Platform Cooperativism Consortium

Berggruen Institute
Ideas for a changing world

POLICIES FOR COOPERATIVE OWNERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

A Report by

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Policy Recommendations To Support Cooperative Ownership in the Digital Economy

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(I)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past decade gave rise to the so-called 'gig economy'—a cluster of service sector jobs contingent workers fulfill through digital platforms. Firms like Uber, TaskRabbit, and GrubHub established themselves as two-way intermediaries between workers and customers with the promise of revolutionizing work itself. While the gig economy has provided some convenience and savings to customers and flexibility to workers, the rise of the gig economy has also been disastrous. Using legal loopholes, well-funded lobbying efforts, and publicity campaigns, platform companies have eroded labor protections, worsened environmental conditions, and undermined public services. In contrast to the early, high-minded dreams of a 'sharing economy,' the gig economy is in effect defined by precarity and exploitation.

On the one hand, these problems have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. Gig workers were on the frontline of the emergency, delivering groceries, cleaning supplies, and preparing food. They were, however, also the workers who were most exposed to the economic dislocation of the pandemic.

On the other hand, effective government response has caused a tightening labor market that leaves some platforms without a sufficient supply of cheap labor. The promise of tech companies was that they would become hegemonic service providers, and thus their losses would be justified with long-term profits. Many of these already unprofitable firms face a real danger of failure just as their aggressive expansion has weakened public infrastructure, leaving vital gaps in essential services.

Our report provides a path forward at this critical juncture: the active promotion of platform cooperatives. Platform cooperatives are democratically-governed organizations owned by workers, customers, and other stakeholders. These entities match workers and customers and return a greater share of income to workers, increase worker protections, and build communities. Though still early in their development, platform cooperatives build on the proven business models of cooperatives to establish alternatives to the gig economy and its supporting digital infrastructure.

Platform cooperatives are critical to creating a fairer economy and building back better from the pandemic. However, they require active government intervention to be able to compete with well-funded and established private platforms.

This report suggests that governments on every level, from national to municipal, can take measures to empower platform cooperatives through actions including but not limited to:

- Procurement policies to provide preferential treatment of platform cooperatives over privately-owned platforms.

- Public solidarity lending to finance early-stage platform cooperatives as part of national, regional, and municipal development strategies.

- Public participation in multi-stakeholder cooperatives via direct state ownership of co-op shares that provide a public voice in cooperative management.

- Conduct legal research and review to ensure that laws governing cooperative enterprises reflect the changing realities brought by digital technology.

- Create a system of public benefits available to the workers of platform cooperatives such as healthcare, childcare, and worker training.

- Establish a network of public spaces that can be used explicitly by platform cooperatives to serve as hubs .

The ultimate goal of these policy prescriptions is to create a more level playing field for platform cooperatives by reducing the risks their members bear through the provision of collective goods. Such basic services allow alternative economic institutions to compete with often unprofitable platform companies flush with venture capital funds.

The policy suggestions found throughout this report are the results of rigorous case studies on government policies toward platform cooperatives and their effects in the following localities:

- California, United States of America

- Kerala, India

- Barcelona, Spain

- Bologna, Italy

- Berlin, Germany

- Paris, France

- Preston, United Kingdom

We selected these localities because of the presence of platform cooperatives in their economies and

to offer diverse geographical, legal, political, and economic perspectives. Each case study examines the status of platform cooperatives and corresponding government policies towards cooperatives and suggests specific improvements and additional actions that local and national authorities can pursue to foster a cooperative ecosystem.

1.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is both a health and economic crisis that has created conditions for more tech platform dependence. The immediate economic impacts are rather evident: a third of Latin America is slipping into extreme poverty, and the United States is living through the worst recession since the 1930s. In September 2020, it was reported that the UK's GDP fell by 22.1% in the first half of the year, outstripping the similarly steep plunge of the GDPs of France (18.9%), Italy (17.1%), and Germany (11.9%). These financial emergencies, once again, are being used to justify austerity politics, which undermines essential public services and most significantly impacts people who need these services most. City councils and municipalities have been forced to take cost-saving measures in critical areas: the City of San Francisco, for example, decided to cut over 40 bus lines to address its fiscal crisis, rendering tech services more invaluable as they fill in the gaps created by austerity.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the value of service workers, both visible and out of sight, in hospitals, public transportation, delivery services, and stores—medical staff and carers are overworked, fighting anxiety, and risking their lives. However, service workers faced increased precariousness even before the pandemic, as their jobs were subsumed into the "gig economy." At the same time, due to the pandemic, more activities of life, work, and human connection moved to digital platforms which are, for the most part, owned by US-based tech companies. Platform capitalists such as Uber and Deliveroo have led the charge to dismantle labor, consumer, and environmental protections as well as outsource risks onto individual workers. Further, platforms also utilize two complementary extraction processes: workers are losing protection and earnings, and users' personal data are monetized through methods that are opaque to the individual.

Complicating matters, platform capitalists benefiting most from the gig economy model also have significant political power and exercise it to their ends. Case in point, the recent Proposition 22 vote in California highlights how dominant tech companies have a vested interest in scripting a future for their industry that will ensure increased revenues and are willing to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to create these outcomes. As such, we cannot rely on the benevolence of venture-backed companies to overcome these overlapping crises: they are not incentivized to act against their own financial interests. It is also becoming increasingly unclear how our current institutions can address these mounting challenges. We need new kinds of organizations that anchor and sustain the coordination of an alternative system at a global scale. This transformation needs to be rooted in existing projects, businesses, and communities worldwide. Platform co-ops provide one such pathway to an alternative economy.

Platform cooperatives are businesses that use a website, mobile app, or protocol to sell goods or services. They rely on democratic decision-making and shared ownership of the platform by workers and users. Today, this movement strengthens the backbone for workers to sustain themselves during difficult times while also keeping the idea of participatory democracy alive.

This white paper responds to the failure of markets to provide certain essential services during the pandemic. It explores how city councils, municipalities, and other forms of local government can support the provisioning of these services through cooperatives and other enterprises that are part of the social and solidarity economy. With the necessary political and financial support at local and federal levels, platform cooperatives can meet the needs of communities. We also highlight issues about ownership, participatory democracy, and data colonialism. In a political climate in which partisan or commercial imperatives often stall action at the federal level, and because co-ops have been active at smaller scales, we consider it strategic and practical to instead focus on the municipal/state levels.

1.1. Gig Economy

1.1.1. What Is the Gig Economy?

In their book The Gig Economy, Alex Wood and Mark Graham offer the following definition of the term:

"What the term 'gig economy' captures is an economic transformation in which work in many sectors is becoming temporary, unstable, and patchworked. It entails workers spending less time at one job, risk of time spent without income, workers undertaking more jobs (possibly at the same time), and unpaid time spent searching for tasks or gigs." [1]

In this paper, we use the term 'gig economy' to refer to labor markets that facilitate casual, independent contract work through digital platforms. Research on the gig economy—books like Juliet Schor's After the Gig[2], Antonio A. Casilli's En attendant les robots: Enquête sur le travail du clic[3], and Tom Slee's What's Yours is Mine[4] —identify several critical problems associated with these new labor markets:

- The duplicitous imposition of independent contractor status on workers which precludes benefits and protections afforded to employees under labor law;
- Economic exploitation through both low, unreliable wages/wage theft, and data collection, creating a dual extraction problem;
- Harassment (e.g., sexual harassment) at significantly higher rates for gig workers[5];
- Fewer legal protections for gig workers as compared to employees;
- The outsourcing of the risk of business operation to workers: costs of ownership and maintenance of the apartment, car, bicycle, etc. remains with workers;

- The inability of workers to plan their lives, as the rules—including pay—change "under their feet;"

- The invisibility of much of the work: For every platform worker that we see driving or cycling out in the streets, there are several that remain less visible, undertaking caring jobs in private households or working throughout the global tech supply chain;

- Workplaces guided by opaque "algorithmic bosses" and one-sided rating systems, resulting in workers who have no clear understanding or control over their workplaces;

- The reduction of worker power because workers are geographically distributed and are difficult to organize;

- Reputation systems within apps discipline workers, with the customer becoming the middle manager;

- Platform companies often heavily rely, for their workforces, on migrant labor and minorities for low-paid platform work. Those marginalized in their society are more exposed to precarity and exploitation in the gig economy because of their caste, poverty, disability, and race;

- Platform companies have deliberately and often illegally circumvented laws and regulations (e.g., wage obfuscation). They are also engaged in high-cost campaigns to influence laws in their favors. While most of these companies have never been profitable, and some may not outlive this decade, their impact on a host of laws, from municipal transport regulations to national labor laws, will be long felt.

1.2. A Brief Definition of Platform Co-ops

Platform cooperatives, like platform companies, are businesses that use a website, mobile app, or protocol to intermediate the sale of goods or services. The key distinction is that they rely on democratic decision-making and shared platform ownership among workers, users, or occasionally both. Platform cooperatives don't follow a single "model" of success—instead, they employ iterative processes that build on small successes.

Platform cooperativism brings together two proven models: the 200-year-old model of cooperatives and the roughly 15-year-old model of digital labor platforms.

Based on the rich history of cooperative business, platform co-ops bring critical benefits:

- Greater resilience during economic downturns
- Increased worker retention and happiness
- Greater worker productivity
- The creation of a new digital economy that meets diverse users' needs[6]
- Decent pay for workers
- Worker control over labor conditions
- Lower failure rate after start-up phases
- Lower levels of staff turnover and lower absenteeism rates as compared with other businesses
- More control over data collection and privacy rights
- Reduced likelihood of businesses outsourcing jobs

Platform co-ops are thus a viable alternative to venture capital-funded, centralized platforms, putting stakeholders before shareholders. Through the platform co-op model, individuals can wear both hats of worker and business owner. This model allows them to aspire for greater income equality, dignified labor, democratic decision-making, financial returns from business success based on their contributions to their workplaces, and ease of access to the data collected about them. The platform co-op model offers an innovative approach with tangible benefits, empowering stakeholders over shareholders.

Currently, over 500 projects in 34 countries incorporate cooperative ownership of digital platforms. This white paper uses the term "platform cooperative" to describe worker co-ops, data co-ops, multi-stakeholder co-ops, and producer co-ops for whom their digital business is central to their operation. It is an emerging area with some companies generating around €200 million in revenue, while others are medium-sized or smaller in scale. Platform co-ops are not only relevant for advanced industrial economies: there are also new developments in the Global South, which could lead to these co-ops providing a wide range of services.

1.2.1. Platform Co-ops in Action

One of the most successful examples of a platform cooperative is Smart.coop, headquartered in Belgium but operating in nine European countries. Smart has a turnover of €200 million a year

and 85,000 users. Smart is a response to the precarity of the creative workers in Europe. It turns independent contractors, for example, artists such as opera singers, designers, dancers, and musicians, into employees of Smart, allowing them to receive legal protections afforded only to employees, including health insurance, unemployment benefits, and pension funds. It also assigns a tax accountant to each freelancer. It guarantees salary payment seven days after completing work, regardless of when the freelancer's client pays their invoice. Smart also pushes back against the social isolation commonly associated with freelancing by providing co-working spaces.

1.2.2. Conducive Environments for Platform Cooperatives

Platform co-ops appear in starkly different sectors, including but not limited to home services, medical care, transportation, and internet infrastructure. Just as with the local/remote distinction that exists in the larger gig economy, some projects are local businesses like Up&Go focused on New York City, while other platform co-ops such as Stocksy United have an international membership with over 1000 photographer-members across 67 countries. Platform co-ops are, for the most part, part of the market economy. They tend to be for-profit businesses with worker or community ownership and democratic governance. They can also appear in different forms: For example, platform co-ops do not only incorporate solely as cooperatives. For instance, several cooperatives are registered as Delaware-based Limited Liability Corporations (LLC), allowing practitioners to operate as a worker cooperative without being incorporated as a cooperative.

The concept of platform cooperatives emerged in a fragmented manner in countries such as Canada, Germany, and Italy, but has transformed into a more global, ideologically-diverse movement following the initial framing of this movement as "platform cooperativism" in 2014 and starting a year later, through various large-scale conferences. In the United States, cooperatives are one of the few topics that Republicans and Democrats can agree on: they appeal to improving worker protections and encouraging entrepreneurship while creating jobs and bringing social benefits to the community.

1.2.3. Platform Cooperatives and Policy: Who Supports Them Already?

Our white paper builds on earlier work on platform cooperatives to help guide interested officials and government bodies. There is growing interest among various stakeholders in many countries to develop and implement public policies that champion platform cooperatives as a way to build economic power and dignity for working people. For example, in 2017, Trebor Scholz, on behalf of the Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC), asked Hal Plotkin to organize an ad hoc PCC legislative policy task force in response to a request for policy ideas supportive of platform cooperatives from U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). That task force produced a proposed "New Bill of Rights for American Workers" that detailed ways in which federal U.S. legislation and executive actions could support platform co-ops.[7] This effort has led to additional interest from other quarters, including from New York Deputy Mayor Phillip Thompson, as well as further policy research in 2020 by Nathan Schneider[8] and Jonas Pentzien.

Additionally, in 2019, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, traditionally the second largest party in the country, embraced platform cooperativism and promoted it in their Party's platform. In the United Kingdom, the Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn and Keir Starmer, included platform cooperatives in their vision for the future of the Internet. Trebor Scholz presented platform co-ops at the G7, the Innovation Group of the Italian Parliament, and the Legislative Assembly of the State Government of Kerala, India. The PCC has also advised the city councils of San Francisco, Melbourne, and Barcelona. We believe this growing interest is a response to increasingly dysfunctional neoliberal policies that routinely disadvantage labor in favor of capital which, not incidentally, provide the capital that controls the discourse and maintains a neoliberal status quo.

1.3. Paper Structure

The most impactful changes in business practices have followed national or local regulation. In this white paper, we introduce the platform co-op model and policy frameworks that support cooperatives in general, and platform co-ops in particular, across the globe. Section three provides an overview of the national policy on cooperatives across seven territories, followed by a closer look at the municipal regulations concerning co-ops. Next, we examine both regulatory layers in the context of the existing projects and grassroots movements (i.e., 'movement builders') in support of platform co-op formation in these places. We conclude each section with concrete policy recommendations for each territory to propose remedies for the shortcomings that impede platform co-op formation and growth.

We consider the following territories:

- California, United States of America
- Kerala, India
- Barcelona, Spain
- Bologna, Italy
- Berlin, Germany
- Paris, France
- Preston, United Kingdom

The fourth section furnishes a set of general recommendations based on the best practices of the aforementioned territories and the experiences of local and global movement builders. We hope that

these recommendations will provide a blueprint for policymakers to take steps in other parts of the world. We conclude with a view towards future directions of the platform co-op movement.

1.3.1. Case Study Selection Criteria

Our selection of territories was spurred by our assessment of the most promising locales for scaling platform co-ops, based on their histories of successfully nurturing traditional cooperatives. These territories we discussed could either become platform co-op pioneers or have already implemented policies that could be used as examples for best practices. In some instances, we made national recommendations due to the potential for larger-scale change and the likelihood of support from the federal government. However, in most places, we pay special attention to municipal-level obstacles, drivers, and recommendations.

This white paper seeks to extend the impact of this previous work and experiences and provides practical suggestions for a new set of alternative public policies that can break down this well-established and seemingly intractable anti-labor power dynamic. It builds on previous papers focused on platform cooperatives that outlined public policy ideas designed to enable the significant social benefits associated with more widely-shared economic prosperity. Our recommendations include viable options that support platform cooperatives implementable by various jurisdictions, including municipal, city, regional, state, or country. Few of these ideas have been fully implemented anywhere. To date, most of these recommendations have only been deployed in a handful of jurisdictions. And even the policies that have generated positive results typically remain overlooked by most legislative bodies that rely primarily on existing capital-based power structures.

