjustment: "One extra pint on Saturday please" [O2].

He makes sure all customers have his private mobile number, and they do occasionally call [O7]. The good relationship with the 'lady' in that property was founded on the assistance he gave some years ago. "She called me on my mobile on Christmas Eve… One of the people on site ordered just 10 pints of milk and she needed 30. So, I drove back to the centre on Christmas Eve, gathered the additional bottles and brought them to the house, where I got a big bottle of champagne" [O4].

He [also] builds a store of knowledge about his customers by paying attention to minute details, like some sort of dairy-based detective! "There is a young family who moved in some months ago. I can see that, as there are small football boots in front of the door" [O3]. He has mental pictures of the people living on his round. "They are messy, they won't pay their bill" is one example of several statements on the nature of the customers [O4].

The observable interactions between the actors at the doorstep often employ a 'contextual language' as evident in the notes, letters and cards, developed through generations of milkmen and customers (macro). For instance, in the most literal sense, *"the good old days, leaving a note in one of the empties, had such an efficiency about them"* [Trustpilot 11]. Such handwritten notes are still used, as Vignette 1 demonstrates, to amend orders, but also offer details related to other dwelling activities enmeshed within broader social groups, such as local fairs, vacation plans, and celebrations. Some communications – paintings by children depicting the act of doorstep delivery, as well as thank you cards for the deliveries made and the additional services offered (e.g. serving despite the weather or 'saving' a special event, as detailed in Vignette 1) – are often displayed in communal areas at depots.

The longer the relationships last, the more individual elements are shared between the actors and the contextual language becomes both more specific and simultaneously subtle (micro). The particulars of the communication deployed are understood only by the specific milkman and *their* customer. For example, the exact place the empty bottles are located communicates an order alteration. This cannot be known by relief milkmen and is why customers say they 'see' when deliveries are done by someone else. Although customers might not even recognize their usual milkman without their uniform (meso): *"We know him in as much we know his name. We don't see him very often… Other than that, would I recognize him necessarily in the street? No, but he delivers, pretty much, every time, what we're looking for. We know it's Paul"* [I3].

Milkmen often keep some service elements secret as it assures their ownership of the customer relationship. They also often subvert institutional systems (meso) in favour of *their* customers; for example, the milkmen (voluntarily) make a second trip in the morning to deliver any missing items to ensure no disruption to customers' – real or imagined – dwelling activities (micro). As the vignette additionally demonstrates, milkmen support such activities by providing customers with their personal contact details.

The vignette furthermore reveals that the relationship in which the activities between milkmen and their customers are grounded is suffused in imagination and projective and contextual interpretation, supported by a few 'real' experiences. Hence, it evidences "multiple layers of imagined community" (Phillips, 2002, p.598), which strongly impact self-perception and the overall contextual understanding of the

central actors. The individual milkman acts locally but from within a group of milkmen at a depot (meso), and historically amid a band of milkmen across time (macro). From this, individual milkmen build the institutionalized concept of 'the milkman' that serves *their* customers and strengthen the relationships developed with them. There is "some kind of self-connection that people feel towards these social phenomena" (Phillips, 2002, p.612) of imagined counterparts and communities, within a shared landscape that supports the creation of real, or fictive, relationships between the parties: *"I know the milkman and I know the days he's coming; I don't know him personally"* [I5].

Each party had a primarily imaginary picture, or expectation, of the other. These expectations are the outcome of the 'real' interaction processes and individuals' projections and interpretations and hence their contextual knowledge "rests on vague and partial understanding" (Möllering, 2001, p.411). Milkmen and their customers – who had little specific knowledge of the opposite party – could however confidently enact their tasks and communicate with each other. Such behaviour is not exclusive to the milkman but is influenced by micro, meso and macro understandings that help unfold a distinct relationship centred on specific dwelling activities.

5.2. Coordination mechanism 2: (Reliable) rhythms

Vignette 2: All his actions [preparing for his round] in the next 45 min look like perfect routine. There is not a word wasted (not even to the other milkmen). There is his vehicle and the products… Very structured, following a strict order [O3]. He opens his door, adjusts the seat belt (between his back and the seat) and places all his personal stuff in dedicated places. Everything in here has exactly one place where it should be, and I am like the alien presence disturbing that exacting model [O4].

