Solidarity Platform Cooperativism in Latin America Report

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Abstract

Since 2015, the concept of "Platform Cooperativism" has reshaped the discourse surrounding the collaborative economy, offering a critical perspective on the corporate-driven new economic models, sometimes named as collaborative, gig, platform or even digital economy. In any case that perpetuates an economic model marked by unfair working conditions. Scholz (2016) suggests that the cooperative tradition could serve as a viable antidote to the kind of economic framework he terms as *reaganism* which exacerbates economic disparities, champions low-wage services, and erodes labor rights. North American and European academics has taken the lead in exploring this paradigm shift, developing distinct concepts and typologies based on various case studies and experiences. However, these concepts are not universally applicable, as the unique conditions prevalent in other regions of the world, notably in Latin America, necessitate a nuanced approach.

This report aims to contribute to the debate widening the empirical research of alternatives to mainstream platform economy. Specifically, this study maps solidarity platform cooperatives in Latin America, showing its different experiences and providing a first of its kind overview of the design, trajectories, and practices that shape the dynamics of platform cooperatives in the Global South. This has been achieved via an empirical analysis of 113 platforms operating in Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. The analysis is based on data collected via a virtual ethnography of the web content of the selected platforms, as well as thirteen semi-structured interviews and speeches from members of solidarity platform cooperatives that took place at the Solidarity Platform Cooperative Workshop[1] (Quito, May 2023).

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[1] Event website: https://ctslab.org/category/eventos/encuentros/

1. Introduction

The rapid pace of digitalisation has hastened, during the last 15 years, has leaded societal disruptions and heralding a new economic era that carries profound implications for the workforce and employment landscape. The prevalent platformisation of labour now reigns supreme in the platform economy, further intensifying disparities in labor dynamics and exacerbating existing inequalities. Within this context, platform cooperativism has been proposed as a potential alternative. It hinges on the belief that democratically owned and managed platforms can foster collaboration without necessarily eschewing market mechanisms. As Trebor Scholz, the original proponent of "platform cooperativism" argues, it aims to contribute to a shift in power relations and to "positively develop a moral vision of digital work that does not tolerate surveillance, surreptitious extraction, and exploitation" (Scholz, 2016, p. 9).

Although, this is a classical definition it is useful to understand the purposes of a cooperative: autonomy, common needs, and internal democracy. In that way, the contemporary platform cooperativism has the potential to enhance worker's self-determination and to expand workers' power, broad-based employee ownership, employees control technological features, job structures, algorithms, and the production process within a democratic governance framework.

The International Co-operative Alliance offers a definition of a cooperative 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"[2]. This definition is valuable in delineating the core objectives of cooperative enterprises: autonomy, collective needs fulfillment, and internal democratic processes.

In line with this, contemporary solidarity-driven platform cooperativism has the capability to empower workers through the promotion of self-determination and the reinforcement of social influence. Consequently, it not only enhances worker autonomy but also contributes to the expansion of societal power dynamics, with workers being able to control and manage the production process and the organization's decision-making.

Although a key feature of platform cooperatives is that they exist to benefit their members and are open to different types of legal forms (such as such as enterprises, social enterprises, civil associations and other). So, the research conducted in Europe and North America does not necessarily account for this phenomenon in Latin America and in the Global South. For this reason, we distinguish between the Platform Cooperativism and Solidarity Platform Cooperativism. Thus, cooperativism is not "only" a legal form or a mode of shared governance, but has a distinct work ethic and a set of social values that have led to new forms and experiences of value generation.

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[2] Website: https://ica.coop/en/what-co-operative

The institutionalized solidarity is expressed beyond the legal form and formal structures of cooperative enterprises by being inspired and being part of the social and solidarity economy (SSE) rich trajectory in the region. The solidarity platform cooperativism, promotes economic activities that are guided by reciprocity, solidarity, self-organization, self-management, and cooperation (Barea 1990; Schwab do Nascimento et al. 2020), as well as generating a social, democratic, ecological, and inter-cooperative market with nature (García 2002). In that sense, cooperatives are the key organizational instrument of the SSE.

Despite their rapid growth, platform cooperatives are poorly understood and underestimated. They have been hailed as a democratic alternative to the oppressive mechanisms of platform economy, but without accounting for the variety of business models that have emerged along these pasts few years. This report focuses on identifying the solidarity platform cooperative initiatives that have emerged in the Latin American context, their business models, and the role that different actors have played in the co-construction of these projects.

We started with a literature review about the platform economy, that has characterised the platforms, but when we realized its limitations and that the known experiences showed a greater complexity, we looked for other frames of reference.. We outline the main characteristics of what we term *solidary platform cooperativism*, along with the challenges these business models face. We then map and characterize the initiatives in each country based on their own trajectories, social organizations, and sectors. Via a policy network analysis, we identify how cooperatives are developing a digital model; the challenges of the scalability, the roles of different actors (such as, national federations, research centers, or international organisations that offer training and technology to local organizations and unions), and the most iconic platform cases in the region.

2. Literature review

With the aim of developing a conceptual proposal to approach the experiences of platform cooperatives in Latin America, this section is structured into two subsections. The first one focuses on presenting a review of the literature on the platform economy, with the aim of showcasing the predominant business model that characterizes it. The second subsection focuses on exposing the main concepts and typologies developed by North American and European academia regarding platform cooperatives. The latter are understood as business models that embody a mode of resistance against the predominant platform economy model.

2.1 Unveiling the Landscape: Exploring the Collaborative - Corporate Economy

The corporate collaborative economy, platform capitalism and gig economy, refer all to a relatively new system of production and commercialization of goods and services, that is becoming the dominant paradigm in contemporary capitalism (Barcellos 2023). While the digital economy

includes all economic activities driven by digitization, the platform economy is a particular focus within the digital economy centered on the intermediation model. Scholz (2016) uses the category "corporate collaborative economy" as synonym of digital economy but highlighting the capitalist and corporations-oriented approach.

Beyond the category, the common aspect is the promise of a better future, which would be possible through the automation of production processes, the datafication of the world, the opening of economic opportunities related to market diversification, and increased efficiency. This includes the development of new and diverse business models, and innovation to further permeate economic sectors, including manufacturing, services, transportation, telecommunications (Lopez 2023). Powerful discourses about the transformative impact of digital technologies have also centered on work and labor. They include a conception of work different from the traditional one, and characterized by freedom, flexibility, prosperity, and autonomy (Scholz 2016). This notion of transformation is based on the use of fast, low-priced, or even nominally "free" services.

In addition to the poetics surrounding the digital economy, there are three pillars that make its operation possible: (i) the role of digital platforms as intermediaries; (ii) the extraction of value from the massive data resulting from the human interaction they mediate; and (iii) the exploitation logic they materialize (Barcellos 2023). In this context, digital platforms serve as diverse and automated systems for exchanging information. They not only serve to connect supply with demand (UNCTAD 2019), but also play a pivotal role in shaping the interactions between workers and users. Moreover, these platforms embody a logic that is primarily geared towards extracting financial value.

For these reasons, the entrepreneurial collaborative economy model has raised several criticisms. Fairwork (2024) has found that a significant number of platforms are still far from safeguarding basic standards of decent work, such as fair pay, conditions, contracts, management and representation. "The number of platform workers looking for earning opportunities on digital labor platforms is increasing quicker than the number of jobs available. And when workers are lucky enough to get consistent work, the costs associated with doing that work are increasing, meaning effective take-home pay is decreasing over time (Fairwork, 2024, p. 3).

Scholz (2016) argues that the illegality with which, to some extent, platforms operate is not a mistake, but a method to introduce and expand new businesses. At the same time, this phenomenon is reinforced by regulatory and legislative often supported by phenomena such as decision capture and revolving doors. The cable called "Uber files" (ICIJ, 2022) shows this dynamic in detail, in which executives used their influence to avoid regulation and obtain permission to operate in some cities or countries. Graham also shows the erosive influence of this business model even in the urban geographies: "Platforms in the urban environment are fundamentally reshaping urban

geographies while being apparently too big to control, too new to regulate, and too innovative to stifle" (Graham 2020, p. 456).

In the same spirit, the monopolistic dynamics in the digital economy and the consequent concentration of ownership among few corporations and shareholders that control the market and the workforce (Wu, 2020). This have received considerable attention by scholars and policymakers. Nevertheless, one of the most important aspect is the mediation of the classic labour relationship given by a platform and their status as "non-employees" versus the supposed autonomy, freedom, and flexibility they are promised (Clomax, 2023). Another characteristic is the "data intensive" business model of the digital economy. Srnicek (2018) argues that "platforms' appetite for data means that these businesses are also constantly expanding. Not only does this lead to privacy concerns, but it also means that these forms grow and expand according to a data-centric logic of capitalist centralization" (Srnicek, 2017, p. 255). Other studies show how the platform economy is sustained through the exploitation of immigrants and other vulnerable groups, who are victims of unfair working conditions because of their vulnerability and needs (Albornoz and Chávez 2020, 2023).

In this scenario, halfway between the exaltation of the benefits brought by the digital economy and its shortcomings, the debate on the challenges in the social control of technologies is not less important (Madarigada, et.al. 2019; Grohmann, 2023). From a critical view, the on-demand service model that constitute the platform economy, benefits from the data resulting from the intermediation of platforms at the expense of the promise of freedom of workers who -monitored, ranked, and disciplined by the same platforms- are an essential part of their supply chains (Scholz 2016).

