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Platform Cooperativism in Brazil

Dualities, Dialogues, and Opportunities

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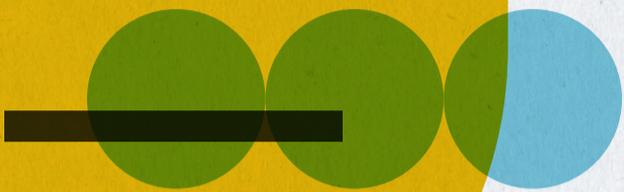
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Introduction



According to the Platform Cooperativism Consortium, 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 platforms by workers and users. Platforms can be described as online applications or websites used by individuals or groups to connect to one another or organize services. It is a form of infrastructure that constitutes a market. A cooperative is usually described as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.” Platform cooperativism has been contrasted with platform capitalism. It is not only an intellectual concept but a political movement that advocates for the global development of platform cooperatives based on values such as social justice, recognition of the dignity of labor, joint ethical commitment, and economic democracy. Platform cooperativism advocates for the coexistence of cooperatively owned business models and traditional, extractive models to achieve a more diversified digital labor landscape that respects fair working conditions. Initially coined in 2014, the concept has now become well-known and widespread.

This paper focuses on the emergence of the platform cooperativism (*cooperativismo de plataforma*) movement in Brazil. I argue that the emergence of platform cooperativism in Brazil is shaped by two distinct social environments featuring specific characteristics. There is a process of platformization within the highly institutionalized sector of cooperatives in Brazil, which is highly organized, has deep connections with political power, and is well structured in terms of resources and components. In this paper, I refer to this sector as “institu-

tionalized platform cooperativism” (ICP), and it includes large projects such as InovaCoop, which is structured by the national cooperative system in Brazil, the powerful Organização das Cooperativas do Brasil (OCB). In the sector of institutionalized coops, enterprises operate as large bureaucracies, generating millions of jobs and boosting economic development all across the country. Platform cooperativism is perceived as an opportunity for innovation and a means of opening new markets intensive in data, logistics, and technology. In this sense, a set of spin-offs built inside the labs of large cooperatives are evolving into platforms that pursue the traditional values of cooperativism and attempt to operate in a market already structured by cooperatives in sectors such as transportation, digital finance, and health. Indeed, the discourse on platform cooperativism adopted by the OCB reveals a strong emphasis on innovation, innovative methods, and “cooperative innovation.” Instead of mounting frontal opposition to the scenario of uberization and disintegration of class relations caused by the domination of the “just-in-time collaborator,” platforms are seen as opportunities for traditional cooperativism to reinvent itself and rebuild itself in markets on multiple sides. This, in turn, should avoid the dominance of big techs in areas where cooperativism is consolidated in Brazil, such as credit, agriculture, and health.

On the other hand, there is an ongoing process of platformization of digital services economies in the margins of society and economic power, outside the scope of the highly institutionalized sector of cooperativism, with a solid commitment to inclusion and social justice. There is an emergence of new projects such as Cataki (a platform that connects workers who collect recyclable materials with individuals that produce waste), Señoritas Courier (a collective of women and LGBT in-

dividuals offering delivery services), AppJusto (an alternative for delivery in which technology serves people with more autonomy), TransEntrega (a delivery platform operated by transsexuals), Contrate Quem Luta (a platform created by the Homeless Workers' Movement), and ContratArte (a platform of artists and content creators based in the state of Rio Grande do Sul). Interestingly, all these platforms seem to share specific characteristics. They are organized by autonomous collectives and groups, have no institutional affiliation with traditional cooperativism, and operate based on a robust ideological program and values that oppose the precariousness of what has been called the “uberization of work” in Brazil. As mentioned before, I refer to this sector as “noninstitutionalized platform cooperativism” (NPC). Although not institutionalized within traditional cooperativism, this sector is supported by philanthropic organizations, research organizations, and think tanks such as Unisinos, Instituto ProComum, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

In this study, I investigate the relationships between these two distinct sectors of platform cooperativism in Brazil from an initial mapping of their interactions and distinctions regarding values and obstacles. By reviewing the Brazilian literature on cooperativism, which distinguishes between the “elite cooperativism” and the “solidarity cooperativism,” I present a distinct conceptual separation related to the forms of institutional bonding of emerging cooperatives. What this study supports is the idea that independent, non-institutionalized, and ideologically organized projects are relevant but do not represent the platform cooperativism movement entirely in Brazil. Furthermore, I present evidence of an internal transformation in traditional cooperativism – often called “elitist,” “conservative,”

and “pragmatic” – which has come to adopt the discourse on platform cooperativism internally.

My second argument is that, despite being distinct and oriented towards relatively different social objectives, these two sectors have gradually connected, which nonetheless does not mean that they will necessarily support each other. They are still far apart, a fact motivated by a series of factors that have been scarcely explored in the literature. My goal is to identify hypotheses for this gap and explore opportunities for an expanded dialogue between these sectors (namely, the institutionalized and the non-institutionalized).

In this sense, this study has a dual purpose. The first objective is descriptive and presents the complexity of cooperativism in Brazil, which takes different forms. To this end, I explain the origins of the link between cooperativism and the government and the emergence of the institutionalized system, which operates from a deeply legalized system initially outlined during the Getúlio Vargas dictatorship and redesigned during the Military Dictatorship of the 1970s. Considering its authoritarian origin makes it easy to understand why the cooperative system is so organized in legal terms since it features a national union, representative units in the State, training schools, and a tax collection method that feeds resources back into the system. This institutional trajectory has helped shape a highly hierarchical, legally constituted system, which holds the monopoly of representation of the interests of cooperatives at the national level and a considerable capacity to invest in new projects. In this system, platform cooperativism has taken on a discourse of innovation and potential for migration from an economy centered on commodities to an information economy, with new possibilities of intermediation to generate value.

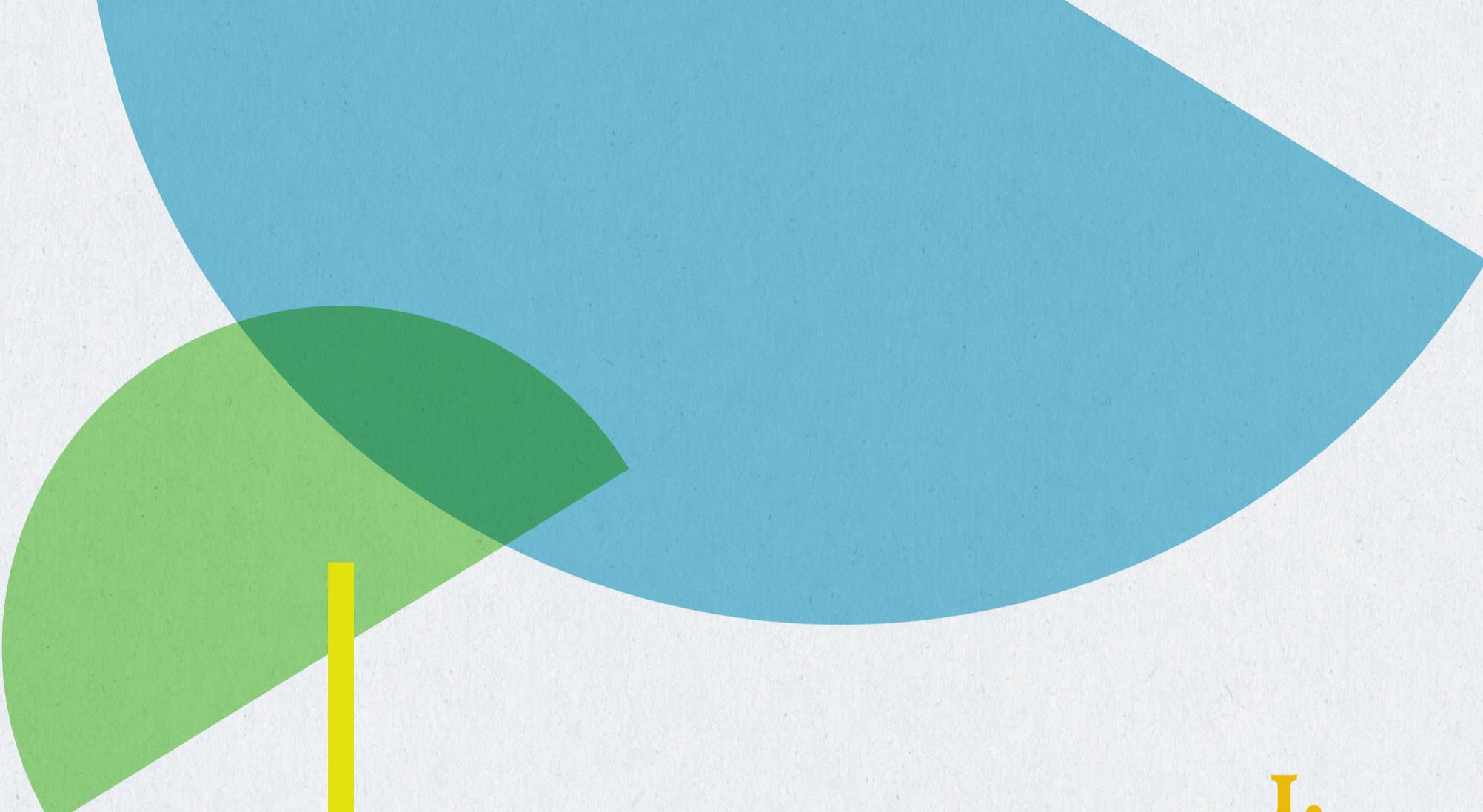
The second objective of this study is cartographic and constitutes a form of intervention research aimed at identifying new problematic elements. Based on the presentation of “interaction patterns” – (i) organization of events with multiple organizations, (ii) creation of strategic plans and projects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

According to a multimethod social research strategy, some techniques were used to conduct the study. First, a mapping of the existing literature on platform cooperativism in Brazil was carried out. Starting from a network established in the last five years, more specifically since the study I conducted on the sharing economy at InternetLab and the translation of the book *Cooperativismo de Plataforma* to Portuguese. I also had regular conversations with members of the Brazilian cooperativism movement involved with platform cooperativism, primarily through WhatsApp. Twitter posts and videos uploaded onto YouTube between 2018 and 2021 were also analyzed. A WhatsApp group was created with members from both sectors (non-institutionalized and institutionalized), and focus groups were organized with participants from both sectors.

This report presents the results of such an investigation, which was performed in 2021 and featured two stages. In the first one, I reconstructed the history of cooperativism in Brazil and detailed how the highly institutionalized system emerged, structured by the Organization of Cooperatives in Brazil and the national cooperative system. In that part, I discuss the contra-

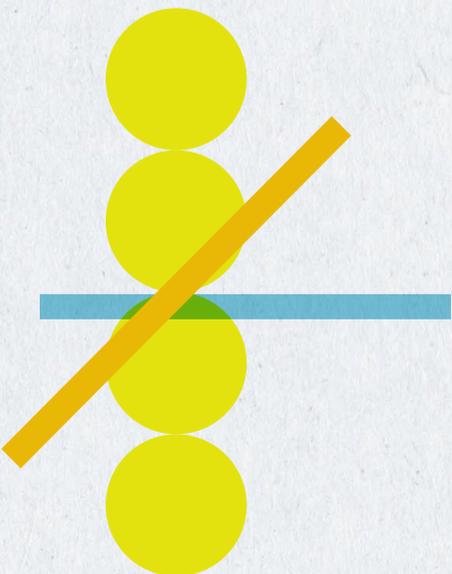
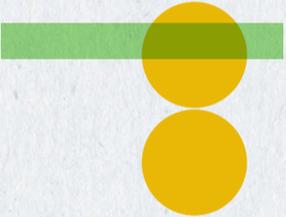
dictions of the institutionalized Brazilian cooperativism, which is often accused of being pragmatic, elitist, and disconnected from the values of solidary and grassroots cooperativism. I argue that there has been a historical division between pragmatic cooperativism, allied to the institutionalization process in the 1970s, and a form of cooperativism guided by rural and labor movements, which forged a discourse on solidarity economy and social justice between the 1980s and 1990s. This reconstruction is crucial to avoid a modality of analysis that considers Brazilian cooperativism monolithic (solid and single-faceted); after all, it is fragmented, multifaceted, and conflictive like any complex social organization.

In the second part, I discuss how the “platformization” of the Brazilian economy has led to a dual platform cooperativism system and how traditional cooperativism has migrated from a discourse based on distrust to a bet on platform cooperativism. On the other hand, I show how civil organizations, non-governmental associations, research centers, and collectives have disputed yet another narrative about platform cooperativism. In conclusion, I discuss the contradictory effects of the institutionalization of platform cooperativism in Brazil, which implies a series of pacts with an already existing system. These contradictory effects are characterized by the possibility of more significant financial aid and support from human resources while implying a formal connection to the system and the acceptance of an ossified legal format. So far, this type of pact has generated a shift from cooperatives to non-institutionalized platforms, which have sought non-traditional organizational and legal solutions.



I.

