

# Care before Code: Supporting the Development of Distributed Co-operative Organisations (DisCOs)

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## Care before Code: It's What Makes DisCOs Different

How can emergent technologies be put to use in the service of emancipatory goals to reshape how we work? The tech sector has been a great disruptor of the labour market and a range of industries. But too often this has been accompanied by increased surveillance, data harvesting and precarious labour.<sup>1</sup> For all their disruption, the one thing Silicon Valley has not touched is the ownership and governance structure of a typical capitalist firm.<sup>2</sup> How can organisations transform work in such a way as to prioritise care, relationships and social value?

We introduce the DisCO model to fulfill this purpose. DisCO stands for Distributed Co-operative Organisations.<sup>3</sup> This is an accessible approach to people working together to create value in ways that are co-operative, commons-oriented and rooted in feminist economics. These values are nourished in small, federated communities. DisCOs harness the utility of tech without being completely tech-centric, emphasising mutual trust and the need to have not only reliable but also enjoyable collaborative relationships. Distributed ledger/blockchain technologies are put to use when these values and their resulting human relationships have become strongly rooted.<sup>4</sup>

DisCOs are a cultural and structural framework combining influences from other forms and movements into a practical toolkit. The framework is based on existing, disruptive economic alternatives normally absent from the blockchain space. They are:

1. **The Commons and P2P:** Self-organised systems stewarding resources to meet human needs while leveraging the power of networks.<sup>5</sup>
2. **Open Co-operativism:** Combining Open Source and Commons principles with

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1. Trebor Scholz, *Uberworked and Underpaid: How Workers Are Disrupting the Digital Economy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

2. Richard Barbrook and Cameron Andy. "The California Ideology." *Imaginary Futures: From Thinking Machines to the Global Village*. <http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/2007/04/17/the-californian-ideology-2/>.

3. See <https://disco.co-op/> and <https://disco.co-op/manifesto/> for a more thorough overview.

4. For an accessible yet thorough introduction to the Blockchain, we recommend this video course, as well as Daniel Drescher, *Blockchain Basics: A Non-Technical Introduction in 25 Steps* (New York City: Apress, 2017).

5. See <https://primer.commonstransition.org/1-short-articles/1-2-what-are-p2p-and-the-commons-and-how-do-they-relate>.

those of the co-operative and social solidarity movements.<sup>6</sup>

3. **Open Value Accounting:** Enables value sovereignty by rewarding meaningful contributions to projects, rather than wage labour.<sup>7</sup>
4. **Feminist Economics:** Challenges normative economic abstractions while factoring reproductive and care work.<sup>8</sup>

These influences, together with a strong focus on accessibility and social and economic justice, provide DisCOs with vastly different affordances to other available alternatives such as Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs). DAOs are blockchain-based entities that can operate autonomously to execute payments, levy penalties, and enforce terms and contracts with minimal human interaction - like a virtual robot that can automate governance processes and execute investments and payments for an individual or organisation.<sup>9</sup>

DisCOs design their accounting and governance structures as convivial tools from the bottom up. These are developed through a process of community deliberation on how to best enact a series of co-operative values and principles. Shifting the design of technologies and their social impact away from grand architects and investors, DisCOs provide more democratic and ethical templates to build disruptive technologies. These, as we will see, provide different pathways to enact more desirable futures of work which are neither dependent on un-checked technological disruption or on top-down governmental interventions.

The Covid-19 crisis has been a bucket of cold water for many economic forecasts about the future of work. The abject failure of neoliberalism to provide urgently needed solutions for the crisis has exposed the structural inadequacies of the market/state, and revealed the exponential rise of voluntary or otherwise typically undervalued work.<sup>10</sup> Frontline workers and mutual aid practitioners are routinely hailed as heroes, yet economically sacrificed as martyrs.

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6. For more information see <https://primer.commonstransition.org/1-short-articles/1-5-what-is-open-co-operativism>.

