



BUILDING PLATFORM COOPERATIVES IN BRAZIL

A Report by

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Platform cooperatives,¹ according to the Platform Cooperativism Consortium, are “business that use a website, mobile app, or protocol to sell goods or services”.² They rely on democratic decision-making and shared ownership of the platform by workers and users. Platforms can be described as an online application or website used by individuals or groups to connect to one another or to organize services. It is an infrastructure that constitutes a market.³

A cooperative⁴ is usually described as an “autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”.⁵ Platform cooperativism has been contrasted with platform capitalism.⁶ It is not only an intellectual concept, but a political movement which advocates for the global development of platform cooperatives, based on values such as social justice, recognition of the dignity of labor, ethical commitment to commons and economic democracy. Platform cooperativism advocates for the coexistence of cooperatively owned business models and traditional, extractive models with the goal of a more diversified digital labor landscape respecting fair working conditions.⁷ Initially formulated in 2014, the concept is now well-known and widespread.

This paper focuses on the emergence of platform cooperativism (cooperativismo de plataforma) as a movement in Brazil. I argue that the emergence of platform cooperativism in Brazil is shaped by two distinct social environments which present their own characteristics. There is one process of platformization within the highly institutionalized sector of cooperatives in Brazil, which is highly organized, has deep connections with the political power and is well structured in terms of resources and constituencies. I call this sector the “institutionalized platform cooperativism” (ICP). Here, one can find big projects like InovaCoop, structured by the national system of cooperativism in Brazil, the powerful Organização das Cooperativas do Brasil (OCB). In the sector of institutionalized coops, enterprises operate as large bureaucracies, generating millions of jobs and economic development all over the country. Platform cooperativism is perceived as an opportunity of innovation and as a means of opening new markets which are intensive in data, logistics and technology.⁸ In this sense, a set of spin-offs built inside laboratories of large cooperatives are evolving into platforms that not only pursue the traditional values of cooperativism but also attempt to operate in a market already structured by cooperatives in sectors like transportation, digital finance and health. In the

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discourse on platform cooperativism adopted by the OCB, there is a strong emphasis on innovation, on innovation methods and on “cooperative innovation”.⁹ Instead of a frontal opposition to the scenario of uberization and disintegration of class relations due to the domination of the “just in time collaborator”, the platforms are seen as opportunities for traditional cooperativism to reinvent itself and re-erect itself in markets on multiple sides, avoiding the domain of BigTechs in areas where cooperativism is consolidated in Brazil, such as credit, agriculture and health.

On the other hand, there is one process of platformization of digital services economies that is occurring in the margins of society and economic power, outside the highly institutionalized sector of cooperativism, with a strong commitment to inclusion and social justice. There is an emergence of new projects like Cataki (a platform that connects workers that collect recyclable materials with people that produce waste), Señoritas Courier (a collective of women and LGBT community for delivery), AppJusto (an alternative for delivery in which technology serve people with more autonomy), TransEntrega (a delivery platform of transexuals), Contrate Quem Luta (a platform created by the Homeless Workers Movement), and ContratArte (a platform of artists and content creators based in Rio Grande do Sul). These platforms seem to share some characteristics. They are organized by autonomous collectives and groups, have no institutional affiliation with traditional cooperativism and operate from a strong ideological program and values opposing the precariousness of what is called in Brazil the “uberization of work”.¹⁰ I call this sector the “noninstitutionalized platform cooperativism” (NPC). Although not institutionalized within traditional cooperativism, this sector is supported by philanthropic organizations, research organizations and think tanks, such as Unisinos, Instituto ProComum and Fundação Rosa Luxemburgo.

In this study, I investigate the relationships between these two distinct sectors of platform cooperativism in Brazil from an initial mapping of their interactions and distinctions regarding values and obstacles. What I sustain in this study is that autonomous, non-institutionalized and ideologically organized projects are important, but they do not represent the entirety of the platform cooperativism movement in Brazil. I present evidence of an internal transformation in traditional cooperativism - often called elitist, conservative and pragmatic - which has come to adopt, internally, the discourse on platform cooperativism.

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My second argument is that these two sectors, despite being distinct and oriented towards relatively different social objectives, are, little by little, connecting. This does not mean that they will necessarily support each other. There is still a long distance between them, motivated by a series of factors still little explored in the literature. My objective is to identify some hypotheses for this distancing and explore opportunities for greater dialogue between these sectors (institutionalized and non-institutionalized).

The objective of this study is cartographic, in the sense of an intervention research aiming to identify new problematic elements. Based on the presentation of “interaction patterns” – (i) organization of events with multiple organizations, (ii) creation of strategic plans and projects made public, (iii) holding of thematic meetings on platform cooperativism, (iv) financing of events, publications and meetings on the subject –, I present evidence of the growing dialogue between the two sectors, which is presented through the support of institutions such as Unisinos and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

To elaborate the research, some techniques were used, in a multimethod social research strategy. First, a mapping of the existing literature on platform cooperativism in Brazil was carried out. Starting from a network established in the last five years - since the research I conducted on the sharing economy at InternetLab¹¹ and the translation of the book *Cooperativismo de Plataforma* in Brazil,¹² I also had regular conversations with members inserted in the Brazilian cooperativism movement that are connected to the issue of platform cooperativism, specially through Whatsapp. Publications on Twitter and videos published on YouTube during 2018 and 2021 were also analyzed.¹³ A WhatsApp group was created with members from both sectors (non-institutionalized and institutionalized) and focus groups were organized with participants from both sectors.

In this report, I discuss how the “platformization”¹⁴ of the Brazilian economy has generated a dual system of platform cooperativism and how traditional cooperativism migrated from a distrust discourse to a bet on platform cooperativism. On the other hand, I present how a series of civil organizations, non-governmental associations, research centers and collectives are disputing another narrative about platform cooperativism. In conclusion, I discuss the contradictory effects of the institutionalization of platform cooperativism in Brazil, which implies a series of pacts with an already existing system. These contradictory effects are

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characterized by the possibility of greater financial support and support from human resources, but at the same time imply a formal connection to the system and the acceptance of an ossified legal format. So far, this type of pact has generated a move away from cooperatives from non-institutionalized platforms, which are seeking non-traditional organizational and legal solutions.

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Brazilian cooperativism was organized during the military regime within a plan of modernization of the rural economy. This made possible a tactical organization of associations of agrarian cooperativism that created an extremely strong organization: the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB). In the 1980s and 1990s, this movement managed to create constitutional norms to support cooperativism and, in the face of a financial crisis, create a system to support cooperative learning. OCB and Sescoop are part of this system.

Non-institutionalized cooperativism is more connected to the traditional solidarity economy, which distanced itself from the OCB and institutionalized cooperativism in the 1990s and 2000s. From a language of class struggle, social justice, participatory democracy and dignity of work, this cooperativism organized itself in an alternative way. The movement was unable to eliminate the OCB's monopoly and, to this day, shows significant distances. During the Workers' Party government and the impulse of the World Social Forum, non-institutionalized cooperativism managed to create a large network of solidarity economy and connections between the struggle of precarious and rural workers.

In this section, I suggest that platform cooperativism, as a movement, spread through different stages. It initially emerged from small collectives and groups focused on Internet economy. It was later adopted by the institutionalized cooperativism in Brazil with the support of new intermediaries and brokers, with a strong support of OCB. It was then adopted by social justice groups that see platform cooperativism as a reaction against the precarious work. These are non-institutionalized groups that are not part of the cooperative system in a traditional sense.

What I intend to demonstrate is that this construction of dialogues enables new forms of cooperation, despite the distinct objectives between self-managed groups like DigiLabour and the movement led by InovaCoop, which seeks solutions for platform cooperativism within the existing cooperative economy ecosystem in Brazil. Platform cooperativism in Brazil presents distinct discourses and a separation between institutionalized and non-institutionalized cooperativism. However, this does not prevent relationships, connections and bridges between these two fields. Strengthening the platform cooperativism agenda in Brazil can take advantage of these early irrigation channels, across these distinct fields, to further spread the seeds of a new type of digital economy in the 21st century.