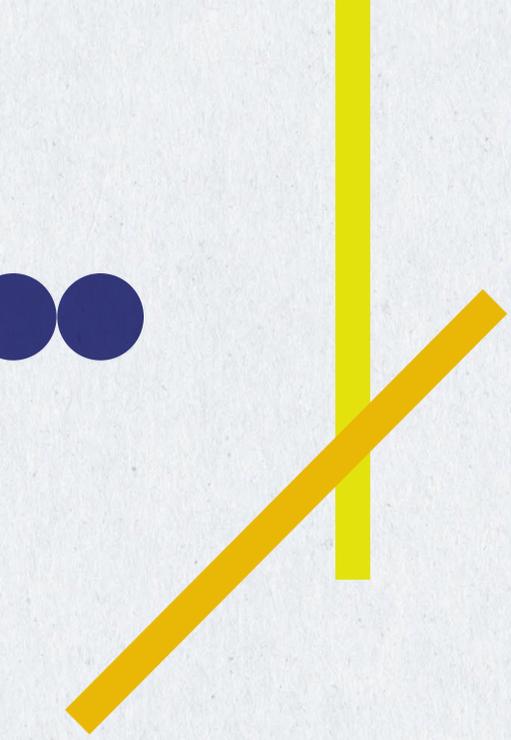
**The contradictions
and ideals of
cooperativism in
Brazil**



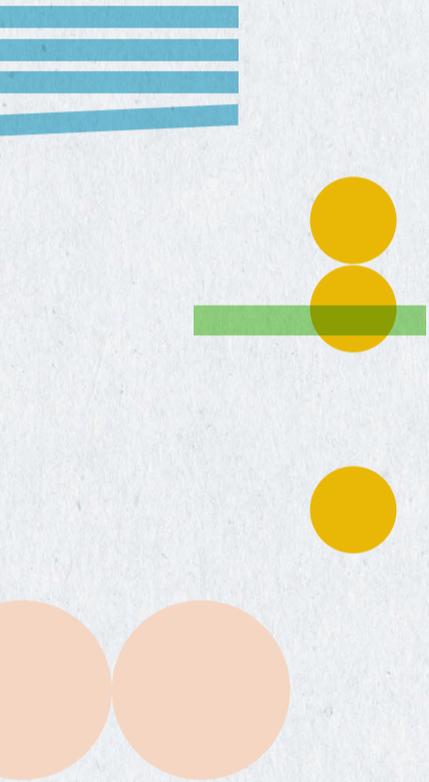
Brazil is a South American country known for its complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities. It has a vast territory and a colonial history, introduced by the Portuguese Empire, based on slavery, exploitation of labor, and the domination of the indigenous peoples that lived in *pindowa-ráma* (the word several indigenous groups used to designate Brazil). The country was once a leading producer of sugar and coffee that initially relied on slave labor by African workers from different regions. In the late nineteenth century, it came to employ cheap labor performed by Europeans that had migrated to Brazil, and in the twentieth century, the Brazilian society underwent a complex process of transformation based on industrialization, economic planning, and diversification of the modes of production. Currently, Brazil is divided between highly industrialized regions and others where agricultural production is dominant, such as the states of Mato Grosso do Sul (Central West region), Pará (North), and Bahia (Northeast).

Over the past fifty years, the country has gone through the turbulence of authoritarian developmentalism under the military regime (1964-1985), the attempt to liberalize the economy through a capitalist-dependent insertion project (1986-2002) developed by former Presidents Fernando Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and the endeavor to compose capital and labor relations through an agenda of economic insertion and combating inequalities (2003-2016), as popularized by Luis Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff from Partido dos Trabalhadores (“Workers’ Party,” PT). Recently, Brazil experienced a radical shift to the right and the intensification of conflicts and social tensions following the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the election of Jair Bolsonaro, a political leader associated with the far right, in 2018.

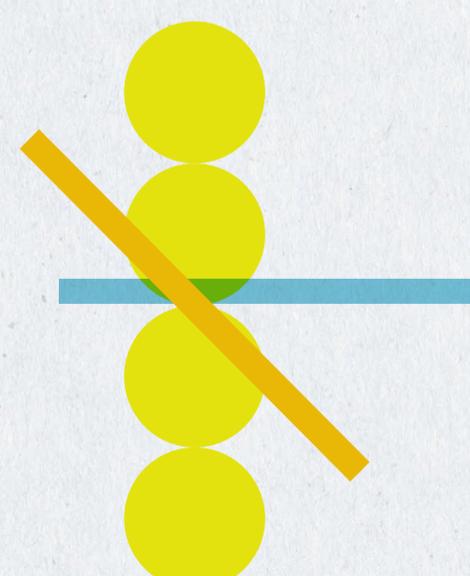
In such a complex context (one that encompasses an economy that has been intensive in slave labor, inequalities, and authoritarianism), cooperativism originated in Brazil amid the transition to a free labor economy at the origins of the Republic in 1889. However, it only took off, at least as an organized system, during the military dictatorship of the 1960s. Cooperativism initially found strength among purchasing cooperatives in Rio de Janeiro, which strengthened their productive capacity through a cost-sharing strategy. In the early twentieth century, cooperativism grew in southern Brazil among rural producers, who saw cooperativism as a method to achieve prosperity by joining efforts and fostering a strong sense of community that would eventually outweigh individual interests. Historically, the essential characteristics of cooperativism in Brazil are cooperative ownership (the association of people, not capital), cooperative management (decision-making power by the assembly of members), and cooperative distribution (distribution of *sobras líquidas* [net surpluses] among members, instead of *lucros* [profits] and dividends). However, as I will show in this section, these values intertwined with a model of cooperativism organized by the State and coordinated hierarchically. This institutionalized origin distinguishes Brazilian cooperativism from that practiced in other regions, as it is more extensively based on free enterprise, independence from the State, and self-organization autonomy.



I.I



**The distinction between
cooperativism as labor and
elite movements**



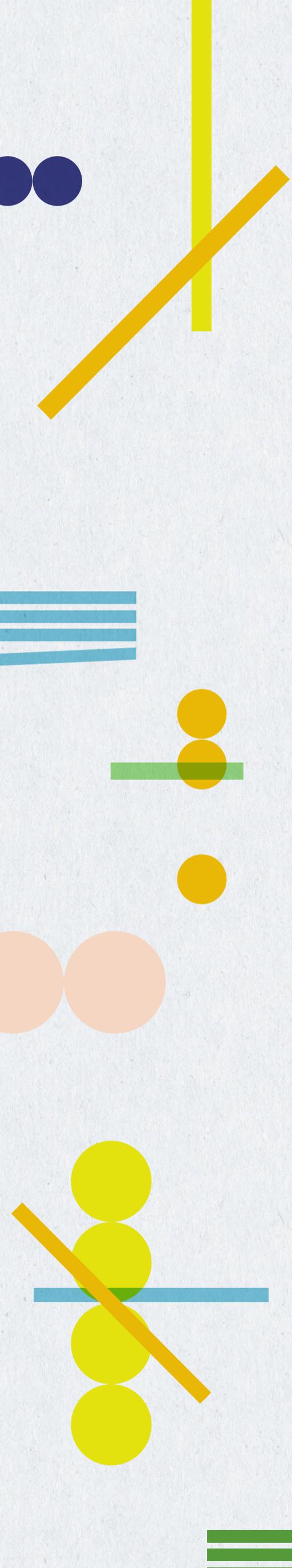
In a classic book on cooperativism in Brazil, author Gilvando Rios addressed the *contradictions of cooperativism in Brazil*, which lacks a cooperativist doctrine such as it exists in Europe. For Rios, cooperativism in Brazil is double-faceted. It was a project envisioned by a section of the conservative population, who had taken advantage of the military regime to institutionalize cooperativism through the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives by strengthening the rural economic organization in the country's backlands. The largest agricultural cooperatives in the country flourished in this context through a robust political dialogue between the government and institutionalized associations officially mediated by a single representative organization. On the other hand, cooperativism was perceived as an alternative to the progressive arena and the solidarity economy to reorganize work based on the principles of economic democracy and social justice. In short, cooperativism in Brazil has long been a project of two distinct worlds. On the one hand, the utopia of autonomous forms of organization and solidarity economy in a non-capitalist fashion while maintaining a closer relationship with the left; on the other hand, institutionalized and conservative cooperativism concerned with strengthening working families and holding a pragmatic view of their relationship with power.

Rios defended a division between two distinct types of cooperativism in Brazil: (i) cooperativism as a labor movement and (ii) cooperativism as an elite initiative. For the author, the examination of cooperativism must concretely situate the conservative or renovating role of cooperatives and cooperativism throughout history. Indeed, he argues that in Brazil, “cooperativism, as an elite conservative movement, will be situated above all in rural areas,” where the “reformist character of the movement is exhausted in the pretensions of agricultural mo-

dernization.” By observing cooperativism in Brazil throughout history, it is possible to notice the contradictory and dual character of its constitution. When writing the second edition of *O que é cooperativismo* in 2007, Gilvando Rios noted:

It is paradoxical to see that the cooperative formula is adopted in the most diverse class situations. Thus, cooperatives serve as intermediaries between sugarcane planting activities and sugar mills, while the Ministry of Labor suggested that farmworkers organize themselves into worker cooperatives. Workers from Santos and artisanal fishermen from Paraíba are familiar with the cooperative formula. Large cocoa planters in southern Bahia have their cooperative, while *minifundistas* [small land owners] organize cooperatively in Piauí. Affiliated to the conservative Rural Democratic Union (UDR), they are sometimes members of cooperative structures; on the other hand, participants of the renovating Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) manage recent cooperatives. Cooperativism appears, therefore, in Brazil, under a double and contradictory face. On the one hand, it is the routine and effective instrument in the economic organization of export agriculture (coffee, sugar, cocoa, soy, etc.) of capitalized agriculture aimed at internal supply or large-scale agriculture for northeastern cotton. On the other hand, cooperativism is systematically presented as the solution for the agricultural commercialization of the products of small farmers, fishermen, and artisans. (...) In 2002 the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB) assessed 7,549 cooperatives and more than 5 million members. Since not all cooperatives are affiliated with this organization, we already have an underestimation of the total number of cooperatives. (...) From the 1980s onwards, a new type of cooperativism emerged, which I call “solidarity cooperativism,” as it explicitly presents an ideological perspective and a political option in opposition to “business cooperativism,” which does not care about class interests.

For Rios, cooperativism in Brazil did not originate from the bottom, that is, from social movements, but was imposed from top to bottom by intellectuals in the agricultural sector who were inclined to cooperative ideas. It was not the conquest of social movements but a social control policy and state intervention. Indeed, European workers' cooperativism was typically urban and identified with various socialist ideals. In Brazil, however, cooperativism adapted to a model of concentration of land ownership. The following section analyzes the origins of cooperativism in Brazil and the relationship between the country's authoritarian background and the institutionalization of cooperativism, which, in turn, has influenced the debate on platform cooperativism to this day. As I will argue, Brazilian cooperativism managed to obtain legal advantages in terms of the monopoly of representation and institutionalization through this close relationship that it maintained with the State.



I.2

From *Estado Novo* to the military dictatorship: the interaction between cooperativism and State power

With the emergence of the Estado Novo in 1930, innovative ideas inspired a set of laws to promote cooperativism, in parallel with Brazilian unionism (*sindicalismo*). However, as Rios points out, the dissemination of cooperativism mainly occurred in the country's agricultural areas. The work of José Saturnino Britto, who studied agronomy in Belgium and architecture in Italy, is remarkable and a clear example of this spirit. In 1911, Saturnino Britto joined the Ministry of Agriculture and toured the states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, promoting cooperativism in agricultural centers in those regions. He published *Cooperation is a State* in 1915, *Progressive Socialism* in 1919, and *Collective Capital and the First Proletarian Cooperatives* in 1922.

Writing in 1932, just after the revolution of Getúlio Vargas in 1930, which was heavily inspired by populist movements, José Saturnino Britto praised the qualities of cooperativism and the potential of a progressive revolution of small “socialist units” within the agriculture sector:

The cooperative is the disinfected seed of organized tomorrow. Only those who do not know how to plant what is true despise it. The cooperative teaches men to be human. It takes them away from the corrupt social herd and integrates them into the laboratories of science, which they are, in fact, friends with, in the airy and clean workshops of work, which are a direct and moral extension of his generous nature. The cooperative transforms the garbage can of proletarian slavery into a noble environment where the ideal does not impede faith but frees from superstitions and those who take advantage of them. (...) The principles of autonomy govern cooperation because its principles are the truest, forming a perfect mechanism that decides the destiny of peoples in the sublime spiritualization of progress. Cooperation is free, but it is necessary to educate it. Nowhere is it exotic, as the sun is not exotic. Wherever there is work, there has to be cooperation. (...) Ambition has to be transformed into collective and

fulfilling idealism. Where the individual genius is lacking, that of the community disciplined in work and tenderness will remain.

Based on the reading of a series of materials from Manchester and Milan on cooperativism, Saturnino Britto defended that cooperation, replacing economic companies that aimed to achieve individual profit, would form collective companies in which each one would have equal rights. This, in turn, inaugurated “a new form of social organization, democratic, in which everyone will be both owner and worker, and in which economic interests will become similar instead of being in opposition.” In consonance with this legalistic and reformist bias, typical of the 1930s, Britto proposed a form of social reorganization through the instrumental use of the law. He suggested the creation of the State Institute for the Promotion of Cooperative Societies, which would aim to articulate the means that encourage, characterize, guide, control, and organize the movement of cooperatives, especially agricultural and consumer ones. The ideas of Saturnino Britto were partially adopted. However, the development of Brazilian cooperativism mutated into something else, influenced by the reshaping of State power during the Vargas’ dictatorship, which later influenced the institutional arrangement created during the military dictatorship (1964-1985).

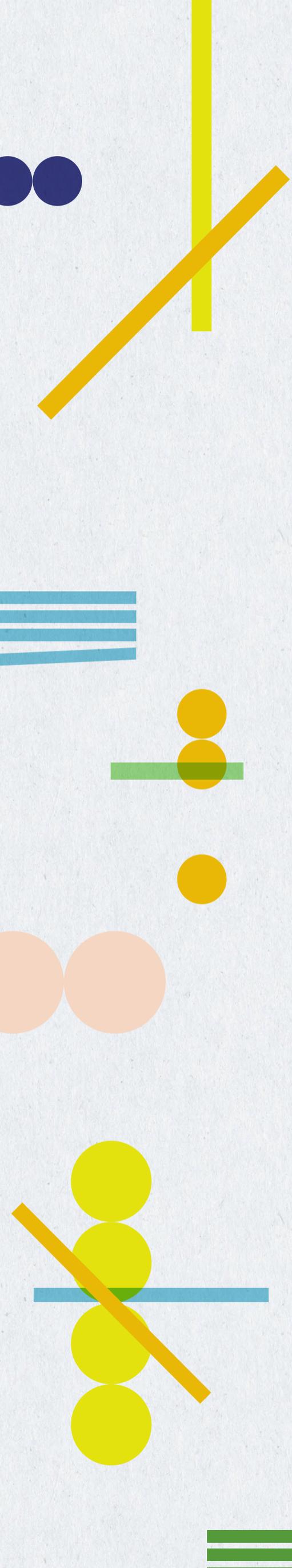
In an article published in 1945, Luciano Pereira da Silva, legal advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture, analyzed the existence of a “Brazilian cooperative regime” characterized by two elements. First, social distrust in the face of fraudulent schemes and false cooperatives emerged after Law No. 1,637/1907, making it possible to break the “one-person, one vote” rule and gave rise to a “proliferation of cooperatives that were true societies of capitals.” Second, an authoritarian mo-

derization process, governed by the State, in the control and inspection of cooperatives. This process involved failed laws, such as Decree 23.611/1933, which created the Professional Cooperative Consortia, preventing cooperatives from arising spontaneously.