At the customer's door, we do not use the handheld [device detailing orders] anymore. He just knows. We jump out of the milk-float, and he tells me exactly what to pick… "One 'semi'. The red lid to the door over there. Put the milk around the corner and pick up the two empty bottles. You will see" [O1].

He walks dedicated routes to each doorstep and does not cross grass – even if it would make his journey shorter [O7]. At the doorstep, he carries out his service: Inspecting the area, he looks for a sign telling him where to place them perfectly. He tells me that they have ordered only for the second time, and he places the products exactly where he left them on the first delivery. "They must be happy with that, as there is no milk minder, or a note under a stone, or any other indication that we are not allowed to put products down…" In his placement, the milk goes in the middle, the bread closer to the door (in a plastic bag) and the bottled water around the milk. He stares at the artificial arrangement of products to give it a final check and then we return to the vehicle. [O2]. "These are my customers. Within the last five years, almost all of them stayed with me. They know me…" [O1].

As evident in Vignette 2, milkmen's individual routines, and knowledge, are also built on their customers' individual behaviours and rhythms (micro). Milkmen were able to repeat anticipated customer orders without checking and were sometimes able to predict the time by which a product was needed.

Specific milkmen's work rhythms were somewhat different, though based on a set of common professional values, business guidance, and prescriptive behaviour, such as loading the milk-float (meso), as Vignette 2 demonstrates. Common routines were influenced by the societal understanding of being a milkman (macro) – for instance not disturbing the community served, and particularly their customers, by adjusting the way they drove and walked at night – one milkman always shut his vehicle door as quietly as possible and others omitted using headlights on some streets – and the milkman in the vignette refrained from making his journey to the doorstep shorter by walking on the customer's lawn. However, some of the repeated actions were an individual milkman's interpretation in a specific local and temporal setting (micro) but, potentially, they were influenced by previously routine practices – such as the specific arrangement of products at a particular

doorstep in the example above.

This outcome supports the widely shared understanding that human behaviour in business contexts is fundamentally socially embedded in *personal* relationships (Mangus et al., 2020; Price & Arnould, 1999). Consequentially, customers also proactively described their working and shopping routines (micro), which fit with the regular rhythm of the doorstep deliveries, e.g. by 7 a.m., so before customers leave for work, or to 'start' the weekend: *"I enjoy the idea of being able to wake up on a Saturday morning go downstairs to find a delivery of fresh milk, eggs, bacon, bread that kind of thing"* [I7].

But interestingly, routines exist that do not match the (meso) business model of the milkmen (for instance, customers also undertake their regular shopping in supermarket chains, where they buy comparable products). Nevertheless, customers appreciated the reliable repetition of the doorstep deliveries (bi-daily), which mirrors their constant consumption of key goods such as milk: *"I know that milk is going to be reliable and delivered for me that morning. … The milkman is still there. He's there despite whatever weather it is… That is why I, personally, I would never ever, ever, stop having a milk delivery, because it's just reliable"* [I8].

So, the reliability of the mutually embedded rhythms impacts the contextual value cocreation as it provides structure, security, constancy, and dependability for both actors. As Vignette 2 highlights, customers have their regular orders and milkmen fashion their patterns of action as a response. This notion accords with Akaka and Schau's (2019) suggestion that from a service user's perspective: value "is continually created through consumption, over time" (p.499) but, importantly, extends the notion. Within this research, the repetitive process forges deep user bonds with service providers and their service assortment: *"The milkman is probably the only person that I tell when I'm going on holiday"* [I11]. Equally, service providers create bonds with users, in part 'through' the goods delivered, which become a symbolic device for broader relationship characteristics (meso): *"The trust that people have for their milkman, goes as far as they would even leave their purse there, and then, just say to the milkman, 'My purse is on the side there. Take out the money you need"* [I8]. Hence, the rhythm of activity evident in Vignette 2 supports the creation of reliable routines and interactive relationships that support value cocreation for each beneficiary.