The employment relation between the platform and the workers has held a central place in the public debate on the role of digital platforms, as the assuring of inclusion and labor autonomy has attracted important segments of the population that find in this type of work a source of income. However, these work arrangements have brought schemes of precariousness and labor simulation since they escape the traditional boundaries of labor law (European Parliament, 2017).

Similarly, aspects such as security, privacy, competition, content moderation and taxation have tested the capacities of governments and international organizations to generate effective regulatory mechanisms. The existence of national regulations has failed to solve the problems linked to the dynamics of labor precariousness, fiscal transparency, and user privacy. Likewise, one of the underestimated dimensions in terms of regulations is the technological aspect, specifically in relation to designs and infrastructure and data governance. This is primarily caused by an often-deterministic mindset of governments with respect to technology where not only technologies are seen as inherently beneficial, but they are understood as universal and devoid of social links.

In contrast to this view, we understand technological design as the process of resolving the many technically underdetermined aspects of systems and devices during the implementation of their technical elements. In this conception, relatively neutral technical elements are arranged into a "strongly biased" concrete device, biased in the sense that the device has been made to fit a particular social context. Once it transitions from a vague notion to become a useful device, system, or practice, it takes on a form determined in part by the surrounding conditions (Feng et al., 2008).

In response to the prevalence of platform models linked to transnational private companies and the limitations and ineffectiveness of state regulations, a current variety of platform models in different places, has shown once again that "one size does not fit all". On the contrary, experiences inspired and guided by the principles and philosophy of cooperativism have emerged which have spread around the world with different backgrounds, strategies, and business models.

2.2 Approaches to Platform Cooperativism. Concepts and typologies from North America and Europe

The term "platform cooperativism" was coined in 2015 by Professor Trebor Scholz of the New School, New York. Since then, the Global North academia has emerged as a central node in the debate through the proliferation of numerous studies on platform cooperatives worldwide and the creation of a consortium of cooperative platforms working as a hub for research, community building, and advocacy for coops that make the digital transition. Additionally, training courses and annual conferences have been organized, bringing together key stakeholders in the field.

This network proposes understanding platform cooperativism as an alternative to the business model inherent in the platform economy and its adverse effects (Mohit, 2023). According to this proposal, platform cooperativism has a dual condition: as a political movement and as a framework for analyzing the multiple experiences of this type. Following Esber (2023), platform cooperativism as a political movement is articulated around the mission to decentralize the internet and transform it into an object of democratic governance. This mission is championed by activists from various domains, including the "digital commons," "web3," and "free culture" movements.

In this first dimension, platform cooperativism can be understood as a bottom-up proposal, meaning it originates from the grassroots level and is driven by a diverse array of actors. These actors include cooperative members, social entrepreneurs and tech developers. Together, they work towards creating digital platforms that are owned and governed by the workers, rather than by profit-driven corporations. However, this movement faces numerous challenges across political, economic, regulatory, technological, and social domains. The main demands of platform cooperativism as a political movement revolve around: the impact of technologies on social life and the environment, the logic of value extraction embodied by technologies, and the control of a few corporations over digital platforms.

As a category of analysis and field of study, platform cooperativism is defined based on three elements: ownership, value logic, and technological design. The central axis of the cooperativism model lies in the collective ownership of platforms and the implementation of democratic governance that allows their control to reduce inequalities and insecurity for workers (Esber, 2003). In terms of value logic, platform cooperatives diverge from a focus on efficiency, innovation, and economic gain, instead offering an alternative to rebalance the power relations in an economy based on the extraction of value from data (Mohit, 2023). Finally, platform cooperativism proposes to employ what constitutes the heart of the entrepreneurial collaborative economy: technological platforms as intermediaries, and it introduces the importance of its technological design.

According to Scholz (2016), there are ten principles that enable cooperatives to maintain their spirit and emerge as a realistic response to the corporate platform business model. These principles are:
-    Collective ownership of the platform.
-    Decent wage and income security for workers.
-    Transparency and data portability, particularly, the collection, harvesting, use and sale of customer data.
-    Appreciation and recognition of the value generated, with special attention to workers' communication with managers.
-    Collective decisions at work, based on the involvement of workers in the technological design of the platform.
-    Protective legal framework for the cooperative model. In many cases, the legal framework rewards corporations and hinders alternative models.
-    Transferable protection of workers and coverage of social benefits. The creation of an individual fund where companies contribute proportionally to the working time of each worker is proposed as a form of social protection.
-    Protection against arbitrary conduct in the qualification systems. Especially in sanctions, suspensions and dismissals, and the possibility of transferring the qualification to capitalize the worker's reputation.
-    Rejection of excessive surveillance in the workplace, as an imperative for the re-dignification of the worker.
-    Right to disconnection. Clear limits on working time.

Furthermore, in order to classify platform cooperatives, Scholz (2016) suggest taking into consideration ownership, emergence, and activity to differentiate platforms by the following types: (i) labor intermediation platforms; (ii) cooperatively owned online buying and selling marketplaces; (iii) municipally owned platforms; (iv) "producer" (acronym for producer and user) community cooperatives oriented to the generation of and access to shared content; (v) labor

platforms supported by unions; (vi) "insider" platforms that emerge through organizational dynamics based on solidarity among corporate platform users; and (ii) "protocol" platforms.

While contributions from the New School network have strengthened the debate on the platform economy and brought platform cooperativism into focus, it is key to think of strategies to overcome challenges that are not contemplated in the concept and principles stipulated by Scholz. Some of these are: internal organization of platform cooperatives, user-based technological design, long-term financing, scale, living wages, constraints in competition with corporate platforms (regulatory, geographic, cultural), and worker isolation. As research is concentrated on the Global North, other regions had little space to contribute to empirical findings and theorizing on union trajectories and cooperative practices that shape other dynamics of platform cooperativism (Grohmann, 2021; Salvagni, Grohmann and Matos, 2022; Grohmann, 2022a; Mohit, 2023; Barcellos, 2023).

According to Fuster, Espelt and Renau (2021), these gaps reflect the fact that the concept of platform cooperativism is considered "officially" born in the Global North. Thus, the authors are committed to understanding platform cooperatives from a critical and interdisciplinary perspective focused on their democratic qualities. Within this framework, the concept of the platform economy encompasses both highly extractive and cooperative business models. Drawing a line between these two contrasting approaches, cooperatives are seen as a key component within the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE).

This proposal shares a common thread with Scholz's (2016), wherein platform cooperativism is positioned as an alternative to the extractivist-corporatist economic model. Its particularity lies in fostering the development of a social movement that embraces authentic practices of exchange and cooperation in the production and consumption of goods and services (Fuster et al., 2021). This analytical matrix, more than a typology, condenses an effort to contrast empirical cases with six dimensions:

- Governance: level of interaction enabled by the platform and democratic participation with respect to its organization.
- Economic model: orientation of the initiative, sustainability, financing models and labor relations derived from the use of the platform.
- Technological policies: licenses and platform architecture.
- Data policies: license that regulates access and governance of the contents.
- Social responsibility: gender equity, levels of inclusion, environmental responsibility, and respect for the sovereignty of the city as criteria for regulating platforms.
- Impact: level of development, economic sustainability, use and capacity for cooperation.

Each of these dimensions is studied through 147 indicators and is part of a broader effort to fill the gap between the theoretical production on cooperative platforms - centered in the Global North -

and the scarcity of empirical studies in other regions. Therefore, rather than a categorization, it seeks to deploy an evaluation exercise from a perspective based on several of the assumptions of traditional cooperativism and nourished by open cooperativism, a feminist and ecological perspective. Consequently, it does not present ideal types of cooperative platforms defined by their legal status or by the centrality of a digital platform in the organizational structure of the business model, but rather puts on the table the tensions derived from the comparison between certain defining presumptions of cooperative platforms, such as the possibility of generating better working conditions for their workers, and their verification in concrete cases.

3. Solidarity Platform Cooperativism: a conceptual and empirical proposal from Latin America

Platform cooperativism in Latin America should not be an immediate reflection of decontextualized principles, rather it must be re-territorialized and placed in context (Kasparian 2022b). Although platform cooperatives have experienced rapid expansion, they remain relatively little known. Often heralded as a response to the oppressive structures inherent in the digital infrastructure underpinning the platform economy, these cooperatives are frequently oversimplified, failing to acknowledge the diverse array of business models that have developed in recent years.

Solidary platform cooperativism represents both, a burgeoning trend and a polysemic analytical category, stemming from longstanding cooperative ethos and reinterpreting them in response to the novel obstacles introduced by platform capitalism in the realm of labor. The core feature of solidary platform cooperativism is not solely the facilitation of interactions and transactions between workers and consumers through a digital platform. Instead, its defining aspect lies in establishing a work structure based on democratic management and control of the organizations, grounded in cooperative values, within an environment increasingly shaped by labor phantomization (Kasparian, 2022c; Salvagni et al. 2022).

To position a conceptual and empirical approach to solidarity platform cooperativism woven in the region, the following sections of the report are summarized in two main parts. The first part (sections 4, 5 and 6) presents the methodology used to build the network of cooperativism in the region, the findings obtained, and the case studies. In the second (sections 7 and 8), the main characteristics of what we term Solidarity Platform Cooperatives (SPCs) are highlighted, along with the challenges these business models face in their contexts. The arguments have been informed by an in-depth literature review, semi-structured interviews with key actors from various platform cooperatives in the region, and the experience gained from a workshop with workers and scholars held in Quito, Ecuador, in May 2023.

