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The Sharing Economy in France: A Favourable Ecosystem for Alternative Platforms Models

Myriam Lewkowicz and Jean-Pierre Cahier

Introduction

Throughout the last decade in France, the forefront of news and debates concerning the collaborative economy has been occupied by the development of commercial platforms, by their destabilising economic and social consequences, and by the measures taken or to be taken to regulate them (with, for the moment, effects which remain very insufficient). But in the background, less spectacularly, the cooperative platform sector has also sparked public action and has grown successfully, until it now occupies a significant space in this country.

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This chapter starts by giving an overview of the French ecosystem, highlighting why and how a number of platform cooperatives could emerge successfully in France. The focus is first put on actors such as think tanks and associations and then facilitating measures that were undertaken by the state, which help businesses, public sector institutions, and local communities to anticipate changes inspired by technology and its uses and to open up their innovation processes. The French cooperative movement is one of the most important in the world. At the end of 2019, the Scop (Société cooperative et participative; Participative and Cooperative Society) movement counted 3439 cooperatives active throughout the territory and 63,000 cooperative jobs. The aggregate turnover of cooperative enterprises was 5.6 billion euros (Scop 2020). The second part of this chapter focuses on three examples of cooperatives that were raised as alternatives of capitalistic or monopolistic models and that significantly developed during this decade. Indeed, these cooperatives took advantage of the intellectual and legal French ecosystem described previously—the examples concern three domains: meal delivery service, carpooling, and energy. The way original business models and social or organisational forms used by these collectives contributed to their economic development is then described. Finally, this chapter ends by discussing how some factors could be considered as characteristics of a ‘French touch’ in terms of platform cooperativism.

A Favourable Private and Public Ecosystem

The French economy is still traditionally characterised by strong intervention from a centralised state, driving public policies from the national level. However, this path is now moderated by strong compensatory trends, with several movements towards openness occurring over the last few decades: regional decentralisation, European integration, and progressive deregulation of sectors such as transportation or energy—deregulation that is still ongoing and came later than in other European countries. Another characteristic is that the state has long been encouraging a strong trend of social and solidarity economy enterprises (community-based associations, mutual insurance companies,

etc.), contributing to a certain ‘French distinctiveness’ of the collaborative economy sector while also supporting the growth of dozens of start-ups or ‘unicorns’ with international critical mass, such as DoctoLib or BlaBlaCar.

The Ecosystem of Actors

In France, there are actually many interactions in all directions between public, semi-public, or private actors, supported to varying degrees at the national, regional, or sectoral level by the public authorities. Drawing on various research and discussion forums, this ecosystem helps to support exchanges and the development of public strategies, with numerous effects in terms of pilot operations, calls for projects, recommendations, and standardisation. In particular, it includes government agencies with specific roadmaps for their mission, think tanks (such as FING, Fondation Internet Nouvelle Génération; New Generation Internet Foundation), associative and citizen networks (e.g. Coop des Communs, OuiShare, La Fabrique des communs), scholarly societies, the French government, and the social and solidarity economy (SSE) sector.

One can, in particular, quote two government agencies: ADEME (Agence de la Transition Écologique; Agency for Ecological Transition) (2020 budget: €721 million), which supports the objectives of environmental public policies, and CNIL (Commission Nationale de l’Informatique et des Libertés; National Commission of Informatics and Freedom), in charge of guaranteeing freedoms in a digital context. In place for several decades, these agencies, which have been able to serve as a model internationally, are supporting digital economy projects in the background. Think tanks, associations, and scholarly societies are also experienced and active in the sector. They maintain numerous relationships with each other, but also with the companies and the state that support them, and draw extensively on their discussions, constituting a melting pot of expertise favourable to innovations. The involvement of the French government can be seen specifically through the work of several ministries (Ministère de l’économie, Secrétariat national au Numérique, Ministère du travail) carrying out studies such

