



The DisCO Elements

Groove is in the Heart



***“The future is already here
– it’s just not evenly distributed.”***

— William Gibson. *The Economist*, December 4, 2003

Dedicated to the living, caring, fun memory of
David Graeber (1961-2020). The whole world
misses you, whether it realizes yet or not.

Groove is in the Heart: The DisCO Elements

—

Commons Care and Governance for Distributed Cooperative Organizations



Toot by [Matt Noyes](#) on [Social.coop](#).



Groove is in the Heart: The DisCO Elements is a [DisCO.coop](#) publication in collaboration with [Geeks Without Bounds](#), [Grant for the Web](#), [Mondragon University](#), the [Platform Cooperativism Consortium](#), [FundAction](#) and the [Transnational Institute \(TNI\)](#) and [Guerrilla Media Collective](#).

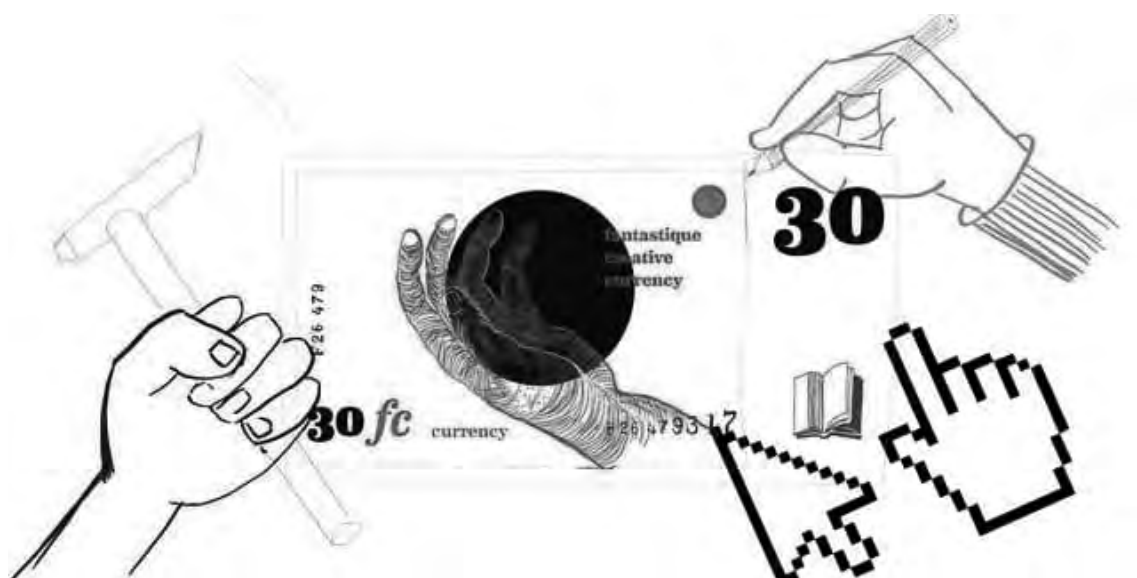
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“It Ain’t Easy”

Foreword by

Ela Kagel



This latest DisCO publication breaks the mold of your typical Future of Work meme: rather than wondering out loud what the future might have in store for us, it wants to hear from us what we actually have in store for the future?

Those of you seeking a warm & cozy, speculative fireside read on what lies ahead of our turbulent times shall be warned: “Care before Code” is not exactly leisure reading. This compilation of texts calls for direct action and challenges our collective imagination of what The Economy™ could actually be. You might even find yourself jumping out of your seat, finally ready to challenge the hollow rituals of your own work environment.

I was lucky enough to get a first glimpse of the DisCO magic two years ago while spending a Sunday afternoon with my friends Ann Marie Utratel and Stacco Troncoso in a café in Berlin. We discussed the latest iterations of their distributed cooperative organization concept and, after a short pause of reflection, Ann Marie came up with a brand new name... DisCO! And immediately it was, like, yeah, of course. What else!? DisCO is the thing. This is how it started – and it has grown strong ever since.

Now you are about to read the second part of the DisCO Trilogy, in which the authors invite us to create templates for an economy that is based on equality, inclusive tech, collective care for humans and the planet and intelligent ways of value accounting. Every word that is written in this compilation of texts can be transformed into action right now. There is no excuse for waiting until the future has dawned or until it is evenly distributed. Each individual, every organization, can work their way through the building blocks provided in the following chapters and can start their own DisCO journey right now.

The only thing is that it ain't easy... Starting off with the DisCO principles means entering a stretch of deep work. Training our imagination, expanding our perspectives on money, value and power, understanding how privilege can limit our perspective on the big picture. The hard thing is that DisCO is about activism, not theorism – and we have to start with ourselves.

I, therefore, do not recommend simply applying a light cosmetic spray of DisCO. It's not a quick win and it doesn't provide any shortcut for the big leap we will have to make. How do we get from DAO to DisCO? From coop to DisCO? From a loose collective to DisCO? What is required to build these patterns of organizing together with the people we want to work with?

You can scan this document from beginning to end, but you won't find any predefined methodical steps or checklists. You will learn about the DisCO principles, you will find tons of inspiration and encouragement. You will be able to draw lessons from a governance principle that grew out of a real-world community. And, ideally, you will find answers to the question: what actually kept you from building this type of organization earlier? Creating a DisCO is about unveiling the blind spots in the system we are a part of. Once seen, we cannot unsee them.

DisCO development leads you along the path, from one kind of learning to another. In following this rhythm of recognizing and adapting your behaviors, you will slowly develop your very own DisCO beat. I am sure this beat will carry you and your peers along the way.

And if you are really lucky, you will eventually figure out that the journey is never over and the learning will never stop – which is fine! As long as you feel the beat, you just keep going. So... maybe it could be easy after all!

Ela Kagel. Digital Strategist, Co-Founder & Managing director of [SUPERMARKT Berlin](#),
[Platform Coops Germany](#) eG board member.
Berlin, December 2020

Introduction



What are the DisCO Elements?

Groove is in the Heart: the DisCO Elements is part 2 of the *DisCO Trilogy*. This publication is the result of a year's worth of learning to live with part one: *If I Only had a Heart: the DisCO Manifesto* (2019). The DisCO Elements directly addresses the how-to of DisCO. What does it mean to be a DisCO in the real world? How do DisCOs apply the DisCO Principles? What technologies are being developed and why? We answer these questions in the sections below.

It is also a “Director’s Cut” version of a chapter on DisCOs published as part of Autonomy.work’s *Platforming Equality: Policy challenges for the digital economy* (2020). The DisCO Elements expands on the subjects covered in the Autonomy paper, adds a chapter on Care Work, as well as new infographics, videos and other resources.

Do I need to read the DisCO Manifesto before the DisCO Elements?

Short answer: not really. If DisCO Elements is all about how-to, the DisCO Manifesto explains more about the reasons behind DisCO, its roots and its proposal for a radically different “Future of Work” based on the commons, cooperativism, P2P and DLT Tech and Feminist Economics. The Manifesto also has a lot of background info on

blockchain, AI, the commons, feminism, cooperatives, cyberpunk and much more. Also: cat jokes.

Chapter Two of the DisCO Elements (**Disco in a Nutshell**) features an abbreviated summary of the concepts found in the DisCO Manifesto, a bit like a TV-series episode opener: *Previously on DisCO...*

What's the best way to read the DisCO Elements?

Elements is less linear than the DisCO Manifesto. A start-to-finish read through provides a deep dive into the state of DisCO one year after publishing the Manifesto, but it's called Elements for a reason. Each chapter presents a different aspect of DisCO, so you can read it in the order that suits you. It's all internally hyperlinked, so if you're feeling Quentin Tarantino-ish with your timeline jumping, feel free to dip in and out. You can also read the different chapters [online here](#), or in our serialization in [Hackernoon](#).

You control how much rabbit-holing you want to indulge in. There are abundant footnotes, hyperlinks, and embedded videos.¹ In-document links are signaled by **pink highlighted text**. We're also very transparent, even reverent, toward our inspirations (read the bibliography [here](#)). If the (DisCO) spirit moves you, we recommend that when you put this publication down, you start talking to people. Do you want to create a DisCO? The first step is to find the others. Do you need our help, or want to exchange ideas? [Get in touch!](#)

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How long will it take me to read this publication?

Haha. We ran the DisCO Manifesto through a word-to-reading time converter, which said "one hour", which we innocently added to that text. All sorts of amused outrage has come our way after people spent weeks, months, reading the Manifesto. Seriously though, it depends on how thorough you intend to be with the links and resources. Elements is full of original and curated art, relevant videos, footnotes and hyperlinks for you to explore in great detail.

Ok, so, for the lulz: the same [words-to-time converter](#) tells us that the main body of the text (without the bonus tracks, and skipping the footnotes) will take you 1 hr 2 minutes (reading) and 1 hr 35 mins minutes (speaking).² Its [reading level](#) is classified as "College Graduate". Tell us how it went! A more concise version is our chapter of Autonomy.work's *Platforming Equality: Policy challenges for the digital economy* — and the other chapters in the Autonomy paper are highly recommended.

1 Click on the video image and it will open in a new window. You can find all of the DisCO Elements featured videos [compiled in this playlist](#).

2 Wordcounter.net's reading time is based on an average reading speed of 275 words per minute. The speaking time is based on an average speaking speed of 180 words per minute. This is all well and good, but, seriously, everyone reads and speaks differently, so take these with a grain of salt.

Who wrote this publication?

Who designed it?

The DisCONAUTS did! This is the result of much effort and collective writing. The main text was written by Stacco Troncoso with Ann Marie Utratel who, apart from having a supervillain-like penchant for referring to themselves in the third person, also wrote the Manifesto. More details in the **Authorship section**.

The Design picks up from Mireia Juan Cucó's designs for the DisCO Manifesto. The new design, illustrations, infographics and icons are the work of DisCONAUTs Felipe Duarte and Guilherme Maueler. Mireia formatted the publication together with Felipe and Guil. Guil created the beautiful cover, Felipe the funky interior design. More details in the **Design and Images** section.



What can I expect from reading it?

Here are the chapter summaries for the DisCO Elements with direct links to take you there:

Hoy to Account for the Future of Work

Framing the problem by describing what we see as unfulfilled ideas about technology and automation “someday” leading to a leisure society and how the blockchain and DAOs may in fact continue that trend.³ This expands on the initial critiques of blockchain cultures developed in the DisCO Manifesto.

DisCO in a Nutshell (COVID Edition)

Providing a definition of DisCOs, their historical precedents and how DisCO outcomes differ from those of DAOs. We update relevant points from the DisCO Manifesto, focusing on the Covid-19 crisis and its impact on labor and economics. You can skip this if you’ve already read the Manifesto, but it can also be a good refresher.

³ Ruth Catlow points out that, beyond blockchain, this is more a critique of since-Internet developments in general and decentralized tech in particular. Blockchains are just the most recent example of these trends and, as they have money attached, they are able to go faster and do more damage.

DisCO in 7 Principles and 11 Values

A new framing of the 7 DisCO principles, with practical examples to address problems previously introduced. Includes background info on the “OG Seven” cooperative principles and how they relate to DisCOs, as well as real world implementation by the DisCO LABS — DisCO’s perpetual beta pilot projects.

Take Your Time, Do it Right: Commons Governance

A layperson’s explanation of how DisCO governance precisely articulates the principles and values given above. The chapter includes an infographic to communicate the basic structure of the model.

The DisCO CAT and DisCO-Tech

The **DisCO CAT** (Community Algorithmic Trust) is a series of modular software platforms designed so people can teach themselves, experiment, and ultimately build viable DisCOs. The DisCO CAT comprises two components:

1. **CULTURE:** Explores any given DisCO’s shared motivations and visions for the future. This is enabled by the **DisCO FLOOR:** a gateway to a series of apps and sites helping you to build your own DisCO.
1. **STRUCTURE:** Comprises the legislative and technological aspects of DisCO and is reflected in the the **DisCO DECK:** a highly adaptable platform to facilitate the value tracking, redistribution and payment protocols of any given DisCO’s governance model

The chapter starts with a short (but not *too* technical) explanation of the tech being developed to enable DisCO-development and uptake for a general audience. After that, the section entitled “For those about to geek, we salute you!” does what it says on the tin and provides a technical overview of DisCO-tech modules in various technology readiness levels of development.

Care before Code: It’s What Makes DisCOs Different

Care work is at the heart of DisCO, and this chapter is the heart of the DisCO Elements. More personal in tone than the rest of the publication, it discusses the joys and challenges of living up to our ideals, and also failing. It’s longer than the other chapters, so it makes a resting place for a reader to join us in considering what we’ve done right and wrong, so far. This chapter is new, and not included in the Autonomy.work paper linked above.

It may be a longer time commitment to read this chapter, but in a sense, that’s precisely the point. Care work is time-work: it’s both material and immaterial at the same time (it’s magic, it’s physics... it’s Feminist Economics!) It’s our affective work, it’s practical and administrative work, but it’s also our emotions and all of the invisible work we put into the team (the cooperative) in order to keep everyone sane and emotionally well. Considering care work broadens the focus, so it’s not just on the productive work. As a form of labor, care work is highly gendered, and that aspect has been naturalized over many centuries. Care work is the labor that we are reclaiming and re-channeling away from being primarily thought of as the reproductive work in the private sphere of the

household and the underpaid, less visible and precarious labor of the care workers. How much of that can we give? For ourselves and others? “Care before Code” asks these questions and more without expectations of finding definitive or final answers quite yet.

DisCO Futures: Building Tracks

After the care work pause, you should be ready for action: “DisCO Futures” is a short rundown of policy recommendations that apply to issues faced by DisCOs, and also DAOs. This includes a strong focus on labor and gender rights, as well as addressing the digital divide. This chapter includes a discussion on how to integrate DisCOs in the public sector, with potential benefits and pitfalls.

“No Experience Required” Afterword by Ann Marie Utratel

Beginner’s mind, beginner’s luck and a willingness to take chances are the best tools to have at the ready as you begin to imagine your own way of using any of these ideas. In this short afterword, Ann Marie Utratel offers some of her own experience on the DIY approach to DisCO.

Bonus Tracks

Authorshop, acknowledgements, design and images, resources and a bibliography.

Where can I find out more about DisCO?

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Short answer: [DisCO.coop](https://disco.coop) is the gateway for all types of DisCO resources with more coming in 2021. The [DisCO.beat Newsletter](#) will keep you up to date with the [DisCO Project](#). Jump to the **Resources section** for more links.

What’s next in the DisCOVerse?

The third and final chapter in the DisCO Trilogy will be the [DisCO PinkPaper](#) (Spring 2021), which will most likely delight and/or enrage those who keep asking us to produce a Whitepaper and the tech specs. Read between the lines, or the lines themselves: DisCO is adamantly tech-savvy, but *not* techno-deterministic. The PinkPaper will describe the technical specs of our in-development DisCO CAT (Community Algorithmic Trust) modular platforms, how they interact with each other and the DisCO Principles and Values. We’ll also give a politicized and critical overview of tech (and distributed tech in particular), as well as describe intra-DisCO relations and [Valueflows](#) interactions between DisCOs and other federated networks.

Chapter 1:

How to Account for the Future of Work

What do automation, remote working, and the knowledge economy have in common? All three are among the typical answers to the question, “what is the future of work?”, and they all depend on emergent technologies. The tech sector has been a great disruptor of the labor market and a range of industries. But too often this has been accompanied by increased surveillance, data harvesting and precarious labor. For all their disruption, the one thing Silicon Valley has not touched is the ownership and governance structure of a typical capitalist firm. If tech development is seen as the lever for disrupting labor markets and future economies, dependence on that development is hardly surprising. Predicting a future without a focus on high tech would break tradition, and seem as disappointing as our lack of flying cars.

These predictions are hardly new. For Marx, gains in productivity caused by capitalist industrial efficiency would create a more developed stage characterized by self-chosen activity where “... society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.”⁴

In the 1930s the Industrial Workers of the World sought to build on the attainment of the 8 hour workday through a “...four hour day, four day week and no wage cuts!”. John Maynard Keynes, neither Wobbly nor Marxist, would make a similar prediction. In his 1930 paper *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*, he asserts: “We are being afflicted with a new disease of which some readers may not yet have heard the name, but of which they will hear a great deal in the years to come — namely, *technological unemployment*.”⁵ Later he concludes: “We shall do more things for ourselves than is usual with the rich to-day, only too glad to have small duties and tasks and routines. But beyond this, we shall endeavour to spread the bread thin on the butter — to make what work there is still to be done to be as widely shared as possible. Three-hour shifts or a fifteen-hour week may put off the problem for a great while.”

Where does the trope of “The Future of Work” fit into a world unwittingly accelerating toward “something worse than capitalism”? In this video, writer and scholar McKenzie Wark talk about the new ruling classes spawned by the IT age, techno utopian apologists and the agency over the mutations of exploitation.

4 Marx, Part I “Feuerbach,” *The German Ideology*.

5 Keynes, *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*.

These three — automation, remote working, and the knowledge economy — are among innumerable, similar examples of projections about the effects of technological, and also political, change. Liberation from menial labor would be all but inevitable, and our focus could be turned toward more worthy, elevated pursuits. So what happened?

A relevant truth to acknowledge is that technology is never neutral. Technology enables affordances, or the qualities that define its possible uses. Its outcomes are determined at the design level by “architects” — coders, designers and researchers — and always according to the will of its investors. It may be created to serve those interests, but it can also simply be appropriated and turned to the benefit of the powerful. A clear example is the Internet itself, once thought to be a free zone, “cyberspace”, complete with its own manifestos and utopian ideals. Then came Web 2.0, surveillance, lock-in and with them, a reshuffling of the power balance.