By combining both actors' views, this research strengthens the relevance of temporal dimensions of value cocreation, recently highlighted Lyons and Brennan (2019), but frames them more holistically as aspects of dwelling, connecting them with enmeshed material and social activities. Hence, there are multiple mental links between past, present, and future, but also elements of asynchronous actions at the shared doorstep (=chronology) and elements of frequent deliveries (=repetition) for both actor groups, which are embedded within the business model (meso) and socio-historical understandings (macro). Here, both milkmen, and customers characterize the business of the milkmen as being reliable, fighting against almost overpowering natural forces with a frequency and regularity that stands in distinction from other home delivery services. The social institution of the milkman reliably 'feeds' the routines of its customers, as Vignette 2 highlights, and as the following exemplifies *"we ordered our breakfast goods the night before whilst waiting in an Italian airport, knowing that we wouldn't be home until 3 a.m. … Hey presto, first thing in the morning, fresh milk in glass, a complementary bottle of juice and lovely bread is waiting on the doorstep!"* [Trustpilot 44].

5.3. Coordination mechanism 3: (Contextual) romanticization

Vignette 3: His friends in the field are the cats and the foxes we greet whenever we see one. He also identifies his milk-float as being female and sometimes speaks to her [O6]. And within that context, it becomes obvious that his float means something special [O7].

He tells me that his customers love him to take care of the neighbourhoods by driving around at night [O4]. "I'm out in the field for more time than the police and I would recognize if something goes wrong" [O5]. He believes that

he is probably the last to serve these customers. Some decades ago, there were eight milkmen required to service this area but as customers declined, one by one they all went…he is 'the last of the Mohicans' [O6].

The naming of this coordination mechanism draws directly on three notions associated with (English, French and German) romanticism – imagination, nature and symbols and myths (Wellek, 1975). It is also used to connect to later ideas that take an antipathetical position to notions of the breaking of social bonds (Sayre & Löwy, 2005), and the separating of people from their own interior lives, from one another and the world, including other entities in it (Taylor, 1992). Given these characteristics, it again serves to unify aspects of S-D logic and taskscape.

This coordination mechanism contains the mutually, context-related symbols and signs embedded in the business, and as Vignette 3 illustrates, these support the creation of imaginary understandings about 'the milkman' (e.g. lone, individual patrolling the neighbourhood in an electric milk-float): *"You hear about a milkman that will maybe see that milk hasn't gone in from an elderly person […]. It's nice thinking that there's that extra pair of eyes that are just looking out for people"* [I4].

These perceptions also rest on individuals' projections and identification by embodying emotions, including nostalgia. For example: *"Yes, as a small child I always remember there were milk bottles on the doorstep, the classic images of the cream on top…"* [I2]; *"to me, a milkman reminds me of my childhood, …the milkman would come, he would leave the milk um… And it's just got a very warm, family feel [I3]; "We grew up with the milkman and little glass milk bottles and all that stuff"* [I5].

Nostalgia is embedded in lives and influences actors' interactions and their perception of value in the past and present (Lyons & Brennan, 2019). As such, it entwines with the symbolic enactment evident; for instance, milkmen acting as the eyes and ears of the community, and both customers' and milkmen's recognition that such practices are shaped by the social and cultural norms that have accreted over the profession's history. This generates an intense sense of professional values in both parties.

This identification has been built through generations of customers and milkmen, keeping the construct of the milkman alive and platforming similar interactions across Britain over time (macro) – as the vignette suggests, this is a matter of decades, or more precisely centuries. The idea of identification is further supported by the surroundings where interaction primarily occurs: the individual's doorstep (micro) in their neighbourhood (meso), as illustrated above. The familiar place of customers' doorsteps and the 'unknown' individual inhabiting the role of a trusted, well-known icon is extensively used as the basis for individuals' projections and interpretations of the business: *"[I]t's historically part of the British mentality"* [I5].

Such historically based projections and interpretations are also influenced by the asynchronous interaction process and the specific time of the day. The night itself offers a distinct atmosphere, which on the one hand impacts "perception and precedes any other associated phenomena" (Ellis et al., 2003, p.718). On the other, the night is a time of the day that is not commonly used by a diurnal species, such as humans (Melbin, 1978). Therefore, the night is often seen as being "outside of ordinary social control [as…] police coverage is sparse" (Melbin, 1978, p.11). Hence, customers appreciated that 'someone trusted is out there protecting their homes'. Here, the milkman occupies the role of the police and incorporates public surveillance (Ellis et al., 2003). Consequentially, customers connected terms such as *"shadows of the dark night cover danger and crime" [I3]* to the institution of the milkman, but also have *"[a] warm feeling that there was also somebody else out there, that would look out for you" [I3]*, although commonly they no longer see, or meet, that someone.