As such, while the ideas in this paper merit consideration and experimental implementation(s), they should be seen as starting points or works in progress whose actual impact(s) should be carefully measured and monitored on an ongoing basis. Results achieved and disappointments encountered must be fully understood and approaches themselves continuously improved. They do not describe, nor will they bring humanity to, a final destination for labor/capital policies within free economies. Still, they are practical steps policymakers can take immediately to begin tipping the scales in favor of a more humane balance between the unrestrained desires of those who control capital and the needs of those whose labor provides capital with products and services it can purchase.

2.
TARGET AUDIENCE

2.1. Target Audience: Which Policy Actors?

This white paper is targeted explicitly towards policymakers at national and local levels, including:

- Federal Policymakers/ Members of Parliament (MP)/ Bundestagsabgeordnete
- State Policymakers/ Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLA)
- Mayors, Mayors' Offices, City Council Members
- Hyperlocal Policymakers/ Gram Sabha

2.2. Which Areas of Law Are Implicated?

It is important to note that we cannot solely bolster the policy framework to support platform co-ops through legal reform. A broader set of ideas must also be considered, including legislation, regulations, and agency directives that make financing options more readily available to cooperatives. While the various areas of law may have considerable state and federal overlap, for example, they can be roughly mapped as follows:

Municipalities & Cities

- Tax Law
- Financing Regulations (Grants, Start-Up Financing)
- Preferential Public Procurement Regulations
- Municipal employee benefits buy-in programs (making them available to PCs)
- Local public facilities management, surplus/abandoned public property rules
- Regional local government associations, such as a "Bay Area Compact"

States and Federal

- Procurement Law

- Tax Law
- Cooperative Law
- Labor Law (State & Federal, depending on context)
- Competition Law (Federal & Supranational, depending on context)
- Business/economic data collection and dissemination (all levels of government)
- Intellectual property law (i.e. recognition of copyleft licenses that are typically used by platform co-ops)

3. THE CO-OP SECTOR, MOVEMENT BUILDERS, AND POLICIES

3.1. California, USA

3.1.1. The Cooperative Movement in the U.S.

Cooperatives have a long history in American labor and social justice battles. In the 1880s, the Knights of Labor[9] used cooperatives as a tool for building labor power. The first U.S. credit union was established in 1909, inspired by financial institutions in Canada and Germany. Credit unions became indispensable for the extension of basic consumer finance to most Americans in the early 1900s. By 1960, there were about 10,000 credit unions with about 6.1 million members. Today, American credit unions have over 122 million members. In 1916, the oldest and largest trade association for cooperatives, the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA CLUSA) was founded, representing the Rural Electric Association, the National Farmers Union, and the United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives, among others. The American cooperative movement now spans all co-op sectors and industries such as agriculture, consumer, finance, utilities, retail, and housing. Today, there are over 65,000 cooperatives that provide nearly two million jobs and create more than $74 billion in annual wages, with a revenue of $650 billion. Whether they realize it or not, one in three Americans is a member of some form of cooperative enterprise. The three most prominent sectors of the American cooperative movement are agriculture cooperatives, rural electric cooperatives, and credit unions.

The American cooperative movement has also produced consistent social benefits. Food/agriculture cooperatives reinvest in their communities at an average of 14% more than conventional grocers. Nearly a million of the nation's farmers belong to cooperatives, accounting for 55% of today's U.S. agriculture sales. Electric cooperatives power 18 million homes, schools, and businesses.

Despite the long history of success, there are still many obstacles to advancing cooperative ownership in America, including:

- Challenges to labor organizing
- Dearth of easy access to funding (especially in the startup phase)
- Lack of adherence to cooperative principles as they scale
- Competition with an extremely well-financed private sector

3.1.2. Co-ops in California:

Already in the 1860s, a variety of industrial worker cooperatives were present across California, including in San Francisco, where a general strike staged by boot and shoemakers led to the

formation of a cooperatively-owned footwear company. A hundred years later, co-ops were an integral part of California's globally-influential "counterculture" movement. By the mid-1970s, cooperative supermarkets in California had hundreds of thousands of members supporting dozens of member-owned stores. Despite widespread popular support, California's co-ops typically had little access to many government or capital support structures routinely showered on privately-owned enterprises.

California's cooperative flame has largely flickered out in the public mind in recent years. However, historically, cooperative forms of economic integration are far from an aberration in California. California has a unique social and cultural history of supporting worker-owned cooperatives. The state can support initiatives that level the playing field for workers and put a decent standard of living back within their reach by enacting policies that empower worker-owned cooperatives.

3.1.2.1. Platform Co-op Movement Builders

NursesCan

In Ghost Work, Mary Gray and Siddharth Suri describe one of the best examples of a union joining forces with a platform cooperative, the NursesCan Cooperative in California:

"In 2017, the Service Employees International Union–United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW), a 150,000-member union, threw its support behind the NursesCan Cooperative, a platform of licensed vocational nurses who provide on-demand care. In the hope of creating more stable, better-paying jobs for nurses, the union offered legal support and connections to potential employers. The idea behind NursesCan, formed by five licensed vocational nurses, was to deliver on-demand, at-home care for patients who wanted the option of a nurse visiting them at home, as opposed to going to a healthcare facility to be seen by a healthcare provider. As the population ages, the need for nurses in the United States alone (not to mention the rest of the world) is projected to grow 12 percent between 2016 and 2026, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics." [10]

The platform cooperative NursesCan, similar to Equal Care Cooperative in the UK, addresses the need to cut overwhelming bureaucracy for workers, as well as their need to take breaks, engage in continuing education, and connect with one another. It is a crucial service in one of the most rapidly developing occupations in the United States.

Policy Drivers: Humanizing Technology: California's Municipal Government, Organized Labor, and Platform Cooperatives Begin to Collaborate

The advent of the fast-growing Platform Cooperative Consortium (PCC) illustrates the current surge of interest in the more modernized form of cooperative ventures presently growing under its umbrella. Recognizing that the same technologies currently used to disempower worker rights—

smartphones, databases, location and mapping services, online payment systems, and so on—can also provide potential solutions for many of the operational hurdles that previously plagued pre-digital era cooperative ventures is critical to ensuring the success of cooperativism in the twenty-first century. In essence, a new suite of digital tools now makes collaboration and cooperative organization far simpler.

This opportunity has not escaped the attention of forward-thinking policymakers interested in fostering economically inclusive social progress. In San Francisco, for example, a task force organized to advise the County Board of Supervisors recently published a report supporting the establishment of municipal support for platform cooperatives. Many other local jurisdictions in California seem likely to follow San Francisco's lead as their initiative takes shape.

Likewise, in early 2020, a group affiliated with organized labor drafted a proposed California Cooperative Economy Act, which is currently online for review and comment. This proposed state legislation would recognize and empower cooperatives as a new labor market intermediary in partnership with organized labor. At present, the PCC and representatives of organized labor are planning a public consensus-building dialogue that could result in an agreement to embed union-friendly organizing procedures as a definitional component of worker-owned enterprises and platform cooperatives, which would enable both groups to develop and advocate a common legislative agenda going forward. Taken together, these developments and enactment of the policy options delineated below would position California to maintain its reputation as the place where the future happens first.[11]

3.1.2.1. Policy Obstacles

California's large size and decentralized governance represents a significant obstacle to policymaking. California has nearly 40 million residents represented through individual legislative districts that in some cases approach the size of entire states in other parts of the U.S. Additionally, the concentration of wealth and power in California stymies legislative interest or activism on actions that threaten to reduce that concentration of power. These structural issues make it difficult for grassroots entities and interests, including cooperatives, to counter the influence achieved by more monied interests. This is reflected by:

- A lack of cooperative economy policy studies at state-supported higher education institutions;
- An absence of legislative working groups organized to advance the interests of cooperatives;
- The absence of any organized fundraising groups providing support to attract legislative interest in policies that support the cooperative economy;
- The absence of any requirements that any state-supported educational curriculum must include the history of cooperatives in California;

- The failure to include references to or special considerations of the social desirability of cooperatives in regulations that impact the formation or operations of cooperatives.

3.1.2.2. Policy Options at the Local, State, and Regional Level

At the federal level, the renewed enforcement of antitrust laws is often seen as the most viable way to restrain a plethora of abuses of power increasingly committed by technology firms. While undeniably useful, the primary outcome of antitrust enforcement usually involves a reduction of monopoly power or, in some cases, merely the transfer of that power to other entities, which gradually rebuild market-choking capacity under another brand. That is why policymakers must look beyond antitrust enforcement. Indeed, local, regional, and state jurisdictions have various other tools they can use, some of which could potentially be as or even more powerful than restoring the enforcement of antitrust regulations.

These tools, whose identification flows from the obstacles cited above and others often encountered by cooperatives in California, fall into three general categories: infrastructure support, incentives, and rewards. Some examples follow.

3.1.2.3. Policy Recommendations

Infrastructure Supports:

- Extend the availability of fringe benefits offered to state employees to members of platform cooperatives on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Include health insurance, subsidies for childcare, pension and retirement fund management and augmentation, and enhanced access to educational opportunities, including professional development. The success of a platform cooperative is more likely when it can more quickly and reliably offer a competitive suite of worker benefits.

- Establish an inventory of available physical facilities that could be offered for free or at low-cost use by startup and operating platform cooperatives.

Include meeting halls, industrial-size kitchens, parking lots, unused office buildings or space, and any other underutilized physical plants or facilities owned by those jurisdictions. Affordable access to those facilities by qualified worker-owned enterprises would contribute to their formation and movement toward profitability.

- Focus more resources on academic and applied research and development projects at state-supported colleges and universities that illuminate and help overcome common impediments to the success of worker-owned firms. Investing in an evidence-based understanding of factors

contributing to the sustained success of worker-owned enterprises would strengthen firms and mimic support routinely provided to more exploitative and extractive business models.

Incentives:

- Enact purchasing preferences that give platform cooperatives and other worker-owned firms fiscal bidding advantages similar to those that some jurisdictions provide to female and minority-owned enterprises.

Local economies can benefit when public funds are spent on and recirculated in a local economy by workers providing goods and services rather than siphoned off into the pockets of non-resident shareholders. The success of platform cooperatives will accelerate if they have increased access to large accounts that reliably pay their bills. It makes sense to steer the economic benefits of large sales to public agencies toward vendors whose ownership structures and compensation practices contribute more reliably to local economic activity.

- Develop and support platform cooperative business incubator services.

Cities such as Berlin and Brussels already offer incubator services specifically designed to support the launch of platform cooperatives. As such, it is "recommended that regional and local authorities promote (physical and online) collaborative spaces, such as makerspaces, living labs, cluster organizations, digital innovation hubs, technology incubators, and accelerators to enable collaborations between various stakeholders of the social economy, including universities, for-profit tech companies, and local government agencies."[12]

- Offer targeted tax advantages, relief, and exemptions to platform cooperatives.

Include reduced or eliminated sales taxes, tax credits based on a mean increase in employee wages measured against comparable local firms, reduced property taxes, and partial or complete rebates on income taxes assessed by the state. The success of platform cooperatives and other worker-owned firms can proliferate by equalizing the economic advantages that have already been secured by and continue to be provided to larger, shareholder-owned firms, many of which are multinational.

Rewards:

- Provide public recognition.

Among other ways, this can be done by certifying their organizational status as cooperatives, measuring, and recognizing their individual annual contributions to local economic vitality, and listing them in specialized brand-building public business directories limited to cooperative ventures consistent with a state's proper role in promoting economic opportunity.

- Provide platform cooperatives and other worker-owned enterprises annual financial awards based on the actual amounts of public benefits saved by helping the recipients of public aid become co-owners of income-generating enterprises. Platform cooperatives and other worker-owned enterprises would also benefit by receiving the lion's share of the financial resources initially saved when people move from public assistance to cooperative employment.

- Provide platform cooperatives with preferred access to state-run export promotion assistance support. For example, existing export promotion offices located in the countries of foreign trade partners can accelerate the success of platform cooperatives and other worker-owned firms through the increased cost-efficient acquisition of increasing export sales.

3.2. Kerala, India

3.2.1. The Co-operative Movement in India

The total membership of all cooperatives in India is 250 million, affecting 98 percent of all villages.[13] Since 1947, the year India gained independence, there has been a massive growth of cooperative societies, predominantly in agriculture. Cooperative banks and housing societies play a significant role in the Indian economy, especially in Mumbai, Chennai, New Delhi, and Kolkata.[14]

For example, in India, the government initiated the formation of Amul cooperative, which unites 3.6 million milk producers. In 1970, Amul spurred the "White Revolution," which created a system that linked milk producers throughout India with consumers. The White Revolution made India the world's largest milk producer.

3.2.2. Co-ops in Kerala

Kerala is a relatively small state, but accounts for 17% of India's cooperative members and 7% of the share of cooperative capital.[15] More than 21 million out of a population of about 34 million are members of a co-op. The growth of cooperatives in Kerala results from national initiatives and the local traditions of public action and grassroots social organizations. In this state, cooperatives have been especially successful in healthcare, manufacturing, and construction. The state has the highest literacy rate in India at 94% (the national average is 79%), and it has the second-highest digital spread in India after Delhi. Left-wing consciousness is deeply rooted among the people in Kerala. According to Thomas Isaac: "The pressures from below for fashioning state-level policies promoting civil rights, social equality, collective bargaining, land reform and public provisioning of education, health care and Social Security was a prime mover in Kerala's achievements in the social sectors for which the state is famous."[16]

3.2.2.1. Platform Co-op Movement Builder

There are opportunities for platform co-ops in the Indian states of Kerala, Gujarat, Karnataka, Delhi, and West Bengal—states that show the highest density of cooperatives--but Kerala seems especially conducive for this work because worker-led movements have been the cornerstone of this state's politics. For example, the Government of Kerala has incubated an app with digital startup Vehicle ST to rival Uber. The app will charge drivers 5% of their fare instead of the 25-60% that Uber charges. 95% of the revenue would go back to the auto-driver. Saji Gopinath, head of the Kerala Startup Mission projected that at least 100,000 drivers would use the app. In Kochi and other cities, unions of taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers are currently testing Vehicle ST. Ultimately, the status of this app is unclear but what we do know is that there is a wide field of experimentation with cooperative digital businesses by unions, cooperatives, and the government, which is promising.

3.2.2.2. Policy Obstacles

- State-sponsorship of Co-ops

As a downside, we found that new initiatives like platform co-ops tend to be implemented as 'top-down,' state-run projects. Cooperatives should receive state funding at the startup stage but eventually need to be autonomous and self-governed.

3.2.2.3. Policy Recommendations/Takeaways from Current Policies

- Autonomy

The state of Kerala could affirm its commitment to autonomous cooperatives with voluntary membership. The governance and operations of the business need to be in the hands of the cooperative members and not the government.

- Startup Funding

The government can support incumbent platform cooperatives with much-desired startup funding. However, government funding should not sustain these autonomous businesses over the long run. The state should give cooperatives the freedom to raise funds and pursue projects independently.

- Less Bureaucracy

The state can also support new platform co-ops by making all processes associated with setting up and running co-ops less bureaucratic and simplifying the steps involved in registering and administering a cooperative.

- A Platform Co-op Summit

The state of Kerala could convene a platform co-op summit to attract funding for this sector. The state can use its convening power to bring together unions, cooperatives, restaurant owners, workers in the informal sector, store owners, service cooperatives, and technologists (programmers, designers, etc.) to launch digital platforms that serve all stakeholders in an ecosystem based on principles of synergy rather than principles of competition.

- Preferential Treatment of Co-ops and Parity with Tax Support for VC-Funded Startups

We suggest policies that protect cooperatives and in particular, platform co-ops. There should be preference (or at least parity) between the platform co-ops and venture capital-funded startups in terms of the tax advantages that they receive.