as the PIPAME (Pôle Interministériel de Prospective et d'Anticipation des Mutations Economiques; Interdepartmental Unit for Foresight and Anticipation of Economic Changes) one (Baecher et al. 2015) and driving initiatives in a coordinated manner. Finally, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) sector has demonstrated a strong commitment to a collaborative economy. Supported by a Secretary of State, the SSE is particularly important in France with several cooperative or financial institutions (CAMIF, La Poste, Banque des Territoires, etc.), mutual insurance companies (MGEN, MAIF, etc.), or cooperative banks (Crédit Coopératif, LaNef, etc.). Its scope and role have been specified (LOI N° 2014–856) in a way that allows it to embrace all business sectors. This law has strengthened the SSE in its objectives 'to create an ecosystem that is favourable to socially responsible businesses and to promote new entrepreneurial methods that reconcile economic development with employee protection and in cooperation with the territories' (LOI N° 2014–856). The associated groups often function as learning communities rich in internal and external debates, with strong connections to the agencies and think tanks mentioned above. All these actors are interested in experimenting with new common spaces, at the crossroads of the challenges of commodification and environmental and social issues, in a country with a long tradition of social innovation. The confrontation between actors with different statuses and points of view encourages new projects and interdisciplinarity.

Facilitating Measures

Upstream reflection projects throughout the ecosystem have led to an important series of measures that have defined the last decade. Public policies in France have tried to better regulate the sector of platform capitalism through all kinds of regulatory or fiscal means while supporting the search for alternative routes for 'French-style public services,' which are valued by the citizens. In particular, the ESS sector has contributed to the dynamism of certain cooperative or non-market digital platforms.

At the same time, an array of legal, regulatory, or practical measures had encouraged entrepreneurial and cooperative experiments and their

scaling up when public interest was at stake, as in the case of priority environmental issues. These measures outline a medium-term policy, ramped up since 2015, which has strengthened the above-mentioned ecosystem of actors. In this way, a whole regulatory and practical infrastructure has been put in place, now enabling players with innovative social and economic models to develop and achieve success faster.

First, statutes or case laws have been introduced to provide a better framework for the status of platform companies and their fiscal and social environment and better protection for employees and other stakeholders in collaborative economy organisations. More than half of the collectives in France which are involved in the community or cooperative economy platforms have developed sustainably because of the SCIC (*Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif*; collective interest cooperative company) status, in fields as varied as education, health, energy, territorial development via third place networks, etc. A SCIC can bring together without any limitation the whole variety of possible actors, individuals, or legal entities, whether they are employees, users, producers, communities, volunteers, etc. SCICs can represent society in all its diversity, thus encouraging new avenues for citizen services: 'the SCIC form can be an effective tool for transitioning from public services to citizen services' (Liénard 2016, p. 65). Some SCICs can offer services that are necessary for the everyday and social life of all, and their cooperative form facilitates or even requires an egalitarian treatment, equitable treatment, and one that emphasises general interest related to the notion of public service. Already in 1984, facing the crisis in the welfare state, Pierre Rosanvallon (2000) thought of experimenting with self-managed collective services working together with public services or replacing them.

Rather than creating their own organisation, a new entrepreneur can also join a CAE (*Coopérative d'Activités et d'Emplois*; business and employment cooperative). This form of collective entrepreneurship is an economic grouping that allows several entrepreneurs gathered within the same organisation to enrich their expertise and share their feedback. This collectivity thus creates development opportunities (innovation, business opportunities, etc.). This status, introduced in 2014, has helped solve some of the problems encountered by platforms, for example, in the

mobility sector, as can be seen in the case studies below. In order to launch their business, the project owner has a legal framework, the status of a salaried entrepreneur with a permanent contract and social protection. Any administrative, tax, and accounting management is shared. This framework allows them to concentrate on their business with greater security.

France also offers the ESA (Entrepreneur Salié Associé; salaried partner-entrepreneur) status, which joins the solution of wage portage, which appeared in France in the late 1980s as a solution to modernise the labour market. Wage portage allows self-employed workers to be paid as if they were employees of a company. It is a tripartite relationship between the portage company, the employee, and the client company. The portage company collects the fees paid by the client and then pays a salary to the freelancer after deduction of management fees and all the social taxes. Wage portage remained marginal for a long time before experiencing significant growth after its entry into the French Labour Code by Act No. 2008–596 of 25 June 2008 on the modernisation of the labour market. Order No. 2015–380 of 2 April 2015 then revised its conditions of exercise.

