Platform Cooperativism:
an international movement on the rise

Impressions of the 1. PlatformCoopBerlinEvent

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#PlatformCoopBerlin

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Platform Cooperativism:
an international movement on the rise

This article comprises an introduction into the notion of platform cooperativism, references and links to main activists, activities and further readings. You'll also find a report on the first #platformCoopBerlin meet-up in Berlin on the 04.03.2016, including a transcript of Michel Bauwen's speech at this gathering. This article might be useful for whoever wants to get a basic or better understanding of platform cooperativism. People intending to organise a #PlatformCoopX meetup in their own city or researching about the subject will also find helpful information, links and contacts.

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About the recent history of Platform Cooperativism

It was Trebor Scholz, Associate Professor of Culture and Media at the New School in New York City, who put the concept of platform cooperativism on the agenda. „Platform cooperativism, says *Trebor*, is about cloning the technological heart of online platforms and puts it to work with a cooperative model, one that puts workers, owners, communities, and cities - in a kind of solidarity that leads to political power." For more information have a look at Trebor Scholz's reader: *platform cooperativism.*

Trebor Scholz and Nathan Schneider, reporter and a visiting assistant professor of media studies at University of Colorado Boulder, initiated the Conference Platform Cooperativism The Internet. Ownership. Democracy in NYC in November 2015. This event brought together about 100 participants and each day an unexpected 1000+ coders and designers, scholars and researchers, worker cooperatives and builders of platforms owned and governed by their workers / participants. 1.800 people followed the twitter-account @platformcoop and the hashtag #platformcoop was leading the national hitlist on the 13.11. for 5h. As intended the conference turned into „a coming-out party for the cooperative Internet" and did not just spread the concept of #platformcooperativism, but also generated a new and important political debate about economy and society at large.

The facilitators of the 1st local #Platformcoop Berlin meetup, Thomas Dönnebrink and Michel Bauwens, also led a session about Platform Cooperativism In The Context Of Alternative Infrastructures For The Commons Economy, at this conference where they tried to converge the collaborative economy, cooperativism and the open source/data/knowledge movement. (Documentation: Presentation / Videostream).

Nevertheless, it didn't stop with the closing of the conference: participants carried the momentum on to successive events like workshops, reunions or talks at the OuiShareFest BCN in Barcelona, Madrid, Badajoz or pu-

blications about the topic – just to name our own undertakings prior to the first event in Berlin. Also, The Internet of Ownership was initiated by Nathan Schneider as a „directory for the online democratic ecosystem", is showcasing further events and organisations on this site.

In this line of tradition, the first #PlatformCoopBerlin meet-up took place in Berlin at the new SUPERMARKT. It was enabled and organized by a collaborative effort of the SUPERMARKT Group, OuiShare Connectors and the Heinrich Boell-Foundation. Michel Bauwens was invited as the keynote speaker. Even though space was limited and had filled up already with direct invitations, more than 50 people attended instead of the 30 expected.

1. Trebor Scholz

2. Thomas Dönnebrink @ PlatformCooperativism Conference in NY

Michel Bauwens view on Platform Cooperativism:
What it is & why it matters (edited transcript of his keynote)

Michel Bauwens

Michel Bauwens opened his speech by pointing out that we are already living in a transition period. More and more people are waking up to the fact that we are in a crisis and that our extractive system cannot continue infinitely in a world that is destroying the biosphere and busting planetary boundaries. According to research done in the Netherlands civic initiatives are growing linearly since the 1980s until about 2005, since then exponentially. Michel calls it the birth of a "sensitive consciousness". "What many activists worldwide are doing is already changing society. We all know it is difficult. We know it is precarious to do this, but the fact that so many have gathered here shows that we believe in it – and we are not alone."