7. For more information see [http://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Category:P2P\\_Accounting](http://wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Category:P2P_Accounting).

8. For an introduction to feminist economics see <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/what-is-feminist-economics/>.

9. For a more in-depth look at Decentralised Autonomous Organisations we recommend this critical overview by Primavera de Filippi: <https://www.guerrillatranslation.org/2014/11/20/ethereum-free-et-or-skynet/>, for a basic introduction see <https://blockchainhub.net/dao-decentralized-autonomous-organization/>.

10. On the concept of the market/state see David Bollier, "State Power and Commoning: Transcending a Problematic Relationship." A Report on a Deep Dive Workshop convened by the Commons Strategies Group in co-operation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation. July 2016. <https://cdn8.commonstrategies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/State-Power-and-Commoning.pdf>. See also David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, *Free, Fair, and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons* (Gabriola, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2019).

Meanwhile, some of the world's richest companies, often in the tech sector, enjoy unprecedented growth.<sup>11</sup> Many of these are willing partners in publicly-funded mass surveillance and citizen control programs.<sup>12</sup> The surge of online remote work is treated as a disembodied extension of office work, bypassing the human affective needs of digital teams in the rush to demand more invisibilised productivity. The uselessness of alienating, unnecessary jobs that exacerbate consumption in the name of growth becomes crystal clear, yet stimulus packages are directed towards propping up big business with corporate-level payouts, while artificial scarcity hampers urgent public health responses.

Socio-economic instability can be a banquet for predators, especially when combined with promises of disruptive technology, but it also provides the opportunity for radical innovations and solutions based on human trust. DisCOs can address the Covid-19 crisis by creating bottom-up resilience and restoring our relationships - both to one another and the planet.

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11. See <https://www.schroders.com/en/insights/economics/covid-19-why-the-tech-giants-have-emerged-as-winners/>.

12. Félix Tréguer, "The State and Digital Surveillance in Times of the Covid-19 Pandemic." SciencesPo Center for International Studies. CERI Unité Mixte de Recherche. 1 June 2020. <https://www.sciences-po.fr/cei/en/content/state-and-digital-surveillance-times-covid-19-pandemic>.

# DisCO in 7 Principles and 11 Values

Co-operatives have formally existed for more than 175 years and, arguably, the spirit of co-operation that led to their creation has been a hallmark of human existence.<sup>13</sup> The commons has long been defined as communities working together with shared resources to achieve common goals.<sup>14</sup> Co-operatives formalise the practice of commoning and facilitate legally regulated operations in the marketplace.

DisCO adds seven additional principles to the original seven co-operative principles in order to reunite co-operativism with its commons origins and better prepare it for technological futures.<sup>15</sup> Building on the groundwork laid out by movements such as Platform and Open Co-operativism,<sup>16</sup> the seven DisCO principles are:

## 1: Put your effort where your heart is: values-based accountability

Most companies and indeed, many co-operatives, orient their production toward profit and meeting market demands. In DisCOs, production is explicitly guided by need, including social and environmental priorities. This orientation towards positive outcomes is the heart of a DisCO's values. The needs-based priorities defined by the co-operative are embedded in each DisCO's legal statutes, as well as the technologies and cultural practices that let DisCOs assess and reflect on the outcomes of their effort.

## 2: Building whole-community governance

Co-operatives are traditionally geared towards bringing democracy to the workplace. But their economic activity has knock-on effects throughout broader chains of production and consumption. Rather than restricting democratic principles to one organisation, DisCOs extend rights of ownership and decision making powers to all those affected by a DisCO's activities. Inspired by the multi-constituent social care co-ops in Quebec, Canada and Emilia Romagna, Italy, DisCOs place measurable value on the distinctive contributions of a defined community that can include workers, neighbouring communities, suppliers, clients, those who perform reproductive and affective labor, financial backers, etc.

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13. For a condensed history of the co-operative movement see <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/co-operatives-short-history>.