For cooperatives to be founded, they had to organize themselves into registered professional consortia, in line with the then-dominant unionism. Under the influence of the model adopted in Pernambuco, the Decree-Law No. 5,893/1943 was adopted, creating an absolute dependence of the cooperatives on the State through the institution of the Rural Economy Service. In addition to imposing mandatory registration, the Decree allowed the Rural Economy Service to intervene and control existing cooperatives. At the time, Pereira da Silva summarized: “the new regime established by Decree-Law No. 5,893 aims to create a favorable environment for the development of cooperativism in Brazil” but “brings this development under the immediate and total control of the State.” The law created the mechanisms of the General Assembly, Deliberative Chamber, Board of Directors, Executive Board, and Fiscal Council. The Deliberative Chamber would have 12 to 30 members elected by the General Assembly.

On the other hand, the Executive Board would consist of three members, with the attribution of complying with the resolutions of the governing bodies (Assembly and Chamber). For the author, Brazilian cooperativism operated under a unique regime, considering that, in other countries, cooperativism was supposed to be free and of private initiative. This control would be exercised through mandatory unionization, which, in turn, would have the support and monitoring of government agents.

In the 1950s, cooperativism grew in the South but lagged in the Northeast, whose lands were ruled by an oligarchy of colonels. At that time, agronomist Valdiki Moura published a series of manifestos and books defending cooperativism. In *ABC of Cooperation*, he listed the rules of free membership, democratic control, limited interest on capital, proportional distribution of profits or surpluses, sale and purchase for money, and political and religious neutrality. Valdiki also emphasized two principles that cooperative writers paid little attention to, namely education and decent labor conditions. For Moura, cooperatives are not charities. Their essence is to operate as economic enterprises and correct the ills of capitalism. In São Paulo, the Free School of Cooperativism was created in 1960 by a group of professors and intellectuals. Still in the 1960s, the works of Pontes de Miranda, one of the most influential intellectuals in Civil Law, were disseminated. Pontes de Miranda published his *Tratado de Direito Privado* [“Treatise on Private Law”], formulating a concept of cooperative society (a society in which the members of the partnership pass over the economic element, and the consequences of the personality of participation are profound, to the point of turning it into a sort of society). The first premise established by Pontes is that the cooperative society is a type of society in which the priority is based on people, not capital. Therefore, albeit indirectly, this jurist recognizes that a cooperative is a society of people.



I.3

The initial shaping of the Brazilian cooperatives legal system and its consequences

In Brazilian law, the legal concept of “cooperative as a society of people” was laid out by Decree No. 22,239 in 1932 by Minister Oswaldo Aranha, who was personally responsible for drafting the Decree based on the work of a Technical Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Decree defined that “cooperative societies, whatever their nature, civil or commercial, are companies of persons and not of capital, in a sui-generis legal form.” Cooperatives were allowed to adopt as their object any type of operations or activity in agriculture, industry, commerce, the exercise of professions, and any services of a civil or commercial nature, “provided that it does not offend the law, morals, or good customs.”

Initially, a minimum number of seven members was established. By law, the statute could not define a maximum number of members. In the first legal architecture of cooperativism, social capital would be made up of “shares” (*quotas-partes*) inaccessible to individuals outside the partnership. The “area of action” should be determined by a cooperative society contract called the “constitutive act.” This initial contract should contain the name of the company, the registered office (place of operation), its economic purpose, the designation of the founding members, and the declaration of willingness to form the association.

In addition, the law required the constitution of a statute (*estatuto*), which should contain, among other things, the method of admission and exclusion of associates, the rights and duties of the associates, the method of convening the General Assembly, the form of sharing the “profits,” representation of the company in court proceedings and financial details (deadline for recording the balance of assets and liabilities, etc.).

The Decree of 1932, which influenced the Federal Law of 1971, prohibited the allotment of shares (*ações*), the constitu-

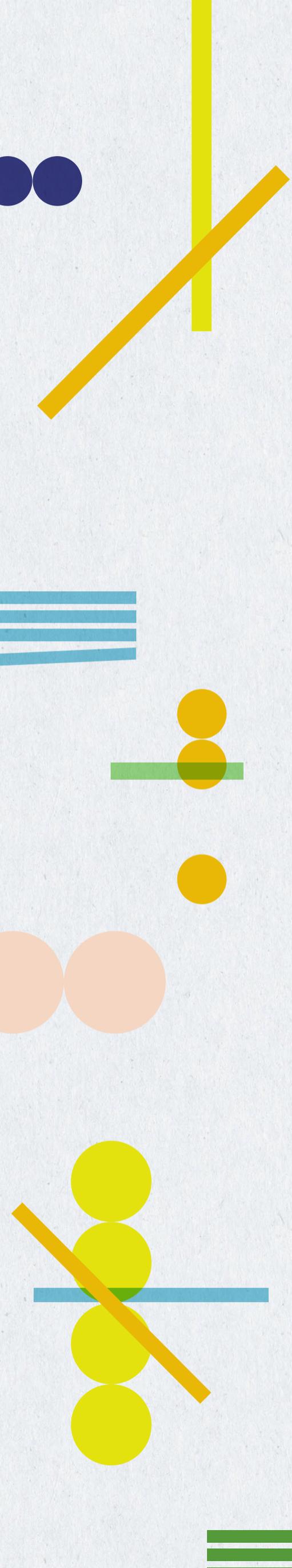
tion of the equity capital through subscription (a common legal mechanism in financial markets), the remuneration of members with commission payment, the establishment advantages in favor of initiators and founders, admitting foundations and civil associations as members, the charge of a premium for the admission of associates, and the direct or indirect participation in any political manifestation through society.

Between the 1930s and the mid-1950s, it is estimated that around 1,200 Luzzatti model cooperatives (credit coops) were created and reached a fair stage of development. In 1951, Law No. 1,412 transformed the *Caixa de Crédito Cooperativo* (which had been created by the Government in 1943) into the National Credit Cooperative Bank (BNCC) to assist and support cooperatives. In the years that followed, they became known as branches of the Brazilian military dictatorship, and some of their operating conditions were withdrawn from the Cooperatives. They were prevented from raising funds through time deposits (investments), and their loans had controlled interest rates. Rural credit could have a maximum rate of 13% per year, with 80% of the credit portfolio allocated in this segment, whereas general credit could be borrowed at 24% interest per year, and the remaining 20% was available to be borrowed. In 1964, Law No. 4,595 equated credit cooperatives with other financial institutions and transferred to the Central Bank of Brazil the attributions that had been previously assigned by law to the Ministry of Agriculture. These concerned the authorization of operation and supervision of credit cooperatives of any kind and the credit branch of the cooperatives that had it. The Law also provided that only two types of credit unions could exist: rural credit and mutual credit.

Until the 1960s, the national representation of cooperativism was divided between ABCOOP (Brazilian Alliance of

Cooperatives) and Unasco (National Union of Cooperative Associations). The military government saw in the cooperatives the support it needed to implement its economic policy for the agricultural sector. In 1967, the then Minister of Agriculture, Luiz Fernando Lima, asked the Secretary of Agriculture of the State of São Paulo, Antônio José Rodrigues Filho, who was already a cooperative leader, to promote the union of the entire movement. On December 2, 1969, the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB) was created following a consensus reached during the IV Brazilian Congress of Cooperatives. On June 8, 1970, the OCB was registered at the notary's office, thus becoming the entity in charge of defending the interests of Brazilian cooperativism.

The enactment of Law 5.764/1971 replaced all previous legislation on cooperativism and reinforced the role of OCB as the sector's national. Based on this regulation, the OCB was able to organize state units, and cooperatives began to fit into a business model, which, in turn, enabled their economic expansion.



I.4

**OCB, SESCOOP and
the institutionalized
cooperatives: enduring
conflicts with the
Solidarity Economy**

Cooperative Law in Brazil was promulgated in 1971 by dictator Emílio Garrastazu Médici along with economists Antonio Delfim Netto and João Paulo dos Reis Velloso, amid a deeply violent scenario. The enactment took place two years after the infamous *Ato Institucional n. 5* (which abolished Habeas Corpus and allowed imprisonment without criminal prosecution and due legal process). Indeed, the institutionalization of the cooperative system in Brazil took place in a context of “authoritarian developmentalism” and the “conservative modernization of the countryside.”

Through Law No. 5.764/1971, the Brazilian government created a “National Cooperative Policy,” elaborated by the National Cooperative Council, which started to operate with the Ministry of Agriculture. In addition to having members from the Ministries of Planning and Finance, the Interior, and Agriculture, the Council formalized the participation of the *Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras* (Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives), according to Article 95. The Law created a Chapter on the “representation of Brazilian cooperatives” and introduced the Article 105, which stated that “the representation of the national cooperative system belongs to the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB), civil society, headquartered in the Federal Capital, a technical-advisory body of the Government, structured under the terms of this Law, with no profit purpose.”

According to the law, the function of the OCB is “to maintain political neutrality and racial, religious and social indiscrimination,” “to integrate all branches of cooperative activities,” “to maintain registration of all cooperative societies,” “to maintain assistance services general to the cooperative system,” and “to denounce to the National Cooperative Council practices that may be harmful to cooperative development,”

among others. The law also provided that in order to operate, cooperatives had “to register with the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives or the state entity, if any, upon presentation of their bylaws and subsequent amendments” (Article 106).

In addition to holding control over the records and functioning as a kind of civil society to “surveil cooperativism,” the OCB started to rely on resources originating from the registration of other coops (10% of the highest current minimum wage if the sum of the paid-in capital is not greater than 250 salaries) and a payment called “Cooperative Contribution” (corresponding to 0.2% of the value of the paid-in capital and funds of the cooperative society, in the fiscal year of the previous year, the respective amount being distributed, in half, to its affiliates, when constituted). Through a legal creation – the “cooperative act,” which, according to the law, does not imply a market operation nor a contract for the purchase and sale of a product or merchandise – the 1971 Law created specific tax immunities. In the 1988 Constitution, thanks to the political pressure of OCB, it was defined that the National Congress should provide for “adequate tax treatment to the cooperative act practiced by cooperative societies.” However, this did not happen and led to a never-ending battle of interpretations about the “cooperative act” taxation in the Federal Supreme Court.

In the 1980s, cooperativism had to deal with severe hyperinflationary crises resulting from the Oil Crisis (1973-1974) and the failure of the military’s developmental policies. Based on a pragmatic vision, the OCB managed to mobilize its power to ensure that, in the transition process between the military and the civilian government, cooperativism was committed as a priority. One of the pieces of evidence of this process is the importance given to cooperativism in the Federal Constitution of 1988, which symbolizes the transition between military go-

vernment and democracy in Brazil. Article 174, which deals with the Brazilian economic order, provides that the law will encourage cooperativism. The text of the Constitution also defined that the agricultural policy will be planned and executed under the law, with the effective participation of the production sector, involving rural producers and workers, as well as the commercialization, storage, and transport sectors, involving the cooperativism.

Carlos Alberto Silva, in his doctoral thesis on the formation of cooperativism in Brazil, argues that, due to the proximity of the OCB to the military government, the cooperative milieu has faced a split in what is a cooperative society, dividing the business and the *popular* view: “While the business has an understanding that emphasizes the cooperative society as an economic enterprise, the popular, in contrast, recognizes the economic characteristic of the cooperative, but also attributes to this organizational mode the social mission.” On one side were the cooperatives affiliated with the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB) as the official legal representative of the national cooperative system. On the other hand, organizations emerged from social movements and family farming, such as the Solidarity Cooperatives system, formed by Unisol (Central of Cooperatives and Solidarity Enterprises), Unicafe (National Union of Family Farming and Solidarity Economy Cooperatives), Concrab (Confederation of Agrarian Reform Cooperatives of Brazil), etc.

As noted by Brazilian scholars in a report produced to the Ministry of Justice in 2012, the dependence on the OCB added to a depoliticized language and a pragmatic view of business concerning the expansion of cooperatives created strong tensions, especially with social movements and Marxist-oriented groups. According to researchers from the Center for Solidarity

Economy at the University of São Paulo, in a report published by the Ministry of Justice, cooperativism was fragmented into different matrices and different political-ideological spectrums:

The 1980s were marked in Brazil by two concurrent and parallel processes, one economic and another political-social in nature, determining the resurgence of popular cooperativism and Solidarity Economy in Brazil. On the one hand, it became known for its economists, such as the lost decade from the economic point of view, with galloping inflation, lack of growth, rising unemployment, and stagnation. On the other hand, it was remarkably known by social scientists as the decade of intense democratic invention and politicization of Brazilian society (...) [with the] emergence and mobilization of social movements around the struggle for democratization, after the long period of the military dictatorship.

During the 1990s, during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government, the Ministry of Agriculture, together with the OCB, created a plan to revitalize Brazilian agricultural cooperatives. According to Marcio Freitas, president of the OCB, Sescoop (National Service of Cooperatives for Learning) “came out of a crisis.” The diagnosis, at the time, was a deep financial crisis and management models. Thousands of cooperatives were in debt and about to close down. From the crisis came the elaboration of a support plan for the management of cooperativism, supported by the government.

In this movement, carried out between 1996 and 1997, Sescoop emerged, with a focus on professionalizing the work of cooperative members with a focus on management and business. The program’s central idea was to create a tripod of professional training, cooperative education, and the social promotion of cooperative actions. Having as its primary goal the constitution of cooperative culture, Sescoop laid the foundations for creating the Escola do Cooperativismo in Rio

Grande do Sul, the Unimed College, credit system universities, and the dissemination of cooperatives in State and Federal Universities. Sescoop was conceived as a decentralized system through actions in the territories and agreements with educational entities. Projects such as “Escola no Campo” also emerged, training teachers to work in the countryside. Based on the national structure of the OCB, Sescoop was also divided among units in the Brazilian states. Sescoop’s main focus was to promote a great leveling of management and administration of companies, focusing on the reality of cooperatives.