What is value? Getting aware of the historical context

Michel compares the grand transformation underway with the great historical transformations of the 10th and 15th/16th centuries: Until the 10th century, if one wanted to get rich they went out to plunder their neighbours. This changed gradually with the peace of God movement in southern France, a social revolt against the plunder economy. A revolution that laid the basis for a new social contract. If you wanted to become rich you had to plunder the earth and toil the land and the people bound to the land. Then around the 15th/16th century another change in value regime occurred, producing or induced by new social or technological innovations like: double book accounting, printing press, Calvinism promising those becoming rich to go straight to heaven as opposed to hell waiting for those who led an idle life. Signs of the new value regime was not more so much exploiting the land, but to make and sell commodities which would eventually create the capitalistic system. According to Michel the struggle of the last 200 years was mainly between labour and capital and about who gets which part of the cookie, but the real social and not so apparent fundamental struggle is: **who decides what is value?**

Following the current economic value logic: an oil spill of a tanker is producing economic value, if you are volunteering to clean the beach, you are destroying economic value. If you help children to become autonomous adults you have no recognition whatsoever. If you are in the care economy you do not exist. The struggle is to move from an extractive system to generative practices and to co-creating shared resources for human groups, communities and nature.

A scattered rebellion

Michel compares the grand transformation underway with the great historical transformations of the 10th Michel points out three big social movements:

– transition to sustainability
– fairness (around creation and distribution of value like solidarity economy)
– commons (around open source, open software, open hardware e.g. a shared/common knowledge base – to create a vibrant society)

Many people and millions of organisations and initiatives are active in these spaces, but the problem is that they are all fragmented. Michel mentions 12 different software programmes for ordering food of community supported agriculture in Italy alone. Local is fine, but if we don't find a way to connect and collaborate to form a strong social force, we will lose. This is the story of transition: Changing the rules of the game.

The shift towards open value creation: commoners vs netarchical capitalism

And according to Michel the game changer is the change to open value creation. The current system considers the private labour and private capital the creator of value: market value, that is.

In a new system the value is – or should be – created through the mutualisation of knowledge: Wikihouse or Wikipedia are just two of the 1000s of open source communities where people decide to mutualise their knowledge and thus generate and distribute value, creating commons. Not labour or capital, but citizens are the productive entity here. Through their contribution they create the condition for value creation.

Under the dominant system one can't make a living directly from one's open and contributory action. So even if we create value, it is not recognized by the system, as it has no market value. Abundant knowledge can't be a market value. This is one of our fundamental problems today. Michel considers the current situation to be even worse for workers/users as he sees that the extractive netarchical economy is a shift in capitalism from labour system (I pay people to create and market products which I sell at a higher price) to direct exploitation of collaboration of others. Think about Google, Youtube, flickr, Uber, airbnb - all companies which do no longer pay anyone for creating content and services but enable us to do this and then they have a vacuum cleaner and suck the value out of our exchange system. Think about facebook: 1,5 Billion people co-creating value – but 100% of the market value is privatized, captured

and is not reinvested in the capacity of the users to contribute. This is the real problem. Even though with this hyper productive system of peer production - Commons based peer production - in place. This the value is directly captured by netarchical platforms. You can call them the "capturists" creating a financialised exploitation of human cooperation. Here the concept of platform cooperativism comes in. Michel suggests that the circulation of the commons should be achieved through open input, participatory processes and commons-oriented output which then creates the condition for open input again – thus closing the loop. This works collectively, but it doesn't work individually, because the system doesn't allow and provide the resources for the commoner to reproduce oneself. Livelihoods can not be reproduced in this way.

In this netarchical system it is actually worse than before, because one even gets less money than in the old system. This is why we have to change this system. These are the death stars as Neal Gorenflo puts it. This is where platform coops become interesting. They create livelihoods around the commons and co-create livelihoods for the commoners.

Michel strikes a blow for open cooperatives and here he sees where platformcoops fit in – or should fit in. One contributes to an open commons. In order to create a living, one creates his/her own cooperative entity. As a commoner one creates abundant goods that are available to all (especially in the form of knowledge). Everybody can contribute to it. Everybody can use it. In order to make a living, cooperatives which connect to the (current) market have to be created. Michel's argument is that non-capitalistic, post-capitalistic markets can be created. He suggests community supported agriculture (CSA) as an example: This is not capitalism. Capitalism is separating value from the means of production. It is about lucrative property, if one owns the land or if one owns the platform receiving a rent from the activities on the platform. In a coorporative context one creates a form - like CSA - that practices solidarity with the producer – a group of consumer. Money might be used, but one is not buying commodities, but a share of the pro-