The research also unveiled that the actors' interpretations of the milkman are suffused with a melancholic, sentimental, and retrospectively glorifying understanding of the profession (meso) – codified as 'the last of the Mohicans' as one milkman in the vignette suggests. For actors who have long-term experience of the service, it is also associated

with "feeling oneself a stranger in a new period that contrasted negatively with an earlier time in which one felt, or imagined, oneself at home" (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p.922). The 'milkmen of yore', and all that is imagined to be attendant with them (e.g. community, familiarity, closeness, support), were extolled in comparison to the impersonal and distant societal relations that are currently perceived: *"There isn't that requirement for the [physical] interaction. We don't interact generally now like we used to. I think it's a missing part of the business, but I think the fundamental basics of the milkman delivery service is still there for the British people" [I5]*. Both actor groups tended to extol the past and load their individual remembered interactions with evocative elements. This is also supported by the contemporary uniqueness of the business: it is essentially the bastion of traditional local and personal doorstep deliveries, resonating with a nostalgic past when having a milkman was the (macro) norm: *"…I think he is very important to the community, I think he is the last service provider of the old traditional England. [Where], you have the milkman, you'd have the veg-man, you'd have the coalman, you would have the um, all of these… He's the last one of those traditional English services" [I1]*.

The research highlights the relevance of the (macro) cultural dimension for value cocreation, echoing recent research in other contexts (e.g. Becker & Jaakola, 2020; Kelleher et al., 2019; Akaka & Vargo, 2014). It also supports Chronis' (2019) thoughts on the 'indirect

Table 4
Coordination mechanisms made manifest.

Coordination mechanism 1:	(Interactive) dwelling activities – levels of aggregation		
Example aspects:	Micro level influence: my everyday facilitated	Meso level influence: systems regulated and disrupted	Macro level influence: memes reinforced
Message in a bottle	Everyday doorstep communication (S, T)	Professional communal display (S, C)	Historic tropes and communication forms applied (S, T, C)
Special signs	Specific contextual language (S, T)	Contextual knowing (S, T, C)	
Secret relationships	Dwelling activities assisted (S, T)	Organizational systems subverted (S, T, C)	Cultural heritage sustained (S, T, C)
Known, unknown	Asynchronous doorstep (inter) actions (S, T)	Actor groups' vague and partial understandings (S, T, C)	
Coordination mechanism 2:	(Reliable) rhythms – levels of aggregation		
Example aspects:	Micro level influence: what my milkman does for me	Meso level influence: what we milkmen do for them	Macro level influence: what we know a milkman should do for us
Actors' routines and rhythms	Individual knowledge and behaviour (S, T)	Common professional values (S, T, C)	Contextually rooted practices (S, T, C)
Actors' reliable behaviours	Consistent dwelling (S, T, C)	Business model fit (S, T, C)	
Coordination mechanism 3:	(Contextual) romanticization – levels of aggregation		
Example aspects	Micro level influence: my hero	Meso level influence: pillar of our community	Macro level influence: a very British disposition
Symbols and signs Identification	I remember when (S, T, C) Our doorstep (S, T)	Symbolic enactment (S, T, C) Our neighbourhood (S, T, C)	Social and cultural norms (S, T, C) Our cultural icon (S, T, C)
Interpretation and imagination	Simply magic (S, T, C)	The last of a kind (S, T, C)	Time-honoured values (S, T, C)

S = spatial; T = temporal; C = cultural.

influence' of imaginations, as customers "infuse the stage with their own meanings and bring their own interpretation" (p.458): *"I've never met him, never seen him. He's just a magician – milk turns up" [I2].*

Table 4 below offers an overview the coordination mechanisms. It illustrates the influences of the three mechanisms as manifest at the micro, meso and macro level. The spatial, temporal and cultural entanglements are also highlighted, and it is conspicuous that these are present throughout – but unsurprisingly often concurrently apparent at the meso and macro levels. As such, the space–time-culture dimensions are interwoven throughout the contextual coordination mechanisms, whose influence is manifest within varied aspects of dwelling.

