

THE POTENTIAL FOR PLATFORM COOPERATIVES IN THE MONDRAGON ECOSYSTEM

A Report by

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About the Institute for Digital Cooperative Economy

The Institute for the Cooperative Digital Economy (ICDE) is the research division of the Platform Cooperativism Consortium. Established in 2019, its research covers the emerging cooperative digital economy, which is a relatively unexplored domain in fields like anthropology, political science, sociology, history, law, and economics. The cooperative digital economy is rapidly expanding and is closely linked to labor and cooperative studies. The ICDE's work also focuses on finance, entrepreneurship, and organizational studies in business schools, as well as governance and corporate structure, which are critical subjects in law schools.

At the ICDE, we recognize that scholars, technologists, artists, community organizers, and cooperators equally contribute valuable insights to the development of a more just and equitable digital economy. Therefore, the Institute's mission is to provide applied and theoretical knowledge, education, and policy analysis to bridge the research gaps in the emerging cooperative digital economy. Learn more at <https://platform.coop>

1.

INTRODUCTION

The Mondragon Valley in the Basque Country¹ is a small, and resilient community located in the region of Debagoiena with a surface² area of 342 km² and a density of 180 inhabitants/km², made up of several adjoining towns in the Deba river valley. The union ties binding this region are deeply intertwined creating a solid amalgam that goes beyond political, commercial or institutional relations. This Valley, especially the town of Mondragon, is especially known for being the cradle of the Mondragon Cooperative Movement with the Mondragon Corporation³ at its head.

What you find in Mondragon is not a large conglomerate of companies—a society characterized by a deep-rooted culture of work and effort, social cohesion and homogeneity in lifestyles and socio-economic conditions, a very marked cultural and linguistic identity, a clear link to the territory, a strongly industrialized rural-urban community, that does not forget its rural origins and a people satisfied with their achievements, accustomed to fighting in hostile conditions and suspicious of what is foreign or novel until it proves to be trustworthy.

This story may seem insignificant, but given the current situation of disappointment⁴ with the prevailing capitalist economic system, a renewed emphasis has been placed on this small town of Mondragon, which has proven to be a fairer, more responsible, balanced, and sustainable system. There are many people and institutions that come⁵ to Mondragon to get to know its experience up close and unravel its keys to success.⁶

Mondragon is the world's largest worker cooperative network and has contributed significantly to social equality in its geographical area of operation, the province of Gipuzkoa. According to Bloomberg, "Gipuzkoa had a lower Gini coefficient — a measure of inequality — than Finland and Norway. The lower the figure, the smaller the differences in income distribution."⁷

In this report, we explore how such a traditional cooperative movement, with a long history and solid foundation, can embrace the new paradigm of digital cooperatives. As a result of the new digital and shared economy trends, we need to rethink the value that cooperatives are discovering and how a context like Mondragon's can be supported in its future growth strategy.

This report is structured into three sections, starting with a description of the Mondragon cooperative model and its innovative ecosystem, which has survived and grown for almost 70 years in spite of adverse business

conditions, which is at the forefront of defending democratic ownership and equality while competing under the same rules of the game. It is creating jobs, advancing its workers' human and professional development, and developing its social environment. The second section analyzes the new paradigm of cooperative platforms, their definition, typology, current and future challenges, and their relevance to Mondragon and the Basque Country. Examining the main actions taken in this regard and in collaboration with some tractor agents and new digital entrepreneurs. The third section involves the incubation, growth, and consolidation of Basque platform cooperatives, born in Mondragon and incubated within the Mondragon Team Academy (MTA)⁸ ecosystem, a 'team-entrepreneurship' unit at Mondragon Unibertsitatea and also an international community of more than 2,500 'team-entrepreneurs' worldwide. With this incubation process, cooperative values are promoted and limitations of digital collaborative economies are avoided.

Overview:

A. The Mondragon cooperative model and its ecosystem

1. Mondragon: characteristics, keys to success and challenges
2. Innovation and entrepreneurship Ecosystem in Mondragon
3. How does Mondragon need to re-invent itself?

B. Mondragon and cooperative platforms

4. The new paradigm of Platform Cooperatives
5. Needs and latent challenges of platform cooperatives
6. Some initiatives implemented in the regional and national context

C. Roadmap for the incubation of platform cooperatives within Mondragon

7. Strategical vectors for platform co-ops promotion
8. Learning by doing: a proposal for action
9. Conclusions and future lines

2.

MONDRAGON:
CHARACTERISTICS,
KEYS TO SUCCESS
AND CHALLENGES

Many publications and books have been written about the Mondragon miracle⁹, its results¹⁰, characteristics¹¹, keys¹², and weaknesses¹³. I will summarize the most relevant ones below.

A single origin, a cohesive leader, and clear values

In 1941, the Catholic priest J.M. Arizmendiarieta arrived in Mondragon, in the midst of the Spanish post-war with revolutionary ideas about solidarity and mutual work, linking concepts such as social justice and retributive balance. He was particularly focused on the well-being of the individual and the community, and their well-being. His ideas inspired courage in a group of young pioneers, who founded the first cooperative company in Mondragon. It was not just a matter of surviving the crisis, but also of coming up with a self-governed model that would create strong, resilient companies ready to be passed on to the next generation.

“One of our characteristics has been the practical sense of knowing how to act in a field of possibilities without renouncing our ideals. It has been possible to unite and take advantage of the opportunities that are in the common interest”. J.M. Arizmendiarieta ¹⁴

Values and principles in practice

Mondragon cooperatives follow a series of corporate principles and values aligned with the International Cooperative Alliance. ICA's seven cooperative principles unite, represent, and serve cooperatives worldwide. What is interesting is not that these principles are defined and put in writing, but that there is a genuine will ¹⁵ to put them into practice, in an authentic way. “Speak little and do a lot” is the unspoken motto at Mondragon that is part of its business culture.

“Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others” ¹⁶

Meaningful figures, ambition, and perseverance¹⁷

Organizationally, MONDRAGON is a network of over 240 businesses, 83 of which are cooperatives, with a total of 68,743 employees. The workforce is divided into Industry, Retail, Finance, and Knowledge, with 44.1% based in the Basque Country, 40.9% elsewhere in Spain, and 15% abroad. It operates throughout the world, with 141 production plants in 37 countries, commercial business in 53, and sales in more than 150 countries. The combined turnover in 2021 was €9,617 million, with a third of sales made

abroad. Mondragon invested €309 million in 2021 and has 370 patent families, and 12 R&D centers. In the same year, they invested €165 million in R&D.¹⁸

Future challenges

However, not everything is easy in the cooperative paradise.¹⁹ The current environment and its evolution require cooperatives to adapt quickly and make decisions that are not always consistent with their principles and values. Questions such as: how can we continue to live with cooperative values and transmit them to the new generations influenced by an egotistical and capitalist worldview? How can we continue generating quality employment? How can we grow internationally in non-cooperative environments? How can we survive in an economic environment that changes, is hostile and speaks a capitalist language?²⁰ How can we adapt to new ways of doing business in the digital age? How can we change without ceasing to be coherent with cooperative principles, and pragmatic?

“The co-op needs to be rebuilt and reviewed every day.”

J.M. Arizmendiarieta ²¹

3.

INNOVATION AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
ECOSYSTEM AT
MONDRAGON

From a Local Network to a Regional and International Ecosystem

Solidarity through inter-cooperation, and social responsibility through mutual support were the seeds of the first network of companies that were created in Mondragon.

Currently, Mondragon has created an ecosystem around itself that nourishes its base cooperatives. This innovation ecosystem includes: these elements: companies, research centers, universities, and financial support entities. It, therefore, constitutes what is called 'M4Future,' the corporate innovation system, where the agents making up the group interact with the necessary outside-agents to generate innovations within the Mondragon Corporation. The model encourages participation and relationships between the agents involved in different areas, applying three sides of the Mondragon 'triangle of knowledge:' Business, Research & Technology, and Higher Education ²².

Business internal agents

Mondragon incorporates within its organization cooperatives and companies with a presence in the financial, retail, and industrial areas, with commercial and production offices around the world. As supportive structures, Mondragon has a 'Finance' area made of a credit union Caja Laboral (Laboral Kutxa) ²³, and a 'Social Welfare Body' Lagun Aro²⁴. The 'Retail Area' consists of the Eroski²⁵ distribution group and the Erkop Group, which focuses on livestock farming, horticulture, and group catering. The 'Industry Area' includes products and services in the consumer goods, equipment, industrial parts, construction, and business services sectors. It consists of a group of cooperatives that is organized into 11 divisions: Industrial Automation, CHP Automotive, CM Automotive, Components, Construction, Vertical Transport, Equipment, Engineering and Services, Machine Tools, Industrial Systems, and Tooling & Systems. Also, Mondragon has established two industrial parks overseas, located in China (Kunshan) and India (Pune) respectively. The aim is to promote, strengthen and support the strategic implementation of Mondragon cooperatives in both these countries.