4. Methodology

Given the concentration of the debate on platform cooperativism in Global North academia over the past decade, this study focuses on exploring the landscape of solidary platform cooperativism in Latin American countries. The countries analyzed include those in which at least one platform cooperative has been identified: El Salvador, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. By delving into the identified experiences and recurring patterns that elucidate the dynamics and distinctive traits of cooperative platforms in this region, we conducted extensive research.

The literature review, centered on the concepts of the "platform economy" and "platform cooperativism," presented in section 2 of the report, serves as the preamble for an exhaustive qualitative and quantitative study. The ethnographic work involved conducting semi-structured interviews with prominent figures in the field, such as cooperativists, representatives of cooperative federations, academics, members of public institutions that support platform cooperativism, and actors who act as brokers of cooperative experiences. The bibliography, containing case studies on platform cooperatives, as well as databases and other resources, supports this ethnographic work. Subsequently, using policy network analysis, the network of actors in the cooperative ecosystem in Latin America is constructed and analyzed. The ultimate goal is to formulate a Latin American-centric framework for the examination of cooperative solidarity platforms.

4.1. Desk research

Our research began with an initial desk research phase, involving extensive mapping to provide a broad overview of the cooperative's landscape. This phase entailed gathering and analyzing secondary data from various sources, including reports, academic journal articles, websites, and databases. The objective was to identify experiences of platform cooperatives, key issues, and strengths within the sector, understand the current state of platform cooperatives in Latin America, and establish a foundational framework for further empirical investigation. By systematically reviewing existing literature and digital resources, we were able to map out the geographical distribution, operational characteristics, and significant trends of platform cooperatives in the region, setting the stage for more detailed qualitative and quantitative research.

Our primary sources included:

- **Reports and academic journal articles:** This material includes reports published in 2023 by the Platform Cooperativism Consortium and the Institute for the Cooperative Digital Economy, as well as academic articles focusing on case studies of platform cooperatives.

These materials formed the basis of our secondary information resources, facilitating a bibliographic chaining process that led to the discovery of additional case studies and key stakeholders at national and regional levels supporting cooperative platform initiatives through promotion, technology provision, training, research, financing, and political backing.

- **Databases, interactive maps, and official websites:** These materials belong to national and international organizations advocating for cooperativism at regional and global levels, such as the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC), the Argentinian Federation of Worker Cooperatives of Technology, Innovation, and Knowledge (FACTTIC), and the Platform Cooperativism Observatory of Brazil (OCP). This type of input allowed access to reports on concrete cooperativism experiences, historical data, figures on cooperatives by country and sector, and geographical locations of cooperatives. From these resources, we were able to connect with the official websites of platform cooperatives to access information about their mission, vision, sector, projects, members, and advocacy actions in their respective countries.Key words we used the "news" section of the Google search and the social platform Facebook, employing meta-searches with terms like "country" + "platform cooperative" to gather further insights.

- **Metasearch engines, social networks, and keywords:** We used the "news" section of the Google search engine and the social platform Facebook, employing meta-searches with terms like "country" + "platform cooperative" to gather further insights. These platforms allowed us to find up-to-date information on the latest developments, news articles, and media coverage related to platform cooperatives. Additionally, we were able to identify discussions, community engagement, and social media posts by cooperative members, which provided valuable insights into the current activities, challenges, successes, and public perception of platform cooperatives in various countries.

4.2. Fieldwork

This study used semi-structured interviews as a qualitative research method. Thirteen virtual interviews were conducted with cooperativists, union leaders, members of cooperative federations, members of social movements, academics, NGO members, and public officials related to cooperativism. The interviewees came from six countries in the region: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador.

The purpose of the interviews was to contrast the data obtained from secondary sources and to highlight the perspectives of key actors on cooperativism in the region, aiming for a deeper understanding. Each interview, from their respective standpoint, allowed the study to include the experiences and challenges of cooperativists in their daily lives, the practices and learnings of public officials and NGO members who have supported cooperative projects, and the experiences

of academics who have researched the topic and have been involved in actions to strengthen cooperativism in the region.

Conducting this stage of fieldwork involved initial consultations with Fairwork project teams operating in various Latin American countries, including Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, and Mexico. This element facilitated the implementation of the snowball sampling technique to reach various actors within the cooperative ecosystem in the region.

4.3. Policy network analysis

This study utilizes Social Network Analysis (SNA), a method for measuring and analyzing the relationships between diverse actors and the social structures that emerge from these interactions (Sanz, 2003). The purpose of employing this method is to: i) reconstruct and characterize the network of solidary platform cooperativism in Latin America; ii) study the relational structures that emerge when the different actors within the network interact, communicate, and collaborate; iii) identify the roles played by the actors that are part of the network; and iv) analyze how these roles are shaping unique dynamics in each country and their impact on the regional dynamic. The software Gephi is used to graph the network structure of actors within the cooperative ecosystem, resulting in a visual representation that illustrates key actors and their relationships.

In the graph presented (Section 5), each node represents an actor and each edge represents the connections and interactions between them. The database that generates the graph is sourced from primary and secondary information from the desk research and fieldwork phases (Sections 4.1 and 4.2). The types of actors employed are detailed below (Table 1):

Table 1. Actors 'type within the network of Solidary Platform Cooperativism in Latin America

Type of Actor	Assigned Category	Brief Description
Platform Cooperatives	Type 1	Cases considered as solidarity platform cooperatives, characterized by aspects noted in Section 7 of this report (cooperative identity, ownership, governance, business model, and technological dimension).
National Federations of Cooperatives	Type 2	National-level entities that bring together cooperatives from different sectors and play a role in their representation and strengthening.

Hubs of Platform Cooperatives	Type 3	International and regional entities that gather cooperatives, represent them, and deploy various actions for their visibility, promotion, and strengthening.
Think Tanks and Research Institutions (universities, centers)	Type 4	Actors linked to cases of solidary platform cooperatives that are part of research-action dynamics.
Institutional Brokers	Type 5	Provide expertise, technology, and training to platform cooperatives.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Social Network Analysis allows for a meso-level analysis, in which actors and their context are considered to be in a dialectical or mutually influential relationship (Marsh and Smith 2000, Kisby 2007). This method sheds light on which countries are advancing a robust platform cooperativism infrastructure, demonstrates how institutional brokers are helping to promote a solidarity-based platform economy, and shows how national federations are addressing the challenge of transitioning to a digital model alongside cooperatives. By mapping this network, we can visually demonstrate how different actors are contributing to the development and promotion of platform cooperativism in the region, highlighting collaborative efforts and synergies among stakeholders.

We utilize the following measures to characterize and study the complex network of relationships that define the landscape of solidary platform cooperativism in Latin America (Table 2):

Table 2. Analysis of the network of Solidary Platform Cooperativism in Latin America

Measure	Definition
Entry Degree	- Measures the level at which an actor is influenced by others. - Relates to the levels of actors' socialization.

Betweenness Centrality	- Determines the nodes that act as intermediaries in providing access to information or knowledge.
	- Measures the degree of control over relational flows within the network; that is, their pivotal role in bridging distinct clusters within the network.
	- Values for betweenness range from 0 to 1 (highest betweenness centrality).

Source: Sanz (2003).

5. Main findings

The network was constructed by listing the identified platforms, their partners, and the countries in which they are linked. A total of 113 cases of solidary cooperative platforms were identified in Latin American countries with the following breakdown by country (Table 3.):

Table 3: Cases of Solidarity Cooperative Platforms

Country	Number of experiences
Argentina	63
Brazil	22
Mexico	13
Uruguay	3
Ecuador	3
Chile	2
Colombia	2

Costa Rica	2	
Peru	1	
El Salvador	1	

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In addition to the listed platforms, the cooperative ecosystem (Scholz 2016) in which they operate is constituted by other actors, which support cooperatives with technology, training, research, financing, and promotion. The following have been identified (Table 4.):

Table 4: Other Actors in the Cooperative Ecosystem in Latin America

Type of Actor	Number	Description
Platform Cooperatives	113	Cases considered as solidarity platform cooperatives, characterized by aspects noted in Section 7 of this report.
National Federations of Cooperatives	11	In Argentina, Uruguay, Guatemala, and Colombia.
Hubs of Platform Cooperatives	10	ACI, OCB, FACTTIC, FIT, PCAD, PCCSC, OCPB, NúcleoTec, DigiLabour, Fundación Confiar.
Research Institutions (universities, research centers, think tanks)	3 Think Tanks and 5 Universities	- Think tanks: ICETT, Platform Cooperativism Consortium, CTS-Lab. - Universities: Universidade Federal do Paraná, Universidad Fundepos, Instituto Federal de Ciência e Tecnologia do Rio Grande do Norte, Mondragon Team Academy, Universidad Iberoamericana de Puebla.
Institutional Brokers	2	CARE and Coopcycle.

On an empirical level, the 113 cases cataloged in this report depict the unfolding developments across various countries in the region in recent times. Nonetheless, not all documented initiatives are fully operational, underscoring the multifaceted and context-specific challenges that impede the sustainability and expansion of SPCs. The relationships of the solidary platform cooperatives with partner organizations are represented in a graph, built in the Gephi software.

