

Things!

Project plan

version 1.5

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selected work
2020-2022



things.express



We are in 2040

The past few decades have brought about incredible positive transformations, thanks to the growing alternative economy movement that now is everywhere.

New generations are born into a world where the economy is owned by the people. Instead of the for-profit elite-driven corporate world that once dominated everything, there is now an interconnected-collaborative ecosystem of large user and worker-owned networks of production and distribution of goods and services.

The destructive culture that once surrounded the corporate world is now a thing of the past. There are no more elite groups or multi-billion dollar corporate masters, no more manipulative advertising, no more arbitrary unilateral rule making, and the public institutions are free from capture. Beyond everything else, the ecosystem that was once destroyed is now being regenerated day by day.

In the past, the planet was a scenario of a competitive and warmongering geopolitical dynamic, but now it's more peaceful and integrated. This is thanks to the large glocal planetary-scale institutions and interconnected cooperative economic chains that foster global integration and local care at the same time.

The retail sector, which was once dominated by mega-corporations and the elite people behind them, is now freed. The distribution of goods is managed by a large network of distributed high-tech user-owned conglomerates that produce and distribute day-to-day necessities in a very equally distributed, participatory, and sustainable way.

The Things! Network, coordinated among other user-owned companies in the retail sector, and along with many other initiatives and organizations across various sectors of the economy, have managed to outcompete the traditional private-corporate world.

While far from utopia, society is now much more equal and sustainable. New generations can dream again of a better future, and they have hope that generations to come will be even better than them.

Still we have many challenges ahead, and a lot that need improvement in the future, as there always will be. However, for now, in this fourth decade of the twenty-first century, we can say that a generation's duty is done. One that has managed to fade away, a destructive system with perverse structures that almost degenerated our society to rapid collapse and environmental destruction.

Now, new generations have been born, ones who are better equipped than their predecessors to tackle the challenges of these new times. They will need to continue building on the progress that has already been made and, with a bit of luck, continue the positive evolution of history.

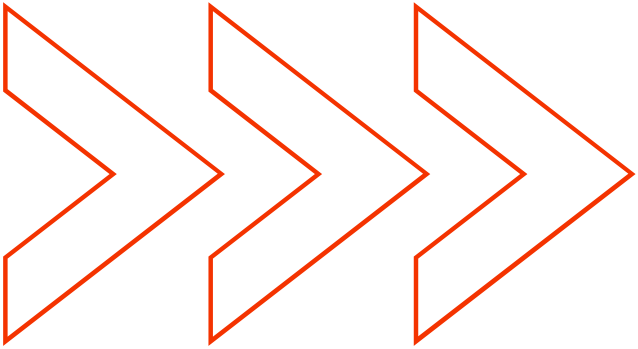


Table of Contents

CONTENTS

01.

The context

02.

Things! alternative

03.

Governance model

04.

Systems-technology

05.

Business model

06.

04. Systems-technology

07.

Final remarks

01. The context

We are currently living in a unique time in history where generalized pessimism and optimism intersect, and where significant societal issues are coupled with great possibilities for positive transformation. In accordance with this reality, many new generation social movements and initiatives are emerging to try to give responses to the vast societal challenges that we currently face, and to foster our abilities to dream forward again as species and ecosystem.

Increasingly, it is becoming evident to almost everyone that we need new economic systems that are oriented towards addressing the present multidimensional crisis, which traditional systems, institutions, and organizations have either created or are unable to properly respond to. These challenges encompass issues such as massive economic inequality, power concentration and institutional capture, environmental destruction, dangers of negative technological disruptions, growing warfare, health-related concerns, and many other issues that are, in one way or another, a product of our outdated and degenerative economic structures.

However, it is not just challenges that we face, but also great opportunities for positive change, which can help us to respond to these concerning challenges and issues, and foster our capacity for dreaming. These new opportunities stem from our vast intergenerational knowledge legacy, significant socio-eco-technological developments, and a wealth of historical experience to draw upon.

As we face significant challenges and take advantage of new opportunities, we should be capable, in the near future, of creating, reinforcing, and articulating new social systems and initiatives that can foster environmental regeneration, enable people's inclusion in decision-making, promote geopolitical integration, and structure a more equal society in terms of resource and power distribution.

The growing corporate-related discontent

Maybe one of the biggest issues that we need to address in this current historical time, is the role that big private for-profit corporations play in our society. It is now evident that these institutions are more destructive than positive, especially regarding the need to address the big problems that contribute to structural behaviors and vested interests respectively.

The generalized distrust of big private for-profit corporations, it's not something casual, it's a product of how they work, the negative incentives behind them, and the destructive culture that they promote. By now, we had enough time to see the reality of the corporate world, and what it has become after decades of rampant neoliberal globalization.