Is blockchain technology one of the most relevant of our times? Its passionate proponents would argue so, although there certainly are other viewpoints and sensibilities.⁶ But many people remain confused and feel a bit intimidated by the topic, so we attempt to answer it here: What is the blockchain and where did it come from?



In an early post describing their invention, Bitcoin’s enigmatic creator, Satoshi Nakamoto, wrote: “The root problem with conventional currency is all the trust that’s required to make it work. The central bank must be trusted not to debase the currency, but the history of fiat currencies is full of breaches of that trust. Banks must be trusted to hold our money and transfer it electronically, but they lend it out in waves of credit bubbles with barely a fraction in reserve. We have to trust them with our privacy, trust them not to let identity thieves drain our accounts.”⁷ The 2009 publication

6 At the risk of constant self-referencing, the DisCO Manifesto goes into these exclusions, whether convenient or unwitting, in depth. It also features a deeper exploration about our many issues with blockchain normativity, summarized in the following paragraphs.

7 Nakamoto, Bitcoin open source implementation of P2P currency.

of the [Bitcoin Whitepaper](#),⁸ with its cautionary tales about centralized structures appropriating technologies, stated that people's trust in banks had become obsolete.

The Bitcoin network was the new "trustless"⁹ technology, enabling transactions over an untrusted network of P2P linked computers. Bitcoin accomplished this through several means: It introduced an incremental improvement on previous cryptographic data structures and it introduced a protocol for verifying the data written to the network. This new cryptographic data structure was called a blockchain and made it easy to verify all of the data contained within it. In particular, Bitcoin implemented the first distributed ledger on these cryptographic data structures.

Distributed ledgers allow parties to [transact securely without centralized databases](#) or single points of failure. They are the underlying accounting technology that allows cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin to operate without a central bank. In this way, they are [not dependent on corruptible](#) (read, human) overseers: all transactions are consensually validated by all nodes in the network.

What is blockchain? Still baffled? [Here is a short video explanation](#). Want even shorter explanations, each with their own biases... Check [this video](#) or [this other one](#) too.

Accounting technologies have been vital in historical economic transformations. There is a theory that the development of modern [double-entry bookkeeping](#) in Genoa, Florence, and Venice during the 13th to 15th centuries enabled the transition to capitalism and the rise of the merchant class.¹⁰ From clay tablets in Mesopotamia to the knotted strings of the *Inca Quipucamayoc*, accounting is a technology¹¹ and its power to change derives from its embedded values and affordances.¹²

8 For a political analysis of the Bitcoin Whitepaper we thoroughly recommend Jaya Klara Brekke's [The Whitepaper](#). You can also listen to [this podcast on The Whitepaper](#), featuring Jaya with Ben Vickers and Paul Mason.

9 For more insight into what is meant by trustless, there are two articles to read: [Building Trust In The Trustless: Blockchain's Best Asset Is Holding It Back](#) and [ELI5: What do we mean by "blockchains are trustless"?](#)

10 Agbi, Ogwiji, *The Double Entry Book Keeping (Deb) System And The Emergence Of Ethics And The Spirit Of Capitalism*

11 Walker, Stephen P. "ACCOUNTING IN HISTORY." *The Accounting Historians Journal* 32, no. 2 (2005): 233-59. Accessed July 15, 2020.

12 Given Wikipedia's status as the entry level default for laypersons to learn about certain subjects, we are saddened to see that its page on the [History of Accounting](#), is majorly focused in Europe, ignoring China and Indigenous accounting. Time for some Wiki editing from the Disco side, perhaps!

The affordances of trustlessness (removing the need for centralized, State or 3rd party validation) would expand the scope of the blockchain.

Beyond Bitcoin, the new cryptographic, digital ledgers spawned a new type of organization that would maximize the possibilities of trustlessness. This is the **Decentralized Autonomous Organization**, or DAO.

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 organization.¹³

While this may be a simplification of blockchain and DAOs' possibilities, it is still important to understand the values behind them, and here is where it gets problematic. While there are many exciting aspects to this technology, DAO projects have mostly focused on speculative assets, tokenization and outsized promises of disruption, while reproducing many of the power dynamics of the normative systems they aim to disrupt and decentralize. The bitcoin community, for example, is 91% men, while 96% of Ethereum users are male. There is also a notable lack of political and historical awareness of the movements that prefigured the dynamics of decentralization,¹⁴ which could benefit from the advantages offered by DAOs.¹⁵

Explanations of DAOs (like blockchains) often range from too deeply technical to over-simplified and incomplete. [This short video explainer by The Blu Mantic](#) strikes a happy middle ground.

13 This is a gross simplification. For a more in-depth look at Decentralized Autonomous Organizations we recommend [this critical overview](#) by Primavera de Filippi.

14 Jill Ada Burrows adds: "'Decentralization' in computer science is about the physical configuration of the machines and networking in relation to how they store and process data. It has nothing to do with any of the past connotations of it in an economic or governance sense (though in a historical sense, they have similar origins in the human organization of work since computers used to be humans). If a computer algorithm or data storage happens over multiple computers, it's 'distributed'. If it happens over multiple computers and physical locations, it's 'decentralized'. That's all that meant by it."

15 Advantages can include lowered transactional costs for social interactions within commons-oriented organizations and the potential for value sovereignty. I.e., when done right DAOs can make countercultural, anti-capitalists processes cheaper and more efficient.

By design, DAOs can earn their own money, and contract and pay for services — they can actually create and wield their own economic power, according to the interests of their programmers. As mentioned before, technology doesn't develop itself, it's built by people and companies with specific worldviews and intentions which underlie the aims of the code. With blockchain investments in the billions of USD being made by mega-corporations like IBM, HSBC, Facebook, Goldman Sachs and others, there is a very real danger that the future of these decentralized autonomous organizations will reproduce *and amplify* existing inequalities and power dynamics. Imagine DAOs that automate and augment mass surveillance, economic tyranny and the suppression of dissent. Sound dystopian? Take a look at some of the investors listed above and engage in some speculative thinking about their means, motives and objectives.

And while DAOs and the blockchain are being hailed as the next big disruption to our economic realities,¹⁶ this supposed disruption is still limited by several key factors. It's difficult to navigate the proliferation of immature technologies. Uses of blockchain and DAOs do nothing to address the basic structural realities; in fact, they may even reinforce them. Early investors with their associated privileges, and highly tech literate individuals are given undue advantage. The promise of decentralization fails as the networks and implementations form centrally around those investors. Meanwhile, the three pillars of present centralization and hierarchy, i.e., the patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism, are rarely acknowledged or addressed.

Developed (and invested on) unchecked, the affordances of the blockchain and DAOs could usher an *algorithmically executed* political economy, where legal recourse, human realities and divergences from the code can simply be ignored. Sometimes, the more things change, the worse they get.

To use disruptive technology for a wider benefit, we need counter-cultural alternatives to leverage the positive aspects of DAOs for radically different economic and social ends. Our proposal is the DisCO form of distributed cooperative organization.

¹⁶ Ruth Catlow adds: "It is hard to know what stage of development the DAO technology ecosystem is currently at. Because some say it's like the Internet in the mid 1980s and others say late 90s and this is another reason not to rush to technical builds."

Chapter 2:

DisCO in a Nutshell (COVID Edition)

DisCO stands for **Distributed Cooperative Organisations**.¹⁷ This is an accessible approach to people working together to create value in ways that are cooperative, 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**, emphasizing mutual trust and the need to have not only reliable but also enjoyable collaborative relationships. Distributed Ledger/Blockchain¹⁸ technologies are only put to use when these values and their resulting human relationships have become strongly rooted.

Trailer co-produced with our friends at the Transnational Institute (TNI) for If I Only Had a Heart: a DisCO Manifesto. The Manifesto is part one of the DisCO Trilogy. You're currently reading part two

DisCOs are a cultural and structural framework that combines 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:

- The Commons and P2P: Self-organized systems stewarding resources to meet human needs while leveraging the power of networks.¹⁹
- Open Cooperativism: Combining Open Source and Commons principles with those of the cooperative and social solidarity movements.²⁰
- Open Value Accounting: Enables value sovereignty by rewarding meaningful contributions to projects, rather than wage labor.²¹
- Feminist Economics: Challenges normative economic abstractions while factoring reproductive and care work.²²

¹⁷ Visit [DisCO.coop](https://disco.coop) or read [The DisCO Manifesto](#) for a more thorough overview.

¹⁸ For an accessible yet thorough introduction to the Blockchain, we recommend [this video course](#), as well as Daniel Drescher's excellent book, [Blockchain Basics](#).

¹⁹ Read [What are P2P and the Commons, and how do they relate?](#) For more info.

²⁰ More information in [What is Open Cooperativism?](#)

²¹ More information in the P2P Foundation Wiki's [entry on P2P Accounting](#).

²² For a layperson's introduction to Feminist Economics, see the Women's Budget Group's [excellent resources](#)

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 **Decentralized Autonomous Organisations** or DAOS (see **last chapter**).

Like a rehash of 90s Silicon Valley, DAO technology is often designed by white, western and, as explained before, tech-savvy “grand architects”²³ attracting communities of investors eager to reap the economic benefits of technological disruption and value distribution. A new status-quo in accounting emerges: it shifts the legitimization of value away from corruptible institutions toward technological, cryptographically secured ledgers. The problem is that this status-quo often leaves *values* based on self-interested accumulation wholly unchecked.

In contrast, 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 actually focused on real disruption and social change. 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.

Here's your short video primer on the DisCO Elements by DisCONAUT, motion designer, art director and illustrator Guilherme Maueler.

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,²⁴ and revealed the exponential rise of voluntary or otherwise typically undervalued

23 The design of blockchain architectures strikes us as totes Masonic/Golden Dawn fodder. Not very compatible with our feminist anticapitalist beliefs. Somebody call the real Illuminati!

24 When the Economist timidly begins to admit that capitalism doesn't work you know you're onto something. For realises and to quote: “Now it seems that this dominant economic paradigm has reached its limit.”

work. Front-line workers and mutual aid practitioners are routinely hailed as heroes, yet economically sacrificed as martyrs.

Meanwhile, some of the world's richest companies, often in the tech sector, enjoy unprecedented growth. Many of these are willing partners in publicly-funded mass surveillance and citizen control programs.²⁵ 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 invisibilized 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 (not trustlessness). DisCOs can address the present Covid and looming future crises by creating bottom-up resilience and restoring our relationships - both to one another and the planet.²⁶

More importantly, this capacity to handle crises toward better futures is not dependent on profit-oriented market solutions or slow, ineffectual and community disenfranchised government programs. DisCOs bring the self determination of technological disruption²⁷ and its affordances to the space where many are expected to spend a third of their life: the workplace.

25 Tréguer, Félix. "The State and Digital Surveillance in Times of the Covid-19 Pandemic," SciencesPo Center for International Studies. CERI Unité Mixte de Recherche, June 1, 2020.

26 Jose Mari Luzarraga adds: "DisCOs born to address a social imperative using economic means, vs conventional organizations & DAOs are rooted to address an economic imperative using social means".

27 And to be clear, NOT Silicon-branded, shareholder profit maximization version of "disruption", but the real deal - i.e., questioning existing power structures and injustices.

Rather than outsourcing our futures to automated systems easily locked-in to a self-defeating profit motive or limiting pro-market solutions, we envision a new social-ecologically oriented federated workforce that lends its productive energies and creativity, toward restorative ends.

To answer the cliché question we posed in the first chapter: what is the future of work? To us, it's *restoration*. We need to restore our relationships to our living planet and to each other. This is the work of our lifetimes, to carry forward in future generations.

Chapter 3:

Principles

and

Values:

DisCO 7-11

Cooperatives have formally existed for more than 175 years but, arguably, the spirit of cooperation that led to their creation has been a hallmark of human existence.²⁸ The commons has long been defined as communities working together with shared resources to achieve common goals.²⁹ Cooperatives formalize the practice of commoning and facilitate legally regulated operations in the marketplace.

Sometimes, the formality of the language used to define things like fundamental principles can feel a little stiff or stale, but taking time to digest these is vital to understanding the foundational thoughts and agreements which underpin the structure and its distinct characteristics. These cooperative principles are the compass by which cooperatives hone their moral orientation. They are:

- Open and Voluntary Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Members' Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Training, and Information
- Cooperation Among Cooperatives
- Concern for Community³⁰



The Seven Cooperative Principles, sourced from the [Food Co-op Initiative](#). You can read more about the OG 7 Cooperative Principles [here](#). You can also watch these short videos on the 7 Principles from [Irish](#) and [Filipina](#) coop colleagues (The second vid includes some Tagalog).

28 For a condensed history of the cooperative movement, see [this article by CulturalSurvival.org](#).

29 Bollier, David, and Silke Helfrich. *Free, Fair, and Alive*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: NEW SOCIETY PUBLISHERS, 2019.

30 All these links are sourced from [Wikipedia's page on the Rochdale Principles](#), we've included them here for easy reference while reading the DisCO Elements.

While all this harkens back to the spirit of commons, the cooperative movement as a whole has not been able to radically reshape economies or extinguish inequality. Some cooperatives operate as de-facto corporations, act as market players for the collective benefits of their members and, in some cases, demutualize altogether. The animating logic of the commons and the original seven principles³¹ are often lost, or relegated in the face of market pressures. In spite of this, we believe that the DisCO framework can help make the cooperative principles more likely to be enacted by strengthening the nourishing bonds between workers and the communities they serve.

DisCO adds seven additional principles to the original seven cooperative principles in order to reunite cooperativism with its commons origins and better prepare it for technological futures. Apart from the OG principles, the Seven DisCO Principles also intersect with other radical patterns of organization, such as Elinor Ostrom's 8 design principles for successful commons and the 12 Permaculture principles. The uniqueness of the DisCO Principles is that they serve as guidelines for tech-savvy (but not techno deterministic or tech-dependent), highly efficient and socially and environmentally oriented organizations.

The DisCO LABS

We will explain each of the Seven DisCO Principles and ground their practices, illustrating how they are used in the various DisCO LABS currently prototyping their own iterations of DisCO.

Put simply, the DisCO LABS are DisCO's pilot projects. Rather than distinguishing between "established" and "pilot" DisCOs, we see all DisCOs as perpetual LABS, continually experimenting with the peer governance forms that feel right to them. The DisCO LABS are culturally and geographically diverse, so they can share and contrast their specific experiences and co-build DisCO together.

³¹ Furthermore, we have some issues with the naming of the original seven cooperative principles. The current version was revised by ICA (International Cooperative Association) in 1995. We'd love to enter into a respectful dialogue about this naming from a DisCO perspective.



The OG DisCO LAB is **Guerrilla Media Collective**³² (or GMC). Created in 2013, GMC is an activist communications collective and agency. The DisCO framework emerged out of GMC's lived experience, and GMC has served as its testing ground.



Cooperation Jackson (CJ) is a black solidarity network of cooperatives and worker-owned, democratically self-managed enterprises. Hailing from Jackson Mississippi (USA), CJ has been a substantial inspiration for DisCO and are now in the process of becoming a series of federated DisCO LABS within Jackson.³³

32 Guerrilla Media Collective is best known for its commons-oriented translation project Guerilla Translation (GT). Check out GT's [English](#) and [Spanish](#) websites, as well as the [Guerrilla Media Collective Wiki](#). All these Elements gave rise to what we know today as DisCO.

33 For more on Cooperation Jackson and their history of struggle, download their seminal e-book [*Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*](#)



Multi-Talented Makerspace (MTM) is Zimbabwe's first makerspace. Following the DisCO Principles and with a deep community orientation, MTM represents a corrective measure for the predominantly white-male dominated makerspace scene.³⁴ As a DisCO LAB, MTM is creating community and making for real world needs to build new post-capitalist economies in the region.

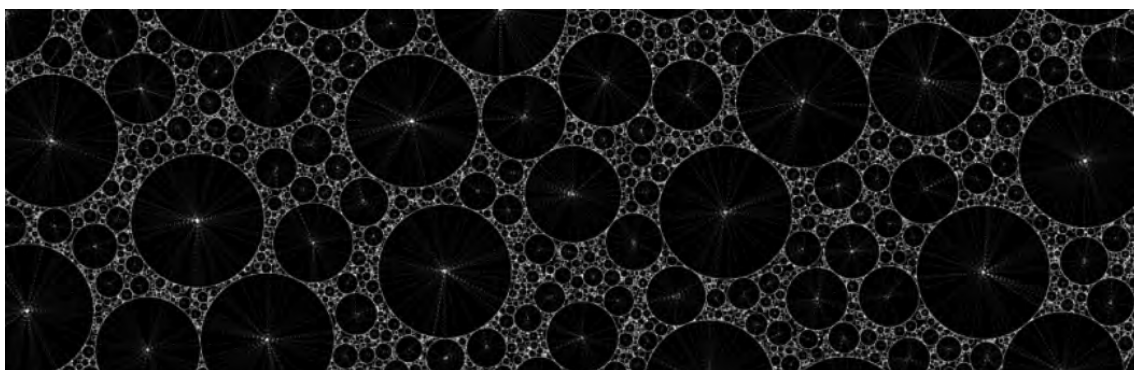


Laneras is a DisCO LAB working with merino wool in the Extremadura region of western Spain. Recuperating ancient wool gathering and weaving practices, Laneras is open-sourcing endangered knowledge and educating commoners on the machinery, tools and special aspects of truly sustainable fiber and clothing.