duction of a farmer. Michel asks: can we create non-extractive new models and why should they be open? Looking at the history of cooperatives – e.g. Mondragon, which Michel says he still loves as a good intent into the right direction – they often only work for their own benefit: for the benefit of its members instead of just certain individuals, nevertheless it still stops there. What you are getting is worker capitalism. On the inside you have democracy at the workplace, but what happened when Mondragon went to Poland for example and didn't want to share their bonuses, they hired Polish workers at a minimum wage and then they had a strike. So these cooperatives are better, but it is not enough. Nowadays coops should co-create shared resources. This could mean using free software licenses. So guaranteeing that the work you are doing is also available outside your community, that it is a gift to the common good. These can be done virtually/digitally or can also be done physically. Michel gave the example of a housing coop in Quito in one of the poorest areas of the city. Members of the cooperative are benefiting from special housing arrangements and in return they pledge to contribute a 100 hours of community work in which they clean dumps and turn them into public parks for the citizens - thus creating Commons.

Then Michel emphasised the meaning of Open Cooperativism, which he proposes have the following characteristics: That coops need to …

… be statutorily (internally) oriented towards the common good
… have governance models including all stakeholders
… actively co-produce the creation of immaterial and material commons
… be organized socially and politically on a global basis, even as they produce locally.

How to build platform coops the "right" way

Platform coops aren't there yet, but they are moving into the right direction.

The effect UBER and airbnb has on local economies is similar to a great grocery-shop that takes about 30% of the value out of a local community. UBER and airbnb do the same. They suck out a big part of the value, but they don't (re)invest in apartments or cars, they don't make anything. The only thing they do is creating an APP - which is no rocket science - but they create a lot of control around it.

Platformcoop is a normal reaction to it. For example Arcade City in Vermont is a Coop of drivers that create their own UBER, creating their own platform (and now using Ethereum and launching in 27 cities). How is it related to the commons? In UBER, airbnb and others of their ilk are no commons, but a platform can be a commons. When we are exchanging on a platform that is a market function, but the platform itself can be our common. This is the connection of the emerging commons economy.

Nevertheless for Michel, this is not enough. He shared his recent experience of taking a taxi in Amsterdam where he was charged 18€ one way and 9€ same way back. So a monostakeholder platform can still exploit others. That is why Michel considers multi-stakeholder approaches to be better.

How could this apply to the creation of platformcoops? Their could be certain shares, Michel called them "Fairshares", reserved for founders (acknowledging and recognizing that they are heavily investing their time for the first 2-3 years), but these shares will diminish over time, not turning into a life-long-rent. A similar share arrangement could apply to (ethical) investors, recognising their input and risk-taking. Another share arrangement including workers and users. A platform(coop) design like this will recognise and acknowledge that in the open systems of today co-creation is the norm. Users of Facebook co-create the value of Facebook, without them Facebook is not worth anything.

According to Michel we have to work on three circles: sustainability, openness, solidarity and especially on building bridges between the three to make the mode

of production and distribution – free – fair – and sustainable. Nature creates abundance and – used wisely – provides enough for everybody's needs, but capitalism is scarcity engineering in order to turn abundant nature, knowledge etc. into market goods. Distribution is extremely unfair: inequality is rising all over the world. So we need a system that gives answers to all three circles. We have to work together. So the dozen CSA ordering software in Italy should talk to each other and create an open source platform where they can share their infrastructure investments.


Friederike Abitz

The need for and potential of openness

This is also connected to the intents of the open source circular economy. Michel does not see how the circular economy can create sustainability without openness. If everybody has, wants and sticks to its private logistical chain, it will take 50 years or so to make it. But in the context of an ethical coalition of entrepreneurs around the commons, cooperation becomes easier. Take for example the enspiral network in New Zealand - "a virtual and physical network of companies and professionals working together to create a thriving society" – they have full transparency internally, consisting of 18 ventures with open logistics, open book accounting, etc. Here we go. Then happens what is already happening in the material world which is called stigmergy: coordination without command by signalling without pricing.

Looking at Linux or Wikipedia: people see what needs to be done, and whoever wants is free to allocate ones time or resources to it. With open supply chains and logistics one can actually move this to the physical sphere. Imagine the hyper productivity that can be achieved if this gets done. Capitalism cannot match it. We already know something like Wikipedia or Linux cannot be done in this way. It has been calculated, it is impossible. We can do it. We did it. We can turn Wikihouse into a global platform for public carbon neutral housing. We can do it. We can use Wikispeed or similar mutualised productive knowledge for sustainable transportation and without it I doubt that we will be able to move to a circular economy.