Behind the for-profit corporate world lie multiple degenerative structures that they have created, which are now visible to all. These structures foster power concentration, institutional capture, data privacy issues, poor labor practices, destructive financial attitudes, environmental damage, disregard for ordinary people, and a general lack of concern for important social issues and well-being.

At the same time, it is becoming clear that state actors and regulators are not effectively addressing the root cause problems generated by big private companies through the use of public laws and policy. This is because some regulators do not care, others are captured by corruption, and others simply lack sufficient power to take effective action against them. The only way to create proper and effective action is to rely more on non-state-oriented strategies, such as creating and consolidating new economic institutions in the civil society sector that can function as counter-power to these private corporations in the economic arena.

With the imminent end of the neoliberal globalization era, lays ahead the opportunity for these active searches for viable alternatives, oriented towards the configuration of better organizational models and new positive institutional economic configurations that can foster well-being and progress.

In that sense, in these times, if we are able to scale up and generalize new economic alternatives in the next decades, maybe we are seeing the start of the end of the for-profit corporate world. Because fundamentally, there is nothing anchored to the laws of the universe that state that these types of institutions should exist, they are just human inventions, and like any other, they are just a phase and state of human civilization.

A growing alternative ecosystem

In the last few decades, especially following the significant global financial crisis, a diverse range of alternative economic ideas and projects have rapidly emerged. These

endeavors attempt to restructure economic institutions towards positive practices that prioritize human, social, and environmental well-being.

This burgeoning alternative ecosystem encompasses organizations such as cooperatives, not-for-profit companies, state-owned banks and enterprises, mutual aid institutions, pro-equality and anti-discrimination social movements, labor unionization, regenerative projects, and other positive manifestations of social evolution.

There are numerous examples of these, such as the large consumer cooperative supermarkets like *Migro* or *Coop Group* in Europe, platform cooperatives like *Drivers Coop* or *REI* in the United States, worker cooperatives related to media like the *Associated Press*, not-for-profit companies like *IKEA* or *Bosch*, the *Mozilla Foundation* or *Linux* in software development, cooperative banking like *Crédit Agricole* in France or *BVR* in Germany, and the many other alternative enterprises with billions of members and users across the planet who are members of at least one cooperative.

These alternative organizational models like cooperatives and not-for-profit companies are much more positive than big private corporations, because they generate structures and dynamics that improve income and wealth equality, are more financially resilient under adverse macroeconomic circumstances, they incentive a participative and good culture, and can incorporate the circular economy dynamics much easier than their traditional private competitors.

Many of these ideas and organizational models are not novel, as they have existed for a considerable amount of time across history. However, they have been suppressed by neoliberal culture and power structures in recent decades. With the end of the neoliberal era in sight, a new wave of alternative economy initiatives is emerging, rejuvenated by innovative ideas and technologies across many sectors.

02. *Things!* alternative

Besides the growing alternative organizations and enterprises that are empowering this new alternative ecosystem, there is almost any large-scale initiative in the retail sector, that at least in the United States, is currently being dominated and predated by quasi-feudal companies like *Amazon* or *Walmart*.

Retail is a fundamental part of our societies, because it contributes significantly to the economy by providing jobs and generating revenue, serves as a primary source of goods and services for consumers, offers convenience by being easily accessible and providing online shopping options, and fosters social interaction and community building through supporting local communities and sponsoring events.

In that sense, due to the large impact of retail in our economy and society, there is the need and duty to foster a non-private user and worker owned retail sector, oriented towards the promotion of collective culture and ownership, fair distribution of profits, customer-focused services and local community needs, and prioritization of social and environmental impact.

Many well-intentioned ethical companies have attempted to create a fairer retail sector, such as Whole Foods. However, when these companies grow to a significant scale, they often end up being acquired by large private corporations.

Also, some small alternative retail cooperatives have emerged, but they are typically focused only on their local geographical region, are framed only as physical-retail alternatives, and typically lack the up-to-date infrastructure and technology approach to scale up significantly, which hinders them from becoming large-scale alternatives towards competing with the actual quasi-feudal retail corporations.

The new alternatives in the retail sector should go from and beyond what the already existing alternative and retail companies are doing. This includes not only structuring the company as a not-for-profit member-owned organization approach to avoid being bought, but also incorporating the already existing high-tech developments in logistics planning and digital-participation, a proper combination of digital-physical retail services approach, and the framing related to an international-local perspective.

***Things!* as an alternative in the United States**

The main idea of *Things!* is to be a *non-for-profit user-owned* digital-retail distribution network in the United States. It will consist of an ecommerce platform where people can buy products, and a logistics system that distributes them.