2.1. The emergence from the margins of the institutionalized sector

The first movements to introduce platform cooperativism occurred in Brazil due to the work of a group of actors who were not articulated among themselves and not linked to the institutionalized cooperative system. As I will argue, in this first phase, platform cooperativism was approached quite speculatively by new social movements originating from the field of digital culture, such as the Pirate Party and the InternetLab research center. Later, the agenda was introduced by political foundations representing the progressive field, such as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

One of the first works to publicize the concept was done by the Pirate Party (*Partido Pirata*) in Brazil. Through translations, Pirate Party activists argued that the cooperative model could be integrated into the digital environment, as opposed to a shallower view of the “sharing economy”¹⁵ spread by the self-promotion of companies like Uber and AirBnb, which started operating in Brazil in 2014.

A second important movement occurred through the alternative media *Outras Palavras*, created by Antonio Martins in 2010, dedicated to the publication of texts and essays on a post-capitalist agenda in Brazil. In an essay written by Rafael Zanatta, the concept of platform cooperativism in its origins at The New School was presented, through the works of Trebor Scholz, Nathan Schneider, Janelle Orsi and other intellectuals involved in the 2015 seminar held in New York. The text presented Scholz’s critique of platform capitalism and the strategy of a return to the principles of cooperativism (ownership must be collective, business must be democratically controlled, the mission must be to guarantee jobs and solidarity must underpin mutual support mechanisms). In this essay, three paths were presented so that Brazil could advance in the conversation about digital cooperativism, connecting with the digital rights agenda already established in Brazil.¹⁶

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A third initial movement was given by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation of São Paulo, by promoting debates on solidarity economy and new social issues promoted by technologies and platform capitalism. On the initiative of Daniel Santini and Ana Rüsche, the translation of the book “Platform Cooperativism” was proposed, based on a project supported with funds from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany. With the support of the director Gerhard Dilger, the Foundation partnered with the independent publishers Editora Elefante¹⁷ and Autonomia Literária and promoted the book’s launch in 2016. The book, licensed in Creative Commons and distributed for free at events and fairs, helped to disseminate the concept to a wider audience, for being in Portuguese.¹⁸

A fourth catalyst for this dissemination process was the work of the InternetLab research center, which carried out the project “Regulatory challenges of sharing economies” between 2014 and 2016, with support from the Ford Foundation. Through the project, the book “Sharing Economies and Law” (edited by Rafael Zanatta, Pedro de Paula and Beatriz Kira) was published, with chapters that dialogued with the concept of platform cooperativism.

With the publication of the materials, the initial reaction took place in the academic world, with texts that began to reflect on the relationship between Solidarity Economy and platform cooperativism¹⁹ and empirical research that began to investigate the formation of cooperativism in the activities of journalists and other focused works in services (or immaterial works). Little by little, along the margins of the institutionalized cooperative movement, a debate on the subject crystallized. It was provoked by the non-institutionalized sector, in particular the Outras Palavras, the Rosa Luxemburg and Ford Foundation, the Pirate Party and independent centers such as InternetLab.

What can be observed in this first movement is its speculative and “agenda setting” character, still disconnected from concrete experiences and undertakings that could declare themselves as “platform cooperatives”. Despite the emergence of sharing economy ventures such as *Tem Açúcar*²⁰ (a platform for sharing objects between neighbors) and *Tripda* (platform for carpooling), none of these ventures was configured as a cooperative in the legal sense.²¹ In this initial period, only *Colivre*²² (Cooperative of Work in Free Technologies), based in Salvador, presented itself as a platform cooperative, offering services for web 2.0 such as development of platforms such as social networks, blog services, intranet and software solutions.²³

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At the launch event of the book *Cooperativismo de Plataforma* at Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Rodrigo Souto, programmer at Colivre, explained that the cooperative had emerged in Bahia under the influence of the solidarity economy movement strongly present at the University:

Colivre arose from the junction of computer personnel, militant of the free software movement, and administration personnel, militant of the solidarity economy. We were all students and penniless. We decided to create a cooperative. In the beginning it was very difficult. People had to work for two reais an hour. There was a great difficulty in formalizing the cooperative. Ten years ago, the laws were much worse. Colivre started with fifteen members, with people from the areas of communication, administration and software development. The idea was to create a less hostile work environment, one that was not hierarchical and individualistic. Colivre's first case, of free software for social networks (Noosfero), remains the cooperative's main product. We want to create autonomous federated networks, where people own the network, as opposed to the Facebook model.²⁴

The debate on platform cooperativism began to emerge from small-scale, autonomous projects fostered by universities, research centers and foundations. As will be seen, this movement began to be observed by institutionalized cooperativism from 2018 onwards.

2.2. The institutionalization from within the system

One of the most interesting phenomena that took place between 2017 and 2019 was the process of internalizing the discourse on platform cooperativism within the institutionalized system of cooperativism in Brazil, which is formed by a triad. As I will argue, after the initial reaction from academics and NGOs, it was the system of cooperativism that embraced the concept of “platform cooperativism” and introduced it into the system through events, meetings and courses. From a work conducted by leaders linked to the subject of digital economy and platforming, platform cooperativism came to be associated with the discourse of innovation and reinvention of cooperativism in a digital economy.

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In order to understand the concept of “institutionalized cooperativism” proposed in this article, it is necessary to know the details of how cooperativism works in Brazil. As previously argued, it is characterized by the legal monopoly of representation of cooperatives established during the military dictatorship and was strengthened by the recognition, in the Federal Constitution of 1988, that the law will support and encourage cooperatives (Article 174, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic Federative of Brazil). It is common to say in Brazil that there is a “cooperative system”. I will explain what this system consists of.

The “OCB System” is formed by the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives, which carries out political and institutional representation, the National Cooperative Learning Service, which carries out education and training within the cooperative system, and the National Confederation of Cooperatives, which conducts the representation union of cooperatives (the interest of people who work in cooperatives). The image below represents the organization of the system.



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The first moves around the theme took place through cooperativism researchers, integrated into the National Service for Learning of Cooperativism. It was through this educational axis, especially in Rio Grande do Sul, that platform cooperativism began to be studied. In Brazil, in addition to the “system of cooperatives” organized at state levels (26 States and the Federal District make up the Federative Republic of Brazil), there are Cooperativism Schools, cooperative banks and innovation and communication agencies that emerged from within cooperativism.

In 2018, at a meeting organized by the Rio Grande do Sul Cooperative System, Mário De Conto, legal manager of the Ocergs-Sescoop/RS System, explained that platform cooperatives have advantages over capitalist platform companies. De Conto argued that “the first issue that denotes the advantage of the cooperative model is co-ownership, as the platform is under the control of workers. They are the ones who will decide how the platform will work, how much will be charged and how these resources will be divided. In cooperatives, the division of results is proportional to operations, that is, in this case to labor and not proportional to capital. People receive according to what they produce, which is the fairest model for distribution of results”.²⁵ The meeting was one of the first ones, within the system, to openly discuss how platformization could be developed within the cooperative ecosystem in Brazil.

In November 2018, the president of the OCB, Marcio Freitas Lopes, made a public presentation on the future of cooperativism. In the presentation, he spoke of the issues of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in today’s society. In 2019, the institutionalized system ultimately adopted the ideas of platform cooperativism. At the Fourteenth Congress, Trebor Scholz and coordinators of Up&Go, an innovative on-demand services cooperative in the United States, were invited to speak at the Congress. During the same period, Somos Coop launched the document “Proposals for a more cooperative Brazil”, signed by Marcio Freitas and delivered to the Presidency of the Republic. The document has five topics: (i) recognition of the economic and social importance of cooperatives, (ii) cooperativism as an engine for the country’s development, (iii) cooperatives in favor of more sustainable communities, (iv) cooperativism as a platform for the collaborative economy and (v) creating foundations for a country of the future.