And same thing for the solidarity economy. By all sympathy if you are a solidarity company but privatising your knowledge you are playing a different game. The same game as capitalism. It makes much more sense to mutualise your knowledge and contribute more value than private companies because you are sharing your knowledge and everybody in the ecosystem can use your innovation. Take Wikispeed again, they release a new design every week. How about Volkswagen? Well, we know about Volkswagen.

If you want to combine all the circles: sustainability, openness, solidarity - there is currently no money for it. So a lot of work remains to be done. Nevertheless there is already a lot of knowledge and experience out there. There are more than 20.000 articles of transition on P2P foundation, Commons transition et al. and Michel brought up examples like Sensorica, Ethos, Enspiral, Las Indias to learn from. There are coalitions out there experimenting and they are doing fine and are growing. This is not utopia. This is something real, but we need to spread the knowledge. The transition has started already, we just need to speed it up because we do not have that much time.
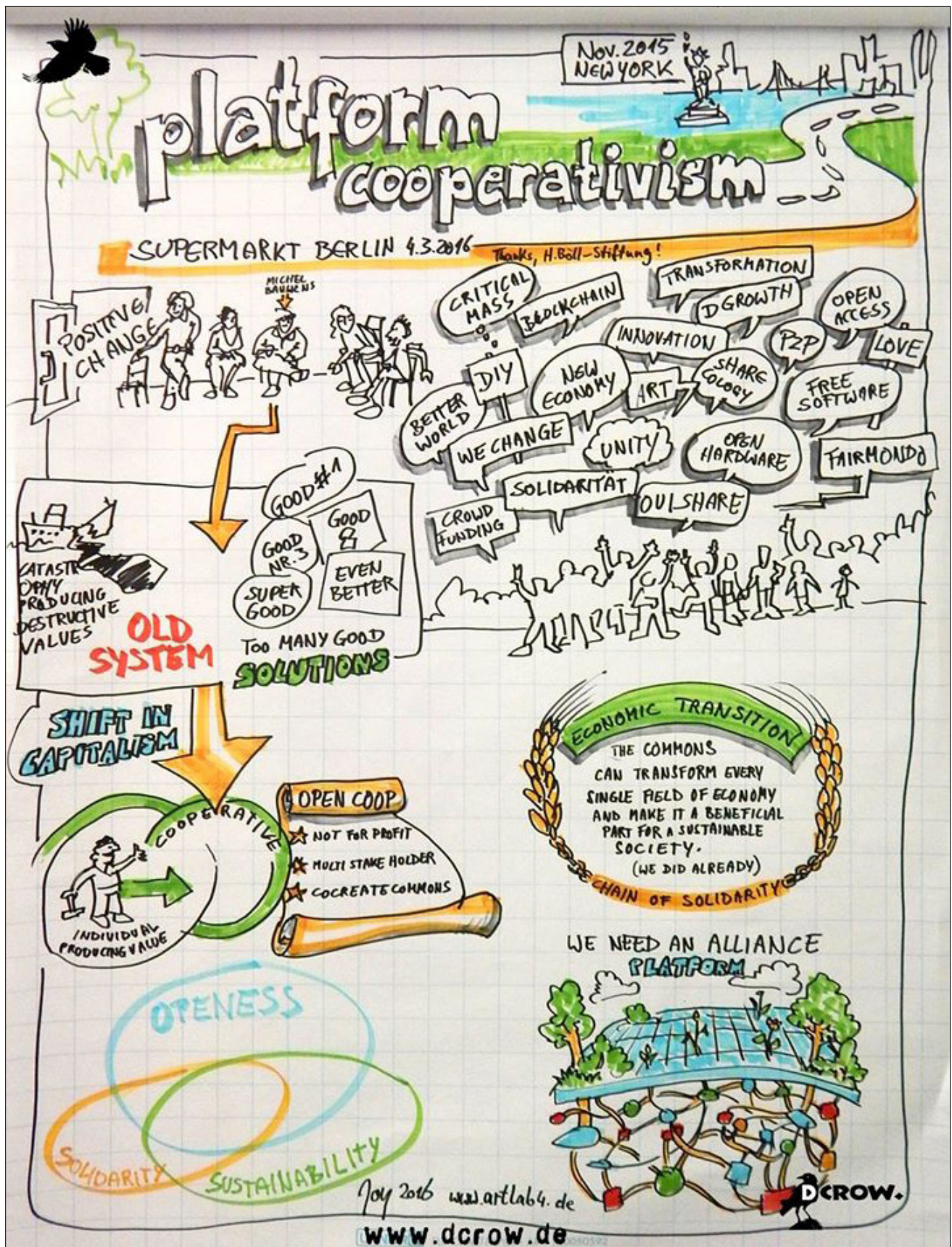
Joy Lohmann

