

Educational Module

Behind Digital Platforms

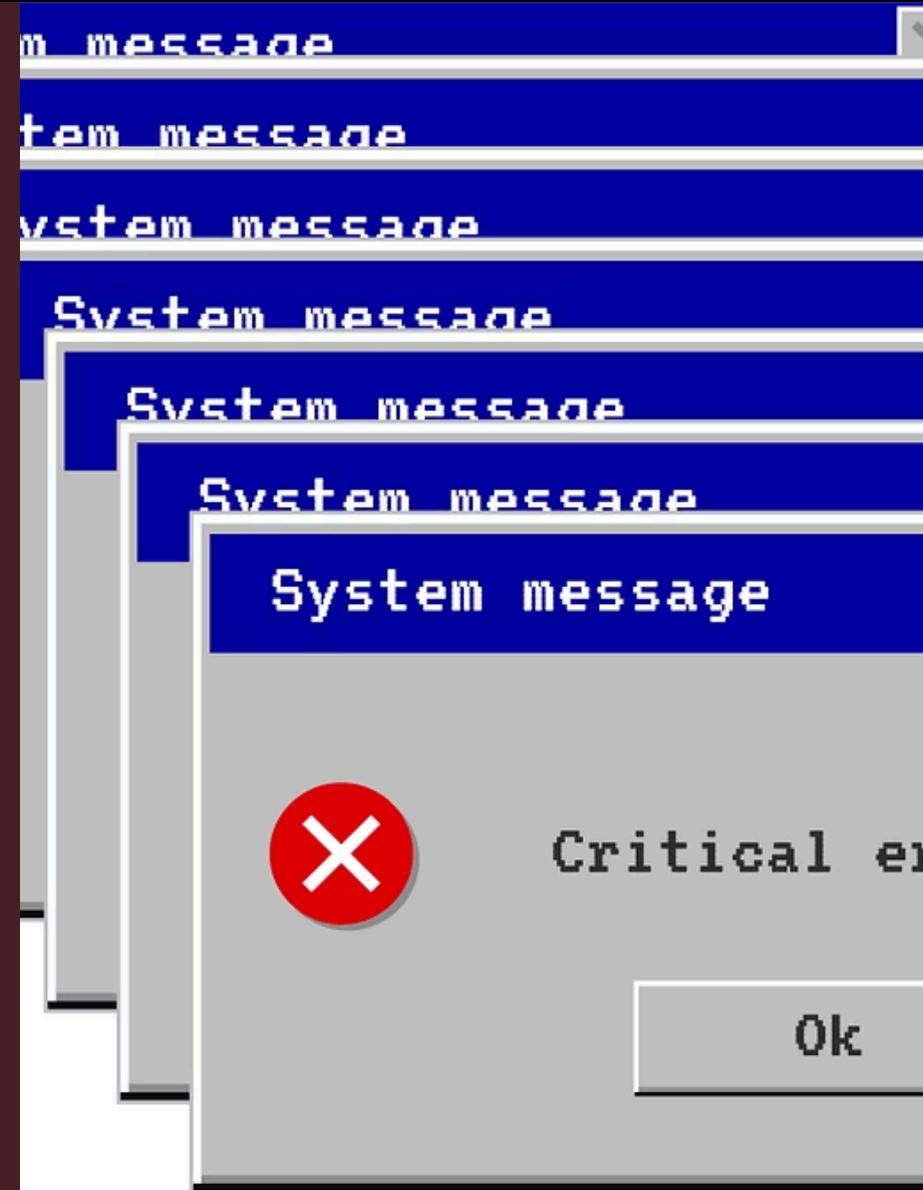
Thematic Unit 4 — So what can be done? Perspectives and some alternatives



A Word of Caution

First of all, let us be careful not to place too much trust in digital platforms and digital technologies in general. They may seem infallible, but they are **NOT!**

The more sophisticated platforms and technologies become, the greater the risks increase. For many reasons – IT-related, systemic, infrastructural (simply electricity supply) – not to mention cyber-attacks, we are increasingly exposed to risks of malfunction, non-functioning, and manipulation.



