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Introduction to the special issue on Digital Solidarity Economies

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Abstract: This introduction situates Digital Solidarity Economies (DSE) as an analytical and practical framework for reimagining the digital economy through cooperation, mutual aid, and shared ownership. In response to the concentration of power within platform capitalisms, DSE highlight grassroots and institutional initiatives that democratise digital infrastructures and governance. Drawing on traditions of the social and solidarity economy, free and open-source cultures, and feminist and decolonial technoscience, the special issue explores how communities across the world build technological sovereignty from below. The contributions collectively advance a plural understanding of digital solidarity economies by foregrounding infrastructural arrangements, situated practices, and institutional experimentation as key sites through which digital economies oriented toward the reproduction of life are being built.

Introducing the context

Over the past decade, digitalisation has intensified the expansion of platform capitalisms (Steinberg, Zhang, & Mukherjee, 2024) concentrating economic and informational power in the hands of a few global corporations. The plural in platform capitalisms means that there is not a single way in which platforms have penetrated states, societies, and workers. Rather, they are entangled with specific histories and contexts, which cannot be confined to just one US-centred version. At the same time of this platform power, multiple counter-movements have emerged – both regulatory and grassroots – seeking to reclaim technological infrastructures as spaces for democracy, equity, and collective self-determination. These responses range from platform cooperativism and open-source communities to feminist, decolonial, and ecological initiatives that reimagine digital infrastructures through solidarity.

This special issue situates Digital Solidarity Economies (DSE) within this broader landscape of resistance and renewal. *DSE refers to the diverse practices, technologies, and organisational forms that challenge extractive models of the digital economy by embedding principles of cooperation, mutual aid, and shared ownership into data governance, platforms, and artificial intelligence.* In doing so, they extend long-standing traditions of the social and solidarity economy into the digital realm, offering concrete pathways toward democratic and sustainable digital futures.

By bringing together case studies and theoretical reflections from across regions, this special issue on digital solidarity economies responds to an urgent need: to reframe the debate on digital sovereignty and autonomy from below, and to recognise that alternative digital economies are already being built – by collectives that prioritise solidarity over profit. Here, “from below” is inspired by the tradition of British Marxist historians, such as Edward Palmer Thompson (1996), as a way of telling history from the perspective of the working class. In the context of digital solidarity economies, this means the experiences led by workers, grassroots collectives, and diverse networks.

Why Digital Solidarity Economies?

The solidarity economy, as a theoretical framework, constitutes a critical perspective that redefines the concept of economy on the basis of three pillars (Quiroga Díaz, 2009). First, it reveals the plurality of economic principles and practices that organise the ways in which our needs are met. Beyond whether these are considered “external” or “internal” to capitalism (Fraser, 2023), there is little doubt today

that instrumental and market rationality do not define the totality of our economic practices and institutions. In contrast, and as a second element, the solidarity economy is based on a reproductive rationality – that is, the economy, as a sphere of society, is oriented toward the expanded reproduction of life rather than capital. Planetary and human life – of present but also future generations – is chosen as the guiding purpose of the economy. Finally, the recognition of the plurality of economic principles, practices, and institutions dismantles ahistorical and universalist views, placing the cultural and symbolic dimension of our economies at the centre. Thus, there are not only multiple economies, but also real possibilities for building new hegemonies (Coraggio, 2007).

We conceptualise DSE both as an analytical framework and as an emerging sub-field of study that addresses alternatives to dominant players in the economy, with a particular focus on transforming hegemonic forms of labour and technology within the current dynamics of the digital economy. Rather than adopting a narrow or sector-specific lens, we approach DSE as a means to capture a wide range of phenomena and practices that exceed conventional institutional, organisational, or technological boundaries (Grohmann, 2025). On one level, they reflect the ongoing digitalisation of the solidarity economy – with its associated processes of datafication, platformisation of work, among others. On another, they embody struggles to build digital economies grounded in solidarity as a core value. They are imagining, designing and building labour and technology otherwise (Amrute & Murillo, 2020).

