

A Platform Coop Learning Journey



organized by:



Table of Contents

A Platform Coop Learning Journey	1
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Purpose of this document	3
What is a learning journey?	4
Why did we organize a learning journey format?	5
Sensemaking: Sharing Economy & Platform Coops	6
Formats of the learning journey	7
Facilitation principles	8
Schedule	9
Key findings	12
Next steps	18
Thanks to participants and partners	19

Introduction

This is a documentation of a two-days gathering of coop entrepreneurs from Belgium and Germany. The aim of this event was to create a prototype for a platform coop learning journey, which would enable participants to build transnational connections and to establish structures for mutual learning and knowledge transfer.

As the title already proposes, this was meant to be a starting point for a longer journey into the challenges, risks and chances of building a platform coop.

The general assumption of the project initiators was that matching participants in teams („tandems“) would inspire participants to review each other’s work and provide solid feedback on business models, resource plans and roadmaps, because the tandem partners work in the same domain and understand each other’s condition from an insider’s perspective.

Apart from the more structural and tangible outcomes, this event also aimed at opening a space for reflection and sharing of aspects that are usually not considered in a business environment: How to maintain health and well-being within the community? How to incentivize participation and sharing of responsibilities? And how to deal with systemic blind spots or frustrations?

The goal of the initiators of this learning journey was to get a better understanding in what ways platform coop entrepreneurs can benefit from regular peer exchange. The following chapters will provide insights into the facilitation formats of this event and give readers an idea about the learnings and key findings of the different sessions.

Purpose of this document

This documentation is meant to be a blueprint of how peer review & learning formats in the field of platform cooperativism can be organized. It doesn’t claim to be a generic guideline that can be followed for random purposes, but rather a compendium of approaches and facilitation methods that might be adopted for similar community events.

„We need more connection and collaboration between cooperatives.“

- Lieza Dessein, SMartBe



What is a learning journey?

Learning journeys are a strategic development approach based in business strategy, but with practical application. They are primarily designed for enabling change and development both within individuals or groups.

Ideally intended for groups, or communities of leaders, a learning journey takes place over time. It incorporates multiple formal and informal development components into a unique design, which optimizes training and maximizes learning to change behaviors and transform leaders. A learning journey is tailored around the specific needs of any given organization's leadership style and culture.

The intentions of this particular platform coop learning journey were:

- bringing entrepreneurs from both Belgium and Germany together
- matching participants in tandems, based on the coop entrepreneur's work domains
- making the platform coops ecosystems in both countries more visible
- facilitating mutual learning and exchange of experience
- creating prototypes for future collaboration
- further developing the network of platform coops and surrounding partners

Participants have been invited to get a deeper understanding of what platform cooperativism is all about. What is the transformative potential for both the organization, but also the community around it? What needs to be considered in terms of governance and participation? For this learning journey, entrepreneurs from Berlin and Brussels got together in tandems, in order to facilitate mutual learning experiences and creating opportunities for transnational collaboration.

Why did we organize a learning journey format?

During our work with coops we realized that many cooperative organizations tend to be rather “introvert”, meaning: due to manifold organizational and structural challenges many coop leaders hardly make time to connect to other coops and to seek for regular peer learning opportunities.

However, inter-cooperation (= cooperation between different cooperatives) as one of the core coop principles, is more than just a networking strategy. Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures. Advocating for political recognition, building business support institutions, creating livelihoods within communities and providing shared apps & technologies are key factors for growing an environment in which coops can flourish.

In that sense, our primary goal was to create a foundation for inter-cooperative exchange.