- Slow Down Big Tech

In the transportation and overall service sectors, the government could slow down the introduction of big tech companies in Kerala. It could do so by enforcing existing laws violated by large labor companies like Uber, Airbnb, and Glovo.

- Update the Kerala Co-operative (Amendment) Act

The Kerala Co-operative (Amendment) Act of 1999 should be updated to include platform cooperatives in the regulation of cooperative enterprises. The definition of platform co-ops, with their key tenets of community ownership and governance, must be clearly stated in accordance with widely accepted definitions of the term.

- Platform Co-op Investment Fund

The state should implement an investment fund for platform cooperatives that helps them pass the initial difficulties of founding a cooperative. The state could also incentivize credit cooperatives to support platform cooperatives.

- Continue Support of LGBTQ+ Communities

Co-operative societies have already been set up for the transgender community in Kerala and platform co-ops could help in integrating these communities into the digital economy.

- Facilitate the Creation of a Federated, Digital Cooperative Platform, especially for Sewa, ULCCS, and Kudumbashree

The state of Kerala could use its convening power to steer the creation of a digital platform that could be a hybrid of municipal and cooperative ownership and serve the interests of both cooperative and individual members. The state could, for example, bring together farmers, a majority of whom have very small landholdings (0.13 acres on average), transportation workers, and small businesses to buy and/or sell food products. For farmers, this 'shared-services'[17] or federated platform could automatically register their inventories and help them with accounting and logistics. The digital platform could facilitate the coordination of such operations and manage relationships within the supply chain. One example of Kerala state actors is the SEWA Social Services Co-op in Trivandrum, Kudumbashree. They are the largest women's organization in the world, with about 4.3 million women covered in Kerala. Some of the authors of this report visited their head office in Trivandrum and learned about their history, their impact, their organizational outreach, and the various services they provide under their three programs: Social, Economic, and 'Gender-sensitive' work. Rather than starting platform co-ops from scratch, Kerala could work with existing very large-sized organizations such as Kudumbashree, SEWA.

- Build a Platform Co-op to Bring Access to Broadband Internet Services from Government Buildings All Across the State

The state of Kerala could encourage and support the formation of tech cooperatives to bring access to broadband Internet services from government buildings across the state to households. Such last-mile service provision has much in common with rural electric cooperatives in the United States.

- Facilitate a Data Commons

Kerala could facilitate and steer the sharing of data across its ecosystem, based on data standards that it has implemented as well as through open licenses.

- Work Toward Becoming a Beacon of the Cooperative Digital Economy

Building on the fact that it has the largest governmental open source and free software IT facility in the world, the state could be a beacon of open-source development for the cooperative digital economy. [18]

- Utilize Anchor Institutions in Kerala

The Kerala government State Planning Board, the Ministry for Cooperatives, the IT Planning Board, and the Kerala Startup Mission can all facilitate support for platform co-ops. Work in the technology sector in Kerala should be inspired by values of cooperation, mutual aid, and solidarity, not by getting seduced by the stardom of multi-billionaires in Silicon Valley whose wealth multiplied in 2020 while the rest of the United States was suffering.

3.3. Barcelona, Spain

3.3.1. The Cooperative Movement in Spain

There are 18,000 worker co-ops across Spain employing 300,000 people.[19] Spain is known for the largest worker co-op in the world, the Mondragon Corporation. Mondragon is a federation of worker co-ops composed of 30,000 worker-owners, roughly half men and half women. It has a total of 80,818 employees worldwide.

Beyond the Basque Country, the home of Mondragon, Catalonia province contains 22 percent of the cooperatives in Spain and thus has the largest concentration of cooperatives in the country. There are about 5,000 co-ops in Catalonia, with 3,000 of them being worker co-ops. Co-ops produce 6 percent of Catalonia's GDP. The largest worker co-op in Catalonia is Suara, a care cooperative. [20] Worker co-ops provide food for schools and care for senior citizens. In addition to democratic governance, the salary spread between the highest and the lowest wages in worker co-ops is a maximum of 7 to 1. The average size of a Catalan co-op is ten members, but some are as large as 4,500 members.[21]

3.3.2. Co-ops in Barcelona

The city of Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, has become a symbol of resistance for the "sharing economy." In May 2015, the citizen platform Barcelona en Comú won city council elections and instated Ada Colau, a prominent organizer who fought against evictions, as the mayor of the city. The Colau administration gives preference to social economy businesses, including cooperatives.

3.3.2.1. Platform Co-op Movement Builders

Katuma

"Katuma is a community-supported agriculture platform based on commons collaborative economy values started in 2012. Coopdevs, a non-profit association focused on free and open-source software to promote social and solidarity economy projects, developed Katuma. From early 2017, Katuma is part of the international project Open Food Network (OFN). Katuma utilizes open platform software from the Open Food Network that supports the development of new ethical supply chains that 'bring together producers to create a virtual farmers' market, building a resilient local food economy' (OFN 2020)."[22] OFN operates through volunteer-led bases in 20 countries, including Brazil, India, and South Africa.

Decidim

The city of Barcelona built the participatory democracy platform, Decidim, which was used by 40,000 citizens in Barcelona and over 60 cities and organizations worldwide. It gives citizens a voice in

the co-design of future policies. It facilitates deliberation, collaboration, and decision-making with thousands of people participating in real time.

Guifi.net

Guifi.net is a community network that started in the Catalonia and Valencian Community in Spain and aims to allow open access to telecommunications for everyone. It provides internet access in rural areas that internet service providers (ISPs) do not reach. As Boyd Cohen writes in Post-Capitalist Entrepreneurship:

"What makes Guifi.net unique is that it was never developed to be a revenue-generating initiative. Instead, Roca and early members were committed to the idea that access to high-speed Internet is increasingly a necessity in today's globally connected world and that it is not fair that people choosing to live in rural communities have inadequate access to this fundamental resource because it is not profitable for the private sector to deliver broadband to less densely populated communities."[23]

Policy Drivers: Transition of the Municipality to a Non-Neoliberal Smart City

This section highlights how Barcelona's broader governmental innovation has made it particularly amenable to platform co-ops.

- Toward Technological Sovereignty

Barcelona en Comú's approach to the Internet is associated with "technological sovereignty" for its residents. Resident-generated data are treated as a public good and are owned by the public. One scholar explains:

"Why should Google, Uber, or Airbnb be the technological and financial beneficiaries of information extracted from citizens in Barcelona, Manila, Johannesburg, New York, or Mumbai? Local democracy means that a city can demand public control over a vital utility, including the Internet or water provision … "[24]

- In the "People's Roadmap Towards Technological Sovereignty," Francesca Bria, the former Chief Digital Technology and Innovation Officer of the City of Barcelona from 2015-2019, argues that cities have to move from a model of surveillance capitalism to a model where citizens themselves can own and control the data. She argues that Barcelona wants to set the world's standard in ethical, open, and responsible innovation moving towards technological sovereignty. Bria calls for a new deal on data, rooted in a rights-based, people-centric framework that does not exploit personal data to pay for critical infrastructure. The concept of 'technological sovereignty' allows city residents to play a more active role in deciding how the city's technological infrastructure works and for what purpose. It has defined an ethical code and reframed legal and economic

models for a digital society so that the immense economic value of data is channeled back to citizens.

- In addition, the Barcelona City Council explicitly supported platform cooperativism by adding platform cooperativism to its innovation and development strategy, meaning that incubators that assisted platform co-ops like Katuma received funding. Barcelona offered a template for cities that would like to introduce tech-based, citizen-centric innovation in the apps-based economy to counter those very well-developed and aggressive visions of corporate tech giants.

- Advisory Council on Technological Sovereignty

Barcelona also established an Advisory Council on Technological Sovereignty, an assembly of experts to guide the city in determining an alternative vision for its approach to technological innovation. This group was formed so that when large technology corporations like Uber approach city leadership, they are confronted with clear guidelines of what they can or cannot do if they want to operate in the city.[25]

- Data to Serve the People

At the end of 2019, Francesca Bria summarized her work over the past four years in her "Barcelona Digital City Plan," which aims to use technology and data to serve the people, improve public services and make better decisions.[26] The goal is to achieve a more transparent, participatory, and more effective governance and to establish a new social pact on data so it can be used to create public value while also preserving citizens' fundamental rights and their data sovereignty. The goal is to "enable citizens to control their data as a common good and to share the on terms that are fair, transparent and accountable, thus enabling a new generation of decentralized digital applications, where communities can leverage the collective value of their data." [27]

- Enforce Public Ownership of Data Within Private Contracts

Under the leadership of Francesca Bria as CTO of Barcelona, the city became known as a standard-setter for cities that seek to integrate digital technologies. Bria introduced modifications of the city's procurement standards to enforce public ownership of data within private contracts with app-based taxi companies, e-scooter startups, and app-based short-term rental companies. The data captured by these companies had to be easily exportable to other platforms, allowing workers to more seamlessly switch from one platform to another.[28]

- Support the Use of Free and Open Technology

The Barcelona City Council supports the use of free and open technology i.e. software and hardware. 70% of the budget allocated to digital development is committed to free and open-source software,

which allows cost-saving, offers better security, and allows the city to interact more easily with and develop software with the technology sector developers. The Barcelona City Council is committed to open standards and interoperable technologies. The Barcelona City Council collects the data of electric bikes that operate in the city through a service app.

- Incubator

The Barcelona City Council proposed funding for an incubator of new projects, including platform co-ops, and the reassigning of public spaces for jointly manufacturing and working spaces. The CCE's policy proposals found the support of the Barcelona City Government. The Barcelona City Government also created a set of policy guidelines entitled "Economías Colaborativas Procomún." [29]

- Events that Center Municipalities, Instead of Corporations, as a Global Reference Point for the "Sharing Economy"

The city of Barcelona created a Sharing Cities Summit in Barcelona.[30] This supports Barcelona's goal to establish the municipality as a global reference point of commons and collaborative production.

- Fund

Barcelona has created a fund, Impulsem el que fas, endowed with 5 million Euros, that offers support for social impact needs such as recycling, digital inclusion with an emphasis on the gender perspective, and the fight against energy poverty. The goal of this fund is to support projects that use digital connectivity while protecting people's privacy as well as robotics and artificial intelligence, open data, open knowledge, and open machinery in the areas of social inclusion and education.

- Innovative Public Procurement

The council has an annual procurement volume of 600 million euros for goods and services, representing almost a quarter of the municipal budget. Therefore, changing procurement policies leads to significant cultural change.

- Participatory Approach to Policy Making

The city council operated under the mantra that participatory processes come first and technology comes second. The city has pushed back against Airbnb and has ruled in favor of a participatory approach to policy making. An event held in March 2016 by the international organization Commons Collaborative Economies produced a set of policy proposals for European governments. Sent to the Barcelona City Council, other local authorities in Spain, and the government of Catalonia, this document criticized the organizational rationale of the 'multinational corporations' based in Silicon Valley.

- Use an Open Budgeting Tool

The Barcelona City Council has an open budget tool to make city governance more transparent and understandable for citizens, answering questions like how much is invested in guaranteeing housing for all, what are Barcelona City Council's main expenses, and how was the money brought in by tourism invested.

3.3.2.2. Policy Obstacles

3.3.2.3. Policy Recommendations

- Support Value-Aligned Foundations

The power of municipal policymakers is limited by federal law and much of technology policy is decided on the national level. Also, the time period that a particular municipal administration is in power is limited. This creates obstacles for the implementation of their policies and limits the longevity of the projects that municipal governments can initiate. Supporting foundations that carry on the agenda of a particular policy maker beyond a legislative period would be one way of making local policymaking more consequential over the long run.

- Direct Public Funds Toward Innovative Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Invest higher percentages of the public budget into innovative small and medium enterprises and cooperatives over both the centralized state and market solutions. Platform co-ops like Guifi.net did not receive significant government startup funding because they could not provide the scale and scope of service provision required for large contracts with the city. Consequently, Barcelona has not supported Guifi.net to provide wi-fi services for all of Barcelona.

- Build City Data Commons

The city council promulgated a decree that service operators cannot own the network data generated by individuals using public services. Instead, the city could invest in building "data commons" by creating conditions that allow community members to establish a collectively-owned, mutually-beneficial data pool.

3.4. Bologna, Italy

3.4.1. The Cooperative Movement in Italy

The first Italian cooperative was a consumer co-op launched in 1854, just a decade after the first

recognizable co-op was established in the UK. The Italian cooperative movement developed in two directions: the socialist part of the movement, which embraced worker and consumer cooperatives and was stronger in the north of Italy, and the second direction focusing on financial and agriculture cooperatives, led mainly by Catholics in the south of Italy. After World War II and into the 1970s, co-ops gradually expanded and continued growing even when the rest of the economy started to slow down. The share of co-op employment has more than tripled since the 1970s.[31] Between 2001 and 2011, cooperatives created close to 30% of new jobs in Italy. [32] Today, Italy's cooperatives tend to be larger than its conventional firms. [33]

In the early 1960s, the first cooperative for solidarity and social assistance was founded near Milan. This cooperative society brought people together who would spend their spare time together, learn from and assist each other, train each other, and work to support people who needed help. Importantly, it did not solely focus on people within the cooperative but also worked to benefit those outside of it. This was the start of the multi-stakeholder model of cooperatives where several interest groups can jointly make decisions. The boards of such multi-stakeholder co-ops represent their worker-members and the local communities that benefit from its services.

Also, social cooperatives–a subset of multi-stakeholder coops–are particularly important in Italy. There are 11,000 social cooperatives in Italy.[34] They bring together the providers and beneficiaries of social services as members. A typical criticism of cooperatives is that they only serve their members; social cooperatives point to an alternative, inclusive form of cooperative organization.

3.4.1.1. Platform Co-op Policy Driver

In 1990, Italy passed a law that eased the process of worker buyouts.[35] As a result, some Italian cooperatives have aggressively expanded beyond niche markets. Coop and Conad, for example, hold one-third of the Italian retail market share. Italian cooperatives employ eight percent of the overall workforce. The typical worker cooperative is a small or medium-sized enterprise rather than a micro business. There are a total of 7.4 million people working in cooperatives in Italy.[36] These cooperatives serve social, economic, and cultural functions.

3.4.2. Co-ops in Bologna

3.4.2.1. Platform Co-op Movement Builder

Consegne Etiche

Bologna is the capital of one of Italy's most prosperous regions, the Emilia Romagna region, and boasts Italy's lowest unemployment numbers. It has a diversified economy based mostly on small firms. Emilia Romagna's 8,000 cooperative enterprises constitute 40% of the region's GDP, and 60% of the region's population are members of at least one cooperative. 60% of Bologna's GDP comes from

cooperatives. Thus, cooperatives play a central role in the region's economy. At the same time, the experience with cooperatives in the region has shown that some cooperatives take on monopolistic characteristics, which can have undesirable effects.

This economic structure is due to Bologna's unique political culture defined by its association with Italian socialist politics; within Italy and Europe, Bologna is known as "the red city." The city's socialist political culture shaped its response to the COVID-19 pandemic with cooperative enterprises taking center stage in providing social provisioning. The Foundation for Urban Innovation, an independent corporation charted by the city and its universities to plan economic development, and the Municipality of Bologna convened to establish a support network for the city. The process started with over 150 interviews with shopkeepers, a consortium of cooperatives, a group of food delivery couriers called Riders Union Bologna, the student organization Idee in Movimento,[37] the bike rental co-op Dynamo,[38] urban planners, various volunteer groups, and other local institutions. The results of these interviews provided the municipality with a better understanding of the needs of the various stakeholders in the city.

Subsequently, the Foundation for Urban Development helped establish a platform co-op for home deliveries called Consegne Etiche, which works with local stores, couriers, and the residents of Bologna.[39] Its wages compare favorably to the gross income (before taxes are deducted) for couriers that work for Deliveroo, Doordash, UberEats, JustEat, and Glovo, which are between six and seven Euros per hour. After taxes are deducted, couriers earn about nine Euros per hour with work safety, dignity, labor protections, and insurance for accidents and illnesses.

