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PROLOGUE: SOCIAL ECONOMY COMPANIES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN MOBILITY

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The “social economy” is formed of private organisations that people create in the attempt to address their own social demands, substantive problems and social aspirations (Chaves and Monzón, 2018). Social Economy Europe considers that, beyond a legal structure, social economy entities share the following characteristics: primacy of people and social goals over capital; democratic control by members (except in foundations); most surpluses reinvested to support sustainable development goals or services of interest to members or more generally; voluntary and open membership; defending and applying the principles of solidarity and responsibility; and autonomous management and independence from public authorities (Social Economy Europe, 2021). In fact, the organisations that make up the social economy have diverse legal structures, ranging from cooperatives and employee-owned companies to mutual societies, foundations and associations. The common thread is that they are all private endeavours with legal personality that are free and voluntary in nature, have democratic decision-making processes and are created by civil society to meet and resolve the needs of specific individuals or groups rather than to repay the investments of capitalist partners.

Social economy organisations (here we will focus on cooperatives and employee-owned companies) start from the principle of management by impact, in other words, there must be an intersection between the interests of the members of the organisation and the general interest. As such, cooperatives and employee-owned companies are businesses in which the execution of their activity must further the common good. They are organisations in which economic benefits are subordinate to impact. That is not to say that these types of companies do not want to make money, but that they consider it a means, rather than an end. This is an element of the utmost importance: the design of their production function is based on making a contribution to the community rather than maximising the appropriation of surpluses.

Mobility studies and plans do not only explore the development of systems to minimise the time and costs of transporting people and goods; they also analyse their contribution to social development, to the rational

use of scarce goods (like energy and urban space) and their environmental impact. An essentially monetarist vision would see the operator's role as basically oriented towards maximising profits and returns. And while regulators undoubtedly play a crucial role in setting operating standards, social economy companies are important actors in the transformation of urban mobility. Because of the way they conceive of their activity, cooperatives and employee-owned companies can play a role in areas such as accessibility and territorial integration and cohesion. This is particularly important for achieving a design that prioritises collective benefit.

For the purposes of this volume, it is worthwhile including the perspectives of several cooperatives and employee-owned companies operating in the free market as representatives of a segment of mobility operators that are essential to the development of a new urban mobility paradigm.

References

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