Digital solidarity economies are not a local or smaller version of other ongoing movements around labour and technology. On the contrary, digital solidarity economies provide an ample and global framework for expanding and connecting various movements that do not always walk together, such as platform cooperativism, feminist economies, decolonial responses to digital colonialism, intersectional struggles for autonomous infrastructures, digital commons, and free software movements, among others. It emphasises the strength of both grassroots and more institutionalised actors who are fighting for digital sovereignty and autonomy from below, seeking to address the infrastructural, economic, and social dependency on major tech companies, moving beyond traditional policy and regulatory frameworks. This means that public policies and the state-promotion of these initiatives may be intertwined in these struggles from below.

The plural form in “economies” signals that there is no single way of understanding the diverse possibilities for constructing digital alternatives. This perspective resonates with Caroline Hossein’s (2024) argument that there exist multiple varieties of cooperativism, often situated within informal contexts, or initiatives guid-

ed by principles of the commons and cooperation, yet institutionally organised in other forms such as collectives, NGOs, or social movements. What is at stake is the creation of prefigurative projects, or “real utopias”, in line with Erik Olin Wright (2010), as attempts to begin building today the digital worlds we wish to inhabit tomorrow. This means that the collectively organised arrangements within the DSE are still prototypes, experiments, laboratories of the digital economies (Grohmann, 2025). Workers and a range of collectives are experimenting with how to develop, for example, a chatbot to address income issues faced by homeless workers in Brazil (Salvagni, Grohmann, & Silva, 2024; Grohmann, 2023), apps for a federation of delivery-worker cooperatives in Europe, among other initiatives. The key point here is how technologies can collectively serve workers and grassroots collectives in ways that enable and strengthen organising. This prefigurative approach avoids treating these experiences as a ready-made formula or as finished, clearly delineated projects. Instead, workers are, in practice, learning in struggle (Vieta, 2020; Azzelini & Vieta, 2024), through trial and error.

Moreover, DSE do not aim to advance technological solutions in a deterministic fashion. Technologies are understood as integral to processes of organising, mobilising, and cultivating communities and relationships grounded in specific territories and embodied experiences, always shaped by intersectional inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989; González, 1988; WOIP, 2025). These technologies may be ancestral or indigenous, social technologies that are not necessarily digital, or contemporary infrastructures such as data systems, platforms, and artificial intelligence. This epistemological framework aligns with traditions of solidarity technoscience (Dagnino, 2019) and technodiversity (Hui, 2020), foregrounding the value of multiple modes of technological expression and practice.

This entails valuing epistemological and ontological multiplicity in the production and circulation of knowledge, embodied in labour processes and technological practices (Grohmann, 2023). It involves recognising and foregrounding indigenous, black, transfeminist, queer, working-class, and majority world knowledges across technology and labour (Escobar, 2018; Krenak 2022; Benjamin 2024; WOIP, 2025; Ricaurte, 2022, Varon, Costanza-Chock & Gebru, 2024; Haimson, 2025). The plural in “knowledges” is intentional, asserting, drawing on anti-colonial and decolonial frameworks – meaning that epistemologies can and should be plural, diverse, intersectional, and situated (Dussel, 2007; Fricker, 2007). DSE invite us to reimagine digital presents and futures, in pluriversal ways, grounded in the needs, values, and principles of people rather than those of big companies, following the tenets of design justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020).

Approaching DSE, then, does not necessarily mean asserting a new field or claiming the advent of a new era for labour and technology. The intention here is not to coin a new term that everyone must adopt, but rather to bring together and connect fields that still tend to operate in isolation. It involves honouring the epistemic traditions that precede us and recognising that so-called new technologies do not inherently signify progress in the terms dictated by Silicon Valley ideology (Marwick, 2017). For instance, there are long-standing traditions of solidarity economies – especially, though not exclusively, emerging from Latin America – that can offer valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges.