In that sense it will be in the sector of other digital-retail companies like Amazon or Target, but will have a different approach and ownership model based on a *for-propose* motive and user ownership. It will be framed as an alternative-type of company that is competing directly in this market sector, as part of this new alternative economy ecosystem that is emerging.

The idea behind the name is simple, the platform is intended to be a place for people to find *things* that they need, and in that sense interconnecting users to producers in the economy.

The system will be structured up in two different parts:

A first one, related to the *things network* thingsnetwork.info, where users and producers can join as part or associates of the company.

And a second one, that is the online store, under the domain things.express, that will be the express delivery service and logistics behind it, that will deliver the products that people buy in the online store.

As the structural configuration, *Things!* will be inspired by the Alternative-Novel Network-Enterprise (ANNE) model, which is based on ideas and frameworks similar to those of the social economy and cooperative movement. However, it aims to improve and innovate these concepts by creating a new model that is adapted to current social and historical contexts, as well as the latest developments in organizational engineering and technology. The model draws on various elements from existing organizations, such as the federated consumer cooperative governance and ownership of *Migros* of Switzerland, the international scale and high-tech focus of *Amazon* and *Mercado Libre*, and the not-for-profit/for-purpose business model and external-community collaboration of *Mozilla Foundation* or *Linux*. The goal behind the model is to create a new innovative organizational design for the production and provision of goods and services that goes beyond existing organizations and is part of a possible future alternative economic system.

As abstract orientations, the model is inspired by values like solidarity, humbleness, mutualism, democratic economy, collaboration, horizontality, transparency, systemic-thinking, among many other similar ones that serve as guidance. Beyond

values, the project also follows certain practical principles such as, related to a *network approach*, *glocalism*, participative open-governance, *not-for-profit*, high-tech application, ethics-based functioning, and an *emergent-adaptive* dynamic reference.

A non-for-profit user-owned approach

On one side, the company will rely on a *not-for-profit* (NFP) or the *for-purpose* model, that means that it is not privately owned, and is focused on achieving a specific organizational purpose beyond private profit. As a result, there is no privately appropriated profit, unlike the shareholder-based private model. The NFP model operates based on the *non-distribution constraint principle*, which redirects all profit that exceeds expenses towards the organization's purpose. This model promotes income redistribution, avoids private hoarding of value and resources, and allows for the value generated by the enterprise to reenter the economy circularly in different areas or towards specific social aims.

The NFP model's legal framework has been in existence for a long time in almost all countries worldwide. This means it can be set up and function easily in almost any place with existing legal infrastructure. Due to the available infrastructure and the specific benefits of the NFP model, many successful examples exist, such as *Migros*, *Bosch*, and *IKEA*. The distributed income and value aspect of the NFP model, along with the constant economic re-circulation of resources, is an important component towards achieving a more socially-owned economy, fairer income distribution, and more ethical and sustainable production.

On the side of *user-ownership*, the company will be owned by the users or customers of the company. In a user-owned company, the users are also members and have a say in the company's decisions through democratic participation, such as voting on major decisions and electing board members. These types of companies are often structured as cooperatives or mutual organizations.

In that sense, the profits generated by the business are either shared among the members rather than being distributed to shareholders or private owners, or also they can be allocated in the *for-purpose* objectives that the company has. This model aims to prioritize the needs of the users rather than maximizing profits for investors. User-owned companies can be found in various sectors, including finance, agriculture, retail, and energy. Examples of user-owned companies include credit unions, where members also own the financial institution and can participate in decision-making, or even some specific stores in the retail supermarket sector where members also have ownership and voting rights.

The mission

General

Things! is a **mission-oriented company**, and in that sense, it's not oriented only to function as a normal company in the market, but also will be compromised to promote certain values and objectives.

As the general mission, the company mission is to create a cooperative enterprise that can contribute to a **more equal society** in the United States. We believe that by building a business that is owned and controlled by its members, we can help to create a more just and equitable society where everyone has an opportunity to thrive. Our focus is on empowering individuals and communities who have been historically marginalized and excluded from traditional economic systems.

In addition to our commitment to social justice, we are also deeply committed to contribute to a **more sustainable future**. We believe that by incorporating environmentally-friendly practices into our operations and supply chain, we can reduce our impact on the planet and help to create a healthier and more sustainable future for all. This includes sourcing materials locally, reducing waste, and implementing renewable energy solutions.

Finally, we are dedicated to **empowering the alternative economy** ecosystem. We believe that by collaborating with other mission-driven businesses, we can build a stronger and more resilient alternative

economy that prioritizes people and the planet over profit. Our goal is to be a part of a larger movement towards economic justice and sustainability, and we believe that by working together, we can achieve this vision.

equality

sustainability

empowerment

Specific

As the specific mission Things!, we will be centered around empowering the emerging alternative economy ecosystems specially to function as an online store where coops and not-for-profit companies can sell their products and services. We believe that by giving them a place to sell their goods and services, we can contribute to a more equal society in the US. In that sense, our platform will be designed to support these organizations by providing them with a space to showcase their products and services to a wider audience, thereby increasing their reach and impact.