The perspectives ahead of us

Let us take an illustrative look at Amazon, a digital platform that we all know and use, in order to identify some possible perspectives.



We are talking about a private company with economic, financial, organizational, and "political" dimensions comparable to those of a State — and certainly not one of the poorest States! But how does it manage to earn so much money by delivering parcels?

Aggregate turnover of the top 25 tech sector companies in 2023: 1.584 trillion USD, approximately double Switzerland's GDP in the same year.

Minimum turnover of each of these top 25 companies: 12 billion USD.

Amazon alone generated revenue of 638 billion USD in 2024, not far from Switzerland's GDP (884 billion USD).

Amazon's Digital Platforms



Streaming



Videogames (Luna)



Domotics (Alexa)



Sound device (Echo)



Audiobooks (Audible)



Logistics



Music, Video, Sports (Prime)



E-Commerce



Twitch (Streaming)



Cloud (AWS)



E-Books (Kindle)



Microcredit & Finance
(Amazon Pay)



Movies (IMDb)

📄 It does not only deliver parcels! Amazon is everywhere, with highly diversified business branches. In fact, parcel delivery is among its less profitable businesses. Amazon is a huge constellation of other companies (a holding). Let us start by focusing only on its digital platforms, listed above.

Beyond Platforms: The Amazon "Ecosystem"

Let us now widen the view beyond platforms to other types of activities within the Amazon "ecosystem," still connected to digital technology, but expanding beyond digital platforms:

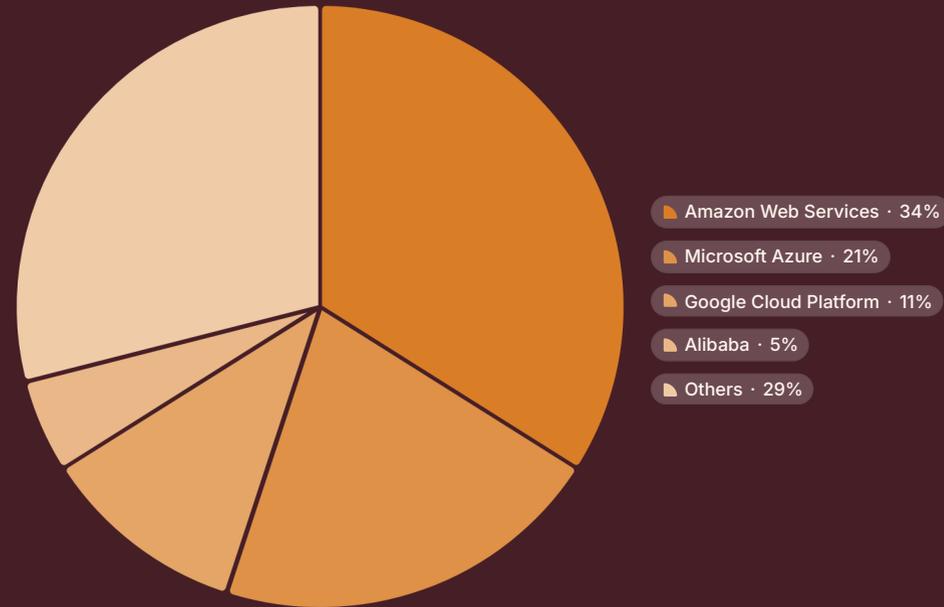


Material Infrastructures Owned by Amazon

Finally, let us add the material infrastructures directly owned by Amazon:

- 1 Warehouses**
Of various types and sizes
- 2 Data centers**
Global server infrastructure
- 3 Submarine fiber optic cables**
Undersea connectivity
- 4 Solar power plants**
2.5 GW capacity in Europe and 8.5 GW globally
- 5 And much more...**

Global Cloud Market Share





What are the implications for our future lives?

Amazon and other global digital companies – what implications do they have for our future lives?

There is no real danger or alarm. On the contrary, these companies seem to make our lives easier. And that is true – otherwise, how could they continue expanding?

At the same time, since we live in a hybrid environment and are digital citizens (as seen in the previous thematic units), **every click and every action of ours is highly influenceable by these few companies**, which are increasingly influential, powerful, and present in all our activities.