Higher education internal agents

Mondragon has its own university²⁶, a 'Management and Corporate Development Center,' and 3 cooperative schools. They are characterized by the formal and continuous training they offer, which are adapted to companies and institutions within an international context.

Research and technology internal agents

Mondragon also has a network of 4 Technological centers (the oldest ones are Ideko²⁷ and Ikerlan²⁸) and 10 Business R&D units that focus on research in fields that are strategic to the business sector.

Support agents

Based on a collaborative innovation model, Mondragon has a structure of corporate support agents who work together to create a critical research mass and leverage financial resources and infrastructures that will boost collaboration between research centers, education centers, and companies. Some of these agents are corporate offices abroad, innovation parks, business incubators, and a Center for the Promotion²⁹ of new activities, whose main objective is to foster and stimulate an open and collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystem, that boosts and displays entrepreneurial activity at all levels of Mondragon. This goal is achieved through the generation of new business opportunities, which are closely promoted and accelerated. Mondragon also has 8 social foundations, including Mundukide³⁰, a cooperative cooperation project involving communities in developing countries, sharing experiences, resources, and cooperative know-how in order to boost their self-management and integral development.

Innovation financing

The cooperatives contribute 10 percent of their gross profit to an Education, Training and Promotion Fund. Part of this Fund is earmarked for the Education and Inter-Cooperative Promotion Fund (FEPI in Spanish). Sixty percent of the FEPI is allocated to training (Mondragon University and other schools) while the remaining 40 percent is used to fund Research and Development projects. Finally, the Central Inter-Cooperation Fund is used for funding new business initiatives and activities.

In addition to these Funds, Mondragon³¹ has a financial network that backs new business initiatives and innovative undertakings. Apart from its bank, Laboral Kutxa, Mondragon has three venture capital companies—Mondragon Investments, Mondragon Foundation, and Mondragon Promotion. Both the bank and the venture capital companies have the backing of the Basque Government, which holds an interest in their share capital.

External agents

Mondragon also collaborates with public institutions, investors, and regulating bodies to obtain the resources necessary to develop its innovation

strategy. Mondragon is a member of associations, technological alliances, foundations, agencies, technology platforms, research agents, and clusters in the areas of research and innovation, and this helps to create a work network and enhance the concept of 'open innovation.'

The Corporation also participates in the bodies of the Chambers of Commerce, in the sectoral associations of the Basque Country and Spain, in the sectoral clusters, and in most of the professional associations in force. It also participates in the governing bodies of the Federation of Cooperatives of the Basque Country and Spain, as well as in other sectoral federations and different bodies of the social economy. Mondragon is active in sectoral and general forums organized by the different public administrations at all levels, helping to define cooperative Basque legislation to promote new cooperatives.

Mondragon works also to promote cooperative principles at an international level, as in the case of the union co-op model³² co-designed for the United Steelworkers to create worker cooperatives in the United States. In the UK, Mondragon has been supporting the Preston model's cooperative mission³³ to develop a cooperative ecosystem, and providing a roadmap to put this learning into action.

4.

HOW CAN
MONDRAGON
REINVENT
ITSELF IN
THE DIGITAL
ECONOMY?

Mondragon's Current Challenges and Threats

Mature business models

Despite significant efforts, most Mondragon companies are engaged in industrial businesses that date back to the 1970s. Competences must still be acquired in new technologies and new markets, and new forward-looking companies must be developed.

Exploring new geographical areas for purchasing, selling, and manufacturing

The markets are becoming saturated, making it necessary to seek new ways to expand. Along with its 'Corporate Promotion Center,' Mondragon has also initiated a search for new products, activities, and businesses.

Globalization and multi-localization

With the rise of new economies and the threats and opportunities posed by changes in the rules of international trade, Mondragon has, since the 1990s, been pursuing a clear internationalization strategy involving the acquisition and incorporation of subsidiaries abroad. In 2021 Mondragon had 132 production plants in 37 countries, commercial business in 53 countries, and sales in more than 150 countries. Moreover, 43.1% of Mondragon workers are based in the Basque Country, 38.4% in the rest of Spain, and 18.5% abroad.

This means that today, Mondragon comprises an amalgam of cooperative and non-cooperative companies taking a variety of legal forms, a situation that poses two main questions: (1) How can Mondragon maintain a cooperative philosophy of member involvement and participation in the new companies which, due to local legislation, cannot become cooperatives?; and (2) How can Mondragon remain consistent with the cooperative principles that call for equality and social responsibility in local development and job creation abroad, without thereby hindering the Basque cooperatives associated with these new companies?

Regenerating the spirit of cooperation, participation, and collaboration

Recent years have seen a crisis in the adoption and maintenance of the cooperative's foundational values. Society's new values based on individual gain are causing the pursuit of the common good and social equality to fall by the wayside. Mondragon must therefore address the question of how to create modern cooperatives that meet the criteria of economic efficiency without losing their essential characteristics based on people's well-being and social development.

Mondragon, however, has many latent capabilities that can enable it to undertake innovative projects in the future. These include:

Two-in-One: Comparing Large and Small

Large national or multinational companies are of increasing importance in our globalized economy. At the same time, however, because of structural traits such as the ability to adapt, small and medium-sized firms are showing that they are better able to undertake innovation and modernization processes. This raises a number of questions. Can the advantages of both sizes of companies be combined? Are corporations or local groups bringing SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and large companies together under central management as a way of responding to this contradiction? Within Mondragon, both diversity and homogeneity live side by side, which can enable the corporation to take the best advantage of being both large and small at the same time.

Shared knowledge base and complementarity

In spite of the difficulty of integrating interests, needs, and actions, Mondragon strives to establish transparent relations among its cooperatives that facilitate the exchange or transfer of knowledge, technology, experience, and people – in short, competencies that will foster the corporation's homogeneous growth. As an example, Mondragon can identify individuals with technical competencies in various technological areas within a group, so that it can compile a very comprehensive technological database that can be used by any co-op seeking to strengthen its technological capabilities. The constant, direct relations between Mondragon's companies, universities, engineering firms, and technological research centers also encourage knowledge sharing. Such liaising is an important source of innovation for the Mondragon industrial cooperatives.

Synergies and inter-cooperation

The origins of Mondragon are grounded in the interrelations and inter-cooperation of its members. Initiatives such as the creation of supra-structure entities, the unification of internal commitments and cultures through shared management models, converging autonomies, and compatible planning systems and management tools help to ensure this integration.

Worker participation and social commitment of Mondragon

Workers in a cooperative are encouraged to contribute value to the company since they are owner members who can make decisions about their jobs. The new trend towards knowledge workers and its direct application in the organizational structure of the Mondragon cooperatives is one of

the most highly esteemed work practices within the group. A clear example of this is the distribution group Eroski, which consists of 1,800 supermarkets operating under 3 different legal formulas: cooperatives with approximately 8,000 members, companies under the legal form GESPA where about 3,000 workers have the same rights and attributions as in a conventional cooperative, and capital companies (limited companies) with about 20,000 employees. Today this group is undertaking an ambitious expansion that involves converting all its associated companies into cooperatives, and all or most of its employees into members with all the rights and obligations that entails.

Organizational innovation at Mondragon

The structure and way of operating at Mondragon constitute in themselves an organizational innovation. An example of how the corporation operates in an effective network is the fact that Mondragon coordinates over 200 independent, autonomous entities within a single body that acts as the facilitator, respecting the decision power of the members of each cooperative. In recent years, Mondragon companies have become increasingly aware of the potential inherent in organizational innovations linked to technological innovations, and for example have undertaken numerous initiatives in which the organizational structure is comprised of self-managed groups, each free to set goals, acquire resources and evaluate results.

Cooperative culture

This distinctive trait of Mondragon is of special importance to entrepreneurship and innovation since people constitute the core of management, and are the *raison d'être* and driving force behind the company. Such motivation means that the cooperatives have people who are aware and committed to the common good.

In summary, Mondragon needs to take a different look at the creation of value in its businesses, and the way it interacts with its cooperative members, and all its stakeholders. It has a great asset—a living ecosystem that would allow it to carry out multiple experiments; experiences that would refresh its current local and global impact, and its adaptation to current global and social trends that lead to greater sustainability and social, business, and environmental responsibility. It cannot limit future actions with what it has done up to now.