An evidence of this internalization of the discourse within the system is the way in which Marcio Freitas, president of the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives, has publicly spoken about the connection between cooperativism and the new generations. In 2021, in an interview about cooperativism in Brazil, he stated:

Cooperativism is an ideology where the person and principles are valued. Each person matters as a person, not as a capital. A cooperative is a society of people, where each individual has one vote. This ideology has spread around the world over the last 150 years and today it is an organizational system that works around the world and gives results to millions of people. (...) As our business is based on trust, we need principles. The new generations, who are transforming the whole world, who communicate over the internet and converse in very advanced ways, this generation wants to value principles. It is a return of values and principles in business.²⁶

Next, I argue that this process of internalization of platform cooperativism was initiated by young leaders connected with the theme of innovation and datification. This internalization occurred from educational projects by SESCOOP, cooperative schools and collaboration networks within the national cooperativism centered on innovation.

2.3. The discourse of innovation and the role of new intermediaries

A central element of the internalization of the discourses was the combination of the language of platform cooperativism with the broader theme of innovation. This was done through a sophisticated strategy, mobilized by some facilitators with considerable influence at the nucleus of OCB, to carry out study missions in the USA.

The first one was a study mission in the transport area, carried out by the OCB in 2018 that involved visits to Center for Cooperativism of the University of Wisconsin.²⁷ A second mission was organized in 2019 by two facilitators, who played a prominent role in the construction of this discourse of alignment between innovation and platform cooperativism. The first was Travis Highis, consultant at

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Clearbench Consulting, a specialist in process management and innovation in technology companies and an enthusiast of platform cooperativism in Brazil. Travis lived in Brazil for many years, studied in Minas Gerais, and met communicators and members of Brazilian cooperativism. He also became a facilitator for meetings with groups and institutions in the US.

The second prominent agent was Coonecta, a communication and innovation agency for cooperatives founded in São Paulo. Coonecta's objective is "to make cooperatives protagonists of the Digital Economy and support the development of a business ecosystem based on cooperative values".²⁸ The company emerged with a focus on workshops, training, missions and events focused on cooperatives. Together with Travis Highis, the Coonecta team organized a mission on platform cooperativism in New York in 2019.²⁹

According to Gustavo Mendes, one of the founders of Coonecta, the idea of the company emerged from a set of discourses about solidarity and economic democracy that they perceived from the private sector but did not really happen in the ecosystem of innovation of the private sector. As stated by Mendes:

*We discovered cooperativism and saw that it was a formula for putting these discourses into practice. We were delighted to see how this has existed since 1840. We created Coonecta to connect the discourse propagated within the innovation ecosystem and the practice that co-operatives already had.*³⁰

Upon entering the universe of cooperatives, Gustavo Mendes and his colleagues at Coonecta noticed old management and innovation practices that were not very connected with what they had experienced in the private sector in the last ten years. The company's idea came from the perception of this distance and the opportunities for connection between the world of innovation and the world of cooperativism:

The idea is to explore new business models in this platform format. They unite the network effect model, of data as business drivers, and combine this with cooperativism in a fairer way for all parties. We saw in this movement of platform cooperativism the union that we wanted to make way back then. It was the union between innovation and cooperativism. The great clarity about the strength of this agenda for us came precisely with the 2019 New York Conference, where we saw a change from the outside to the inside, a two-

*way movement, where there are also agents outside of cooperativism. (...) At the beginning there was a lot of resistance, but we worked with the idea of educating the cooperative market in Brazil.*³¹

The “New York Mission” of 2019 had as participants professionals from different areas of Brazilian cooperatives. Leaders from the health cooperative area, engineers specialized in logistics and transport cooperatives, engineers specializing in solar energy and energy sharing ventures, computer science professionals working in information technology cooperatives and experienced managers of agricultural cooperatives participated.³²

The mission also involved internal workshops focused on a set of questions, like (i) How can new cooperatives (traditional and startups) be financed without providing equity participation or handing over control to non-members?, (ii) How to empower gig economy workers? What do they need to participate fully as entrepreneurs in the new economy?, (iii) What are the constraints on cooperative development and how can policy be used to overcome them?, (iv) How can public tech be leveraged to create more economic opportunity?³³

The participants of the mission visited the New York City Office of the Mayor, Bloomberg, Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Park Slope Food Coop, Cooperative Home Care Associates, Savvy Cooperative, Stash, Cornell Tech and IDG (Independent Drivers Guild) of New York. By creating a routine of constant meetings for four days, including The New School seminar, the mission had a networking function, connecting people. In addition, it brought an air of novelty to cooperative members in Brazil. The missions had central roles in the internalization of platform cooperativism within the institutionalized system.

2.4. InovaCoop and the strategy of open innovation

InovaCoop is one of the most ambitious projects of Brazilian cooperativism. Thinking about the challenges that our cooperatives face in search of change, the OCB System developed Inovacoop – a platform to foster innovation in the cooperative ecosystem. In September 2021, the OCB System launched a course on this subject during InovaCoop Week. The Platform Cooperatives course is taught by the Escoop teacher and director, Mario de Conto. The idea is to prepare cooperatives to act with greater strength and results in this world of applications and platforms.

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It is easy to see, in the case of InovaCoop, the centrality of the discourse on innovation. The platform's promotional material says:

*Here you will find information, analysis, tools and courses that will help bring innovation to the day-to-day of cooperatives. In addition, we are going to bring together the success stories of coops that are already innovating. It is essential to be aware of trends and variations in scenarios. It is looking outside, but also looking inside and understanding how to use the resources you have in the best way. Thus, innovation will not only contribute to improving the internal processes of cooperatives, but will also increase their competitiveness and relevance in the market.*³⁴

InovaCoop also launched a series of materials about platform cooperativism.³⁵ In a more critical tone, the article analyzes a set of bottlenecks for Brazil to have a greater development of platform cooperativism, which finds obstacles in the legal formatting of cooperatives. The text says:

*It is possible to affirm that platform cooperativism - as a movement and a business model - still has major challenges ahead and is advancing little by little. But the need to question the current model of digital platforms and propose platform cooperativism as a solution is undeniable. After all, why don't we see the emergence of "cooperative startups"? One challenge, for example, is the issue of financing the creation of cooperative platforms. As the lawyer and director-general of Escoop, Mário de Conto explains, the platform cooperatives still need to find a way to get financing, since Brazilian law does not allow partner-investors.*³⁶

With formal support from the OCB, InovaCoop is a robust project, with a large budget and considerable narrative creation capacity. However, it is noted how the discourse is internal, closed to itself, that is, to the very universe of cooperatives formalized as such and belonging to the cooperative system institutionalized by the OCB. This is one of the relevant elements of these initiatives: they seek to foster cooperativism within the system, rather than an approximation with marginalized groups or enterprises without solid legal definition (collectives that behave like cooperatives in the part of solidarity and votes, in accordance with the cooperative principles).

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One of InovaCoop's main projects is the "InovaCoop: Connection to Startups" program. The program operates as an incubator for innovative cooperative projects. Currently in its second edition, it is carried out with the company Silo Hub (partnership between Embrapa and Neoventures). In 2021, InovaCoop chose to focus on the technological agronomy sector (Agro Tech). From a public notice launched in May 2021, the program announced in November 2021 the selected startups: the cooperatives Cemil (MG), Coopama (MG), Coplana (SP), Santa Clara (RS) and Uneagro (SC).

