

**Towards a fair sharing economy:
The role and place of cooperative platforms**

December 5, 2016

Conference in the European Economic and Social Committee, Brussels

Digital platforms are at the heart of the so-called "collaborative" economy. This "collaborative economy" is based on peer-to-peer practices and takes two main forms:

- *peer-to-peer and commons-oriented*. Peer-to-peer (or P2P), brings together people around a common object (free software, shared design ...), shared, maintained and defended by a community. A Commons is comprised of three basic elements: a resource, the community that manages this resource and an active governance that establishes rules;
- "*distributed market relations*" where people create, via a platform, market relations by replacing the usual intermediaries with a privatized platform. This "netarchic capitalism" allows the creation of a market by direct extraction of the value resulting from human cooperation and the production of social value, without going through the remuneration of labor.

The conference in the EESC¹ aimed at shedding light on the future and for public decision-makers by showing diversified models of more collective, "commons-based" solutions. These often take the form of collective organizations present in the social and solidarity economy: cooperatives, associations, mutual societies.

The diversity of forms of entrepreneurship is consubstantial with the European social model, as much as with social dialogue. The creation of models with a cooperative and mutual prevalence, carried by stakeholders of a different nature, is likely to nurture the European model of social dialogue and to reinsert the concept of social innovation into processes carried by the actors. The EESC thus enabled six organizations close to the social and solidarity economy and the commons to bring together, on December 5th, nearly 200 people at the EESC. The conference was an opportunity to:

1 - Discover innovative experiences of cooperative platforms:

The experiences presented, plus the ones from "Platform Cooperativism" —a movement launched in New York in favor of cooperative platforms governed by

¹ La Coop des Communs, Confrontations Europe, P2P Foundation, SMart, Ouishare, Cecop



See the records and presentations on <http://confrontations.org/reports/towards-a-fair-sharing-economy-the-role-and-place-of-cooperative-platforms?lang=en>

their users— and the ones described in the study realised by Cooperatives Europe are all based on trust between the stakeholders, according to two axes, not exclusive of each other:

- *The first one considers the platform as a cooperative, a common good, owned by the interested parties who manage them.* They are developing all over the world, involving a varied labor demographic, which includes underprivileged, precarious and manual workers” poor and manual workers, and their unions; This is particularly evidenced by the Platform cooperativism movement;

- *The second one aims, through, for example, multi-stakeholder cooperatives, the creation and preservation of common goods.* Beyond the sole interests of workers and users, it is a new sharing of value that is sought. This is particularly evidenced by the movement in favor of "open cooperativism"
In any case, participatory governance issues are central to these experiences.

2 - Exchange on regulatory issues:

The type of regulation is an element of competition policy, favoring certain models and fewer others. If cooperative platforms try to better respond to market failures by empowering consumers and protecting workers, they are, at the present time, in a position of weakness. This contradicts the principle of a "level playing field" in which social economy can compete effectively and fairly, without regulatory discrimination ". Self-regulation and external regulation do not oppose but complement each other. Self-regulation is only possible if regulation gives it a chance to exist.

The current legal environment necessarily leads to situations of monopoly. Hence the central question of ownership of data. At present, the law makes the data collector the owner. It is necessary to shift to a public basis of ownership of the data, shifting the role of the collector towards that of « depository » while empowering all those who feed and data as co-owners.

There remains the huge question of products which cannot be sold as commodities any longer. While being a disturbing development within our current economic system, this state of “de-marketization could usher scenarios of "Sustainable prosperity" through a new monetary and financial systems where currency is designed and used as a commons

And, of course, the question of social rights and the remuneration of workers is central. How to preserve independence while at the same time enjoying the benefits of wage-earning as revenue is generated? The contract of employment shall not be regarded as a service contract.

The European Commission produces a large number of texts and feeds the expectations of civil society. These expectations can be addressed by using the examples which fuel the debate. The European Union does not want to legislate, but it also recognizes that the technology is not neutral: the new call for proposals ICT-1162017 aims to promote innovative models for sustainable lifestyles.

3 - Promote possible partnerships between cooperative worlds, communes, cities ...

The platforms that work best are those with investment capabilities. Alliances are needed to foster experimentation, transgression and transition solutions.

Cooperatives are surely inspiring models. Multi-stakeholder cooperatives make it possible to approach redistributory solutions, with horizontal democracy. Are they sufficient, particularly for commons that do not create market value? Should new legal instruments be created to meet these needs? Beyond the issue of selling products on the market, the cooperative movement should deal with the issue of land and rent and guarantee that the common will remain common, not privatizable.

The world of the commons is encouraged to identify them and express them in order to find the co-operative model or other social and solidarity models that suits it. If certain forms of co-operatives do not correspond to the needs identified by the world of the commons, it is important that the people concerned must continue to seek an exact definition of their needs. The work between cooperatives and the world of the commons must continue to find the most adapted tools according to the scenarios.

4 - Agree on follow-up:

Partners such as REVES, cities like Barcelona, the ILO, the European Trade Union Confederation are interested in the follow-up, with the organizers, according to 3 axis:

- 1 - invite one another to upcoming conferences and work on the subject of cooperative platforms
- 2 - list sites, forums, ... which identify and document experiences
- 3- deepen the questions, in particular by encouraging dialogue between researchers and operators.

In summary, there are a number issues to be explored:

=> define the needs to better identify the types of cooperatives or other forms of organization that are appropriate, making the distinction between two types of issues:

- the ownership and of legal status and regulations of the platforms, right of workers, property
- the integration of the common interest in the platforms

With a sub-question on the management of public services.

=> Taking into account the national dimensions of the applicable duties (need for training)

=> Deepen the governance issues (both in cooperatives and commons)

=> Advocate for a "level playing field" to experiment and to develop cooperative platforms.