So what?

Digital platforms are useful, efficient, and entertaining – and we all use them. However, they also have aspects and implications that we do not know and that are worth understanding.

This does not mean not using them, boycotting them, banning them, or destroying them. It is, however, worth knowing that there are many other platforms and several alternative organizational models – less well-known, perhaps less "comfortable" to use, but functional.

But they are essential to maintaining a minimum plurality of actors and tools necessary to live as digital citizens within a "digital democracy."

Should we at least take some action?

Concrete Examples of Alternatives

Platform Cooperativism

Platform cooperativism = cooperative + digital platform.

Platform cooperativism (or the concept of a cooperative platform) is an organizational model. These are activities that use a website, a mobile app, or a digital protocol to sell or connect goods or services.

They are based on democratic decision-making processes and shared ownership of the platform by workers and users. There are no shareholders or a single entrepreneur, but stakeholders who are also partial owners.

 **A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons voluntarily united to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.**

This would involve applying a similar organizational model, adapted to the era of the digital economy.

Concrete Examples of Alternatives

Digital Data Partnership

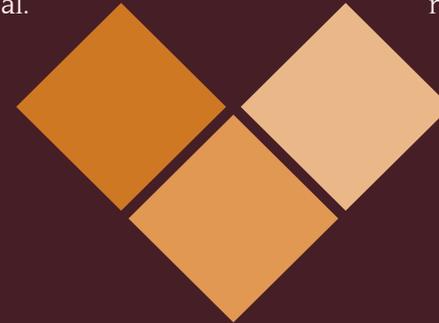
Digital data partnerships are initiatives that bring organizations together around a common and shared objective (for example, city management/administration), pursued through data sharing and usage.

Joint Objective

Organizations unite around a shared goal.

Institutional Leadership

Public institutions lead, not large private firms.



Data Governance

Define decision rights, processes, and accountability.

In short, the digital data partnership process determines data governance: who makes decisions, how they are made, and how decision-makers are held accountable for the collection, use, sharing, or control of data within an organization or group.

Usually, large private companies propose to institutions (again, for example, a city) how to manage, collect, and use data. **The digital data partnership process reverses this perspective.**



Concrete Examples of Alternatives

Decidim.org

Decidim is a digital platform for citizen participation born from the experience of the city of Barcelona. It is free and open-source web software managed by a large and active community.

Who can use it?

Decidim can be used in a public or private organization, with hundreds or thousands of potential participants, such as a city council, an association, a university, an NGO, a trade union, a neighborhood association, or a cooperative.

What does it do?

It provides features and tools to foster participatory decision-making, and the generated information (data) remains the property of the institution or collective that adopts it.

Adoption

It is already used by thousands of organizations.

Concrete Examples of Alternatives

FairBnB

It is an alternative to AirBnB and functions in a very similar way.



Community Investment

Half of every commission paid by guests of a property within the network goes directly to local communities, projects, and cooperatives.



Fair Practices

The platform also emphasizes proper tax payments and fair conditions for workers.



Cooperative Structure

FairBnB is structured as a cooperative, with around thirty people involved in management.



One Property Rule

The rule for hosts is that they may rent out only one of their properties for short-term rental, and no one may manage more than one property.



TRAVEL WITH
YOUR
VALUES



Final Reflection

Examples of alternatives are countless — platforms, organizational models, governance forms. They are little known but they exist.

We, in our own small way, can make a significant contribution to building the digital citizenship of the future:

1

Experiment with open-source

Occasionally experiment with open-source and open-access resources

2

Use alternative platforms

Make purchases from alternative platforms

3

Promote awareness

Participate in or promote initiatives to raise awareness among decision-makers (for example, within our municipality) to negotiate with large digital platforms

4

Verify information

Verify the reliability of online information

These are small and feasible actions to try to **guide the techno-political machine** discussed in previous thematic units, rather than simply endure it as mere cogs within it.

Thematic Unit 4

Bibliographic / Web References for Further Study

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Online article - [The many faces of Amazon capitalism - Intotheblackbox \(2024\)](#)

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