

Question:

Hi , I have a question. SoSmartbe.be is a cooperative, Up&Go is a cooperative, both have been described as Platform cooperatives. But Smart is an agency which is sector agnostic. Up&Go is a specific agency which uses a digital platform to sell its services B2B and B2C.

To my mind Up&Go is a genuine Platform Co-operative because it moves co-operative business online - onto a Platform. Isn't Smart then an agency in which the digital platform is just a tool?

TS:

Good question. PCC supports the cooperative digital ecosystem. Smart is platform-centric in Belgium but in Spain it is not. Platform co-ops operate in many sectors and in the form of various types: home services, care, agriculture, software, data, cultural services, gig platforms (local or globally distributed), marketplaces, and assets sharing. Morshed Mannan co-authored a chapter on this typology (forthcoming). Platform co-ops emerge as worker co-ops, multi stakeholder co-ops, data co-ops, and producer co-ops. Recently, many data co-ops launched. And most importantly, there are experiments with data trusts.

To answer your question about Smart: they self-identify as platform co-op (so, I'd take them up on that) and it makes sense as in Belgium, the digital platform is quite central to the services they offer but, like I said, in other countries it is not. So: is Smart a platform co-op or coop with a website? Yes. Rather than getting stuck in definitional trench wars, I would focus on the ecosystem and the value that they are creating. Our work is situated at the intersection of cooperatives and the digital economy. That also includes a focus on data trusts, data co-ops, etc.

Thanks for answering Trebor.. Yes, 'Ecosystem' is a great generic term.

TS: I think a problem for the Left, in the U.S. at least, has been an overemphasis on form (unions vs co-ops, ESPOs vs co-ops, worker co-ops vs consumer co-ops, etc) when the **outcome** should really be the focus.

===

Question for @CooperSystem (Joachim from themobilityfactory.eu and Partago.be cooperative electric car sharing): which license system do you apply on your developments? Is part of your development open source? Or is it cooperatively owned by Coopsystem? Thanks for the explanation.

Hugo:

Hi Joachim. Curia is the first software at Coopersystem that is distributed by licenses, which is per event, not monthly. We have not yet developed Open Source projects, they are all owned by Coopersystem or our customers, but we intend to start a large project that should be in this format.

===

Question for @CooperSystem : Another question with regards to the platform you introduced (Curia). To what extent do you think the limitations of direct participation / workplace democracy can be overcome via technological means like deliberation / decision-making platforms? I.e., many economists, philosophers and others have suggested that it's impossible to scale democracy because people just need to meet locally to make decisions. To what extent can such tech help compensate and serve larger groups to facilitate (direct) democracy?

@Hugo:

It's a great question. The law in Brazil that regulates the format of the assemblies, the meetings held for these types of important decisions, is very old. It did not allow online meetings and was changed only last year. Incredibly, we are noticing that the participation of the members of each cooperative has increased with this format and the debates are more cohesive and decisive. We believe that people end up participating more because they are in the comfort of their homes. We also believe that democracy continues to be made or even increased. Our platform was developed to give everyone the right to participate and vote, regardless of where they are.

@Coopersystem:

thanks (by the way, this is Jerome, not Hugo!!). I am writing a dissertation coming from an economics paradigm looking at democracy. What you're saying is basically in total contradiction to what many "armchair academics" say. Fascinating, and I would like to find out more. You also emphasize the important role the law has in shaping possibilities. Laws designed to help democracy can hurt it, as you say the law forbade online assemblies. What in the end caused the law to be changed? Activism?

@Hugo:

Hi Jerome, actually Hugo is me. Very interesting what you are writing. We sure can talk more about it.

===

@ShareTribe: Thanks for your inspiring talk! Won't I have a vendor lock-in when I choose to go with ShareTribe? The big companies you fight have all built their platform themselves, because they know they own it, the data on it, and they can profit from network effects. So, to fight them, as is your goal, which advantages does your approach have that those giants don't have, other than just 'now you're also into the game'.