³⁴ More and more is being written about the exclusionary practices of maker culture - purporting to be "democratizing" while globally imperializing the concept of local grassroots innovation and aligning it with extractive capitalism. Writers like [Sasha Costanza-Chock](#) and [Christina Dunbar-Hester](#) redress the dominant narrative of the white male maker by drawing attention to less well known initiatives and makerspaces in their publications.



DisCO.coop is the organization tasked with carrying out the [DisCO Project](#). The [DisCO MOTHERSHIP](#) is the group of humans [doing the work](#) and “[staying with the trouble](#)”.³⁵ It includes people from Guerrilla Media Collective and some new team members. Leading the tech development side are our sister organizations [Geeks Without Bounds](#) (GWOB) and [Mikorizal Software](#). In practice, we operate together as an integrated team, dogfooding³⁶ the DisCO methodology and developing [Valueflows](#)³⁷ in the real world. The three organizations (DisCO.coop, GWOB, Mikorizal) form a multi-node DisCO.



The Seven DisCO Principles

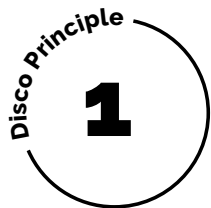
Building on the groundwork laid by movements such as [Platform and Open Cooperativism](#), the DisCO LABS follow these principles:

³⁵ You can find a regularly updated spec-doc for the DisCO Project [here](#).

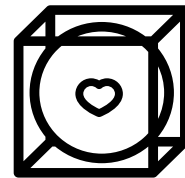
³⁶ From [Wikipedia](#): “Eating your own dog food or dogfooding is the practice of an organization using its own product. This can be a way for an organization to test its products in real-world usage. Hence dogfooding can act as quality control, and eventually a kind of testimonial advertising. Once in the market, dogfooding demonstrates confidence in the developers’ own products.” In DisCO.coop’s case it’s not so much a product as a [living commons](#).

³⁷ Valueflows is a set of common vocabularies to describe flows of economic resources of all kinds within distributed economic ecosystems. DisCO is one specific instance of Valueflows with plenty of wiggle room for situation-specific, feminist and commons-oriented adaptations. Valueflows is, however, not limited to DisCOs and works with other models and “Next Economy” frameworks.





PUT YOUR EFFORT WHERE YOUR HEART IS: VALUES-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY



In DisCOs, production is guided not by profit but by social and environmental priorities.

Most companies and indeed many cooperatives, 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 cooperative 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.

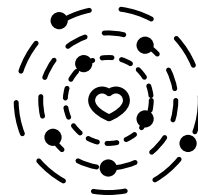
Guerrilla Media Collective's Goals and Values inform their practices and are codified in their legal statutes as a non-profit, socially oriented cooperative.

Cooperation Jackson's principles include self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, as well as honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.





BUILDING WHOLE-COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

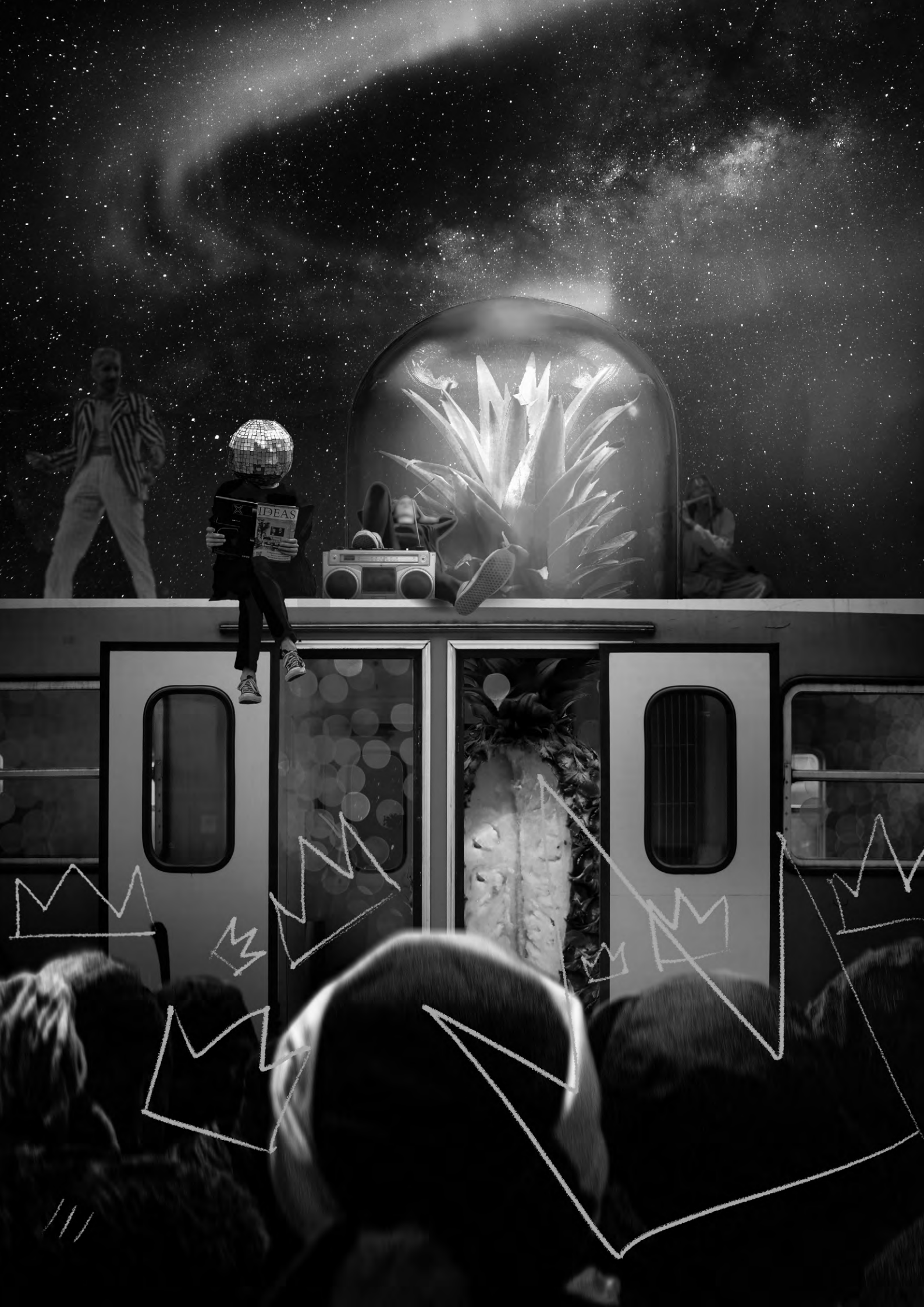


DisCO extends decision making and ownership to all contributors whether present in all value chains or affected by the coop's actions.

Cooperatives 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 organization, 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, neighboring communities, suppliers, clients, those who perform reproductive and affective labor, financial backers, etc.

DisCO.Coop has several layers of membership: **Casual** members perform pro-bono contributions with no strings attached. Those wanting to become **Committed** go through a **dating phase** where they progressively accrue higher levels of decision making power and compensation while learning to build trust within the collective.

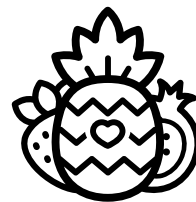
Multi-Talented Makerspace is open to everybody (casual relationship). Members can either be **active** (approved by the board and with voting rights), or **supporting** (give feedback to the board and receive perks).





ACTIVE CREATORS OF COMMONS

New digital (code, design, documentation and best practices) and physical (productive and deliberation spaces, machinery) commons are created through various types of work.



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).

Laneras give free workshops on the recuperation of merino wool harvesting traditions in Western Spain. They are also open sourcing low-tech machinery for weaving and looming. Laneras works to revive sustainable practices, spinning traditions and the use of local raw materials to prevent their loss, and to revitalize the community and territory, protect local land and social bonds and support biological biodiversity and rural development.

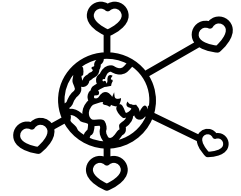
Guerrilla Media Collective creates open knowledge repositories of the work they produce, e.g., [pro-bono translations](#) and illustrations, shared on the web under a [Peer Production License](#), which benefits coops while discouraging extraction.³⁸ The collective itself documents its practices in [its wiki](#) to share with other DisCOs.

³⁸ From the DisCO Manifesto: "The [Peer Production License](#) allows cooperatives and solidarity-based collectives, but not corporations, to monetize productive works. Similar to how the [Fairshares Association](#) facilitates the capitalization of [assets within their networks](#), DisCOs can use PPL to allow purpose-oriented organizations to become more economically resilient by creating and controlling their own shared assets in a [permissionless](#) manner."





REBALANCING THE SCALE: RETHINKING GLOBAL/LOCAL ECONOMICS



Physical production is kept local while knowledge, resources and values are shared globally with other DisCOs.

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 Local³⁹ template. Here, physical production is kept local and needs-based, while knowledge, resources and value flows⁴⁰ are shared at the global level with like-minded initiatives to create a political and cultural counterpower to the prevailing corporate/capitalist economy. This also requires directing attention toward exclusionary social practices and the willful invisibility of environmental impacts, which are habituated responses carried over from mainstream techno-cultures into peer production communities. DisCOs foster explicit attention to environmental justice and the various forms that enclosure can take, in the so-called new industrial revolution.

DisCO.coop is crewed by the DisCONAUTS. We're spread among various locations in Spain (Andalusia, Basque Country, Catalonia, Extremadura, Madrid); in Athens, Berlin, London in the EU; in Washington State and rural Wisconsin in the US; and in Mexico City. We all do activist work on the ground, and our work in the DisCO Project is designed to be replicated and developed transnationally.⁴¹

Multi-Talented Makerspace uses locally sourced materials to produce world standard products. They also work with the Fablab and Makerspace networks worldwide to exchange best practices and learnings, applying them on the ground in Zimbabwe and sharing the knowledge with their immediate community.

39 For a layperson's overview, see our article *Reimagine, Don't Seize the Means of Production*.

40 As mentioned above, Valueflows is the economic vocabulary informing DisCO interactions. For more information, visit Valueflows.org.

41 DisCO.coop is organized around two legal structures. A 501 non-profit in the US (GWOB) and the new DisCO Foundation. The latter is in progress, so the EU side of the project is currently being hosted by Guerrilla Media Collective, which is a worker-owned, no-profit, socially oriented coop under Spanish law.





CARE WORK IS THE CORE

DisCOs are living entities reflecting the values of its members which need care and attention to maintain their health and the well-being of the persons working there.



Care and affective work are essential in DisCOs and are supported through established mutual support structures. These can include a rotating list of designated mentors⁴² and support “buddies”⁴³ in a roster where each person both gives and receives support within the group. In this way we establish a peer-to-peer mentorship, which is horizontal and reciprocal. Emphasis is placed upon openly expressing observations and criticisms about the workings of the group and also sharing individual and collective aspirations, preoccupations and humor. This makes space for stronger interpersonal bonds and better trust-based communication, employing healthier and more emancipatory conflict-resolution tools. 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 any DisCO’s social mission is the responsibility of working circles or self-organized 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 fulfill its values ongoing.

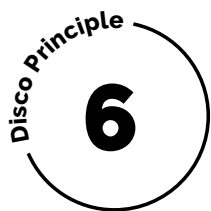
Guerrilla Media Collective is explicitly feminist in its orientation. Members’ emotional well being is prioritized daily. Work is organized around these needs, not in spite of them. Every member has a dedicated mutual support buddy and the collective is cared for through various circles dedicated to community, sustainability, outside peers and more.

Care work is closely tied to **Laneras’** own origins, worldview and development. Their project has an ecofeminist nature which prioritizes care towards oneself, others and the environment. Community support networks are essential to their mission and the relationships that members form are strongly grounded in trust, mutual support and interdependence.

⁴² See our [entry on Mentoring](#) for more.

⁴³ See our [entry on Mutual Support](#).





REIMAGINING THE ORIGIN AND FLOWS OF VALUE



Three types of value — market value, commons-creating value, and care work value — are tracked through complementary metrics.

In the capitalist marketplace, production is determined hierarchically and is exclusively oriented toward profit, while value is measured through opaque mechanisms and financial instruments.⁴⁴ Further, the value only becomes manifest through market exchange. Everything else is externalized, omitted from the value equation. In DisCOs, production is communal and value measurement aims to be transparent. Three types of value are highlighted and rewarded:

Livelihood Work: productive market value (the DisCO's goods and services are paid for);

Love Work: productive pro-bono value (the commons created through self-selected volunteer work); and

Care Work: reproductive work value (towards the collective and among its members, see above).

All are tracked through complementary value metrics that apply to all DisCO members. Recognizing 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. Tracking and revealing the often invisible, even dismissed, strands of value-producing labor is structurally different from purely quantifying work. By having the ability to track flows of value produced for both the internal operations and also for external exchanges between clients and the DisCO members, we can hack the neoliberal labor classification, hence value exploitation. Seeing, naming and tracking the value of Love and Care work lets us reclaim these contributions with the same level of respect afforded to the provision of goods and services.

DisCO.coop organizes its own Valueflows around a Worker Self-directed Non Profit fork⁴⁵ of the DisCO governance model.⁴⁶ In this model (DisCO.NP) **Livelihood Work** is composed of funded/specific project deliverables. **Lovework** comprises unfunded DisCO development work, including some partnerships and DisCO LABS. **Care Work** is the reproductive work needed to keep the machine running and its humans happy.⁴⁷

Cooperation Jackson is working towards fully recognizing care work and repositioning it to reflect the value of worker-cooperatives in building a solidarity economy. This includes caring for marginalised community members, as well as taking special care of those who need more help. Care work in cooperation are at the core.

44 Pazaitis, Alex, Primavera 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.

45 Watch [this page](#) for updates in the DisCO MOTHERSHIP Governance Model.

46 Unlike DisCOs based on worker-owned coop legal structures (where the governance/value model is applied to the income generated by selling goods and services) DisCO.coop is in essence a non-profit, with capital coming in through philanthropic, institutional or crypto grants, not goods and services.

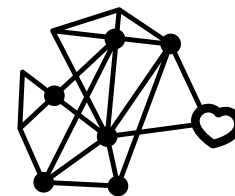
47 Jump to the [chapter on Care Work](#) for more info.





PRIMED FOR FEDERATION

DisCOs replicate through a standard federation protocol that allows critical mass without regimenting all parts.



Cooperatives worldwide have a combined turnover of US\$3 trillion, which is similar to the aggregate market capitalization of Silicon Valley's greatest players (Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple and Facebook).⁴⁸ Unfortunately, this economic power is dispersed, with many coops only nominally acknowledging the sixth cooperative principle, cooperation among cooperatives. 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 center 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.⁴⁹ This allows federations of DisCOs to achieve critical mass without regimenting all parts. The modularity of DisCO Value Tracking allows DisCOs to mutualize economic power (as well as shared, non-monetary resources) for greater impact. Every node retains the levels of 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 cooperatives transcend their status as a form of economic alternative and instead, become a collective economic counterpower.

Multi-Talented Makerspace makes sure the ideas, inventions and information that are generated within the DisCO are accessible to anyone who might want to use them. Following an open source approach, and licensing information and ideas under the universal law of commons, Multi-Talented Makerspace is part of other global and regional networks such as the [makerspace movement](#), the [Nook network](#), [connected Sahara](#), etc.

Cooperation Jackson reinvests most of their surpluses in the Jackson and Kush Districts (the contiguously Afrikan counties of western Mississippi). Surpluses are used to support new jobs and community development (through the use of social funds) and a social security system based on mutual solidarity and responsibility. They also help support cooperation with other institutions, advancing the cause of workers in Mississippi and collaborative efforts towards developing a transformative culture in Mississippi that can be readapted in other cultural contexts.

⁴⁸ Until recently (2018) these were similar numbers. At the time of writing MAGAF [has leapt to US\\$4.9 trillion](#). Source for cooperative stats: [Measuring the size and scope of the cooperative economy: Results of the 2014 global census on co-operatives](#). Dave Grace & Associates, October 9, 2014.

⁴⁹ See our section on the [Federation Protocol](#).

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. Based on our experience, DisCOs are:

Balanced in culture and structure: Striking a balance between the off-chain (human) and on-chain (technological) dimensions.

Inclusive, relatable and educational: Prioritizing accessibility and ongoing self-development and mutual support.

Non-speculative or deterministic: Creating an emergent roadmap, determined by the communities that form the federation and focused on well-being and socio-environmental priorities.

Multilayered/holonic: Interdependent and transparent value flows. Exchanges are geared toward consensual solidarity, network resilience and mutual support.

Modular — but not prescriptive: Designing for economic interoperability with complementary frameworks, such as traditional and Platform Coops or the Social Solidarity Economy.

DLT-enabled, but not dependent: Distributed ledger and blockchain tech facilitates human to human interactions, but never pre-determine them.

Online or offline? Onlife! Maximizing trust, holding space for the affective dimension and putting life at the center of our economics in both digital and corporeal spaces.

Copyfair-Licensed: Allowing cooperatives and solidarity based collectives (but not shareholder-profit oriented entities) to capitalize on our commons.

Have viable, ethical business models: Creating frameworks for economic counterpower with a strict loyalty to our pro-social guidelines.

Political: Prototyping post-capitalist practice-based alternatives that challenge the patriarchy, colonialism and the status quo.

Fun or bust! Offering engaging and enjoyable spaces to fulfill a social mission, but never disregarding humor.