Consegne Etiche also works with other institutions in Bologna to deepen the social fabric of the community. For example, it works with the Bologna public library to operate a home book delivery.[40] And with the help of the Baker's Association of Bologna, freshly baked bread is distributed among the various businesses in the city by the platform co-op every morning. Further, it respects community environmental concerns by only using bicycle-based couriers.

Consegne Etiche's practices are grounded in Bologna's charter of fundamental rights for digital work, which aims to promote solidarity and sustainable business. The goals of Consegne Etiche are to respect the rights and protections of workers, guarantee fair pay, and protect the right to health and safety. Consegne Etiche is also consciously rejecting any reputational systems that would fuel competition between workers. These principles are enshrined in the aforementioned fundamental charter of digital workers' rights.[41]

3.4.2.2. Policy Obstacles

- Platform cooperatives face resistance from traditional cooperatives, policymakers, and the public who are distrustful of platforms and other digital technologies due to their association with large platform companies.

- Italy's sizable co-op associations–such as LegaCoop–are engaging with and publicly supporting the platform co-op movement. However, they use their development funds to invest in already proven platform co-ops such as Fairbnb, circumscribing a vital source of capital used to finance new platform cooperatives.

3.4.2.3. Policy Recommendations

- Push digital literacy (i.e., workshops, advocacy, training in lower and elementary schools) to destigmatize platform cooperatives and separate them from the more exploitative models used by venture-backed platform companies.

- Make Bologna a global reference point for civic-minded innovation by joining international conferences and publishing publications about the local work, translated into English, French, and Spanish. The city and its surroundings can aspire to be the "Co-op Valley" (instead of Silicon Valley).

- Policy discussions should be based on the understanding that the dominant form of business isn't always a private company. An acknowledgment of entrepreneurial pluralism that considers multiple forms of property ownership should be at the forefront of any regulatory discussion. Speaking to the Italian situation, scholars Giovanni Ferri and Angelo Leogrande argue that the "reality tells us that entrepreneurial pluralism is actually the norm rather than the exception, and that these 'non-archetype' enterprises do not in general disappear—and on the contrary often thrive." [42]

- Platform co-ops should get the same tax advantages and other financial support created for venture capital-funded businesses in Italy.

3.5. Berlin, Germany

3.5.1. The Cooperative Movement in Germany

After decades of decreasing societal relevance, cooperatives in Germany have experienced a 'comeback' in recent years. [43] Around 2,000 new cooperatives were founded between 2007 and 2015 alone, many of them in sectors and industries that had previously seen little cooperative activity. [44] The reasons for this are manifold: on the one hand, substantial amendments to the country's cooperative code in 2006 have simplified the founding process of cooperative organizations and made the legal form more attractive to entrepreneurs.[45] On the other hand, cooperatives have increasingly been re-envisioned through the lens of the common good. In fact, many of the recently incorporated cooperatives operate in fields such as renewable energy production[46] or local and regional supply of mobility and goods,[47] where the primary aim is not only to benefit a clearly defined group of members, but also the commons.

Today, Germany's 7,800 registered cooperative enterprises count more than 22 million members, making it the organizational form with the most members in the country.[48] While these numbers seem relatively high at first glance, most of the 22 million cooperative members in Germany belong to so-called Förderungsgenossenschaften (such as producer and consumer cooperatives), among them many of the traditional German housing cooperatives and credit unions.[49] Even though technically one in four Germans is a cooperative member, most are not aware of this fact.

Compared with other countries such as India or the U.S., worker cooperatives (the so-called Produktivgenossenschaften) are less common in Germany. This is reflected in the country's platform co-op sector, where only one platform co-op explicitly responds to the failures of the gig economy. The most prominent German platform co-ops see themselves as commons-oriented digital infrastructures rather than organizations that aim at improving working conditions for gig workers.

3.5.1.1. Platform Co-op Policy Drivers

German policymakers across the political spectrum generally show an awareness of the potentials of cooperativism and express interest in supporting cooperative formation. For example, the coalition agreement of the country's 2017-2021 government stipulates that the government wants to "strengthen cooperatives as a sustainable and crisis-proof organizational form in a wide variety of economic sectors." To achieve this, the government aimed at implementing measures that support a high level of membership and offer guidance to smaller cooperatives.[50]

While platform co-ops are not specifically mentioned in any official policy document, the idea of creating alternatives to the shareholder-driven platforms from Silicon Valley or the Chinese, state-driven platforms from Shenzhen has received considerable attention. In its coalition agreement, the 2017-2021 government committed itself to build "strong German and European players in the platform economy,"[51] thereby creating an opening for debates around platform cooperativism. Yet, these two intentions–fostering cooperativism on the one hand and fostering alternative platforms on the other–are rarely thought of together. As such, platform cooperativism remains a niche topic that does not yet factor into policymaking, neither on the federal nor on the municipal level.

On a discursive level, however, high-ranking German politicians have increasingly referenced the burgeoning movement. For example, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which governed the country in a joint coalition with the CDU and CSU between 2017 and 2021, hosted an event in 2018 on the topic of how to break up data monopolies, where Trebor Scholz held a keynote about platform co-ops. Subsequently, he discussed potential policy responses with then-party chair Andrea Nahles.[52] The event led to a joint statement, which emphasized the necessity of centering digital platforms around notions of solidarity and cooperation.[53]

3.5.1.2. Policy Obstacles

Despite this growing interest, Germany has not yet successfully created a supportive policy ecosystem for platform co-ops. On the contrary, many of the obstacles that platform co-ops face are explicitly rooted in policy. In the following, three problems requiring policy change are discussed.

The first problem relates to the relationship between platform co-ops and the country's cooperative ecosystem. In Germany, the Cooperative Code stipulates two basic principles: first, that every incorporated cooperative is legally obliged to become a member of an auditing association, and second, that every cooperative needs to subject itself to a regular audit.[54] The overall aim of these audits is to ensure that the cooperative organization in question has a sustainable business model, thereby fostering stability within the overall cooperative ecosystem.[55] However, recent studies have shown that both the mandatory membership and mandatory audit can also discourage founders, nudging them towards legal forms other than the cooperative form.[56]

In an attempt to address these problems, policymakers have amended the cooperative code twice in recent years, once in 2006 and a second time in 2017.[57] Both amendments aimed at removing administrative obligations for small and medium-sized co-ops, thereby making the cooperative form more attractive to entrepreneurs.[58] These measures, however, have proven rather controversial. While some German platform co-ops have claimed that the amendments do not go far enough, thereby limiting the possibilities for co-ops in the tech sector to emerge, the auditing associations have criticized the law for 'hollowing out' the German cooperative system, potentially facilitating 'co-op washing.' Supporters of the particularities of the German cooperative code point towards the fact that cooperatives in Germany seldom go bankrupt, which, they argue, is primarily due to the extensive auditing process.[59] Coupled with recent studies on the cooperative ecosystem in Germany, which have revealed a general satisfaction with the role of the auditing associations amongst the country's cooperative organizations, it becomes clear that the current impasse demands more complex answers than simply removing the auditing framework entirely.

How could the situation for platform co-ops 'on the ground' be improved, without 'hollowing out' the country's (historically grown) co-op ecosystem? Besides lowering the financial burden for small cooperatives even further, an additional improvement would be to foster more trusting relationships between the auditing associations and the platform co-ops. In fact, irritation within the platform co-op-sector not only stems from the financial burden associated with the mandatory audit, but also from the difference in cultural codes that the platform co-ops perceive. Many of the founders and members of platform co-ops have a background in tech or in Berlin's 'start-up' environment and therefore come from sectors that have historically seen little cooperative activity. Consequently, they communicate and operate differently than, for example, credit unions or housing cooperatives, which can create adaptation challenges for both the platform co-ops and the auditing associations.

One helpful solution is to strengthen platform co-op-specific knowledge within the auditing associations, particularly in the context of online voting. As many platform co-ops are (inter)national

in scope, meaning that their members are often not bound to a particular region or municipality, online voting constitutes an essential tool for organizing a cooperative's daily business. According to Article 43(7) of the country's cooperative code, online voting is legal as long as it is incorporated into the cooperative's bylaws. In fact, a variety of platform co-ops such as Fairmondo and Hostsharing already successfully employ digital tools to organize online assemblies (such as, for example, POLYAS or Simply Voting). Yet, these insights and best-practice examples have so far only been insufficiently synthesized, processed, and then made available again, making it difficult for emerging platform co-ops to access them quickly.

Another problem that platform co-ops in Germany face is that digital memberships are not legally recognized. Article 15 of Germany's cooperative law stipulates that anyone interested in becoming a member of a German cooperative has to manually sign a form, print it, and then send it via post to the cooperative's office.[60] This arcane system makes it difficult for platform co-ops to attract members, especially those residing outside of Germany. Given that many German platform co-ops see themselves as digital infrastructures with a global scope rather than worker cooperatives serving a particular local community, this constitutes an essential impediment to their growth. To circumvent this problem, more and more cooperatives in Germany resort to other legal forms that could similarly serve their purpose, for example, the SCE on the European level or the GbR on the federal level. This underscores the problem that Germany's legal framework is not yet designed to accommodate the idea of platform co-ops as digital infrastructures. Legislative changes are needed to accommodate their particular needs.[61]

The third issue that platform co-ops in Germany face is the absence of suitable loan programs and the overall lack of financial support. Throughout the years, platform co-ops and ecosystem actors have argued that the funding opportunities in Germany would constitute a major impediment to their growth.[62] Particular criticism has been leveled at the funding guidelines of the country's state-owned development bank, the KfW, which provides assistance to German small and medium-sized enterprises, including individual entrepreneurs and startups.[63] Although co-ops are explicitly mentioned in many of the loan programs of these agencies, cooperative organizations nevertheless find it difficult to apply because these programs are oftentimes coupled to a notion of (individual) entrepreneurial responsibility.[64] In fact, any organization trying to access KfW grants needs to designate an individual who can be held accountable by the bank. While this is par for the course for classical GmbH entities (the German version of an LLC), cooperatives are organized horizontally, which means that responsibility is shared among the cooperative members. As such, platform co-ops are unable to apply for many loan programs due to the simple fact that these programs ascribe considerable importance to individual entrepreneurial responsibility.

3.5.1.3. Policy Recommendations

- Build Incubators Policymakers should provide funding for platform co-op-specific incubators that can create sector-specific knowledge concerning incorporation rules and funding opportunities and share this information with the country's cooperative auditing associations.

- Modernize the Law Policymakers should amend the Cooperative Code so that media discontinuity in the process of becoming a member of a cooperative is eliminated. Inspiration could be taken from countries such as Belgium or Ireland, where this is already possible.

- Remove Institutional Discrimination Policymakers should make it possible for federal agencies to redraft their guidelines for public loan programs so that funding opportunities are not only extended to natural persons, but also to horizontally-run cooperatives (e.g., by consensus). In the meantime, federal agencies should be enabled to accept sureties provided by external cooperative institutions, such as credit unions.

- Implement Solidarity-Oriented Loan Programs Policymakers should implement loan programs that focus on social innovation (in addition to programs that focus on technological innovation) and that define social impact funding in a way that alternative organizational structures or even platform co-ops are explicitly taken into account on the federal level. Already existing loan programs on the Länderebene could be taken as a starting point for drafting such loan programs.

3.5.2. Co-ops in Berlin

In recent years, Berlin has emerged as a hotbed of platform co-op-specific activity. In fact, most German platform co-ops are currently based in the country's capital. Reasons for this concentration are manifold: on the one hand, Berlin presents itself as one of the 'young and trendy' epicenters of tech activity in Europe. The city is home to the headquarters of Facebook and Spotify as well as German shopping marketplace Zalando. In addition, the sheer number of incubators and tech hubs makes the city a thriving place for networking and mutual support. The size and scope of Berlin's tech ecosystem have real economic implications. Between 2015 and 2019, around 1,000 tech start-ups were founded in the city alone, and in 2019, €5.9bn were invested into German startups, with most of the money going to the capital. This puts the country second within Europe, behind only the U.K.[65]

Berlin has also become a place where the negative consequences of platform capitalism–exploitative labor relations, public surveillance, and short-term rental-driven gentrification–can be felt on almost every corner. As a result, many social movements have emerged in recent years that explicitly challenge the tech sector's 'underbelly.' "F*** Off Google Campus!" scandalizes the housing-related implications of tech companies moving into the city's neighborhoods. "Make Amazon Pay" and the Berlin Tech Workers Coalition pressure the platforms that operate in the city into paying their employees a decent wage. Grassroots union projects such as DeliverUnion organize delivery riders and conduct wild strikes to fight the practices of quasi-monopolist JustEatTakeAway.com. Resistance to tech culture thus factors prominently in the city, making Berlin almost equally known for its resistance to tech dominance as for its tech start-ups.

Berlin's platform co-ops operate precisely along this dividing line of entrepreneurial tech utopia and grassroots resistance. While some of the city's co-ops skew more towards the business and start-up

ecosystem side, others try to create strong linkages with the city's social movements.[66] Over recent years, an infrastructure of support has blossomed that tries to bridge these elements. For example, Platform Cooperatives Germany, itself a cooperative, provides educational and networking events, consultations, and an incubator program for platform co-op founders and members.[67] Because of this activity, platform cooperativism has managed to carve out a promising niche in the German capital.

3.5.2.1. Platform Co-op Policy Drivers

Similar to the undertakings on the national level, the city of Berlin has expressed a strong interest in fostering cooperativism. To this end, the joint coalition agreement between the SPD, the Green Party, and the Left, the coalition that governed the city between 2016 and 2021, stated that:

"cooperatives, due to their structure, have ideal prerequisites for combining entrepreneurial action with social values and sustainability goals. They have also prevailed in highly competitive industries, are stable companies, reliable employers, and have recently proven to be particularly resistant to crises. The coalition will strengthen advisory services for companies in the solidarity and cooperative economy and anchor it institutionally in the economic administration so that they can make better use of the state's funding programs."[68]

Despite this explicit interest in fostering cooperative business models, no platform co-op-specific activities have been initiated so far. The primary field in which Berlin supports cooperative activity is housing. For example, every time a private investor buys a house located in one of the city's so-called 'Milieuschutzgebiet' (social protection area), the government can exercise a right of first refusal. As a result, the city can preempt the planned transaction by buying the house in question and subsequently transfer ownership either to one of its own housing associations or to one of the many housing cooperatives operating in the city.[69] While this is not done in every instance, the practice has nevertheless created widespread visibility for the cooperative model. To build on this policy, the city has also set up a so-called "KfW Home Ownership Program," which supports private individuals in purchasing cooperative shares for owner-occupied cooperative apartments.

Beyond cooperativism, Berlin has also increasingly focused on creating an infrastructure for social innovation in recent years. For example, from 2019, the city has provided funding for the Social Innovation Capital Berlin project, which aims at bringing together various traditions of Berlin's social enterprises in order to facilitate networking opportunities and create new impulses for future activity.[70] Through the GründungsBONUS loan program, the city provides funding of up to 50,000€ for technological, digital, creative, non-profit, and sustainable business models that plan the development, manufacture, and introduction of new applications, products, services, methods, or processes. Similarly, the Förderprogramm Innovative Gründung has funded 13 projects that develop sustainable, innovative technical solutions for vital social tasks and policy areas. Due to the broad scope taken here, these programs provide interesting outlets for platform co-ops and illustrate that Berlin has taken the first steps towards incorporating notions of solidarity, social sustainability, and innovation into its funding guidelines.

3.5.2.2. Policy Obstacles

While these initiatives hold promise, they can nevertheless only provide the initial opportunity towards a supportive ecosystem for platform cooperativism. We should make no mistake: Berlin's primary focus is still on nurturing the mainstream tech sector, not on notions of solidarity and social innovation.