In this section, I start with discussing the digital economy, as it is a reality

5.

THE NEW
PARADIGM
OF PLATFORM
COOPERATIVES

that has quickly emerged and has changed the rules of the global business ecosystem. According to Nick Srnicek in his book *Platform Capitalism*, “the digital economy refers to those businesses that increasingly rely upon information technology, data, and the internet for their business models. This is an area that cuts across traditional sectors – including manufacturing, services, transportation, mining, and telecommunications – and is in fact becoming essential to much of the economy today.”³⁴

The digital economy is an area with exponential growth, dynamic, and in constant search for innovation that is guiding commercial transactions, business relationships, and even social and community ties. It is based on the management of huge amounts of information, key data in the development of the economic activity, as Srnicek points out: “they educate and give competitive advantage to algorithms; they enable the coordination and outsourcing of workers; they allow for the optimization and flexibility of productive processes; they make possible the transformation of low-margin goods into high-margin services; and data analysis is itself generative of data, in a virtuous cycle.”³⁵ Data has become the currency of exchange, the key resource to control the basic raw material of a new economy.

This is the origin of the platforms—as a new more efficient business model to handle data, extract it, analyze it, use it quickly, as well as to monopolize it. Now we can see numerous examples of companies incorporating platforms, such as technology companies (Google, Facebook, and Amazon), dynamic start-ups (Uber, Airbnb), industrial leaders (GE, Siemens), and agricultural powerhouses (John Deere, Monsanto). Srnicek states that Uber, as the platform for taxis, draws on traffic data and the activities of drivers and riders, besides shifting the taxi industry into a digital form. Facebook, as the platform for social networking, brings in a variety of intimate social interactions that can then be recorded. And, as more and more industries move their interactions online more and more businesses will be subject to platform development. The platforms are therefore not only internet-based digital companies, they can operate anywhere, at any time, and among all the economic agents that interact digitally.

“Platforms are therefore digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They are intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects. They provide the basic infrastructure to mediate between different groups” Nick Srnicek³⁶

Platform Features

The rapid growth of platforms is due to several features that have pushed the boundaries of the traditional economy. They are intermediary agents, hence the investment in infrastructure, resources, marginal costs, and personnel are reduced. This leads to greater flexibility in both their cost structure and their strategy for attracting new users. Its growth and consolidation are due to the “network effects,” produced by the volume of users using the platform. The more users there are, the more recognized, valuable, and useful the platform will be, as can be observed on platforms like Facebook, Uber, or LinkedIn.

The nature of the platforms also leads to the display of other less flattering characteristics, such as monopoly tendencies, unfair or advantageous competition at the price level with other traditional businesses, and the design of an architecture that governs the interactions between users and the rules of development of new products and services linked to the platform. For example, Uber, despite presenting itself as an empty vessel for market forces, shapes the appearance of a market. It predicts where the demand for drivers will be and raises surge prices in advance of actual demand, while also creating phantom cabs to give an illusion of greater supply³⁷.

The platforms have received multiple criticisms, and generated fears and social alarm in recent years, due to the inequalities that some of these platforms have generated, such as the lack of secure jobs, minimum wage, safety, health insurance, and pension funds³⁸.

At the Platform Cooperativism conference, John Duda stated that:

“The ownership of the institutions that we depend on to live, to eat, to work is increasingly concentrated. Without democratizing our economy, we will just not have the kind of society that we want to have, or that we claim to have, we are just not going to be a democracy. The Internet is certainly not helping! It is fueled by short-term thinking, corporate profits; it is directed by venture capital and it’s contributing to the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands... We need to reverse that trend”³⁹

Besides this social awareness, the global crisis recently experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought deeper challenges and inequalities, lacking an offering of decent and responsible jobs, triggered by the need for greater flexibility to service delivery, operations execution,

personnel hiring, and labor productivity.⁴⁰ As Scholz stated, “none of these issues can be addressed effectively until we reinvigorate solidarity, change ownership, and introduce democratic governance”.⁴¹

Platform Cooperatives: A New Paradigm

Platform cooperatives have emerged as an alternative to digital labor platforms, introducing cooperative principles such as solidarity, ownership, and shared governance in this context. According to the Platform Cooperatives Consortium PCC, platform cooperatives are:

“Businesses that use a website, mobile app, or protocol to sell goods or services. They rely on democratic decision-making and shared ownership of the platform by workers and users. Today, this movement strengthens the backbone for workers to sustain themselves during difficult times while also keeping the idea of participatory democracy alive”⁴²

Among the differences between platform co-ops and traditional businesses, Scholz points out: “first, they’re democratically owned and controlled by their members. Second, they’re focused on providing social and environmental benefits as well as profits. And third, they use technology, often open source, to connect customers and producers directly, cutting out the middleman”⁴³.

The concept of platform cooperatives focuses on changing the technological approach of current platforms, together with a different ownership model, where people are more important than technology or concentrated power. The second axis of change is solidarity and placing the focus on the people who make up the workforce, which until now has been anonymous. Platforms can be owned and operated by inventive unions, cities, and various other forms of cooperatives, everything from multi-stakeholder and worker-owned co-ops to producer-owned platform cooperatives. Finally, platform cooperatives are changing the focus on cost reduction, efficiency, and innovation as a search for economic benefits to seek the good of all, the well-being of the many instead of the benefit of the few.

In a discussion paper, the International Co-operative Alliance ICA, an independent association that unites, represents, and serves cooperatives worldwide, concluded that key characteristics of emerging platform cooperatives appear to be that they combine the participatory features of network interaction with the democratic rule bases of collective control.

ICA draws a working definition proposal for platform cooperatives, stating that they⁴⁴:

- Are participative,
- Are networked,
- Have a clear end-use,
- Provide tangible member benefit,
- Are democratically controlled, and
- Create or exchange value.

In November 2017, a resolution calling on cooperatives to explore the potential of platform co-ops was passed at the General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance in Malaysia. The resolution indicated that

“a new generation of businesses are emerging online, and we are concerned that the extraordinary potential for cooperative models rooted in participation and equality is not being realised because of a narrow focus in these markets on investor-led models of business. We applaud pioneers of democratic business in digital markets, including emerging models of platform co-operatives operating in line with core international values and principles. We encourage and welcome efforts by cooperatives actively to support the risk-taking of this new generation of co-operative entrepreneurs, through information sharing, promotion and appropriate finance and business partnerships.”⁴⁵

Therefore, platform cooperatives stand as a new paradigm that promises to be a sustainable alternative to current digital platforms under capital principles and that is recently receiving multiple supports from various social and institutional actors of cooperatives worldwide.

Case Studies

In recent years, platform cooperatives have also experienced rapid growth. Different types of business models and governance structures have been adopted by companies across a wide range of industries. There is a whole field of research rich in real experiences, growth catalysts, good and bad practices, social and community results, and the impact created. Platform co-ops that have gained market share include the following:

Fairmondo

Creation date: 2012

Origin: Germany

Sector: E-commerce, global online marketplace - owned by its local users

Website: <https://www.fairmondo.de/>

Alternative to: eBay, Amazon, Google.

Results: It offers over 2 million products, including a largely complete range in the section of German-language books and a wide variety of high-quality, fair-trade, and sustainably produced products throughout most categories. It has funded itself through a series of successful crowd-funding campaigns. Over 2000 members have invested about € 600,000 in shares. To scale globally, the Fairmondo team plans to create an international network of country-based co-ops feeding into the Fairmondo platform.

Up&Go

Creation date: 2017

Origin: USA

Sector: on-demand cleaning services booking platform, Up & Go is cooperatively owned by professional home cleaners. many of whom are immigrant women from Latin America

Website: <https://www.upandgo.coop/>

Alternative to: TaskRabbit, Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT)

Results: 5 percent of revenue from the cooperatives go back into the maintenance of the Up&Go booking platform with the other 95 percent going to worker-owners.

Stocksy United

Creation date: 2013

Origin: Canada

Sector: art-forward, royalty-free stock photo + video agency where contributing photographers are also owners.

Website:

Alternative to: Shutterstock, iStock, Getty.

Results: Contributing Stocksy photographers receive 50% of a Standard License Purchase and 75% of an Extended License Purchase. Every Stocksy contributor receives a share of the company.

Stocksy has paid out over \$20 million to their nearly 1,000 artists during the period from 2013 to 2017.

CoopCycle

Creation date: 2017

Origin: France

Sector: Bike delivery riders.

Website: <https://coopcycle.org/en/>

Alternative to: Justeat, Deliveroo.