14. Bollier and Helfrich. *Free, Fair, and Alive*.

15. See <https://www.ica.co-op/en/co-operatives/co-operative-identity>.

16. See our article on Platform Co-operativism and Open Co-operativism to find out about the history and differences between both movements: <http://commonstransition.org/from-platform-to-open-co-operativism/>.

### 3: Active creators of commons

Typical market enterprises permit the exploitation of shared wealth, such as land, natural resources or human knowledge. According to mainstream economics, businesses are drivers of a process of enclosure, whereby resources are turned into commodities and relationships into services. DisCOs reverse this trend by actively generating decommodified, open-access resources. These commons can be digital (e.g. code, design, documentation, legal protocols and best practices) or physical (e.g. productive infrastructure, deliberation spaces, machinery).

### 4: Rebalancing the scale: rethinking global/local economics

Corporations extract resources as if they were infinitely abundant, while restricting immaterial flows of knowledge, usually reproducible at marginal cost, through intellectual property laws and patents. Conversely, DisCOs support and provide a business model for the Design Global, Manufacture Local template.<sup>17</sup> Here, physical production is kept local and needs-based, while knowledge, resources and value flows are shared at the global level with like-minded initiatives to create political and cultural counterpower to the prevailing corporate/capitalist economy.<sup>18</sup>

### 5: Care work is the core

Care and affective work are essential in DisCOs and are supported through established mutual support structures. These include a rotating list of designated mentors and support “buddies” in a roster where each person both gives and receives support within the group.<sup>19</sup> Emphasis is placed upon openly expressing observations and criticisms about the workings of the group and also sharing individual and collective aspirations, preoccupations and humour. This helps build stronger interpersonal bonds and better trust-based communication. Beyond individual members, DisCOs extend the notion of care work towards the collective as an entity represented by the upkeep of its goals and values. This empowers individuals to undertake, or at least understand, what would usually be considered bureaucratic or administrative work. This work is often channeled to either a highly-paid upper management class, or a low-paid assistant function, both acting in the interest of the capitalist class. Upkeep of a DisCO’s social mission is the responsibility of working circles or self-organised teams which collectively manage specific needs (e.g. building community, following leads for livelihood work, evaluating potential co-op members) to ensure that the DisCO is healthy and able to continue fulfilling its values.

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17. For an overview, see <https://truthout.org/articles/reimagine-dont-seize-the-means-of-production/>.

18. Value flows is the economic vocabulary informing DisCO interactions. For more information, visit <https://valueflo.ws/>.

19. See <https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Mentoring>. See also [https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Mutual\\_Support](https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Mutual_Support).

## 6: Reimagining the origin and flows of value

In the capitalist marketplace, production is determined hierarchically and is exclusively oriented toward profit, while value is measured through opaque mechanisms and financial instruments.<sup>20</sup> Further, the value only becomes manifest through market exchange. Everything else is externalised, omitted from the value equation. In DisCOs, production is communal and value measurement is transparent. Three types of value are highlighted and rewarded:

1. productive market value (the DisCO's goods and services paid for by clients);
2. pro-bono value (the commons created through self-selected volunteer work); and
3. care work value (towards the collective and among its members, see above).

All are tracked through complementary value metrics that apply to all DisCO members. Recognising different types of value influences functions including payments, work priorities and certain key decisions. This recognition gives visibility and empowerment to other values left out by the market nexus.

## 7: Primed for federation

Co-operatives worldwide have a combined turnover of US\$3 trillion, which is similar to the aggregate market capitalisation of Silicon Valley's largest businesses (Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple and Facebook).<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, this economic power is dispersed, with many co-ops only nominally acknowledging the sixth co-operative principle: co-operation among co-operatives. Unlike networks, which may or may not share common goals, federations are held together by shared commitments and power is equitably distributed among all nodes. Federations also provide viable alternatives to the dangers of scaling, where a worldview is simply extended from a centre of power and forces everything in its path to conform to its values.