Plural genealogies of the solidarity economy

Neoliberalism has profoundly influenced economic activities and relationships worldwide through two main assumptions: first, that individuals can optimise their self-interest by assessing costs and benefits, and second, that markets operate efficiently and self-regulate (Vilas, 2011). These assumptions suggest that a robust free market enhances human well-being. In response to this framework, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) has emerged as a significant global alternative over the past three decades, providing a distinct approach to improving human welfare, promoting social justice, and fostering sustainable economic development.

The SSE challenges the foundational principles of capitalism by recognising that capitalist markets are socially constructed phenomena with both theoretical and political dimensions. Transforming these markets necessitates an engagement within the existing hegemonic system, requiring a deconstruction of established scientific understandings and widely accepted beliefs (Coraggio, 2011). The SSE emphasises cooperation, mutual aid, and democratic participation, offering an alternative economic model that can contest current capitalist structures and cultivate more equitable and sustainable practices. By viewing the economy as a socially constructed process, the SSE focuses on how the production, distribution, marketing, and consumption of goods and services can better address the legitimate needs and desires of individuals and communities. This perspective prioritises human welfare over the accumulation of profit, aligning with the insights of thinkers like Karl Polanyi (2007).

The defining features of this economy are its solidarity-oriented principles, which are grounded in a social value system distinct from that promoted by capitalist and neoliberal ideologies. The concept of the solidarity economy suggests that the social framework of the economic system – encompassing production, distribution, marketing, and consumption – should be grounded in egalitarian relationships

that prioritise the values of solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation in order to meet the needs and aspirations of workers, grassroots collectives, and networks (Jácome, 2016).

A fundamental aspect of solidarity economies is their commitment to pluralism, which acknowledges that there is no singular path to social change. Instead, multiple avenues exist for achieving transformation. This recognition allows us to explore how various elements within pluralism can connect and support one another, fostering solidarity among diverse initiatives. This pluralistic perspective is closely aligned with the theory of community economies, which highlights that the ethical and political vitality of social movements like SSEs is contingent upon expanding our understanding of both community and economy. By doing so, movements can harness a broader spectrum of approaches and strategies, enhancing their overall effectiveness and impact.

Various theoretical frameworks related to the solidarity economy have emerged across Europe, North America, Africa (and African diaspora, see: Hossein, 2024) and Latin America. The roots of the solidarity economy can be traced back to the historical experiences of the social economy (Gaiger, 2017), which is widely recognised to have emerged simultaneously in the United States and Europe during the 1890s (Defourny & Nyssens, 2023). The concept refer to various collective initiatives aimed at establishing independent and democratic management structures, which have historically led to the development of three primary subsectors: cooperatives, associations, and mutual organisations (Defourny, 2005).¹

The European social economy has its roots in the 19th century as a pivotal response to the exploitation and social disintegration caused by industrial capitalism, and it now serves as a historical foundation for many global solidarity economy movements. Comprising three significant subsectors – cooperatives, associative organisations; and mutual organisations, this model promotes a holistic approach to social and economic development (Laville, 2004). Central to the European social economy are principles that distinguish it from traditional capitalism: autonomous and democratic management ensures that power is shared among members, prioritising people over capital means that decision-making is based on participation rather than financial investment, and viewing profit as a means rather than an end underscores the commitment to using economic activity to provide essential goods and services for the community (Gardin, 2006). This framework not only fosters co-

1. The concept of mutual organisations, or mutual societies, refers to entities that operate on principles of solidarity, with members playing an active role in their governance.

operation and equity among participants but also offers a compelling alternative to conventional economic models, advocating for more just and sustainable societies worldwide.

In Europe, the EMES International Research Network laid the groundwork for social economy analysis by developing key theoretical and empirical foundations, with a particular emphasis on delineating three categories of indicators of social enterprise: the economic and entrepreneurial, the social, and the governance (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001). Social economies aim to fulfil social objectives that are integral to their missions. Their political ambitions are linked to their "political embeddedness", which underscores the contribution of social economies in fostering a democratic framework for economic activities (Laville, Lemaitre, & Nyssens, 2009).