What if your community had a way to organize itself to better represent ALL the work that was happening? Not just which is deemed “economic value” but inclusive of commons, care work and mutual value exchange, within a trusted group of friends? Learn more about the DisCO framework through [this webinar](#) presented by Lisha Sterling, from DisCO.coop and Geeks Without Bounds. Additional info and resources [in this post](#).

Taken together, the 7 principles and 11 key values provide frameworks to tackle the present challenges exposed by the Covid crisis, identified earlier.

49

Rather than big state or corporate solutions, 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, rather it is factored into the value equation. Digital working teams communicate and relate through established working rhythms,⁵⁰ where both practical and affective realities are continually discussed. Finally, all production is oriented toward the urgent issues of our time, but without sacrificing well-being 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.

50 See our entry on [Community Rhythms](#).

Chapter 4:

Take Your Time, Do It Right: Commons Governance

The DisCO Governance model is an extensive reworking of an orphaned open source governance protocol.⁵¹ As **mentioned above**, it was developed and put into practice by Guerrilla Media Collective (GMC), the Spain-based cooperative focusing on language and communications services, which became the first DisCO LAB. In 2018, a group of experts on decentralized/non-hierarchical organizations, facilitation, peer governance, distributed tech and mutualized finance were invited to help reimagine the model, which resulted in a new version: The Distributed Cooperative Organization Governance and Economic Model.⁵²

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,⁵³ as well as reproductive or care work⁵⁴ (**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 unit of applicable currency or income),⁵⁵ creating shares.⁵⁶ Using the example of GMC, the shares accrued by co-op members correspond to the work done in these three areas of value:

Paid work performed for outside clients who are invoiced by GMC as an agency. We call this the “livelihood work” stream.

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.⁵⁷ These translations are presented in Guerrilla Translation's websites,⁵⁸ 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.

Care work which, as explained in the 5th 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, and “caring for the humans that make up the collective”.⁵⁹

These are proportionally accounted for and treated as shares, and are the basis for the distributions of income.⁶⁰ 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

51 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.

52 At the time of writing, the model is at V 3.5. V 4.0 (coming in 2021) will feature substantial changes in the structure, if not the intent. If you want to read a simplified overview as applied to Guerrilla Translation, [click here](#).

53 See the DisCO Governance Model's sections on [Pro bono](#) and [Livelihood work](#) for more details.

54 See the section on [Reproductive Work](#).

55 Each DisCO can choose the appropriate unit in which to value their credits. This could be a currency such as euros or dollars, a crypto-currency, or any other type of resource appropriate to the DisCO's situation.

56 See [this section](#) of the DisCO Governance Model for more details on types of Credits.

57 See Guerrilla Translation's [Goals and Values](#).

58 Guerrilla Translation currently has two blogs ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) to present their pro-bono “Love Work”, with other languages planned for the near future.

59 For a more detailed overview of care work in DisCOs jump to chapter 6: [Care before Code: It's what makes DisCOs Different](#)

60 For more details on how income is distributed on a monthly basis, read the DisCO Governance Model's section on [“The Monthly Payment Pipeline”](#).

members' agency (livelihood) shares, and the remaining 25% pays for pro bono (love) shares.⁶¹

Meanwhile, reproductive work is tallied in hours⁶² and distributed according to each member's ratio of benefits vs. contributions. 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/Pro-bono 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.

To show how the model can be applied in real world situations, we've created this infographic:

61 These are the ratios recommended by the DisCO.coop team for a realistic balance of income needs, vs the creation of commons in the currently sucky economy. However, there's nothing to stop you from tweaking these ratios to your group's preference.

62 For more information, consult the DisCO Governance Model's section on [Care Work Value](#). Would you rather "tokenize" care work in a unit other than hours? It didn't work for us so we don't advise it, but if you try, let us know.



DisCO economics and governance are determined by each individual DisCO.

DisCO Governance Model offers tweakable templates to meet the **7 DisCO Principles** in various ways.

HERE IS HOW IT WORKS:

Each DisCO member is a shareholder whose work is accounted for in three ways, representing **"value streams"** that determine their **share of income distribution**.

THE VALUE STREAMS ARE:



LIVELIHOOD:

Client-paid market goods or services



LOVE WORK:

Pro-bono/voluntary work to create commons



CARE WORK:

Mutual support for members and maintaining the collective

OPEN VALUE ACCOUNTING

DisCO members' work becomes shares in 3 streams:

Tokens account for **Livelihood** and **Love work**.

Both are **the productive work** of any DisCO

(goods and services like translation, plumbing, music production, textiles... anything goes!)

But what is Care Work?

It's all the **reproductive work** done to maintain the DisCO and keep its members happy, accounted for in **hours**.

When work in three streams has all been accounted, each type of share is paid based on **current liquidity**.

So, if a DisCO has 10,000 € cash available one month,



75% goes towards
Livelihood shares
(7,500 €)



25% goes towards
Lovework shares
(2,500 €)

NOW, EACH BUCKET IS DIVIDED ACCORDING TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS' SHARES IN LIVELIHOOD



Joaninha has **25%** of
Livelihood Shares **(1,875 €)**
and **40%** of Love Shares
(1,000 €). They are paid
2,875 € TOTAL



Gayatri has **50%** of
Livelihood Shares **(3,750 €)**
and **25%** of Love Shares
(625 €). She is paid **4,375 € TOTAL**



Julio has **25%** of Livelihood
shares **(1,875 €)** and **35%** of
Love shares **(875 €)**. He is
paid **2,750 € TOTAL**

BUT WHAT ABOUT CARE WORK?



The Care Work shares (in hours) are **dynamically balanced**. The method is similar to a "tax".

TWO POSSIBLE SCENARIOS:

1



Joaninha and Julio have done **2 hours of care work** each.
Gayatri did **4 hours of care work** this month.

Amazing coincidence! Each member has contributed **proportionally** the same, so **no change is made to the payments above**.

2



Joaninha, Gayatri and Julio have contributed care work hours according to their real capacity for the DisCO's needs

Joaninha has accrued **8 hours** of care work.

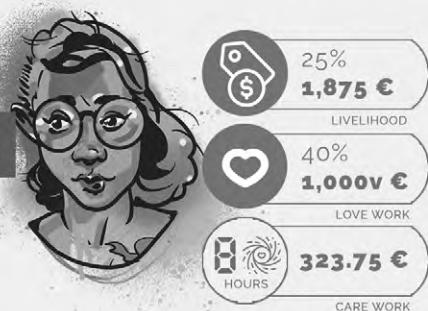
Gayatri has accrued **4 hours** of care work.

Julio has accrued **3 hours** of care work.

In this case, the ratio is **dynamically** applied, to fairly balance the payments. Those who contributed **less** time for care work will compensate those who contributed **more**.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN NUMBERS:

Joaninha

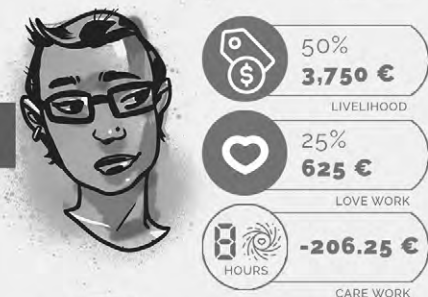


Joaninha's care work hours this month are valued at 7% of their total livelihood and love shares.

Gayatri's care work is 2.3% of her total livelihood and love shares.

Julio's care work is 2.7% of his total livelihood and love shares.

Gayatri



In a perfect world, care work would always be distributed fairly among members. In this example, that would equate to the equivalent of 7% of their total love and livelihood shares each. For real world reasons, that ideal is impossible, but it is the benchmark for the formula to apply to balance payments fairly.

Julio



So, **Gayatri** should have carried out **12.25 hours** of monthly care work, but instead owes **8.25 hours** (12.25 minus the 4 hours of completed care work) to **Joaninha**, a total of **206.25 €** (8.25 times 25 €). **Julio** should have carried out 7.7 hours of monthly care work, owing 4.7 hours (7.7 minus the 3 hours of completed care work) to Joaninha, a total of **117.50 €** (4.7 times 25 €).

WHAT DOES THE DisCO GOVERNANCE MODEL ACCOMPLISH?

- ♥ Encourages and rewards all types of work (care, love, livelihood) per each DisCO's value agreement
- ♥ Values forms of power-to-act centered around the commons
- ♥ Highlights affective and movement-building work (often hidden)
- ♥ Optimally balances the workload to avoid "activist burnout"
- ♥ Creates community-empowered platforms for sustainable activism
- ♥ Enables economic resistance
- ♥ The DisCO Governance/Economic model enables federated, mission oriented co-ops to practice value sovereignty and address urgent socio-environmental crises.

DisCOnomics does it differently

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.⁶³ A corporation employs wage labor to produce profit-maximizing 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. Other variations, such as having several tiers of external pricing adjusted to align with means-based criteria, are also possible.⁶⁴ For example, 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 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 organizations 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.⁶⁵

63 For a short overview of power to/over/with/within, [see this article](#).

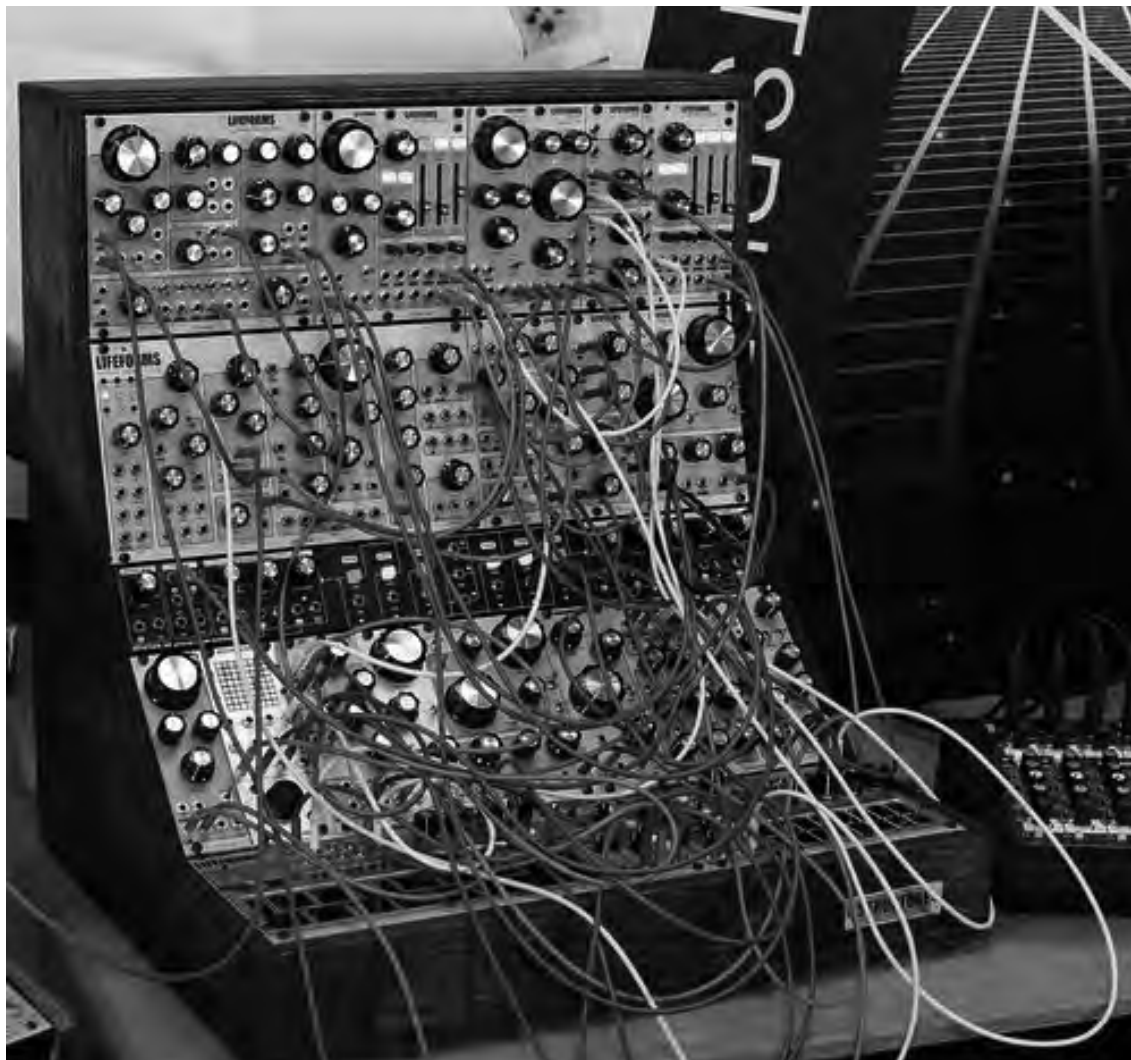
64 For the pricing tiers (as used by Guerrilla Translation) see the following section of the DisCO Governance Model: [Credit Estimation, Translation Value and the Sliding Scale](#).

65 Still have questions and doubts about DisCO Governance? It is a complex subject. It’s also way simpler than, say, economic paradigms affecting all our daily lives (try to grok derivatives or high frequency algorithmic trading in a pinch). As we want DisCONomics to be understood by all DisCO members, not just economic boffins and technocrats, we’ve also put together [this F.A.Q. on the subject](#).

Chapter 5:

The DisCO CAT and DisCO- Tech

Introduced in the DisCO Manifesto, the DisCO CAT⁶⁶ (Community Algorithmic Trust) is a series of modular software platforms designed so people can teach themselves, play around and, ultimately, build viable DisCOs. In this sense the DisCO CAT is like a big ol' analog synthesizer. If you're not familiar, old-school analog synths are massive contraptions full of options, allowing you to hook cables together, like telephone switchboard operators, and create all manner of crazy sounds.



Spaghetti heaven! Believe it or not, this is a relatively simple modular synthesizer ([click here](#) to see how bad things can get!) Image sourced from [Pittsburgh Modular](#).

Unlike the imposing musical contraptions of yesteryear, our CAT is being designed to be super user-friendly and inclusive, with unnecessary information and components being kept in the background. The foremost priority is getting people to learn DisCO by playing... until the game gets real and you may have already built your own DisCO!

Take this chapter in the DisCO Elements as a catnip-like whiff of what's to come, though, because this publication is not about the DisCO CAT. That most mysterious of entities will be the centerpiece of the upcoming [DisCO PinkPaper](#), which will describe the tech being developed for DisCO and why we chose those particular technologies and their affordances.

⁶⁶ Cats have many lives and the DisCO CAT is no exception. Apart from being the umbrella term for DisCO's platforms in development, she's also the moody author of the [DisCO.beat newsletter](#).

“I can haz diversity! Who is building the technologies that we use and the content that we consume?” In this video, Anasuya Sengupta and Siko Bouterse from Whose Knowledge confound, delight and provoke their audience to deal with the hard questions around tech design and self-empowerment with a special focus on those who don’t look like the people in the video thumbnail. In DisCOs, each individual DisCO LAB self-determines the technologies they want to use and how.

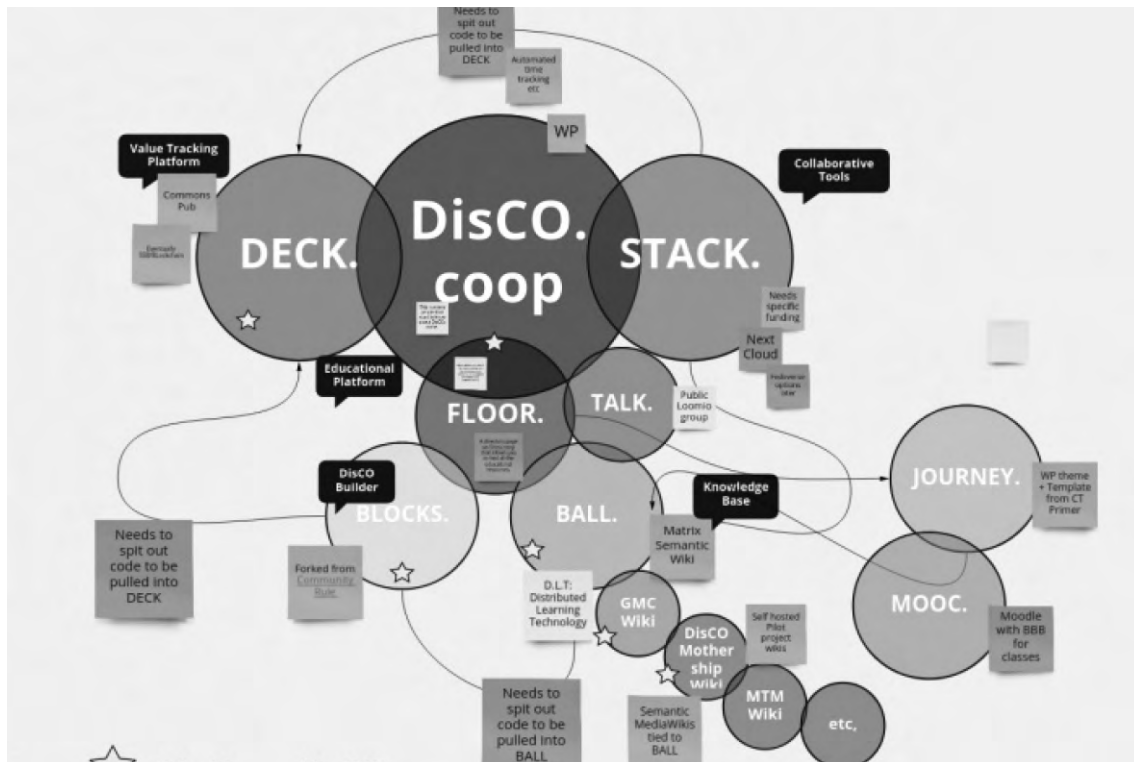
60

Just like life, we think that software is *always* in development, and that we can use this understanding to our advantage. With “change is the only constant” as our mantra, we will work in Perpetual Beta, and our components will be modular and concurrent. In this chapter we will describe the overall vision. At the time of writing,⁶⁷ we’re just starting to assemble the Free/Libre and Open Source Software Elements that constitute the DisCO CAT.

