

Presentation: Digital Cooperatives, an alternative model to the gig economy?

Digital technologies open a broad scope for self-employment since the ‘means of production’ can be diminished to your personal laptop and set of skills. That notion is not without illusions: a high availability server or a powerful brand with tons of data is not something you keep in your garage. Nevertheless, the public discourse is full of success stories that promote the ‘values’ of innovation, excellence and entrepreneurship. All this fuels the startup ecosystem where technology is coupled with “angel investors” to offer a path to quick enrichment.

Can cooperativism inspire a counter-vision to start-up narrative, especially during a time of economic precariousness? In 2014, we established a worker’s coop in Athens, Greece working on digital technologies. Since then we have grown significantly in both members and turnover. Viability though is only one aspect of the process. Establishing a cooperative structure of operation remains a constant goal and raises several questions. Is what we do fundamentally different from a conventional tech company? Are we self-exploited? Are we a collective boss or united workers? How does digital technology and open source culture influence our way of work? How do we face precarity? We are eager to present our experiences from the last 8 years and discuss the answers we tried to give together in search for an alternative model of production in the digital era.