In addition to empowering alternative economy projects, we are committed to incorporating local and global communities in our decision-making process. We believe that by doing so, we can build a more sustainable future that benefits everyone. Our platform is designed to be transparent and collaborative, allowing all stakeholders to provide input and feedback on

the company operations and strategy. By working together, we can create a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

It's not only voice and vote that communities need, also is the case that many communities face financial and technological barriers that prevent them from thriving. That's why our company is dedicated to providing financial and technological resources to communities in need. Whether it's through direct donations, grants, loans, or access to our technology and tools, the idea is to develop an ecosystem not just for the company itself, but also for the alternative ecosystem and for communities in need.

Finally, we are committed to selling affordable products at cost. We believe that everyone should have access to high-quality, sustainably-produced goods, regardless of their income. By selling products at cost, and thus removing private shareholder's profit, we can ensure that everyone has access to the essentials they need to live a healthy and fulfilling life. This commitment to affordability is central to our mission, as we believe that access to basic goods and services is a fundamental human right.

extend
voice
tools
afforability

The United States opportunity

In *Things!* we believe that there is currently a great opportunity and duty to establish an alternative retail network in the United States. There are three main opportunities that we see for the US to develop this project: the first opportunity is related to the current macro-contextual situation, the second opportunity pertains to the concrete socio-cultural and financial capacities that exist in the country, and the third one is a market-entrance opportunity given that there are no yet competitors to Amazon in the alternative economy ecosystem.

Macro-contextual factors

The current macro-contextual situation revolves around the effects of the neoliberal culture that has been dominant in the US since the 1970s. This situation presents a two-sided opportunity.

On one hand, the unregulated hegemonic financial-cultural capitalism that has characterized these times has kept the alternative economy underdeveloped and restrained for some time, especially in sectors related to platform services, in contrast to other Western countries like those in Europe. Therefore, we see that we have a duty, and a lot of potential to establish a new non-private retail platform in the US.

On the other hand, the frequent harsh corporate practices in the US have generated a growing skepticism towards neoliberalism and created momentum for the alternative economy. This has led to the emergence of a growing movement of alternative cooperatives and not-for-profit companies in various economic and cultural sectors, that are trying to compete with these big private corporations, and which we intend to be part of also.

Thus, there is not only a significant opportunity to expand a new alternative retail network in the US, but also a growing movement of alternative economy ecosystems that can generate an emergent network effect around the retail network that *Things!* intends to establish through collaboration and learning between these ecosystems.

Beyond all of that, we need to consider that if significant cultural and economic shifts occur in the United States, they may have a substantial international impact. This is because the US holds significant influence across many regions of the planet, which could benefit people and ideas in other countries.

The other more specific factors are related to the values, capacities of people and organizations in the United States:

Firstly, there is a growing interest in alternative economic models and the idea of shared ownership and control. This is evidenced by the increasing popularity of cooperatives and other forms of worker-owned businesses in various sectors, including high-tech. This interest is partly driven by a desire for greater economic democracy and fairness, as well as a recognition of the potential benefits of cooperative ownership and management in terms of productivity, innovation, and employee satisfaction.

Secondly, there is a strong culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in the US, particularly in the high-tech sector. This culture values risk-taking, creativity, and collaboration, and is often characterized by a focus on solving big problems and disrupting traditional industries. These values and attitudes can be harnessed to support the development of a high-tech cooperative that is innovative, agile, and responsive to changing market conditions.

Thirdly, there is a well-established ecosystem of support for high-tech startups and entrepreneurs in the US, including access to funding, mentorship, networking opportunities, and other resources. This ecosystem includes a range of institutions and organizations, such as accelerators, incubators, VCs, and industry associations, which can provide valuable support and guidance to a high-tech cooperative in its early stages.

Overall, these sociocultural factors create a favorable environment for the creation and growth of a high-tech cooperative in the US. By leveraging these factors and building on the existing ecosystem of support for entrepreneurship and innovation, a high-tech cooperative can thrive and make a significant contribution to the US economy and society.

Market-entrance factors

There are several market-related entrance reasons and opportunities that exist for a not-for-profit user-owned retail company to compete with Amazon and other private digital retail corporations:

Firstly, Amazon has been facing criticism over issues such as worker treatment, monopolistic practices, and data privacy, which has led to growing public scrutiny and calls for greater accountability. A not-for-profit cooperative retail company that prioritizes worker rights and ethical practices will differentiate itself from Amazon and appeal to consumers who are looking for more socially responsible alternatives.