According to InovaCoop, the idea of the program is to use open innovation, which occurs with partnerships or inter-cooperation to, together with startups, find the best and most creative solution to the challenges presented by the selected cooperatives. According to Samara Araújo, one of the project coordinators:

*By connecting the two ends in a network, the objective is to increase the efficiency of the projects, reduce costs and risks, improve the return on investments and expand opportunities and sources of income. We intend to contribute to the development of a culture of innovation in cooperativism, consolidating successful initiatives and disseminating new opportunities.*³⁷

In this sense, it is necessary to see the discourse on platform cooperativism, within InovaCoop, from a broader agenda on investments, open innovation and new business opportunities in digital markets. It should also be noted that projects like InovaCoop are focused on strengthening existing cooperatives and spin-offs. This is not a kind of work aimed at needy communities and poorly organized workers to set up new cooperatives. This work is generally carried out by solidary enterprise incubators in public and private universities throughout the country.³⁸

2.5. The experience of hackathons

An important move was made by Sescoop in Rio de Janeiro, through the administration of Abdul Nasser as Superintendent National Cooperative Learning Service (Sescoop) of Rio de Janeiro. As he stated in an interview, Rio de Janeiro has unique potential for economic growth. It is the third largest economy in Brazil, the second largest consumer market and the state with the largest number of universities per square meter in Brazil. The problem with the advance of cooperativism in Rio, however, was that the successful models were linked to the countryside, whereas Rio presents a profoundly urban economy. In 2019, a dual strategy was launched under Nasser's management at Sescoop in Rio de Janeiro:

*The first strategy was to talk about innovation and platforms for traditional cooperatives. This is an arduous and time-consuming path. On the other hand, it was also necessary to attract digital entrepreneurs to cooperativism. And the convergence for this was to foster platform cooperativism in Rio de Janeiro.*³⁹

Nasser obtained sponsorship from Hacking.Rio to organize an edition of a hackathon on cooperativism in Rio de Janeiro. A hackathon is a programming marathon for developing digitally based solutions. For this, multidisciplinary teams are formed that have a theme or general challenge proposed by the organizers. According to Nasser, "this drew our audience's attention to innovation and platforms and the hackers of cooperativism".⁴⁰ The theme became part of the recurrent discussions of cooperatives and Sescoop RJ formations.

Hacking Rio, held between October 9th and 11th, received 2,650 applicants, 566 mentors and 14 thematic clusters. Among them, the cooperativism cluster, sponsored by the OCB/RJ System. In total, 135 were enrolled in the cooperative cluster, forming 31 teams. Of these, five reached the stage of delivering the project codes. In total, a team of 26 mentors supported the cooperativism cluster teams in Hacking.Rio. In October 2021, specific hackathons were also carried out on smart-city solutions, with a focus on sustainability, for the cities of São João da Barra and Campos dos Goytacazes. The event was called HackAÇU.

In 2021, as a result of this development, a training program for innovation agents was created in Rio de Janeiro and the inclusion of the theme of platform cooperativism in the training module for executives of cooperatives. It is an induction strategy for the education of leaders. Examples given by Adbul Nasser are Unifop, a cooperative that created a platform for psychological assistance through digital means, and “Where is Coop?”, a platform whose objective is to serve as a marketplace for businesses and services of other cooperatives.⁴¹

In 2021, Rio de Janeiro also launched campaigns such as “Cooperativism: more than a business model, a different way of doing business”, focused on a young audience. What is observed, to sum up, is not only the modulation of a discourse on innovation and platforms, but also the partnership with organizations specialized in “tech culture”, such as Hacking Rio, to organize large events focused on programming, problem solving and support for entrepreneurship. This is something unprecedented and with high potential in the cooperative system. Hackathons in Rio de Janeiro are known as the biggest in Latin America.

2.6. The effect of the pandemics and the precarization of platform work: the rise of the observatory of platform cooperativism

As I will argue in this section, the pandemic and the diagnosis of precarious work gave rise to important projects and social movements, such as the DigiLabour project, organized by Rafael Grohmann at Unisinos, in Rio de Grande do Sul.⁴² From a diagnosis of self-organization problems of small groups interested in platform cooperatives, the project emerged as an instrument to support social movements. Instead of dialoguing to the institutionalized system of cooperatives, DigiLabour works with platform workers, creating networks between existing cooperatives in other parts of the world and expanding the narrative about the forms of self-organization and decent work on platforms.

The Platform Cooperative Observatory, created in 2021, is characterized by a critical analysis of the precariousness of work on platforms. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the protests organized by delivery application workers that shook Brazil in 2020 and the set of problems they faced in order to constitute new cooperatives.

2.6.1. Pandemic and platform work: understanding the protest “breque dos apps”

In March 2020, the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic generated a scenario of global social and economic disruption. In Brazil, lockdown policies began at the end of March 2020 and Brazilians had to close their business, interrupt urban mobility and create new forms of sociability through the internet. In an initial lockdown scenario, all workers who could work from home went to work from home. According to the municipal and state laws created, only essential service workers should continue working. Among them were firefighters, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, supermarket workers and app deliverers.

In a “new normal” of the pandemic, the centrality of thousands of app workers like Rappi, Uber Eats, iFood and other large corporations that mediate between restaurants and stores, on the one hand, and end consumers, on the other, was made explicit. Application workers have become central to civic life. Without them - mostly young workers living in the periphery of cities⁴³ -, Brazilians would not be able to meet the isolation requirements imposed by the pandemic.

After months of pandemic, a social movement called “Breque dos Apps” began in May and June 2020. The name Breque means brake in informal Portuguese. In other words, it was a protest related to braking the motorcycle: not delivering the food. Stop working. Slow down.

Between July and August, under the leadership of the movement entitled Entregadores Anti-Facistas, Breque dos Apps was organized and generated a massive effect on the media and society. Delivery workers paralyzed the streets of big cities like São Paulo and gained support from progressive sectors of society. As noted by Gabriela Delgado and Bruna Carvalho, in July 2020, these workers receive from the digital platform the right to work in exchange for remuneration on which they cannot express their opinion, serving clients who cannot choose, in working conditions that they cannot manage: “cooperation loses the solidary sense of common commitment and gains contours of exploitation, through the exercise of the directive power of algorithms, which is mirrored in the algorithmic subordination of these workers”.⁴⁴ As seen in the image below, the protest mobilized catchphrases such as “our lives are worth more than their profit” and “I am not a number, but a life” or “risking my life to satisfy your hunger”. These phrases made clear the character of exploitation, precariousness and the need for resistance.

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Source: Cem Flores (2020)⁴⁵

According to Nina Desgranges and Wickson Ribeiro, Breque dos Apps was organized by delivery workers who were also influencers, who made intensive use of social networks to build narratives about their awareness of their condition of social vulnerability, insecurity and workload. It was also a movement that criticized the entrepreneurship and free market discourse of “partner drivers” [motorista parceiro], who are not considered workers and do not have labor rights in their relations with the platforms. For Desgranges and Ribeiro, systematic digital action was effective in gaining the attention of the media, academics, unions and the organized left, as well as the general population.⁴⁶ Application workers defended as agenda the increase in the value of the kilometer traveled, increase in the value of the minimum delivery fee, the end of undue blocking of registered users, the end of the scoring system and restriction of the Rappi location and pandemic aid, with distribution of masks and financial support should a driver become ill.

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A series of protest measures were carried out at Breque dos Apps. The Instagram account “Treta no Trampo” asked people to put up posters and use the hashtag #BrequedosApps. People were also asked to rate companies in the PlayStore and AppleStore with just one star, to affect the companies’ digital reputation. The central request was also for people to cook at home and not place orders for a day, in a boycott strategy.⁴⁷

As noted by Grohman and Zanatta, Breque dos Apps posed a central question for discussion: “what decent working conditions exist behind smartphone algorithms and screens?”.⁴⁸ The protest was profound because it amplified the discussions about the meaning of “uberization of work” in Brazil. As also noted by Ludmila Abílio, one of the leading thinkers about precarious work in Brazil:

*The multitude of uberized workers organized themselves, appropriating the power they have as a crowd. In this process of informalization and monopolization promoted by uberization, what we see are hundreds of thousands of people working for one, two, five companies. When this crowd organizes itself, it's hundreds of thousands against one, two, five companies. But it is evidently an action crossed by many dilemmas and different possible consequences. The Breque dos Apps is a collective brake on the way this mode of uberization control is organized and increasingly deepens the means of degradation and exploitation of work. (...) We are witnessing a new form of management and organization of work and the working class (...) To be uberized is to live in an uncertain, unstable way and at the same time subordinate to a centralized and almost unattainable control.*⁴⁹

At the end of July, at the height of the Breque dos Apps protests, it was announced that workers were looking for new ways of organizing their work. In an article written by BBC Brazil by Mariana Schreiber, it was reported that movements arising from application workers were in contact with other cooperatives, such as Mensakas, from Barcelona, and CoopCycle, a collective that has federated cooperatives in Europe and Canada.⁵⁰ A project was launched called *Despatronados*.