Figure 1. Network of Solidarity Platform Cooperativism in Latin American countries
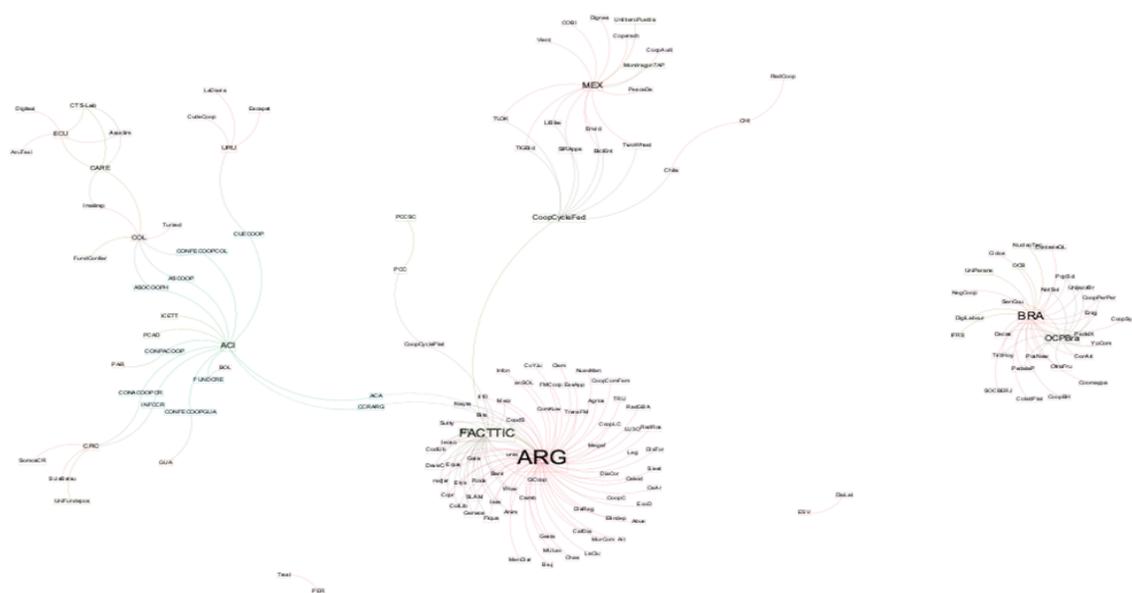
Based on the entry degree measures linked to the sociability levels of network nodes, the analysis indicates that Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico emerge as the three most significant countries by the concentration of relationships they hold. Additionally, key organizations observed as central in the regional ecosystem include FACTTIC, Brazil's Platform Cooperativism Observatory, International Cooperative Alliance, and the CoopCycle Federation. Conversely, the network highlights other national clusters of comparatively lesser importance due to fewer platforms and connections, such as those in Ecuador, Colombia, and Costa Rica. Table 4 specifically outlines the most interactive actors within the network, shedding light on the pivotal nodes fostering connectivity and collaboration across the platform cooperativism landscape in Latin America.

Table 4. Importance of nodes by entry degree

Actor	Id	Entry degree
Argentina	ARG	67
FACTTIC	FACTTIC	28
Brazil	BRA	27
Mexico	MEX	15
Platform Cooperativism Observatory	OCPBra	14
International Cooperative Alliance	ACI	13
CoopCycle Federation	CoopCycleFed	9

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In Argentina, the majority of the mapped platform cooperatives belong to the software sector, with their visibility closely tied to the presence of a local cooperative federation, FACTTIC. This federation plays a pivotal role in bolstering each cooperative individually within the network. Moving to Brazil, the largest portion of mapped cooperatives are associated with the Platform Cooperativism Observatory, which has identified around twenty projects primarily within the communication sector, with fewer in delivery and ride-hailing sectors. Lastly, in Mexico, the mapped initiatives predominantly focus on the delivery sector, one of four key areas in which the business platforms are categorized.

When considering the most influential organizations, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) stands out as a key global player dedicated to representing and enhancing cooperative platforms. Through the ICA's databases, such as the World Cooperative Monitor, Global Census on Cooperatives, and Data Explorer, its major initiatives and reports underscore a thematic emphasis on cooperatives grounded in traditional cooperative principles. Notably, starting in 2022, a burgeoning discourse has emerged within the ACI surrounding platform cooperatives, addressing critical themes like digitalization, participation, and democracy to adapt to the evolving landscape in the cooperative sector.

During the data collection process to construct the platform cooperativism network, CoopCycle emerged as a prominent case within the region. Originating in Europe, over the past year, CoopCycle has notably expanded its presence into Latin America. It is recognized not only for its role as a software infrastructure facilitating multiple initiatives but also for its establishment as a federation focused on empowering local cooperatives. While initially rooted in Europe, CoopCycle has taken diverse paths in three Latin American countries, with detailed explanations on these trajectories to follow in the subsequent Section.

On the other hand, betweenness centrality is utilized to further enhance the comprehension of individual actors' significance within the network (Sanz 2003). This metric assesses the degree of

control over relational flows within the network of certain nodes and their pivotal role in bridging distinct clusters within the network. The values for betweenness range from 0 to1, with the latter denoting actors possessing the highest betweenness centrality (Kong et al. 2019, Kuz, Falco, and Giandini 2016). In this context, FACTTIC, an Argentine tech coops federation, emerges as the primary connector within the cooperative platform ecosystem, while CARE follows closely due to its engagements in Andean Region countries. Notably, this network displays a hierarchical nature, indicated by the presence of a single actor with notably high intermediary centrality, emphasizing the hierarchical structure within the network.

Betweenness centrality exhibited by these actors raises questions regarding the significance of their role in advocating for and fortifying platform cooperatives within a landscape largely governed by the corporate dominance of industry. Delving into the analysis of betweenness centrality affirms the importance of nodes with pronounced sociability levels as outlined earlier, thereby enabling the recognition of sub-networks wielding substantial influence within the broader network ecosystem. This insight sheds light on key actors exerting notable agency and impact within the overall framework of platform cooperativism, potentially shaping the direction and evolution of solidary platform cooperativism amidst the prevalent corporate paradigm.

6. The most salient case studies

Given that the majority of empirical and theoretical contributions about platform cooperativism have been concentrated in North America and Europe, distinctive characteristics that define the dynamics of cooperative platforms in the Global South have not received due attention. A colonialist approach to knowledge production in the context of Solitary Platform Cooperatives (SPCs) has limited the development of interdisciplinary research agendas tailored to address the unique challenges encountered by cooperative models in regions of the Global South (Milan and Treré 2019). Therefore, we advocate for an examination of four specific cases.

The first two cases are from the countries with the highest number of solidarity platform cooperatives in the region, Argentina with 63 cases and Brazil with 22. Additionally, we include the case of Coopcycle, an institutional broker recognized not only for its role as a software infrastructure facilitating multiple initiatives in the region, but also for its establishment as a federation focused on empowering local cooperatives. Finally, we delve into the case of CARE as an institutional broker that has significantly contributed to the pioneering experiences of solidary platform cooperatives in the Andean region, characterized by being respectful, violence-free, and democratic (Asoclim in Ecuador and Ima Limpia in Colombia).

6.1 Argentina

Argentina is the country in the region where we identified the largest number of cooperative initiatives, with 63 cases. In Argentina, the predominant cooperative experiences revolve around worker and service cooperatives, primarily within the technology sector, and to a lesser extent, the communication and care sectors. Notably, Argentina has the highest number of identified and documented SPCs, due to the presence of a federation that unites them and facilitates access to information about its member cooperatives, as well as the cooperatives' own strength in promoting their work in professional and academic participation spaces at both local and regional levels. Beyond the legal framework under which they are established, these cooperatives operate through participatory governance structures, utilizing democratic practices such as weekly and annual assemblies guided by their internal regulations.

The funding sources for these cooperatives typically stem from projects initiated by public entities within the country, such as the National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy, INAES[3], the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation, and the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research[4], CONICET. Additionally, financial support often comes through collaborations with various actors within the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) realm (Código Libre 2023).

Within Argentine technology cooperatives and the federation overseeing them, a strong emphasis is placed on technological designs, including software development processes and data management, all aligned with principles advocating for free software, digital rights, and open knowledge. Moreover, these cooperatives uphold values such as equality, solidarity, participation, and gender equity. Their specialization in technology empowers them with unique capabilities. Additionally, unlike cooperatives in other sectors, employees in technology cooperatives typically receive a wage equivalent to a minimum living standard, which has allowed them to develop technology for their own cooperatives, their clients, and even provide support to other cooperatives in the region. This has enabled them to be actively involved in socially impactful projects at both national and international levels (Sutty, 2023).

These factors have positioned technology cooperatives as significant contributors in the implementation of technological innovations both within Argentina and across other countries in the region. An illustrative example is CoopCycle, a digital cycle-logistics platform originally from Europe that made its way to Latin America. In this context, the Federation of Technology and Information Worker Cooperatives (FACTTIC) played a pivotal role in adapting the platform to the Argentine environment. This adaptation not only facilitated the technological transition but also

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[3] In Spanish: Instituto Nacional de la Economía Social, INAES.
[4] In Spanish: Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, CONICET.

laid the groundwork for a broader socio-economic ecosystem centered around values of the Social and Solidary Economy (SSE) (Kasparian, 2022c). FACTTIC's ability to cultivate relationships with governmental bodies and academic institutions was instrumental in securing financial resources and tapping into skilled human resources. These contributions significantly enhanced the localized operations of CoopCycle. While FACTTIC also collaborated in bringing CoopCycle to countries like Chile and Mexico, its success was not as pronounced as it was in its home territory.