Results: CoopCycle is a federation of bike delivery co-ops. Governed democratically by coops, it enables them to stand united and reduce their costs thanks to resource pooling. It creates a strong bargaining power to protect the biker's rights. Decisions are made democratically by the local cooperatives. Coopcycle has expanded to more than 60 collectives in 12 European countries. CoopCycle has an economic model of federated growth and progressively decentralized governance. Each local cooperative around the world may mutualize according to its income (2% of its added value) and, with that, can benefit from CoopCycle's resources: brand, platform software, smartphone app, management models, international support networks, etc.

The Drivers Cooperative

Creation date: 2020

Origin: USA

Sector: Driver-owned ride-hailing cooperative in New York City. Drivers make more on each trip, all profits go back to drivers, and drivers have democratic control over the decisions that affect their lives.

Website: <https://drivers.coop/>

Alternative to: Uber, Lyft

Results: Drivers earn more on each trip—8 to 10% more than other platforms because it takes a smaller commission—and all profits go back to the drivers in the form of annual dividends, based on how much labor they contribute. The Drivers Cooperative takes a 15% commission for operating costs, which go toward driver onboarding, licensing, customer service, engineering, etc.

Categories of Digital Cooperative Projects

To understand how a platform can be cooperative and to distinguish the level of cooperative principles engagement of these new business initiatives, ICA has developed a categorization, based on the work of the Internet of Ownership and Platform Cooperativism Consortium.⁴⁶ This serves the need to differentiate cooperatives and other organizations active in this sphere. Categories are defined as:

- *Platform co-ops* – primarily online platforms and digital businesses that deliver their goods and services through the internet. Examples include Stocksy United, CoopCycle, and Fairmondo.
- *Co-op run platform* – where the platform isn't the primary mode of organization of a cooperative (for example, through which ownership and governance flow) but where value is added to the cooperative. Examples include The CoMetrics, Digicoop, Loomio, Co-op Cabs, The Drivers Cooperative, Up & Go, and Bank of the Commons.
- *Shared platform* – A platform is used collaboratively, often in adherence to principles of open source software, but where ownership and control are not democratic. Examples include Open Collective, ScholarlyHub, GNU Social.
- *Supporter* - Organisations that work to develop and/or promote platform cooperatives. Examples include National Co-operative Business Association, Co-operatives UK, Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada, Cooperative Educators Network, Domains.coop, and the National Centre for Employee Ownership

The prospect of platform cooperatives within Mondragon

Mondragon cooperatives, like the rest of the companies competing in current markets, have business models that are not adapted to the new collaborative economy, to the use and extraction of data and information as raw material for their operations. They are still focused on producing goods in a factory where much of the data is lost (even despite new trends like Industry 4.0), selling them, and learning little or nothing about the final consumer and how the product is being used. Although the global logistics network has contributed a lot to information tracking, it still needs to be integrated with the rest of the business and strategic decision processes.

The collaborative economy is a rapidly growing phenomenon that requires a response, a position, and a joint effort to lay the foundations for some-

thing truly cooperative. As early as 2012, a report by Co-operatives UK argued that:

“The informal information economy is open and global. It is driven by interest and enthusiasm rather than money. The bulk of its traffic is free. It is taking time to digest the implications of these changes, and for those involved to work out what rules are necessary to govern behaviour. Some have seen it as a new form of the commons, and looked at codes of behaviour that have been developed by those using common land or fishing grounds. But this informal economy is more than sharing a common resource, for with the web the resource is unlimited. It is a site for relationships, and where joint projects are involved, it requires the kind of qualities found in those pioneer communities where everyone worked together to raise the roof of a home. It is growing with the speed and diversity of a tropical forest. It is informal and astonishingly inventive. It shares many of the same values and practices of formal co-operatives, and opens up numerous possibilities for a meshing between them”⁴⁷

The cooperatives in Mondragon have a lot to contribute to this global movement of cooperativization of online platforms and have a lot to learn from new technologies and their boosting of new business models adapted to the current economic-social context.

Aside from all these issues, a current social trend involves the search for a new meaning to work by the next generation. Phenomena such as the great resignation show that there is a value foundational problem, that distance young people from inherited economic and business structures.⁴⁸ The cooperative movement in its traditional form is often seen as irrelevant or old-fashioned for these younger generations, but those of us who are involved in a cooperative know that it is a valid response to the discontent and disconnection of the younger generation. The platform co-op movement is a novel model that can make the cooperative model more attractive and relevant to young people. So it is possible to start our own tech co-op that aligns with our values, through a platform co-op.

Some of Mondragon’s capabilities as already presented in this report, that enable it to get involved in the platform cooperative movement are the following:

- Experience in managing a large network of companies, and in-

dependent organizations, enabling a decentralized structure and self-managed units.

- Presence in a wide variety of sectors, complementary businesses, accumulating a lot of knowledge of the market and industrial technology.
- Inter-cooperation mechanisms tested and validated over many years.
- A powerful innovation ecosystem, with many players and capabilities in a relatively small territory, but also globally.
- A social commitment to change and transformation of the environment and the communities where it is located.
- A cooperative culture forged over many years, which knows the basic foundations of real collaboration and the coming together of people under a common goal.

Platform cooperatives are an example of how Mondragon's almost 70-year history can combine the benefits of a well-established cooperative model with the possibilities that digital labor platforms present today. As an example of this, in February 2023 the first digital cooperative was created in Mondragon called Bihar, a platform that allows home care services for dependent elderly people to be contracted, matching caregivers offer and families with the need.

As has been established, cooperative platforms are a new type of cooperative enterprise that combines the capabilities of an online platform with the strengths of a cooperative organization. This duality brings benefits and challenges to solve, both for being an online platform and for being a cooperative. To establish the latent needs and challenges in the incubation and creation of new cooperative platforms, we start with certain research questions that will help us understand and focus on the phenomenon:

- How can digital platforms help worker co-ops create more value and generate future growth vectors?
- What are the benefits of being a platform cooperative?
- Which sectors/industries are most suitable for platform cooperatives?
- What business support is available for platform co-ops?
- What changes to Mondragon policy and funding ecosystems would help scale platform cooperatives?
- In what ways can earlier cooperative movements be compared and contrasted with the nascent platform cooperative movement?

6.

NEEDS AND
LATENT
CHALLENGES
OF PLATFORM
COOPERATIVES

In a first exploration and based on the work carried out by Scholz ⁴⁹ and ICA ⁵⁰ the following needs and challenges have been identified that we must resolve in order to find sustainable and lasting cooperative platforms:

A cooperative supportive ecosystem

Platform cooperatives are not isolated and need a local, but also a global ecosystem to grow and develop. Providing market knowledge, technology support, financing, legal and organizational assets, and supportive policy environments, just as Mondragon has in its own innovation ecosystem. At a higher level, these cooperatives also need to test business models, learn from customers, adapt to changes, be flexible and replicate good practices to start more, stronger and more lasting platform cooperatives.

Values-based platforms

Cooperatives' identity can be viewed through their norms rather than through their business structures. Digital platforms are neutral in character, but co-operatives are values-driven. So, the question is: how important are ethical, values-based frameworks in defining and differentiating cooperatives in the digital economy?

“The potential of co-operative values and principles is twofold. Values may shape the need to which a platform co-op responds, so threats to privacy for example could encourage user control of data. After all, it is possible to map the international co-operative values and principles (almost) directly onto the main ethical arguments and concerns around digital platforms: transparency, ownership, digital inclusion, data portability, privacy, fairness, online behaviour, safeguarding. Or values may form an effective way of gathering and binding together users online or offline – this is what values do.” ⁵¹

Technological resources and structures

Platform co-operatives may be limited in adopting the technologies that underpin the sharing economy, for both practical and principled reasons. For existing co-ops, including some platform co-ops, the technology is not always released on an open-source basis, limiting the potential for wider collaboration. Furthermore, building a robust, attractive, and useful platform is not easy or cheap. Many platform cooperatives are born without this basic knowledge and need to acquire it as soon as possible to survive in a very competitive market, with rivals whose software development budget is much higher.

Truly democratic governance

Good governance in terms of design and practice is important to all cooperatives. Cooperative structures need collective decision-making, conflict resolution, consensus building, and the managing of shares and funds in a transparent manner. Besides the overall management of workers. One central question is how the power can be truly distributed and decisions are made taking into account all opinions. How could the platform govern itself in a distributed, truly democratic way? How to maintain democratic governance across platform co-ops without a geographically-rooted community is another issue.