Modernisation, in terms of management and accounting tools, was also a favourable factor. The innovation of new types of businesses can, in fact, be greatly stimulated by new accounting approaches extended to environmental and societal assessment reports. France was the first EU country to introduce extra-financial reporting through the NRE (Nouvelle Régulation Economique; New Economic Regulation) law in 2001, supplemented by the Grenelle 1 and Grenelle 2 laws in 2012. Innovations from research in Management Science in France tend to give rise to in-depth debates and to spread to companies in the cooperative digital economy. For example, work on accounting standards (Rambaud et Richard 2016; Charolles 2019) aimed in particular at connecting the treatment reserved for work and the environment with the type of company and the economic process they represent.

Finally, the labour laws, amended recently in particular because of reports from the general inspection of social affairs (Amar and Viossat 2016) and from the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Cohesion (Montel 2017), have changed social law and are also a favourable

factor. The measures that have already been taken or are planned aim in particular to offset the imbalances (dumping, unprofessionalisation, etc.) linked to the platform company sector. Other aspects target the status of work on platforms in a non-market or hybrid context.

In addition to these legal, regulatory, or accounting developments, other types of more operational actions also contribute to a favourable context. First, the state creates or encourages standards or support organisations to unite the actors, create or support the creation of intermediate tools, remove regulatory barriers using the law, stimulate start-ups, and create a talent pool (beta.gouv.fr infrastructure). These actions may concern intersecting problems or priority public policy areas. For example, on the theme of new mobility, ‘La fabrique des mobilités’ (the mobility factory) network and the regulatory clearing for ride-sharing registers have enabled pilot experiments and the removal of barriers blocking the transition to a new generation of platforms.

The state or other actors in the ecosystem have also created standards, supporting organisations, and shareable methodological building blocks, which have encouraged an explosion and multiplication of uses at the level of local platforms bolstered by local authorities. For example, FING has developed detailed recommendations of principles and methods to guide the design of ethical and sustainable alternative platforms (FING 2020), in particular as part of its Transition2 program (‘Transitions2 Relier transition écologique et transition numérique’). In terms of digital identity, the state has created a unique identifier infrastructure, which is now operational and used by both public and private platforms, thereby saving money and facilitating service for users. Another example is the open data distribution platform: data.gouv.fr, created in 2011 on the initiative of Etalab, a mission under the authority of the Prime Minister.

This rich ecosystem constantly supports an exchange of ideas, bringing together the state, companies and both reformist and activist circles in the world of associations. This diversity is having a positive impact on discussions related to the digital economy in a country that traditionally sees a lot of tension between different schools of thought which fuels lively discussions. It fosters plurality around a broad range of approaches ranging from pure commons sharing platforms to platform cooperativism solutions generating more value and jobs. For example,

the platform ‘C’est qui le patron?!’ (Who’s the Boss?!) (Gueutin and Zimmer 2020), under the brand founded in 2018 by Nicolas Chabanne, proposes that consumers pay a fair price to properly compensate dairy farmers. This initiative has continued to expand to products other than milk and to other countries. ‘C’est qui le patron?!’ is not limited to a win–win model (between producers and eco-responsible consumers, thus imposing pressure on distribution intermediaries and thereby creating fair trade in local food products) but also explores additional avenues with a focus on general cooperation. For example, during the COVID-19 crisis in the spring of 2020, this brand created a fund to help the struggling self-employed and small merchants. The French ecosystem, therefore, appears to be an open crossroads where social and cooperative initiatives taking advantage of a favourable context intersect with those of actors committed to models of stronger profitability, who are sometimes their partners or their competitors.

Examples of Alternative Cooperatives in France

Taking advantage of the ecosystem described in the previous section, a number of cooperatives related to the sharing economy have emerged in France. The objective here is not to provide an exhaustive description, but rather to focus on three sectors that are interesting because they illustrate different themes; what is happening in the meal delivery service portrays a new way of working that is no longer salaried, carpooling—a domain in which France illustrated itself by creating Blablacar—allows to discuss resources (cars) that are no longer individual, and finally, the energy domain is very particular because infrastructure needs to exist to produce the resource that will be shared.