In North America, the historical framework of the "third sector" has primarily been dominated by the concept of non-profit organisations such as charitable organisations and volunteer groups, all driven by a robust tradition of association and community support (Evers & Laville, 2004). However, this traditional approach often overlooked cooperatives and other forms of mutual aid that actively distribute profits among their members, thereby limiting the scope of what is considered part of the sector. In recent years, particularly around 2005–2007, the term "solidarity economy" began to gain traction in the United States. This shift was significantly influenced by international networks such as the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS) and collaborative forums like the World Social Forum. These platforms played a crucial role in linking various grassroots initiatives and providing a unified framework for alternative practices that already existed, including cooperatives and community economic development efforts.

The growing recognition of the solidarity economy reflects an evolving understanding of solidarity itself, expanding beyond mere charity or volunteerism to involve a more collaborative and equitable economic model. Emerging from civil society, this new perspective is characterised by an entrepreneurial spirit that seeks to address social needs while promoting sustainability and collective welfare (Poirier, 2008). A range of new social dynamics is emerging in a convergent manner, this includes worker cooperatives that are often linked to the broader solidarity economy movement, alongside various intersecting causes and social movements related to immigration and labour rights (Kawano, Masterson, & Teller-Ellsberg, 2010). The solidarity economy embodies a different approach, where economic, social, and political dimensions are intertwined, addressing aspirations for

emancipation and driving global change (Williams, 2014). Across diverse contexts, organisations within the solidarity economy are crucial in fostering grassroots initiatives focused on achieving equitable and sustainable development, as well as promoting active political citizenship.

The solidarity economy in Latin America is not merely a recent development, but the continuation of a long and rich history of popular solidarity with deep roots in diverse antecedents. This history encompasses pre-Columbian Indigenous organisational structures, collective systems established by freed slaves, and community practices aimed at preserving ways of life in the face of encroaching capitalist markets. Many of these expressions signify a powerful resistance to abandoning social systems where economic and social relationships are intricately woven together, elevating values such as reciprocity and trust (Coraggio, 2007; Lianza & Henriques, 2012). This heritage is fundamental to the Solidarity Economy's principles, emphasising community connection and mutual aid as vital components in the quest for a more equitable and just society. Unlike the models in the North, which often emerge as a reaction to the crisis of the welfare state, the Latin American model has historically been forged in the struggle for the material survival of populations that were never fully integrated into the formal market economy (Miño, 2015).

A central feature of the Latin American model is the inseparable integration of economic and social dimensions within its initiatives (Guerra, 2016). This integration arises from both its socio-cultural foundations and a specific rationality in which productivity is linked to participation, and efficiency is connected to well-being. Furthermore, these initiatives often take on additional roles in areas such as health, education, and environmental protection, reflecting their strong social embeddedness. This holistic approach acknowledges that economic success cannot be divorced from social impact, fostering a more equitable and sustainable development that benefits communities (Jácome, 2016). By intertwining these dimensions, the Latin American Solidarity Economy exemplifies a commitment to creating resilient and inclusive societies that prioritise the welfare of individuals alongside economic growth. The social and solidarity economy is a project of collective action (including strategic practices of transformation and everyday practices of reproduction) aimed at countering the socially negative trends of the existing system, with the perspective – either current or potential – of building an alternative economic system (Coraggio, 2011).

In light of this historical context, the solidarity economy is recognised for its emphasis on democracy and collective engagement within local public spheres, as

well as for critically addressing the dominant economic model on a global scale. In this context, various elements have slowly been exchanged across the Atlantic, moving from East to West and from South to North. Among these is a fresh interpretation of solidarity relevant to today, including the struggles for digital economies with solidarity as a core value.

