

Democratising Work in the Software Sector: Insights on Cooperative Businesses

About

This study explores cooperative software businesses as an alternative model to address social-environmental crises and corporate short-termism. Researchers analyzed a dataset of 76 cooperative software firms and conducted interviews with members from 23 of them. The goal was to understand member motivations, democratic management practices, and the potential impact of this business model on the software sector.

Problem

Traditional corporate structures often focus on short-term financial gains, which can lead to negative social and environmental consequences. While cooperatives present a democratically managed alternative, software worker cooperatives have remained an under-explored area of research. This study addresses this gap by investigating their characteristics and potential for positive transformation in the tech industry.

Study Outcome

- Members of cooperative software businesses are motivated by both practical benefits, like greater involvement and work-life balance, and ideological alignment with Social Economy values.
- These businesses actively promote workplace democracy, stakeholder engagement, and long-term value creation.
- Three distinct profiles of members were identified: ideologically-driven, autonomy-seeking, and newly-aware members who join without prior knowledge of the cooperative model.
- While these firms care about their societal impact, the formal measurement of this impact remains a limited and underdeveloped practice.
- With broader support, cooperatives have the potential to play a transformative role in making the software sector more inclusive, participatory, and socially responsible.

Keywords

software business • workplace democracy • stakeholder engagement • social economy • ICT cooperatives • human-centered