The Argentine case serves as a valuable reference point in discussions regarding the significance of strategic technological partnerships in advancing solidary platform cooperatives across the region (Fantasia, 2023). Furthermore, it underscores the vital role that various stakeholders play within the cooperative ecosystem, such as governments and academia, fortifying these alternative work models by providing resources and supporting specific initiatives. Ultimately, the Argentine experience underscores the critical nature of inter-cooperation in promoting dignified work structures that resonate with the diverse intersections within the workforce.

6.2 Brazil

Brazil ranks as the second country in the region with the highest number of SPCs mapped, totaling 23. These SPCs operate across diverse sectors such as media, delivery services, ride-hailing, and specialized tasks. An intriguing observation regarding the Brazilian SPC landscape is the presence of journalist cooperatives and other cooperatives related to art, particularly in the music industry. This unique characteristic sets Brazil apart, as it deviates from the norm observed in other countries, similarly to Argentina. As Grohmann (2022a) suggests, most of these initiatives were established in the 2000s with the legal form of cooperative, it means a shared property form but closer to a group of shareholders than to a social organization with democratic governance. While it might be premature to label this as a distinct "new wave" of cooperativism in journalism with its unique features, the growth and development of these cooperatives are noteworthy (Grohmann, 2022a, 25).

These Brazilian cooperatives exhibit varied business models, emphasizing self-sustainability and leveraging a mix of technology tools that blend social networks with both proprietary and open-source applications. This last aspect is highlighted both in Argentina and Brazil, which have a wide network of collaborators and cooperative spaces with developed technological capabilities and skills, comparable to those of large corporations owning corporate platforms.

Moreover, in Brazil, the Platform Cooperativism Observatory[5], OCP, a project spearheaded by Brazilian researchers in collaboration with support from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Santini, 2023) – has been instrumental in identifying and promoting platform cooperative initiatives. The

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[5] In Portuguese: Observatório de Cooperativismo de Plataforma

project advocates for platform cooperativism as a more equitable economic alternative hinged on the empowerment of workers through the control of digital technologies (OCP, 2021).

Within the realm of SPCs in Brazil, we also encounter initiatives in the delivery sector. A distinctive feature of Brazil's SPC landscape is the prevalence of ventures that utilise bicycles for the transportation and delivery of goods. This choice can be attributed to both the primarily flat terrain of many areas in Brazil and the cost-effectiveness of bicycles compared to motorcycles, making them an attractive work option for various individuals, including former employees of corporate delivery platforms. These SPCs often leverage social media platforms in conjunction with instant messaging applications for operational efficiency.

One notable case is Señoritas Courier, a delivery service tailored for cis and transgender women workers. The platform has revamped its business model to prioritize enhancing working conditions, focusing not only on income but also on ensuring safety and security to combat misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia (Os, 2023). The founder, Aline Os, define the inspiration behind Señoritas is to build as a place to work, where women can develop their work tasks, avoiding problems of harassment or physical overexploitation in shipments and merchandise deliveries. This has also made it possible to redefine delivery work normally associated with men and masculinized bodies. (Goldsman, 2023).

Additionally, a standout example in the SPC landscape is ContrataQuemLuta (hire those who fight), a platform devised by the technological branch Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto – MTST, traduced as Homeless Workers' Movement. This platform aims to streamline the process of connecting skilled workers with construction and maintenance tasks for residential and commercial properties (Barbosa & Simeone, 2023). Notably, they have created a custom technological application that prioritizes customer privacy and was developed using open-source tools. This instance stands out as a unique platform model that deviates from conventional frameworks, having built its own infrastructure, applications, and computational capacities through the combined efforts of politically and technically committed tech activists, such as members of free software communities.

Throughout the research period, various public initiatives were identified aimed at not only regulating the operations of traditional platforms but also at bolstering diverse initiatives. This shift is reflective of the country's move towards a public approach that is less business-oriented and focused more in the rights guarantee and best management of public services and public spaces. An exemplary case is the Bibi Mobi platform, which was developed by the municipality of Araquara (Brasis, 2023), a small city in São Paulo State, to connect conventional taxi drivers with customers through a technological platform developed, managed and financed by the local government. (Bibi mobi, 2022).

While it is still too early to assess concrete results and the effectiveness of existing regulations, it is clear that there is a political will to sustain this initiative. Usually, local governments have jurisdiction over issues related to mobility, public space, promotion of rights and land use planning, leaving out issues such as working conditions, ownership of platforms, governance and use of data and business models.

In the Brazilian context, platforms exhibit strong ties to local territorial dynamics (Santini, 2023). Unlike countries like Colombia or Argentina, which have national organizations serving as affiliations for platform cooperatives, Brazil lacks National Federations that could function as forums for collective representation, resource management, and knowledge exchange. Moreover, there is a limited level of internationalization among platform cooperatives in Brazil. For instance, while Brazilian entities within the International Cooperative Alliance primarily consist of traditional cooperatives (ACI, 2018), initiatives like CoopCycle – a bicycle-sharing project leveraging open-source software with partners in Europe and South America – have yet to establish partnerships in Brazil.

6.3 CoopCycle

Established in France in 2017, CoopCycle embodies multiple facets: a platform cooperative, a digital cycle-logistics infrastructure rooted in open-source software principles, and a federation comprising bicycle delivery cooperatives that leverage its platform (Cancela et al., 2023; Blanchon, 2021; Kasparian, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023a, 2023b). The initiative took shape in Europe through the collaborative efforts of volunteers engaging with users and has since evolved into a federative entity designed to serve as a collaborative hub for diverse delivery collectives utilizing the CoopCycle software (Kasparian, 2022a).

The federation targets three key groups: (i) Individual delivery workers interested in establishing or joining cooperative ventures; (ii) Delivery drivers or cooperatives seeking membership under the federation's umbrella; and (iii) Businesses seeking direct delivery services. To support these objectives, the federation provides a range of services, including delivery management software, e-commerce platforms, dedicated smartphone applications for both delivery personnel and customers, assistance with business development, legal guidance, and the opportunity to leverage the CoopCycle brand for enhancing the visibility of cooperative platforms (CoopCycle, 2022).

The governance model of CoopCycle is grounded in a social security strategy where member contributions are democratically determined, alongside the utilization of mutualized values. These mutualized values aid in reducing software costs and providing training for workers, with payments to cooperatives being promptly processed. Disparities in annual contributions and worker payments between Europe and Latin America stem from variations in their socioeconomic landscapes. Technologically, CoopCycle's design emphasizes the algorithm as a digital common

asset belonging to all contributors, with a license permitting modification and redistribution of the software and its derivatives under a cooperative model (Blanchon, 2021).

In Latin America, CoopCycle functions as a digital cycle-logistics infrastructure provider and a federation of bicycle delivery cooperatives founded on solidarity among its members. It supports platform cooperatives in navigating digitalization challenges while advancing social economy principles. Argentina spearheaded the territorial adaptation of the CoopCycle software, subsequently collaborating with Mexico and Chile in its implementation.

The Argentine Federation of Technology, Innovation, and Knowledge Cooperatives (FACTTIC) secured government subsidies to tailor the software to local requirements and fortify delivery cooperatives leveraging the platform (Kasparian 2022b). CoopCycle's introduction in Argentina marked a pivotal move towards establishing a national ecosystem aligned with the Social and Solidary Economy values of the country. Between 2020 and 2021, FACTTIC engaged with Mexico and Chile to tailor platform functionalities to each country's unique context.

In Mexico, the implementation of CoopCycle was facilitated by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policies (ITDP by its name in Spanish). ITDP spearheads the IDEAMOS Program and the Rolling Together Initiative (Rodando Juntas by its name in Spanish), both dedicated to fostering a sustainable and inclusive mobility ecosystem across Mexico (Bustillos, 2023). Collaborating with seven bicycle delivery cooperatives, including the notable work of TLOK delivery cooperative, ITDP has worked on testing technological tools and management approaches. The focus has been on creating iterative processes to drive the scalability of sustainable last-mile delivery solutions.

As a result of this ongoing process, TLOK has adopted the CoopCycle application and has played a pivotal role in solidifying the CoopCycle Latin America Federation. The seven cooperatives forming part of CoopCycle in Mexico offer delivery services to a range of businesses, such as opticians, dentists, laundries, and coffee mills. Leveraging territorially customized software has enabled the establishment of customized working hours and delivery methods tailored to individual client requirements. These aspects have proven instrumental in enhancing delivery efficiency and customer satisfaction (Marquez 2023).

In the Chilean context, the International Center for Social and Cooperative Economy at the University of Santiago de Chile, CIESCOOP[6], provided crucial support to three delivery cooperatives interested in utilizing the CoopCycle platform. CIESCOOP forged alliances with various national and regional entities supportive of cooperativism, including FACTTIC, the National Institute of Associativism and Social Economy (INAES), municipalities, and the University of Mondragón. However, CoopCycle faced challenges in establishing a foothold in

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[6] In Spanish: Centro Internacional de Economía Social y Cooperativa

Chile due to issues concerning limited technological capabilities and the lack of a robust regulatory framework and policies designed to recognize and bolster traditional cooperativism and platform cooperatives in their specificities (Inostroza 2023).

While the CoopCycle federation initially included 67 collectives primarily from Western Europe (Kasparian 2022b), it currently spans three countries in the region -Mexico, Chile, and Argentina- encompassing 8 active platforms and 3 inactive platforms. The active platforms are those that are currently operational, meaning they have workers and perform delivery activities to provide their service to various clients. In contrast, the inactive cooperatives refer to those that have ceased operations for various reasons that hindered their sustainability.