Cooperative-friendly funding & capital

Start-up costs may be small, but scaling up, both in terms of customer acquisition and in terms of spreading operations across legal and regulatory jurisdictions, is resource-intensive. Platform cooperatives will struggle to access the capital they need to grow given the financing landscape in the start-up tech sector relied on speculation, short-term returns, and jumping ship through initial public offerings. This is not the right funding model for cooperatives, which grow slowly and are designed for sustainability. Some examples of changing funding schemes are Slow Money in USA, a national nonprofit organization that catalyzes investment in sustainable food and farms in particular. Goteo, a Spanish crowdfunding that allows projects to seek funding that follows a commons-oriented set of values, and Crowdcoop, a collective financing platform specialized in cooperatives and their particular needs. Also, Fairmondo with a series of crowdfunding campaigns is creating an international network of country-based co-ops feeding into the Fairmondo platform.

Alliances and networking

Co-ops rely on other cooperatives, they need to collaborate for new funding schemes, operating solutions tailored to co-ops, and legal and organizational resources, in addition to representing co-ops in institutions. Alliances between co-ops are essential. They need to be based on standards, a commitment to the open commons, shared strategies, goals, and values. Global coordination and community building among platform and worker co-ops are also essential. Coopcycle is an example of that, they are creating a federation of cooperatives to foster solidarity between co-ops, to reduce their costs thanks to services pooling, and to create a common force to advocate couriers' rights.

Scaling and growth

Platform co-operatives are unlikely to follow the established growth strategies of incumbents and so will find it difficult to build the natural “network effects” that fuel market penetration and consolidation. Cooperatives don’t always have to scale up. Scholz argues that democratically controlled businesses such as worker cooperatives could target smaller, local niche markets without having to focus on scaling up. When the priority is to take care of the workers, then scaling up is not an immediate imperative. In contrast to countless startups, the goal isn’t to jump ship by way of acquisition but to build lasting business over decades to come.⁵² However, examples such as Mondragon in the consolidated cooperative world and more recently the efforts of Coopcycle or Fairmondo show another form of multi-location and use of global resources from a more supportive and inclusive perspective.

On a national scale: Spain

In Spain, new platform cooperatives are emerging, closely linked to the cooperative movement rooted in the territory and supported by cooperative development entities. Some of these cooperatives have grown out of collaboration with established platform cooperatives, such as the Coopcycle Federation. Listed below are the platform cooperatives recently created in Spain, with the exception of the Basque Country, which is detailed in the following section.

Name	Origin	Creation date	Sector	Objective	Alternative to
La Zona	Barcelona, Catalonia	1998	E-commerce marketplace	Digital market with local products and services. Aiming to be sustainable and respectful of the environment and people	Amazon
Som Mobilitat	Barcelona, Catalonia	2015	Electric car sharing business. 80-car fleet	Consumer coop offering mobility products and services to accelerate the transition towards sustainable mobility.	Sharenow, Free2Move
Som Conexió	Barcelona, Catalonia	2015	Telephone and internet services	Non-profit cooperative that offers an alternative in sustainable, social and participatory telephony.	Movistar, Vodafone, Orange
Mensakas	Barcelona, Catalonia	2018	Food delivery collective, CoopCycle partner	Responsible distribution cooperative prioritizing the labor rights of workers. Responsible consumption and social good.	Glovo, Justeat, Deliveroo
La Sarria	Sabadell, Barcelona	2020	Food delivery collective, CoopCycle partner	Sustainable alternative to traditional distribution prioritizing decent employment and local commerce.	Glovo, Justeat, Deliveroo



7.
SOME
INITIATIVES
IMPLEMENTED
IN THE
REGIONAL AND
NATIONAL
CONTEXT

Salus Coop	Barcelona,- Catalonia	2016	Data co-op In the health sector	Control of personal data and its management and transfer for the advancement of medical research	No direct com- petitor
Katuma	Barcelona, Catalonia	2017	Open Food Network & Platform	Support the development of ethical supply chains that bring together producers in a 'virtual farmers' market.	Lidl, Alcampo, Mercadona, Veritas
Decidim	Barcelona, Catalonia	2021	Citizen voting platform	Increase transparency and citizen participation	No direct com- petitor
CrowdCoop	Catalonia	2020	Collective financing platform for co-ops	Advice and training for coop- eratives and financing through crowdfunding	Coopfunding, Ver- kami, Lánzanos.
Guerrilla Translation	Seville, Anda- lusia	2013	Translation and Comm. Collective	Knowledge exchange for an ethical and sustainable change	Alphatrad, Lin- guavox
Givit	Granada, Andalusia	2019	Delivery col- lective	Quality service based on collective intelligence and digitization.	Glovo, Deliveroo, Just eat.
La Pájara	Madrid, Ma- drid.	2018	Food delivery collective, CoopCycle partner	Local, sustainable and decent em- ployment alternative to promote responsible consumption	Glovo, Deliveroo, Just eat.

The emergence of an ecosystem of cooperative platforms in Catalonia is particularly salient, where the Barcelona City Council made a commitment to platform co-ops and has long served as a model for other cities seeking a digital transition that puts residents at the center, but even more can be done to specifically support digital cooperatives through procurement, incubators, and other initiatives, according to Scholz.⁵³ As an example, the Barcelona Council is deploying a number of initiatives to increase transparency, such as Decidim, which is a digital platform for citizen participation, helping to configure a system of democratic governance in all kinds of organizations.

On a regional scale: Basque Country

In the Basque Country, the creation of platform cooperatives is still very incipient. Two kinds of enterprises are distinguished. On the one hand, there are cooperatives for the sustainable distribution of food federated within CoopCycle, specifically Eraman in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Botxo Riders in Bilbao, and Ziclo-P in Pamplona.

On the other hand, there are two cooperatives also recently created thanks to the training course offered by Mondragon Unibertsitatea and Platform Cooperativism Consortium called Platform Co-ops Now!, which is described in the following section. The two cooperatives created were:

Astindu, a cooperative that supports the creation of platform cooperatives that use digital business models, but with a shared and democratic ownership structure, and Pikara Magazine, an association transformed into a cooperative of journalists who jointly create a quality magazine with a feminist, critical and transgressive perspective.

Initiatives undertaken at Mondragon

The Mondragon Corporation has not yet undertaken a formal strategic line in regard to platform cooperativism. Nevertheless, a collaboration agreement between the Platform Cooperativism Consortium, Mondragon Corporation, and Mondragon Team Academy (MTA), the team-entrepreneurship unit at Mondragon Unibertsitatea and also an international community of more than 2,500 team-entrepreneurs co-creating a global network of social innovation ecosystem labs has been developing, since 2020, several initiatives around the following three working axes:

In the education axis, an online course was created collaboratively by these organizations to introduce, incubate, and accelerate platform cooperatives⁵⁴. The Platform Cooperatives Now! (PCN!) course was developed to foster a global community in this space, assist participants in building their own platform cooperatives, and assist policymakers and researchers in entering this emerging field of research⁵⁵. In four *Platform Coops Now!* iterations, approximately 1,300 participants were taught and a network of 49 partner organizations from 62 countries was built. This work resulted in the establishment of platform co-op incubators in a number of countries⁵⁶.

The course was effective at communicating the fundamentals of platform co-ops and in generating a multitude of opportunities and connections, which resulted in 300 platform co-ops project ideas created and over 120 projects supported at various stages of development including:

- Drivers Coop (a New York City-based driver-owned ride-hailing cooperative),
- Style Crush (a member-owned online resale market where anyone looking for affordable, confidence-boosting fashion can find secondhand items),
- coAPP (an app to assist in the establishment of grocery cooperatives, raise additional funds, and expand store locations),
- Interpreters Coop (Interpreters' Cooperative of Madison is entirely owned and operated by the interpreters),

- Auto Collab (a global hub for mutual support, encouraging neurodivergent individuals and businesses to connect and form long-term partnerships),
- CIC (Uruguayan consulting co-op),
- Outdoor Media Coop (an artist-owned stock media company and a job board for the outdoor industry, focusing on underserved photographers and videographers),
- Tres-I-Coop (Peruvian project promoting the development of products and enterprises, as well as the establishment of impactful organizations and cooperatives),
- The Commonwealth Cooperative (experimenting with the power of decentralized autonomous organizations, cooperatives, and permaculture),
- Pikara Magazine, (an association transformed into a cooperative of journalists who jointly create a quality magazine with a feminist, critical and transgressive perspective),
- Astindu (a cooperative that supports platform cooperatives in the creation of a shared and democratic ownership structure).