Therefore, the language within Table 4 underscores the actors and their dwelling activities, the relationships and rhythms at play, and the contextual resonance evident. In so doing, the reciprocal nature of individual practices and social order begins to emerge. For example, in the flow of sensemaking apparent within the identification aspect of (contextual) romanticization, the day-to-day routines that occur at 'our doorstep' (micro), are both embedded in, and shape, what is evident within 'our community' (meso) and 'our cultural icon' (macro). Equally, divergences within, and between, the influences of coordination mechanisms appear. For instance, at the meso level consider the subversion of some organizational systems within (interactive) dwelling activities alongside the embodiment of common professional values within (reliable) rhythms. Hence notions of taskscape and dwelling elucidate the complexities evident in contextual value-cocreation coordination mechanisms.

6. Discussion

The taskscape – or pattern of dwelling activities (Ingold, 1993) – of Britain's doorstep milk delivery unfolds through the interactions and movements of milkmen and customers, who perform tasks bound up in (interactive) dwelling activities, (reliable) rhythms, and (contextual) romanticization. These three coordination mechanisms likewise connect with the business, the industry, the neighbourhood, the community and society – or as Habermas' (1985, 1985b) might characterize it, the mechanisms that are part of the 'lifeworld's background'. The findings highlight that this taskscape involves the enmeshing of a contextual perspective, helping respond to calls for such work (Akaka et al., 2015, Helkkula et al., 2022), to identify value cocreation mechanisms that are evident at *all* aggregation levels. This underscores the potential unified resource that Ingold's (1993; 2014; 2017) notions and the dwelling perspective (Gruppuso, 2020) offer to those seeking to explore contextual value coordination mechanisms and practices.

For instance, (interactive) dwelling activities include communication practices that connect historic tropes (macro), such as the leaving of notes, but also include individualized codes that only a specific milkman and customer pairing can decipher (micro) (Alexander et al., 2018). Additional practices around knowing develop from this coordination mechanism – but the asynchronous nature of the service means that 'knowing' is repeatedly generated from fictive relationships. The milkmen use the 'clues' at, and around, the doorstep to fashion knowledge about their customers. Customers draw on cultural knowledge (Akaka et al., 2015) and business practices to support understanding, leading them to proffer potentially contradictory phrases such as '*I know the milkman…I don't know him personally*'.

In (reliable) rhythms, aspects of relating develop through the placing of trust in the milkman, sharing information that would not be given to others, such as holiday plans, or allowing interaction with personal objects such as a wallet or purse. The commitment of both actors is also evident – customers expounding their loyalty and milkmen battling to ensure delivery no matter what. Routines, rituals and ceremonials abound, at the level of their individual (micro) actions and through the shared rhythms of dwelling (meso). An engagement occurs that arises through using the world (Gruppuso and Whitehouse, 2020). This might be differently expressed as *being* in the world and, consequently,

engaging with it in a manner that constitutes 'ongoingness'.

The rhythms of dwelling (Gruppuso, 2020) are evident in the referential function of the milkman. The milkman is a concept to associate the use of other things and actions (be this the prosaic connection to breakfast, the ability to relax at the weekend or the extraordinary provision of security and safety, or the saving of Christmas), that creates a totality, a place (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; McKenzie Aucoin, 2017) whose meaning derives from such objects and actions.

(Contextual) romanticization also helps frame dwelling practices and draws together present, past and future (Razmdoost et al., 2019). This further connects milkman and customers' temporal horizons to support value cocreation. This mechanism equally reinforces the (possible) nature of actions – creating shared patterns of rhythmical resonance that span temporal horizons, which support the identification depicted in the findings. In this manner, the doorstep is the contextual and relational constellation of dwelling activities, where ongoingness is manifest, rather than the outcome of a discrete and separable series of tasks (Gruppuso, 2020). The milkmen's and customers' experiential and embodied practices therefore emphasize the performative and multifaceted nature of temporality – they illuminate the pattern of dwelling activities (Ingold, 1993, 2017).

The potential of taskscape and dwelling is additionally evidenced when the findings are considered against the four aspects that Koskela-Huotari et al. (2020) contend aid a more nuanced understanding of institutions. Firstly, institutions as inhabited by actors – each identified mechanism, as discussed above, is not viewed as 'external'; rather, it arises from everyday activities and is expressed in patterns of dwelling. Activities are thus influenced by the embedded social pattern, but equally what actors 'do' creates the institution itself. This resolves previous issues in considering action and social order. Secondly, each identified mechanism is dynamic and can be considered a reciprocal process; the explanation of institutions as static is disrupted. Thirdly, the emotional content and embodied nature of the coordination mechanisms is explicit at all levels of aggregation – and the cognitive aspect no longer predominates. Fourthly, the contradictions apparent in the coordination mechanisms illuminate aspects of power, politics and bias. Hence, taskscape, as a conceptual device, addresses each of Koskela-Huotari *et al.*'s exhortations.