Report on #PlatformCoopBerlin1 meet-up

The three-hour-workshop consisted of two parts, about 90 min each.

The first round of input was all about contextualisation, the motivations of the Boell Foundation and the SUPER-MARKT. A quick presentation of all participants showed which actors and interests had gathered. Thomas Dönnebrink provided the introduction and the context. Michel Bauwens, researcher, activist and director of the P2P foundation, gave an introductory speech.

In the second part of the evening, participants were asked to organise themselves in the form of an open barcamp. The barcamp evolved into five workshops and a final closing round presenting the outcomes of each group. A final discussion about learnings, findings and patterns emerging closed the official part of this workshop. The rest of the evening was dedicated to networking, drinks and snacks.

Who was there?

This first meeting of the local Berlin initiatives brought together more than 50 people:

· Founders, CEOs and members of platforms and/or co-ops such as:
Fairmondo, Fairleihen, SMART, Yunity, WeChange, Coliga, Jolocom, DCrow, Leihbar, Central Association of Consumer Cooperatives

· Networks and Network Platforms such as:
OuiShare, Open Source Ecology, Solidarische Ökonomie, berlinerpool, das-kooperativ, StopResetGo

· Members of Foundations such as:
Boell, P2P, Anstiftung, Free Software Foundations

· Institutes & Organisations such as:
Commons-Institut, Institut für ökologische Wirschaftsforschung, Konzeptwerk neue Ökonomie

· Individual journalists, artists, programmers, activists, changemakers, foresight strategist, researches and facilitators interested in the topic.

For more information about the participants and their contributions see: bit.ly/PlatformCoopBerlin1Voices

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What were the open barcamp workgroups all about?

1. Why Platforms? Centralised platforms vs distributed network

Almost everyone liked the idea of cooperativism, but some people also criticised the idea of platforms. Initiatives, such as Jolocom, explicitly strive towards distributed, autonomous nodes and being in favour of the network concept, rather than the centralised platform. Felix Weth from Fairmondo took up the challenge and brought another perspective into the debate: We have to think big in order to be able to provide real alternatives to proprietary, large-scale user platforms.

These were the main questions debated in this workgroup: Can we outcompete multinational corporations

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by creating our own platforms? Will we manage to adhere to our principles of openness and safety while operating fast-growing, international platforms? Or is a network of decentralized autonomous organisations the only viable and sustainable solution?

2. Mapping the ecosystem: Overview of people and platforms

In this group Adrien Labaeye urged the community to start mapping the platformcoop ecosystem. „We have to know what's out there and with whom we can cooperate". He is part of a larger group working on transformap, a techno-social architecture to visualize the commons transition. The workgroup tried to define basic criteria helping to source data for the creation of maps. Adrien Labaeye presented a first metamap to get started with an overview of concepts, tools, directories, activists, platforms, movements, foundations and other entities in the field of platformcoops – or related to it.

3. Linking the ecosytem - Interoperability of existing platforms

Another group, mainly consisting of the programmers of the various platforms present, discussed terms, chances and difficulties of interoperability and collaboration between platforms. One of the outcomes were that technical and interpersonal solutions are both key in or-

der to establish collaboration and cooperative thinking. Further collaboration is envisaged.