For the ‘incubation’ part of the above axes by June 2020, a European consortium was created to launch the first European Digital Cooperativism accelerator called CoopWorks, a two-month entrepreneurship program for early-stage team startups in the field of platform cooperatives offered by Mondragon Corporation, MTA-MU, and Luvent Consulting. CoopWorks engaged 10 European start-ups: 6 of them in a prototype stage, and 4 were scaling up. Some of them were:

Startin’blox		Fairbnb	
Open source cooperative solutions to create the next generation of web applications		The non-extractive alternative to current vacation rental platforms	
<p>Business The Startin’blox cooperative provides ready-to-deploy web applications that allow organizations to interconnect and collaborate in a fully decentralized way.</p>	<p>Milestones 50 organizations with a total of 2,000 individual users have adopted the Startin’blox applications. €450,000 of turnover in 2020.</p>	<p>Business Fairbnb.coop is the cooperative accommodation booking platform that promotes and finances local initiatives and projects.</p>	<p>Milestones They reached €270,000 in funding, they have 15,000 registered users and are present in 9 pilot cities and working to activate more than 40 destinations with global partners.</p>

Target €1,000,000 in 2021 through business angels and investment funds.			Target Looking for investors to raise €1,000,000 Q1 - 2020 for growing and completing the platform.	
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ZUos		Aurora Co-working	
Empower communities to manage their energy		Co-working business in suburban and rural areas	
Business ZUoS is an energy services platform for community energy cooperatives to drive a 'just transition' to zero emissions.	Milestones Two ongoing pilots in Scotland, involving 45 households and 2 businesses.	Business A network of co-working micro-spaces, in rural areas and suburban towns, owned by members. A digital platform designed for members.	Milestone They started a co-working space in 2015. Three potential clients, one conference speech, three potential network members.
Target £1.5million, for drivers between the end of 2021 and 2023.		Target Apply for a business grant. From 2021-€75,000. They want to finance technological development.	

In the 'research' axis, some work has begun, taking into account some research questions and research lines, as follows:

Research questions:

- How does Mondragon adapt to new business models in the digital age? How can Mondragon cooperative experience benefit platform cooperatives?
- Who are the new digital entrepreneurs? What are their needs? How can we assist them?
- What kind of environment is required to launch a successful platform co-op?
- What is their real contribution to their community and region?

Research trajectories:

- Local and regional ecosystems to support the creation of new platform cooperatives.
- Role of public administrations in the promotion and creation of new platform cooperatives.

Actions implemented:

- A seven-month residency at Mondragon hosting PCC Founder and Director Trebor Scholz from January to July 2022⁵⁷.
- MTA's participation in the Berkman & Klein Institute's research sprint on the future of data and data cooperatives, exploring cooperative approaches to data ownership and governance⁵⁸.
- MTA's participation in the 2022-2023 Fellowship Cohort of the Institute of the Cooperative Digital Economy at The New School⁵⁹.

Articles:

- *Platform Coops Now!* A team entrepreneurship building program to create platform coops - GIZAEKOA_Basque Journal of Social Economy⁶⁰.
- Data Cooperatives in Europe: A Legal and Empirical Investigation, conference presentation⁶¹.
- Blog Post in the PCC blog 'Platform cooperatives "Made in Mondragon"'⁶².

Projects:

- *Platform Co-ops Now!* project co-funded by the European Social Fund in its 2020-2023 program. The main partners are Mondragon Corporation, Espazo Coop, Escuela Andaluza de Economía Social, Florida Universitaria, and Tazebaez.
- Goal of co-creation of platform cooperatives collectively between the global north and south. Funder: Basque Agency for Development Cooperation and in collaboration with Mundukide. Creation of the Observatory of Platform Cooperatives in Brazil and creation of a Platform Co-ops Manifesto⁶³.
- European COST project: P-WILL Platform Work Inclusion Living Lab, aiming to build a pan-european multistakeholder network to foster the upsurge of alternative scenarios in the frame of platform work.

According to ICA, there are estimated to be around 250 initiatives world-wide exploring the scope for platform co-ops⁶⁴. Some of the national support programs that exist with the aim of supporting new platform co-ops are:

USA

The Platform Cooperativism Consortium at The New School is a hub that helps you start, grow, or convert to platform co-ops.

Start.coop is a ten-week accelerator program for cooperatives, including but not limited to platform co-ops, which opened to applications in 2018. The program is designed to be open to investment from the wider co-op sector.

UK

Co-operatives UK teamed up in 2017/18 with Stir To Action for UnFound, an accelerator program for early stage co-ops. UnFound is the UK's first structured program of support for platform co-ops.

Finland

ShareTribe offers a support process for platform co-ops to accelerate key elements of functionality needed to get going.

Germany

Platform Coops Germany is a cooperative that focuses on building the digital cooperative economy in Germany. The organization helps connect initiatives and organizations with a digital-cooperative business model and offers help and advice for the early stages of platform coop incubation.

Now, to establish the vectors for the promotion and growth of new platform co-ops in Mondragon and the Basque Country, Mondragon will first need to consider the innovation ecosystem in Mondragon and its own strategic plan, together with the fit and competitive advantage that platform cooperatives provide. Next, Mondragon will need to see the role that public administration at the regional level plays in this ecosystem. Finally, it will need to select a list of actions that can cover the needs and overcome the challenges inherent to the cooperative platforms that is analyzed in Section 5 of this report.

Basque ecosystem boosting platform co-ops

As stated in Section 2 of this report, Mondragon has a well-structured and coordinated ecosystem that includes internal and external agents to support and consolidate its cooperatives. In the 4 axes that make up this model, the following agents can be distinguished that could also facilitate the emergence and consolidation of new platform co-ops:

Internal agents

Business:

Mondragon includes co-ops and other organizations in the industrial, financial and retail sectors, with commercial and production offices around the world. The industrial area is organized into 11 divisions/ industries: Industrial Automation, CHP Automotive, CM Automotive, Components, Construction, Vertical Transport, Equipment, Engineering and Services, Machine Tools, Industrial Systems, and Tooling & Systems. Industrial worker co-ops have plenty of opportunities to meet their needs with the potential platform co-ops offer. For example, a report by Co-operatives UK with NESTA identified a number of contexts in which platform cooperation can offer a competitive advantage, including⁶⁵:

Health and social care sector: by bringing all the various stakeholders that characterize the marketplace into the governance of the business, a platform co-op model can act as the necessary commitment mechanism to ensure all parties have an equal stake in how these services can be well run and provide real value. An emerging platform coop in this sector is Equal care.

Transport and retail: by offering both a means of control for workers and producers and a means of organizing labor outside of traditional trade union structures. A nucleus of consumers and workers

8.

STRATEGICAL
VECTORS
FOR THE
PROMOTION
OF PLATFORM
CO-OPS

can use platform co-ops to ensure much-needed welfare and equity are embedded in online marketplaces. Coopcycle and its federated co-ops are good examples of these platform co-ops.

Financial sector: In addition to being immersed in a wave of innovations, this sector plays a crucial role in the establishment and scaling of cooperatives of all kinds, especially platform co-ops that compete in a technological sector based on traditional capital investments.

Higher education: Mondragon through its university and the Management and Corporate Development Center can offer formal and continuous training on platform co-ops fundamentals, research, and development.

Research & Technology: Mondragon also has a network of business R&D units and technology centers that focus on research in fields that are strategic to the business sector. Ikerlan for example can be a good ally for platform co-ops developing their tech infrastructure and platforms.

Support: Mondragon has a structure of corporate support agents who work together to create a critical research mass and to leverage financial resources and infrastructures that will boost collaboration between research centers, the university, and companies. The Corporate center - innovation, promotion and knowledge (IPK), the Center for the Promotion of new activities, and Mondragon Foundation can channel corporate operations, such as grants for analyzing the viability of new platform co-ops and non-profit contributions to own research centers.

External agents

Mondragon also collaborates with public institutions, investors, and regulating bodies to obtain the resources necessary to develop its innovation strategy. All these agents can also adopt a supportive role for the emerging platform co-ops inside the Mondragon ecosystem.

Furthermore, the 2021-2024 Mondragon Strategic Plan involves “strengthening its positioning, becoming more competitive, more cooperative, and more flexible towards potential upheavals.”⁶⁶ It will be centered around seven key future strategies that are totally aligned with the emerging platform co-ops movement:

1. Commitment and corporate identity, with the aim being to accommodate the model to the new scenario without losing its essence.

2. Sustainability, to ensure future generations are the recipients of more robust businesses and a healthier planet.
3. Forward-looking businesses, to evolve towards operations with higher value-added and sustained performance over time.
4. Flexibility and adaptability, involve dynamic businesses that can preempt trends and respond swiftly.
5. Digital transformation, towards a scenario in which businesses, processes, and jobs are informed by digitization.
6. Inter-cooperation, to launch business projects of a size and positioning that adapt to the future.
7. Attraction and development of talent, as people will be the main differentiating factor across companies seeking to guarantee their success.