Taskscape, therefore, offers a cohesive conceptual device from which to explore the contextual value cocreation coordination mechanisms embedded in actors' lifeworlds and everyday activities. Understood from within this perspective, the doorstep is more than a backdrop or part of the material world in which social life takes place -such distinctions are dissolved in the taskscape as (human and non-human actor [Gruppuso, 2020]) dwelling *is* the life of the world – performed amid its material, temporal and social entanglements.

7. Conclusions

7.1. Theoretical implications

By applying taskscape (Ingold, 1993, 2017) and the dwelling perspective (Gruppuso, 2020), this research has extended the conceptualizations available within S-D logic to understand when, where and how contextual coordination mechanisms shape value cocreation. This permits more nuanced investigation of the institutions that are central to axiom 5 (FP 11) of S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) and that have seen increasing attention in service research (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020). Additionally, this treatment affords a more holistic perspective than the evident atomistic approaches available in prior S-D logic-based work (Akaka et al., 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2011; Löbler, 2011). Taskscape and dwelling provide midrange conceptual tools that assist researchers in drawing together related, but previously dispersed, treatments of the role of institutions and institutional arrangements (coordination mechanisms) in value cocreation and promote the further extension of S-D logic through cross-disciplinary efforts.

This is firstly done by replacing the understanding of context as simply constituting the scenery or backdrop in which life, and value cocreation, take place with one where contextual factors are intertwined with each other *and* with the variety of actors' tasks. This expanded perspective elucidates the dynamic role of context and foregrounds interactivity and relationships as part of the environment rather than separate to it (Ingold, 2017).

In doing this, taskscape and dwelling also embrace the individual as part of a social group, capturing the notion of resonance. This again foregrounds (individual and joint) activities, iterative interactions and relationships as being shaped by, and themselves influencing, concepts such as place, rhythms, and rituals that are then further immersed in broader space–time-culture dimensions (see Tables 1 and 4). Consequently, the application of taskscape and dwelling secondly reveals the various strands of space–time-culture present in coordination mechanisms and does so in a manner that moves their treatment beyond the unidimensional and orthogonal and as separable from actors' practices. This is imperative to advance service research concerning the interconnection between physical materials or enactments and the invisible or taken for granted aspects of institutions (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020).

Thirdly, given the aspects outlined above, taskscape and dwelling conceptually resolve the relationship between practices and institutions by acknowledging that institutions are themselves cocreated and reshaped through actor groups and their everyday activities expressed in dwelling patterns. Therefore, these tools offer an effective and elaborated means of amalgamating practices and institutions, which remains a contested proposition within service research (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020; Skålén and Gummerus, 2022; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This conjoint consideration of practices and institutions offers researchers a means for multi-levels of aggregation (Alexander et al., 2018) that clearly locates such perspectives contextually, thereby also addressing requests for such additional treatments (Akaka et al., 2015, Helkkula et al., 2022) and takes explicit account of individuals' understandings of actors' day-to-day routines (Akaka & Vargo, 2014; Becker & Jaakola, 2020; Heinonen et al., 2010). As such, taskscape and dwelling clearly facilitate the emergence of interconnected and specific understandings that advance considerations of value cocreation.

Therefore, through the study of actors' everyday activities and patterns of dwelling, taskscape creates a view of the service ecosystem from that of its chief participants, that unites the social (the actors, their iterative interactions and emerging relationships), whilst unambiguously locating them in relation to the multi-stranded aspects of space–time-culture. It also foregrounds everyday activities and patterns of dwelling as a dynamic and reciprocal exchange, where context is created and surrounds the actors, then guides, constrains, and coordinates value cocreation, while being forged through those self-same activities.

Finally, the exploration of this service, with its inherent idiosyncrasies, has helped to reveal (interactive) dwelling activities, (reliable) rhythms and (contextual) romanticization as coordination mechanisms, which may have transferability as broad notions to other research sites. Such generalizability would lie in their application at the broadest level, as issues of context and meaning would invariably alter their interpretation (Akaka & Vargo, 2013). Hence, which strands dominate may change as may the nature of the interweaving. This would then result in specific practices that affect the mechanisms themselves. Consequently, these mechanisms offer a template in which specific patterns are created.