3.5.2.3. Policy Recommendations

- Policymakers should build on the city's promising cooperative ecosystem by providing long-term-oriented funding for a platform co-op-specific incubator.

3.6. Paris, France

3.6.1. The Cooperative Movement in France

France's cooperative ecosystem is well developed. As of 2015, the country's 23,000 cooperatives counted around 26 million members, which together realized an annual turnover of more than 300 billion euros in sales.[71] In addition, cooperatives in France are responsible for the employment of over one million individuals. Of all cooperatives registered in 2015, nearly 2,000 were structured as worker cooperatives. Together, these co-ops provided around 41,000 jobs.[72] These numbers, however, need to be taken with a grain of salt, given that members are primarily concentrated in a single sector. In fact, the country's 92 cooperative banking enterprises alone–including three of the country's largest banks, the cooperatively organized Groupe Crédit Agricole, Groupe BPCE, and Groupe Crédit Mutuel–account for more than 24 million members and roughly a quarter of this turnover.

Cooperatives in France are considered part of the so-called economie sociale et solidaire (SSE), the country's 'third sector'. SSE organizations–among them not only cooperatives, but also associations, mutual societies, and foundations–seek to reconcile economic activity with social equity. While the concrete activities that these heterogeneous organizations engage in differ, they all share a particular set of operating mechanisms defined by collective decision making and limited profitability in the name of social, solidarity, and cooperation objectives.[73] SSE organizations can therefore be characterized according to both economic principles (such as non-profitability) as well as notions of democratic ownership and participatory governance. In 2013, the SSE counted 200,000 companies that employed over two million people, a total of 1 in 8 private-sector jobs. Activity in the sector accounts for almost 10% of GDP. Between 2003 and 2013, the social and solidarity economy created 440,000 new jobs–an increase of 23%, compared to 7% in the traditional economy.[74]

Many groups and initiatives within the French SSE actively promote both cooperativism in general and platform co-ops in particular. The Coop de Commune association in Paris, for example, aims

at strengthening notions of solidarity and social equity within the co-op ecosystem by way of creating networking opportunities, disseminating knowledge about the commons, and enabling concrete forms of organized democracy.[75] In 2017, the association founded the Plateformes en Communs sub-group to position platform cooperativism as one of its primary projects.[76] While not all member organizations of Plateformes en Communs are platform co-ops in the strict sense (as defined by the Platform Cooperativism Consortium), all of them commit to the "Common Platforms Charter" principles, which include Inclusive Governance, Data Ethics, Production of Commons, and Cooperation between Members.[77]

3.6.1.1. Platform Co-op Policy Drivers

One important driver behind the thriving French ecosystem is the rather supportive legal framework for cooperatives. The multi-stakeholder model of the Société cooperative d'intérêt collectif (SCIC), incorporated into the French cooperative code in 2001, provides a framework to realize stakeholder flexibility—something that platform co-ops are especially interested in.[78] The SCIC model is meant to achieve two goals. First, it is intended to 'bake' a social welfare logic into the cooperative form and thereby reorient it towards the common good. Second, it aims to make it easier for public authorities or private funds to invest and participate in socially-oriented cooperatives, thereby providing new funding opportunities within the SSE. To achieve these goals, the social utility of a SCIC is not defined by the nature of the good or service that it provides, but by the process through which it does so. **As such, social utility is inextricably linked to the notion of social inclusion, i.e., notions of governance.** To assure inclusion, the SCIC is obliged to incorporate at least three different categories of members/stakeholders: 'employees' (or an equivalent group such as, for example, producers or farmers); 'users/beneficiaries'; and a third group to be chosen freely, which could, for example, include public authorities, investors, or even volunteers. This possibility of including public authorities (or other third groups) as members could benefit platform co-ops in three ways:

- First, by creating new funding opportunities. Given that the third member group is allowed to hold up to 50% of the overall capital of the organization, the SCIC–similar to other multi-stakeholder models such as the ULCAA in Colorado, USA–provides new possibilities for cooperatives to access outside capital.

- Second, by realizing economic activity beyond markets. In opening up funding opportunities related to social utility and social inclusion (instead of supply/demand), the SCIC model could provide room for socio-economic activity on platforms not directed towards the market but towards the common good. Given that platform co-ops often struggle to provide services at a similar cost or quality as platform incumbents, the multi-stakeholder approach offers new possibilities for creating resilient networks of heterogeneous stakeholders that each bring their abilities and strengths into the platform, thereby making them less dependent on the market. Suppose policymakers would actively support these organizations, for example, by becoming members of a platform co-op themselves. In that case, commons-oriented networks of service provision at the local and municipal level could be created.

- Third, by ensuring public accountability. For example, the platform co-op Fairbnb aims to provide a socially-sustainable alternative to market incumbent Airbnb. A multi-stakeholder approach is employed to make sure that all relevant stakeholders (including hosts, renters, city councils, neighbors, and hotels) have a say in the platform's decision making, something that the founders of the platform co-op see as a requisite for a successful and sustainable short-term rental market. In this sense, the SCIC model promises to strengthen links between public institutions and platform co-ops, which could help create public accountability of platforms and build 'counter-power' to the dominant incumbents.

Platform co-ops in France can benefit from supportive taxation rules. In 2014, the French Parliament passed a new law that fundamentally reshaped the SSE. This law's aim was two-fold: on the one hand, it aimed at creating tax incentives for organizations to reorient their businesses around the question of social utility. On the other, it created incentives for investors to orient their activities towards the SSE. To this end, the law did two things: first, it opened up the SSE classification to any legal entity in France–including for-profit companies that previously operated outside of the strict boundaries of the country's third sector. While 'traditional' organizations associated with the SSE (such as cooperatives, foundations, or associations) are automatically classified as SSE companies due to their legal entities, for-profit companies are now able to apply for reclassification under the condition that they:

"(1) Pursue an on-going production, distribution or exchange of goods and services activity; (2) Pursue a primary social purpose or 'social utility'; (3) Govern the company with the principles of a democratic governance the expression of which is not solely linked to capital contribution; and (4) Manage the company in a way that is consistent with the limited distribution of profits and assets." [79]

This change substantially amended the list of organizations that can be considered part of the SSE, providing possible tax benefits to previously excluded companies, including platform co-ops that explicitly operate as businesses.

Second, the law also created an entirely new additional label for SSE companies: the enterprise solidaire d'utilité sociale (i.e. the ESUS label), which comes with further financial benefits. Since 2014, any organization already classified as an SSE company can now also apply for the more extensive ESUS company status. To acquire an ESUS label, the organization in question needs to go beyond the above-mentioned criteria by implementing a compensation cap for directors and employees and proving that the organization's orientation towards social utility has a direct (negative) impact on the company's income or expenses. In broadening the possible recipients this way, the French government intends to create and foster an enabling environment for the development of social enterprises that straddle the line between profitability and social utility.[80] For platform co-ops, this is interesting for three reasons:

- First, the ESUS label creates economic incentives for private investors to invest in social enterprises through so-called solidarity-based saving funds.[81] Investors who channel their

funds towards ESUS companies receive a 25% reduction on income tax and a 50% reduction on property tax.[82] The provision of such tax rebates is associated with the hope that more money is funneled into the SSE, potentially opening new funding opportunities for platform co-ops.

- Second, the law addresses governance as a key component to the structure of an SSE and ESUS company. As stipulated in the law, an ESUS company must employ democratic governance mechanisms and define them as part of their corporate documents. Hence, the law combines access to incentives for funding with democratic governance. Doing so might lead to strengthening the overall cooperative ecosystem, which could also enhance the position of platform co-ops.

- Third, it decouples the provision of tax rebates from the question of profitability, thereby opening up funding potentials for platform co-ops that are forced to realize a profit to improve their platform's functionality and usability. While the legal entity of the 501(c)(3) (in the U.S.) and the Gemeinnützigkeits-label (in Germany) are given exclusively to non-profits, the 2014 law hypothetically also allows profit-oriented platform co-ops that employ democratic ownership and decision making to benefit from the SSE-specific tax rebates. In broadening the SSE criteria, the law constitutes a novel approach for rethinking how to support democratically-structured organizations that operate in highly capital-driven contexts such as the platform economy.

3.6.1.2. Policy Obstacles

While the cooperative code in France is rather beneficial for platform co-ops, policy responses in other areas of law have been less accommodating. The rewriting of the French Labor Law, in particular, has reinforced the unlevel playing field of the platform economy, constituting a pressing obstacle for platform co-ops that try to provide decent labor opportunities. At the center of the debate has been the so-called Projet de loi d'orientation des mobilités (Loi LOM), which the French Parliament implemented in November 2019 to restructure the country's mobility sector. Article 44 of the law introduced the idea that labor platforms in the mobility sector, such as Deliveroo or Uber, could develop a charter to outline their social responsibilities towards their workers.[83] Both platform and workers would then sign these charters, thereby following the government's logic–increasing transparency and improving relationships between both sides.

Platform cooperatives should theoretically benefit from Article 44 since its stated aim is to improve the (social) dialogue between platform and platform workers. Unfortunately, the mechanisms listed as part of Article 44 are purely voluntary. The government argued this would be sufficient because the mere existence of the article would foster inter-platform competition over the rights they give to workers, eventually improving working conditions in the platform economy. However, this competition-oriented argument disregards the fact that platform-based markets in the delivery sector are increasingly monopolistic. In Germany, for example, the sudden exit of Deliveroo in August 2019 left JustEatTakeAway.com as the de facto monopolist.[84] The hope that market-based incentives alone would end up regulating labor relations appears unsubstantiated. Instead, policymakers

should encourage riders of platforms to unionize and participate in collective bargaining and support the creation of clear and binding forms of employment relationships for the gig economy. Similar to the implementation of AB5 in California, this could include the application of an ABC-test, which would most likely lead to the reclassification of many gig workers as employees.

The most pressing challenge for platform co-ops, however, relates to financing. On the one hand, the country's rather lively tech sector is almost exclusively oriented towards the so-called 'French Champions,' i.e., the tech companies that are supposed to strengthen the country's standing in the global digital economy. A recent five billion euro pledge by President Macron that was intended to support the development of shareholder-owned French tech startups illustrates this particular approach to industrial policy.[85] On the other hand, the Caisse des Dépôts–a sort of sovereign fund that has traditionally funded local authorities, social housing programs, and projects with a particular territorial impact–has recently switched approaches to a more commercial lending model. Whereas before, no specific returns on investment were stipulated, profitability and advanced investment evaluations now play an essential role. These evaluations, serving as a barrier to entry, make it harder for organizations such as platform co-ops to gain access to seed funding. As such, French platform co-ops struggle with financing, both in the startup phase and in later stages.

3.6.1.3. Policy Recommendations

- Facilitate Worker Participation Policymakers should modify Article 44 of the Loi LOM, so that platform workers have a say in the stipulation of the social responsibilities of platforms.

- Incentivize Collective Bargaining Policymakers should encourage workers of labor platforms to unionize and participate in collective bargaining and support the creation of clear and binding forms of employment relationships for the gig economy. This could include the implementation of an ABC-test similar to that of California's AB5.

- Create a Level Playing Field Policymakers should more strongly regulate incumbent platforms which engage in monopolistic and extractive practices.

3.6.2. Co-ops in Paris

3.6.2.1. Platform Co-op Policy Driver

In recent years, platform co-ops have also started to experience more and more direct support from local authorities in Paris, as well as other municipalities such as Bordeaux or Marseille. Local authorities can give direct support to platform co-ops either by contracting them through public procurement or by raising their visibility. In France, public procurement is an important instrument with which public institutions actively influence and shape markets.[86] Public procurement describes the process of acquiring works, supplies, and services by public bodies. It can range from

the purchase of routine supplies or services to formal tendering and placing contracts for large infrastructural projects.[87] As such, it constitutes an essential tool for getting smaller platform co-ops–in particular, those with localized business models–off the ground.

Given that public-private partnerships have become an increasingly popular approach to reorganizing civil society-related work, platform co-ops that use the SCIC model are already at an advantage because of their capacities to integrate both public institutions as well as local organizations. For example, some of the bike delivery co-ops organized within the CoopCycle federation have managed to secure public procurement contracts with local authorities in recent years by pointing towards the very concrete benefits (concerning job provision as well as service provision) that their business models provide in the communities in which they operate.

Another option that governments have at their disposal to support platform co-ops is to raise their public visibility. The City of Paris, for example, has an annual budget to award prize money to social enterprises with a particularly innovative approach. In 2018, CoopCycle was a recipient of such a prize. Hence, one of the possibilities in which local and municipal authorities can support platform co-ops is by distributing prize money and publicly communicating this process. In France, the SSE provides an adequate framework within which platform co-ops could be supported further.

3.6.2.2. Policy Obstacles

European law stipulates a general principle of equal treatment of companies across borders in the context of public procurement, meaning that the individual member countries of the European Union are not allowed to give preferential treatment to their own national companies.[88] This policy creates potential problems for platform co-ops. This general principle makes it more difficult for politicians to recommend using specific platforms or service providers directly. As such, current procurement statutes tend to benefit larger corporations with a certain market share, given that they are more adept at proving their ability to provide required services. Local authorities and municipalities are therefore limited in how they can contract platform co-ops directly. Changes on the European level are needed so that municipalities have more leverage.

Existing principles on the European level also create uncertainty about the extent to which the active participation of a municipality, city, or local authority within an SCIC would similarly constitute a violation of European law. In fact, public authorities in France remain reluctant to take shares in SCICs, precisely because they fear violating European law. In recent years, a variety of associations have tried to address these issues and present solutions. Yet, a substantial legal investigation into possible contradictions between public multi-stakeholder participation and European competition law is still lacking. To change this, policymakers on the federal and municipal levels should work in tandem to provide funding for research projects that clarify legal uncertainty surrounding the conditions under which public authorities on the municipal level can actively engage in SCICs.

3.6.2.3. Policy Recommendations

- Clarify Law
- Policymakers should provide funding for R&D projects that aim at streamlining legal aspects surrounding issues such as public engagement in SCICs, the rewriting of public procurement clauses, and conditional licenses for platform co-ops.
- Realize Public Participation in Multi-Stakeholder Cooperatives
- Policymakers should strive to become active members and hold shares of platform co-ops that organize as SCICs. Paris, for example, should take an active role within the French Fairbnb offshoot.
- Provide Funding for Incubator
- Policymakers should push for the implementation of a platform co-op-specific incubator program, in Paris and other municipalities.
- Amend Public Procurement Guidelines
- Policymakers should adapt the guidelines for public procurement (i.e. limiting the level of paperwork and adjust the market cap needed to apply) so that platform co-ops can compete.
- Push for Legislative Changes in the EU

Policymakers should push for changes in European legislation so that European stipulations for public procurement do not limit the options that municipalities have for supporting platform co-ops.