@Juho: A great question! If you build your platform with Sharetribe, you own your business and data. From that perspective we're just a hosting provider, we don't have any rights to the data and can't do what we want with it. You can take your brand and data away at any point. Also, a big part of our code is open source, so if you build on top of Sharetribe, you could later take all that code and data with you and move it to your own servers, and be completely independent of us. Our Flex solution does have a shared proprietary component too (we have a multi-tenant backend which wouldn't work well as an on-premises hosted solution) so when you'd move away, you'd need to replace the components it uses with your own, but the open source

templates we've created on top of Flex, which are fully functional example marketplaces that you'd be utilizing when building your custom code, that are yours to keep for free.

The other point I want to make is that our company structure completely prevents us from trying to maximize our profits and extract the maximum amount of money from our customers. We did a crowdfunding round, so we're hoping to provide some returns to our investors, but those returns have a script cap. Once those have been paid out, 100% of our profits, if we make any, are going into enabling our mission. There's no way for our team to just put it in their own pockets. Even if we suddenly became evil, we can't change this structure, because it's made permanent with the foundation structure. This ensures that you know that any money you'll be paying us for our services will benefit a good cause, not just make a few people richer.

@sharetribe: Can you talk a bit more about the governance model of sharetribe?

@Juho: Voting rights are fully controlled by our team members currently. However, the part that we haven't yet managed to fix is to distribute it more equally. The co-founders still hold more voting shares than others. We want to fix this. My hope is that we can distribute the shares fully equally between all team members. To do this we need to figure out a couple of things regarding legislation, taxes, etc, but I'm sure we'll be able to make it happen.

We still have a CEO and a board, and will likely have those also in the future. However, once the voting shares have been distributed equally, our team can at any point change the board and CEO, if they're not happy with them. This keeps the CEO and the board accountable. Today we're a small team of 21 people so we anyway have a pretty flat structure when it comes to making decisions, we just come together and discuss, but if we grow, I think having this system could become a lot more important.

This article describes how our company structure works

<https://medium.com/bettersharing/steward-ownership-is-capitalism-2-0-76a1c50a6d88>

Question: Curia seems to be a great example of old cooperatives working with new ones. For others, what could the big and old existing cooperatives do to help out smaller and newer cooperatives (or coop like enterprises in the case of ShareTribe) like yours?

@Hugo:

@Juho: From our perspective, I'd like to turn this around: perhaps we could work together with some existing, big cooperatives to help them digitize some of their operations? We'd love to have those conversations, but I think ultimately it starts from those coops figuring out if there's a need for a digital platform solution in their business.

===

@Obran: Can you talk more about how the WBO process works that you employ?

Question for @Obran

What about exporting this model outside of USA? What are your thoughts and experiments on that?

Lets talk! Joseph@obran.org

Thank you Joseph! Really inspiring

====

David Ellerman, who joined us here today, has a new book out

:

Neo-Abolitionism

Abolishing Human Rentals in Favor of Workplace Democracy

New book just out!

Backcover text gives a good description:

"This book argues for the abolition of the employment system in favor of workplace democracy and thus escapes the usual capitalism-versus-socialism binary choice by reframing the basic issue as the employment contract, not private property or a market economy.

The author repositions the political and economic debate in the lineage of abolitionism—against the owning of other people—which in its modern version of neo-abolitionism would also abolish the renting, or hiring, employing, or leasing of other people.

The overall argument is based on three recovered theories, each one of which is sufficient to yield the neo-abolitionist conclusion. These three rights-based theories are developed throughout the book. The three theories are 1) inalienable rights theory, 2) the natural rights or labor theory of property, and 3) democratic theory as based on a democratic constitution that only delegates governance rights versus a non-democratic constitution that alienates governance rights.

The book, therefore, is a must-read for everybody interested in a better understanding of the political economy, workplace democracy, rights-based theories, and the employment system."

<https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783030626754>

For Ellerman's book, see www.memoryoftheworld.org

====

For a model of a Coop-ESOP being developed in Europe, see our paper on our site <https://ekonomiska-demokracija.si/en/gradiva/> or the site of the European Federation for Employee Share Ownership. It is unlike the US ESOP since the trust is replace by a worker coop but unlike a worker buyout it can start with partial ownership of the underlying company and build up to 100% coop ownership when it become a Mondragon-type coop.