7.2. Managerial implications

The identification of contextual coordination mechanisms and understanding of when, where and how they shape value cocreation endows managers with multiple insights. These may have utility as a frame for management consideration in service value cocreation. This serves to work against what may be the prevalent tendency to deal managerially with *isolated* aspects of context (which, as a position, makes no sense within the notion of taskscape).

Managers, this research suggests, need to understand the broader nature of context to effectively integrate micro, meso and macro concerns. This means reconsidering the distinct treatment of space, time and culture, and embracing their interconnectedness and various aspects. It supports understanding that social life is not set against, or distinct from, to these aspects but that they are inherently enmeshed and inseparable – hence micro, meso and macro concerns are continually indivisible, as any pattern of dwelling activities resonates across these levels. This supports a move away from context as *straightforward* setting – where there is inherent focus on one, or two, specific strands of the space, time and culture dimensions and these are juxtaposed against social, and particularly human, practices. Taskscape dissolves these problematic tensions but necessitates considerable shift in management understanding.

In this research the three coordination mechanisms demonstrate that the relationship between milkman and customer is beyond that of 'mere employee' and customer. This needs to be recognized in the management of the milkmen themselves. Whilst the customer may not personally know the employee that serves them, they 'know' their milkman; equally, milkmen comprehend their role as delivering service to 'their' customers and communities. The company's positioning in this could be to 'reinforce or render' such connections – the latter potentially alienating customers from the bonds that currently tie them to 'their milkman' and, by association, the company. Considered management is needed to respect the relationship patterns, whilst ensuring that the business continues to enfold contemporary practices – particularly in the management of communication between the customer, milkman and company, a site of much resonance for customers.

This will enable the trust and loyalty placed into the role of the milkman to be further leveraged as part of the value proposition, and here recognition of the potential for service to extend beyond the goods delivered is critical. For instance, the 'magical' value of the service might be foregrounded, or the community benefits afforded in a society that increasingly seeks to consolidate 'the home' as both a literal and metaphorical place of safety, comfort and joy. Enabling managers to understand the everyday activities and patterns of dwelling present on the UK's doorstep fosters decision-making around staff management, and operational and communication practices, helping ensure this iconic service continues to persist.

7.3. Areas for future research

Our research has left many questions unanswered. It opens further research avenues, promising meaningful possibilities for knowledge creation in the domain of S-D logic at the intersection of marketing and anthropology.

The processes of value cocreation and the role of institutions and institutional arrangements, alongside their impact on the service users, need further multi-level (micro, meso and macro) exploration. Here this is approached through the application of taskscape to offer a unified perspective. The principal question remains as to whether taskscape is the *only* means of reducing the tension seen to exist between action (practices) and social order (institutions), as reflected in practice theory and in institutional theory. Future research might examine this and suggest alternate midrange resolutions, drawing from anthropology and beyond.

Before such inter- or *trans*-disciplinary alternatives are sought, the question of whether the integration of taskscape and S-D logic as presented in the initial conceptual device (see Fig. 1), and as evidenced in the research outcomes, is supported in *similar* dwelling contexts remains? For instance, is the approach adopted here useful in understanding other asynchronous services, which could encompass editing, dry cleaning and steel fabrication. A similar logic could be used to investigate other nocturnal services or those that occur in boundary

spanning spatial contexts, or that are equally significant culturally.

Conversely, divergent contexts could be considered to examine further the integration of taskscape and S-D logic. Is this approach effective within service contexts where actors meet (regularly) or never meet or indeed see no manifestation of the other actors? Can it be used where customers enter the provider's space or vice versa? Will the integration of taskscape and S-D logic developed in this research extend to situations that are not as richly culturally figured or laden as the milkman? Can it be deployed in contemporary contexts, for example peer-to-peer sharing, fintech applications, where what occurs is often wholly in the digital domain?

Equally, can the application of taskscape help explore the more 'negative' activities and practices that lead to value co-destruction and its (particular) mechanisms, rather than the generally positive aspects considered here?

Should taskscape, as presented here, bear out in response to the questions above, then attention might turn to further elaborating aspects of its conceptualization – for example, the inclusion of the non-human – which may also have a place in the value cocreation mechanisms central to S-D logic.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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