The DisCO CAT is subdivided into two main components: **Culture and Structure**. From the DisCO Manifesto:

“Distributed cooperative practices should *never* be solely dependent on technology, protocols or governance models. These are only tools to facilitate and strengthen our collaborative culture. There is a fundamental tension in all commons governance between **culture**, or that which defines the group’s shared motivations and visions for the future, and **structure**, or that which formalizes the group culture into recognizable legal and institutional forms, and enables certain capabilities. Culture and structure are interdependent in a commons, but they also can pull in different directions. Creating resilient, self-organized communities requires an artful balance.”

⁶⁷ December 2020.



A snapshot of the evolving DisCO CAT topography.

CULTURE: DiSCo FLOOR

Representing the **culture** side, we have the DisCO FLOOR. This functions as a gateway to a series of apps and sites helping you to build your own DisCO.

The main design/UX inspiration for the DisCO DECK is Saturday Night Fever's fantastic multi-light dance floor (as well as the world of modern midi control surfaces and virtual synths, like this one)⁶⁸

68 **Confession time.** For one of this paper's lead authors (Stacco Troncoso), DisCO's musical/philosophical roots lie in the Funk, the Blues, EDM, Avant-garde Jazz, Punk and No Wave more than late seventies disco. So it's been *really hard* to resist the temptation of giving in to *Saturday Night Fever* references. Stacco will write more about this and how sound design and signal flows factor into DisCOconomics in a future article.

Here's a rundown of the DisCO FLOOR modules at various stages of development:

The **DisCO BALL** is DisCO's main knowledge base, offering documentation of best practices for DisCO development and management. The DisCO BALL will provide semantic categories linking to further resources and examples from the self-hosted wikis maintained by each DisCO LAB (powered by [Semantic MediaWiki](#) (SMW) and [Tweeki](#)). Two early examples in development are the [DisCO MOTHERSHIP](#) and [Guerrilla Media Wikis](#). Much of the material found therein is being updated and adapted for inclusion in the DisCO BALL.

DisCO BLOCKS is an interactive DisCO Governance Model builder. BLOCKS displays the basics of DisCO Governance through a series of questions and prompts, with graphic materials and drop down texts for more details. Like a [Choose Your Own Adventure](#) book, communities can prototype DisCOs, value flows, governance, etc., through drag and drop "Governance Modules", presenting recurring solutions to common DisCO challenges sourced from various DisCO LABS and experiences. These modules also serve to program the basic function and value flows of the DisCO DECK, as we'll see below.

The DisCO JOURNEY will feature interactive materials to explain DisCOs in plain language through a series of short, didactic articles, complemented by pop-up vocabulary definitions, infographics and videos (see below), TL/DRs, quizzes and games. Taking a pop-science approach, it will be based on our previous work in the [Commons Transition Primer](#).

BALL, BLOCKS and **JOURNEY** are the three main/most visible modules under the **DisCO FLOOR** subdomain. Other standouts include: a directory, handbook, audiobook versions of the DisCO Manifesto, Elements and PinkPaper, more publications, articles, infographics and videos, a graphic novel (because who doesn't need more comics about feminist and commons-oriented coops in the [new abnormal!](#)). All of these culture and knowledge resources are implementing [Web Monetization](#) (WM),⁶⁹ a way to convert any given website's traffic into revenue for the community to support the development of DisCO.

New technological standards must transcend purely transactional exchanges and enable social and solidarity practices. As we will see in Chapter 6 (**Care before Code**), volunteer and activist work can depend upon a degree of privilege that makes access unequal and can lead to burnout for marginalized persons. From ownership to decision-making and voluntary social practices, the DisCO CAT prototypes sustainable pathways for socially and environmentally focused work that explicitly requires the creation of digital commons (documentation, content, storytelling).⁷⁰ All current DisCO LABS contribute resources that can benefit from Web Monetization, as well as other community solidarity byways, such as [Circles UBI](#), [Open Collective](#),

69 We love the possibilities that Web Monetization brings but really would love to suggest a better name! The overall DisCO Project has been awarded two grants from [Grant for the Web](#): a \$100K fund to "... boost open, fair, and inclusive standards and innovation in Web Monetization". Search for DisCO.coop and ValueFlows in the [Grantees page](#). We are currently developing WM-specific plug and play modules that can intersect with the DisCO Governance Modules for various communities.

70 The digital/material commons binary is misleading, though: all digital commons depend on physical infrastructures, often built on precarious or even slave labor and massive resource extraction. As Dmytri Kleiner says "Technology is built out of blood". By that same token, we also envision DisCOs functioning totally outside the digital realm, or through offline networking, such as Secure Scuttlebutt.

[Seeds](#), or [Giveth.io](#). Given enough real world experience, these can help to ensure the sustainability of decommodified but socially vital work.⁷¹

Our tools are browser-based, and our methodology is dedicated to value mutualization and fair exchange among cooperatives and generative economic entities. Along with Interledger, Web Monetization is also a key component of the DisCO DECK, as we'll see below.⁷²



STRUCTURE: DisCO DECK

So, if the DisCO FLOOR and its various modules cover the **culture** part of DisCO-building, what about the **structure**? Structure can comprise both the legal and technical. On the former, the [DisCO Research Circle](#) is investigating [transnational, DisCO-appropriate legal frameworks](#)⁷³ (among other research directions), which will be the subject of future papers.

With the caveat that all the modules described under DisCO FLOOR, *are also* technical/structural (this is not a binary), the heart of the Structure side is the **DisCO DECK**.

⁷¹ Complementary to the footnote above, the creation of digital commons is still predicated on the growth of the digital technology industries (and their concomitant exploitation of Mother Earth and her descendants) to make access to digital technology cheap. How can we create processes with a lessened focus on dissipating energy?

⁷² Web Monetization and Interledger, are being built as modules of the DisCO Floor and Deck platforms, explicitly tying it to the template DisCO Governance/Economic models.

⁷³ Other research directions are [listed here](#), and there are more to come.

Need another musical break? In [this video](#), turntablist Q-Bert gives it his all. DJ Culture, turntablism and electronic music are well within DisCO's definition of The Funk. Dj Decks, mixers, sampling, etc. are some of the main inspirations behind the DisCO DECK interface, currently in development.

The DisCO DECK is a highly adaptable platform to facilitate the value tracking, redistribution and payment protocols of any given DisCO's governance model.⁷⁴ Based on the [Valueflows](#) economic vocabulary, DisCO DECK balances lightweight, federated tech for accounting. In the near future we will provide options to incorporate select DLT and blockchain technologies⁷⁵ for transactions and value mutualization with other DisCOs and generative economic entities. In contrast to an automated platform auto-executing smart contracts (i.e., DAO), the DisCO DECK will help support mission-oriented cooperatives in new, inclusive economic flows that support all their members.

The DECK is being developed around three main components:

1. **Configurable modules for value accounting with adjustable ratios and characteristics** including productive and reproductive work metrics and modes of tokenization, integrations for automated value tracking and time tracking tools.
2. **Interactive real time visualizations** of value stream ratios, personal and team dashboards, economic projections and budgeting tools with intuitive drag and drop graphic interfaces.
3. **Financial tools** enabling democratically executed transfers of value. This includes transferring credits among DisCO members and nodes, DisCO Federations, regular and Platform Coops, as well as between DisCOs and other SSE⁷⁶ entities. It will also support conversion of credits to fiat and cryptocurrencies with bank and wallet transfers.

⁷⁴ As you'll see in the next section, the value equations pertinent to these governance models are actually facilitated by the DisCO BLOCKS.

⁷⁵ In this we're particularly interested in the work of [Informal Systems](#), a burgeoning DisCO themselves, who work on the [Cosmos Network](#) building [parallel blockchains](#) through [Tendermint consensus](#). Remember, [not every DLT is a blockchain](#).

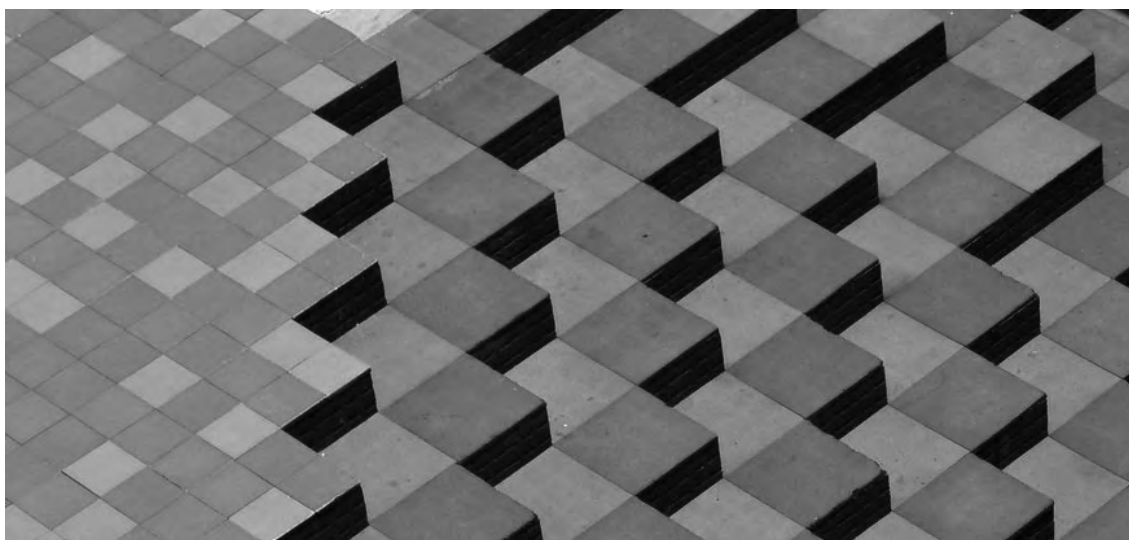
⁷⁶ Social and Solidarity Economy. Here's ILO's [introductory page to the SSE](#). In truth Valueflows can handle [all sorts of value transfers](#), including full decommodification (which within the DisCO "parcel" of Valueflows is called "UnDisCO"). More to come in the DisCO PinkPaper.

Unlike a typical DAO design, the DisCO CAT (and DisCO DECK in particular) doesn't assume it immediately gets things "perfect" by delegating everything to smart contracts.⁷⁷ Based on DisCO's modular methodologies for community deliberation,⁷⁸ all DECK components will allow for granular customization. This will allow its processes to be:

1. automatically executed by the CAT
2. automatically displayed by the CAT but only executed via customizable permissions and members' votes (based on their governance model)
3. individually permissioned

It's important to be mindful of how one thinks of processes and value flows in these contexts. In DAOs, everything has predetermined and, to some extent, immutable meanings, values, and contracts. In real life everything is determined by relationships. We can enter into new relationships, relationships can change over time, and we can expand the range of entities with whom we can be in a relationship (the trees, the water, all the "things" around us). Each configuration of relationships provides a specific prism for seeing reality and making decisions. The software tools we use can either reflect or ignore that ethos. They can give space for those changing relationships or build an idealized, algorithmically executed snapshot, imposed at large. The DisCO CAT aims to embody a flexible sense of relationality and involvement. Instead of just having a contract which allows no deviations, we can deliberate and weigh the state of the world as seen through the many relationships of our community, and make more appropriate decisions through our community conversations. We can give each decision the appropriate attention and care needed for the maintenance of all our relations instead of adhering to careless contracts, no matter how "smart" they may think they are.

65



⁷⁷ Read the small print, really...oh, it's too long? That was precisely the point!

⁷⁸ These are based on [this section](#) of the DisCO Governance Model and will be implemented as configurable modules in the DisCO BLOCKS.

For those about to geek, we salute you!

GEEK-SPEAK ALERT! Non-tech-enthusiast readers are free to skip ahead to the “**After hours at the DisCO-Tech**” section below. Don’t worry, the DisCO BALL and JOURNEY (see above) will provide the relevant, non-techy explanations, videos and infographics.

Now then, let’s get geeky: Our DisCO DECK implementation is being built within the [CommonsPub/Bonfire Ecosystem](#). The DisCO DECK is an [Elixir](#) based app set up on a DisCO server. It’s based on open standards and protocols, meaning anyone can implement additional features or capabilities in any tech stack as long as they use those same shared protocols and vocabularies (specifically [ActivityPub](#) and [Valueflows](#)). This means if the need arose, anyone could create their own version of the DisCO DECK with their favorite tech stack and it would still interoperate with the other federated applications. By using ActivityPub, the DisCO DECK will become part of the “fediverse”.⁷⁹ Each DisCO can have its own Deck and communicate with other DisCOs or other groups in the fediverse through ActivityPub, which includes social networking. Economic networking occurs through Valueflows. The architecture may also employ blockchains for logging compendiums and transacting with other entities. If a DisCO found it useful to store files in [IPFS](#), new modular applications can easily make that possible.

By that same token, the federation layer (ActivityPub), can be swapped out for a communication layer, such as [Secure Scuttlebutt](#) (SSB) or a blockchain. SSB is a perfect fit for DisCOs in places where connectivity might be intermittent, while a blockchain would be a good fit for DisCOs that have good connectivity and want their full history of activity to be distributed across all nodes participating in the blockchain network. It may even be possible to allow for interoperability between the different modalities by creating bridges between ActivityPub and SSB or a specific blockchain.⁸⁰ In this potential configuration, the blockchain based nodes could conveniently serve as a backup for the federated nodes.⁸¹

The capacity for DisCO value transfers with other DisCOs, and also transfers between DisCOs and regular coops and collectives, is being built through [Interledger](#), with future modules also capable of working in [TenderMint](#). Interledger will enable DisCOs to use emerging open web payment standards⁸² like [Web Monetization](#) and [Payment Request](#). At first, this will let DisCOs transact in any cryptocurrency supported by the Interledger settlement engines. Once more of the work is done to integrate with Coil’s [live Interledger network](#), DisCOs can choose to ditch traditional payment services for certain types of transactions.

79 From “federated” + “universe”.

80 For the especially technologically astute amongst our readers, there are several hurdles to this. The primary hurdle is figuring out exactly how to map identities across the particular channels. The second hurdle is ensuring permissions are respected. We’ll likely need to implement an identity server or mapping service that also helps manage private keys (since losing keys means there’d be permanently irrecoverable data — aka useless junk — in the blockchain).

81 This requires individual federated nodes to run a bridge to a blockchain so their data can be written to blockchain.

82 These are currently draft specifications, which means they are currently moving targets. However, it doesn’t mean they aren’t already useful. What limits them is browser support, but browser plugins could easily provide all the functionality. In fact, [Coil](#) already has [browser plugins](#) to implement their Web Monetization provider.



After hours at the DisCO-Tech

67

The different modules of the DisCO CAT have been designed to play together nicely.⁸³

For example, some prospective DisCO-verers want to get together to build a DisCO, maybe it's online or maybe in person.⁸⁴ The group has already taken the **DisCO JOURNEY**: they are familiar with the framework and have some initial ideas about how to adapt it for their needs. A process of community discussion on value and values begins, aided by the **DisCO BLOCKS**. The group is presented the DisCO Principles and the base governance model, to digest at their speed. Through question-based prompts, they decide which blocks to drag and drop into their first draft DisCO Governance model. They can also create their own blocks and add them as new modules.

As they play this game together, **DisCO BLOCKS** is busy spitting out data in the background, with two destinations: **DisCO DECK** and **DisCO BALL**.⁸⁵

The group's governance decisions and value ratios serve to create their own **customized DisCO governance model**, particular to their DisCO, the situation and their needs. This bespoke model is then placed on a holding page in **DisCO BALL**. From here, the group is given the tools to set up their own self-hosted DisCO Semantic

⁸³ Do you want more info about the DisCO CAT or the DisCO Project's general direction for the next few years? We've already linked to this [entry in the DisCO MOTHERSHIP wiki](#) during the present chapter. This is our sketchpad for DisCO Project features and modules. Sometimes out of date, always being updated, it is our public repository for the Project.

⁸⁴ Dear Future Readers: this publication was completed in December of 2020. You may have noticed that a *few* things have happened to a *lot* of people this year!

⁸⁵ Those who are technically minded might wonder if this might relate to the software architecture. It doesn't. It's just a useful metaphor.

Wiki. All the new knowledge and modules they create are then ongoingly fed back to the main **DisCO BALL** semantic Wiki.

Concurrently, these value ratios which are embedded in the group's governance model **are also being programmed into the instance of the DisCO DECK Software they'll be using**. This, in Valueflows is known as a value equation: the group's values and their interpretation of the Seven DisCO Principles are now reflected in their own DisCO DECK, ready to be rolled out.

Does everyone live happily ever after? Probably not, but if there's two things that this world needs is **a)** more trees and **b)** more coops.⁸⁶ The DisCO CAT is a way to make the latter more fun and make sure everyone's heard, that tech design is not led by investors or otherwise narrowly focused actors, and that our privacy, autonomy and the right to use our own energy and creativity towards socially and environmentally restorative ends is upheld and maintained with care.

68

Privacy? What privacy? In [this video](#) human rights advocate and gender consultant, [Nobukhosi Zulu](#) shares her personal experiences around the (barely) consensual usage of our data and the creepiness inherent in Silicon Valley's neocolonial tech design.