Legally, Sescoop is an Autonomous Social Service. According to Brazilian law, it is a legal entity of private law created by law to assist certain professional categories socially. Government support occurred precisely in the edition of Provisional Measure 1715/1998, which created Sescoop. In Brazilian administrative law, an Autonomous Social Service is considered a “parastatal entity” [entidade paraestatal], in cooperation with the government, with its own administration and assets. Sescoop was designed like other entities in Brazil, such as SENAI (National Service for Industrial Training), SENAC (National Service for Commercial Training), SESC (Social Service for Commerce), and SEBRAE (Brazilian Service to Support Micro and Small Businesses). These entities of the so-called “S system” do not need to comply with the rules for public notices and public tenders. They can use the resources more freely. The revenue of Sescoop comes from the compulsory monthly contribution of 2.5% on the amount of remuneration paid by cooperatives to employees. This compulsory contribution model is paid by cooperatives and has proven successful at SENAI and SESC.

With the professionalization of cooperativism in the period of re-democratization and the emergence of grassroots

autonomous movements on solidarity economy, Brazilian associations were split. On the one hand, the solidarity economy associations that were not configured as cooperatives were associated with highly politicized left-wing groups. On the other hand, the production and labor cooperatives linked to the OCB grew a lot, reaching the scenario described in the table below.

Table 1. Dimensions of the institutionalized cooperativism in Brazil in 2018

Activity	Co-operatives	Associates	Employees
Agricultural	1.618	1.017.481	198.654
Consumption	179	2.585.182	12.629
Credit	929	8.941.927	60,237
Educational	270	53.403	3.367
Special	8	321	8
Housing	284	106.659	577
Infrastructure	135	1.006.450	5.692
Mineral	97	23.515	182
Production	239	5.777	2.960
Health	805	238.820	103.015
Labor	943	188.435	943
Transportation	1.327	98.713	9.835
Tourism and Leisure	23	760	11
Total	6.887	14.267.483	398.110

Source: OCB (2018)

At the height of this conflict between pragmatists (oriented to expanding the power of cooperatives in a non-political way) and Marxists (oriented to the elaboration of Solidarity

Economy as a socio-economic alternative in the programmatic plan), Paul Singer defended a total separation between cooperativism and solidarity economy. According to the author, the institutionalized group should not be recognized as part of this new solidarity economy. In Singer's words:

Cooperativism arrived in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century, brought by European emigrants. It mainly took the form of consumer cooperatives in the cities and agricultural cooperatives in the countryside. Consumer cooperatives were generally per company and served to protect workers from the rigors of famine. In recent decades, large hypermarket chains have conquered markets and caused the closure of most consumer cooperatives. Agricultural cooperatives expanded, and some became large agro-industrial and commercial enterprises. However, none of these cooperatives were or are self-managed. Its management and the people who operate them are salaried, both in consumer cooperatives and in agricultural purchases and sales. That is why they cannot be considered part of the solidarity economy. In the wake of the social crisis of the lost decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the country was de-industrialized, and millions of jobs were lost, resulting in mass unemployment and accentuated social exclusion, the solidarity economy revived in Brazil. It generally took the form of a cooperative or productive association under different modalities but was always self-managed

During the 2000s and 2010s, the Solidarity Economy became the main economic project of the Workers' Party for a solidary reinvention of the economy. It was articulated through networks and hundreds of university projects to promote solidarity enterprises. Institutionalized cooperativism, which has the OCB as its primary political vector, came to be seen as bureaucratic, hierarchical, and not part of the proposed political project. This increased the distance and tension between these social and economic movements, thus affecting the debate on platform cooperativism.

There is a consensus in the sociological literature on cooperativism in Brazil that there is a gap between traditional cooperativism, part of a “conservative modernization in the rural sector,” and the “new cycle of cooperativism” created by the associated and democratic participation of workers and self-managed enterprises. In the 2012 report produced by academics to the Ministry of Justice, the main actors in this “new cycle” are the following:

Table 2. Main actors of the cooperativism system associated with autonomous enterprises and labor struggles (Kruppa, Gonçalves & Brendan, 2012)

Actor (name in Portuguese)	Description
UNICAFES – União Nacional das Cooperativas da Agricultura Familiar e Economia Solidária	In 2012, it represented more than 1,000 cooperatives in the country and had five regional and state units. UNICAFES is close to rural workers’ movements and Brazilian rural unions. It is a network close to CONTAG
UNISOL – União e Solidariedade das Cooperativas e Empreendimentos de Economia Social do Brasil	The Union was created with the support of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) as a non-profit civil association. The Union registered more than 700 cooperatives spread across 27 states. Its institutional objective is to defend the interests of the working class, improve people’s living conditions and engage in the process of transformation of Brazilian society based on the values of democracy and social justice
CONCRAB – Confederação das Cooperativas de Reforma Agrária	It was created in 1992 to organize production in the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) settlements through the promotion of cooperatives and cooperation. CONCRAB represents hundreds of producer cooperatives in rural settlements to articulate international relations for exports and relations with other associations and cooperative networks

<p>ANTEAG – Associação Nacional dos Trabalhadores de Empresas Autogeridas e Cogeridas</p>	<p>Created in 1991 from the creation of workers’ cooperatives that sought to recover companies in crisis through self-management. In the past, it came to represent 400 companies recovered or controlled by workers. ANTEAG’s objective is to build, disseminate and develop self-management models that contribute to creating work and income for workers</p>
<p>FBES – Fórum Brasileiro da Economia Solidária</p>	<p>FBES results from the historic process promoted by the I World Social Forum (I WSF), which was attended by 16 thousand people from 117 countries between January 25 and 30, 2001. The expression of interests and the need to articulate the national and international participation of the I WSF led to the constitution of the Brazilian Working Group on Solidarity Economy (GT Brasileiro), composed of networks and organizations from various associative practices of the popular solidarity segment: rural, urban, students, churches, union bases, universities, government social policy practices, credit support practices, information networks and links to international networks. The first Brazilian Plenary of Solidarity Economy was held in São Paulo on December 9 and 10, 2002. In 2003, the World Social Forum took place in January in Porto Alegre (RS) and was the benchmark for mobilizations, meetings, and construction of strategies in the field of Solidarity Economy. The II National Plenary took place on this occasion. In 2004, there was the creation of state and regional forums that were able to guarantee, in turn, the holding of the 1st National Meeting of Solidarity Economy Enterprises</p>

Source: Kruppa, Gonçalves & Brenda (2012) e FBES (2021)

In 2005, UNICAFES represented more than 1,000 family farming cooperatives. UNISOL had more than 700 member cooperatives. In 2003, with Lula’s victory and the rise of Paul Singer, the Brazilian Forum for Solidarity Economy (FBES) was created with the participation of 900 delegates, organized in the 27 states of Brazil.

As noted many years ago, these new entities “are positioned in a certain field of conflicts, building unity in the confrontation with their antagonist, the OCB.” UNICAFES defends the multiplicity of representation in a regulated manner. CONCRAB defends total freedom of representation according to their reading of the constitutional rights on freedom of association.

The approval of the Labor Cooperative Law during the Dilma Rousseff administration was also a moment of antagonism between organizations. OCB and UNISOL favored the legislation, while UNICAFES and CONCRAB were against the promulgation of the law. CUT has also defended a legal framework for solidarity economy, separating it from the traditional arrangement of the cooperative system created in the 1970s. Finally, there is a divergence of political positions and values within Brazil's large universe of cooperatives.

I agree with Armando Lisboa, who identified, in 2017, a distance between solidarity economy movements and cooperativism for different historical reasons and political values. For adherents of the theories of class struggles, social transformation through political struggle, and post-Marxist currents of thought and activism, Brazilian cooperativism seems too pragmatic and charged with a form of artificial political neutrality. At the same time, for institutionalized cooperativism, solidarity economy movements seem too partisan, politicized, and disconnected from the conservative values of a large part of the interior of Brazil. As I will argue in the next part, this historical distance has gradually diminished thanks to a common language about social innovation and economic democracy through digital cooperativism.



2.

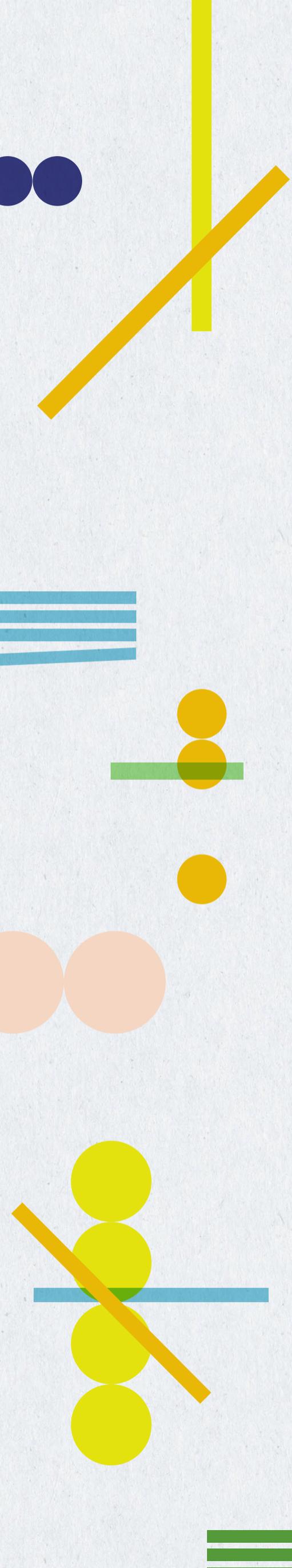
**Building the
movement
of Platform
Cooperativism in
Brazil**

An interesting element of the emergence of platform cooperativism in Brazil is the possibility of overcoming these separations and crises of the past around the re-articulation of a common agenda. I maintain in this part that this re-articulation has not taken place at the strategic level, but at the tactical level, between institutionalized and non-institutionalized groups. The radical separation proposed by Paul Singer might not hold up twenty years later. There may be new forms of dialogue between the sectors, partially overcoming a political and ideological separation. A dual phenomenon explains this: first, by the emergence of a set of enablers (or brokers of platform cooperativism), which I will describe in this section; secondly, as Solidarity Economy broke apart from the debate on platforming and from a new discourse on social economy and innovation that finds parallels between institutionalized and non-institutionalized sectors.

I will describe how platform cooperativism, as a movement, spread through three stages: (i) emergence from the margins, (ii) internalization by institutionalized cooperativism, and (iii) bifurcation of discourses and agendas. My argument is that this construction of dialogues enables new forms of cooperation, despite the distinct objectives between self-managed groups like DigiLabour and the movement led by InovaCoop, which seeks solutions for platform cooperativism within the existing cooperative economy ecosystem in Brazil.

Platform cooperativism in Brazil presents distinct discourses and separation between institutionalized and non-institutionalized cooperativism. This does not prevent relationships, connections, and bridges between these two fields. Streng-

thening the platform cooperativism agenda in Brazil can take advantage of these early irrigation channels across these distinct fields to further spread the seeds of a new type of digital economy in the 21st century. Below, I explain how this is happening.



2.1

The emergence from the margins of the institutionalized sector

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

One of the first works to publicize the concept was done by the Pirate Party (*Partido Pirata*) in Brazil. Through translations, Pirate Party activists argued that the cooperative model could be integrated into the digital environment instead of a shallower view of the “sharing economy” spread by the self-promotion of companies like Uber and Airbnb, which started operating in Brazil in 2014. In a text published in March 2016, it is noted:

While the Sharing Economy seems to have lost much of its original meaning, we now have a social movement that operates in full force, breaking down social constructs of property and exchange. (...) Today, we can link the cooperative model with the digital environment, allowing the creation of scalable platforms that share value among value creators, known as Platform Cooperativism. While venture capital is often needed to establish a prolific business model, a crowd can act as an engine of exchanges and deals if given the incentives to do so. The cooperative business model is not new, but it has endless implications when applied to global platforms. There is a number of newly created companies opting for a Platform Cooperative model, including Stocksy (an archive photo market), Fairmondo (a more aware eBay located in Germany), Lozooz (a blockchain version of Uber), and Loomio (a tool for group decisions).

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

Brazil has a strong culture of cooperativism, especially in the rural productive sector. According to a recent report by the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB), there are more than 6,500 cooperatives in the country, bringing together 13 million members – more than the population of Austria and Norway combined. Indirectly, the number of those involved reaches 33 million, according to data from FEA/USP. Therefore, the first challenge to advancing “platform cooperativism” in the country is to transport this cooperative culture to the universe of immaterial and technological production. Cooperativism is, as stated by the OCB, “an alternative for productive inclusion and transformation of people’s lives.” However, Brazil has not yet promoted a robust discussion on digital cooperativism. As a matter of fact, it is symptomatic that of the thirteen categories of economic activities of cooperatives in Brazil, the categories “technology” or “digital cooperatives” do not exist. The agricultural, credit, and transport sectors

dominate the cooperativism in the country. The second challenge is to make this possibility more visible through a more intense circulation of ideas and projects to democratize the economy on the Internet. There have been isolated efforts, like the Pirate Party, to spread blockchain technologies and the “platform cooperativism” project. However, we need more initiatives and more groups on this agenda. In this sense, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation’s initiative to discuss ‘solidarity economy’ and new technologies is commendable and more than necessary. (...) Platform cooperatives are not only alternatives to large companies with Uber and Airbnb, but they are also strategies for greater control over financial transactions and personal data, as users are the owners and managers of these platforms.

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

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

was published, with chapters that dialogued with the concept of platform cooperativism.