Coopcycle: A New Model for Food Delivery

Delivery is a rapidly growing sector in France for more than five years: 3900 jobs were created in this sector in 2015 compared to 900 in 2014, and more than 8000 were created in the last three months of 2019 (INSEE). Food delivery is a particular form of delivery that does not wait. This activity existed in France before the platform economy (AlloResto was created in France in 1998), but some big platforms have deployed this activity since 2000. Instant meal delivery platforms organise the relationships between meal producers, consumers, and delivery people. The costs of the platform are mainly related to the development of the technological side of the platform and marketing, to which are added insignificant salary costs: the ratio between the number of employees and the number of delivery people is from one to ten for Deliveroo in France: 1000 employees for nearly 10,000 delivery men (Aguilera et al. 2018). It is then obvious that the only variable of the economic model on which the platform can really act is the remuneration of the delivery person.

The workers of these platforms are most of the time self-employed, which allows the platforms to ignore the regulation of salaried work and to make considerable savings in terms of social benefits. In addition, the platforms declare that they do not fall under transport regulations. However, the work of delivery people or drivers corresponds to a relationship of subordination constituting a salaried relationship, as the platform fixes the prices and the nature of the services. A redefinition of the relationship into an employment contract would make the platforms non-viable in the current market context. The low level of remuneration that results from this situation is denounced for many years (Block and Hennessy 2017). Facing that, demonstrations by Deliveroo couriers took place in 2017 and 2018 against brutal price changes in France (shift from hourly remuneration to payment per trip). A call for a strike by deliverers was launched in France during the last FIFA World Cup (2018). Activist groups of couriers have been the main drivers of resistance in France, mainly around Paris and Nantes. Couriers have also been represented by traditional unions, in particular SUD (Solidaires Unitaires

Démocratiques) and CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail), especially in Bordeaux, Dijon, and Lyon, other French big cities (Vandaele 2020).

In this context, Coopcycle was developed in France to offer platform software to any local cooperative who would like to benefit from a platform. Forty-one cooperatives, two in Canada, and 39 in Europe (nineteen in France), currently use the software (CoopCycle). Everything started after the bankruptcy of Take Eat Easy in 2016, led by a developer and a former courier for Take Eat Easy and Deliveroo, who created CLAP (Collectifs des Livreurs Autonomes de Paris; Collective of Autonomous Couriers from Paris). It developed as an association that brings together riders and restaurants who want to engage in ecological and socially responsible delivery service, and it ensures the development and the mutualisation of the software platform. The platform is made of a website that allows the cooperative to manage the logistics and the orders and a smartphone application that is used by the clients to put orders. The association also supports the different cooperatives for their back-office activities (e.g. administrative and legal issues and insurance). Coopcycle became a member of 'Plateformes en Commun.' An initiative launched in 2017 by the French association 'Coop des Communs' (*Plateformes En Communs* 2020) to federate cooperative platform projects that bring social and solidarity economy and the 'commons' together. The source code of CoopCycle is available on GitHub, but its commercial use is reserved for cooperative companies. The license of the software (Coopyleft) is available only to structures that adopt a cooperative model, employ their riders with a traditional contract or through a wage portage company, and that meet the definition of social and security economy as stipulated by the national law of the country in which the platform operates (Chagny 2019).

In the Coopcycle organisation, different statuses are possible, as the state of salaried employees is not possible to apply in all countries, neither desired by all riders. In France, the status of an employee can be obtained through wage portage or by leaning on a CAE (Coopérative d'Activité et d'Emploi; activity and employment cooperatives) (Chagny 2019). CAE offers independent workers to become 'contracted-entrepreneurs'

(entrepreneurs-salariés in French), which means being bound to a cooperative by an employment contract. The cooperative collects the business sales revenue and gives it back to the project owner in the form of a salary once societal charges and management fees have been deducted. In most of the employment and activity cooperatives in France, the payment is approximately 50–60% of the sales revenue. This work status is close to the wage portage but goes further by offering individual support. As of three years from the date they joined, entrepreneurs become associates of the employment and activity cooperative. As an associate, they participate in the daily life and decisions of the cooperative. The legal status of employment and activity cooperatives in France was specified in a law on Social and Solidarity Economy that passed on 31 July 2014 (LOI N° 2014–856). This system offers an alternative to the creation of a company or to working freelance.