Reframing the digital economy through solidarity

In the field of the digital economy in particular, the solidarity economy framework has been renewed and proves valuable for scholars. By adopting its lens, we can perceive a “forest” of plural principles, practices, and institutions for the internet that the “tree” of hegemonic platform capitalisms often obscures. As the popular saying goes, “don’t let the tree block your view of the forest.” The full picture of the digital economy must include the many experiences – anchored in solidarity – of workers’ resistance to the platformisation of labour, the autonomous development of technologies led by diverse collectives, and community organisation to access digital infrastructures, often with the support of progressive public policies. This theoretical perspective should form an essential part of our critical toolkit for analysing both the actually existing and the emerging digital economy.

In a similar vein, policymakers can draw on this perspective, as well as on the experiences that make up the field of the social and solidarity economy, to develop policies that promote a plural digital economy centred on the expanded reproduction of human and planetary life – one that takes into account cultural, spatial, environmental and political differences. Positioning oneself from the notion of DSE makes it possible to build bridges with experiences, interlocutors, and traditions deeply rooted in local communities, where there exists a wealth of knowledge that is central to the project of strengthening more just, equitable, and solidarity-based digital economies.

For social movements and organisations working within the social and solidarity economy, adopting this theoretical framework can foster debate and strengthen the development of their own discourse on what technologies mean and what purposes they should serve. This implies avoiding a perspective that assumes technologies can solve everything (a techno-determinist or techno-solutionist view) and instead adopting an approach grounded in the needs of communities, which does not always entail having more or newer technologies, but rather what makes sense for those communities. Researching digital solidarity economies also entails an ethical, political, and methodological commitment to conducting research *with* communities, not *on* them, avoiding parachute relationships and extractivist re-

search models. Instead, the key lies in the co-creation of knowledge and in forms of knowledge mobilisation that amplify community voices, drawing, for example, on traditions such as workers' inquiry and participatory action research.

Advancing the conceptual framework of Digital Solidarity Economies

The fourteen contributions gathered in this special issue expand and pluralise the conceptualisation of DSE by showing that these economies are neither a single organisational model nor a uniform theoretical paradigm. Rather, they form a dynamic and heterogeneous field of practices through which communities, cooperatives, and movements experiment with democratic digital infrastructures, shared governance, and situated knowledge. Taken together, the articles demonstrate that DSE is a living framework that bridges the SSE, free and open-source cultures, and struggles for technological sovereignty. Their combined insights point to three intertwined dimensions of DSE: (1) infrastructural and governance innovation; (2) the articulation of solidarity through situated, intersectional, and territorial practices; and (3) institutional experimentation and political imagination across scales.

Infrastructures and governance

A first cluster of contributions focuses on the construction of collective digital infrastructures and their modes of governance. These works reveal that solidarity is not only a normative aspiration but a set of design and organisational decisions embedded in software, data management, and institutional arrangements.

The case of *The Drivers Cooperative in New York* (Stefano Tortorici) illustrates the tensions of scaling digital infrastructures within a worker-owned model. As the cooperative grew, its capacity to control its own platform diminished, showing that ownership alone does not guarantee technological sovereignty. In particular, the case highlights frictions between democratic decision-making processes and the need for operational speed and technical responsiveness in a highly competitive platform environment. A similar ambivalence appears in *CoopCycle* studies – both in Europe (Laura Eccher, Alejandro Fortuny-Sicart & Arthur Guichoux) and its Latin American federations (Alexandra Belén Gualavisi & Daniel Vizúete-Sandoval) – where federated architectures and free software licensing enable decentralised replication, yet sustaining democratic participation and equitable livelihoods remains an ongoing challenge. These contributions clarify that DSE governance operates through federation rather than centralisation, favouring horizontal coordination over vertical growth.