3.7. Preston, U.K.

3.7.1. The Cooperative Movement in the U.K.

The United Kingdom is considered to be the origin of the modern cooperative movement. In 1844, it was the birthplace of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, the first recognizable co-op. This pioneering role also extends to manufacturing cooperatives, notably, the Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Co-operative Society Ltd., founded in 1848.[89] While the formation of credit and savings cooperatives was an important component of colonial development policy in the early part of the 20th century, cooperatives based in the United Kingdom have experienced varying fortunes over the course of that century.[90] The most notable example is the Co-operative Wholesale Society

(CWS). The CWS went from being a major cooperative federation to a shadow of its former self by the end of the century. The CWS has been demutualized as The Co-op Group since 2013 but is still struggling with market pressures.[91]

Of the 7,063 cooperatives registered in the UK in 2020, 43.6% are consumer cooperatives. Worker cooperatives comprise 0.44% of the total turnover, while multi-stakeholder cooperatives are responsible for 3.41%. There are 382 worker cooperatives and 381 multi-stakeholder cooperatives. Worker cooperatives predominate in the professional and legal services (67; 3.39 mil. GBP turnover) sectors.[92] Multi-stakeholder cooperatives are more common in educational, sports, and recreation sectors. Some have attributed the relative decline in the number of worker cooperatives from their peak in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s to a reduction in funding to the Cooperative Development Agencies that had been integral to the growth of worker cooperatives in Britain.[93]

A 2015 Co-operatives UK report says worker cooperatives are competitive in terms of survivability, productivity, and sustainable job creation compared to investor-owned firms. Worker control is integral to securing these advantages, according to Co-op UK's report.[94]

The United Kingdom is the only country in the world that has a Co-operative Party.[95] Co-operative societies established the party in 1917 to promote cooperative values and to ensure a more even playing field for cooperatives. It has 26 members of Parliament, 13 members of the House of Lords, and seven members of Scottish Parliament. Historically, the Co-operative Party has had an electoral alliance with the Labour Party.[96] Labour's 2017 and 2019 manifestos committed to bold plans for the co-operative economy. For example, in 2017, it aimed to introduce a workers''right to own', analogous to France's Loi Hamon (July 21, 2014), and double the size of the UK co-op sector.[97]

In a separate Digital Democracy Manifesto, launched in late 2016, the head of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, foresaw an important role for platform cooperatives. There were four planks of this nascent policy:

(1) to provide political support for platform cooperatives,

(2) to provide financial support to platform cooperatives through a National Investment Bank and regional banks,

(3) to require platforms to provide "secure employment" contracts and the right of collective bargaining to those who earn their livings through said platforms, and

(4) to apply the best practices from the development of platform co-ops to the provision, delivery, and utilization of public services.[98]

The UK's first platform co-op support program, UnFound, was set up by advocacy groups Co-operatives UK and Stir to Action.[99] Platform co-ops are part of Labour Leader Keir Starmer's agenda for a 'Just Society.' This involves encouraging the creation of new cooperative platforms for the digital age.[100] However, with a Conservative majority government in office and a mixed record of supporting employee ownership, it is unclear whether such ambitious policies will be realized in the near future. It is noteworthy that the Conservatives committed to establishing a 150 million GDP Community Ownership Fund to enable communities to buy post offices, pubs, and other local assets, which has the potential to foster community cooperatives and the use of the 'community shares' financing model.[101]

3.7.1.1. Platform Co-op Policy Drivers & Movement Builders

The main drivers for the formation of platform co-ops in the U.K. are:

- Legislative Amendment and Political Interest from the Opposition As mentioned above, the recent reforms to cooperative legislation have helped modernize co-operative legislation and brought some clarity to a complex area of law. It has contributed to reducing the costs of registering a co-operative society. This is aided by political support by the main Opposition party.

- Business Support Organizations such as Co-operatives UK have been proactive in supporting the UK cooperative movement in general and platform co-ops in particular through the provision of a wide variety of business support services outlined above.

- Interest in Improving Workers' Protections The downward pressure exerted by platform companies on workers' rights (including the right to collectively bargain) and the erosion of stable, secure employment contracts. It appears that there is an interest and focus on the development of cooperative alternatives to gig platform companies, such as Uber, Deliveroo, and Care.com, in particular.

3.7.1.2. Policy Obstacles

The United Kingdom has been home to worker and multi-stakeholder cooperatives for several generations, which has recently been accompanied by a consolidation of its cooperative law in 2014. While platform co-ops are new in the U.K., business advice is available and accessible for cooperative start-ups, conversions, and buyouts. This extends to guidance on legal structuring, governance, and sources of finance. The main policy obstacles are:

- Limits on Platform Worker Organizing The characterization of platform or gig workers as being self-employed has, among other things, deprived these workers of the right to collectively bargain, a right enjoyed by employees and a third category of worker colloquially referred to as 'limb (b)' workers. The typical course of action has been for platform workers to claim before

an Employment Tribunal or a Central Arbitration Committee that they have been misclassified. However, the issue with rulings from these bodies, even if favorable for a worker, is that they are decided on a case-by-case basis, based on the facts of each individual dispute, the dependency of the worker on the platform, and the level of control exercised by the platform. Given the frequency with which platforms change their management practices, a large number of platform workers may be uncertain about their legal status and unsure whether they have the right to unionize. This can potentially cause issues for the formation and running of a cooperative as well. If deemed to be genuine independent entrepreneurs and not employees of a cooperative, there is risk that platform co-op members may be vulnerable to charges of e.g., direct or indirect price-fixing between entrepreneurs via a platform.[102] At present, independent service providers are, for instance, prohibited from setting minimum prices in a collective agreement with employers, given that the exemption in EU competition law for collective bargaining is limited to employees and the falsely self-employed.[103] This is especially a concern as competition law in the European Union does not provide a blanket exemption to cooperatives, outside specific exemptions in the agricultural sector.[104]

- Unavailability of Adequate Financing Options The financing options typically available to cooperatives, such as member subscriptions or even modest bank loans, are inadequate for platform co-ops that seek to compete with businesses that can afford to spend the millions in venture capital. In short, the risk and speculation inherent in the platform economy are antithetical to the reliability and stability offered by cooperatives. There is an absence of policy support to build funds of sufficient size that are also patient in receiving returns on investment.

- Lack of Political Support from the Government The current national government has not indicated support of platform co-ops. Instead of addressing the needs of platform workers, in its most recent manifesto, it has conveyed the more equivocal aim of finding the right balance between the need for flexibility in the economy with job security. [105]

3.7.1.3. Policy Recommendations

- Shifting the Burden of Proof of Employment The burden of proof concerning employment status should change from independent contractor by default to employee by default—unless the employer can prove otherwise. The UK could adopt a test similar to the ABC test used in certain U.S. states.

- Expanding the Right to Collectively Bargain: With the Brexit transition ending, there is an opportunity to reform the right to collectively bargain in which this right is bifurcated from employment status. One approach could be to extend the right to collectively bargain to everyone who provides a service in a personal capacity—instead of inhibiting this by grouping them with other commercial undertakings.

- Financial Support Among the recommendations for expanding sources of capital made by the

research group, Nesta, is the creation of a Platform Co-op Fund to provide patient seed capital to platform co-op startups.[106] While they do not explicitly mention what kind of institutional configuration this fund should have, a National Co-operative Development Agency that is governed by both the government and the co-operative sector could allocate a part of its budget for such a fund.

- Progressive, Preferential Public Procurement If national-level public bodies with large purchasing capacities also engage in progressive, preferential procurement practices, such as the National Health Service (NHS),[107] home-care platform cooperatives such as Equal Care Co-operative could be encouraged to participate in tender bids and open a new avenue for income for its worker-members. A trend in this direction is already visible, with the UK government requiring contracting authorities in the public sector to consider how procurement can deliver 'social value' since 2012 and, more recently, issuing a policy note clarifying that bodies, including the NHS, should give social value a minimum weight of 10% of the total score used in evaluating a bid.[108] Many central contracting authorities are now obliged to apply a new Social Value Model for public procurements above a certain monetary threshold, which entails achieving policy themes and outcomes, such as the tackling of economic inequality by enhancing supply chain resilience. Without mentioning platform co-ops specifically, this means that these contracting authorities should consider in their award criteria the relative presence of voluntary, community, and social enterprises in their supply chain if, for example, there is a need to diversify the supply chain in the relevant market (this social value award criteria should bear in mind the general principles of proportionality, relevance, equal treatment, and non-discrimination).[109]

To be clear, this should not be seen as tacit encouragement of institutions such as the NHS leaving state ownership. Instead, it should be viewed as an effort to include platform co-ops and their members within their existing procurement network rather than precariously positioned agency workers.[110]

That being said, given a recently elected Conservative government with a comfortable majority, the likelihood of support for platform co-ops from Westminster appears to be low. Instead, there appears to be greater promise for such support at the municipal level, in cities such as Preston.

3.7.2. Co-ops in Preston

The Preston model emerged in the North of England out of a conviction that the region could only overcome years of economic stagnation and austerity through local control and preservation of community wealth. The belief that local government could contribute to this arose from the realization that 'anchor institutions'–the leading drivers of economic activity in a region–must be rooted in a particular territory to foster community wealth building.[111] The majority of local anchor institutions' (i.e., NHS, university, and public authorities) expenditure–61%–was flowing out of the greater Lancashire economy in 2012/2013. This amounted to 458 million GDP of a total 750 million GDP spent by these institutions in a year. [112] Preston's plan to localize the economic activities of these

institutions was inspired by progressive procurement policies in Cleveland, Ohio, Manchester, and other cities.

Preston City Council introduced a new procurement policy to encourage local suppliers. The aim was to create conditions in which they could compete and win tenders. At the core of this new procurement policy was the simple idea that anchor institutions should spend more on local suppliers, not through direct favoritism but rather through the creation of conditions in which they can compete and win tenders.[113] This was achieved in a variety of ways, from inserting terms into construction planning documents which require commercial developers of a certain scale to provide training and employment opportunities for local residents, to introducing social value creation requirements in procurement tender documents. Such a social value requirement can include requiring contractors to have some form of employee involvement in their business. This serves as an incentive for worker-owned businesses to bid for public tenders and improves their chances of securing a tender. During this period, ten new worker cooperatives have been launched.

As a result of these policies, Preston is one of the most improved cities in the UK, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers and Demos.

The council's plans included increasing the number of small and medium-sized-business bidding for anchor institution contracts from 100 in 2017 to 500 by 2020.[114] They also plan on setting up a new investment fund, akin to the Fund for Employee Ownership established by the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio, to finance the anchor institutions of the region so that more business can be converted into cooperatives and other democratic business models. [115]

In addition to the policy drivers that exist at the level of national government, there are additional policy drivers in places like Preston, which make them promising locations for platform co-ops.

3.7.2.1. Platform Co-op Policy Drivers

- Social Value Requirements The introduction of social value requirements in procurement documents, which includes a requirement that businesses wishing to participate in the procurement process having some form of employee involvement, lends itself to cooperative alternatives. The current terms of Preston's planning documentation already work to the benefit of local construction workers–a class of workers who have usually been self-employed. It is possible to work with this sector to create a cooperative-based platform for contracting construction workers.

- Proximity to the Community Procurement officials in Preston hold regular meetings and workshops with local businesses to identify their needs and to help them understand the procurement process. They also organize meetings with potential suppliers to identify why those suppliers may or may not submit bids. This creates a conducive environment for platform co-op

startups to approach anchor institutions to identify whether their services/goods may help satisfy their procurement needs.

- Cooperative Incubators The Preston model involves officials from anchor institutions working with local academics to build cooperative incubators (e.g. Guild Cooperative Network, Preston Cooperative Development Network). The process of incubating worker co-ops has already begun. They have helped create new worker cooperatives in food (The Larder) and tech (Preston Digital Foundation, the PDF co-op). While these are not platform co-ops, the support services for such cooperatives are present.

- Local Investments by Public Pensions Public pensions in Preston are currently being used, in part, to finance the construction of student accommodation. With some imagination, it is possible to imagine that such a fund could also be an investor-member in local platform cooperatives.

While the Preston model does not explicitly address platform cooperatives, it is not a stretch to envision how, for example, a web designers' cooperative could integrate a platform to find work or how a restaurant cooperative could itself be part of a multi-stakeholder platform cooperative, including courier-members, restaurant worker-members, consumer-members, and local authority-members.

3.7.2.2. Policy Obstacles

- Size of the Gig Economy in Preston While there are no precise statistics on the size of the gig economy in Preston or Lancashire, one helpful indicator is the size of the resident workforce engaged in non-permanent employment. It has been estimated that 5.7% of workers living in Lancashire are involved in non-permanent employment. This is slightly higher than the 4.9% average in other parts of England outside of London; however, the implications of this on e.g., skills drain is indeterminate. It is also unclear what share of this non-permanent employment takes place in the gig economy. As such, the support of platform co-ops may be a lower priority in Preston than other locales.

- Limits to Public Procurement Anchor institutions may be able to be regular buyers of e.g., a food platform cooperative or users of a car-sharing platform cooperative. However, whether a single or small set of buyers or users would provide sufficient, regular work for a platform's workers is questionable. There are also limits to the types of platform co-op that would be able to do business with an anchor institution, given the particular needs of local authorities and universities.

3.7.2.3. Policy Recommendations

- Inclusion of Platform Co-ops in Procurement Explicitly mention platform co-ops in procurement

documentation as part of the social value requirement. This can extend to more information on platform co-ops in buyers guides and suppliers' toolkits.

- Investing in Platform Co-ops Devoting some of the funds of anchor institutions, such as public pension funds, to platform co-op development in the region.

- Digital Hubs One recent paper has suggested that municipalities should support the creation of 'digital hubs' which can host platform co-ops during their initial years of operation. This support could be in the form of subsidizing the rent of office space and offering mentorship.[117] Preston has a form of digital hub, known as Digital Preston, under the umbrella of Digital Lancashire CIC. Lancashire County Council currently partners with Digital Lancashire, and a part of its website and activities could be dedicated to highlighting platform co-ops. This would not only inspire fruitful collaboration with individual members of Digital Lancashire and allow the co-op to benefit from mentorship, but could also provide a space for new platform co-ops to feature their events and advertise membership and employment opportunities.[118]

4.
OUTCOME AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

4.1. Policy Recommendations Beyond the Listed Territories

What Tools Do Policymakers Have at Their Disposal to Support Platform Cooperativism?

Political support for platform co-ops is growing around the world. In 2019, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, traditionally the second-largest party in the country, embraced platform cooperativism and included it in their Party's platform. In the United Kingdom, the Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn and Keir Starmer, included platform cooperativism in their vision for the future of the Internet. Trebor Scholz presented platform co-ops at the G7, the Innovation Group of the Italian Parliament, and the Legislative Assembly of the State Government of Kerala, India. The PCC has also advised the city councils of San Francisco, Melbourne, and Barcelona on the topic.

Examining the various territories in the preceding section allows us to identify common patterns of policy that can support cooperatives in general and platform co-ops in particular. These territories, to varying extents, have a rich cooperative history, and some, like California, Berlin, and Kerala, have become prominent 'tech hubs.' Consequently, they offer both salutary lessons on the development of policies that are friendly towards platform co-ops and warning signs for how social and solidaristic practices can be undermined by capitalist imperatives.

The reform of cooperative legislation, tax benefits, public procurement incentives, rewards, business support services, efforts at technological sovereignty, and cross-border municipal cooperation are consistent themes across these territories that have helped make them attractive venues for cooperative formation. However, much work remains to be done in order to put platform co-ops in particular on an even keel with venture capital-funded platform companies. Platform co-ops need specific technical advice targeted towards such co-ops and financing options that will allow them to compete with platform companies while also making the wider cooperative movement more receptive to the specific needs of platform co-ops.

Based on the experience of these seven territories, policymakers have at least eleven ways at their disposal through which they can support platform cooperatives:

- Mandate Government Procurement Policies That Favor Worker-Owned Platform Cooperatives

Phase in a requirement over five years that government-funded contracts to procure goods and services grant substantial vendor preferences to firms organized as worker-owned platform cooperatives.[119] Screening criteria of bids need to include 'social value' considerations (e.g., worker involvement in governance). Social value documentation should be mandated for bid documentation. Social value should be given sufficient weight, even if the competitiveness of the price remains the primary factor. To bridge the information gap between public authorities and small scale, employee-owned vendors (including platform co-ops), regular sessions should be held to inform such organizations about the tenders available and how bids should be prepared.

- Implement Solidarity-Oriented Loan Programs

Policymakers should implement loan programs that focus on social innovation (in addition to programs that focus on technological innovation) and that define social impact funding in a way that alternative organizational structures or even platform co-ops are explicitly taken into account on the federal level.

We can also envision a revolving loan fund for platform cooperative technical assistance, to be allocated to such uses including but not limited to legal, accounting, business advisory and technology development services.