Secondly, a cooperative retail company can leverage the advantages of the cooperative model, such as shared ownership and democratic decision-making, to create a more inclusive and participatory business that involves workers, customers, and other stakeholders. This can lead to a more engaged and motivated workforce, as well as greater customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Thirdly, a *glocally* oriented retail company can focus on building a strong community presence and supporting local economies, which can help it to compete with Amazon's vast scale and reach. By emphasizing local sourcing, community partnerships, and a personalized shopping experience, a cooperative retail company can differentiate itself and appeal to customers who are looking for more personalized and authentic retail experiences.

Overall, a cooperative retail company has several opportunities to compete with Amazon by focusing on worker rights and ethical practices, leveraging the advantages of the cooperative model, and building a strong community presence. By doing so, it can offer consumers an alternative to Amazon's dominant position in the retail industry and create a more socially responsible and inclusive business model.

Beyond the case of Amazon and other private digital-retail corporations, the retail sector is expected to grow in the next few years.

Digital commerce has been on a steady rise for many years, and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated its growth even further. Many consumers have shifted to online shopping due to the convenience, safety, and wider product selection offered by digital retailers.

According to data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, e-commerce sales in the United States reached \$791.7 billion in 2020, up 32.4% from 2019. This represented 14.0% of total retail sales in the country, up from 11.0% in 2019.

Furthermore, eMarketer predicts that e-commerce sales will continue to grow in the coming years, reaching \$1.2 trillion in 2026. This growth is driven by factors such as the increasing number of consumers who shop online, the growth of mobile commerce, and the expansion of omnichannel retail strategies.

Overall, the digital retail sector is a significant and growing part of the U.S. economy, and it is likely to continue to play an increasingly important role in the future.

03. Governance model

To achieve a governance structure that is inclusive and open, efficient and empowering, it is necessary to establish an effective network-enterprise governance structure based on principles such as glocality, open-participation, equal distribution of roles and responsibilities, and technological application.

This can be achieved by implementing a concrete organizational governance structure that includes top-level and intermediate entities, multi-layered, glocal, distributed and participative decision-making mechanisms, and auditory entities for transparency and cohesiveness.

The inner-network

The **top-level organization** will deal with high-level systemic decisions and will integrate with the decentralized decision-making bodies of other institutions. It will encompass aspects such as the board of directors, consultative election rules, funding, and main intertemporal planning.

Intermediate entities will be decentralized sub-organizations that have a high degree of autonomy but are still dependent on the top-level organization. Auditory entities are responsible for supervising and enforcing rules and regulations to improve transparency and organizational function.

Decision-making should be based on *glocalization* and *technical relevance*, and should be divided into **geographical-based** and **expertise-based layers**. The former allows people to create local decisions based on their location, while the latter allows for specific decisions based on knowledge, experience, or other criteria.

Complex institutions should use different types of open-participation and people's engagement to deal with decision-making complexity. These include **direct-participation**, **indirect-participation**, and **liquid-participation**.

Overall, the proposed governance structure aims to create a distributed process of decision-making that is inclusive, efficient, and empowering.

Membership

As an user-owned open-membership company, any ideonic person and organization can be part of the company, and in that sense in decision-making, consultation, or beneficiaries of certain only-members benefits.

To achieve full membership, it is expected that individual and group users really believe in the mission and framing of the company, which will be the product of a process of time periods and proof of work.

A feasible and actionable member entrance model for the company should be based on clear criteria for membership and a transparent application process. The criteria should reflect the cooperative's values and objectives and may include requirements such as residency, occupation, or participation in community activities. The application process should be user-friendly, with clear instructions and guidelines, and provide opportunities for applicants to ask questions and receive support. The company should also consider ways to promote diversity and inclusion in its membership, such as outreach to underrepresented groups or special incentives for new members. Finally, the cooperative should regularly review and update its membership policies and procedures to ensure they are fair, effective, and aligned with its overall goals.

Every member of the company will have the capacity to vote on the continuation or removal of the company administrative boards once elections are settled up, by the principle of one person one vote, in addition to being capable of presenting themselves as eligible persons to be part of the board at the top-level and intermediate-level structures.

The middle-network

The inner network will encompass people that are in the process of getting full-membership in the organization, in addition with associates that just want to be associated with the company network, but without intention of being direct members. This could include normal users, producers of goods that want to sell on the platform, non-member workers, associated professionals, and many other categories that fit this network sphere.

Thus, without elective powers, the inner network members and associates will have certain capacities and benefits that the *outer-network* parts will have not, as for example the capacity to vote on certain non-elective issues, special discounts to buy products, the ability to sell certain goods in a preferential way, the capacity to send specific feedback, among other things.