A contribution in this special issue examining the Brazilian context, deepens this infrastructural perspective by reconnecting technology to territorial ecosystems. Celso Alexandre Souza de Alvear, Flavio Chedid Henriques, Marcelo Alves de Souza, and Camilla de Godoi Pacheco propose the *Functionality and Cooperation Economy* framework, which redefines efficiency around cooperation and use-value instead of profit. This contribution reconnects technology to territorial ecosystems, showing how technical design, education, and local governance can operate as mutually reinforcing pillars of digital solidarity economies. They highlight university-community collaborations as critical spaces for co-producing public digital goods grounded in feminist and cooperative values. These contributions demonstrate that technical design, education, and local governance can be mutually reinforcing pillars of DSE, turning universities, cooperatives, and territorial networks into co-producers of public digital goods.

From another angle, Dwayne Ansah, Mai Ishikawa Sutton, Sophie Bloemen and Bonno Pel explore collaborative drafting in the creation of a European *Code of Conduct for Data Sharing in the Social Economy*, offering a meta-infrastructural view of DSE. Their analysis exposes both the promise and the risk of institutionalisation: participatory processes can democratise standards, but may also reproduce asymmetries between experts and grassroots actors. In dialogue with this, Monica Garriga Miret, David Gomez Fontanills, Xavier Martinez Serrano and Enric Senabre Hidalgo study Catalan cooperatives, showing how commons-based digital infrastructures such as *Dolibarr* and the *SomNúvol* cloud service embed solidarity through free/libre open-source software (FLOSS) and peer learning. Their approach reframes technological sovereignty as a collective pedagogical process rather than a static state, resonating with the notion of “learning in struggle” (Vieta, 2020), understood here as a praxis-based process through which different workers communities collectively learn how to organise in terms of labour and how to develop technologies that serve to their own purposes. It means that the process of being part of digital solidarity economies is also a process of critical pedagogies, in a prefigurative way.

Together, these contributions move DSE theory beyond platform cooperativism. They shift attention from platform ownership to the co-governance of infrastructures, highlighting hybrid arrangements that combine digital commons, cooperative federations, and civic-public alliances. Governance in DSE thus emerges as a continuous negotiation between autonomy and interdependence, between code and community.

Situated solidarities

A second set of papers foregrounds the plural and situated nature of solidarity. They examine how marginalised communities reconfigure digital tools to sustain collective life and resist extractive data economies. In doing so, they extend the conceptual reach of DSE beyond economic or technological innovation toward epistemic and cultural transformation.

Nuria Vega-Rodríguez's study on gender and digital competences in Barcelona situates feminist and anti-fascist pedagogies as key drivers of democratic digitalisation. It argues that building technological capacity in the SSE is not merely about skills transfer but about transforming patriarchal power relations in technology production. Similarly, Hiu-Fung Chung and Ho Lam (Roland) Cheng explore how queer collectives in East Asia tactically inhabit and subvert commercial platforms, creating "platformised solidarity economies" that expand the field of DSE to include affective, cultural, and spatial dimensions of digital resistance.

In Latin America, Leonardo Foletto and Daniel Santini trace the deep interrelation between free culture and digital solidarity economies through cases such as *Código Libre*, *Alternativa Laboral Trans*, and *EITA*. Their comparative study shows how the principles of free culture – autonomy, sharing, and copyleft – have long informed solidarity practices in Argentina and Brazil. By linking free software cooperatives, transfeminist tech collectives, and the legacy of cultural policies like *Pontos de Cultura*, they reveal DSE as a lineage of technopolitical sovereignty rooted in the Global South. Free culture, they argue, provides the ethical and epistemic foundation that allows DSE to counter both platform capitalism and new forms of data colonialism.

This decolonial and intersectional orientation resonates with Anne-Pauline De Cler's ethnography of *GrownBy*, a farmer-owned platform cooperative in the United States. Through the lens of community supported agriculture (CSA), De Cler shows how cooperative digital infrastructures mediate accessibility, governance, and work in food systems. By integrating low-income and racialised groups via public assistance programmes, *GrownBy* transforms digital participation into food justice, revealing how DSE can operate as a mechanism of redistribution in contexts of structural inequality.