Sensemaking: Sharing Economy & Platform Coops

The evolution of the sharing and collaborative economy gave rise to the platform coop movement. The following text aims at contextualizing this development:

While at peak times (around the years 2014-2015) more than 200 projects and startups aiming to achieve social or environmental goals and working based on collaborative practices were active in Berlin, many of them did not prevail and have ceased activities by now. ¹

At the same time, many European cities have experienced the proliferation and growth of large platform companies such as Airbnb and Uber. Such companies are based on the idea of externalizing labor and parts of the value chain aiming at making their own business more efficient, effective and lean. As a result, those who are responsible for providing services and products are not employees of the respective companies but oftentimes self-employed and private persons. This means that they are not equally protected by social security systems and have to compete with others to offer their workforce on the platforms. Furthermore, there is at least anecdotal evidence that cities and states are bypassed easily when it comes to the payment of taxes generated by these large platform companies. This development has motivated many former project initiators and social entrepreneurs to think the idea of sharing on a new level. Instead of focusing on sharing of products and services, sharing of ownership in the organization is a key component of the new movement. Implementing democratic governance and collaborative ownership structures is seen as a promising way toward overcoming potential negative effects that tend to accompany the proliferation of large platform companies. One form of legal vehicle to accomplish such efforts is the 'cooperative', where every participant of the value creation - from programmers and marketeers to the active prosumers - can become a member of the organization and thus participate in decision-making process and profit from the overall value created by the ecosystem. Voting rights are thereby typically not linked to the amount of invested capital, but follow the basic rule "one member, one vote."

Most participants from this Learning Journey, like Fairmondo and Leihbar, have over the years of existence not managed to enter major markets. According to them, the above mentioned monopolists position themselves at the best customer touch-points which cannot be afforded by startups and social-impact projects.

Instead of sharing the value creation solely (e.g. offering a ride or hosting tourists) platform coops find it necessary to implement democratic governance and collaborative ownership structures to overcome the various externalities that are well experienced by their peers and often caused by the current market leaders. Therefore and at the contrary to sharing economy corporations, they create participatory structures in the workspace. For instance, Fit My Nest, the Belgium co-housing coop, invites people to establish self-owned and -managed living environments by fostering community building and supporting the financial setup. This way housing concepts are tailored by the people themselves overcoming the market failures (e.g. high rental price, lack of community spaces, non-

¹ Sharing City Berlin map of projects, 2014-2015, source: <http://sharingberlin.de/sharingberlin-map/uebersicht/>

existence of an engaging neighbourhood) developed by new and traditional real-estate companies.

Having said that, this platform coop learning journey also aimed at highlighting these examples to the participants, thus providing sensemaking and context for the very domains they are actively shaping with their work.

Formats of the learning journey

A learning journey can include all sorts of facilitation formats, as long as they are horizontal, inclusive, allow for diversity, encourage deep listening and enable participants for interesting & inspiring engagements.

A learning journey typically starts with an extended slot for participants to getting to know each other. This can be seen as the foundation for everything that is about to follow over the course of the next days. Examples for such introductory sessions can be co-sensing walks or mutual storytelling in smaller groups or for instance an exercise of landscape mapping the interests and potentials of all people in a big group. In this particular learning journey participants were matched in tandem teams and asked to work together in this constellation throughout the two days.

After people have made these initial connections, it's usually good to engage people in more structural formats, such as a *world café* or *open space*. These methodologies allow for some deep exploration of both the social and the professional fields people are part of.

If people need to get a deeper understanding of underlying problems or systemic issues we encourage peer review formats such as the *case clinic*, which allows participants to tap on the collective knowledge of the group they are a part of. Also the *4D prototyping method* can be quite an eye-opener, as it allows a system to see itself in a really interesting way.

Besides all these formats that already exist and got extensively tested in different communities worldwide, we encourage organizers to pay close attention to the group's needs. Instead of pushing through a rigid schedule, it is usually best to allow for maximum flexibility, as it is often hard to anticipate where group dynamics will lead to.



Serendipitous moments: when participants reached out to learn about housing in Berlin and came across this activist street sign during their tandem walk.

Facilitation principles

The organizing team aimed at curating the teams and designing the encounters based on the following principles:

- Allow for enough time to make contact and engage in deep conversation.
- People need the chance to meet peers from other domains as well and work together as a tandem.
- All the knowledge exchange formats should be based on self-organization, so that the teams can figure out what works best for them.
- Communication at eye level, no lecturing, no consulting. Instead: Active listening, mirroring and co-creation.
- Let participants change sceneries every now and then: don't make people stay in the same space for a whole day.
- Breaks, leisure time, walks and casual encounters at the coffee machine are most important.