- Realize Public Participation in Multi-Stakeholder Cooperatives

Policymakers should strive to become active members and hold shares of platform co-ops.

- Fund Research to Identify Legal Obstacles

In an ideal scenario, the legal framework of a jurisdiction will be able to accommodate 'global' platform cooperatives, whose board, members, and economic activities are internationally dispersed, as well as local platform cooperatives, whose governance organs and economic activities are in a single country or region. Policymakers should provide funding for R&D projects that aim at streamlining legal aspects surrounding issues such as public engagement in platform co-ops, the rewriting of public procurement clauses, and conditional licenses for platform co-ops. To be able to incubate both global and local platform cooperatives, the legal framework requires the existence of certain features in cooperative law as well as in ancillary areas of law that are crucial for platform cooperatives to function, including electronic signature law, tax law, labor law, competition law, and bankruptcy law. One possible step towards such research could be a benchmarking study that assesses the 'friendliness' of a legal system to platform cooperatives, based on the ease of forming an ideal-type global or local platform cooperative in a given jurisdiction. This is inspired by the ICA's cooperative legal friendliness assessment, as part of their recent #coops4dev project, and the Cooperative Law and Research Initiative (CLARITY) Principles and Scorecards. This could be seen as a non-neoliberal alternative to the World Bank's Doing Business Rankings. Morshed Mannan, co-author of this paper, is working on constructing the criteria for such a study.[122]

- Offer Social Benefits Specifically to Members of Platform Cooperatives

This should include health insurance, subsidies for childcare, pension, and access to educational opportunities, including professional development.

- Create a List of Physical Spaces That Could Be Offered for Free or at Low Cost Use to Platform Co-Ops

This includes meeting halls, industrial-size kitchens, parking lots, unused office buildings or space, and any other underutilized physical plants or facilities owned by those jurisdictions.

- Provide Public Recognition

By certifying their organizational status as cooperatives, measuring and recognizing their individual annual contributions to local economic vitality, and listing in specialized public business directories limited to cooperative ventures, platform co-ops could receive much needed public recognition, consistent with a state's proper role in promoting economic opportunity.

- Improve the Conditions of Platform Co-op Operation

Another option available to governments is to indirectly address platform cooperativism by improving their framework conditions. To do so, policymakers would need to level the playing field of the platform economy within their territorial boundaries. This could be accomplished by limiting the power of incumbents to dominate a market, thereby providing "breathing room" for alternatives. This can be achieved by rewriting taxation rules, providing exemptions for cooperatives from antitrust law, or–as has become visible when looking at the U.S.–by trying out new classification rules for determining labor relations, one of the striking problems in the platform economy.

- Provide Purchasing Preferences to Give Platform Cooperatives and Other Worker-Owned Firms Fiscal Bidding Advantages

Rather than siphoning them into the pockets of non-resident shareholders, local economic benefits derived when public funds are spent on and recirculated in a local economy by workers providing goods and services should be reflected.

- Fund Platform Co-Op Incubators

Municipalities, in particular, can set up incubators supporting platform cooperatives. Municipalities can connect internationally to support platform cooperatives. Policymakers could provide funding for platform co-op-specific incubators, which could not only support the creation of new platform co-ops, but also gather sector-specific knowledge, which could then be shared with the various auditing associations. This could enable the auditing associations to improve their knowledge about these new cooperative forms and allow them to disseminate this knowledge in a way that all concerned stakeholders have access to it.[123] Through this, the cooperative business model could be made more attractive for entrepreneurs in the tech sector, which would ultimately also bring new lifeblood into the overall cooperative ecosystem. In short, more stronger linkages between the platform co-op sector and the traditional co-op sector are needed. The government could play a role in bridging the gap.

- Fund a Municipal or National Advisory Committee

Large technology companies approach cities with tempting offers for access and a complete package for how they imagine implementation of their services. Municipal governments are frequently unprepared and under-resourced to respond to those visions with a clearly formulated set of values and principles that guide all of their tech development and implementation. We therefore recommend the convening of a cross-border Advisory Committee that can guide policymakers on the development of platform co-ops. Lastly, policymakers could convene the public for their input.

- Include Platform Cooperatives in the Political Platform of Parties

Various parties, left and right, have included platform cooperativism in their political visions officially, thereby sending a strong signal of symbolical support. Platform co-ops (as a sort of a civic society-embedded form of economy) allow politicians, who currently are (increasingly) dependent on private companies (especially the big players) and their neoliberal market and extraction logic to regain more freedom to act (instead of just reacting) by giving more choices and less dependency.

5.

LIST OF RESOURCES FOR LOCAL AND STATE POLICYMAKERS

Appendix 1

The following institutions have supported the development of platform co-ops as partners for the Platform Coops Now! Course offered by PCC & Mondragon University:

BCCM/Incubator.coop (Australia), BOPHUB SDG Centre, FACTTIC (Argentina), Centro emprendimiento e incubación de economía social de Universidad IBERO – MTA Puebla (Mexico), Confecoop (Colombia), Conseil Québécois de la Coopération et de la Mutualité (Canada), Cooperativa Sulá Batsú (Costa Rica), Cooperatives UK (United Kingdom), Florida Universitaria – MTA Valencia (Spain), Industree.org (India), Legacoop Liguria (Italy), MTA China (China), MTA Singapore (Singapore), Ibero Puebla (Mexico), PCC Hong Kong (China), Platform Cooperatives Germany (Germany), Start.coop (USA), Universidade Federal do Paraná (Brasil), Cooperative Support Services (Nigeria), RedRoot Artist (Philippines), Cooperative University (Kenya), OCAD University (Canada), Institut Mines-Télécom (France) Platformes en Communs (France) Zuhura Innovation Africa

Appendix 2

'Platform Cooperative Benchmarking Study, v.1.0 that Assesses the 'Friendliness' of a Legal Regime Towards the Formation and Governance of Platform Cooperatives by Morshed Mannan

The benchmarking study is inspired by the ICA's cooperative legal friendliness assessment, undertaken as part of the multi-year #coops4dev legislative mapping research project. The study tailors this friendliness assessment to the specific characteristics and challenges faced by cooperatives engaged in for-profit commercial activities in the platform economy. It also draws on the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Cooperative Law & Regulation Initiative (CLARITY) Scorecard and the CLARITY Principles that the Scorecard operationalizes.[124] While the CLARITY Principles are animated by a concern about state intervention in cooperative formation and governance in the Global South,[125] as a legacy of colonial and command economic administrations, this benchmarking study is interested in creating an enabling environment for platform cooperatives based on the early experience of existing actors. Such an environment does not preclude a clearly defined and circumscribed role for governments (e.g., municipal authorities) to become supporters or legal members of a platform cooperative, should such a cooperative find it to be helpful.

The study draws on some of the questions and research methods used by the World Bank's Doing Business Ranking but aims to contribute to alternatives to such a neoliberal ranking system by decentering the stock corporation (and the formation of the same) as the main focus of legal reform in support of small and medium enterprises. Instead,

cooperatives are the primary focus. Moreover, the purpose of the benchmarking study is not to chastise countries for their performances on the 'friendliness' scale, as influential multilateral organizations have previously done with respect to underperformance on Doing Business Rankings, but rather seeks to open discussions on whether or not certain features of a jurisdiction's legal framework and bureaucracy concerning cooperatives are amenable to the needs of cooperators in that jurisdiction. As such, national respondents to this study are encouraged to add qualitative comments below certain questions. The comments are intended to buttress the responses of national experts who participate in the study.

Once the first version of this study has been examined in a workshop involving a group of experts and implemented in trial jurisdictions, it will be possible to assess whether some of the questions have to be reconsidered and if more (comment) boxes have to be included. This process may reveal that an analysis document akin to the CLARITY Scorecard Analysis worksheet is necessary to complement the scale below, so as to have a telescopic and microscopic overview of areas that need attention. It can also open a conversation on recommended solutions to these reform areas.

INSTRUCTIONS

National experts are asked to respond to the questions in the spreadsheet, based on the assumptions about platform cooperatives provided below.

Assumptions about the Platform Cooperative

You are setting up a Platform Cooperative with the following information:

- The cooperative initially has three (3) members. Two (2) members are nationals of your jurisdiction, and one (1) member is a foreign national.

- Six (6) members join as independent contractors within the first month of formation, with four (4) persons being nationals of your jurisdiction and two (2) persons being foreign nationals. They will become eligible for membership after a three (3) month probation period.

- The cooperative is engaged in for-profit commercial activities in the platform economy. Some activities may be subject to a special licensing regime (e.g., ride-hailing, short-term rentals), which may be accounted for in the comments.

- The cooperative is able to define its own purpose in its bylaws.

- The cooperative is a multi-stakeholder cooperative with one category of member being worker-members. (If, in the view of the respondents, the choice of cooperative type significantly alters their responses, the scale may be completed again.)

- The cooperative does not own real estate but leases a small office space.

Yes is scored with 1 and No is scored with 0. The higher the score, the more 'friendly' the legal system is to platform cooperatives. The highest possible score is 45. Other than the aggregate score, the subtotals may provide a more specific indication of which areas of law or bureaucratic administration merits particular scrutiny.

	Features of a Legal Framework that indicate 'friendliness' towards the formation of platform cooperatives	Yes	No	Relevant Articles
Infrastructural Features				
1	There is a centralized cooperative registry with national coverage			
2	There is an online database to search for consolidated cooperative records			
3	There is an online database to search for individual cooperative records			
4	There is an online system that can be used for every step of cooperative registration (from electronic application submission using a fillable PDF or digital form to obtaining documents concerning the cooperative, such as the registration certificate and annual financial reports, through an online portal)			
5	There is a fully online system for filing changes to the membership structure of a cooperative			
6	There is a fully online system of payment for the fees relating to the formation of a cooperative (including any one of: wire transfer, online banking and mobile transfer)			
7	Electronic signatures are valid for online registration of cooperatives.			
8	Electronic signatures are valid for authorizing representatives of the platform cooperatives (e.g., if a legal representative abroad has to file court proceedings or make a payment on behalf of the cooperative).			
9	Electronic signatures are valid for ordinary cooperative transactions (e.g., signing meeting minutes) [Please note in the comment box what the limits are in using electronic signature for relevant business transactions, if any.]			
	Comment:			
10	It is possible to open a bank account online without any requirements as to physical presence (including nationals of other countries opening a corporate bank account from abroad).			
11	A registered address in a jurisdiction is sufficient for a cooperative to be validly formed [in other words, it is immaterial if the central place of administration or principal place of business of a cooperative is online or in another jurisdiction.]			
12	It is possible to submit mandatory disclosure documents (e.g. an annual report) electronically or by post.			

13	The internal, external and cooperative auditing of a cooperative can be completed with electronic documents [i.e. there is no requirement for the inspection of original hard copies in a physical premises.]			
1. Subtotal for Infrastructural Features:				
14	The list of documents needed to form a cooperative is available to the general public.			
15	The list of all fees (and amounts) required for cooperative formation is available to the general public.			
16	There is a distinct legal entity form for co-operative firms.			
17	It is permissible for cooperative firms to use a variety of legal entity forms. [Please note in the comment box whether the use of other legal entity forms, such as a private company limited by guarantee, trust, foundation or blockchain-based limited liability company is conditional on not using the cooperative marque.]			
	Comment:			
18	The cost of registering a cooperative is similar to the cost of registering other legal entities that can be used by a cooperative firm.			
19	Forming a cooperative does not require more than 3 members.			
20	No nationality restriction for membership of a cooperative (including indirect discrimination, e.g., by prohibiting cooperative shares/equity being held by a citizen in a cooperative registered in another jurisdiction.)			
21	No nationality restriction for directorship or management of a cooperative (including restrictions in terms of a proportion of the board being of a certain nationality) [Please mention in the comment box what those restrictions are]			
	Comment:			
22	Cooperatives are permitted to have investor-members [Please note in the comment box any limitations to cooperatives having such a class of members.]			
	Comment:			
23	A registered cooperative can adopt consensus-based decision-making (e.g., holacracy, sociocracy)			
24	It is optional for a cooperative to have delegated management through a managing committee or board of directors.			
25	A registered cooperative can opt for voting rules for internal decision-making that departs from 'one member, one vote'			
26	There is no restriction as to the geographical scope of the cooperative's activities.			
27	Online/Virtual meetings of a managing committee/board of directors are permissible under the law.			
28	Online/Virtual general assemblies are permissible under the law.			
29	Voting online in managing committees/board of directors has the same legal effect as voting in person.			
30	Voting online in general assemblies has the same legal effect as voting in person.			
31	Appointing proxies to vote on a member's behalf is permissible under the law.			

32	The cooperative registrar is not responsible for the internal dispute resolution of cooperatives.			
33	The cooperative enjoys managerial autonomy and operational freedom from government interference.			
34	The law permits the creation of reserve funds, comprising a percentage of the cooperative's surplus. [If yes, please note in the comment box if the law mandatorily requires the creation of a reserve fund or if it is voluntary.]			
	Comment:			
35	The law encourages cooperatives to educate and train their members, elected representatives, managers and employees to further the effective development of their cooperative [e.g., through the allocation of part of a financial year's results for educational purposes.]			
36	Cooperation among cooperatives is encouraged by cooperative legislation [e.g., through the inclusion of this principle in the law.]			
37	Concern for community is encouraged by cooperative legislation [e.g., through the inclusion of this principle in the law.]			
2. Subtotal for Features of Cooperative Law:				
Ancillary laws and regulations that support the operation of platform cooperatives				
38	Cooperatives are permitted to receive grants and donations. [Please note in the comment box if your response is influenced by the tax status or legal entity form of the cooperative.]			
	Comment:			
39	There are tax incentives for the formation of, or conversion into, cooperatives [Please note in the comment box whether this answer would change if the members are not nationals of the jurisdiction where the cooperative is registered.]			
	Comment:			
40	There are tax incentives for subscription of cooperative membership/shares [Please note in the comment box whether this answer would change if the members are not nationals of the jurisdiction where the cooperative is registered.]			
	Comment:			
41	There is preferential procurement for cooperatives and the terms of these incentives are wide enough to include platform cooperatives. [Please note in the comment box whether your answer would differ if the majority of the cooperative's membership is globally dispersed as opposed to being in the same jurisdiction where the cooperative is registered.]			
	Comment:			
42	There are public subsidies available for the economic activity that the platform cooperative is engaged in. [Please note in the comment box which sectors are eligible for such subsidies, e.g., renewable or clean energy.]			
	Comment:			

43	Changes in the control of the cooperative (e.g., mergers, transfer of undertakings in the vicinity of insolvency) must always be subject to the approval of membership. [Please note in the comment box if business laws, such as insolvency law, preclude member involvement in certain circumstances.]			
	Comment:			
44	Depending on how the cooperative and work relationship is structured, the applicable labor and employment laws are able to accommodate both worker members that are employees of a cooperative as well as those that are not. [This question seeks to understand whether there is a presumption of an employment relationship for worker members. Please note in the comment box any nuances to this position, including the existence of third categories of employment status other than employee and independent contractor/ self-employed.]			
	Comment:			
45	Cooperatives enjoy special protection from–or under–applicable competition law. [Please note in the comment box any nuances to this position, including whether this depends on the risk conferred on members, members' employment status, type of cooperative, its economic activity and its prominence in a given geographic or product market.]			
	Comment:			
3. Subtotal for Ancillary Laws:				
TOTAL (1 + 2 + 3):				

Appendix 3

PCC Policy Brief (March 3, 2017)

State and Federal Legislative and Executive Action Opportunities

Primary Public Policy Benefit - Brief Summary

Public policymakers have a vital stake in fostering a healthy relationship between productivity gains and personal income, and more generally, in reducing income inequality and the concentration of power it often represents. In the midst of an increasingly centralized and unequal online economy, platform cooperatives (PCs) are online businesses that share ownership, governance, and profits far more equitably among users and workers. They are also a powerful new way to address growing concerns about data privacy, cybersecurity, and the inappropriate use of secret algorithms. PCs are building a new digital public square, one where the benefits of modern Internet technologies support jobs and economic growth without the dangerous centralization of power that threatens democracy and the common good. Policymakers can support the fast-growing Platform Cooperative movement and ensure that the thriving online economy shares its benefits more equitably in local communities.