Across these contributions, digital solidarity is not an abstract collaboration but an infrastructure of care: maintaining servers, designing algorithms, and organising work all become acts of mutual support. They collectively demonstrate that DSEs

are made by feminised, queer, racialised, and agrarian actors who reprogramme technologies from their lived realities, producing a multiplicity of solidarities that challenge Eurocentric and technocratic visions of digital transformation.

Institutionalisation, experimentation and policy interfaces

A third group of papers situates DSEs at the intersection of social movements, co-operatives, and public institutions, exposing both their enabling conditions and contradictions.

The study of the *Lunch Bell Project* (Ashique Ali Thuppilikkat, Priyank Chandra, & Fabin Filal) in Kerala portrays a hybrid initiative connecting community kitchens, local government, and digital communication tools. Here, DSE manifests as infra-structural care: WhatsApp groups and local apps coordinate daily food distribution, translating solidarity into an operational public service. Similarly, Jeongone Seo and Tawfiq Ammari's analysis of a South Korean collaborative transportation platform reveals how state-led attempts at digital inclusion can falter when bureaucratic logics overshadow participatory design. The comparison between these cases underlines that institutional proximity alone does not guarantee solidarity; rather, co-governance and community ownership are essential for sustaining it.

By contrast, the Latin American and European experiences highlight constructive forms of institutional embeddedness. The Brazilian engineering cooperatives, the Catalan integral cooperatives, and the federated networks around *CoopCycle* all demonstrate how public policies, research institutions, and federations can act as solidarity infrastructures – platforms for platforms – supporting replication and mutual aid. The *Collaborative drafting and the institutionalisation of data sharing: Insights from the EU social economy* (Dwayne Ansah, Mai Ishikawa Sutton, Sophie Bloemen and Bonno Pel) and *Social and solidarity economy and shared knowledge: Facilitating and integrating the collaborative adoption of digital commons in Catalan coops* (Monica Garriga Miret, David Gomez Fontanills, Xavier Martinez Serrano and Enric Senabre Hidalgo) papers, in particular, bridge grassroots practices with European data-governance frameworks, illustrating how bottom-up knowledge can shape continental policies on the social economy and digital rights.

At the same time, the decentralised autonomous organisations (DAO) study by Tara Merk, Laura Lotti, Nick Houde, Morshed Mannan pushes the conversation toward emerging technologies. Drawing on a workers' inquiry among blockchain contributors, the authors critically assess whether decentralised autonomous organisations can embody solidarity economy principles. They find that despite rhetorical affini-

ties – such as collective governance and open participation – DAO labour often reproduces precarity and self-exploitation. Yet, the paper also formulates proposals for “web3-native social protections,” envisioning cooperative social security mechanisms and collective standards for fair work. This contribution is crucial for expanding DSE theory into the domain of algorithmic governance, showing that the question is not whether technology is decentralised but whether its labour relations are solidaristic.

Across contexts, institutionalisation thus appears as both a risk and a resource: while public programmes or blockchain protocols may reproduce inequality, they can also be repurposed as spaces of democratic experimentation. DSE, in this light, is a project of institutional hacking – that is, a situated and often contested practice of intervening in existing institutional arrangements from within, repurposing their rules, infrastructures, and resources toward solidarity-oriented ends, rather than building entirely new institutions from scratch.

Toward an expanded conceptual framework and plural cartography of DSE

Taken together, the contributions provide a textured, multi-scalar understanding of DSE that enriches its theoretical foundation. Several transversal insights emerge.

First, DSE is best understood as a continuum of practices rather than a category of organisations. It includes cooperative platforms, FLOSS-based infrastructures, feminist tech collectives, civic data commons, community agriculture platforms, and blockchain experiments. These entities share commitments to democratic governance, mutual aid, and non-extractive digital infrastructures, even as they operate across different legal, technical, and cultural regimes.

Second, DSE foregrounds infrastructural politics: solidarity is enacted through the design and maintenance of servers, code repositories, data protocols, and algorithms. Whether in *Dolibarr's* cooperative implementation or in *GrownBy's* SNAP integration, digital architectures encode political values about who can participate and under what terms.