Finally, it's important to note that all the toys in the DisCO CAT's playpen (i.e.: DECK, BALL, BLOCKS, etc.) are not developed in absentia. Oh, and: all of the DisCO technology (culture and structure) is being designed and developed by a team consisting largely of women. Mic drop.

We'll be actively testing the robustness of these resources and technologies alongside the DisCO LABS, reworking to fit them around *their* needs, not our assumptions and biases. The DisCO CAT may be a cat that wants to take over the world (I mean, have you *seen* the world lately? Cats would do *so* much better!), but it still wants to do so according to the needs of the people doing the work, staying with the trouble.

⁸⁶ So why not make some tree-planting DisCO-coops?

Chapter 6:

Care

before

Code:

It's What

Makes

DisCOs

Different

Where does care begin?

In his 2014 treatise, *What's the Point If We Can't Have Fun?*, the late great anarchist thinker and anthropologist David Graeber states:

“To exercise one’s capacities to their fullest extent is to take pleasure in one’s own existence, and with sociable creatures, such pleasures are proportionally magnified when performed in company.”

Graeber’s essay explores the dynamics of play in the animal realm. Beyond evolutionary concepts colored by normative economic thought, it turns out that animals just wanna have fun.⁸⁷

Later that same year Graeber published “Caring too much. That’s the curse of the working classes”, a shorter article on one peculiarity of the less privileged: they care more about others. He writes:

“And humans being the empathetic creatures that they are, knowledge leads to compassion. The rich and powerful, meanwhile, can remain oblivious and uncaring, because they can afford to. Numerous psychological studies have recently confirmed this. Those born to working-class families invariably score far better at tests of gauging others’ feelings than scions of the rich, or professional classes. In a way it’s hardly surprising. After all, this is what being ‘powerful’ is largely about: not having to pay a lot of attention to what those around one are thinking and feeling. The powerful employ others to do that for them.”

70

There seems to be a great, millenia-long cultural gaffe at play here. If biological entities (worms, butterflies, flowers and trees, humans) are bursting with care and play, why do our economies subvert those urges?

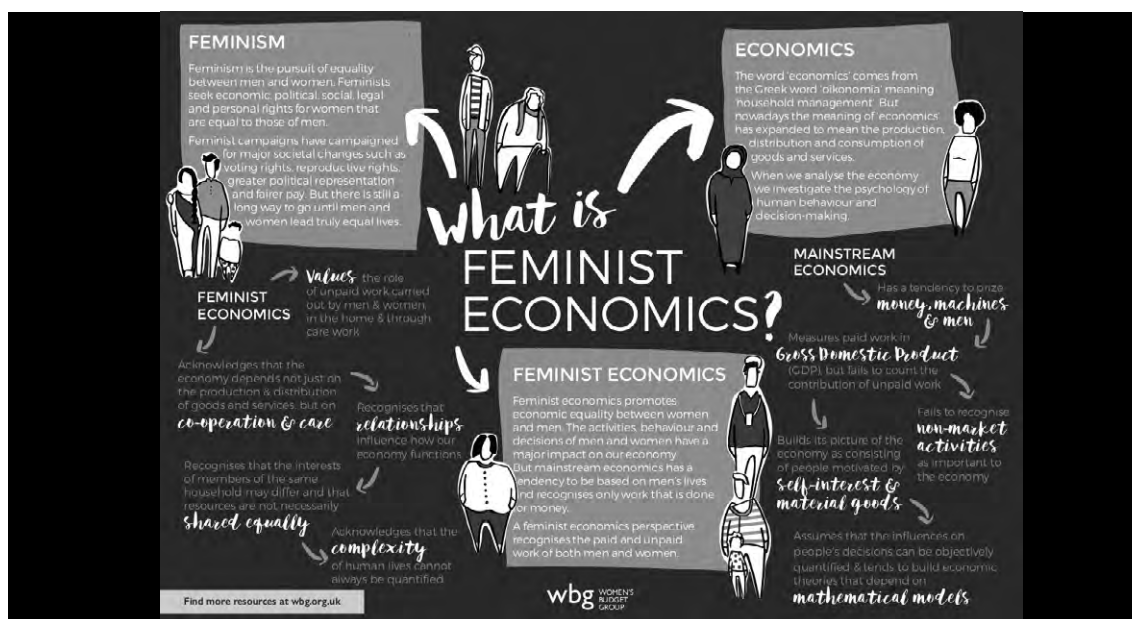
Care work is a fundamental concept in Feminist economics. The discipline argues that, absent the labor of child nurturing and the non-commodified provision of psychological well being, the very economies that have built their house of cards on the backs of this invisibilized labor would collapse. It stands to reason that the people who, Graeber argues, care, have a lot more power than they give themselves credit for.

It’s not our place to give lessons on the history and discipline of Feminist economics⁸⁸ but, unlike the allegedly “scientific” premises of Enlightenment-legacy economics,⁸⁹ Feminist Economics is instantly relatable to anyone who’s ever cared for another being. We do it all the time.

87 “Fun” being, of course, one of the ¹¹ DisCO Values.

88 But we won’t leave you hanging. The Women’s Budget Group in the UK (see the infographic extract above) has some excellent starting resources. Start with these books, the materials listed in this reading group, and this list.

89 For an analysis of this subject, we recommend reading Céline Piques and Xavier Rizos’ Peer to Peer and the Commons: A matter, energy and thermodynamic perspective.



This is a section of a wonderful infographic by the Women's Budget Group. Read [their introductory text on Feminist economics](#) and see the [full size infographic](#).

Feminist [economics](#) and [legal theory](#) bring other key points to the table, including a critique of GDP as an [essentially sexist construct](#), the [Wages for Housework movement](#), and how the lack of care work in lefty circles has helped capitalism [undermine progressive movements](#).⁹⁰ Also, witches! (Not joking about the witches, just watch the video below).

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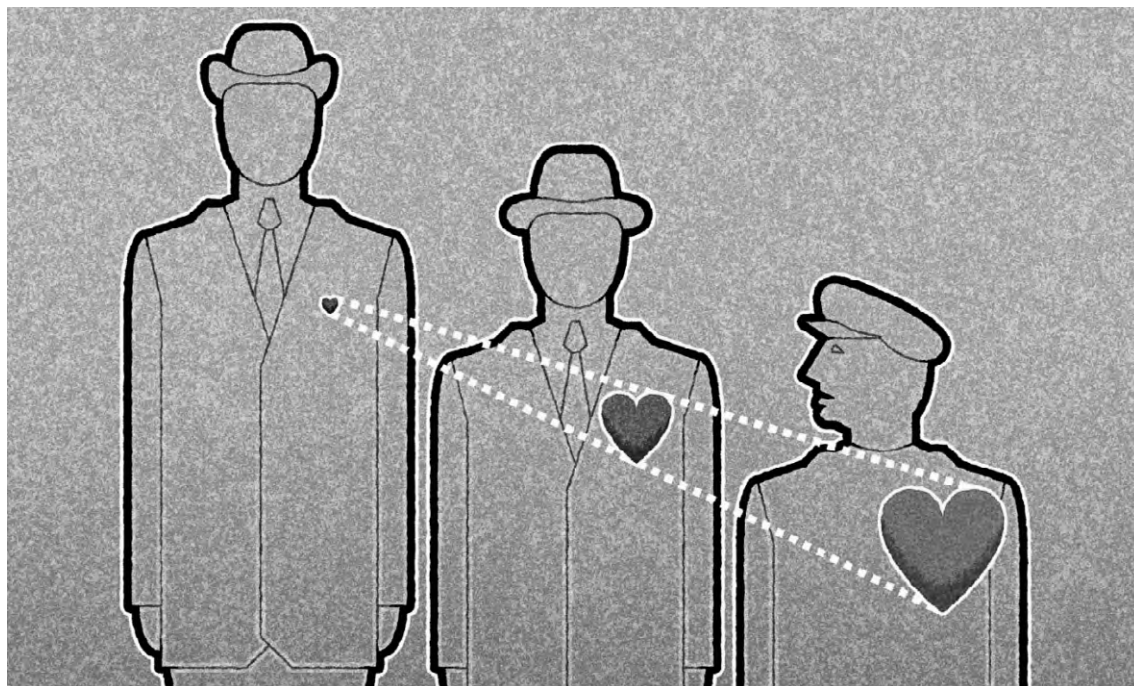
Should feminists embrace the image of the witch? It's complicated! In [this video](#), autonomist feminist (and one of the figures behind Wages for Housework) [Silvia Federici](#) talks about the history of persecution, torture and murder women have been subjected to over the centuries, reminding us that it wasn't women who created the figure of the witch, but the system that oppressed and oppressed them. For more on this subject, check out Federici's modern classic, [Caliban and the Witch](#).⁹¹

90 [Hilary Wainwright](#) (the author of the linked article) and many female-identifying friends often comment on how the best most valuable conversations and prefigurative experiences of what a post-capitalist future looks like often take place in the ladies room at lefty/progressive/commons conferences.

91 For another view on how the figure of "the witch" serves to highlight womens' power, see [this short video by Starhawk](#).

Tensions between mainstream economics and omnipresent, yet invisibilized, care work can be compared to ungrateful children who abuse their parents after they've raised them. In this way, mainstream economics is actively *anticare*, by commodifying it and outsourcing it in a perverted tribute to profit, while being totally dependent on invisible (or perhaps better put, tacit) care to survive. When can we stop feeding the vampire? ⁹²

One of the main subjects covered in the DisCO Manifesto is the ever abundant blindspots of the DAO world. In a techno-deterministic future, care is... What? Where? Automated? Are we ready to put love in an incorruptible, write-only blockchain? Maybe we can do something funkier. If you agree, then welcome to the DisCO.



In DisCO, we distinguish between two types of care work. The first is what you would expect: **the people in the DisCO care for the people in DisCO**. Behind this simple statement lies a world of assumptions that readily clash with lived experience, highlighting how we're *not* educated to do any of this. Really not.

The second type of care work is more controversial: **we care for the “spirit” of the DisCO itself**, which, while hard to define or describe, has to do with a commonly held vision of how we want to see and support one another, and within the group.

In the end, what really matters are the goals, values and missions that you and your group want to uphold. You can be accountable to this vision in various ways: from an informal group of friends sharing a commitment within the bounds of their personal relationship,⁹³ to a regular coop with its statutes, to a DisCO with its Community Algorithmic Trust or DisCO CAT (see last chapter).

Let's take a look at each in turn:

⁹² And also, the Vampire Squid, which, as it happens, has wrapped its tentacles around its own font.

⁹³ Intra-actions are totally a thing! And we like it a lot.

Caring among DisCO members

When do the people in a group stop being people? When they're treated as cogs within a machine, or part of somebody else's plan. Capitalism is such a plan, as are many DAO projects. Design obliges culture; those with the means to do so can design the architectures required to oblige the cultures they want, to support their plans.

The commons does things differently. Writing about the concept of the Nested-I, David Bollier and Silke Helfrich tell us:

“In trying to communicate the realities of commoning, we kept coming up against the duality of the concepts *I* and *we* in English. The very words assert an opposition that commoning transcends. But seeing the world through a binary choice of *I* or *we* inhibits a real understanding of commoning. Language itself is a problem in communicating a different OntoStory. As we pondered this quandary, one day a solution occurred to us: the term *Nested-I*. It is an expression that helps us describe the practices and identity of a *commoner*. It overcomes the deeply rooted assumptions about individual identity and agency being opposed to collective goals. The *Nested-I* is an attempt to make visible the subtle, contextual social relationships that integrate ‘me’ and ‘we’. Even if our Western mindset does not easily acknowledge the idea, that reality is everywhere.”⁹⁴

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“Economics is not just about money. Economics is about our holistic well-being as a planet, as a people, as an animal species”. In [this video](#), commons advocate, speaker and shaman Nonty Charity Sabic teaches us how Ubuntu Philosophy serves to remind us that we are of nature, not separate from it.

The 5th DisCO Principle states that “**care work is the core**”. This can mean different things for the existing DisCO Labs, but likely includes being attentive to others’ circumstances and gently inquiring when something left unsaid is nonetheless perceived, as well as the ongoing practices of mentoring and mutual support. In the two DisCO LABS we have direct experience of (Guerrilla Media Collective and DisCO.

⁹⁴ *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*, Chapter 2: The Onto Shift to the Commons. More on “Strengthening the Nested I” [here](#).

coop), the members share hopes, fears and aspirations but also jokes and silly memes. When we talk, we make sure that everyone has the space to express themselves, and we stay quiet when necessary (creating and holding space with moderation). Like riding a bicycle, care among the members of a DisCO is not something that can really be “taught”. It needs to be practiced and experienced and, we know from experience, there will likely be more than one fall.⁹⁵

We are adamant that we should be paid for this care. As a rule, many of us are simply not used to seeing care rewarded directly with money — it feels wrong, somehow. Not because care isn’t valuable to us, but because of where it usually happens, or is made visible, in our lives. It often (culturally) seems too intimate, too pure a thing to translate into payment in exchange. Money’s dirty magic of making hard transactions out of softer exchanges seems like an insult to the spirit of care, in many of our eyes. How many times can you recall having a friend refuse money for bringing you lunch, or a small item you requested from the store? But then how can we make right the issues of balance, fairness and gratitude in a money-based workplace?

If money still holds a kind of top-level supremacy in our culture and we need to work with what we have, let’s redistribute the existing money we have available in fairer ways, as a restorative act towards better recognition of the time we take in supporting one another beyond hard productivity. Cooperatives offer us the freedom to make certain decisions: do we divert a part of our existing income away from the “productive stuff” and towards rewarding reproductive and care work? Your coop’s assembly can discuss and decide. Money, as Wages for Housework showed us, shouldn’t be the “be-all/end-all” of our changemaking programs, but it’s a real attention grabber. Referring back to the basic **DisCO Governance Model**, the amount of money diverted towards paying for care or love work is the same as what would otherwise be paid towards “productive”, aka market or livelihood work. It’s just distributed more fairly, in our opinion.

There’s another facet to this, too. In practice, we also just give things away (be they tangible, or intangible, like time). Care always trumps “the numbers” in the end. Once we take pains to meet all fiscal/legal obligations, we’re left with human considerations and these take precedence. The DisCO Governance model and tech in development include ways to gift to others. Beyond that, we are also exploring the concept of UnDisCO: What happens when the collective lets go of protocols and ratios, and just shares based on abilities and needs?⁹⁶ All these affections, nudging thoughts and conversations are what inform DisCO in both its storytelling and technological design. Like the Zapatistas say, we learn by listening quietly to each other, and only then can we feel empowered to speak with the world.

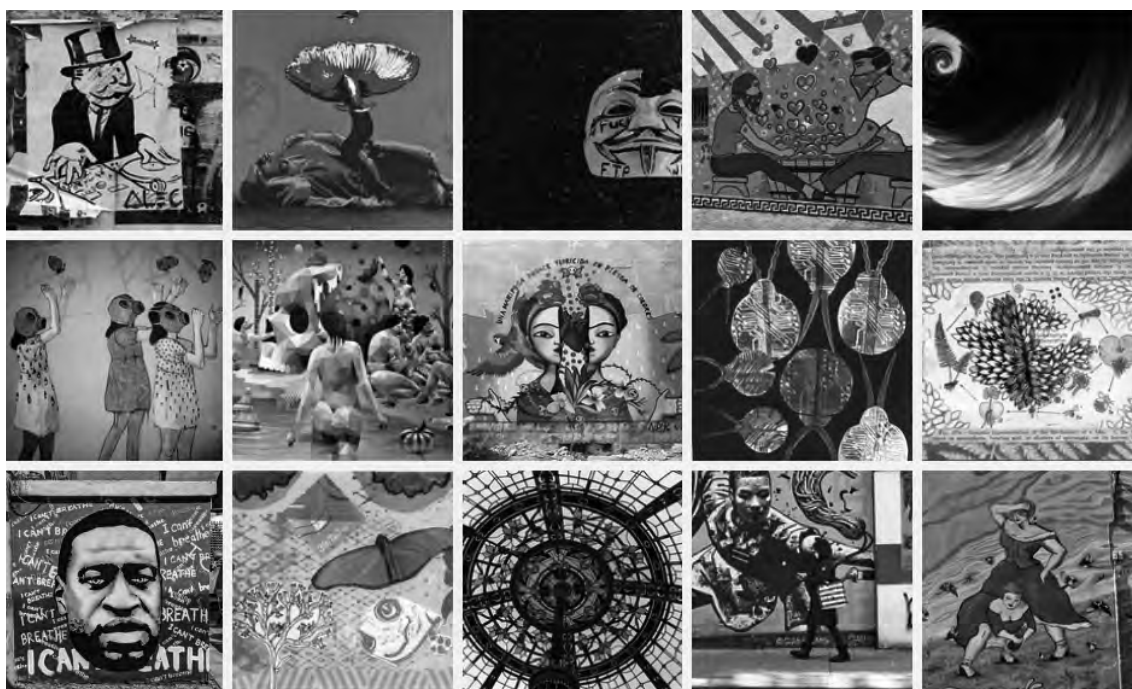
⁹⁵ You can read about Guerrilla Media Collective way of handling care work among its members [here](#).

⁹⁶ Guerrilla Translation was very much influenced by the ideas in Charles Einsentein’s *Sacred Economics*. Other later influences include David Bollier and Silke Helfrich’s new ontology for the commons (see *Free, Fair and Alive* Chapter 3: The OntoShift to the Commons). But, none of this is exactly new, in fact, it’s obviously older than money. It’s always good to go back to the classics though. More info on UnDisCO will be shared in 2021.