The outer-network

An organization's wider network refers to the external entities that are connected to the organization in some way, but they are not an institutional part of the company itself, and therefore are inside the *wider-ecosystem*. This network can include suppliers, non-associated customers, partners, government agencies, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders who have an interest in the organization's activities.

The wider network is important for organizations as it can impact their operations and overall success. For example, a supplier's inability to deliver goods on time can affect the organization's production schedule, while changes in government regulations can impact the organization's ability to conduct business in a particular market. Therefore, it is essential for organizations to understand and manage their wider network to ensure their success and sustainability.

As related but a non-associated part of the company, the counter-network relation and participation will rely on mostly in consulting capacities and specific-issues decision-making if considered so by the inner-organization network.

The decision support system

In order to make efficient and inclusive decisions, it is necessary not only to rely on human expertise and good will, but also to establish an up-to-date decision support system that is accessible to everyone.

This open-source system, which will be powered by artificial intelligence, should not only provide assistance on shopping giving support and suggestions to users, but also will help on decision-making by presenting evidence, and other management related tasks that the company has to deal with.

Through this approach, engagement with these types of decision support systems can create a much richer user experience, reduce human error, enhance collaborative decision-making, and automate certain repetitive processes that can be streamlined.

Participation

In a user-owned participatory network-company, the participation of all members is crucial to the success of the business. To enable greater participation and collaboration, digital technologies can be utilized to enhance communication, decision-making, and information sharing among members.

One digital technology that can be used to facilitate participation in a cooperative company is a social collaboration platform. These platforms allow members to connect and collaborate with each other through features such as group messaging, video conferencing, document sharing, and project management tools. By utilizing a social collaboration platform, members can work together more effectively and efficiently, regardless of their physical location.

Another digital technology that can be used to enable participation is a mobile app. A mobile app can provide members with easy access to important information, such as meeting schedules, voting records, and financial reports. In addition, a mobile app can enable members to participate in polls, surveys, and other forms of feedback, providing them with a greater voice in the decision-making process.

A digital voting platform is another technology that can be used to facilitate participation in a cooperative company. This platform can enable members to vote on important decisions, such as the election of board members or changes to the company's bylaws, regardless of their physical location. By using a digital voting platform, members can participate in the decision-making process more easily and conveniently, increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Finally, a digital customer relationship management (CRM) system can be used to enable greater participation and collaboration between the cooperative company and its customers. This system can provide members with real-time access to customer data, allowing them to better understand customer needs and preferences. By utilizing a digital CRM system, members can work together to improve the customer experience and drive business growth.

Overall, digital technologies can play a crucial role in enabling participation in the economy of the future. By leveraging these technologies, people can work together more effectively, make better decisions, and achieve greater success in the competitive business landscape.

04. Systems-technology

The infrastructure behind Things! has two inter-related main components, that are the technological aspect behind the online platform, and the logistics system of distributions of goods.

Platform technology

As an ongoing project, the technology behind the concrete online platform is still being decided by technical teams. By now, we are considering the following platforms to start, that do not require higher levels of investment in software development:

As for the **e-commerce platform**, that is the backbone of any online retail store, *Things*, at the initial stage, is going to function in Shopify, that is a well-known reliable platform that provides the necessary tools to create and manage an online store, including product listings, shopping cart functionality, payment processing, and shipping and inventory management. Later on, when the network manages to build its own software developing capacities, there is going to be the intention to build an own platform infrastructure.

For the customer **Relationship Management** (CRM) software, that is the technology that helps manage customer interactions and data, including contact information, purchase history, and feedback, we are planning to use some of the Popular CRM tools for online retailers like HubSpot, Salesforce, and Zoho CRM.

As the **payment gateways** we are planning to integrate the versatile *Shopify* payment infrastructure, which is very reliable and secure, and has features to purchase with credit card payments, or use third-party methods that include *Paypal*, *Shopify Pay*, *Meta Pay*, *Amazon Pay*, *Google Pay*, and *Apple Pay*. Later on, the idea is to create an own payment infrastructure that the network can use, but also external customers that are not part of the network, similar to Mercadolibre's *mercadopago* in Latin America.

Related to **Social media marketing tools**, which have the intention to be an effective channel for driving traffic to the online store. We can use software services Hootsuite, Buffer, and Sprout Social for helping to manage and automate the social media presence.

In the same sense, related to **online performance mapping**, the website analytics tools that the platform would rely on are going to be as *Google Analytics*, that can provide

valuable insights into your website's performance, including traffic sources, user behavior, and conversion rates. This information can be used to optimize the website and marketing efforts.

The Content management system (CMS): A CMS such as WordPress or Drupal can help you create and manage the website content, including product descriptions, blog posts, and landing pages.