„A successful learning journey is usually build on both planning and spontaneous reaction to whatever is needed at any given moment. It's all about flexibility, while at the same time holding a safe space for everyone involved.“

The organizing team from SUPERMARKT Berlin.

9

Schedule

Together the delegation and locals followed a schedule which was designed according to the learning journey principles of getting to know each other and creating opportunities for deep insights and inspiration.

This schedule can be used as an inspiration for similar learning journey events and people are invited to mine this document for ideas on how to create a schedule that works over the course of 1,5 days or longer.

Day 1, at SUPERMARKT Berlin

09:00 Welcome & coffee

09:30 **Intro round:** *Everyone introduced themselves, their expectations and what brought them to participate in this learning journey.*

10:00 Landscape map: *This exercise aimed at visualizing the different domains, challenges and chances of each project, with the goal of understanding the fundamental setting of the group.*

10:30 Tandem walk: *We invited each tandem group to take a walk in the neighborhood and visit public sites that might be relevant to their project. This session provided a nice opportunity to getting to know each other and to get a deeper understanding of the local context.*

12:00 Lunch break

13:30 Consolidation of the morning sessions: *Five min. sharing of findings from each group. The tandems get together and report back to the big group.*

14:00 Case Clinic: *The purpose of this case clinic was to access the wisdom and experience of peers and to help the case giver solve a particular challenge or problem.*

16:00 Teatime and field trip to taz, a cooperative German daily newspaper administrated by its employees. *The group was welcomed by Konny Gellenbeck, one of the founding members and the participants had the opportunity to ask questions and to learn from the long-standing experience of this project.*

17:15 Consolidation of the afternoon sessions: *Five min sharing of findings from everyone. Visual feedback by our graphic recorder Katerina Kosack was provided as well.*

19:30 Dinner (Cafe Madame) with dinner guests

Day 2, at BeShared Berlin Partner

09:00 Coffee

09:30 Introduction: *Welcoming and presentation by Mona Meyer zu Kniendorf / BerlinPartner & Camille Lepinay /hub.brussels (both host organizations, EEN services, BeShared and EU-GIVE projects on the Sharing Economy).*

Presentation of the event at the EU Commission in Brussel in September by Lieza Dessenin.

Input by Dominika Wruk on insights from her research projects (*i-share* and *platforms2share*), particularly on the relations between sharing and platform organizations and their institutional environments.

10:30 CoCreation Lab (in one or two parts): Prototyping session for the tandem teams and/or focus groups and/or working on policy papers and/or exchange/collaboration between cities.

12:00 Consolidation of CoCreation Lab. Sharing of results

13:00 Lunch & End of Learning Journey



Dominika Wruk from the platforms2share research project presenting the key findings of her research on day 2.

Key findings

5 different domains have been explored by 5 tandems in this learning journey. Here is a brief overview of the key findings:

Item Sharing Platforms

Usitoo (BE), Leihbar (DE), SharePar (DE)



Key findings and questions:

- P2P sharing is limited (both community-run or business oriented)
- P2P item sharing cannot be considered a real business model, as it's difficult to reach a critical mass among users
- P2P Sharing should become a local commons: local city administration might become providers of items and provide state libraries of things.
- P2P ItemSharing doesn't work economically, as resource input (time/money) is too high in comparison to possible benefits. Therefore the group created the idea of a public service offer in the context of a "general livelihood (versus basis income).

Freelancer Cooperatives

Society of Owners (DE), CZY WRK (DE), Cobea (BE)



Key findings and questions:

- How to develop and share common values within a large, heterogenous group of people?
- Successful freelance coops require an equal distribution of responsibility. The weight of space maintenance and community building should be carried on different shoulders, not just within the realm of the founders and legal "owners".
- Freelance coops are in need for new types of organizations allowing for more ad hoc formations of organizations, like for civil rights movements who get together on a short-term basis.
- Debate around freelancers vs. entrepreneurs: Are we all freelancer or do we see each other as enterprises? Some strong arguments against seeing individual as enterprise because all the burden is on the individual and the risk is not distributed in a fair way.