At the time, it was reported that Eduarda Alberto (leader known as Duda from the collective *Entregadores Antifascistas*) and other workers had translated the CoopCycle application to Portuguese and were working to adapt the platform to a payment system that could operate in Brazil, in order to launch *Despatronados*.

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However, the CoopCycle adaptation encountered two problems. First, CoopCycle is a co-op focused on bicycles for environmental reasons. In Brazil, the large number of delivery people use motorcycles. Second, for investment reasons for the development of the platform. The solution found by the collective was to create a WhatsApp group to operationalize the deliveries.

In August, the journalist Lu Sudré reported that workers [motoboys] from *Entregadores Antifacistas* were “articulating to build another form of work”. They built a “proto cooperative” of 15 workers and a Wix website. According to one of the members, “the idea of cooperativism is necessary now”. The proto cooperative model was built with a few elements. The website generated direct access with a Whatsapp group. Through this Whatsapp group, deliveries could be arranged for the next day. The price was decided collectively: R\$ 15 (Brazilian reais) for deliveries of 5 kilometers and R\$ 1 for additional kilometer. It was decided that workers doing delivery at night would receive additional remuneration.

We are going to show them that it is necessary here and, based on that, getting the application to work. The main proposal is to improve working conditions through collectivism and cooperatism. It's not getting rich. It is valuing the worker's struggle, the work of the one who delivers. What companies and apps don't value. It's without a boss and people are aware. We present the idea to those who, for the most part, were blocked, whose morale was hurt by the apps. We show: 'look what we can do, look at what the worker is capable of, what we can achieve'. They are no better than us. If it weren't for the workers, the apps wouldn't exist. ⁵¹

The proto cooperatives that originated from Breque dos Apps did not take off in well-structured applications in the first months after the protest. As recognized by the leaders, the main focus was not to create cooperatives. This was an idea that emerged as an opportunity, but it was not the main agenda of the social movement. At an event organized by the Rosa Luxemburgo Foundation called “Precarization and Labor Rights”, Paulo Galo, one of the leaders of the application workers movement in São Paulo, stated that the main objective of the protests is the fight for better working conditions:

I wanted the struggle of the movement Entregadores Antifacistas to be a struggle for workers' rights more broadly. (...) When I started denouncing the applications, I made the video and the video went viral, my fellow workers said

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that I was an actor hired by The Intercept Brasil to introduce communist ideas. They said I was financed by the Workers' Party. The movement of Entregadores Antifascistas is to make street politics [política de rua]. All street politics must come together to empower the worker. In street politics you shouldn't have a career, but you can make history. What's the idea? If we get hold of the tool called politics, we can make changes. If we use this tool to our advantage, we can change the world. But they put it in people's minds that politics is a bad thing. The workers are so screwed up, the media messed with their heads so much, that they are suspicious of what we do. And when they refuse to believe it, they stop doing politics, which paves the way for fascism.⁵²

The possibility of cooperativism, at the beginning of the Breque dos Apps movement, was seen as an opportunity, however cautiously by workers. Paulo Galo's narrative is illustrative in this regard. He argued that easy solutions are seen as opportunism. At the same time, he announced that the movement was already in the process of formulating a cooperative, within a larger struggle strategy:

Solutions appear and I get very suspicious. When I started this thing, a lot of lawyers came wanting to set up a cooperative. I would leave them out and say 'wait a minute and I'll see what we're going to do'. I take great care of new solutions. Are they really solutions? Because labor laws are already a solution. (...) iFood spends a million reais to advertise on prime-time television, but does not spend a million to improve working conditions. We have to deconstruct a lot of lies in order to fight. (...) We believe that the workers have to operate this technology. The problem is not the technology. The movement is trying to create its co-op, its own app, its relief fund, because we believe that 'we for us' works very well.

The months following the protest showed practical problems in the establishment of new cooperatives by workers. First, for an investment and capital cost reason. Application prototypes cost up to one million reais, as reported by CooperSystem (the largest information technology cooperative in Brazil).⁵³ The organizational model of "venture capital" supplies these needs with large amounts of capital that are invested in start-ups to launch new applications. This capacity for investment does not exist in the self-organized movements of workers in Brazil.

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Second, due to the lack of tools, guides and management support. The institutionalized movement of cooperatives did not provide any clear support for the movements that emerged from the streets. At no time, as far as I could see in the research, did the OCB create specific funds to support application deliverers or mobilize its large apparatus to support the formation of new cooperatives. Perhaps because it was so involved in its own problems (coping with the pandemic, the need to migrate to digital work, creation of new instruments for digital assemblies, digital document signatures, and many other problems that arose by the pandemic), institutionalized cooperativism did not establish tactical partnerships with street movements interested in forming cooperatives. [54](#)

Third, because of a problem of little practical knowledge about how cooperatives can be formed and operate in multi-sided markets. Although platform cooperativism already exists as a concept and there is a great mobilization of the OCB on the subject (as seen above), SESCOOP and learning services such as SESC and SENAI did not offer practical support for collectives in 2020. The reaction from SESC, for instance, only occurred in 2021. It is not known, for sure, what was the nature of the problems encountered by the collectives in this initial phase of constitution. This is a topic that demands further specific research. What can be affirmed is that there was a diagnosis of lack of support and support for social movements, which was supplied, at least in part, by the work of DigiLabour and the Observatory of Platform Cooperatives in 2021.

2.6.2. The rise of the Observatory of Platform Cooperativism in 2021

In the period of practically a year, between July 2020 and July 2021, researcher Rafael Grohmann, from Unisinos University, structured the project called Observatory of Platform Cooperatives (Observatório do Cooperativismo de Plataforma).

The idea of the Observatory was supported by the Rosa Luxemburgo Foundation, which made the project financially viable. The Platform Cooperativism Observatory was created as a hub for platform cooperativism in Brazil, with a curatorship of content on the subject. The Observatory's idea is to give more visibility to people who are carrying out projects in practice, creating networks between collectives, new associations and emerging cooperatives. The launching event occurred in June 23rd 2021 and gathered representatives from different universities, NGOs, collectives and cooperatives.

At the launch event, Daniel Santini, project coordinator at the Rosa Luxemburgo Foundation explained that the project aims to think of alternatives to the logic taken for granted by large technology companies, creating new markets and much fairer logic.⁵⁵ Ana Paula da Rosa, coordinator of the postgraduate course in communication at Unisinos, explained that one of the Brazilian challenges is building bridges between universities and civil entities, in an approach to the interests of society. "We have to do research with the subjects that transform society",⁵⁶ she maintained.

Rafael Grohmann, in his presentation on the reasons for creating the Observatory, explained that the Observatory is a spin-off from DigiLabour, a research laboratory on the platformed work existing at Unisinos. The discourse on platform cooperativism at the Observatory is structured along four axes: (i) democratic governance, (ii) decent work, (iii) data for the common good and (iv) encouragement to the local economy.

The emphasis on decent work is an important point, considering that Rafael Grohmann is the Brazilian representative of the FairWork project, created by Mark Graham in the United Kingdom. The FairWork project created methodologies for evaluating work on platforms with the aim of analyzing conditions of justice and

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dignity. In this sense, the Observatory is also influenced by activism around fair work, which is articulated in global networks of research and cooperation.