Email marketing tools: Email marketing is a powerful tool for engaging with customers and driving sales. Popular email marketing tools include Mailchimp, Constant Contact, and Campaign Monitor.

Live chat software: Live chat can provide customers with real-time support and help drive sales. Popular options include Intercom, Zendesk Chat, and Olark.

These are just a few examples of the technologies that can be useful for an online retail store. The specific tools and platforms you choose will depend on your business needs, budget, and technical expertise.

Logistics

In the initial stage of a cooperative retail company, logistics is a crucial aspect to consider for the efficient management of inventory, transportation, and distribution.

We will start with inventory management software to track inventory levels, manage orders, and monitor sales. This can help to avoid inventory-related issues and ensure that you always have the right products in stock. While the network works on building a logistic storage center for its operations, we will rely on *Third-party logistics* (3PL) and drop-shipping providers can also be considered to outsource logistics operations to experts who can manage inventory, transportation, and distribution needs. To empower the local economy, in this initial stage we will contract local courier services that are a cost-effective option for local deliveries, especially if they are not-for-profit and cooperative delivery organizations.

When the logistic network grows, it will have its own vertically-integrated logistics systems, just like Amazon or other retail companies have, that can be integrated with already existing associated logistics networks, and that can be used for Things! and other associated providers.

These systems will rely on the integration over the entire supply chain, from production and manufacturing to warehousing, transportation, and delivery. One of the key benefits of a vertically-integrated logistics system is that it can streamline operations, increase efficiency, and reduce costs. By owning and controlling each aspect of the supply chain, online retailers can eliminate many of the inefficiencies and bottlenecks that occur when working with multiple third-party providers.

To achieve this level of integration, online retail platforms need to invest in advanced technology and infrastructure. For example, they may use advanced software systems to manage the production and manufacturing of goods, ensuring that they are made to exact specifications and delivered on time.

In addition to having control over the production process, an own-integrated logistics systems also include a sophisticated warehousing system. This may involve using automation technology and robotics to manage inventory and reduce the time and labor required to fulfill orders.

Transportation is another critical component of a vertically-integrated logistics system. Companies may invest in their own fleet of vehicles or partner with logistics providers to ensure that goods are transported quickly and efficiently to their final destination.

Finally, last-mile delivery is also an important part of a vertically-integrated logistics system. By owning and controlling the delivery process, online retailers can provide a seamless and efficient customer experience, ensuring that goods are delivered on time and in perfect condition.

05. Business model

A business model is a plan or framework that outlines how a company will generate revenue and achieve profitability. It includes various components such as the company's target customers, products or services, distribution channels, pricing strategy, revenue streams, cost structure, and value proposition.

In essence, a business model is a description of how a company intends to be financially solvent. It provides a roadmap for the organization to follow and helps to align its activities with its overall strategy. A good business model should be feasible, scalable, and adaptable to changing market conditions. It should also be well-communicated and understood by everyone within the company, from top management to front-line employees.

The network-company income

The income of a company, also known as revenue or sales, is the amount of money generated from the sale of goods or services during a specific period of time. It represents the total amount of money that a company brings in before deducting any expenses, such as cost of goods sold, operating expenses, taxes, and interest payments.

Things! It's expected to rely on in three main different streams of income: *small margins* on products, *direct sales*, and the *initial funding*:

Small margin

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in ethical and sustainable production practices among consumers. Many people are willing to pay a premium for products that are produced in a socially responsible manner, and they want to support small cooperatives and local communities. However, it can be difficult for these cooperatives to reach a wider audience and sell their products on a large scale.

To address this issue, the *Things!* platform will present and sell the production of alternative enterprises, but also private business with a lower priority, with a small markup price to fund the platform. This platform can provide a marketplace for companies and people to sell their products and earn a sustainable income, while also making it easy for socially conscious consumers to purchase these products online.

The key to this business model is to maintain a fair price for the products sold on the platform, while also generating enough revenue to fund its operations. By keeping the markup price small, the platform can offer customers competitive prices, while still generating enough revenue to cover the costs of the platform, paying for logistics and delivery services, paying loans, and fulfilling the organization's proposed goals.

In addition to providing a platform for these alternative enterprises and socially conscious consumers, this business model can also benefit the platform itself. By building a loyal customer base that values ethical and sustainable production practices, the platform can potentially attract advertising and affiliate partnerships with other companies. It can also potentially charge membership fees for cooperatives or customers to access additional benefits or services.

Overall, an eCommerce platform based on reselling production of cooperatives with a small markup price to fund the platform has the potential to create a sustainable and socially responsible business that benefits everyone involved. By supporting cooperatives and socially conscious enterprises and consumers, while also generating revenue to fund its operations, the platform can become a key player in the growing market for ethical and sustainable products.