The objective for Coopcycle is to make it possible for drivers and employees of the associations to work on a full-time basis, paid approximately 25% above the legal minimum wage (€1229 net monthly as of 1 January 2020). Another important decision is that the remuneration is set on an hourly basis, not by shift and that a minimum number of working hours per week is guaranteed, as well as predictability on working hours. Working conditions (bicycle load, climatic conditions, and length of tours) are integrated into the cooperatives' internal regulations in the form of charters. The collective provides the equipment (bicycles worth about €4000). The cooperatives also provide all other materials (headphones, etc.). Coopcycle is also negotiating insurance contracts with MAIF, a mutual insurance company highly committed to supporting the so-called 'collaborative' economy (Chagny 2019).

The first budget for the Coopcycle association was approved in spring 2019, with a grant obtained from the City of Paris. The grant is planned to cover travel and infrastructure costs (server, hosting, and some necessary services). Most of the costs of developing the tools were based on free work. It raises the question of financial means allocated to initiatives based on 'Commons.' One possible approach is to recognise the positive externalities for cities of this type of platform and to provide them with public subsidies. Examples of subsidies granted by municipalities exist in France, particularly in Paris, with an integration platform 'Les lulu

dans ma rue.’ Today, approximately 12% of the revenue of the Coop-cycle association comes from public funding (‘coopcycle, nous socialisons la livraison à vélo’).

Mobicoop: Carpooling as Common Good

In France, the driver is alone on board in seven vehicles out of ten (Raballand and Laharotte 2019), and even nine out of ten during rush hour. The potential for carpooling is then significant, but practices remain marginal: around 3% of trips between home and work are made by carpooling in France (ADEME 2015). More precisely, carpooling practised from the centre of Paris is almost exclusively limited to occasional long-distance journeys via digital platforms (BlaBlaCar). On the contrary, in sparsely populated areas, carpooling is more likely to be used for everyday trips, where car-poolers organise themselves mainly with people they know. Where carpooling makes sense, for example, for a 20-km journey to an employment area in the inner suburbs, the carpooling market share can reach 10–20% and still has room for improvement (Pigalle et al. 2020).

In France, carpooling is regulated by the French Transport Code, which specifies that the public use of a vehicle is conducted ‘free of charge, except for the sharing of costs.’ The legislative framework makes it possible to distinguish carpooling from individual passenger transport offered by professional taxis or transport car services with a driver (such as Uber, Kapten, Marcel, Lecab, or even Snapcar) (Pigalle et al. 2020). Some cities are starting to integrate carpooling into their transport policy with ambitious projects; in Grenoble, three complementary services coexist: organised hitchhiking, spontaneous carpooling lines, and planned carpooling with an appointment. These services are combined with a lane that is reserved for carpooling on the A48 motorway and a ‘Mobility Pass,’ allowing residents to use these diverse types of mobility with a single account (Pigalle et al. 2020).

Mobicoop was developed in this context. The association Covoiturage-libre.fr was born in 2011 when Blablacar changed its business model and imposed a commission on all journeys. A number of

users felt that this was against the core values of carpooling. One of them developed a small website to offer routes. Very quickly, the site attracted many users, publishing more than 100,000 trips per year (Mobicoop 2020b), and a tight-knit community has developed on Facebook around the values of the association. From 2013 to 2015, the association had a difficult time because it lacked a management team truly dedicated to the project. Nonetheless, the site continued to operate, demonstrating the resilience of its user community. At the end of 2015, a new team took over the management of the association, positioned the website as a common good, and developed actions in this direction, such as relaunching volunteer activities and developing partnerships with social economy actors.

In 2017, after six years, the association noted that carpooling can and must be a common good, that is to say, a transport service serving all, which benefits should remain in the hands of its users, but also that carpooling must improve, both in terms of quantity (number of trips) and quality (user experience). The associative status did not allow improvement nor the right to decision-making to the donors. The association then decided to transform itself into a cooperative (SCIC), in which everyone (a user, an employee, a private company, or a public body) can take a share by becoming a member. Mobicoop, under its new name, can also recruit people to improve services and offer a real alternative to existing carpooling sites (Mobicoop 2020a). Indeed, the cooperative aims at preserving carpooling as a ‘common good.’ unlike other platforms such as BlaBlaCar that push individuals to monetise services that were formerly free of charge (Compain et al. 2019).

