

social.coop strategy conversation, proposals

Mike Hales - 2019 10 27

Looking forward to Wednesday's Zoom discussion. I have three interlinked proposals for discussion, as possible strategic developments in social.coop:

- Developing a self-aware practice as a **cultural commons** - which is not exactly the same as 'a coop'.
- Starting up a durable, evolving, 'commoned' **knowledge base** around the core concerns; and
- Adopting a **statement of core concerns** and intentions - an 'A-list'.

A fourth matter arises along with these:

- Reviewing the financial basis of social.coop, and payment for the tech ops team members who maintain and develop **the platform infrastructure**.

Below is a bit on each. And fifth, a brief reflection on where we maybe are, compared with the meltdown in 2018.

1 Core concerns and intentions

In last year's meltdown, in [this thread](#) on social.coop principles and [here](#) on social coop purpose, I found myself proposing there should be a statement of core concerns and intentions - an 'A list' - which all participants in social.coop should formally subscribe to in order to have **access to the Mastodon instance**. Progress has been made in this as part of the revised onboarding process, though I'm unsure where we are, with regard to the entire population of historical social.coop users. I certainly feel that social.coop shouldn't be open to just anyone, and continuing participation shouldn't just be a matter of not behaving badly - which is basically what the revised community ops team practices are designed to handle (?).

*I propose that **moves should be made to develop an agreed 'A list'**.*

@emi has tacitly been at work on part of this, with her polls on social-coop features and participation. At the heart, I imagine an A-list would have:

- Communication around coops practice, skills, strategies
- Coops news, informal help and live queries, and
- Exchanges around coop principles & values, in the world generally (and their opposites, of which there are many!).

Also similar communication around

- Solidarity economy and commoning.

- P2P federating (in software and other spheres). P2P infrastructures, tools and apps, at a relatively lo-tech level. P2P data practices. P2P values.

And of course

- Governance and stewarding of social.coop itself. (Loomio rather than Mastodon is where this gets the main attention?)

Or whatever it turns out to be . . . An A-list should apply across all the platforms governed by social.coop; should be explicit, prominent and public; and social.coop participants should be aware that this is basically *what social.coop is for*, and that there are other (fraternal/sororal/affiliated?) Mastodon instances majoring in other leading preferences.

Of course, at their discretion social.coop folks would continue to boost, DM or Content-warn stuff that is not necessarily core A-list and might even be controversial. Where does this leave us with gossip between friends? Cuddly animals? Snapshots of mountain trails? How serious can we afford to be?

2 Durable collaborative knowledge base

Mastodon is terrible at enabling 'memory'. There are basically no features for managing Favourites, and IMO hashtags aren't enough to track developing perspectives on things. Anyway, 500 characters is too small for developing a substantial knowledge base and Deep Thought. **Loomio** is good for recorded deliberating and alerting of active participants, adequate for explicit decision making, and provides for a bit of document management although that's not a well developed feature. The social.coop **github wiki** is maybe OK for publishing 'rules' and basic info on the platforms, processes and structures (what do you think?) but IMO isn't a way of husbanding shared understanding and skill, in a properly wiki-ish way.

*I propose social.coop should **host an instance of fedwiki** alongside the Mastodon instance, and that active participants of social.coop should develop that as the communal federated documentary resource-base for shared wisdom and capability with regard to **all the domains of the A-list**. <<http://fedwiki.org/view/welcome-visitors>> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smallest_Federated_Wiki>*

3 A coop? A commons!

I've always puzzled about the way in which social.coop can be a coop. It might be a **consumer coop** for a Twitter-ish communication service (if the only users were funder-members, which I think is quite far from being the case?). It might be a **producer coop** for - what? Understanding

of coops and the coop economy? In which case, it's much more like an artists' coop or an education coop than, say, a food coop or a printers' coop. Some kind of '**cultural**' **coop** anyway. It's certainly not a 'social coop' in the important Italian sense, providing **operational care services** to a material community as part of a solidarity economy. It's some kind of **multistakeholder** affair, involving practical cooperators (in material rather than cultural coops), FLOSS software geeks, system admins and devs, and solidarity activists - but not all having identical day-to-day needs and concerns.

*I propose that, whatever part the Coop Principles and Values play here - for example, in formulating the A-list and in day-to-day operations - social.coop should set out to **develop itself as a cultural commons** . . curating, stewarding and enjoying a commoned field of (distributed) understanding and capability.*

A **commons** is not at all the same as a **coop** and weaving both together isn't necessarily an obvious thing. The latter is certainly a way of dealing with some of the 'stewarding' challenges of the former (eg ownership and governance of material infrastructure). But I see the former as bigger, and the 'curating' commitment of a commons, especially, defines what the community *exists and cooperates for*. David Bollier & Silke Helfrich have a really good book now on the politics and form of 'commoning': *Free Fair and Alive - The insurgent power of the commons*.

4 Financial basis of social.coop, and platforms ops infrastructure

Although I've been an 'at large' member of the community ops team this year, it's not clear to me how sound the financial basis of social coop is. It would be good to have this explicitly laid out. But I do have a sense that the basic technical ops of social coop - which keep the Mastodon platform working and updated - are nowhere near as secure or well resourced as we need them to be. The people who do the work need to be funded well enough to enable them to give it the time and commitment it warrants, without exploiting them or leaving them exposed in emergencies. The platform software needs to be updated and kept updated. Ideally, it should have some new features forked into it (like management of Favourites?). And if we open up a fedwiki channel, as I propose above, that's more work for the admins.

*I propose that there should be an explicit strategy of **funding** (of labour) **and tech development** for the tech ops infrastructure(s) of social.coop, covering all its platform elements: Mastodon, github, Loomio, maybe fedwiki. (Are we happy with Skype/Zoom/Riot, as informal, ad hoc, Cloud infrastructure for live chat/meetings?)*

5 Where we're at?

AFAIK the ripples of last year's meltdown have subsided (with some good founder-people hurt and lost) and some new practices now exist that may help avoid the like of these events occurring again - although, these ops do depend on a rather small and possibly fragile core of active (slightly remunerated) ops team on-call volunteers.

The decision making principle in social.coop - ie, in Loomio - appears to be rather 'flat' but it's my impression that relatively few strategic decisions are in fact made - with this current gathering this week being a welcome exception - and that social.coop is in fact more like a benevolent and committed oligarchy (with relatively few members even signing into Loomio?) than a commons or fully functioning coop or federation. (How does it seem to you? In what way does it matter?)

I sense that the principle, of **actively excluding supremacist practice** of all kinds (which I found myself trying to get to grips with here in the wake of the meltdown) is broadly accepted, but I'm unsure how well expressed it is yet, right up-front, where people consider applying for membership of social/coop, and are accepted as members. What do you reckon?

Does all of this sound way more closed or limited or 'managed' than you thought social.coop should be, as a federation? (D'you feel, in fact, that it's a federation as distinct from a coop?) Or, does the stuff above seem more ambitious than you sense the actual commitments (of labour time, basically) seem able to sustain?