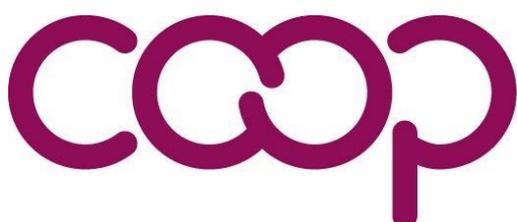


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“Rethinking co-operatives: From local to global and from the past to the future”

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& ΜΕΛΕΤΩΝ (ΙΣΕΜ)

Cooperative approaches in the digital transformation of SMEs

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Abstract:

The article discusses new possibilities for cooperatives in the digital economy. It will be argued that the current economic development with its increasing shift towards digital platform operators leads to increasing power asymmetries and unfavorable market outcomes. A situation which affects small- and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) especially, since they often depend on the services of these platform operators such as SMEs in the gastronomy or accommodation sector. Currently, the European Union as well as other state entities are taking measures to tighten regulation and control to address the situation in the digital market. However, corporations in the digital economy are characterized by network, scale and learning effects and tend towards the development of monopolies. Therefore, one can ask about the enduring success of these state interventions. As a consequence, one could discuss a further option in dealing with these developments, namely cooperatives. Due to the specific structure of cooperatives, asymmetric power relations could be evaded. Further on, the principle of promotion could ensure that the cooperative does not develop an independent or competing business model but focus on the interests of its members. In order to analyze the possible role of platform cooperatives, the article presents the findings of a qualitative interview study with regard to possibilities and obstacles of platform cooperatives and explores the question whether cooperatives can be seen as a feasible tool for SMEs to deal with the developments in the digital economy. To cover a broad variety of perspectives, experts from academia, cooperative associations, consulting and public institutions as well as representatives from SMEs in the gastronomy and accommodation sector in Vienna were consulted.

Keywords: digitalization, platform cooperatives, SMEs, power asymmetries