The Mobicoop cooperative now comprises 20,000 active members (for 420,000 users involved in 800,000 rides per year) (Mobicoop 2020a) organised in four categories: volunteers, beneficiaries, and any other natural or legal person with no weighting among them: each member has one vote, and the general assembly has the right to choose the board members. Some ‘participatory circles’ are also established: some contributors are not cooperative members but have a seat on the board of directors (Compain et al. 2019).

Enercoop: 100% Renewable

Until the 2000s, the energy sector in France was a stable sector. A monopolistic national company (EDF) took charge of the production, transportation, and distribution of electricity. The development of the energy sector has been regulated by strategic plans, such as the development of nuclear energy in France after World War II. Four characteristics of this sector in France make the emergence of sharing unlikely (Vernay and Gauthier 2017). First, the characteristics of the production of electricity favour a centralised organisation. Second, as mentioned above, the sector is dominated by a few large multinationals, which do not have any interest in promoting the emergence of sharing. Third, new actors who are inspired by social movements advocate the sharing economy rather than companies in a dominant position, which do not have any interest in sharing their market. Finally, consumers only participate in sharing activities if they benefit from them, which is difficult to meet in this sector. Indeed, one of the reasons why few consumers change their supplier is that they have a limited perception of the associated benefits. In addition, electricity is an abstract product: invisible, intangible, and in which consumers pay little interest except when they have to pay their bill. What is then the interest of consumers to share such a product? However, even with all these obstacles, sharing is indeed taking place.

In France, European ambitions related to energy transition were first addressed in the Energy Transition Law for Green Growth (LTECV), adopted in 2015. Indeed, France was the first EU Member State to introduce incentives (called ‘participatory bonuses’) to promote the financial participation of local actors in renewable projects (article 111 of the law). This law resulted from lobbying efforts of the Collective for Citizen Energy (le ‘Collectif pour l’ ‘energie citoyenne’). In particular, the law simplified the juridical conditions for setting up citizen renewable energy production projects by paving the way for joint-stock companies and cooperative companies to develop renewable energy production projects capitalised or financed in part by local citizens or municipalities (Sebi and Vernay 2020). In November 2019, within the framework of the Energy and Climate Law, the French government first mentioned community renewable energy projects (CREP). A CREP involves a group of citizens,

social entrepreneurs, public authorities, and community organisations who participate directly in the energy transition by jointly investing in, producing, selling, and distributing renewable energy (Interreg 2018). In France, CREPs are emerging but evolving quickly as their number multiplied fourfold between 2014 and 2019, at the end of which there were 240 CREPs in the country (Vernay and Sebi 2020).

Enercoop was created for managing the energy produced from renewable energy sources and for providing energy services aiming at reducing energy consumption and increasing the share of renewable energies in the national energy balance (Soulias 2018). Enercoop was born in 2005 from the reflection of several Greenpeace activists wishing to supply 100% 'green' electricity. It started with commercial partners such as Biocoop stores, WWF, and Greenpeace France. Enercoop is also thought of as a lobbying tool for changing energy management practices, ensuring a counterpoint of view to EDF (Becuwe and Cateura 2010). In addition to promoting renewable energies and the desire to offer a different industrial model, Enercoop directly involves the end consumer by having adopted the SCIC model. The governance is then ensured by a variety of stakeholders (producers, employees, and consumers) who may have divergent interests. However, the discussion around the purposes necessary to ensure the sustainability of the company can lead to an awareness of their interdependence. Enercoop has also added legal entities to the governance (partners, communities, and funders), which can help in sustaining the project (Liénard 2016).