Role of regional government in the creation and consolidation of platform co-ops

As Pérez says, “it is the time when intelligent governments step in to establish a win-win game between business and society. It is when capitalism becomes legitimate by making the search for the profit of the few result in benefits for the many. It is when the potential of the new technologies is clearly directed by systemic policies towards the best possible ends.”⁶⁷

Governments are guarantors of a clear and fair business competition arena. They must face a proactive attitude and benefit the community. The priority is not a political prebend or a favorable position in front of the electorate, but the search for true vectors of growth, development and social welfare. Cooperative platforms prove to be a new mechanism driving such growth vectors.

Innovative platform co-ops such as Loomio are adding value to governments and political practices by creating open-source software to facilitate democratic communities. In Spain, for example, 27,000 citizens joined Loomio to connect a nationwide grassroots network to the rapidly growing political party ‘Podemos’. Also, D-CENT was born as a Europe-wide project developing the next generation of open-source, distributed, and privacy-aware tools for direct democracy and economic empowerment. Their goal is to give political power to people who are able to propose policies, debate options, draft and scrutinize the proposal, vote and make decisions.

At the same time, growing concerns over privacy, safety, and the decent work agenda make such safeguards more critical than ever. Governments must ask themselves how can they regulate all these issues (that are real and possible in the transfer of information, interaction, goods, and services) without suffocating the emerging co-ops or creating an extremely complex regulatory framework that slows down its growth and daily operation.

As ICA stated: “where values are delivered through regulation, there can be a paradoxical effect that the costs of compliance encourage the very concentrations of power that can lead to abuse. In digital markets, with cross-border regulation, this is all the more likely. Where values are delivered through voluntary means, the challenge is to find an entrepreneurial way that makes values a source of competitive advantage, saving or positive differentiation in the market rather than a source of complexity and cost.”⁶⁸

In a recent white paper called “Policy Recommendations to Support Cooperative

Ownership in the Digital Economy,” some measures are suggested by PCC to encourage the platform co-op movement through policymaking⁶⁹. Some of them that can help in the Basque regional context and the Mondragon ecosystem could be:

1. Procurement policies to provide preferential treatment of platform co-ops over privately-owned platforms.
2. Public solidarity lending to finance early-stage platform co-ops as part of national, regional, and municipal development strategies.
3. Public participation in multi-stakeholder co-ops via direct state ownership of co-op shares that provide a public voice in co-op management.

None of these measures are being applied in the Basque environment currently but could be a good beginning for regional governments and municipalities wanting to support Basque platform co-ops.

Actions to meet the needs and overcome the challenges of platform co-ops

Summing up the needs and challenges faced by emerging platform co-ops identified in Section 5 of this report, a tentative set of options are listed based also on ICA's work:

A cooperative support ecosystem

Reach partnership agreements with global social partners, in particular key trade union networks, around the promotion of platform co-ops.

Work with municipal governments on the creation of platform co-ops, particularly on a multi-stakeholder basis, where there is concern about the impact of platforms such as Uber and AirBnB on cities.

Nominated from across Mondragon's members, people willing to be champions for platform co-ops.

Values-based platforms

Set platform co-ops as a key focus and enabler for engaging young generations into a cooperative world.

Recruit existing primary co-operatives at a leadership (or young leadership) level willing to engage in an exchange with fledgling platform co-ops, either through events or a structured program of learning with one of the key international partners on co-operative education, in which the latter are paid to support the learning and digital transformation of current co-operatives.

Explore opportunities for promoting gender equality in technology through platform cooperatives, as part of wider work on women in cooperatives.

Technological resources and structures

Promote or broker the sharing technology and development, as for example in the emerging cooperative corporate ride-hail (taxi) platforms in development.

Research on the use of free, and open source software in the cooperative sector, with recommendations for widening this.

Engage with initiatives aimed at developing a digital ecosystem supportive of platform co-ops.

Truly democratic governance

Establish a network for learning on the legal and regulatory features of platform co-ops, with the aim of highlighting good practice that can be shared or a legal jurisdiction that is most conducive to new platform co-ops looking to operate across borders.

Cooperative friendly funding and capital

Advance work on co-operative capital and business development along the lines of the recommendations made by CoLab to the International Co-operative Alliance.

Explore the conversion option through a targeted approach to candidate platforms for whom the co-operative option could provide a competitive advantage.

Engage co-operative banks through the relevant sector network to explore the potential to develop an informed source of capital to put behind business opportunities around platform co-ops.

Engage existing worker co-ops through the relevant sector networks around options for development using platform co-op models.

Alliances and networking

Promote education of the co-operative model through technology networks, in order to bridge gaps of understanding on the possibilities and scope of platform co-ops.

Engage with key staff across primary co-operatives with established innovation programmes around possible shared models of 'Innovation Challenges,' 'Labs' or 'Hackathons' around key tech.

Map platform co-ops as part of wider work on co-operative data worldwide, in partnership with those leading efforts to do this at present.

Agree on international partnerships with promoting agents to find ways to support their development as stable and inclusive co-operatives.

Scaling and growth

Broker relationships across leading primary co-ops with strong member or customer relationships for the collaborative development of platform co-ops, including scope for joint venturing and “intra-preneuring”.

Identify two or three platform co-ops that could credibly become global platforms and work with co-operatives, in particular consumer co-operatives, across different countries to champion and grow the model.

Provide tools for founding platform co-ops, or replicate models of accelerating platform co-op growth tested at the national level overseas.

Consider the potential for quality assurance or certification as a tool for platform co-op development at a future stage.

As a starting point, and according to ICA, there are four introductory boundaries which may help to inform how to characterize the emerging platform co-ops ⁷⁰.

1. Platform co-ops are inspired by the open-source movements within the technology community but are not defined by them. Platform co-ops will often take an open approach but they are defined by their adherence to cooperative rather than open principles.
2. They are more than digital tools to increase participation or improve governance, although such tools may form part of any platform to support their democratic nature.
3. Working conditions and labor rights are core to the ideas around platform co-ops, but they can also be of relevance to other stakeholders, including of course users.
4. They are more than co-ops using digital channels / offering digital services. There is an important and welcome field of digital co-operatives, often using the worker co-op model, but this goes wider than the more focused arena of platform co-ops, which operate online platforms for people to come together, in which the platform is driving a business and/or creating significant dependencies.

An action proposal can start by establishing 3 layers, that can also be combined and analyzed jointly:

1. Development stages -time evolution and incremental growth
2. Platform co-ops categories -types of incubated or accelerated platform co-ops.
3. Levels of engagement - depth of involvement and responsibility

Development stages

Depending on the entrepreneurship life cycle of the platform co-op or the maturity of the platform co-op local ecosystem, this scheme could be a starting point for defining what kind of support they need and how we can assign and split the available resources.

Entrepreneurial life cycle of a platform co-op

Stage	Needed support
Pre-incubation	Awareness, networking, training
Early stage	Capital, tech support
Market entry	Market wise, Resources
Growth	Funding, Champion

Platform co-ops categories

As it was stated previously some categories can be set to understand platform co-ops nature and set up the portfolio of new platform co-ops in our ecosystem, fueling the interaction among them and visualizing complementary efforts. The categories defined were:

- Platform co-ops – completely online platforms and digital business that deliver their goods and services through the internet. Examples: Eraman, Botxo, Ziclo-P.
- Co-op run platform – where the platform isn't the primary mode of organization of a cooperative (for example, through which ownership and governance flow) but where value is added to the cooperative. Example: Pikara Magazine
- Shared platform – A platform is used collaboratively, often in adherence to principles of open source software, but where ownership and control is not democratic.
- Supporter - Organisations that work to develop and/or promote platform cooperatives. Example Astindu

Level of engagement

Finally, a third layer can be the level of depth in which the actors within the innovation ecosystem are involved in the promotion and incubation of new platform co-ops. The following table establishes what could be a priori the levels of engagement of Mondragon and its cooperatives in the platform co-ops movement.

9.

LEARNING
BY DOING:
A PROPOSAL
FOR ACTION IN
THE BASQUE
COUNTRY

Engagement levels for promoting platform co-ops

Level	Type of engagement
Networking	Getting to know, attending events
Promotion	Recommend, advertise
Partnership	Matching, cooperating
Incubating	Supporting, co-creating
Funding	Investing, tracking

A combination of these 3 layers can help us to plan the entry and presence of such cooperatives in Mondragon and the emergence of new platform cooperatives enriched by the created ecosystem, as well as providing differentiation, know-how in the digital economy, and an approach to new growth markets.