DisCOs are distributed and differentiated structures that replicate themselves through a standard federation protocol.<sup>22</sup> This allows federations of DisCOs to achieve critical mass without regimenting all parts. The modularity of DisCO Value Tracking allows DisCOs to mutualise economic power (as well as shared, non-monetary resources) for greater impact. Every node retains the levels of

20. Alex Pazaitis, Primavera De De Filippi, and Vasilis Kostakis. "Blockchain and Value Systems in the Sharing Economy: The Illustrative Case of Backfeed." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*. Science Direct, June 10, 2017. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0040162517307084>.

21. In 2018, these were similar numbers, but at the time of writing MAGAF has leapt to US\$4.9 trillion. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/30/apple-amazon-alphabet-facebook-added-200-billion-in-value-thursday.html>. Source for Co-operative stats: Measuring the size and scope of the co-operative economy: Results of the 2014 global census on co-operatives. Dave Grace & Associates, 9 October 2014: <https://portailco-op.hec.ca/in/details.xhtml?id=h%3A%3Ac3357139-31ae-4270-83ef-9d24884e-2be3>.

22. See [https://wiki.guerrillamediainitiative.org/index.php/Distributed\\_Co-operative\\_Organization\\_\(DisCO\)\\_Governance\\_Model\\_V\\_3.0#Federation\\_Protocol](https://wiki.guerrillamediainitiative.org/index.php/Distributed_Co-operative_Organization_(DisCO)_Governance_Model_V_3.0#Federation_Protocol).

trust, mutual support and well-being that only small groups can achieve, while still achieving a larger collective impact by being part of broader economic networks. The long-term goal is to make co-operatives transcend their status as a form of economic alternative and instead, become a collective economic counterpower.

Complementary to the 7 principles, DisCOs also introduce 11 key values which, taken together, provide the framework to tackle the present challenges posed by the Covid crisis.<sup>23</sup> Rather than turn to big state or corporate solutions, in the DisCO model, social and environmental change is brought to life from below by federated collectives which actively educate in post-capitalist, feminist economics. Volunteer work is no longer ignored or undervalued and is factored into the value equation. Digital working teams communicate through established working rhythms, where both practical and affective realities are continually discussed.<sup>24</sup> Finally, all production is oriented toward the urgent issues of our time, but without sacrificing wellbeing or a friendly, enjoyable workplace environment.

These principles and values are articulated through DisCO Governance models (plural), designed to adapt to the cultural and contextual specificities of each DisCO. At the same time, they share common patterns that help fulfil the DisCO principles, as we will explain.

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23. For the additional 11 DisCO Values see: [https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Open\\_Value\\_Co-operativism\\_and\\_DisCO\\_in\\_7\\_Principles\\_and\\_11\\_Values#11\\_Values](https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Open_Value_Co-operativism_and_DisCO_in_7_Principles_and_11_Values#11_Values).

24. See [https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Community\\_Rhythms](https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Community_Rhythms).

## DisCO-Tech and Commons Governance

The DisCO Governance model is an extensive reworking of an orphaned open source governance protocol.<sup>25</sup> It was developed and put into practice by Guerrilla Media Collective (GMC), a Spain-based co-operative focussing on language and communications services, which became the first DisCO pilot.<sup>26</sup> In 2018, a group of experts on decentralised/non-hierarchical organisations, facilitation, peer governance, distributed tech and mutualised finance were invited to help reimagine the model,<sup>27</sup> which resulted in a new version: The Distributed Co-operative Organisation Governance and Economic Model.<sup>28</sup>

Here is a brief overview. Co-op members are owners and shareholders, each holding different types of shares in the collective. These correspond to value-tracked pro bono and livelihood work, as well as reproductive or care work (see below). Shares in these three types of work determine how much is paid on a monthly basis. The money to pay shares come from the productive work performed by the co-op's worker-owners, which is accounted for in internal credits (1 credit = 1 Euro), creating shares.<sup>29</sup> The shares accrued by co-op members correspond to the work done in these three areas of value:

1. **Paid work** performed for outside clients who are invoiced by GMC as an agency. We call this the 'livelihood work' stream.
2. **Pro-bono work** in a DisCO's specific productive area. For example, members of GMC choose articles to translate pro-bono based on their enthusiasm and how the material aligns with their values.<sup>30</sup> These translations are presented in Guerrilla Translation's websites,<sup>31</sup> with the consent of, but at no cost to, the authors. These translations create an open knowledge commons. This is described as the 'love work' stream.
3. **Care work** which, as explained in the 5<sup>th</sup> DisCO principle above, includes 'caring for the collective and its social mission' ensuring that all the collective's administrative, communication and economic needs are cared for,

25. See <https://disco.co-op/governance-model/> for the full governance model, or read this simplified overview as applied to Guerrilla Translation: <https://www.guerrillatranslation.org/our-governance-model/>. The original Better Means Governance Model can be read here. The changes have been so substantial that it should not be taken as a reflection of our current governance model, but mainly an inspiration.

26. See <https://guerrillamedia.co-op/> and <https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/>.

27. For a summary of the meeting see <https://www.guerrillatranslation.org/2018/08/22/punk-elegance-how-guerrilla-translation-reimagined-itself-for-open-co-operativism/>.

28. "Distributed Co-operative Organization (DisCO) Governance Model V 3.0." DisCO.co-op, Guerrilla Media Collective. <https://disco.co-op/governance-model/>.

29. For more on how this model operates in practice see the DisCO Governance Model. [https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Distributed\\_Cooperative\\_Organization\\_\(DisCO\)\\_Governance\\_Model\\_V\\_3.0](https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Distributed_Cooperative_Organization_(DisCO)_Governance_Model_V_3.0).

30. See [https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Guerrilla\\_Translation%27s\\_Goals\\_and\\_Values](https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Guerrilla_Translation%27s_Goals_and_Values).

31. Guerrilla Translation currently has two blogs (English <https://www.guerrillatranslation.org/> and Spanish <https://www.guerrillatranslation.es/>) to present their pro-bono 'Love Work,' with other languages planned for the near future.

and ‘caring for the humans that make up the collective.’

These are proportionally accounted for and treated as shares, and are the basis for the distributions of income.<sup>32</sup> Note that the same value metrics are used for both types of productive work (in this case, translations). DisCO’s model of income distribution diverts a portion of paid work towards the pro-bono work previously performed by members. Net funds held on account are distributed on a monthly basis: 75% to pay members’ agency (livelihood) shares, and the remaining 25% pays for pro bono (love) shares.

Meanwhile, reproductive work is tallied in hours and distributed according to each member’s ratio of benefits versus contributions.<sup>33</sup> These care work hours dynamically affect the 75%/25% Livelihood/Love split described above. Members who performed fewer care hours while earning more in the Livelihood/Agency or Love/Probono streams will have a proportional deduction from their pay. Those adjustments are redistributed towards those contributing more care hours. In practice, this means that if all members perform roughly the same amount of care work over a month, the 75%/25% split on Livelihood and Love shares will remain intact. Any imbalances are immediately compensated. The system enables flexibility and fair compensation toward activities that each DisCO values as essential for their health and reproduction.

This type of share-holding is in contrast to that found in a corporation. While shareholders in a corporation accrue power through money, the DisCO model treats power differently. DisCOs value forms of power understood as ‘shared capacity to act’ and ‘collective strength’ centered around work undertaken for the commons.<sup>34</sup> A corporation employs wage labor to produce profit-maximising commodities through privately owned and managed productive infrastructures. By contrast, DisCOs work together for social and environmental purposes while also creating commons and building community, locally and/or globally. The model allows members to choose to do work that they consider value-aligned, and therefore worthwhile. This is how DisCOs model a practice of economic resistance.