Vertical Integration

As a user-owned not-for-profit eCommerce platform, *Things!* will begin by focusing on establishing itself in the market, and other strategies beyond reselling third-party products, can be beneficial to consider vertical integration as a way to streamline its operations and increase its competitiveness. Vertical integration involves bringing the production and distribution of goods and services under one umbrella, by not being dependent on the *middle-man*, and allowing a greater integration over the entire supply chain.

At the initial stage of vertical integration, the company-network can start by exploring partnerships with local cooperatives that produce the goods it resells. By collaborating with these cooperatives and integrating their production processes into the platform's supply chain, the platform can have greater control over the quality and sustainability of the products it offers.

For example, if the platform has some focus in selling sustainable food products, it can partner with local agricultural cooperatives to source its produce. By working closely with these cooperatives and integrating their production processes into its own supply

chain, the platform can ensure that the products it sells are truly organic, sustainably grown, and of the highest quality.

In addition to sourcing its products from local businesses, the platform can also consider integrating its logistics and delivery operations. By establishing its own distribution network, the platform can have greater control over the delivery of its products and reduce its reliance on third-party logistics providers. This can help to improve delivery times, reduce shipping costs, and improve customer satisfaction.

However, it's important to note that vertical integration can be a complex and resource-intensive process, especially for networks that are still in the early stages of development. The platform will need to carefully consider the costs and benefits of integrating various aspects of its supply chain, and ensure that it has the resources and expertise necessary to effectively manage the integration process.

Overall, the initial stage of vertical integration can be a valuable step for the network-platform that is looking to increase its competitiveness and improve its control over its supply chain. By partnering with local cooperatives and integrating their production processes into its own operations, the platform can ensure that the products it sells are of the highest quality and produced in a socially responsible manner. This can help to establish the platform as a trusted source for ethical and sustainable products, and position it for long-term success in the eCommerce market.

Initial funding

To successfully launch a crowdfunding campaign, a marketing strategy should be developed which includes social media outreach, email marketing, and advertising to promote the campaign heavily. Additionally, offering compelling rewards or perks to potential backers is crucial to increase the chances of success.

Once the campaign is ready to launch, it should run for a set amount of time with regular updates provided to backers. After successful funding, it's important to fulfill the rewards promised to backers and deliver the project while keeping them informed about its progress.

Following these steps and planning carefully can help a startup or small business raise funds and generate interest in their project through an initial stage crowdfunding campaign.

Crowd lending

In addition to normal crowd-funding, crowd-lending is a form of crowdfunding that involves raising funds through loans from individual investors. For an eCommerce retail platform, a crowdlending campaign can be a valuable way to raise capital and expand operations.

The first step in launching a crowdlending campaign is to determine the funding needs of the eCommerce platform. This includes identifying the costs associated with expanding operations, such as hiring additional staff, increasing inventory, and improving marketing efforts. Once the funding needs have been identified, the platform can choose a crowdlending platform that best suits its needs.

When launching a crowdlending campaign, it's important to clearly communicate the goals of the campaign to potential lenders. This includes providing a detailed description of the eCommerce platform, its growth potential, and the intended use of the funds raised. The campaign should also outline the terms of the loan, such as the interest rate, repayment schedule, and any collateral requirements.

To maximize the success of the campaign, the eCommerce platform should develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that includes social media outreach, email marketing, and advertising. The campaign should be promoted heavily on social media channels, as well as through email marketing to potential lenders.

In addition, the eCommerce platform should offer compelling incentives to lenders. This can include exclusive access to the platform's products, discounts on future purchases, or other rewards that are relevant to the platform's target audience.

Once the campaign has been launched and funds have been raised, it's important to keep lenders informed of the progress of the platform's growth and repay the loans according to the agreed-upon terms. This can help to build trust and foster long-term relationships with lenders.

Overall, a crowdlending campaign can be a valuable way for an eCommerce retail platform to raise capital and expand its operations. By following these steps and carefully planning the campaign, it can be successful in achieving its funding goals and positioning itself for long-term growth and success in the competitive eCommerce market.

07. Final remarks

1. This document is framed as a theoretical framework that tries to give foundations for the *Things!* network-company project, as also later guidance to deployments of different concrete projects materializing in different geographical areas.
2. The developments presented here are meant to be actionable in practice, doable in the present historical context, and with the current states of technology and social capacities of existing societies.
3. The system architecture presented here is embedded in more abstract macro-systemic economic theory, sociopolitical mobilization programs, and concrete actions towards finding effective alternatives to current destructive economic dynamics.
4. This document is an open ongoing process of development, which means that it is open to feedback, collaboration, integration and further development.