The Observatory's strategy was to increase the visibility of projects and themes related to platform cooperativism. In a period of six months, the Observatory launched 20 videos about the following topics. The Observatory does not provide consultancy and does not provide management support to new cooperatives. However, it creates bridges and connections between researchers, activists, cooperative members and workers. Focused on research, the Observatory also aggregates research, articles, master's theses and doctoral theses on the subject, allowing researchers to also submit their work to the Observatory. ⁵⁷

The focus of the Observatory of Platform Cooperativism is the noninstitutionalized platform cooperativism (NPC). The Observatory sheds light on projects such as Cataki (a platform that connects workers that collect recyclable materials with people that produce waste), Señoritas Courier (a collective of women and LGBT community for delivery), AppJusto (an alternative for delivery in which technology serve people with more autonomy), TransEntrega (a delivery platform of transsexuals), Contrate Quem Luta (a platform created by the Homeless Workers Movement), and ContratArte (a platform of artists and content creators based in Rio Grande do Sul).

3.

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3. CURRENT CHALLENGES IN EMERGING PROJECTS OF PLATFORM COOPERATIVISM IN BRAZIL

In the previous sections, it was argued that platform cooperativism in Brazil is complex, multifaceted and connected to different sectors, which present concerns that range from innovation to combating precarious work. I also explained how cooperativism can be separated into “institutionalized” (IPC) and “non-institutionalized” (NPC). In this last section, I will explain concrete examples of emerging projects and analyze the challenges encountered from a legal and governance perspective. I will argue that the movement of platform cooperativism is growing in Brazil, but it faces challenges of scale and coordination, as well as legal problems related to traditional formats that hinder investment and more flexible management models.

A study carried out by Unisinos professors in 2021 mapped emerging projects that can be classified as platform cooperatives.⁵⁸ Below, I present a basic description of these projects based on information from this survey carried out between 2020 and 2021, differentiating them if associated with institutionalized cooperativism.

What is observed is a double phenomenon. On the side of institutionalized cooperativism, there is a tendency to continue with the legal cooperative format, despite the enormous difficulties in operationalizing investments and more flexible business models within the rigid legal regime of cooperativism. The second phenomenon is the emergence of projects that take on the values of platform cooperativism, but opt for different legal formats. Some, like Cataki, prefer to keep their membership format and work with donations and sponsorships. Others, like AppJusto, prefer to work as a private company and institute clear rules for equity participation and prevent an investment fund from taking majority control of the votes. Others choose to articulate people registered as Microentrepreneurs (MEI), who can issue their own invoices.

What is observed is a distancing from the traditional legal model of cooperativism in Brazil, including within institutionalized cooperativism. The CargOn is a notorious example of this process. It was created with financial support from a cooperative in the south of the country to meet a demand for logistics and data from the cooperative sector. However, it opted for a private company model in which the financial contribution was made by a cooperative. Its statutes and internal rules also guarantee that it operates as a cooperative, from the construction of participation, voting and economic democracy rules through statutes.

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Table 01. Emerging projects framed as “platform cooperatives” in Brazil

Name	Legal arrangement	Associated with institutionalized cooperativism?	Description
Somos Ciclos	Cooperative	Yes (incubated by Sicoob Espírito Santo)	Cooperative for the integration of doctors, health plans, credit and sustainable energy services. It emerged to meet a demand from cooperative members for intermediation of non-financial services
Cataki	Association (civil society organization)	No	Application that integrates solid waste generators, collectors and recycling points. Through the platform, waste producers (people and companies) and collectors can connect and agree on a fair value for the collection. The project is maintained by the Movimento dos Pimpadores association, founded by the artist Mundano, from São Paulo. In 2019, 355 municipalities had collection points in Cataki. By 2020, that number had jumped to 1088
Caronaê	University project	No	Student initiative project at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. ⁵⁹ It is open source and allows people to connect to combine races. Caronaê is a university project of a federal autarchy (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)
Pedal Express	Limited company	No	Founded in 2010 by Marcos Ritter, Guilherme Schubert and André Mancuso as a limited liability company. The company is headquartered in Porto Alegre and has a group of 40 people who deliver with their bicycles, combining passion for cycling and delivery services at fair prices
AppJusto	Limited company	No	Founded in September 2020 as Justo Tecnologia e Inovacao Social LTDA. Its partners are Pedro Brito, Rogério Nogueira and José Eduardo Araújo, in addition to three non-management partners. ⁶⁰ AppJusto is a delivery platform focused on transparent and fair relationships. The company's goal is to register 3,000 restaurants, 5,000 couriers and reach 800,000 transactions in 2022. ⁶¹
Vou Bem	Cooperative	No	Born in Maringá, Paraná, it is a movement that started on Facebook in 2018 and that migrated to a platform and an application for Android and iOS. It was created by two coops: Cooper Dinâmica and CooperMap, a cooperative of drivers from Maringá. It was estimated that, between 2020 and 2021, it connected around 300 drivers
SmartCoop	Project of Federation of Coops (Association)	Yes	Platform of digital innovation founded by the Federation of Farming Coops of Rio Grande do Sul with the object of managing data, information and business opportunities for rural workers and associated coops. The platform was launched in April 2021. The SmartCoop platform is the result of an intercooperation work between 30 agricultural production cooperatives in Rio Grande do Sul linked to FECOAGRO/RS ⁶²
ContratArte	Educational project	No	Digital platform created by artists in Rio Grande do Sul. It is not formed as a cooperative. It is an association of artists formed in June 2021 to connect artists with consumers. It is a project of Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Rio Grande do Sul

Source: expanded from Silveira, Wegner and Silva (2021)

During the interviews carried out in the research, it was observed that the issue of the legal format of cooperatives in Brazil is seen as a major obstacle for emerging projects. First, because there is a requirement for a minimum number of members and a very strong focus on one-dimensional work. This facilitated, for example, the emergence of CooperMap, cooperative of drivers in Maringá, as the work is uniform, carried out by drivers. But this unidirectional vision prevents more sophisticated platform projects, where there is a great diversity of types of work. In digital markets, the intermediation of work is complex. It involves not only the direct provision of the service, but also database organization, design, logistics, programming, user relations, marketing and branding services. The legal regime of traditional work cooperatives (Cooperativas de Trabalho in Brazil) is not suitable for this diversity of types of work.

A second obstacle is the impediment, which has existed for almost a hundred years, of indirect forms of participation in cooperatives through financial support. This prevents crowdfunding projects and decentralized equity participation from taking place in cooperatives in Brazil. It is practically impossible to arrange “seed capital” in a platform cooperative in the traditional legal framework in Brazil. There is also a big impediment to donations and philanthropic models. For this reason, both AppJusto and Cataki opted for different legal models.

As explained in one of the interviews, Samara Araújo from the InovaCoop project, the large cooperatives that have massive amounts of resources are promoting investment in platform projects and platform cooperativism. While for others, smaller and from sectors with fewer resources, investment is proceeding at a slow pace. There is an investment capacity problem that is significant even in institutionalized cooperativism:

The theme [of platform cooperativism] has not yet taken off. We see ourselves in this important role of discussing the topic, clarifying people, bringing in references from outside. But, in fact, the timing of how things happen is not necessarily the timing we believe will occur. What I've noticed over the last year is that the interest of cooperatives that already exist in the topic of platforms is greater than that of people who are looking to found new cooperatives. When we first brought up the theme of platforms, we came with the discourse of work cooperatives and the fight against precariousness. What I felt was a latent demand from existing cooperatives, seeking the path of platforms and intermediation. This occurred especially in the credit sector, which made a

*large investment. There is an interest from work, transport and infrastructure cooperatives, but as they are not large cooperatives, the organization and agility to carry out these movements is more restricted. Credit and agricultural cooperatives have many resources to make this transformation.*⁶³

In 2020 and 2021, the focus of legal reform work in cooperativism focused on legal changes to enable virtual assemblies, without the physical presence of members, and the inclusion of cooperatives in programs to facilitate access to credit by the federal government.⁶⁴ There has still not been a substantial legal change to face the problems of impediment of financial support in the network, by people who want to support cooperatives and cooperate in ways that are not directly related to work.