Enercoop supports their members to lower electricity consumption through diverse interventions: (a) 'TupperWatt' meetings arranged and led by a member of Enercoop where they introduce Enercoop's values and topics revolving around the energy transition; (b) 'Dr. Watt' a training course to help consumers make a self-diagnosis of their electricity consumption, using a software platform. By 2016, 'Dr. Watt' had been tested successfully in three local cooperatives, with a reported energy-saving potential of 40% (Hoppe et al. 2019); the 'Energie Partagée' citizen investment fund to support projects. By 2016, the investment fund had 4312 subscribers and raised over 11 million euros (Hoppe et al. 2019). Enercoop also issues newsletters and provides

personal advice to users. Although Enercoop started as one single cooperative, it has become a network of ten cooperatives and 300 producers ('Les coopératives' 2020) that allow citizens to reconnect with the challenges of the energy transition on the regional level. These figures remain modest compared to those of other European countries, but in view of the French context and history described above, they reflect a certain evolution.

Discussion and Summary

The three cases described above depict three successful cooperatives in France that started as a confrontation with powerful capitalistic competitors that are not sufficiently regulated, although some progress has been made. In these cases, actors were actively searching for new ways to implement the sharing economy, receiving public support through the SSE (social and solidarity economy) while keeping a realistic eye on the market. These circumstances have acted as opportunities for actors to mobilise other actors and even more motivated stakeholders to join alternative platforms in the roles they offer (clients, members, donors, and partners). However, for these opportunities to be taken to allow a rapid response, on a larger scale, to an amplifying social demand, the economic models, the legal conditions, as well as the appropriate social and organisational forms had to be present.

The actors of the three cooperatives mentioned succeeded because these conditions were met. First, because these cooperatives have been able to quickly handle the managerial dimension sometimes by innovating strongly in the forms of coordination and governance. The resulting organisations imply more democracy, helping to create communities that are more united and to involve all the actors in the management and the sharing of created value. Thus, increasing importance has been placed on the remuneration of contributors at a fair price (differentiating from the models of pure free access to commons that had prevailed in previous periods). The underlying software components of these initiatives were also discussed, with the launch of adapted free licenses. All these decisions have fostered open modes that create jobs

and confidence and that are economically sustainable in the long term. Finally, these projects were successful because they benefited from a favourable ecosystem of actors and facilitating conditions that were set up upstream with public support, as was underlined before.

All in all, one can see from the examples presented, and following other authors (Forestier et al. 2020; Giusti and Thévenoud 2020), that a favourable dynamic has started in France for cooperative platforms, promoting them both as a type of collective and as a support for new social statuses. Indeed, cooperatives appear increasingly as alternative forms of collectives to a deleterious capitalist approach in the debate on the opportunities and risks of platform economies within the general digital transition of territories. In particular, legal forms such as the new SCIC, open to all types of stakeholders, including local communities, guaranteeing more egalitarian governance, are now recognised as significant progress and are popular with stakeholders. Cooperative platforms thus appear as viable solutions in locally anchored arrangements where local public authorities can gather to face territorial problems (transportation, logistics, and data access). In terms of new statuses, the actors of the French movement of cooperative platforms have indeed appropriated the important opportunities given by the creation of new staff statuses that particularly fit the activity of platform workers, such as the CAE (Cooperative of activity and employment, since 2014) and ESA (salaried partner-entrepreneur, since 2016) for the cooperation between freelancers. In addition to these statuses, some measures were also taken, allowing platform workers to come together or unite within organisations that can represent their collectives.

To conclude, our work goes in the same direction as the one from (Compain et al. 2019), who, after studying several French cooperative platforms, claim that they have some common goals: ‘ensuring the welfare of the platform workers and contributors (mainly by including them in the governance), encouraging reciprocal exchange, or paying attention to the impact on the nature of platform-mediated activities’ (Compain et al. 2019, p. 19). These authors envision in these characteristics, which can also be noticed in the three cases presented above, a dynamic of ‘re-embedding’ (Polanyi and Pearson 1977) the transactions that take place on these platforms so that transactions serve a

general interest. Therefore, the engagement of such shared initiatives with multi-stakeholder governance presents a connection and a natural synergy with public action. Accordingly, public policies may look for promoting platforms that offer new frameworks for partnerships with civil society. Although a more in-depth study would be necessary to support this hypothesis, such a synergy seems to characterise the dynamic observed in France, where the public authorities appear to seek to seize this opportunity through a supportive framework.

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