Third, the issue advances the idea of technological sovereignty from below. Across the Catalan, Brazilian, and Latin American cases, sovereignty is not a chauvinist-nationalist project but a collective capacity to choose, adapt, and govern technology according to community principles. This orientation does not imply opposition to the state *per se*, but rather foregrounds forms of selective, negotiated, contested, and often fragile engagement with public institutions. This stands in contrast to

the corporate appropriation of “sovereignty as a service” by big tech firms (Grohmann & Barbosa, 2025), as Foletto and Santini note, and instead points toward grounded forms of autonomy embedded in peer learning, cooperative ownership, and free culture.

Fourth, learning and pedagogy emerge as constitutive dimensions of DSE. From Monica Garriga Miret, David Gomez Fontanills, Xavier Martinez Serrano and Enric Senabre Hidalgo “learning forks” to diverse Brazilian experiments in co-produced technological learning, and the feminist pedagogies of Nuria Vega-Rodríguez, the production of knowledge is inseparable from the production of solidarity. DSE thus offers not only alternative infrastructures but also alternative epistemologies – ways of knowing and governing technology collectively.

Finally, the contributions illuminate the ambiguities and failures that shape DSE’s development. Platform cooperatives confronting market pressures, public–private hybrid models struggling with bureaucracy, and DAOs navigating regulatory uncertainty all show that solidarity must be continually negotiated. These frictions are not marginal but formative: they define DSE as a field of ongoing experimentation where ethics, governance, and technology meet.

By mapping a broad spectrum of initiatives – from queer digital spaces in East Asia to free culture cooperatives in Latin America, from Catalan cloud infrastructures to US agro-digital co-ops, from Brazilian pedagogical experiments to blockchain-based governance – the special issue consolidates DSE as a *conceptual and political frontier*. It argues that the future of digital economies will depend on the ability to collectivise not only ownership but also knowledge, infrastructure, and care.

In this sense, the collective contribution of the special issue lies in expanding DSE beyond a set of alternative business models toward a broader infrastructure of solidarity: one that weaves together feminist, decolonial, ecological, and technological struggles; that treats learning and governance as shared processes; and that reclaims the digital as a commons for sustaining life. Across the contributions, this infrastructure emerges as multi-layered. At a technical level, it includes shared digital tools, platforms, and software infrastructures designed to enable collective ownership and non-extractive data practices. At an institutional level, it is constituted through governance arrangements such as federations, codes of conduct, and cooperative or civic-public partnerships that stabilise solidarity-based practices over time. At a social level, it is sustained by networks of trust, peer learning, and political coordination that allow communities to appropriate, adapt, and collec-

tively govern technologies. Taken together, the cases in this issue do not merely document isolated initiatives, but illustrate how these layers interact to form durable, yet contested, infrastructures through which digital solidarity economies are enacted.

Conclusion

The contributions gathered in this special issue collectively affirm that DSE are not a distant ideal but a living and evolving terrain of practice. They demonstrate that solidarity can be designed into digital infrastructures, governance models, and knowledge systems – transforming how communities produce, share, and sustain technological resources. Across geographies and disciplines, the articles reveal that the digital economy can be reoriented around the expanded reproduction of life, rather than the accumulation of capital.

By articulating diverse traditions – from feminist and decolonial technoscience to cooperative data governance and free culture – the special issue positions DSE as both an analytical framework and a political horizon. It invites scholars to study the plurality of digital alternatives as interdependent rather than isolated experiments; policymakers to recognise the social and ecological dimensions of technological sovereignty; and communities to continue weaving networks of mutual aid, innovation, and care.

Looking forward, the challenge is to consolidate DSE as a transversal field of inquiry and action that bridges academic research, public policy, and grassroots experimentation. This requires continued dialogue among movements and institutions, attentive to the contradictions and possibilities that define digital transitions. The future of DSE lies in nurturing infrastructures of solidarity that can sustain democratic digital futures – plural, situated, and grounded in the everyday practices of those who build them.

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