The effect of the inexistence of more innovative legal changes has been a kind of “escape from cooperativism” in a formal legal sense, at least in relation to the legal format of constitution of these projects. This seems to be in line with a larger problem, which goes far beyond Brazil, about the inadequacy of cooperative legal regimes for multi-sided markets. Mario de Conto’s research also points in this direction, towards a possible set of legal reforms that can make platform cooperativism viable in Brazil. There are still no bills elaborated with this theme.

The issue of “escape from cooperativism” was also reported by private sector entrepreneurs, such as Pedro Araújo, founder of AppJusto. He explained that initially the legal format option was to form a cooperative. But there were many obstacles generated by the lack of knowledge about how cooperatives work dynamically and difficulties about how to operate equity crowdfunding, for example. In view of the legal and governance obstacles, AppJusto opted for a model in which the values of cooperativism, valuing work and participation were made through internal private instruments:

In the beginning, everything was motivated by the problem of delivery workers. Because they don’t have autonomy in their work. When we started thinking ‘how are we going to create something?’, the first thing we thought was a co-op. Because if the worker owns the business, this will make more sense than providing services to others. We talked to many people from cooperatives and thought about a few things. First, how much this would actually attract workers was anybody’s guess. Because the knowledge about cooperativism was very low. For the worker to understand the possibilities of cooperativism and to join is not so trivial. But what really was decisive was that we didn’t

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know much about this world. I already knew some cooperatives, but we didn't know how to manage them. We also noticed governance limitations, bureaucratic limitations and investment limitations. We've already invested a million reais and opted for equity crowdfunding. We only found one case of investment in cooperatives in New York, but this possibility did not exist in Brazil. We looked at the problem and realized that, as we didn't know it and there were many legal obstacles, we decided to go to the world we already knew, of startups. We then chose to leave the code free and consider this as a collective good. If the code is free, it's as interesting as creating a co-op. If a cooperative has a private, closed source code, it is not a common good. As the code is free, everyone who participates, everyone who is there, can take the code and reuse it to make a new initiative.⁶⁵

This problem is also recognized by Mario de Conto, professor of the School of Cooperativism in Rio Grande do Sul. He believes that, in order for the movement to grow, there is a need to rethink the challenges imposed by the limitation of investments in cooperatives in Brazil:

The Brazilian law does not admit the participation of investors, differently from USA and Canada. Other instruments, such as the participation of cooperatives in non-cooperative societies can be used as a way to allow external financing. Nowadays, we have a new regulation about startups and cooperatives are included as enterprises that access new financial instruments. This issue deserves further reflection in order to guarantee cooperative autonomy.⁶⁶

Finally, what the research identified is a kind of "internal look", of institutionalized cooperativism, in relation to the potential for the constitution of new platforms. In sectors such as agribusiness, health and credit, there is an interest in establishing new intermediation markets and organizing data, logistics and efficiency gains through massive analysis of information. What these sectors of cooperativism are doing is anticipating changes in the markets and creating, on their own, their own intermediation platforms. In this sense, a new type of platform cooperativism has emerged, focusing on markets already constituted by relationships between cooperatives and members. This "internal look" has the advantage of precisely the size of cooperativism throughout Brazil. It is deeply capitalized in the interior, involves millions of families and has strong links with credit unions and markets that are not dominated by the big corporations based in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

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This pragmatic view, oriented to the potential of the cooperative market itself, contrasts with another type of platform cooperativism concerned with the precariousness of work, decent work and the mobilization of deeply disorganized workers, such as application workers. Here, the scenario is completely different. These are projects that do not have strong institutional support. They don't have resources. They do not have pre-constituted networks. They operate through small, self-organized initiatives by educational projects, NGOs and foundations. These are different worlds from platform cooperativism.

As noted by the research, in 2021 there were several initiatives, such as the launch event of the Platform Cooperative Observatory, the Brazilian Institute of Architects' Institute discussion event, the SESC training event⁶⁷ and the annual Platform Cooperative Consortium event⁶⁸ which brought together representatives from these two worlds: institutionalized cooperativism, formed by OCB, SESCOOP, Inovacoop, Cooperative Colleges, and non-institutionalized cooperativism, formed by collectives, foundations such as Rosa Luxemburgo, research centers such as DigiLabour and ITS. There is a constant dialogue between them, but there are also separations and distances that are significant.

For the platform cooperativism movement to flourish in Brazil in the coming years, it will be necessary to strengthen these irrigation channels, greater involvement of entities associated with the Solidarity Economy and the structuring of public, municipal or federal policies, which are able to make viable financial and management instruments for cooperatives.

It is not clear how to solve the problem of how institutionalized cooperativism can support emerging projects that do not want to constitute themselves as a cooperative and be part of the system. As exemplified by the case of CargOn, cooperatives can support non-cooperative enterprises as investors. But this is mainly occurring in enterprises that attend to the market needs of the cooperative system itself, such as it is occurring in the platformization of new credit services (attached to the services of credit coops) or the platformization of the services of transportation (attached to the services of logistics and transportation coops).⁶⁹ There are no clear incentives for investments that are completely detached from the cooperative market itself, such as platform of delivery workers, platform of artists and creators or data coops focused on users of Internet application services, for instance.

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It is also not clear how to solve the legal problems that prevent platform cooperatives from having different levels of members, distributed in different regions of the Brazilian territory, with the possibility of support through immaterial work or indirect financial contributions. There remains an almost century-old view that, in Brazilian cooperatives, investment can never be of capital but must be based on human labor. At the same time, there is an impasse regarding new forms of immaterial work, such as the work to be performed by influencers, programmers and creators of audio-visual content. For now, the only legal impasses resolved were related to the possibility of digital meetings and digital signatures of documents.⁷⁰ And also the inclusion of cooperatives in the legal regime of “startups” in Brazil.⁷¹

4.

CONCLUSION

4. CONCLUSION

This qualitative research presented a comprehensive mapping of the emergence of platform cooperativism in Brazil, its opportunities and contradictions. Based on experiences in the field over the last five years and the design of a qualitative research that involved interviews, a focus group and the organization of discussion events on platform cooperativism with multiple stakeholders, it was possible to identify the diversity of discourses and movements in Brazil.

The main theoretical construction of this study is the separation between institutionalized and non-institutionalized platform cooperativism. This theoretical construction makes sense in Brazil, considering the unique character of the constitution of the cooperative system in the country.

The emergence of the platform cooperativism movement in Brazil does not have a direct connection with the solidarity economy tradition. It emerged from the initial work of institutions such as Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, InternetLab, Partido Pirata and research centers interested in the relationship between decent work and the platform of society. What happened, however, was that, between 2018 and 2020, new brokers emerged, coupled with the institutionalized system of cooperativism, which began to consider platform cooperativism as a great window of opportunity for innovation and new markets of the digital economy. With an eye very focused on innovations and new businesses, the OCB quickly embraced the platform cooperativism discourse and started to support important projects via Sescop. What I argued was that these intermediaries played an important role in the construction of a discourse connecting innovation and decent work, in connection with the values of the old movement of non-institutionalized cooperativism.

In the last two years, the protest movements of workers from application companies (“Breque dos Apps”) generated a profound social impact in the discussion about precarious work. Based on this diagnosis, projects such as the Platform Cooperative Observatory and a set of autonomous initiatives and new businesses with a focus on platform work in a fair manner emerged. Considering that there was already a previous institutionalized cooperative movement to work with the theme, events, discussions and collaborations began to take place, at least at the tactical level, between different groups. On the one hand, institutionalized cooperativism via Inovacoop, Coonecta, Sescop and OCB. On the other hand, a support network for non-institutionalized cooperativism, such as the Rosa Luxemburgo Foundation,

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ProComum and DigiLabour. Despite the recognition of differences between these actors, there is a tactical alliance to improve the institutional and economic scenario in support of platform cooperativism in Brazil.