Various things are accomplished through this method. First, all members can gain income for both types of productive work, whether pro-bono or paid for by a client. Second, nobody has to compete internally for paid work versus the equally important pro-bono and care work. All three types of work are equally valued within a DisCO. Meanwhile, there are variable tiers of external pricing based on the client’s means and budget.<sup>35</sup> Clients with the greatest financial means who are aligned with the DisCO’s principles and values, and who wish to provide support for developing its mission, are offered the top tier rate. Extra income from this level of client payment goes directly toward repaying the collective’s internal pro-bono

32. For more details on how income is distributed in a monthly basis, read the DisCO Governance Model’s section on “The Monthly Payment Pipeline”: [https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Distributed\\_Co-operative\\_Organization\\_\(DisCO\)\\_Governance\\_Model\\_V\\_3.0#What\\_this\\_looks\\_like\\_in\\_practice:\\_the\\_Monthly\\_Payment\\_Pipeline](https://wiki.guerrillamediacollective.org/Distributed_Co-operative_Organization_(DisCO)_Governance_Model_V_3.0#What_this_looks_like_in_practice:_the_Monthly_Payment_Pipeline).

33. For more information, consult the DisCO Governance Model’s section on Care Work Value.

34. For a short overview of power to/over/with/within, see this article: <https://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/expressions-of-power/>.

35. For the pricing tiers (as used by Guerrilla Translation) see the DisCO Governance Model.

shares (this additional income is also used to offset the cost for work performed for clients in the 'solidarity tier,' i.e. value-aligned small organisations with minimal or inadequate budgets). This sliding scale helps nurture relationships and supports collectives and initiatives with the least financial means, creating better and fairer access to the DisCO's services.

Currently in testing phase, the DisCO Deck is a custom platform being developed to facilitate the value tracking, redistribution and payment protocols of this governance model. Based on the Value Flows economic vocabulary,<sup>36</sup> DisCO Deck balances lightweight, DLT tech (such as CommonsPub) for Intra-DisCO accounting and blockchain technologies for transactions and value mutualisation with other DisCOs and generative economic entities.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to an automated platform auto-executing smart contracts (i.e. DAO), the DisCO Deck will help educate mission-oriented co-operatives in new, inclusive economic flows that support all their members.

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36. See <https://valueflo.ws/>.

37. See <https://commons.pub.org/>.

## DisCO Policies

What needs to happen for DisCOs to grow and flourish across the economy? This is the purpose of the DisCO Project: to provide educational tools and experimental spaces for the transnational development of DisCO.<sup>38</sup> It's an undertaking that needs ongoing support to reach a broad base of potential advocates and participants.

DisCOs are designed to be developed from the bottom-up. To create the desired co-operative economic counterpower, they will need to find each other and network through agreements. Supportive legal and policy frameworks would greatly enhance some of the potentials described in this paper. As explicitly political and federated initiatives, DisCOs also act as a training ground for deliberative and inclusive decision-making processes, preparing members for responsible civic action. In this way, DisCOs could act as pilots to prefigure new forms of policy around networked politics.

Given DisCO's transnational orientation, the following recommendations are general and non-domain specific. Individual DisCOs and federated DisCO networks need to actively campaign for legislative change at various levels in applicable jurisdictions. Additionally, the objective is for the state to provide the necessary infrastructure to empower and protect the creation and upkeep of DisCOs, but not direct the process of federated DisCO development.

Arguably, the development of DisCOs centered on ecologically and socially-oriented work can directly address urgent crises at their root, radically democratising social and public health provision and large infrastructure management. This lessens the need for costly post-hoc state interventions and brings a more democratic distribution of economic power, alleviating government enforcement of redistributive strategies through taxes or benefits.