4. A coalition between cities

Discussed were the vision of forming a coalition of different cities working together with the open source and open makers movement creating a platform for their citizens making sure that the money/value generated on and via the platform also stays in the region. A coalition of cities that start pooling infrastructure investment costs for collaboratively creating a common kernel platform seems ideal and logic given the fact that one person can only be in one city at a time, making competition and the development of expensive own proprietary solutions little sense and not a smart move. On the ground of fairness and solidarity rich cities and entities would contribute more, poorer less. At the end each member contribute what they can and just take what they need.
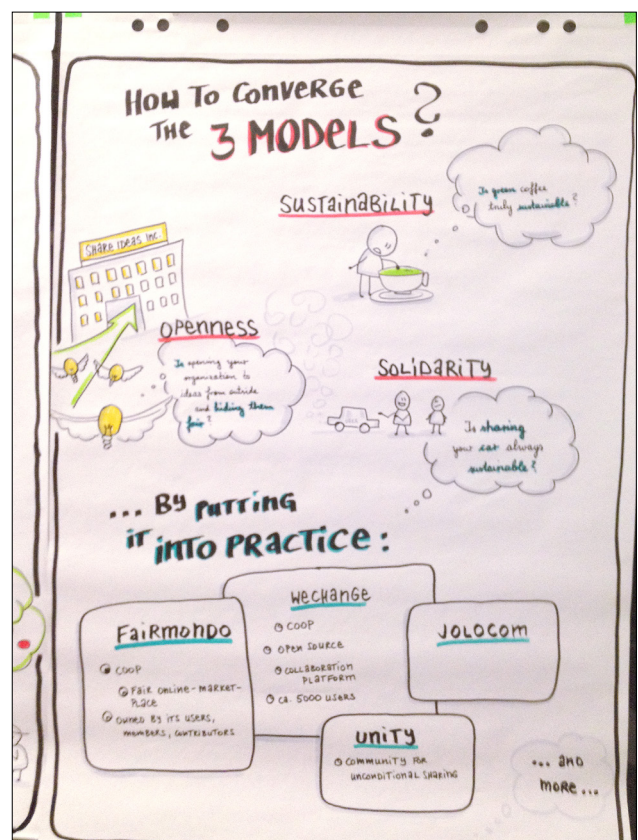
Friederike Abitz

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5. Sustainability

A fifth group looked into another big topic: Sustainability. While it is certainly important to work with sustainability as a main standard, it is also essential for activists to sustain themselves and to avoid activists' burnout. The group came up with the idea of creating a social charter, a set of values and measures that takes effect at the core of any action.

How to integrate the users of coop services? How to create principles of mutualism?

Up to this date the cooperative world has not much heard, understood, used or put its teeth into the fast-growing sharing and collaborative economy and digital platforms. Almost the same applies to the sharing and collaborative economy who has little or no knowledge about cooperatives and has rather looked to old system when it comes to ownership and governance models. To bring both separated worlds together showing and exploring the potentials that lay in the part where they overlap, is the main purpose and aim of this and the successive #PlatformCoop meet-ups, events and publications. The first #PlatformCoopBerlin meet-up with Michel Bauwens and many very knowledgeable and experienced participants from either or both worlds was a very good start and has created a momentum beyond Berlin, where several of the platformcoops and activists are located. #Convergence and mutual learning and experimenting as well as carrying it to a wider audience and into the political sphere came on the to do list for the next events.

Next steps

First suggestions for the to-do list to foster the topic and (local) community around #PlatformCoop. (feedback, recommendation, participation all welcomed)

• #PlatformCoopBerlin meet-ups should not only take place in and be organized by the Supermarkt Group, but in the spaces and with the help of other players in the field.

• Define clear goals for those meet-ups and the way it can relate to other commons-oriented communties, groups.

• Reflect on existing proposals/principles like in Trebor Scholz's report and existing critique by Bauwens and

discuss positions and ideas within the PlatformCoop (Berlin) community.

• Create a pathway and best practice solutions on how to achieve sustainable platforms and economic entities that will operate for the interest and the benefit of the common good and the workers, users and contributors of the platforms and will not be undermined or taken over by corporations or serving just particular interests.

• Put together some guidelines and share expertise.

• Build an infrastructure/space/forum for mutual learning and support

Links to PlatformCoop events, topics, groups & URLs

Click link for future and past #PlatformCoopBerlinEvents

Click link for topics of interest around PlatformCoop
In both documents you are welcomed to add further interesting events and suggestions and your topics of interests – via the comment function there.