Table 5. CoopCycle in Latin America

Country	Platform	Number
Mexico	Envici	7
	Libelubike	
	Bicientrega	
	TLOK	
	TIB Bicimensajería	
	SIRApps	
	Two Wheel Collective	
Chile	Por la Chita	3 (non-active)
	Pídelo en Cleta	
	Panteras Curier	
Argentina	CoopCycle	1

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The evolution of CoopCycle from a software cooperative to an international federation of cooperative platforms involved knowledge transfer dynamics, as well as organizational efforts from cooperatives, the public sector, and academia. In this dual capacity, CoopCycle stands as a socially-oriented alternative that competes with privately-owned corporate platforms (Brard 2023). This transformation is not merely a replication of best practices; rather, it signifies a continuous journey involving the adaptation of technological structures, legal frameworks, and the establishment of interconnected networks among various stakeholders within specific geographical contexts.

6.4 Domestic work and Care Cooperatives in the Andes

We have examined two interconnected solidarity cooperative platforms that offer care services, i.e. cleaning, household and companionship of the elderly or young children: Asoclim in Ecuador and Ima Limpia in Colombia. Asoclim, established in 2020 as a social enterprise, provides care services, including cooking, through a web-based platform. It emerged within the framework of the SSE with full legal recognition. Notably, Asoclim's workforce is affiliated to the National Union of Paid Home Workers and Related Trades, UNTHA[7], a recognized union in Ecuador categorized as a "union by branch", it means the union is conformed by workers in the same trade or sector of economic activity, regardless of the company in which they work. Asoclim enables clients to book services in four Ecuadorian cities: Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca, and Esmeraldas (CARE, 2022a).

Similarly, Ima Limpia, established in 2021 as a corporation, offers a range of care services including laundry, pet care and gardening. Registered commercially at the Medellin Chamber of Commerce and authorized to function as a nonprofit entity. Ima Limpia is constituted by the workers of the Afrocolombian Domestic Service Workers Union, UTRASD[8]. Ima Limpia's operations are facilitated through a web platform, enabling clients to access services throughout the city of Medellin.

Both platforms draw inspiration from and are aligned with feminist principles, emphasizing women's autonomy, acknowledging the value of care and domestic work, promoting participation in decision-making processes, a non-violent space work and claiming the racialized dimension (Afro-descent) of the majority of its members. These principles are espoused by both UNTHA and UTRASD that were conceived as means to establish secure, appropriate, and inclusive employment opportunities (Lara, 2023).

The constitution of unions by branch has been a strategy used by social organizations to expand union coverage in non-conventional work sectors and, at the same time, has made it possible to renew the aging, masculinized and whitewashed leadership of the union world with female, young and non-white leadership, leading a new wave of union organizations in their respective countries.

These initiatives were developed with the support of various non-governmental organizations and international cooperation agencies focused on bolstering organizational capacity and financial sustainability. Notably, CARE, an international nonprofit organization, has been instrumental in promoting these initiatives through its Women, Dignity, and Work project across several South American countries.

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[7] Spanish: Unión Nacional de Trabajadoras Remuneradas del Hogar y Afines
[8] Spanish: Unión Afrocolombiana de Trabajadoras Domésticas

Under the guidance of CARE, Asoclim and Ima Limpia have been incorporated as "Social Enterprises" with a primary focus on establishing a sustainable business model that prioritizes the creation of dignified employment opportunities. These enterprises recruit and train workers who are members of their associations, utilizing a combination of social media, websites, and apps to compete in the gig economy. Importantly, the technological framework adopted by these platforms diverges from traditional corporate applications by eschewing algorithmic management of workers and mass data collection practices.

While CARE has not worked in isolation on these initiatives, it has played a key role as a facilitator, connecting UNTHA, UTRASD, and other organizations, and coordinating essential support (CARE, 2022a). At times, CARE has also assumed a sponsorship role by providing direct resources, encompassing legal and financial guidance, training initiatives, and technological support for the Asoclim and Ima Limpia startups. This is why we called CARE a broker.

In the Ecuadorian context, CARE orchestrated a collaborative effort involving Asoclim, UNTHA, and the Ecuadorian Professional Training Service (SECAP) (Asoclim, 2021). In Colombia, CARE.org facilitated partnerships with other non-profit organizations such as the Bien Humano Foundation and international entities like the French Development Agency to support Ima Limpia (Ima Limpia, 2021).

A significant challenge faced by these initiatives is the issue of financial and accounting management and the availability of technological resources among the workers themselves. While strides have been made in addressing the first challenge through ongoing training initiatives, the improvement of technological resources remains a work in progress due to prevailing digital disparities.

7. Leveraging insights and key aspects of solidary platform cooperatives

In this section, we present the five fundamental aspects that characterize Solidarity Platform Cooperatives in Latin America. In the region, their origins in a global cooperative movement and the influence of the principles of the Popular and Solidarity Economy at a regional level delineate the identity and structure of these cooperatives. These elements establish distinctive ownership and governance models that are hybrid, as they intersect with elements of the platform economy. Despite this complex interaction, these hybrid models can be perceived as viable and beneficial alternatives within the landscape of the platform economy and its unjust and precarious working conditions. This is because their varying levels of technological enablement (Cousin, 2021) align with cooperative values. To effectively explore solidarity platform cooperatives in the region, we will focus on five key dimensions: origins and roots in the international cooperative movement and the Popular and Solidarity Economy; identity; governance, ownership, and hybrid models; technological dimension; and working conditions.

7.1 International Movement Origins and Roots in the Popular and Solidarity Economy

With a history spanning over a century, Latin American cooperativism has been deeply influenced by French socialism. The initial cooperatives were founded on core principles of equality, cooperation, and mutual aid. Later, they were influenced by the British, who founded the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) to promote and strengthen the cooperative movement worldwide (International Cooperative Alliance, 2024). Today, they form a significant sector within the economies of Latin American countries, based on the values of both the international cooperative movement and the Popular and Solidarity Economy (PSE), such as self-help, responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity.

In the early 21st century, the PSE emerged as a tangible collection of practices for organizing life reproduction, as a field of academic study, and as a socio-political initiative aimed at fostering social transformation in response to an exploitative production system. The PSE lacks a uniform definition in the region and its recognition as an economic sector alongside the public, private, and mixed sectors has evolved without a singular trajectory. However, the fundamental premise of structuring life and labor outside the constraints of capitalist production models has underpinned the genesis of what we now refer to as Solidarity Platform Cooperativism. Singer (2008) highlights as key aspects of this approach the equality of rights, control of means of production and access to management decisions.

Although platform cooperatives have experienced rapid expansion, they remain relatively little known. Often heralded as a democratic response to the oppressive structures inherent in the digital infrastructure underpinning the platform economy, these cooperatives are frequently oversimplified, failing to acknowledge the diverse array of business models that have developed in recent years. Solidarity Platform Cooperativism represents both, a burgeoning trend and a polysemic analytical category, stemming from longstanding cooperative ethos and reinterpreting them in response to the novel obstacles introduced by platform capitalism in the realm of labor.

The core feature of Solidary Platform Cooperativism is not solely the facilitation of interactions and transactions between workers and consumers through a digital platform. Instead, its defining aspect lies in establishing a work structure grounded in cooperative ideals, Popular and Solidarity Economy values, and democratic management and control of cooperatives within an environment increasingly shaped by labor phantomization (Kasparian, 2022c; Salvagni et al., 2022).

7.2 Identity: defining the soul of solidary platform cooperatives

The construction of a cooperative identity is intricately linked to the historical evolution of these organizational structures, which serve as paradigms for both work and lifestyle. Unlike entities

solely driven by profit motives, cooperatives are rooted in principles and values that transcend conventional notions of workers as mere "entrepreneurs" or "self-employed entrepreneurs," as often perpetuated by neoliberal ideologies (Kasparian et al., 2021). Embracing a global perspective, the recognized cooperative values and principles encompass essential traits such as self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, solidarity, voluntary participation, democratic governance, economic involvement of members, autonomy, education, cooperation among cooperatives, and a commitment to community welfare (ACI 2024).

As the popular and solidary economy sector gains traction across various regions, values such as the common good, fair trade, ethical consumption, self-management, environmental stewardship, and gender equality are increasingly being emphasized. These principles play a crucial role in shaping the evolving identity of solidarity platform cooperatives, through a dynamic process unfolding over time. The construction of solidary cooperative identity draws upon a diverse array of factors including regional experiences, social class, gender, race, and age of cooperative members. It also reflects their efforts to reimagine and redefine the intricate relationships among these intersecting dynamics, labor practices, and technology (Salvagni, Grohmann, & Matos, 2022).

While identity remains a dynamic and constantly evolving concept that resists strict categorizations, two key aspects are emerging as fundamental components. First, one aspect involves a critical analysis of how capitalism, particularly within the realm of platform capitalism, intersects with patriarchy. This examination reveals the ways in which gendered divisions of labor persist and are further exacerbated within the structure of the sharing economy. Second, an aspect focuses on interrogating the presumed neutrality of technological designs, which frequently embody the extractive principles inherent in the platform capitalist model. This blend of understanding showcases how solidary platform cooperativism is in the process of taking form through acts of resistance, the embracement of diversity, and the unwavering advocacy for labor rights. This movement represents a notable countercultural and transformative initiative that seeks to challenge prevailing norms and values.