Finally, I argued that there are persistent challenges to the expansion of platform cooperativism in Brazil in legal terms. Several enterprises chose to organize themselves as private companies, private associations or university projects. Incentives for forming formal cooperatives are low, given investment and governance limitations, something already perceived by Luciano Bruno in her report in 2021. There are very advanced diagnoses on this problem, such as those produced by Mario de Conto and researchers from Rio Grande do Sul. For the next few years, it will be necessary to deepen concrete proposals for legal reform to make platform cooperatives viable in Brazil.

Like any complex social organization, platform cooperativism in Brazil is multifaceted. It combines a set of potentials and ambiguities. The objective of this research was not to present solutions to these problems, but to reconstruct the origins and path of this movement in Brazil. There is a large set of research hypotheses to be explored. It is too early to assess the success or failure of this movement. It is still in its infancy and has enormous potential in an unequal, complex and creative country like Brazil.

ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

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2. See <https://platform.coop/> (describing the concept of platform cooperativism). For a full description of the concept and typology of forms of platform cooperatives, see Trebor Scholz, *Platform Cooperativism: Challenging the corporate sharing economy*. New York, NY: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2016.
3. Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*. London: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.
4. Stefano Zamagni & Vera Zamagni, *The Cooperative Enterprise: facing the challenge of globalization*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010, p. 27.
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22. See <http://colivre.coop.br/>
23. Colivre emerged from the Federal University of Bahia and had as clients the Federal Government during the Dilma Rousseff administration, the Sercoop System of Bahia, the Brazilian Forum of Solidarity Economy and large state clients, such as the Parque Tecnológico de Itaipu Foundation and the Federal Service of Data Processing (Serpro).
24. Transcription of a speech at a public event. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDbReIFj20>
25. "Ramo Trabalho realiza Seminário no RS | Sistema Ocergs-Sescoop/RS". <https://www.sescoopr.br/noticias/2018/06/19/ramo-trabalho-realiza-seminario-no-rs/>
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27. See <https://www.somoscooperativismo.coop.br/noticia/21203/ramo-transporte-desembarca-nos-eua>
28. See <https://coonecta.me/>
29. See <https://conteudo.coonecta.me/report-missao-cooperativismo-de-plataforma>
30. Interview with Gustavo Mendes. File with the author.
31. Interview with Gustavo Mendes. File with the author.
32. Participants were from Sicred, Sicoob Empresas, Coopercargas, Cooperative Bank of Brazil (Bancoob), Coonecta, Unimed Seguros, Sicoob, CleanClic, Escoop, OCB, Coopersystem, Ciclos, Commercial Association of Governador Valadares and Ideia Comunicação.
33. See <https://coonecta.me/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Travis-Higgins.pdf>
34. See <https://inova.coop.br/ler/sobre-o-inovacoop>

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35. See <https://inova.coop.br/blog/o-que-e-cooperativismo-de-plataforma-dc43a891e6b0>
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41. Interview with Abdul Nasser. File with author.
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45. See <https://cemflores.org/2020/07/02/o-breque-dos-apps-so-o-primeiro-dia-da-guerra/>
46. Nina Desgranges & Wickson Ribeiro, O Breque dos Apps e as novas formas de manifestação de trabalhadores em plataformas digitais. *Revista Movimentação, Dourados, MS*, V.8, nº.14. 2021.

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51. Statement by Eduardo Pereira. See Lu Sudré, Entregadores antifascistas buscam criar cooperativa com aplicativo próprio, *Brasil de Fato*, August 1 2020. Available at: <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/08/01/entregadores-antifascistas-buscam-criar-cooperativa-com-aplicativo-proprio>
52. Statement by Paulo Galo. Fundação Rosa Luxemburgo, Live Precarização e Direitos Trabalhistas, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUA1woBjIMl>
53. Rafael Grohmann & Rafael Zanatta, Cooperativismo de plataforma: quais as possibilidades, August 21, *Nexo Jornal*, 2021.
54. This may have occurred for several reasons, such as (i) lack of building bridges at that time (between July and August 2020), (ii) distrust of workers in the face of excessive proposals on how to create cooperatives by lawyers, (iii) distancing generated by the presence of people linked to social movements historically distant from the OCB, such as UNICAFES, CUT, MST, and others. I have no elements to affirm what happened. These are just hypotheses that need to be tested in qualitative research.

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55. As argued by Daniel Santini, “in Brazil, we have to consider our profound social inequality in this equation. If we manage to mobilize people who want to work, who are in a difficult situation, who can build beautiful things, we have the possibility of reversing the sad path that Brazil has taken in recent years”. DigiLabour, Lançamento do Observatório do Cooperativismo de Plataforma, June 23, 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o4g29Kb6F4>
56. Statement by Ana Paula Rosa. DigiLabour, Lançamento do Observatório do Cooperativismo de Plataforma, June 23, 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o4g29Kb6F4>
57. <http://cooperativismodeplataforma.com.br/pesquisas/>
58. Alexandre Borba da Silveira, Douglas Wegner & Joel Queiroz Silva, *Cooperativismo de Plataforma como alternativa para o desenvolvimento econômico pós-Covid 19*, Convibra, Rio Grande do Sul, 2021.
59. See <https://caronae.org/termos-de-uso.html>
60. The company has 30 employees and volunteers. See <https://www.projtodraft.com/e-se-o-entregador-pudesse-definir-o-valor-do-seu-servico-saiba-como-o-appjusto-quer-tornar-o-delivery-bom-para-todo-mundo/>
61. See <https://appjusto.com.br/>
62. See <https://app.smart.coop.br/>
63. Interview with Samara Araújo. File with the author.
64. With the publication of Provisional Measure 931 at the end of March 2020, cooperatives gained the possibility of holding meetings in a virtual format. In July 2020, Law 14.030 was enacted, which recognized the possibility of cooperative members participating in Assemblies at a distance, due to the new social dynamics adopted due to the coronavirus pandemic.
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66. Statement by Mario de Conto. The New Common Sense, Platform Cooperativism in Brazil, 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnV7i2XqWbU>

67. The SESC event (Cooperativismo de plataforma: uma opção possível?) occurred in August 2021. The participants were Fabrício Barili (DigiLabour), Rafael Zanatta (Data Privacy Brasil), Victor Barcellos (ITS), Renato Mota Ruiz (Cataki), Andreia Rabelo (Recicla Mais), Beatriz Pinheiro (Reclyclin), Aline Os (Señoritas Courier), Vinícius Hax (Pedal Express), Daniel Tygel (Coletivo Eita!), Amanda Santana (Tucum Brasil), Josiane Masson (Artesol), Julia Asche (Design Possível), Bruno Mahfuz (Guia de Rodas), Ronaldo Tenório (Hand Talk), Adriano Rabelo Assis (Expressia TIX), Suely Maciel (Biblioteca Falada). See <https://www.secsp.org.br/cooperativismo-de-plataforma-uma-opcao-possivel/>
68. The New Common Sense, Platform Cooperativism in Brazil, 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnV7i2XqWbU>
69. One of the greatest examples of this strategic investment within cooperativism is the work of Coopercarga, which gave rise to CargOn. Coopercarga created an Innovation Center two years ago. Coopercarga's Innovation Center is part of the coworking of PUC-PR, considered an educational institution focused on actions aimed at innovation, in addition to being one of the best universities in the country. In addition, the cooperative is connected with other startups focused on Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Big Data. Coopercarga also has partnerships with innovation networks present in Santa Catarina, it is still inserted in the community context, with a focus on Concordia, Santa Catarina.
70. Law 14.195/2021 allowed the adoption of books or digital files by cooperatives.
71. Originating from the Complementary Law Project (PLP) 146/19, the measure established the Legal Framework for Startups, created to foster innovation in the country, by reducing bureaucracy in processes and increasing legal certainty for investments. The Law established criteria for a company to be considered a startup, such as a maximum annual turnover of BRL 16 million and up to ten years of existence (companies with more than ten years are not considered startups). In addition, it is necessary to declare in its articles of incorporation, the use of innovative models that fall under the special regime Inova Simples, provided for in the Statute of Micro and Small Enterprises.



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