Caring for the Spirit of the DisCO

The DisCO CAT is DisCO's soul, and not just a collection of interoperable apps. We use “soul” as a metaphor; any group, commons or organization hatches a set of shared memes and expectations that form a kind of spirit. Sometimes people will anthropomorphize things in order to create a sense of connection or empathy. We've even found ourselves trying to relate to hostile entities or groups in order to find common ground or to understand the origin of the behavior or mitigating circumstances, even as their actions or inactions may be destructive to people and the planet. If relatability is a key to transformative engagement, we say, let's embrace that impulse. That's one reason we've invited the friendly figure of the DisCO CAT along for this journey, but if you don't find that relatable, choose your own mascot or do without; just don't lose the guiding light of connection. The notion of “caring for the collective as a living being” arose out of difficult experiences and challenges in Guerrilla Translation starting in 2013, and which we're honestly still trying to crack. We are happy to share these challenges because they have made DisCO what they are. In the spirit of relatability, let us share some real world background on how we got to these notions of care work in the workplace through our own bumpy experiences.



A selection of Creative Commons Licensed art used in Guerrilla Translation's [English](#) and [Spanish](#) webpages. See [this expo](#) for full credits.

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Since the creation of Guerrilla Translation⁹⁷ we've experienced it all. Love, joy, excitement and creativity, the unbelievable sense of having helped birth something that resonates with people. Over the years we've cultivated life long friendships and amazing camaraderie. But we'd be remiss if we didn't acknowledge the hard times, precarity and pain. The OG team that configured GT has been called things like tyrannical, controlling, baffling, irresponsible and naive — all criticisms which bear a grain of truth. Hurtful as these may have been, we've tried to use these criticisms to better hone and explain our intent (and to learn from our own mistakes). The following is also true. Over much time and many members, whether still with us or now moved on, the GT team made a consistent effort in love and care (work), prioritizing the collective well being while striving to uphold GT's goals and values. We just never gave up, and this passionate belief (or stubbornness) slowly took the seed germinated in GT/GMC to eventually sprout into DisCO.⁹⁸

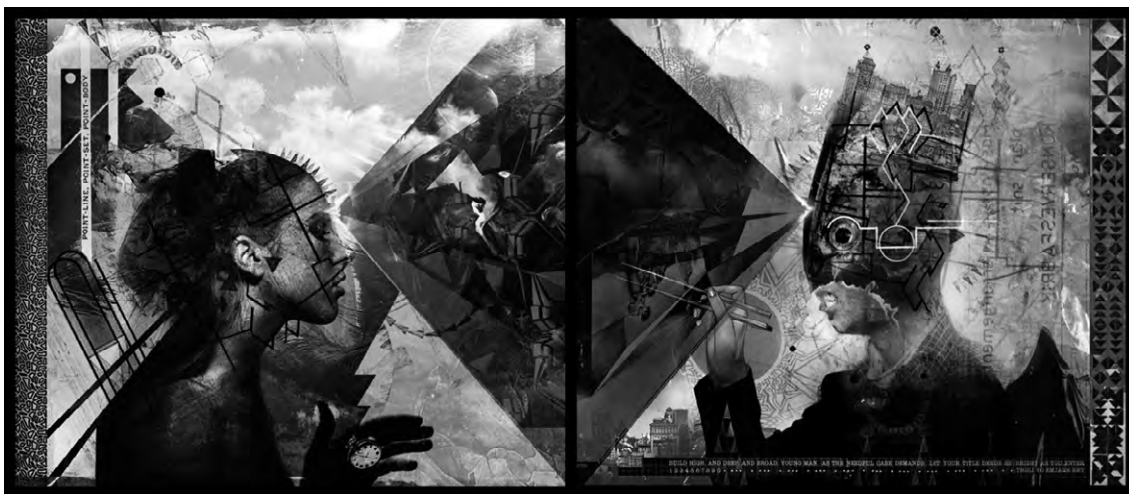
From the start, we were clear on a few things that have crystalized in the DisCO Governance Model. We would do both pro-bono work and agency work (mainly translation, at the time). A percentage of the agency work would pay back the sweat equity accrued through pro-bono work. But we were always at a loss on what to do about how to encourage everyone to take up their fair share of *all the rest*, i.e., formatting, contacting authors, seeking work, social media, dealing with people's emotions (including our own), and a very long etcetera.

97 Which is now officially "Guerrilla Media Collective". For the intent and purpose of this publication, you may consider them the one and same. If you want to read more about GT/GMC's original story, read this: [Punk Elegance: How Guerrilla Translation reimagined itself for Open Cooperativism](#).

98 Check out this great article by our colleagues Timothy McKeon and Sara Escribano on how GT/GMC became a DisCO and, cue record scratch, the many challenges we've had getting there: [Tales of a DisCO, Straight from the Dancefloor](#).

We sometimes describe DisCO as the daughter of GT/GMC, but also its mother.⁹⁹ The reality of our lived experience has led to certain biases. We are trying to alleviate these in ourselves through the influence of the DisCO LABs, not least of which is DisCO.coop itself. The latter has a healthy representation of people coming from GT/GMC, and happily not the majority — and with new voices added, the timbre of the chorus has changed. Still, this notion of invisibilized “admin” work is a perpetual issue, which has a parallel with activism. Anyone who’s done organizing, protesting, or community building has probably experienced, or at least witnessed, activist burnout.¹⁰⁰ How could we prevent our group from falling into the same trap?

In 2014, we wrote the first version of this article, then called “What is Admin”. Within the collective, we saw the same productivist dynamics which permeate capitalism were finding a foothold (sometimes with crampons). Declaring a flat horizontal organization and expecting things to just fall into place doesn’t work.¹⁰¹



Power and hierarchy can’t simply be waved away, it would be naive to think so (at least, in our cultural context and personal experience). Even if an attempt is made to avoid or eliminate things that look like power and hierarchy in practice, if they’re not actively replaced with deliberately counteractive methodologies, they simply shapeshift and jump back into the vacuum with different masks, ready to trigger those same traumas we’d tried to bypass. Whoopsie! The work of replacing starts with ourselves, in acknowledging **how deeply rooted these systems are** in our own psyches and behaviors.

Here’s what we’ve seen or learned about what can happen in organizations that are, perhaps, activist in nature or somehow counter to capitalism (whether anti, post, etc.). People who end up with reputational power can also end up to be the perceived bosses, even if they’re not exploiting people financially via wage labor — and they may be even more burned out than anyone who confers this power upon them. These de-facto and unwilling “bosses” are the people who ended up quietly doing much or all

⁹⁹ Yes, color us confused! But then again, both the Terminator and Netflix’s *Dark* have proven to be very popular in a paradox-friendly world.

¹⁰⁰ Activist burnout is so real that even www.activist-trauma.net hasn’t been updated since 2014. Did the activists behind it simply burn out?

¹⁰¹ “New Economy” orgs often broadcast their successes against a predatory economy. While perhaps minimal in GDP terms, they’re worth celebrating (and do we *really* care about GDP anyway?) But we also need to acknowledge our failures and incorporate lessons learned, not just toot horns.

of the unacknowledged sustainability work to keep the ship afloat, including both the admin work for the organization and the care-taking work for the humans. Those who are just joining or don't understand the full picture due to miscommunication also suffer and feel frustrated when things don't work as expected and problems arise.

DisCO adds activism where we feel it belongs: in the workplace. If you're expected to spend a third of your lifetime at work, what are you working toward?

Participatory Economics or "Parecon" can give us some pointers. This is a set of economic patterns based around shared decision making. Described as a "anarchist economic vision" by its most visible proponents, Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel,¹⁰² Parecon provides a fascinating set of ideas relevant for DisCO or, indeed, anyone yearning to live in an economy liberated from the maladies of capitalism. Of particular note for this discussion is the notion of balanced job complexes. In a 2012 interview, Albert explains the concept thusly:

"In the traditional corporate approach, which is common both to capitalism and to twentieth century socialism, about 20 percent of the workforce monopolizes the empowering tasks. In other words, they do jobs which are largely composed of tasks and responsibilities that empower those doing them — giving them overarching information, skills, knowledge, social ties, energy and initiative, and access to levers of control. Here we are talking about engineers, managers, accountants, CEOs, lawyers, doctors, high-level professors, and so on. The other 80 percent of the workforce is left doing jobs composed of tasks and responsibilities that disempower those doing them by diminishing their skills, knowledge, social ties, energy and initiative, and separating them from all means of control."

The former empowered group, called **the coordinator class**, operates above the latter disempowered group, called **the working class**. Their situations give these two classes contrary interests, and great power is given to the coordinators. In capitalism, the coordinators are between labor and capital, often carrying out the will of the owners, but also, to a degree, advancing their own interests in conflict with the workers below and the owners above. In twentieth-century socialism, while owners no longer exist, the coordinator class not only still exists, it becomes the new ruling class. For this reason, advocates of Parecon tend to call twentieth-century socialism, "coordinatorism".

¹⁰² If you're triggered by the word "anarchism", please reconsider and take the time to study its history, (Peter Marshall's *Demanding the Impossible* is a good place to start). This is a discussion often avoided in the more "polite", New Economy circles. What wisdom can we gain from these attempts at fairer futures in our shared past? You may be pleasantly surprised.

*Mmmkay...Bill Lumberg (from Mike Judge's classic [Office Space](#)) is **the coordinator class personified**. From his [Wikipedia entry](#): "He greets subordinates with an unenthusiastic, "What's happening?", and when asking an employee to do an unpleasant task, starts the sentence with, "I'm gonna need you to", or "If you could go ahead and", as well as ending these requests with "that'd be great/terrific" and "mmmkay?" [Watch him in action here](#).*

Parecon's introduction of the "coordinator" class may help explain some of the contradictions of twentieth-century socialism. We won't get into that, but let's contrast what happens in the typical coordinator-class enterprise with what happens in activist or commons-based peer production projects (e.g. free/open source software, fablabs, wikis, and community gardens).

We should mention the 90-9-1 rule. Research on the activities in commons-based peer production communities shows a pattern of "deeply unequal distribution of effort", wherein 1% of a group fully participates (e.g. in a wiki, "adding content"), 9% participate to a far lesser degree ("changes/updates/edits content") and a big 90% basically just lurks. Sometimes this is depicted as 1% of a community doing 90% of the work. The rule is also questioned by some, but it does reflect a lived experience in many communities: most will hang back and let a few take the lead, and with it the responsibility, and the power.

An ironic and troubling paradox is the idea of an organization without structure. An organization is a structure, a cultural one that organizes the actions and goals of a group.¹⁰³ If a group organizational structure isn't deliberately, formally discussed and created, then an informal one, perhaps less immediately visible, will emerge that attempts to serve the unspoken needs and agendas of some (but not all) of its constituents. This results from the lack of focus on the "how", and can lead to a lot of conflict and fallout. Just a few people will end up making the decisions and rules, and whether they intended this or not their power concentrates further into an elite

¹⁰³ Culture and structure pop up again: In this case, it's worth noting that "structure" shouldn't be taken as immobile. If culture is understood to be organic and pattern-based, structure (specifically technology and law) can follow suit through modularity and tweakability. What's important is that groups are always aware of both facets so they can be consciously and caringly shaped by the community, and not its unexamined biases, cultural contexts and built-in technological affordances.

group.¹⁰⁴ This process is spectacularly unpacked in Jo Freeman’s iconic essay, The Tyranny of Structurelessness. So, anyone who doesn’t work towards making power visible in their groups — e.g., activists, coders, commoners — will almost inevitably and invisibly suffer burnout when not only power but effort becomes unbalanced. Eventually, the whole collective is subject to burnout from the lack of mutual support and the need to prioritize one’s own needs, in the absence of any provision to support everyone’s needs.

Another aspect to this problem is the gendered aspect of power and care work in activism and research projects alike, and the persistence of high profile positions taking credit for work that was in large part made possible by completely and deliberately invisible care work done by less high profile people. There is a lot more to say about this particular structural inequity, and how it is perpetuated through not only cultural but financial dominance, which we will continue to explore in other, future works (did someone say “PinkPaper”?).

Not vicious or malicious, just de-lovely and delicious!?! If you’ve made it this far, congrats! You deserve to take a break and remember how you felt the first time you heard this song!

OUTRO: Groove is in the Heart

How can we ever hope to address these systemic problems? A recurring answer that has become almost a trope in DisCO presentations and webinars is, “we don’t know”. This answer might be rare in progressive, political projects, but we really don’t; however, over time, we’ve developed some ideas:

- **Care is at the heart.** Is the care work within our activist organizations going to be made explicitly visible? Both the “soft” (affective labor) and the “hard” (crossing the Ts and dotting the Is) are necessary — and we see them as

¹⁰⁴ This “elite group” is, more often than not, white and male. This is not an opinion, but a fact validated by even the most cursory look at peer reviewed articles like: “Hacktivism and the male-only stereotype” or “Gendered practices in institutions of hegemonic masculinity”.

reproductive labor. If they don't happen, our activism will fail, and the epilogue of the end of history will continue its suicidal slide into species extinction.¹⁰⁵

- If we agree on conceptualizing this as “carework” (and you don't necessarily have to, yet you can still DisCO), **we need to see who's doing these two types of work and how much**. We only value what we see and perceive.¹⁰⁶ This is the animating logic and need behind **the tools we're developing and why we're building them**. Mainstream economics has been taken out of the hands of people and put into the hands of technocrats. Future, Doughnut, Commons and DisCO economies (DisCONomics?) need to be **clearly understood and co-created** by the people for the people, but for real this time. Care work needs to be clearly and intuitively visible, but not to trigger a smart contract to blindly compensate for it. It needs an open and honest (and ongoing) conversation among **the humans that must do the work** and make the (sometimes) hard decisions. There's no killer app for this, there will never be.
- **Why is the person cleaning the toilets paid at least 278 times less than the CEO?**¹⁰⁷ Even little kids agree: Everyone Poops. What gives? How do we manage the growing pains of encouraging balanced job complexes in a society actively uneducated and disempowered to meet such a change?¹⁰⁸
- **Money is dirty magic**. Yet, unless you are privileged enough to escape from capitalism, you'll need money to survive. What ethical boundaries and usages of money are we comfortable with in order to, not only survive, but become an economic, transitional counterpower?¹⁰⁹
- **Markets are *not* capitalism**. They pre-date it. If we make it through and don't raze the biosphere, we *may* have a gentler, kinder future that includes (but would not be unquestioningly dominated by) exchange, trade, barter and gifting. Mutualism is a long standing tradition that gives us pointers on anticapitalist markets.¹¹⁰ None of this is exactly new and we need to honor our elders, even when they make us uncomfortable.

We need to face these issues honestly and humbly. And, by constantly admitting that *we don't know everything*; we need to make fluid maps and strong footholds for a shifting territory. In this podcast,¹¹¹ ecofeminist author and activist Starhawk tells

105 Assertive, yes. There's a time to express opinions in E-prime, and there's a time where storytelling tells a more honest truth than mere fact. We feel strongly about this point. Changemaking will NOT happen without the explicit incorporation of care work in the way we do things. The ends determine the level of care of attention we pay to the means.

106 What is value and how should we value things? In this article by fellow DisCONaut, activist, and software engineer Jill Ada Burrows, the answer is full of maybes: “Maybe it's too hard to derive units of megajoule×bit×hours for knowledge work, so perhaps we end up paying people to learn everything necessary to support an economy. Maybe we'll recognize all economic activity stems from motherhood and that all economics would cease without mothers and that all care work deserves to be paid. Maybe we will even go a step further and come to believe that all work is actually care work done to support and nurture our communities. At any rate, the basis in understanding the manifold relationships between all the flows of value is what will help us define these precise relationships and how we should choose to structure society.”

107 Philémon Poux points out: “It's 278 times the average worker. But it's likely that the cleaning person is below the average salary so that might very well be much more than this”.

108 Our DisCO suggestion on how to crack this is: The Working Circle, a way of dividing tasks and focusing efforts on thematic areas, each with its own membership and team stewards.

109 Is a transitional state apt to also be qualified as “permanent beta”, or do we expect absolute destination points... we'd say that the last 150 years of experiments give good ideas of where the path may lead us.

110 Curious about Mutualism? Check out Kevin Carson's Studies in Mutualist Political Economy or the Mutualist F.A.Q

111 The whole podcast is as inspirational and joyful as it is grounded. Our (slightly edited) quote begins at minute 45:17 and ends at 46:11. You can check out the Empowerment Manual here.

us how to balance power and responsibility, while not shying away from conflict in equipotential organizations:

“In the *Empowerment Manual*, I talk about what I call ‘the Talisman of Healthy Groups’ which is like a magic circle with power and responsibility being one axis and accountability, communication, and trust being the other. We balance power and responsibility when people gain power in a group by taking on responsibility and fulfilling it. When people take on the responsibility, the group empowers it. The group gives them the authority, the license to use power to do what they need to do. When these things are in balance, the group is much healthier and has a much healthier chance of surviving and thriving.”

Asking questions for which we don’t have any answers already in mind is taking a chance, a leap into the unknown — not unlike dancing.



At the head of the chapter we asked, where does care begin? Perhaps the real question is: When does it end?