DisCOs also provide solutions for state actors by providing meaningful employment, narrowing the digital divide, and actively addressing the gendered aspects of work. To support these goals we propose that states and municipalities enable DisCO development through:

1. The provision of special economic incentives for DisCOs, implemented as:
  - a. Tax benefits, including reducing the tax rate dynamically calculated against measurable social and environmental gains, social security bonuses for employing underprivileged or marginalised persons and more;
  - b. State-supported microcredit systems with demurrage based interest rates based on achievement of co-defined social provision goals. These can be delivered through co-operative banks, some of which may practice forms of DisCO accounting. State-supported social and crypto currencies are another possibility;
  - c. Direct financial injection and social investment through renewable, interest-free loans. These can act as seed funding for DisCOs and

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38. For more information see <https://disco.co-op/disco-project/>.

- enable positive credit valuation;
  - d. Public subsidies towards DisCOs Worker Self Directed Nonprofits as a more democratic and mandate-accountable alternative to traditional NGOs;<sup>39</sup>
  - e. The monetary value of employee pro-bono work could be treated as a tax-deductible contribution to the non-profit co-op.
2. The development of legal frameworks to provide DisCOs with appropriate institutional (i.e. state, federal) support to facilitate their operation and innovative accounting practices.
  3. The development of commons-public partnerships as an alternative to the established public-private, following the Preston and Evergreen models,<sup>40</sup> with DisCOs facilitating:
    - a. Municipal service provision for local economies;
    - b. FLOSS-built & open licensed, common-pool civic knowledge resources;
    - c. Practical workplace education on feminist economics, the commons, decentralised technology and the ethical market sectors offered by participating DisCOs.
  4. Supportive municipal policies for provision or support for physical infrastructures for DisCOs, including hackerspaces, hackerlabs, maker and co-working spaces. Unused municipal facilities could serve as short- or long-term incubators for knowledge work, skill sharing and technology transfer, as well as for the development of new, federated DisCOs.
  5. Support of community investment funds for federated DisCOs, with dispensations for:
    - a. DisCO federation contributions;
    - b. Tax-exempt charitable donations;
    - c. State sponsorship (see point 1).
  6. DisCO-oriented work training programs with DisCOs providing practical education in their specific sectors, as well as the DisCO methodology and tools. This would include credit convalidation for higher education.
  7. Research and higher education support, leveraging existing DisCO open-access documentation, training programs and pedagogical materials.

39. Read more on worker self-directed nonprofits here: [https://www.theselc.org/worker\\_selfdirected\\_nonprofits](https://www.theselc.org/worker_selfdirected_nonprofits). Guerrilla Media Collective is constituted as a non-profit and socially oriented worker owned co-operative legally registered in Andalusia, Spain.

40. For more on commons-public partnerships (the order of words is important) see <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/reports/public-common-partnerships-building-new-circuits-of-collective-ownership>.

8. Support of DisCO initiatives as bottom-up facilitators of Green New Deal projects. Compared to public-private solutions, this would:
  - a. Disburse funding for GND projects more equitably and at a lower risk;
  - b. Enable substantial savings, absent a profit motive;
  - c. Bring the benefits of impact at scale through highly federated actors, focused on regenerative economies of scope, not scale.
  
9. Prioritisation of DisCOs and DisCO federations over for-profit entities when capitalising on products/services derived from publicly funded research, including healthcare and medicine, code and end-consumer products. This would ensure fair pricing, ethical application and open licensing.
  
10. Policy development in concert with the International Labour Organisation and the International Co-operative Alliance to recognise transnational, onchain DisCOs as federated co-operatives.<sup>41</sup>

At present, a variety of DisCO pilots in various sectors such as the arts, textile recycling/reuse, permaculture, education, online marketplaces and medicine are presently being created. Research findings from these pilots would experientially validate DisCOs advantages and potentially facilitate policy uptake. Complementarily, there is abundant existing research on many of DisCO's formative influences, such as multi-constituent social solidarity and co-operative sectors, existing Commons-public partnerships, the benefits/savings of FLOSS, blockchain/ DLT experiences in record keeping and inventory tracking, can be included into DisCO-focused policy proposals.