7.3 Ownership, governance and business models

The mainstream platform model is based on the private ownership (commonly transnational enterprises) of the technology and data generated by the interaction between businesses and customers. This model is useful, as profits can be extracted by circumventing and avoiding regulations, national and local legislation, since the platforms do not open a subsidiary company in all the countries where they operate (Albornoz et al., 2022).

The evolution of the platform economy has led to the emergence of a range of platform models worldwide. In many countries, local based platforms align with national regulations but their

governance structures still reflect managerial principles. In cooperative endeavors, a significant distinction lies in the collective ownership and governance structure. This collective ownership can manifest in various ways, as cooperative models vary widely and are shaped by contextual factors such as business practices, political ideologies, values, and legal frameworks. Consequently, cooperatives can be supported and governed by a social collective, with or without formal legal recognition. Alternatively, they may operate as social enterprises or cooperatives in regions where the social and solidarity economy holds official state endorsement (Albornoz et al., 2023).

In every scenario, the key focus is on seeking employment opportunities for members or communities that break away from traditional patterns of exploitative labor practices. Additionally, various studies have pinpointed instances where platforms, despite being infused with cooperative values and principles, are owned by a private entity usually of national origin yet governed collectively with the participation of workers. This blending of models, known as hybridization, is especially prevalent in sectors like passenger transport and care services (Albornoz et al. 2023).

7.4 Technological dimension(s)

We observe two trends concerning the integration of technology within Latin American Solidary Platform Cooperatives. In some instances, there is limited technological integration, where cooperatives use external corporate platforms, particularly real-time messaging apps like WhatsApp, while still incorporating human input to conduct their operations. Conversely, other cooperatives have developed their own mobile applications in-house. Noteworthy cases in countries such as Argentina and Brazil exemplify these trends. In Argentina, the presence of technology cooperatives and a supportive federation equips them with the expertise to create and implement their own technological solutions based on open-source software. In Brazil, a social movement serves as the driving force behind a collaborative and experimental technological laboratory dedicated to the same purpose.

In addition to the previously mentioned trends, Mexican cooperatives affiliated with the CoopCycle Federation in Latin America stand out. These cooperatives utilise a transnational software framework rooted in open-source principles, tailored to address localized needs of workers and users. Furthermore, there are instances where a developed platform exists but struggles to establish and operate an effective organizational and work structure around it.

All these experiences underscore the intricate interplay between the technological and social dimensions, which significantly influences the trajectory of SPCs in the region and highlights the diversity of experiences. As outlined by Grohmann (2023), platform cooperatives are often not just platforms in the traditional Western sense, and sometimes they may not strictly adhere to cooperative principles either. Instead, they are often crafted by workers striving to explore

alternative pathways for survival, work organisation, and technological innovation within their communities.

7.5. Labour conditions

An important aspect of SPC has to do with working conditions. In general, experiences of this type are born as an alternative to jobs where workers are exploited or mistreated in different ways and the platforms do not intervene in almost any way, due to the circumvention of the labor relationship. On the other hand, in these experiences, although not all safe working conditions are resolved and guaranteed, alternatives are proposed to achieve them.

The evaluation model of the Fairwork project proposes, in conjunction with the International Labor Organization, 5 minimum principles for fair work in location-based platforms (Fairwork, s.f.). These principles are Fair Pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management, Fair Representation. In a general analysis, SPCs have better solved the principles linked to representation and management, thanks to the development of collective governance structures and common ownership of the platform. In contrast, principles linked more directly to business models, such as pay and working conditions, are more problematic due to the market share occupied by each SPC and the fixed costs required to operate. Finally, the principle linked to contracts is directly influenced by national and local legislation, both in terms of the labor dimension, as well as, digital policies.

8. The Future of Solidarity Platform Cooperativism: Challenges and Opportunities in Latin America

In this section, we address the main challenges faced by Solidarity Platform Cooperatives in the region, based on information obtained from the desk research and fieldwork phases of this report (Sections 4.1 and 4.2). We focus on four key aspects. The first concerns scale beyond mere capital accumulation, emphasizing the importance of strengthening practices and networks aligned with cooperativism within a platform capitalism context. The second aspect relates to the elements involved in enabling cooperatives to reach digital proficiency levels that enhance their operations while maintaining cooperative values. The third aspect deals with sustainability, which includes the strategies and challenges cooperatives face in navigating and surviving in the market while ensuring fair pay and a supportive network for their employee-partners. Finally, we address institutional and public policy dimensions, highlighting that while there has historically been some institutional and policy development for the cooperative sector, there is a need to design public policies specifically for platform cooperativism, ensuring that the state plays a key role in its promotion and strengthening.

8.1 Scale: size, associativity and inter-cooperativism

Challenging the traditional view of scale as simply a measure of capital accumulation through network effects and data exploitation has led to a redefinition of its meaning. While size traditionally encompasses aspects like market presence, operational capacity, and geographical reach, it can also be seen in terms of the network size that SPCs are embedded in. Scaling, therefore, entails enhancing and expanding practices, experiences, and networks in ways that have the potential to reshape the power dynamics inherent in platform capitalism (Kasparian et al., 2021). The factors facilitating or impeding the scalability of cooperatives are diverse and non-uniform. As such, the concept of scale is best grasped by delving into the localized territorialization processes unique to each cooperative experience.

Recognizing the contextual nature of scale, innovative collaborative strategies for scaling up Latin American SPCs have emerged. These strategies encompass various approaches such as association and inter-cooperation, as well as cultivating strong relationships with other stakeholders within the cooperative ecosystem, including government bodies, universities, social movements, academics, cooperative federations, and NGOs, at both national and international levels (Kasparian, 2022c; Muñoz et al., 2023).

A prominent case of successful inter-cooperation in the region is exemplified by the Argentine Federation of Worker Cooperatives of Technology, Innovation, and Knowledge. FACTTIC showcases comprehensive and structured collaboration through networking platforms, regular assemblies, internal training initiatives, support for technological advancements, and knowledge-sharing dialogues, all of which serve to bolster existing cooperatives and foster the establishment of new ones. Conversely, Brazil stands out as a noteworthy example where collective advocacy efforts have translated into public policy frameworks supporting SPCs, a unique initiative in Latin America that positions SPCs within the policymaking realm.

8.2 Capabilities: technological infrastructure and committed technicians

The digitalization of SPCs faces significant challenges primarily stemming from limited access to resources and a competitive environment entrenched in market-oriented principles. The creation of custom proprietary platforms involves substantial costs that are often beyond the financial reach of cooperatives prioritizing the sustenance of their workforce and day-to-day operations. Building in-house technologies requires essential resources like skilled technicians, servers, web managers, and marketing teams, all of which come with associated expenses. While these resources can be procured from the market, the issue of sustainability remains a constant concern (see section below).

Securing the retention of technical talent poses a notable economic dilemma, given the competitive landscape of the technology sector and the global demand for specialized human capital. However, a viable solution emerges through collaboration and cooperation with other organizations or technological communities that are dedicated to nurturing and providing skilled individuals,

particularly technicians (Barbosa & Simeone, 2023). This approach has shown success in countries with strong traditions in free software, such as Ecuador and Argentina.

However, there are notable instances in the region where technology cooperatives, social movements, and federations have actively worked to bridge these disparities. These examples of digital cooperation (Cousin, 2021) offer encouraging insights into the potential scalability of SPCs and underscore the significance of innovative technological frameworks in envisioning alternative models of work.

8.3. Sustainability and funding

One of the most prominent challenges faced by SPCs is ensuring their sustainability. While these platforms differ in their social values and goals from other conventional platforms, they also aim to provide meaningful and equitable employment opportunities to their members. The work offered by SPCs is not merely any job; it is intended to be decent and rooted in democratic principles. Therefore, the central challenge is multifaceted: these cooperatives must navigate survival in the market while simultaneously guaranteeing fair pay and a supportive network for their employee-partners.

This challenge is intricately linked to factors such as size, collaboration, and inter-cooperativism in a pragmatic sense. It would be erroneous to evaluate a solidarity-based platform cooperative solely through the lens of traditional market metrics like market share or cost structures. Instead, SPCs exhibit a range of sustainability strategies that involve leveraging their core business activities alongside complementary resources (Aguirre, 2023). Notably, these cooperatives employ diverse yet mutually reinforcing income streams to sustain their operations:
1. Social marketing
2. Service diversification
3. Non-public support

As regards social marketing, certain SPCs have proactively endeavored to convey a crucial message emphasizing that their value proposition is rooted not in profit-seeking but in the provision of dignified employment opportunities for their members. This communication effort, whether deliberate or subconscious, is shaped by the identities and backgrounds of the cooperative's members, reflecting a broader ethos present in the SSE that emphasizes consumer engagement and fair-trade practices.

When it comes to service diversification, some SPCs have adopted a sustainability strategy that involves offering multiple services, enabling them to diversify their market participation and leverage their existing capabilities and expertise. For instance, while certain delivery oriented

SPCs may also provide guided cycling tours, others may offer pre-scheduled delivery services, thereby expanding beyond real-time delivery models.

Finally, non-public support, while less common, serves as a fundamental enabler for various initiatives. We have observed how social movements (e.g., in Brazil) or non-governmental organizations (e.g., in Ecuador and Colombia) provide vital support to SPCs through activities such as funding for infrastructure setup and maintenance, member training programs, and promotional and marketing assistance. Some SPCs have even emerged from within these supportive social entities, such as MTST[9] and UNTHA[10], fostering a symbiotic relationship between social causes and cooperative endeavors.