Early leadership opportunities include:

- Conduct public hearings in the U.S. Capitol, in state Capitols, and in local communities on the long-term impact of platform co-ops on the economy at large.

- Host or sponsor Platform Cooperative organizing meetings that bring together small business owners, software developers, unions, and others to explore sustainability plans for local cooperative ventures that benefit the local economy.

- Incentivize the production of open-source technologies that can be freely used or licensed by many co-ops in multiple localities.

- Sponsor legislation that provides vendor preferences to worker-owned, cooperatively-run businesses in government procurement policies.

- Collaborate with the Platform Cooperatives Consortium at The New School to conduct site visits, ride alongs, or meet and greet sessions with workers in cooperatively run businesses, platform cooperative developers, entrepreneurs, and supporters.

- Make annual or monthly awards to cooperatively-run businesses, including platform co-ops.

- Accelerate local economic growth by providing funds for academic and field-based peer-reviewed research that identifies sectors where platform cooperatives, and cooperative businesses more generally, are best positioned to thrive.

- Sponsor legislation that creates a revolving loan fund for locally-based platform cooperative technical assistance, to be allocated to uses such as the provision of legal, accounting, business advisory and shared technology development services.

- Provide funding to establish an academic center of excellence in the formation and continuous improvement of cooperatively-run businesses, including platform co-ops (e.g., https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/36/11/40).

- Provide matching funds and other economic incentives that support both the modernization of existing cooperatives into PCs while also providing new incentives that encourage startups to organize themselves as cooperatives. (e.g. tax abatements for cooperatively-owned firms).

Appendix 4

Expert Speakers on Platform Co-ops in Numerous Countries

Expert speakers	Country	Role, Affiliation, Website URL	Contact Email
Andrew Ward	Australia	Co-founder Incubator.coop	andrew@incubator.coop
Rohan Clarke	Australia	Co-founder Incubator.coop	rohan@incubator.coop
Mario de Conto	Brazil	Director of the Co-operative Faculty of Technology (ESCOOP) in Brazil. https://www.escoop.edu.br/	mario-deconto@ocergs.coop.br
Rafael Grohmann	Brazil	Professor Unisinos, Coordinator DigiLabour Research Lab, Leading Platform Co-op Observatory in Brazi, Principal Investigator Fairwork in Brazil, Founding Board Member of the Labor Tech Research Network, https://digilabour.com.br https://cooperativismodeplatforma.com.br (soon)	rafaelgrohmann@unisinos.br
Rafael Zanatta	Brazil	Activist and Lawyer, Latin American Network of Surveillance, Technology, and Society Studies, Data Privacy Brazil, https://twitter.com/rafa_zanatta	zanatta@dataprivacybr.org
Josiane Caldas	Brazil	PhD Candidate in Law with a dissertation on platform co-ops. Federal University of Paraná	josiannecaldas@gmail.com
Luciane Barzotto	Brazil	Associate Professor in Law at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Labor judge.	lcardoso@trt4.jus.br
Ricardo Lima de Mello	Brazil	Researcher on the use of codesign techniques for the development of platform cooperatives. Currently, he is doing research with university students on the creation of a cooperative brand to help people in situations of refuge in Brazil. Link: https://www.facebook.com/codemocracia	rlmello@anhembi.br
Morshed Mannan	Bangladesh	PhD candidate at the Company Law Department, Leiden Law School finalizing a dissertation on platform cooperatives and Advocate, Bangladesh Bar Council	m.mannan@law.leiden-univ.nl
Georgi Georgiev	Bulgaria	Head of Cooperative Development, National Union of Worker Producers' Cooperatives	georgiev@uniontpk.com

Todor Kolev	Bulgaria	CEO of Obekto Innovation Builders Cooperative and Comrade Digital Cooperatives	contact@obecto.com
Yasen Lazarov	Bulgaria	Developer at Camplight Digital Cooperative	jasen.lazarov@gmail.com
Stephanie Guico	Canada	Consultant - sgui.co	stephanie.guico@gmail.com
Daniel Jiménez Quiroz	Colombia	Researcher on the use of cooperatives, facilitation tools and methods, and governance structures advancing art organizations. M.A. in Arts Administration & Cultural Policy. Platform Co-ops NOW participant and facilitator. Member of Entreviñetas and Coopia.	danieljq@protonmail.com
Cynthia Srnec	France and Argentine	Academic researcher at LITEM and IIEP-UBA-CONICET (https://twitter.com/CynthiaSrnec)	csrnec@econ.uba.ar
Nicole Alix	France	Chairperson of La Coop des Communs. One of our main project is on Plateformes en communs	nicole.alix@coopdescommuns.org
Alexandre Bigot Verdier	France	One of the main contributors of Plateformes en Communs. Has written the report on Plateformcoops en 2020. Social entrepreneur in the North of France (platformco-op and co-working spaces). https://plateformes-en-communs.netlify.app/	alexandre.bigotverdier@protonmail.com
Florian Perret	France	Animator of Plateformes en communs, a project he has initiated.	florian.perret@coopdescommuns.org
Jonas Pentzien	Germany	Researcher on policy for platform cooperativism at the Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW)	jonas.pentzien@ioew.de
Leo Sammallahti	Finland	Worker member of VME Co-op and involved in numerous other ventures	leo.sammallahti@vme.coop
Ela Kagel	Germany	Co-founder and board member of Platform Cooperatives Germany eG and Platform Coops Network. Managing partner of SUPERMARKT Berlin. platformcoop.de/. and platform-coops-netzwerk.de/supermarkt-berlin.net	bagusrachman1971@gmail.com
Bagus Rachman	Indonesia	Vice deputy at Ministry of Cooperative and SMEs	bagusrachman1971@gmail.com
Heira Hardiyanti	Indonesia	Cooperative expert	heirahardiyanti@gmail.com
Francesca Martinelli	Italy	Director of the Centro Studi Doc Foundation and researcher on platform coops and self-management cooperation	info@centrostudidoc.org
Damiano Avellino	Italy	Project manager, Hypernova Coop; Contributor, Platform Design Toolkit	Damiano@platform-designtoolkit.com

Francis Mwongela Mikwa	Kenya	Doctor of Philosophy in communication Studies and a Platform Coops Researcher	mwongelakim@gmail.com
Kirianki M'Imanyara	Kenya	Lecturer of Cooperative philosophy and its associated economies at www.cuk.ac.ke	mkirianki@cuk.ac.ke
Rafael Pavón	México	CEO NEDI (Digital Strategists) and member of 3i Coop https://tres-i.coop/ https://nedi.mx/	rafael@nedi.mx
Damion Bunders	The Netherlands	PhD candidate at the Rotterdam School of Management, doing research on what makes cooperatives of gig workers resilient	bunders@rsm.nl
Paul Gadi	Philippines	CTO/ Co-founder at OPGames - Using open-source and co-op principles to build game systems. Platform Co-ops NOW participant. http://game3js.com/	paul@outplay.games
Samer Hassan	Spain	Assoc. Professor at UCM (Spain), Faculty Associate at BKC (Harvard Univ.), Principal Investigator of P2P Models	shassan@cyber.harvard.edu
James De le Vingne	UK	Head of Development Unit at Co-operatives UK	James.delevingne@uk.coop
Ludovica Rogers	UK	Programme Manager for New Co-operative Ventures at Co-operatives UK	ludovica.rogers@uk.coop
Ian Snaith	UK	Emeritus Senior Lecturer, Law School, University of Leicester, editor of leading textbook on UK cooperative law, an author of the leading work on UK clubs and associations and an experienced speaker on UK Co-operative Law	
R. Trebor Scholz	USA	Professor and activist, The New School, NYC. Founding Director Platform Cooperativism Consortium,and Affiliate Faculty at the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University http://platform.coop	scholzt@newschool.edu
Danny Spitzberg	USA	Advisor, Start.coop; Lead Researcher, turningbasinlabs.com	danny@turningbasinlabs.com
Greg Brodsky	USA	Founder and co-director at Start.coop	greg@start.coop
Doug O'Brien	USA	President and CEO of NCBA CLUSA, the apex association for cooperatives in the U.S. Frequent author and lecturer on cooperative history, policy, and identity. https://ncbaclusa.coop/	dobrien@ncba.coop

Technical Assistance Providers for Platform Co-ops

Technical Assistance Provider for Platform Co-ops	Country	URL	Contact Email
Coopersystem	Brazil	https://coopersystem.com.br/	
CoLivre	Brazil	http://colivre.coop.br/	
Coonecta	Brazil	https://coonecta.me/	
PopSolutions	Brazil		marcos.mendez@popsolutions.co
Mélissa Boudes	France		melissa.boudes@imt-bs.eu
Startin'blox	France		salut@startinblox.com
Misitioba	France		arancibiajav@gmail.com
FDO Solutions GmbH	Germany		felix@fdo-solutions.de
KODI	Indonesia		inra@kodi.id
Hypernova Coop	Italy		info@hypernovacoop.it
3i Coop	México		rafael@nedi.mx
RedRoot Artists Coop	Philippines		redrootideas@gmail.com
Coopdevs	Spain		info@coopdevs.org
Jamgo	Spain		info@jamgo.coop
Outlandish	UK		
CoTech	UK		
Start.coop	USA		hello@start.coop
CoLab	USA		

Legal Assistance

Legal Assistance for Platform Co-ops (law firms, legal experts)	Country	URL	Contact Email
Nexa Legal Asia	Bangladesh	https://nexalegalasia.com/	info@nexalegalasia.com
Untung Tri Basuki	Indonesia		untungtb@gmail.com
Alejandra Sánchez	México	https://tres-i.coop/	alejandra.sanchez.rem@gmail.com
Ian Snaith, (as above) and consultant at Anthony Collins Solicitors, Birmingham	UK	https://www.anthonycollins.com/	ian.snaith@anthonycollins.com
Cliff Mills, consultant at Anthony Collins Solicitors, Birmingham	UK	https://www.anthonycollins.com/	cliff.mills@anthonycollins.com
Emma Watt, Commercial Contracts Associate at Anthony Collins Solicitors, Birmingham	UK	https://www.anthonycollins.com/why-choose-us/meet-our-team/emma-watt/	emma.watt@Anthonycollins.com
Co-operatives UK advice team	UK	https://www.uk.coop/support-your-co-op	
Jason Wiener, pc	USA	http://jasonrwiener.com	

Sustainable Economies Law Center	USA	https://www.theselc.org	
Jonathan Askin at the Brooklyn Law Incubator & Policy (BLIP) Clinic	USA	www.blipclinic.org	jonathan.askin@brooklaw.edu; blip@brooklaw.edu
Kelsey Jae, Law for Conscious Leadership	USA	www.kelseyjae.com	kelsey@kelseyjae.com
Collectiu Ronda	Spain	https://www.cronda.coop/	https://www.cronda.coop/en/Contact

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80 N evertheless, it is important to note that the 2014 law has further increased the already existing tensions within the SSE outlined earlier. Concretely, in the run-up to the implementation of the law many 'traditional' SSE organizations expressed insatisfaction with the fact that explicitly profit-oriented companies can now also lay claim to the ESUS status. Because of this, the OECD/European Union OECD und European Commission, Hrsg. Boosting Social Enterprise Development: Good Practice Compendium. Paris: 2017. They have argued that "ancient cleavages between an altruistically driven economy and co-operative enterprises that have leading positions in competitive markets are reaffirming themselves" in the context of the law.

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123 In recent years there have also been efforts to establish new auditing associations that explicitly address digital and platform cooperatives. CoopGo can be used as an example. But whether and to what extent there is actually a demand within the cooperative ecosystem for such alternative auditingtesting associations can only be assessed with some distance.

124 For an update version of the study and more information on these earliest assessments and tools, as well as background regarding the development of this benchmarking study, see Morshed Mannan, Democratic Firms in the Platform Economy, forthcoming PhD dissertation, Leiden University.

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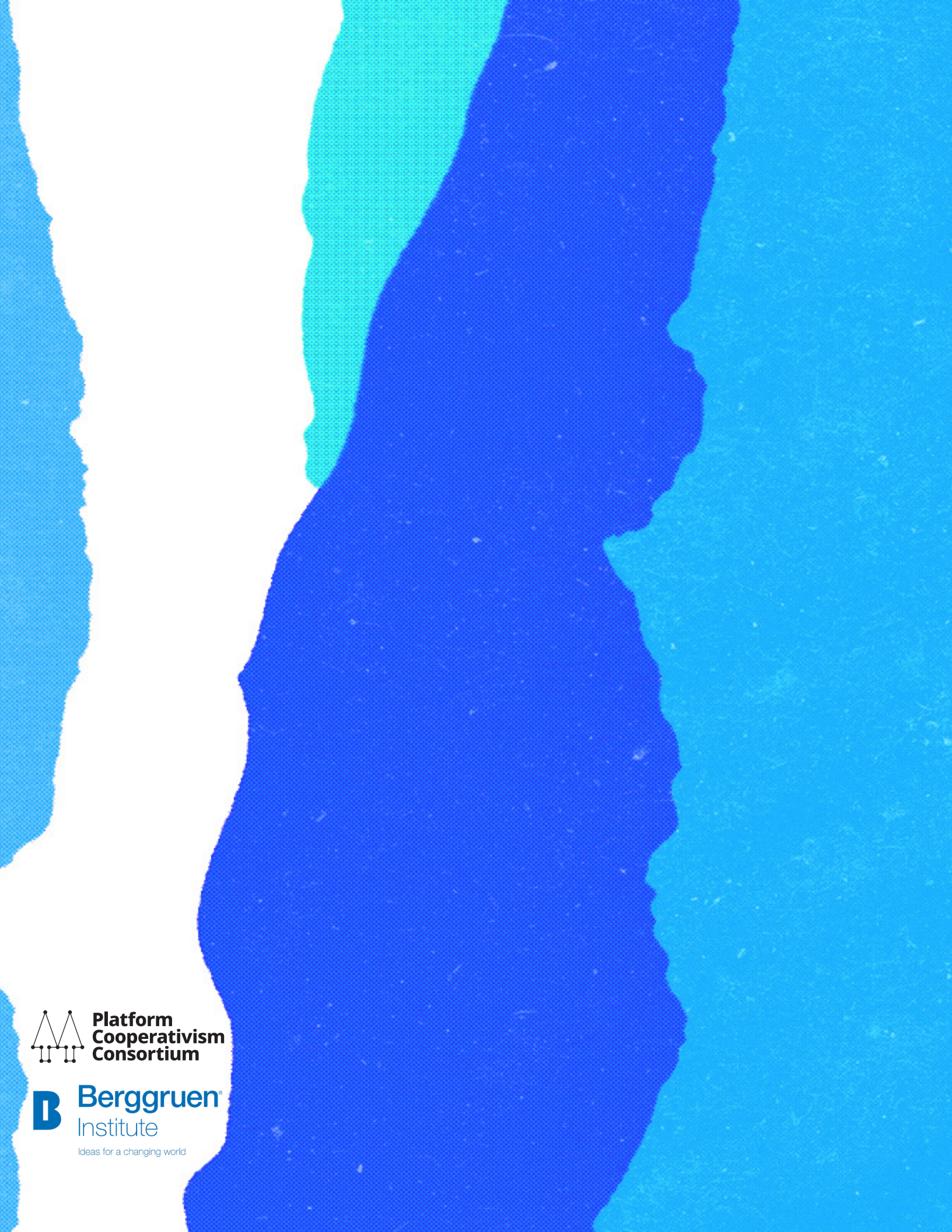
Notes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