It shouldn’t, it hasn’t and it won’t. It’s vital for our survival, and care is the only way to heal this much abused planet. In this heinous, shocking year of 2020 we’ve seen some of the worst the human species has to offer, but also the best. In an article published in late March 2020, as the world was coming to terms with the crisis and before complacency, denial and covid-gaslighting had fully set in, British ecologist and thinker George Monbiot wrote:

“Power has migrated not just from private money to the state, but from both market and state to another place altogether: the commons. All over the world, communities have mobilized where governments have failed.”¹¹²

Monbiot is literally describing one of the souls animating DisCO. Radical (read, not bound by capitalist biases) anthropology tells us that:

“...early *Homo sapiens* were not just physically the same as modern humans, they were our intellectual peers as well. In fact, most were probably more conscious of society’s potential than people generally are today, switching back and forth between different forms of organization every year. Rather than idling in some primordial innocence, until the genie of inequality was somehow uncorked, our prehistoric ancestors seem to have successfully opened and shut the bottle on a regular basis, confining inequality to ritual costume dramas, constructing gods and kingdoms as they did their monuments, then cheerfully disassembling them once again.”¹¹³

If power is migrating, we can’t just expect to receive it passively. To quote one of the great critical voices of our time, we need to take it back. Dealing with established power, (i.e.: the Market/State¹¹⁴) is not an eventuality to be wished away; we should actively engage in fun, creative and also assertive ways to take it back.

The closing chapter of these DisCO Elements is all about a future built by us, the people who care. Let’s see how we get there, with care.

¹¹² *The horror films got it wrong. This virus has turned us into caring neighbors.*

¹¹³ David Graeber and David Wengrow: *How to change the course of human history* (at least, the part that’s already happened).

¹¹⁴ From David Bollier and Silke Helrich’s *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*, chapter 3: “Although markets and states are often cast as adversaries — the public sector vs. the private sector — in fact they share many deep commitments and are highly interdependent. It makes sense to speak of them as partners in a shared vision. Both see market activity, economic growth, individualism, and technological innovation as the drivers of human progress. Each depends on the other in specific ways, too. Capital-driven markets look to the state for subsidies, legal privileges, research support, and mitigation of market externalities such as pollution and social inequality. And states, for their part, look to markets as sources of tax revenue, jobs, and geo-political influence.”

Chapter 7:

DisCO

Futures:

Building

Tracks

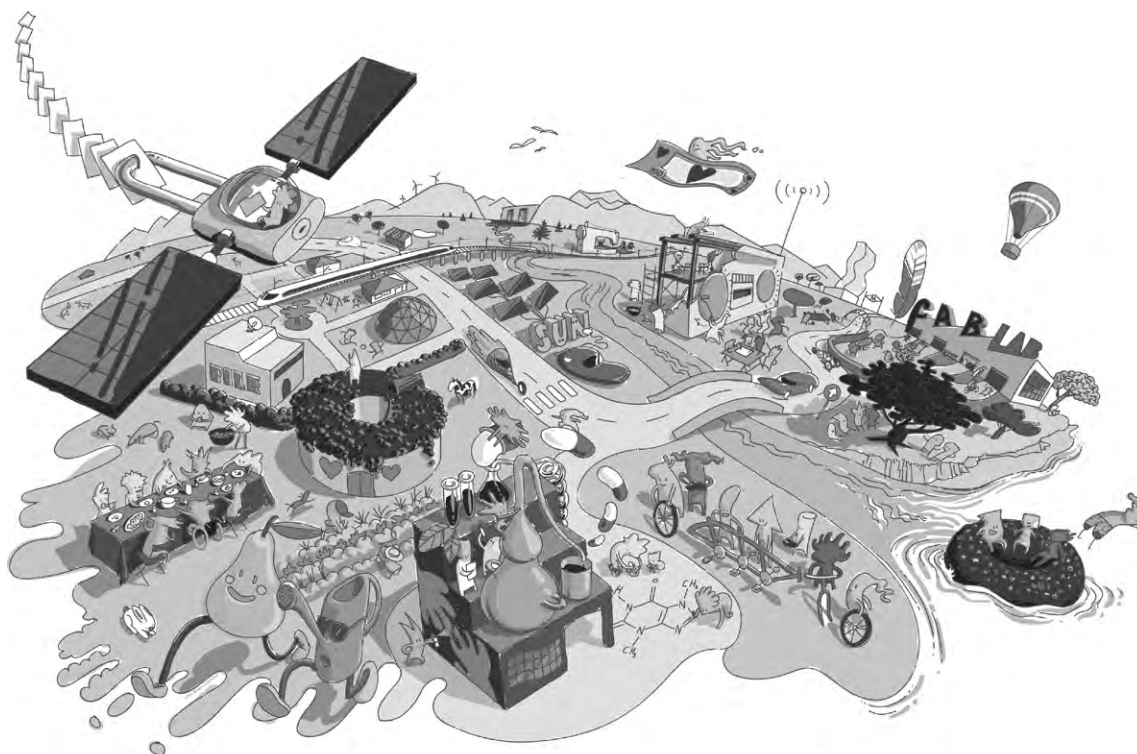
What needs to happen for DisCOs to grow and flourish across the economy? This is the purpose of the DisCO Project: to provide educational tools and experimental spaces for the ongoing, transnational development of DisCO. It's an undertaking that needs ongoing support to reach a broad base of potential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

DisCOs are designed to be developed from the bottom-up. To create the desired cooperative 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 publication. As explicitly political and federated initiatives, DisCOs also act as a training ground for deliberative, 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.¹¹⁵

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

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¹¹⁵ How much should commoners be working *with* the Market/State? Here is our take on that subject: Commons in the time of monsters: How P2P Politics can change the world, one city at a time.

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 marginalized 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 cooperative 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 enable positive credit valuation.
 - d. Public subsidies towards DisCOs Worker Self Directed Nonprofits as a more democratic and mandate-accountable alternative to traditional NGOs.¹¹⁶
 - e. The monetary value of employee pro-bono work could be treated as a tax-deductible contribution to the non-profit coop.
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 partnerships¹¹⁷ as an alternative to the established public-private, following the Preston and Evergreen models, with DisCOs facilitating:
 - a. Municipal service provision for local economies.
 - b. FLOSS-built¹¹⁸ and open licensed, common-pool civic knowledge resources.
 - c. Practical workplace education on feminist economics, the commons, decentralized 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.

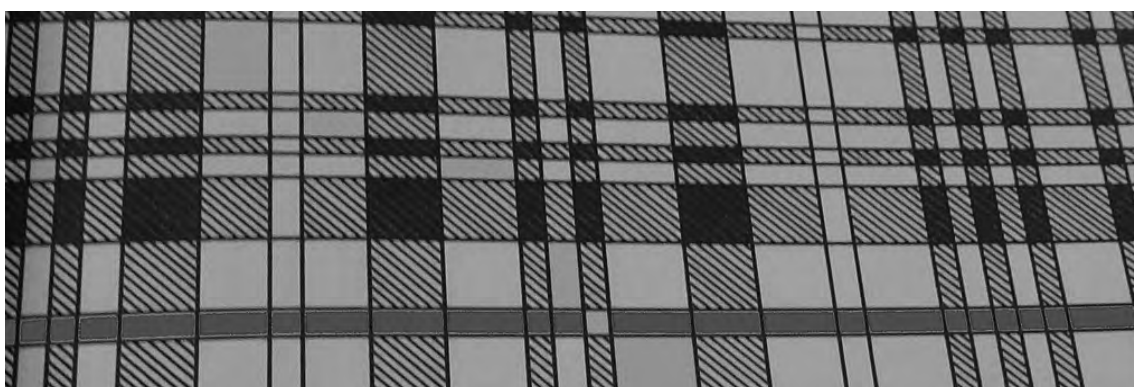
¹¹⁶ Guerrilla Media Collective is constituted as a non-profit and socially oriented worker owned cooperative legally registered in Andalusia, Spain.

¹¹⁷ For more on Commons-Public partnerships (the order of words is important) see this report by Common Wealth.

¹¹⁸ FLOSS" stands for Free/Libre and Open Source Software

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 transfer and acknowledgement of credits for higher education.
7. Research and higher education support, leveraging existing DisCO open-access documentation, training programs and pedagogical materials.
8. Support of DisCO initiatives as bottom-up facilitators of Green New Deal projects. Compared to normative 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. Prioritization of DisCOs and DisCO federations over for-profit entities when capitalizing 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 Organization and the International Cooperative Alliance to recognize transnational, on-chain¹¹⁹ DisCOs as federated cooperatives.

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Earlier we mentioned the first few **DisCO LABS**. At present a variety of additional DisCO LABS in diverse sectors such as the arts, textile recycling/reuse, permaculture, education, online marketplaces and medicine are presently being planned and

¹¹⁹ On-chain and Off-chain are terms used in the DAO space to distinguish algorithmic based governance (On-chain) from human agreements (Off-chain). We argue that the very dichotomy of off/on-chain 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 considerations. For a simple description of On-chain/Off-chain governance, [read this article](#).

launched. 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 cooperative 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, cooperatives are private entities. But in the interest of long term remediation — social, economic, environmental — governments would be called upon to prioritize support for generative, restorative industries, and to divert funding and subsidies away from harmful, extractive and exploitative ones. If DisCOs, to paraphrase the IWW,¹²⁰ 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. 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 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 one another. 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, the Social Solidarity Economy, etc.) 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 center. 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. DisCOs catalyze these practices into a feminist economic and care-oriented framework, paving the way for pervasively sustainable commons-based alternatives to the dominant order.

¹²⁰ Industrial Workers of the World. Click [here](#) to visit their website or [here](#) to read their history.

Wild facts and habit fables. Creatures, imaginations and impossible worlds. In this video feminist scholar and all around badass Donna Haraway shows us how Science Fiction is a “critical germ/seed and point of eruption” towards better futures.

As Ela Kagel wrote in her **Foreword, many pages ago**: It ain’t easy. Take the power back, stay with the trouble. Let’s build tracks together towards a future of care. It may be our only chance.

**“No
Experience
Required”
Afterword
by Ann Marie
Utratel**

I'll keep this brief. If you've read some or all of this publication or its predecessor, the Disco Manifesto, it might seem like information best used by people with specific experience or expertise in fields like human resources, academic research, economics, organizational psychology, project management, accounting, team building, software design, cooperatives, or any of the other fields that may have been mentioned or implied. I don't think that's the case.

The teams we've helped build and work with do have members with specific expertise, but they also have some people – like me – with far more general experience, and perhaps even several careers in their past. When I say “no experience required”, what I mean to do is remind you that in some moments, it's more important to take a beginner's approach and see what you can do with some new ideas. To someone who may be working from home now during the up-and-down pandemic crisis, I'd say try our time-tracking advice and understand where your precious hours go. If the research I've been reading is helpful to mainstream corporations, it's helpful to you too: reports say that people are often more productive working from home, for a few reasons, one of them being that they're simply spending more time working. Why? In my opinion, it's possible that people don't know when to stop, don't have good boundaries yet, and don't feel like they're seen as “doing enough”. That's not going to be sustainable in a shifting work-life balance full of new expectations, but it's better not to rely on feelings or impressions. Capture your own time-tracking data and see for yourself. To someone who has a less secure position, or who is trying to move their side hustle up to the main focus, I'd say: consider if you might want to form a small, trusted team, make it a cooperative and share the workload as the side gig grows. Can you implement some mutual support practices? Are you interested in tracking care work, and opening discussions about how everyone's work is valued? Can the team make decisions together and bring everyone's strengths forward? What about creating something to share in a community you belong to? Building an information or material commons is another step towards changing how we share and create together.

All of the DisCO Principles and Values can be interpreted, adapted and implemented at a very small scale, and every step counts. If it seems like you'd need to be a multi-titled expert to take this on, let me debunk that right now. Cooperation doesn't depend on titles, it depends on attitudes, goals and care. We care about the future, and we offer these ideas so that you can take inspiration and hope from them, starting exactly where you are right now.

We'll be here if you need us. Take care.

Bonus Tracks

Acknowledgements

“No manifesto is an island...” This is how we began the acknowledgments section of our previous publication, *The DisCO Manifesto*. A year and a month has passed since then, and not just any year. The rather dystopian and accelerated 2020 has brought pain, fear and death to so many. Despite the overbearing atmosphere, DisCO has found a way, continuing to blossom in the cracks and show hopeful signs of better days to come. Things like this can’t happen in a year like 2020 without people who bring their solidarity, understanding, ideals and, of course, a little of their crazy and a lot of their fun. This might sound like an Oscar speech, but we *are* deeply grateful. So, let’s namedrop some people:

To start with the near and dear: these are [the DisCONAUTs](#)¹²¹ mentioned throughout this booklet, who form the current crew at DisCO.coop. The DisCONAUTs page linked above reorders names randomly, so we’ve done the same. Shout outs of love and respect to:

Maro Horta, Lynn Foster, Lisha Sterling, Cindy Kohtala, Javier Arturo Rodríguez, Bob Haugen, Sofia Bustamante, Caitlin Cole, Silvia López, Sara Escribano Romero, Jillian Ada Burrows, Felipe Duarte, Stacco Troncoso, Guilherme Mauler, Timothy McKeon, Natalia Avlona, Irene López de Vallejo, Ann Marie Utratel, Lara San Mamés and Laura Hughes. Extra deep thanks and appreciation to the great Mireia Juan Cucó, who formatted the booklet at warp speed while being a full time super-mom (bon día Ventura!) and an awesome person.

We also send our love and gratitude to all the non-DisCONaut reviewers and commenters, including (in random order): Philemon Poux, Ruth Catlow, Ela Kagel (who also wrote the wonderful intro), James Muldoon, Shon Feder, Hilary Wainwright, Will Stronge, Arianne Flemming, Jose María Luzarraga and George Dafermos.

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Thanks also to the dynamic, decentralized Extremeño duo: Alejandro Hernández Renner and Antó Recio Cuesta.

¹²¹ Given DisCO’s Federation Protocol we expect this team to grow slowly, only one or two people more with very specific profiles. Watch DisCO.coop and subscribe to our newsletter for updates.

Shout out to the awesome crew at the Sharing Society Project for hosting the first DisCO public presentation back in the before-times, and showing us ongoing support: Benjamín Tejerina, Cristina Miranda de Almeida, Diego “Carbajus” Carbajo and Ignacia Perugorria.

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More importantly, **there are DisCO babies on the way!** Our deepest love and congrats to our friend and ally Elsie Bryant (and her Trekkie anticapitalist DisCO twins) and DisCONAUT Laura Hughes for already doing the care work! And finally, thanks to our various pets including these dogs and cats for keeping us sane in this crazy 2020: Kora, Lucas, Yoda, Leia, Bear, Chenoa, Bomba, José Maria Zózimo III, El PiraCat (one name), Pixie, Neko and all the rest...DisCO futures make room for all of you four-leggeds, winged things and water-dwelling friends, too.

Finally, in loving memory of Lilo (2017-2020) and all friends dearly departed. We honor and miss you all.



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Authorship

The main body of the DisCO Elements text has been written over the course of several months, springing from our chapter in Autonomy.work’s *Platforming Equality* paper. “Groove is in the Heart” is a deeply extended “director’s cut” or longform version (i.e.: from mixtape to boxed set), authored by [Stacco Troncoso](#) and [Ann Marie Utraltel](#). Stacco did most of the writing, Ann Marie most of the editing, but sometimes it was the other way around, because they’re like that and that’s just fine. However, significant co-authorship and editing was contributed by the entire [DisCO team](#). In particular we want to celebrate and acknowledge the work of [Lynn Foster](#) and [Jill Burrows](#), who co-wrote significant portions of Chapter 5 (The DisCO CAT) in collaboration with Stacco and Ann Marie. [Natalia Avlona](#) and [Cindy Kohtala](#). [Timothy McKeon](#), [Silvia López](#) and [Caitlin Cole](#), [Sara Escribano](#), [Irene López Vallejo](#)... [the whole team](#) really chipped in to lend a hand.

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Design and Images

The Design picks up from [Mireia Juan Cucó](#)’s designs for the DisCO Manifesto. DisCONAUTs [Felipe Duarte](#) and [Guilherme Maueler](#) created the new design, illustrations, infographics and icons.

Stay tuned for gallery.disco.coop for DisCO Web Monetization modules to reward the many artists who've graciously licensed their work under Creative Commons and other open licenses.

For full image credits, [click here](#).

Resources

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

- [DisCO.coop website](#)
- [DisCO Manifesto](#)
- [1 minute DisCO video trailer](#)
- Short intro article: [Last Night A Distributed Cooperative 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](#)
- [Care before Code](#): Chapter on DisCO from [Autonomy.work](#)'s booklet *Platforming Equality*
- [Take back the App!](#) Episode of the Laura Flanders show featuring DisCOs, Platform Coops and more...
- [DisCOs Dancing Together: Value Flows and Future Economies](#): 25 mins presentation by Lisha Sterling. Full version and more resources [here](#).
- April 2020 [DisCO Webinar](#) recording
- 45 min presentation (and audio/podcast version) [Rage Against the Machine and Science Friction: a video introduction to DisCOs](#).
- [Deliberate Dancing: A Critical Investigation of DisCO's Potential to Re-Politicise the Economy](#). (Research paper)
- **DisCO Governance model**
 - [Layperson's overview](#) (from the point of [Guerrilla Translation](#))
 - [Full model](#)

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Bibliography

A full bibliography for The DisCO Elements can be found [here](#).

Stuck at home?
Want to start a revolution?
Groove is in the Heart: The DisCO Elements

As we come to the end of a challenging and destabilizing year, many of us have been shaken out of our regular practices and patterns. Looking back over the devastation of 2020, it feels appropriate to reflect on our lives and identify what's missing. Can we use this moment as a turning point to build what should have been there to begin with?

The short answer is YES, and the long answer is laid out in Groove is in the Heart: The DisCO Elements. Part one of the trilogy – the DisCO Manifesto – answers the question why. Part two: the DisCO Elements takes it a step further to address the how.