8.4. Public policy and institutional aspects

In some countries of the region, specific institutions have been established to promote, regulate, and support cooperatives at both national and subnational levels. Historically, cooperatives served as a unifying force for workers, farmers, and migrants long before they received formal recognition. The formal recognition of cooperatives as legitimate forms of work facilitated the enactment of comprehensive laws and the establishment of institutional structures and public policies. Initially, these public institutions were primarily focused on control and regulation rather than on promotion. However, cooperative movements and social advocacy efforts have influenced a shift in institutional frameworks toward policies designed to nurture and strengthen these cooperative structures within a broader strategy to enhance national productivity, encompassing the popular and solidarity economy sector (Correa, 2022).

One challenge in the region is the advancement of specific public policies targeted at supporting SPCs across multiple dimensions, including cooperative formation and resources for business planning. Additionally, these policies should consider strategies and subsidies for scaling up and technological support for infrastructure development and tool creation. In the region, countries like Brazil and Mexico exemplify approaches to overcoming these challenges. In Brazil, the introduction of the first public policy for platform cooperatives involved a diverse range of stakeholders, including cooperatives, social movement members, and academics. In Mexico, the governing body for the Popular and Solidarity Economy recognizes platform cooperativism at an institutional level and deploys initiatives in collaboration with academia and cooperatives to promote it as an economic and social alternative.

8.5. Building Fairwork

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[9] In Portuguese: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto. In English: Without Home Workers Movement
[10] In Spanish: Unión de Trabajadoras Remuneradas del Hogar y Afines. In English: Home and related Workers Union.

While SPCs face all these challenges, a less common issue also needs attention: how to ensure fair standards related to the work performed by its members. Fair standards related to aspects such as pay, conditions and management should be discussed from the start and monitored to comprehend how these commitments and rules are being followed. The study has found many difficulties associated to the issues above. However, the concerns about fairness in the work conditions management should also be considered.

Working conditions are closely related to business models, as well as to the legislation and policies of each country. In that sense, this discussion has an inherently political aspect and not only a technical one in terms of technology or business management. To override the political dimension and the claims for workers' rights is a key aspect, which must be approached in a contextual way, which is why it was not explored in depth in this study, but which should guide future theoretical, methodological and political reflections.

Conclusions

The vast array of digital platforms, spanning from prevalent corporate models to the diverse cooperative platforms present in Latin America, underscores an overarching principle that resonates with the ethos of the Fairwork project: an alternative platform economy is viable. Conceptually, there is an imperative for research to delve into the historical underpinnings, evolutionary paths, key characteristics, and obstacles within what is emerging as solidarity platform cooperatives in the region. These insights are crucial in Latin America, offering a lens to comprehend our distinctive approaches to mitigating the negative impacts of the platform economy. While insights from North America and Europe have enriched this discourse, such as the principles of cooperative platforms or the differences with the corporative platform economy, they cannot be blindly transposed as universal frameworks. This report endeavors to bridge this gap by emphasizing identity, ownership, governance structures, hybrid business models, and technological facets as defining aspects of these nascent initiatives. It also underscores the challenges of scale, technological capacity, and sustainability that these ventures encounter. We studied a group of SPC from Latin America, but other regions like Africa, Asia and Oceania must also be explored in order to understand the particularity of that regions. This highlights the necessity to develop a research agenda focused in deepen the national trends, the critical dimensions, new experiences and comparative studies.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize the predominant focus of research on platform cooperativism in the Global North and the limited presence of regional organizations dedicated to documenting such initiatives. This leads to methodological hurdles, as regional endeavors are inadequately represented in databases and mapping tools maintained by prominent organizations. This scarcity can create the misconception that these initiatives are non-existent or insignificant,

pointing to the need for enhanced visibility and recognition of regional efforts in fostering alternative platform economies.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: List of cooperative platforms by country

Country	Platform
Argentina	ALT
Argentina	Animus
Argentina	Bantics
Argentina	Bitson
Argentina	Cambá
Argentina	caracol.ar
Argentina	Chasqui
Argentina	Clementina
Argentina	Código Libre Coop
Argentina	Colectivo Libre Coop+Tics
Argentina	CoodeSoft
Argentina	CoopCycle
Argentina	Coprinf
Argentina	Devecoop
Argentina	El Maizal
Argentina	Equality
Argentina	Eryx
Argentina	ESSApp
Argentina	Fiqus
Argentina	Gaia
Argentina	Gcoop
Argentina	Geneos
Argentina	Gestara
Argentina	it10
Argentina	Nayra
Argentina	redjar
Argentina	Rook
Argentina	SLAM
Argentina	Sutty
Argentina	tecso
Argentina	tera
Argentina	unixono
Argentina	Wow

Argentina	TRU
Argentina	Cooperar la comunicación
Argentina	Comercio y Justicia
Argentina	LU3 - Olas
Argentina	FM Cooperativa
Argentina	Caleidoscopio
Argentina	EcoDías
Argentina	El Café Diario
Argentina	Diario Tortuga
Argentina	Agrios
Argentina	Radio Gran Buenos Aires
Argentina	anSOL
Argentina	El Diario (Córdoba)
Argentina	Revista MU/ Radio Lavaca
Argentina	La Nueva Mañana
Argentina	El Megáfono
Argentina	El Independiente
Argentina	El Diario de la Región
Argentina	Redacción Rosario
Argentina	La Brújula
Argentina	Manifiesta - Cooperativa de Comunicación Feminista
Argentina	Comunicación de Kuwait
Argentina	Abuela
Argentina	Muro de Comunicación
Argentina	Mucha siesta
Argentina	En Tránsito FM
Argentina	El Mensajero Diario
Argentina	Infonoticias
Argentina	La Ciudad
Argentina	Legumbres
Brazil	Colaborativa platform
Brazil	Negócios Coop
Brazil	COOMAPPA
Brazil	Contrate quem luta
Brazil	Señoritas Courier
Brazil	Coopertaxi BH
Brazil	Ciclos - Cooperativa de Infraestrutura, Consumo e Serviço do Brasil
Brazil	Sindicato e Organização das Cooperativas no Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Brazil	Coopersystem

Brazil	Tribune Hoy
Brazil	Positive News
Brazil	Decastories
Brazil	La Otra Fruta
Brazil	PopSoluciones
Brazil	Noticias Solidarias
Brazil	Yo Comunico
Brazil	Pedal Express
Brazil	Pedala Porto
Brazil	Enigma
Brazil	ContratArte
Brazil	UNIJAZZ BRASIL
Brazil	Cooperativa de Periodistas de Pernambuco
Chile	Por La Chita
Chile	Radio Cooperativa
Colombia	Imalimpia
Colombia	Turired
Costa Rica	Somos CR
Costa Rica	Sula Batsu
Ecuador	Asoclim
Ecuador	Digitaxi
El Salvador	DIario Co Latino
Mexico	Dignas
Mexico	SIRApps Unión Mexicana de Bicimensajeros por Aplicación
Mexico	Two Wheel Collective
Mexico	TIG Bicimensajería
Mexico	Bicientrega
Mexico	TLOK
Mexico	Envici
Mexico	Libelubike
Mexico	Comunidad y Biodiversidad (COBI)
Mexico	PescaData
Mexico	Vientos
Mexico	La Cooperativa Audiovisual
Mexico	La Coperacha
Peru	Tres I Cooperativa de plataforma
Uruguay	CUDECOOP
Uruguay	La Diaria

Uruguay	Escapatoria

Annex 2. List of non-platform related organizations

Name
International Cooperative Alliance (Alianza Cooperativa Internacional ACI)
Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives OCB
Argentinian Federation of Technology, Innovation and Knowledge Cooperatives (Federación Argentina de Cooperativas de Trabajo de Tecnología, Innovación y Conocimiento FACTTIC)
Intercooperative flow of work (Flujo Intercooperativo de Trabajo FIT)
International Cooperative Entrepreneurship Think Tank ICETT
Platform of Cooperatives of the Americas for Development (Plataforma de Cooperativas de las Américas para el Desarrollo PCAD)
Platform cooperativism consortium
PCC Solidarity Collboratory
Cooperativism Observatory (Observatorio del cooperativismo)
Technology Core (Nucleo de Tecnologia)
DigiLabour
Universidade Federal do Paraná
Universidad Fundepos
Mondragon Team Academy Puebla
IBERO Puebla
Federal Institute of Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Norte (Instituto federal de ciencia e tecnologia do Rio Grande do Norte IFRS)
Argentine Cooperative Association (Asociación de Cooperativas Argentinas ACA)
CONFECOOP
Uruguayan Confederation of Cooperative Entities (Confederación Uruguaya de Entidades Cooperativas)
The Paraguayan Confederation of Cooperatives (La Confederación Paraguaya de Cooperativas – CONPACOOP)
Guatemalan Confederation of Cooperative Federations (Confederación Guatemalteca de Federaciones Cooperativas – Confecoop)
National Institute for Cooperative Development (Instituto Nacional de Fomento Cooperativo)
National Council of Cooperatives (Consejo Nacional de Cooperativas – Conacoop)
Colombian Association of Cooperatives (Asociación Colombiana de Cooperativas – ASCOOP)
Foundation CRE (Fundación CRE)
Cooperative Confederation of the Republic of Argentina (Confederación Cooperativa de la República de Argentina)
ASOCOOPH
CARE