Housing Cooperatives

Fit my Nest (BE), Community Land Trust (DE), Mietshäusersyndikat (DE)



Key findings and questions:

- Difficulties in the process of forming a house cooperative, the need for a solid financial concept.
- How to manage to not lose the idealist view and to include people with less means?
- Cooperative housing needs both idealists and realists
- Cohousing is a building process but also a human building process, so that the needs of the people are answered by the building.
- How to engage all stakeholders in decision-making processes?

Carsharing Organizations

Drivy (DE), Pampa (DE), Volkswagen spin off (DE), Wibee (BE)



Key findings and questions:

- There is a need to change the rules and laws around carsharing.
- The sharing economy is not very advanced in rural areas, but that's where there is a great potential for carsharing.
- Interesting new exchanges between carsharing coop, housing coop and energy coop.
- Carsharing companies still need to work on a wider acceptance by both regulators and potential clients.

IT Cooperatives

Fairmondo (DE), Hostsharing (DE), Coop IT Easy (BE)



Key findings and questions:

- How to adapt latest developments in UX / UI?
- How to create an open source model that is based on collective ownership?
- How to activate and nourish a group of programmers on a long-term basis
- What are sources of funding for open source-based IT cooperatives?
- Finding the right balance between modular-generic and customized to cater needs of all clients?

General Aha Moments

More connection and collaboration between coops needed (landscape mapping, shared memberships and principles of inter-cooperation)

We need a coop tech suite!

Let's organize ourselves on alternative social media, like Mastodon!



Coop actors are not connected enough!

Would be great to come up with an independent language & narratives!

Let's come up with shared political strategist and advocacy work!

Above all: Community matters! Take care of your community and treat members well!

Next steps

After such an intense experience of spending deep time together the question remains of how to preserve the momentum that has been build over the course of two days.

The project team has therefore made to sure to plan enough resources for documentation and sharing of results as a fundament for ongoing collaborations.

This document can be seen as a first step. Other than this paper, there is a video which sums up the two days-experience in Berlin. It is available for streaming or download here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=9&v=LrWalzOdtFo

During the summer month 2019 there is a collaborative attempt between the workshop participants Sharepar & Leihbar to apply for a pilot project regarding neighborhood sharing systems, funded by the Berlin senate for environment and traffic under the Berlin 2030s climate and resource protection goals.

SUPERMARKT has organized two follow-up events that are directly linked to the platform coop learning journey: a DAO organizational design workshop and a platform coop ecosystem puzzle, both in autumn 2019.

Some of the participants will meet again in October 2019 in Brussels, in order to participate at a EU-wide conference on platform coops.

Above all, we hope to be able to repeat the experience in one year, in order to learn from the experiences of participants and see where they stand after the first part of this learning journey - next time in Brussels.

One of the most important aspects however are the personal ties that have been established during the time participants spent together. For some of the tandem partners this proved to be an interesting starting point for an ongoing collaboration.

A learning journey actually never stops. It does not have a particular lifespan and an end to it. A learning journey is designed to enable transformation processes and allows for an ongoing consideration of people's roles and relations in any given ecosystem.

We hope this paper is useful for you. If you might have any questions please let us know. You can contact us via e-mail: info@changemaker-journeys.de

Thanks to participants and partners

Participants

The organizing team wants to thank all the *founders and representatives of the following cooperatives from Belgium and Germany: Usitoo, Leihbar, SharePar, Society of Owners, CZY WRK, Cobeia, Fit my Nest, Community Land Trust, Mietshäusersyndikat, Drivy, Pampa, Wibee, Hostsharing, Coop IT Easy and Fairmondo.*

Partners

Thanks to partners, co-organizers and supporters:

- Mona Meyer zu Kniendorf und Miriam Sufraga, *BeShared Berlin*
- Camille Lepinay, *Hub Brussels & Enterprise Europe Network*
- Lieza Dessenin, *SmART Belgien*
- Dominika Wruk, *platforms2share*
- Andreas Arnold, Ela Kagel and Thomas Dönnebrink from *SUPERMARKT Berlin*
- Thanks to Katharina Kosak for the graphic recordings!

Authors

This documentation paper was co-authored by Andreas Arnold, Ela Kagel and Thomas Dönnebrink, supported and reviewed by Dominika Wruk and Santje Kludas (platforms2share).