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

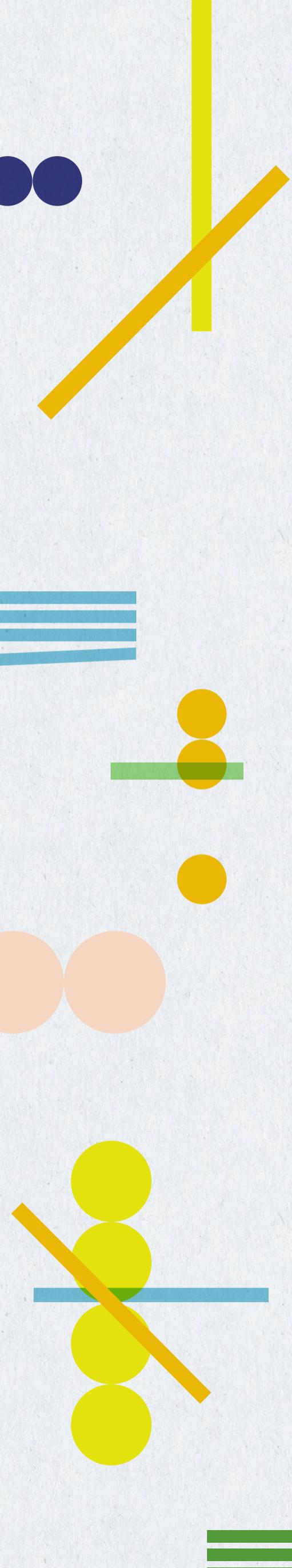
What can be observed in this first movement is its speculative and “agenda-setting” character, still disconnected from concrete experiences and undertakings that could declare themselves as “platform cooperatives.” Despite the emergence of sharing economy ventures such as Tem Açúcar (a platform for sharing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

At the launch event of the book *Cooperativismo de Plataforma* at Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Rodrigo Souto, pro-

grammer at Colivre, explained that the cooperative had emerged in Bahia under the influence of the solidarity economy movement strongly present at the University:

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

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



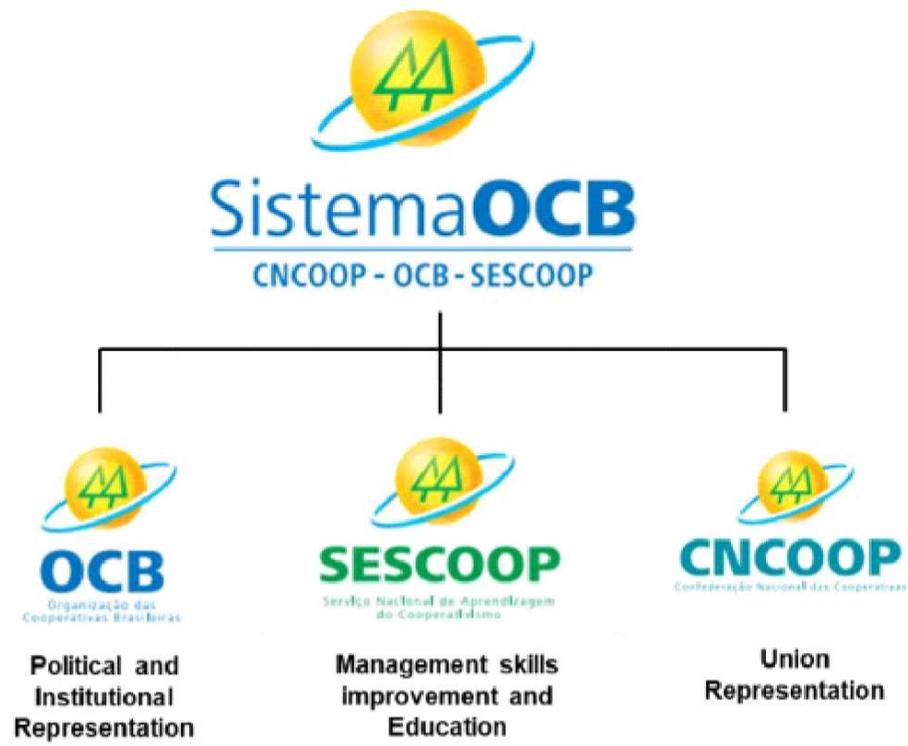
2.2

The institutionalization from within the system

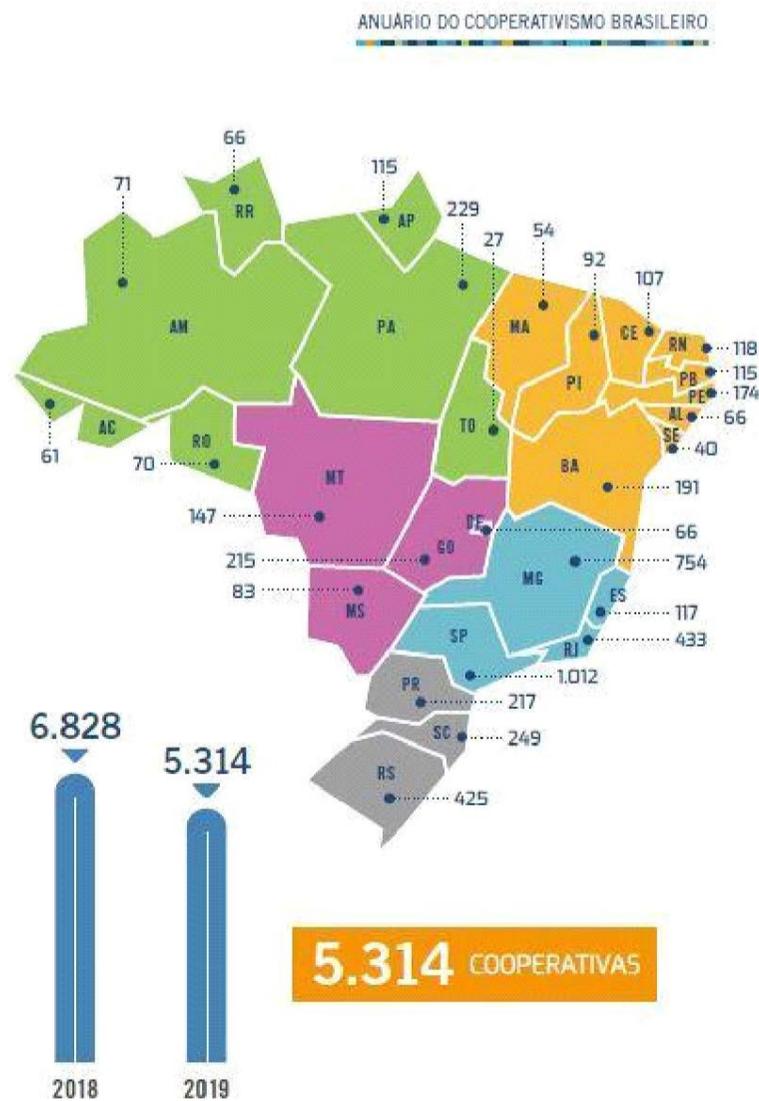
One of the most interesting phenomena between 2017 and 2019 was the process of internalizing the discourse on platform cooperativism within the institutionalized system of cooperativism in Brazil, which is formed by a triad. As I will argue, after the initial reaction from academics and NGOs, it was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

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

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



The system represents the totality of coops in the country, which had a sharp decline from 2018 to 2019 and can be best visualized below.



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

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

In November 2018, the president of the OCB, Márcio Freitas Lopes, made a public presentation on the future of cooperativism. In the presentation, he spoke of the issues of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in today’s society. For him, “the market will be increasingly guided by disruptive innovations,” and cooperativism must respond accordingly by promoting the values of (i) economy of purpose, (ii) fair trade,

(iii) shared value, (iv) feminist values of flexibility and empathy, (v) sustainability, (vi) creative empowerment, (vii) shared leadership, (viii) deep ecology and (ix) conscious capitalism. Announcing the “Somos Coop” movement and the 14th Congress of Brazilian Cooperatives, he spoke of the Stocksy cooperative from Canada, which was defined as “an example of platform cooperativism that brings together photographers from 63 countries”, and the Hansalim Cooperative from South Korea, which relies on technology and brings together cooperative producers and cooperative consumers of organic products.

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

Item 4 states that “Thinking about cooperativism is also about reflecting on public policies to encourage new trends in networking, connecting people and placing them at the center of decision-making in their businesses, through entrepreneurship. Thus, we suggest to the government proposals to support cooperatives as a sustainable option for thousands of Brazilian workers to have better conditions for inserting their products and services in the market.” What stands out is an explicit item about “Support and encouragement of platform cooperati-

vism.” The proposal argues that it is necessary to “encourage, through legal improvements and public policies, the cooperative model as a sustainable option to explore new trends in networking, connecting people and placing them at the center of their decision-making, with self-management through collective entrepreneurship, whether in collective purchase platforms or the hiring of services through applications.”

The public speech by Marcio Freitas, president of the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives, on the connection between cooperativism and the new generations presents evidence of such an internalization of the discourse. In 2021, in an interview about cooperativism in Brazil, he stated:

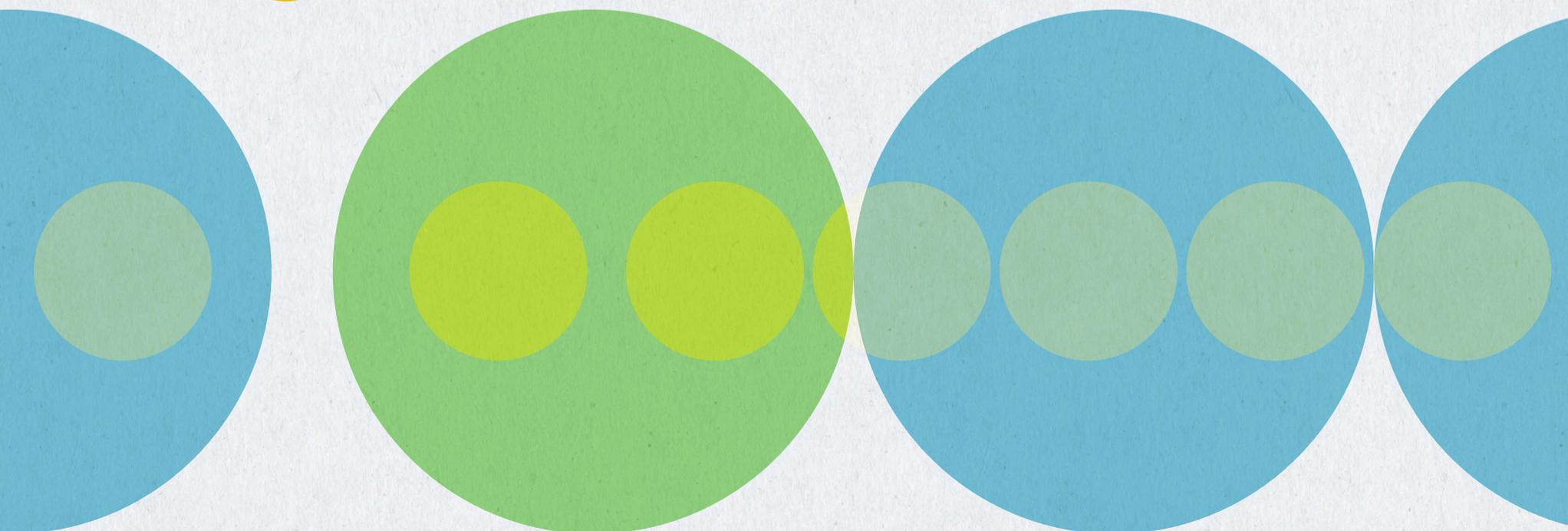
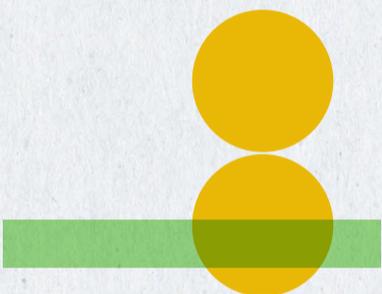
Cooperativism is an ideology where the person and principles are valued. Each person matters as a person, not as capital. A cooperative is a society of people where each individual has one vote. This ideology has spread worldwide over the last 150 years, and today it is an organizational system that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

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



2.2.1

The discourse of innovation and the role of the “missions”



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

The first was a study mission in the transport area, carried out by the OCB in 2018. It can be noted how the announcement made by the OCB highlights the element of innovation in its press release:

Representatives of the Brazilian cooperatives started this Monday (24/9), in Wisconsin, in the United States, the schedule of the Study Mission of the Transport Sector in the USA, organized by the OCB System. The idea of visiting the world's largest economy, where companies and cooperatives have taken the lead in improving processes and products, is to encourage innovation in cooperativism. Therefore, today, and tomorrow, Brazilians participate in a training course for leaders at the University of Wisconsin, focused on new management techniques. (... Through the Center for Cooperativism at the University of Wisconsin, the UW is considered an international reference in cooperativism. Along with the University of Sherbrooke in Canada, and the University of Bologna, in Italy, the institution ranks among the three main lines of research in cooperativism in the world. Starting on Wednesday, the Study Mission of the Transport Branch will land in Silicon Valley, where it will participate in a lecture with the professor [Trebzor Scholz] at The New School in New York, considered one of the best private universities in the United States, and a reference in innovation.

A second mission was organized in 2019 by two facilitators, who played a prominent role in constructing this discourse of alignment between innovation and platform cooperativism. The first was Travis Highis, a consultant at Clearbench Consulting, a specialist in process management and innovation in technology companies, and an enthusiast of platform cooperativism in Brazil. Travis lived in Brazil for many years, studied in Minas Gerais, and met communicators and members of Brazilian cooperativism. He also became a facilitator for meetings with groups and institutions in the US.

The second prominent agent was Coonecta, a communication and innovation agency for cooperatives founded in São Paulo. Coonecta's objective is "to make cooperatives protagonists of the Digital Economy and support the development of a business ecosystem based on cooperative values." As the company emerged, it focused on workshops, training, missions, and events focused on cooperatives. Together with Travis Highis, the Coonecta team organized a mission on platform cooperativism in New York in 2019.

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

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

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

The idea is to explore new business models in this platform format. They unite the network effect model, which treats data as business drivers, and combine this with cooperativism in a fairer way for all parties. We saw in this movement of platform cooperativism the union that we wanted to make way back then. It was the union between innovation and cooperativism. For us, the strength of this agenda became clear precisely following the 2019 New York Conference, where we saw a change from the outside to the inside, a two-way movement that also features agents outside of cooperativism. (...) In the beginning, there was much resistance, but we worked with the idea of educating the cooperative market in Brazil.

The 2019 “New York Mission” counted on the participation of professionals from different areas of Brazilian cooperatives. For example, leaders from the cooperative health area, engineers specializing in logistics and transport cooperatives, engineers specializing in solar energy and energy sharing ventures, computer science professionals working in information technology cooperatives, and experienced managers of agricultural cooperatives participated.

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

The mission participants visited the New York City Office of Mayor Mike Bloomberg, the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, the Park Slope Food Coop, the Cooperative Home Care Associates, the Savvy Cooperative, Stash, Cornell Tech, and the Independent Drivers Guild of New York (IDG-NY). The image below shows a picture of the visit to Cornell Tech. As one can see, the location is *Tata Innovation Center*. An explanatory hypothesis is the legitimizing force of the innovation discourse. Therefore, it is always safer to present a visit focusing on business innovation rather than announcing a focus on social justice and economic democracy.