Click link for joining one of the current PlatformCoop Facebook Groups.
PlatformCoopBerlin or PlatformCoopBarcelona or Rise of the Digital Cooperative

Click link für PlatformCoop Internetsites: NYC Conference 11/2015 or Internet of Ownership

PlatformCoopBerlinEvents – upcoming
(for past events see bottom)

PlatformCoopEvents listed here will take place in Berlin OR are co-organized by members of the PlatformCoopBerlin team and community in other cities or countries. For further PlatformCoopEvents by other platformCooperativist in other cities and countries see: http://internetofownership.net/

2016-04-22
#PlatformCoopBerlin2 meet-up @Fairmondo in Berlin – Glogauerstr. 21
Platform Cooperativism in practice: Fairmondo - Crowdfunding to avoid the venture capital trap.
A series of six #PlatformCoopBerlin meet-ups are planned every 6 - 9 weeks and taking place in the locations of different hosts (if you/your entity or initiative wants to host one event please leave comment or contact us with date, location and topic suggestions)

2016-05-01
Co-op DiscoTech (good occasion for #PlatformCoopBerlinEvent - to be discussed/planned?)
MIT's Co-Design Studio is calling for people to organize Co-op DiscoTechs—simultaneous events around the world designed to connect people into the intersection of cooperative enterprise and technology.

2016-05-03
How Platform Cooperativism Can Unleash the Network @Re:publica in Berlin
Trebor Scholz et al.

2016-05-09
Berlin auf dem Weg zur Sharing City? Die Potenziale der Share und Collaborative Economy in Berlin. Diskussion der Chancen und Handlungsempfehlungen. im Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin, Niederkirchnerstr. 5, Raum 376

2016-05-18ff
Several #PlatformCoop Events @OuiShareFest in Paris (see programme)

2016-05-31f
Genopreneurship Summit in Köln (Akademie Deutscher Genossenschaften)
Thomas Dönnebrink, Ela Kagel, et al.

2016-06-9/13
Second Open Source Circular Economy days in Berlin & 30+ cities worldwide
(good occasion for #PlatformCoopBerlinEvent - to be discussed/planned?)

2016-06-15
Konferenz: Sharing Economy zwischen Gemeinwohl und Gewinn. Neue Herausforderung für Zivilgesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Politik (BMBF/FONA gefördertes Forschungsprojekt mit IÖW, IZT, ifeu)
Thomas Dönnebrink, et al.

2016-07-02
Internationaler Tag der Genossenschaften
(good occasion for #PlatformCoopBerlinEvent - to be discussed/planned?)

2016-08-30ff
#PlatformCoop Event @Degrowth in Budapest: Platform Cooperativism & Co Workshop.
Access INSTEAD of ownership was yesterday. Access AND ownership will be tomorrow.
Thomas Dönnebrink, Ela Kagel, Andreas Arnold, Cristobal Gracia

2016-09-29f
#PlatformCoop Event @Goethe-Institute in Mexiko City, Mexiko
Thomas Dönnebrink, Felix Weth

2016-10-26f
Tacit Futures: a 24 hour workshop on platform cooperativism at the Volksbuehne
Trebor Scholz, Ela Kagel, et al.

Past Events

2016-03-04
#PlatformCoopBerlin1 meet-up @Supermarkt with Michel Bauwens
Michel Bauwens, Thomas Dönnebrink, Ela Kagel, Documentation: bit.ly/PlatformCoopBerlin1

2016-02-22
#Platformcoop & #Convergence Event in Badajoz (part of OuiShareSummit)
Thomas Dönnebrink

2016-02-14
#Platformcoop & #Convergence Event in Madrid
Thomas Dönnebrink

2016-02-11
#Platformcoop & #Convergence Event in Barcelona
Thomas Dönnebrink

2016-02-04
The New "Sharing Economy" - #PlatformCooperativism @Goethe-Institute in NYC
Trebor Scholz, Felix Weth

2015-11-20
Präsentation & Workshop – Inmersión en las plataformas cooperativas digitales /OuiShareFest Barcelona
Thomas Dönnebrink & Elena Dinaro: Documentation: Profil@Conference / Presentation

2015-11-14
Special Lunch Session with Michel Bauwens Platform Cooperativism In The Context Of Alternative Infrastructures For
The Commons Economy @Platform Cooperativism Conference NYC
Michel Bauwens, Thomas Dönnebrink: Documentation: Profil@Conference / Presentation / Videostream

Credits

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