DisCOs are designed to be autonomous in operation and not state dependent. From a legal standpoint, co-operatives are private entities. But in the interest of long term remediation – social, economic, environmental – governments would be called upon to prioritise support for generative, restorative industries, and to divert funding and subsidies away from harmful, extractive and exploitative ones. If DisCOs, to paraphrase the IWW, aim to 'build the new world in the shell of the old,' it must be acknowledged that the old world still holds vast amounts of power.<sup>42</sup> The affordances of radical, prefigurative projects such as DisCOs will always be affected by the constraints of existing systems, including public policy.

What DisCO proposes is radical economic subsidiarity: distributed production and economies not of scale, but of multi-faceted scope. With the increasing awareness and discussion (even if divisive) of our many global crises, taking a stand becomes more important, collectively and individually. Covid-19 has required countless people

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41. Onchain and Offchain are terms used in the DAO space to distinguish algorithmic based governance (Onchain) from human agreements (Offchain). We argue that the very dichotomy of off/ onchain elevates the blockchain as the primary focus of attention, subordinating social practices. In the DisCO Manifesto we argue that everything occurs 'onlife' where the corporeal dimension and human and environment needs precede all other consideration. For a simple description of On-chain/Offchain governance, see: <https://education.districtOx.io/general-topics/what-is-governance/off-chain-governance/>.

42. Industrial Workers of the World. For their website: <https://iww.org/> To read their history: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial\\_Workers\\_of\\_the\\_World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Workers_of_the_World).

to work from home, which has also raised many reflective questions on the purpose and effects of those jobs. For true change to happen we must first address the productive and reproductive spheres of work, the decisions about what we produce and why, and how we regard fairness in the way we treat each other. Lasting change can't be predicated on individualistic patterns of consumption, but consider this question: as citizens (more than consumers), can we continue to support the exploitative labor practices of the ever-growing economic power monopolies exemplified by Amazon, or do we see ourselves capable of contributing to the revolution of work, as exemplified by DisCO?

While compatible with existing economic forms (i.e. co-operatives) and actively working to subvert the right-libertarian bent of most blockchain economics towards associationist ends, DisCOs also pave the way for decommodification and non-market exchange thanks to their commons orientation. They train us to resist and create capacity for whatever the future may hold.

Finally, DisCOs place a new and more empowered political subject at the centre. Beyond the precariat, DisCOs exist to care for and reproduce commoners – understood as people in communities who steward their own resources according to the rules, norms and values they set for themselves. With the sustenance of 2.5 billion people depending on natural resource commons and an abundance of commoning practices taking place in digital spaces, mutual aid groups, food production, cohabitation and fablabs and makerspaces, the logic of commoning is evident in the ongoing Covid reality.<sup>43</sup> DisCOs catalyse these practices into a feminist economic and care-oriented framework, paving the way for pervasively sustainable commons-based alternatives to the dominant order.

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43. See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/31/virus-neighbours-covid-19>.

# DisCO Resources

The [DisCO Project](#) is constantly creating new resources to advocate for DisCOs. Sign up to the [DisCO.beat newsletter](#) for updates. Also, see [DisCO.co-op's stories section](#) for more stories.

[DisCO.co-op website](#)

[DisCO Manifesto](#)

[1 minute DisCO video trailer](#)

Short intro article: [Last Night A Distributed Co-operative Organisation Saved My Life: A brief introduction to DisCOs](#)

Practical experiences of Guerrilla Translation as a DisCO: [Tales of a DisCO Straight from the Dance Floor](#)

[Take back the App!](#) Episode of the Laura Flanders show featuring DisCOs, Platform Co-ops and more...

April 2020 [DisCO Webinar](#) recording

45 min presentation (and audio/podcast version) [Rage Against the Machine and Science Friction: a video introduction to DisCOs](#).

[All Your DAOs Belong to Us](#) (interview with the DisCO CAT – Community Algorithmic Trust)

[Deliberate Dancing: A Critical Investigation of DisCO's Potential to Re-Politicise the Economy.](#) (Research paper)

DisCO Governance model [Overview](#) from [Guerrilla Translation](#) and [Full model](#).

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