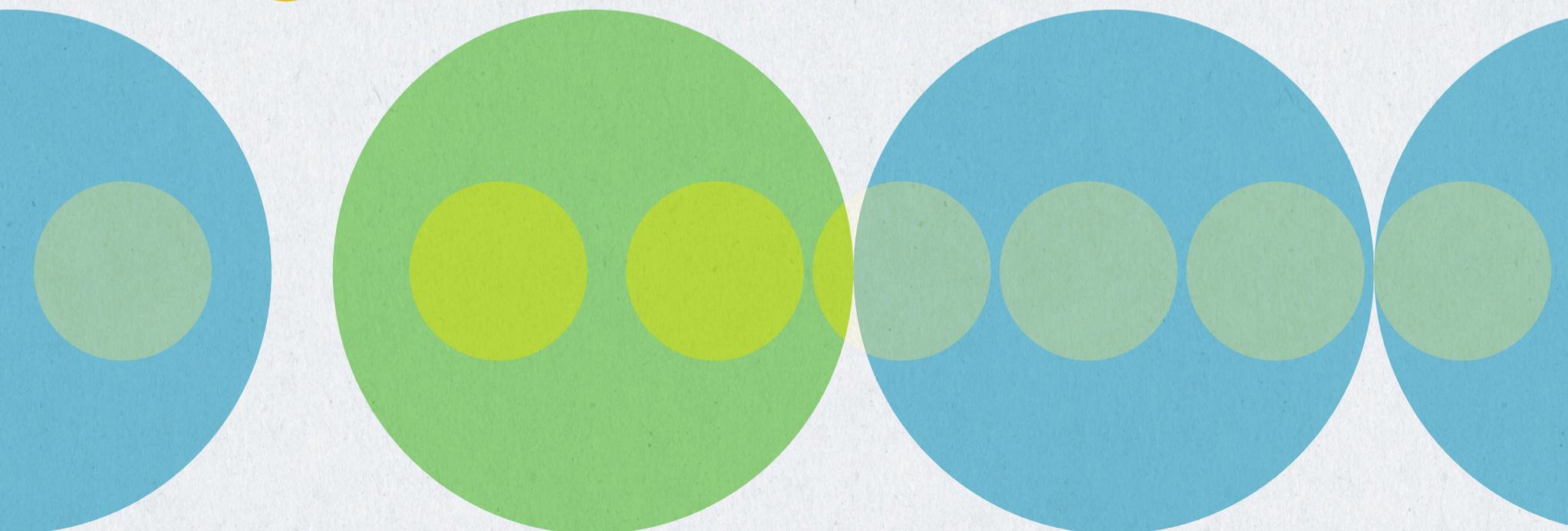
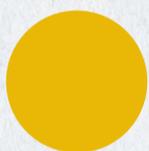
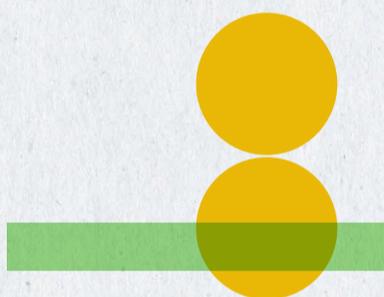
Fonte: Coonecta (2019)

By creating a routine of constant meetings for four days, including The New School seminar, the mission had a networking function, connecting people. In addition, it brought an air of novelty to cooperative members in Brazil. Finally, the missions played crucial roles in the internalization of platform cooperativism within the institutionalized system.



2.2.2

**The role of the brokers
within the system: a
typology**



In the institutionalized system of cooperatives, internal actors and coupled actors emerged, so to speak. The articles produced by *Geração Cooperativismo*, for example, are evidence of production by an internal actor. Launched by Sescop/RS in early 2012 to celebrate the International Year of Cooperatives, the platform demystifies cooperativism, bringing it closer to the reality of young people through interviews with professionals, students, and managers of diverse types of cooperatives in the state. Sescop/RS is the National Cooperative Learning Service of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, linked to the Organization of Cooperatives of Rio Grande do Sul (Ocergs).

In the case of the Cooperation Generation, there is an appeal to a young language, with intense colors in purple and pink, and a message much more linked to resistance to a dystopic future (“when robots dominate the world”), as it can be seen below. In this respect, one can see how discourses on platform cooperativism change according to the interests behind it. For example, when targeting very young people, the discourse on innovation and management was abandoned in favor of an idea of resistance.



Source: Geração Cooperação (2019)



Source: Falae Geração (2019)

A different example is the content produced by Mundo Coop. MundoCoop was created in 1999 when much was said about the need to transform information into knowledge in Brazilian cooperativism. MundoCoop has ideology and principles and aims to generate superior levels of information for all those involved in the cooperative sector. In August 2019, MundoCoop published a long story about platform cooperativism, with interviews with Nathan Schneider and Trebor Scholz.

Both in the case of MundoCoop, as in the case of Coonec-ta, one can see how members linked to the institutionalized system of cooperativism came to have a vital role in constructing the movement and dissemination of these ideas within the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives, which, considering its hierarchical position, plays a pivotal role of radiating into the system. Paradoxically, the hierarchical legacy of the OCB – which could be called undemocratic or very centralizing – ended up serving as an advantage and reducing transaction costs, considering that information started to circulate internally within the cooperative system, facilitating the process of democratically accessing information on platform cooperativism.

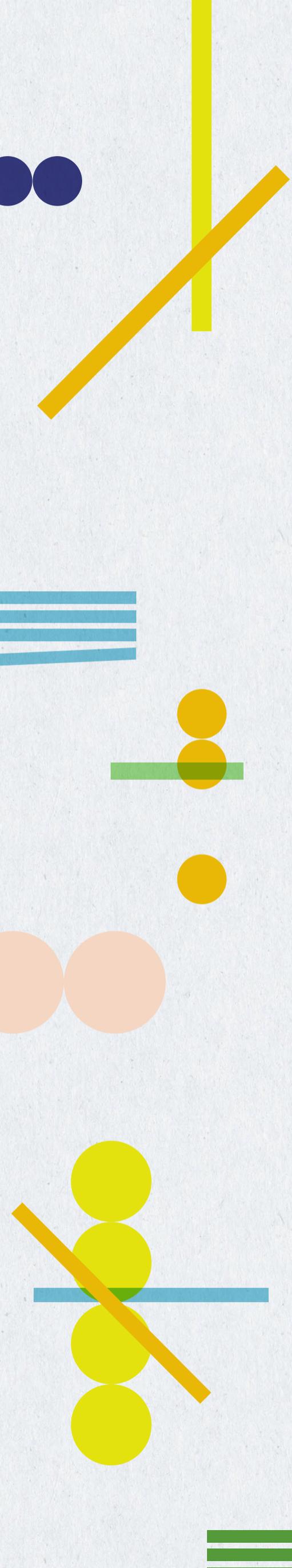
One of the internalization proxies within the system is the number of articles produced by MundoCoop about “platform cooperation.” Below is a compilation of articles published between 2020 and 2021.

Table 3. Articles about “platform cooperativism” published by MundoCoop between 2020 and 2021		
Year	Articles	Titles
2019	2	<i>Cooperativismo de plataforma é a alternativa para um capitalismo mais humanizado (August 06, 2019)</i> <i>Cooperativismo de plataforma ganha força pelo mundo (December 18, 2019)</i>
2020	2	<i>É hora do cooperativismo de plataforma (July 30, 2020)</i> <i>Cooperativismo de plataforma: quais as possibilidades (August 21, 2020)</i>

2021	6	<p><i>Precisamos falar sobre Cooperativismo de Plataforma (March 26, 2021).....</i></p> <p><i>Cooperativismo de Plataforma é tema de encontros no SESC (August 03, 2021)</i></p> <p><i>OCB lançará curso sobre cooperativismo de plataforma (31 de agosto de 2021)</i></p> <p><i>Cooperativismo de plataforma: o caminho para uma economia digital justa (21 de setembro de 2021)</i></p> <p><i>Cooperativismo de Plataforma é tema de novo curso (15 de setembro de 2021)</i></p> <p><i>Cooperativismo de plataforma: quando os trabalhadores são os donos do app (24 de outubro de 2021)</i></p>
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Source: Mundo Coop (2021)

These brokers (or simply “facilitators”) played a leading role in disseminating a new language on platform cooperativism during 2018 and 2020. We can separate them into two types. Internal brokers operate within the institutionalized system, such as Geração Coop, a project organized by Sescop in Rio Grande do Sul. *Coupled brokers*, as I provisionally called them, provide services directly to cooperatives, such as MundoCoop, a magazine dedicated to cooperativism, and Conecta, an events agency dedicated to innovation in cooperativism. They are “coupled” in the sense that their existence is dependent on institutionalized cooperativism. Finally, we can notice the emergence of a type of internal discourse, oriented to the potential of the cooperatives system’s enterprises, targeted at the internal, legally constituted system of coops, as well as the members of this group.



2.3

InovaCoop and the discourse about open innovation

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

In the case of InovaCoop, it is easy to see the centrality of the discourse on innovation. For example, the platform’s promotional material writes:

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

InovaCoop also launched a series of materials about platform cooperativism. By adopting a more critical tone, the article analyzes a set of bottlenecks for platform cooperativism to achieve superior development in Brazil, as it must overcome obstacles in the legal formatting of cooperatives.

It is possible to affirm that platform cooperativism – as a movement and a business model – still has significant challenges ahead and is advancing little by little. But the need to question the current model of digital platforms and propose platform cooperativism as a solution is undeniable. After all, why don’t we see the emergence of “cooperative startups”? One chal-

lenge, for example, is the issue of financing the creation of cooperative platforms. As Mario de Conto, a lawyer and the director-general for Escoop, explains, the platform cooperatives still need to find a way to get financing since Brazilian law does not allow partner investors.

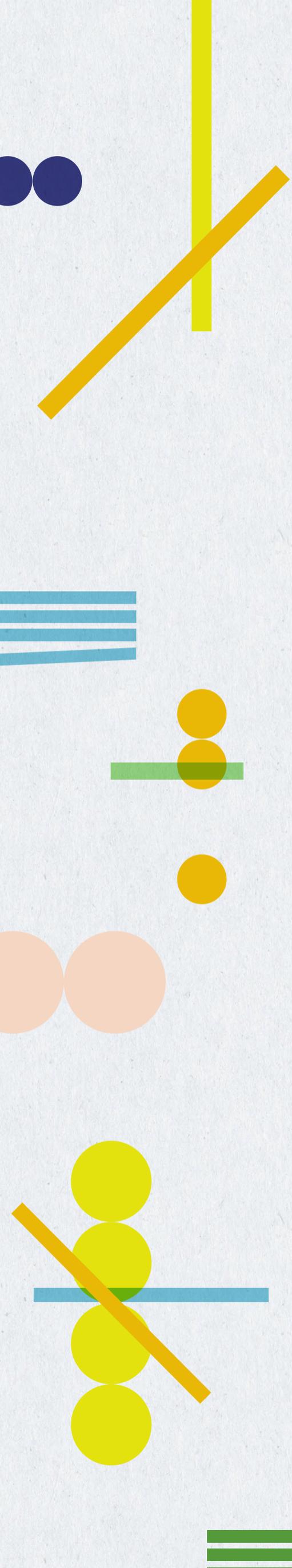
With formal support from the OCB, InovaCoop is a robust project with a large budget and considerable narrative creation capacity. However, it is noted how the discourse is internal, closed to itself, that is, to the very universe of cooperatives formalized as such and belonging to the cooperative system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

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

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

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

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



2.4

The experience of
Hackathons on platform
cooperativism

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

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

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

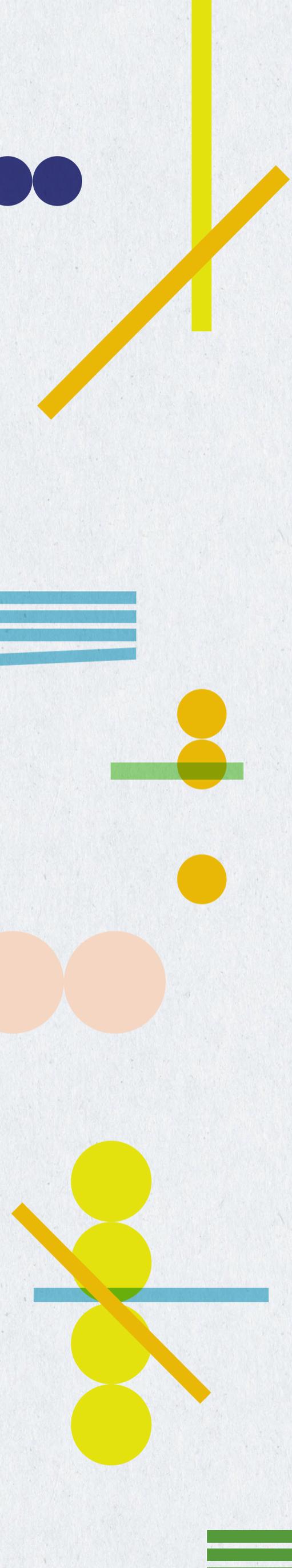
Hacking Rio, held between October 9th and 11th, received 2,650 applicants, 566 mentors, and 14 thematic clusters. Among them is the cooperativism cluster, sponsored by the OCB/RJ System. In total, 135 were enrolled in the cooperative cluster, forming 31 teams. Of these, five reached the stage of

delivering the project codes. A team of 26 mentors supported the cooperativism cluster teams in Hacking.Rio.

In October 2021, specific hackathons were also carried out on smart-city solutions, focusing on sustainability, for the cities of São João da Barra and Campos dos Goytacazes. The event was called HackAÇU.