After analyzing all the relevant aspects of platform cooperatives applied to the Mondragon context, the following conclusions are drawn:

The cooperative movement in Mondragon has shown the ability to combine economic growth and impact with the ability to promote meaningful forms of empowerment, participation and social interconnection. These are an important asset in the collaborative economy model, and if Mondragon's co-ops can also value them digitally, they can become their distinctive added value in this emerging movement.

The Social Economy can provide a new framework of action and values to the digital economy and, in turn, cooperative platforms can provide a regeneration and adaptation of Mondragon's cooperative values to the new technological-digital context.

There are benefits to platform cooperativism, but also challenges in Mondragon. Platform cooperatives represent a shift in approach from current platforms, favoring a different ownership model, focused on people rather than technology or concentrated power. Platforms can be owned and operated by unions, cities, and various other forms of cooperatives, from multi-member or mixed-worker cooperatives to producer- and consumer-owned cooperatives. Platform cooperatives can also shift the focus on cost reduction, efficiency, and innovation to seek the common good, the well-being of the many rather than the benefit of the few. All these benefits can be adopted at Mondragon, being aware of the underlying challenges and the need to adapt and fit. If Mondragon is willing to fully invest in the potential of the collaborative economy, it may face a series of challenges, such as these:

- Generate awareness about platform cooperatives, their characteristics and models;

- Encourage existing cooperatives to explore the potential of digital technologies in improving their internal patterns of participation;

- Support the development of new cooperatives by establishing financial, technical and strategic support schemes;

- Design relevant frameworks for testing solutions, evaluating results, and replicating successes while fostering open and distributed discussion, and

- Establish a true innovative culture, transgressing the status quo and seeking a transformation of the ways of doing things, challenging the current quality, excellence and planning structures that slow down the adoption of innovations at Mondragon.

Moving Forward

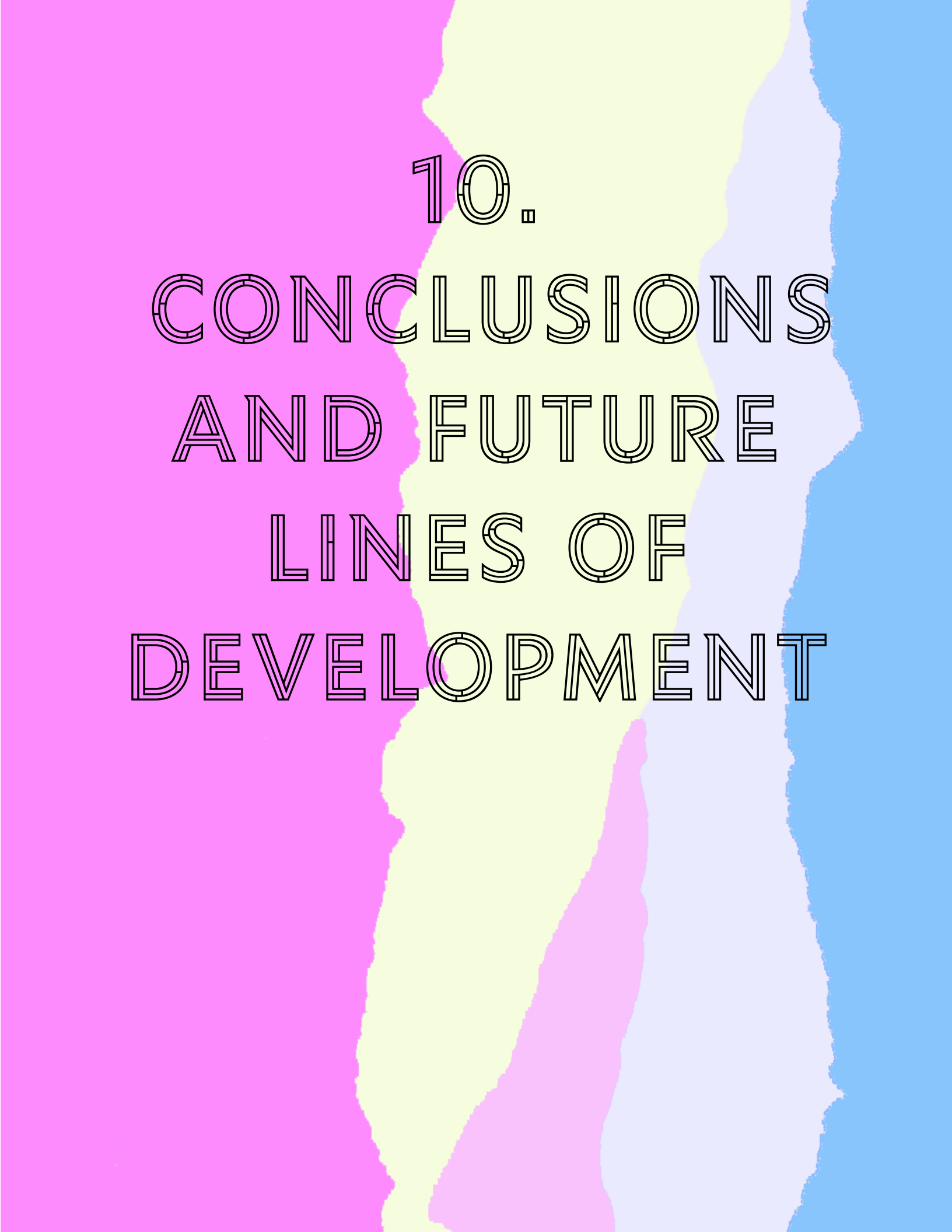
The knowledge technology revolution is here and in addition to filling us with apps, and invasive and omnipresent devices, they also represent an instrument of transformation. Maybe we get hives, and their handling makes us insecure, but there will be no turning back, we must use them intelligently for the common good and not let a free economy without restrictions make decisions, without focus, without objective, without vision.

Mondragon should ride this wave: manufacturing, Industry 4.0 and the approach to the market (whatever it may be) will go through the collection, management, analysis, and exploitation of data. Do we want this business model to be owned only by capitalist companies that own the collective data, using it in favor of private interests? Is it not likely to become a cooperative model of collaboration and associated work? The platform model until now tends to monopolize data, interactions, and benefits. Platform cooperatives represent an alternative to this.

As ICA pointed out, we cannot dismiss that as the co-operative sector is diverse, so there is a challenge of cultural differences between old and new. It is possible to generalize the largest co-operative enterprises worldwide as older rather than younger businesses, analog in their focus rather than digital, and typically national rather than cross-border in their operations. This situation reflects the way in which people over time have organized democratically through co-operatives, typically to meet the local or national needs, and the pattern of patient growth characteristic of more restricted access to capital. There is therefore a cultural distance from the community of platform co-ops, rooted in the possibilities of scalable and replicable technology and the formation of new services they might enable.⁷¹

But in any case, we need young people who believe in creating a more sustainable economy, who are willing to invest in it, and who are not afraid to embark on a new way of doing business. Who are these people in the Basque Country and Spain? What are they doing? What needs do they have? How can we support them in this new venture? What ecosystem is needed to launch successful platform co-ops? What real contribution do they make to their community and region? How can platform cooperatives benefit from Mondragon cooperative experience? These are still open questions to solve in this research.

As a future line of this research work, an action-research initiative could be proposed to take the first steps in attracting the first internal and external agents of this ecosystem, designing the value chain that will benefit everyone, and putting forward a concrete action plan for future development.



10.
CONCLUSIONS
AND FUTURE
LINES OF
DEVELOPMENT

To address the challenge of supporting the growth of platform cooperatives and establishing a stronger foothold in the digital economy, Mondragon could take several key steps.

First, it could carry out a dissemination campaign and direct contact with key people in the ecosystem to raise awareness and interest in platform cooperatives.

Second, it could recognize the key entities that would support platform co-ops within the ecosystem, such as government bodies, business associations, and other organizations that are aligned with the mission of platform cooperatives.

Third, Mondragon could contact potential entrepreneurs or promoters of new co-ops and offer them resources, mentorship, and other forms of support to help them get started.

Fourth, it could identify the sectors that Mondragon needs to promote within the digital economy, analyzing the market and identifying areas of growth potential.

Finally, Mondragon could find the intersections between cooperatives and possibly new platform co-ops, exploring the overlaps and synergies between traditional cooperatives and emerging platform co-ops to create innovative business models that combine the best of both worlds and create new opportunities for growth and collaboration.



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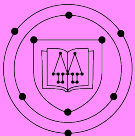
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