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

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



2.5

**The effect of the pandemics
and the precarization of
platform work: the rise
of the Observatory of
Platform Cooperativism**

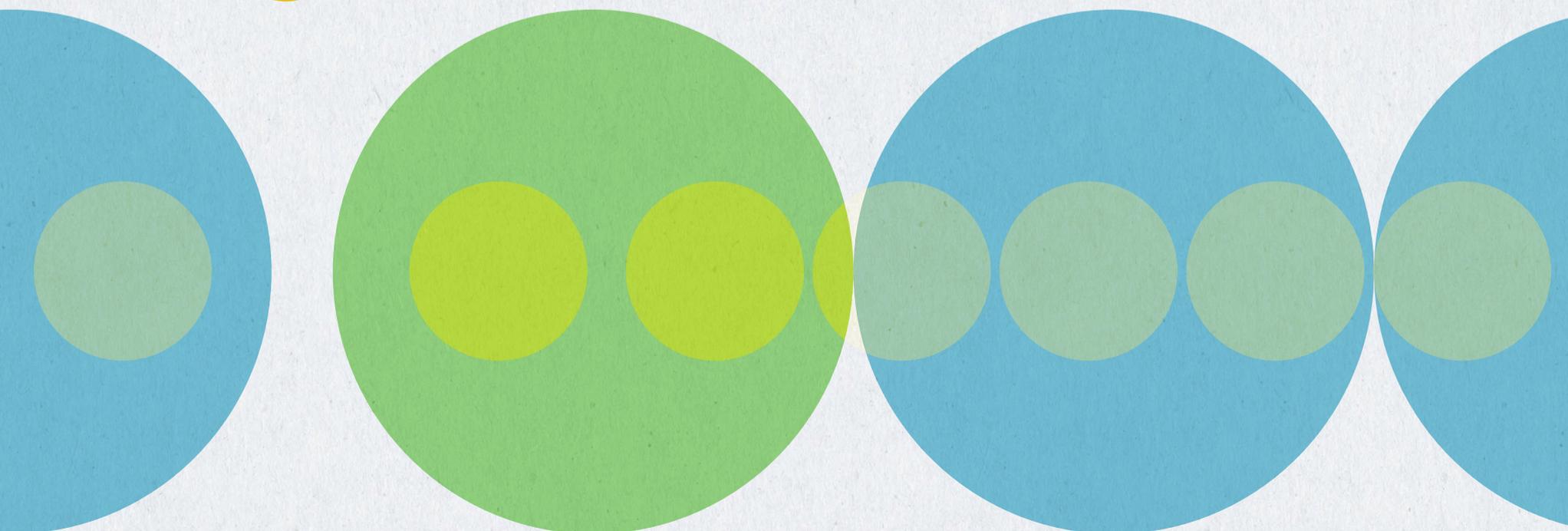
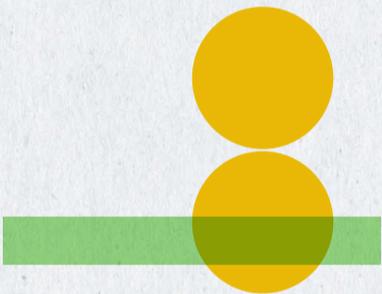
As I will argue in this section, the pandemic and the diagnosis of precarious work gave rise to important projects and social movements, such as the DigiLabour project, organized by Rafael Grohmann at Unisinos in Rio de Grande do Sul. From a diagnosis of self-organization problems of small groups interested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

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



2.5.1

**Pandemic and platform
work: understanding the
protest called *Breque dos
Apps***



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

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

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

Between July and August, under the leadership of the movement entitled *Entregadores Antifascistas*, Breque dos Apps was organized and generated a massive effect on the media and society. Delivery workers paralyzed the streets of big cities like São Paulo and gained support from progressive sectors of society. Gabriela Delgado and Bruna Carvalho noted that in July 2020, these workers are granted the right to work by digital platforms in exchange for remuneration in a context in which

they cannot voice their opinion and choose their clients or manage their working conditions. Indeed, “cooperation loses the solidary sense of common commitment and gains contours of exploitation, through the exercise of the directive power of algorithms, which is mirrored in the algorithmic subordination of these workers.” As seen in the image below, the protest mobilized catchphrases such as “our lives are worth more than their profit” and “I am not a number, but a life” or “risking my life to satisfy your hunger.” These phrases clarified the character of exploitation, precariousness, and the need for resistance.



Source: Cem Flores (2020)

According to Nina Desgranges and Wickson Ribeiro, Breque dos Apps was organized by delivery workers who were also digital influencers and used social media extensively to build narratives about their awareness of their condition of social vulnerability, insecurity, and workload. It was also a movement that criticized the entrepreneurship and free-market discourse of “partner drivers” [*motorista parceiro*], who are not considered workers and do not have labor rights in their relations with the platforms. For Desgranges and Ribeiro, systematic di-

digital action effectively gained the attention of the media, academics, unions, and the organized left, as well as the general population. Application workers defended the increase in the value of the kilometer traveled, the increase in the value of the minimum delivery fee, the end of undue blocking of registered users, the end of the scoring system and restriction of Rappi's locations, and a pandemic aid in the form of masks distribution of masks and financial support should a driver become ill.

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

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

The multitude of “uberized” workers organized themselves, appropriating the power they had as a crowd. In this process of informalization and monopolization promoted by uberization, what we see are hundreds of thousands of people working for one, two, or five companies. When this crowd organizes itself, it's hundreds of thousands against one, two, five companies. But, of course, it is an action pervaded by various dilemmas and different potential consequences. The Breque dos Apps is a collective brake on how this mode of uberization control is organized and how it has worsened the degradation and exploitation of labor (...) We are witnessing a new form of ma-

agement and organization of work and the working class (...) To be “uberized” is to live in an uncertain, unstable way and, at the same time, subordinate to a form of centralized and almost unattainable control.

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

At the time, it was reported that Eduarda Alberto (leader known as Duda from the collective *Entregadores Antifascistas*) and other workers had translated the CoopCycle application to Portuguese and were working to adapt the platform to a payment system that could operate in Brazil to launch *Despatronados*. However, the CoopCycle adaptation encountered two problems. First, CoopCycle is a co-op focused on bicycles for environmental reasons. In Brazil, a substantial number of delivery people use motorcycles. Second, for investment reasons for the development of the platform. The solution found by the collective was to create a WhatsApp group to operationalize the deliveries.

In August, the journalist Lu Sudré reported that workers [*motoboys*] from *Entregadores Antifascistas* were “articulating to build another form of work.” They built a “proto cooperative” of 15 workers and a Wix website. According to one of the members, “the idea of cooperativism is necessary now.” The proto cooperative model was built with a few elements. The website generated direct access with a WhatsApp group. Through this WhatsApp group, deliveries could be arranged for the next day.

The price was decided collectively: R\$ 15 (Brazilian reais) for deliveries of 5 kilometers and R\$ 1 for every additional kilometer. Finally, it was decided that workers doing delivery at night would receive additional remuneration.

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

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

I wanted the struggle of the movement Entregadores Antifascistas to be a struggle for workers' rights more broadly. (...) When I started denouncing the applications, I made the video, and the video went viral. My fellow workers said that I was an actor hired by The Intercept Brasil to introduce communist ideas. They said I was financed by the Workers' Party. The movement of Entregadores Antifascistas is to make street politics [política de rua]. All street politics must come together to empower the worker. Street politics is not about having a career, but you can make history. What is the idea? If we get

hold of the tool called politics, we can make changes. If we use this tool to our advantage, we can change the world. But they stick into people's minds that politics is a bad thing. The workers are so screwed up, the media messed with their heads so much that they are suspicious of what we do. And when they refuse to believe it, they stop doing politics, which paves the way for fascism.

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

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

The months following the protest showed practical problems in establishing new cooperatives by workers. First, because of the investment and capital cost. Application prototypes cost up to one million reais, as CooperSystem (the largest information technology cooperative in Brazil) reported. The organizational model of "venture capital" supplies these needs

with copious amounts of capital invested in start-ups to launch new applications. This capacity for investment does not exist in the self-organized movements of workers in Brazil.

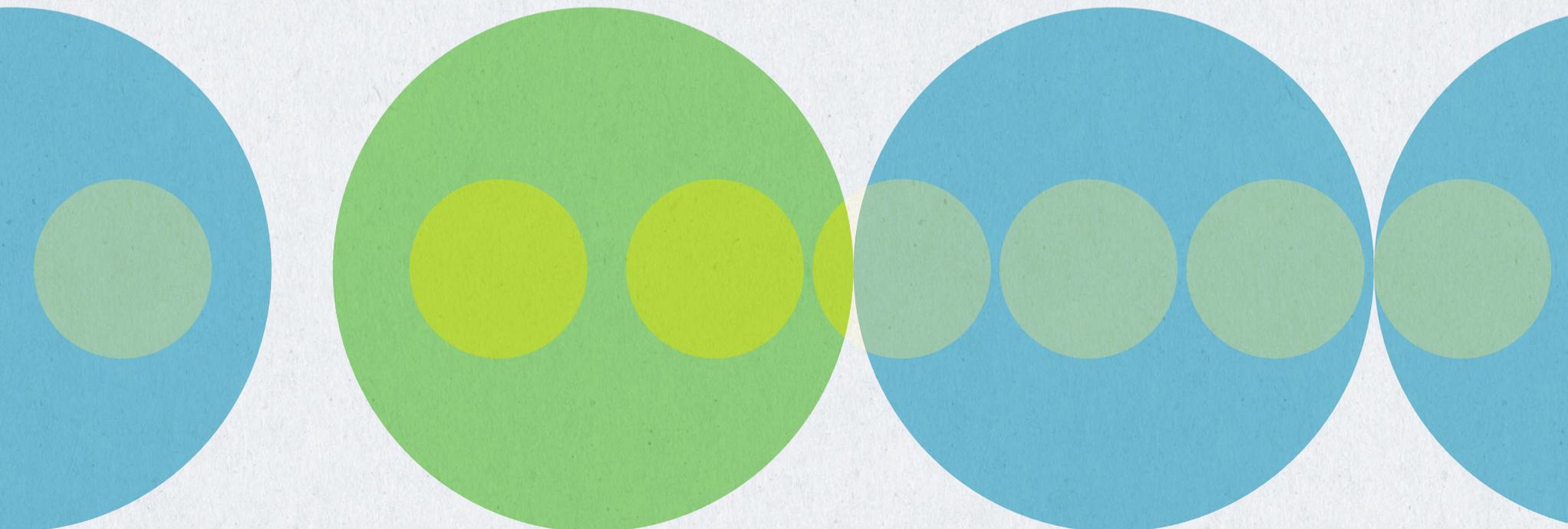
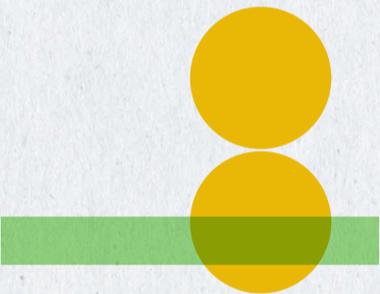
Second, due to the lack of tools, guides, and management support. The institutionalized movement of cooperatives did not provide clear support for the movements that emerged from the streets. At no time, as far as I could see in the research, did the OCB create specific funds to support application deliverers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

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



2.5.2

**The rise of the Observatory
of Platform Cooperativism
in 2021**



Between July 2020 and July 2021, researcher Rafael Grohmann from Unisinos University structured the Observatory of Platform Cooperatives (*Observatório do Cooperativismo de Plataforma*).

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

At the launch event, Daniel Santini, project coordinator at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, explained that the project aims to think of alternatives to the logic taken for granted by large technology companies, creating new markets and much fairer logic.

Ana Paula da Rosa, coordinator of the postgraduate course in communication at Unisinos, explained that one of the Brazilian challenges is building bridges between universities and civil entities to serve society's interests. "We have to do research with the subjects that transform society," she argued.

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

The emphasis on decent work is a critical point, considering that Rafael Grohmann is the Brazilian representative of the FairWork project, created by Mark Graham in the United Kingdom. The FairWork project created methodologies for evaluating work on platforms to analyze conditions of justice and dignity. In this sense, the Observatory is also influenced by activism around fair work, articulated in global research and cooperation networks.

The Observatory's strategy was to increase the visibility of projects and themes related to platform cooperativism. In six months, the Observatory launched 20 videos about the following topics: (i) the meaning of platform cooperatives, (ii) the existence of data coops, (iii) the experience of Driver's Seat, (iv) the project Means TV, (v) the problem of decent work (divided into Part I and Part II), (vi) the concept of design justice, (vii) the experience of the project Up & Go, and others. A playlist is freely available for those interested.

The Observatory does not provide consultancy and does not provide management support to new cooperatives. However, it creates bridges and connections between researchers, activists, cooperative members, and workers. Focused on research, the Observatory also aggregates research, articles, master's theses, and doctoral theses on the subject, allowing researchers to submit their work to the Observatory.

The focus of the Observatory of Platform Cooperativism is the noninstitutionalized platform cooperativism (NPC). The Observatory sheds light on projects such as Cataki (a platform that connects workers that collect recyclable materials with people that produce waste), Señoritas Courier (a collective of women and LGBT individuals that offers delivery services), AppJusto (an alternative for delivery in which technology serve people with more autonomy), TransEntrega (a delivery pla-

tform of transsexuals), Contrate Quem Luta (a platform created by the Homeless Workers Movement), and ContratArte (a platform of artists and content creators based in Rio Grande do Sul).



3.

Current challenges in emerging projects of platform cooperativism in Brazil

The previous sections argued that platform cooperativism in Brazil is complex, multifaceted, and connected to different sectors, which present concerns that range from innovation to combating precarious work. I also explained how cooperativism could be separated into “institutionalized” (IPC) and “non-institutionalized” (NPC). This last section will explain concrete examples of emerging projects and analyze the challenges encountered from a legal and governance perspective. Finally, I will argue that although platform cooperativism has grown in Brazil, it faces scale and coordination challenges, as well as legal issues concerning the traditional formats, which, in turn, prevent investment and more flexible management models.

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

What is observed is a double phenomenon. First, on the side of institutionalized cooperativism, there is a tendency to continue with the cooperative legal format, despite the enormous difficulties in operationalizing investments and more flexible business models within the rigid legal regime of cooperativism. The second phenomenon is the emergence of projects that take on the values of platform cooperativism but opt for different legal formats. Some, like Cataki, prefer to keep their membership format and work with donations and spon-

sorships. Others, like AppJusto, prefer to work as a private company and institute clear rules for equity participation and prevent an investment fund from taking majority control of the votes. Finally, others choose to articulate individuals registered as Microentrepreneurs (MEI), who can issue their own invoices.

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

Table 4. Emerging projects framed as “platform cooperatives” in Brazil

Name	Legal arrangement	Associated with institutionalized cooperativism?	Description
Somos Ciclos	Cooperative	Yes (incubated by Si-coob Espírito Santo)	A cooperative for integrating doctors, health plans, credit, and sustainable energy services. It emerged to meet a demand from cooperative members for the intermediation of non-financial services
Cataki	Association (civil society organization)	No	An application that integrates solid waste generators, collectors, and recycling points. Waste producers (people and companies) and collectors can connect and agree on a fair value for the collection through the platform. The project is maintained by the “Movimento dos Pimpadores” association, founded by the artist Mundano from São Paulo. In 2019, 355 municipalities had collection points in Cataki. By 2020, that number had jumped to 1088
Caronaê	University project	No	A student initiative project at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. It is open-source and allows people to connect to combine rides. Caronaê is a university project of a federal autarchy (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)
Pedal Express	Limited company	No	Founded in 2010 by Marcos Ritter, Guilherme Schubert, and André Mancuso as a limited liability company. The company is headquartered in Porto Alegre and has a group of 40 people who deliver with their bicycles, combining a passion for cycling and delivery services at fair prices
AppJusto	Limited company	No	Founded in September 2020 as Justo Tecnologia e Inovacao Social LTDA. Its partners are Pedro Brito, Rogério Nogueira and José Eduardo Araújo, in addition to three non-management partners. AppJusto is a delivery platform focused on transparent and fair relationships. The company’s goal is to register 3,000 restaurants, 5,000 couriers and reach 800,000 transactions in 2022.

Vou Bem	Cooperative	No	Born in Maringá, Paraná, it is a movement that started on Facebook in 2018 and that migrated to a platform and an application for Android and iOS. It was created by two coops: Cooper Dinâmica and CooperMap, a cooperative of drivers from Maringá. It was estimated that, between 2020 and 2021, it connected around 300 drivers
Smart-Coop	Project of Federation of Coops (Association)	Yes	A digital innovation platform founded by the Federation of Farming Coops of Rio Grande do Sul with the object of managing data, information, and business opportunities for rural workers and associated coops. The platform was launched in April 2021. The SmartCoop platform is the result of an inter-cooperation work between 30 agricultural production cooperatives in Rio Grande do Sul linked to FECOAGRO/RS
Contra-Arte	Educational project	No	A digital platform created by artists in Rio Grande do Sul. It is not formed as a cooperative. Instead, it is an association of artists formed in June 2021 to connect artists with consumers. It is a project of Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Rio Grande do Sul

Fonte: desenvolvido a partir de Silveira, Wegner e Silva (2021).

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

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

As explained in one of the interviews, Samara Araújo from the InovaCoop project, the large cooperatives with massive resources are promoting investment in platform projects and platform cooperativism. While for smaller ones from sectors with fewer resources, investment is moving forward in slow steps. There is an investment capacity problem that is significant even in institutionalized cooperativism:

The theme [of platform cooperativism] has not yet taken off. We see ourselves in this vital role of discussing the topic, clarifying people, and bringing in references from outside. But, in fact, the timing of how things happen is not necessarily the timing we believe will occur. I’ve noticed over the last year that the interest in cooperatives that already exist in the topic of platforms is greater than that of people looking to find new cooperatives. When we first brought up the theme of platforms, we came up with the discourse of work cooperatives and the fight against precariousness. I felt a latent demand from existing cooperatives, seeking the path of platforms and intermediation. This occurred especially in the credit sector, which made a large investment. There is an interest on the part of work, transport, and infrastructure cooperatives, but as they are small, the organization and agility to carry out these movements are more restricted. Credit and agricultural cooperatives have many resources to make this transformation.

In 2020 and 2021, the focus of legal reform work in coo-

perativism focused on legal changes to enable virtual assemblies without the physical presence of members and the inclusion of cooperatives in programs to facilitate access to credit by the federal government. However, there has still not been a substantial legal change to face the impediment of financial support in the network by people who want to support cooperatives and cooperate in ways not directly related to the organization's work.

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

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

In the beginning, everything was motivated by the problem of delivery workers. Because they don't have autonomy in their work. When we started thinking, “how are we going to create something?”, the first thing we thought of was a co-op. Beau-

se if the worker owns the business, this will make more sense than providing services to others. We talked to many people from cooperatives and thought about a few things. First, how much this would actually attract workers was anybody's guess. Because the knowledge about cooperativism was very limited. For workers, understanding the possibilities of cooperativism and joining it are not trivial things. But what was really decisive was that we didn't know much about this world. I already knew some cooperatives, but we didn't know how to manage them. We also noticed governance limitations, bureaucratic limitations, and investment limitations. We've already invested a million reais and opted for equity crowdfunding. We only found one case of investment in cooperatives in New York, but this possibility did not exist in Brazil. We looked at the problem and realized that, as we didn't know it and there were many legal obstacles, we decided to go to the world we already knew, [the world] of startups. We then chose to leave the code open and consider this as a collective good. If the code is open, it's as interesting as creating a co-op. If a cooperative has a private, closed source code, it is not a common good. As the code is free, everyone who participates, everyone who is there, can take the code and reuse it to make a new initiative.

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

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

Finally, the study identified a kind of “internal look,” or ins-

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

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

As noted by the research, in 2021, several initiatives were carried out, such as the launch event of the Platform Cooperative Observatory, the Brazilian Institute of Architects’ Institute discussion event, the SESC training event, and the annual Platform Cooperative Consortium event, which brought together representatives from these two worlds: institutionalized

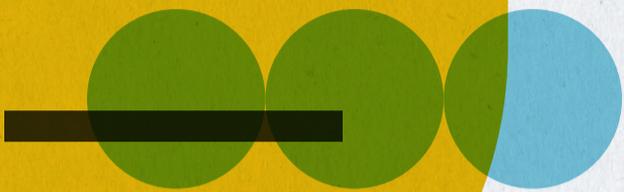
cooperativism, formed by OCB, Sescoop, Inovacoop, Cooperative Colleges, and non-institutionalized cooperativism, formed by collectives, foundations such as Rosa Luxemburg, research centers such as DigiLabour and ITS. There is a constant dialogue between them, but there are also significant separations and distances.

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

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

It is also unclear how to solve legal problems preventing platform cooperatives from having distinct levels of members, distributed in different regions of the Brazilian territory, with the possibility of support through immaterial work or indirect financial contributions. There remains an almost century-old

view that, in Brazilian cooperatives, investment can never be of capital but must be based on human labor. At the same time, there is an impasse regarding new forms of immaterial work, such as the work to be performed by influencers, programmers, and creators of audio-visual content. For now, the only legal impasses resolved were related to the possibility of digital meetings and digital signatures of documents. And also the inclusion of cooperatives in the legal regime of “startups” in Brazil.



Conclusion



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

The main theoretical construction of this study is the separation between institutionalized and non-institutionalized platform cooperativism. This theoretical construction makes sense in Brazil, considering the unique character of the constitution of the cooperative system in the country. As argued in this study, Brazilian cooperativism was organized during the military regime within a plan of modernization of the rural economy. This made possible a tactical organization of associations of agricultural cooperativism that created a powerful organization: the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB). In the 1980s and 1990s, this movement managed to create constitutional norms to support cooperativism and create a system to support cooperative learning in the face of a financial crisis. OCB and Sescoop are part of this system.

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

solidarity economy and connections between the struggle of precarious and rural workers.

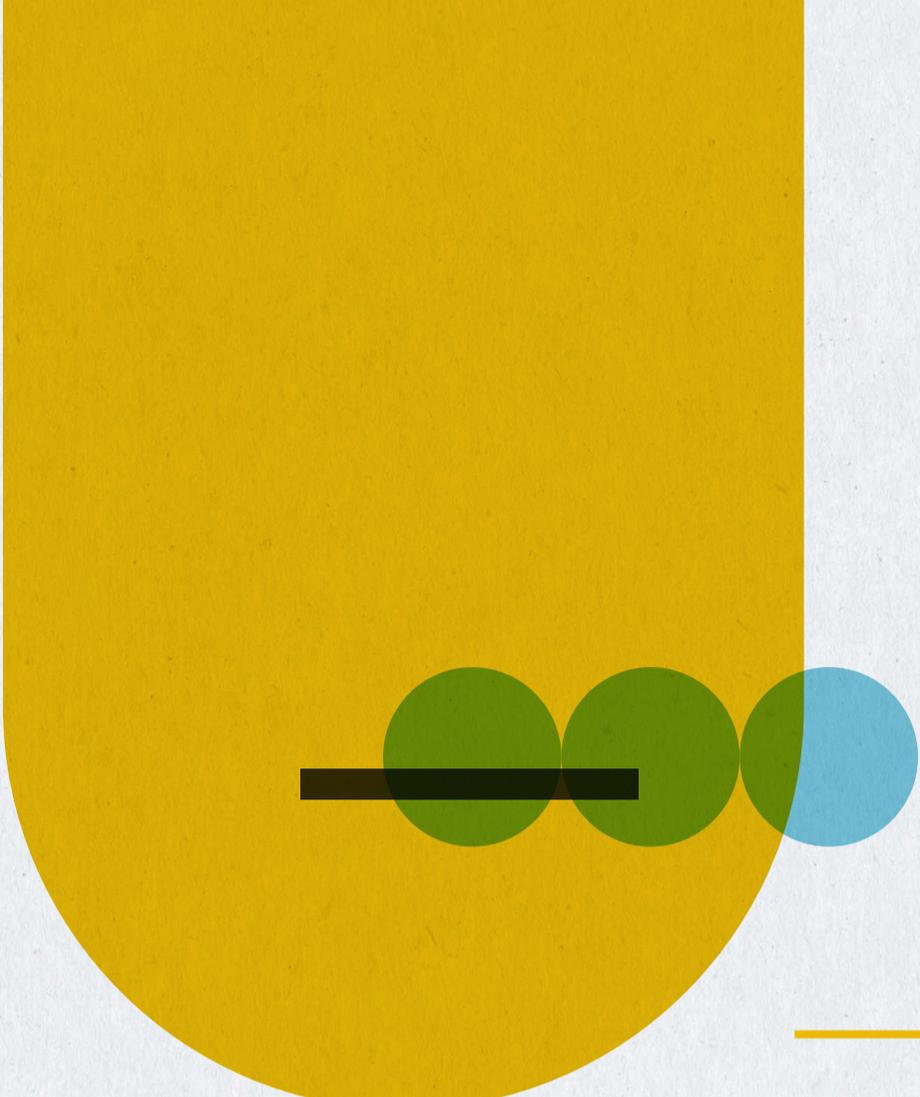
The emergence of the platform cooperativism movement in Brazil does not directly connect with the solidarity economy tradition. Instead, it emerged from the initial work of institutions such as Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, InternetLab, Partido Pirata, and research centers interested in the relationship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

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

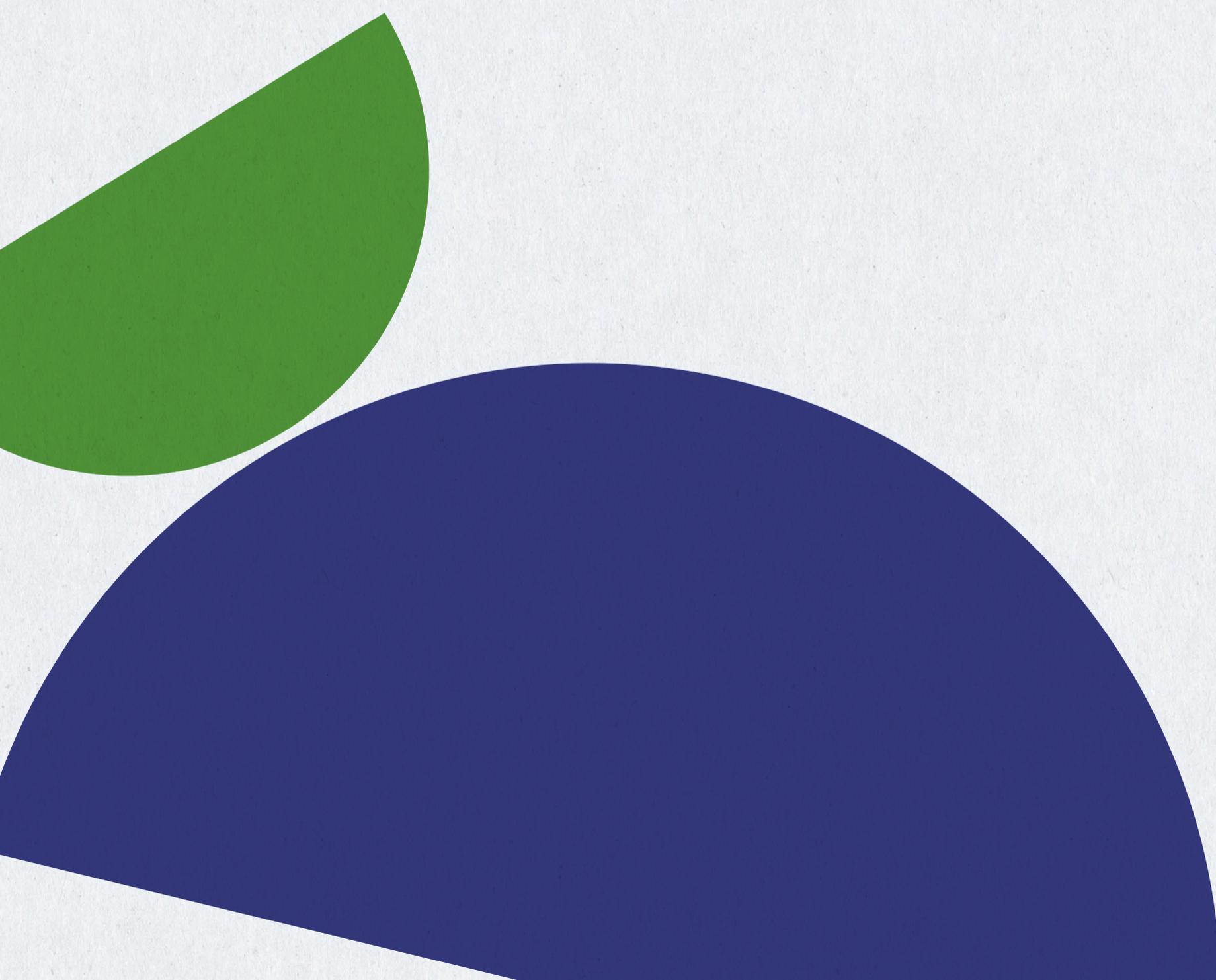
xemburg Foundation, ProComum, and DigiLabour. Despite recognizing differences between these actors, there is a tactical alliance to improve the institutional and economic scenario in support of platform cooperativism in Brazil.

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

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



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