PLATFORM GOVERNANCE, NONPROFIT INTERMEDIATION, AND LOGISTICAL PLANNING: COMPARATIVE EVIDENCE FROM ALTERNATIVE URBAN EXCHANGE SYSTEMS IN TURIN

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Digital platforms are often examined through the lens of corporate extraction, yet non-corporate urban platforms also deserve attention as organizational and planning infrastructures. This study presents a structured secondary comparative analysis of two digitally mediated exchange initiatives in Turin, Italy—CeloCelo and COSO—to examine how platform rules, intermediary structures, and material constraints shape the delivery of socially useful exchange outside conventional market logics. The analysis is grounded in published qualitative evidence on the two cases, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and direct engagement with the platforms, and it limits inference to organizational patterns that are explicit in the source accounts. CeloCelo is a citywide donation platform that connects individual donors with nonprofit associations, which collect and redistribute goods to beneficiaries. COSO is a neighborhood-based blockchain-supported lending system designed to foster non-monetary exchange through complementary social currency. Although both initiatives support non-capitalist circulation, they do so through sharply different governance arrangements. COSO embeds inclusion and reciprocity through token rules, co-designed norms, and non-punitive exchange. CeloCelo, by contrast, achieves broader operational reach by simplifying user interaction and assigning coordination and trust functions to nonprofit intermediaries. The comparison shows that the practical viability of alternative digital exchange depends not only on ethical intent but on governance design, organizational capacity, and logistical feasibility. The article contributes to management and planning research by clarifying how platform architecture shapes coordination and accountability, by identifying nonprofit intermediation as a decisive operational capacity, and by showing why fulfillment logistics remain central to service delivery in community-based urban systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies now structure an expanding range of organizational, civic, and urban processes. Much of the literature on platform-based exchange has focused on corporate actors, platform monopolies, and the concentration of digital power. Yet this emphasis, while necessary, can obscure a parallel field of experimentation in which digital tools are designed to coordinate exchange, improve access to resources, and support local collective needs outside dominant commercial models [1, 4, 21]. These initiatives matter not only because they broaden the empirical landscape of platform research, but also because they reveal how civic exchange is organized when digital coordination must be coupled with institutional trust and practical delivery.

This article examines two such arrangements in Turin, Italy: CeloCelo and COSO. CeloCelo is an online donation platform that allows individuals to offer goods while registered third-sector associations collect and redistribute them to people in need. COSO, by contrast, is a neighborhood-scale digital system that enables residents to lend and borrow underused objects through a blockchain-based wallet application and a complementary community currency [2, 22]. Both initiatives are rooted in local civic goals, both rely on non-corporate digital tools, and both organize exchange beyond conventional market transactions. At the same time, they differ markedly in scale, access rules, forms of intermediation, and operational design.

For management and planning research, these cases are analytically valuable because they connect platform governance to organizational design, service operations, and urban coordination. In such contexts, success is not determined by technology alone. It depends on who is allowed to transact, how trust is stabilized, how exchange is matched with operational capacity, and how the physical characteristics of goods affect storage, movement, and delivery. These questions sit directly at the intersection of platform governance, nonprofit operations, urban service coordination, and community planning.

The central argument advanced here is that alternative digital exchange systems should be studied as organizational designs whose effectiveness depends on the alignment of governance rules, intermediary capacity, and material logistics. More specifically, the article makes three linked contributions: it compares two contrasting models of access and accountability, it specifies how nonprofit and community intermediaries stabilize exchange, and it demonstrates why fulfillment constraints condition the practical reach of digitally mediated exchange. A platform may embody strong normative commitments, but if participation remains too thin or coordination demands exceed local capacity, it will struggle to function. Conversely, a simpler platform may scale more effectively when responsibility is allocated to trusted intermediaries capable of managing operational complexity.

The article addresses three research questions:

1. How do CeloCelo and COSO organize access, coordination, and accountability?
2. What role do nonprofit and community intermediaries play in stabilizing exchange?
3. How do logistical and spatial constraints influence the practical viability of these systems?

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section situates the study within work on digital platform governance, community economies, and urban care infrastructures. The third section presents the empirical basis and comparative method. The fourth section examines the two Turin cases in detail. The fifth section develops the management and planning implications of the comparison. A concluding section follows.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Digital Platforms Beyond Corporate Urbanism

Recent work in digital geographies and urban studies has challenged the assumption that platforms are necessarily synonymous with corporate platform urbanism. Alongside dominant commercial platforms, scholars have documented non-corporate and civic-oriented digital infrastructures that support participation, local coordination, and alternative forms of exchange [1, 3, 21]. These initiatives demonstrate that platform design is not politically neutral: digital tools can reproduce market-centered relations, but they can also be configured to support collective provision, local solidarity, and more inclusive organizational forms.

For management and planning researchers, the key issue is therefore not simply whether a platform exists, but what kind of governance architecture it embodies and whether that architecture can sustain reliable service delivery. Platform rules determine access, shape incentives, define responsibilities, and influence transaction costs. They also affect how decisions are distributed between software, users, and organizational intermediaries. In applied settings, these design choices have direct consequences for efficiency, reliability, inclusion, scale, and administrative workload.

Community Economies, Supportive Infrastructures, and Organizational Mediation

The literature on diverse and community economies provides a useful lens for understanding exchange systems that do not conform to conventional market assumptions [10–12]. This body of work emphasizes that reciprocal, non-market, cooperative, and ethically negotiated forms of exchange already exist and should be analyzed on their own terms rather than only as marginal deviations from capitalism. Such a perspective is valuable here because both CeloCelo and COSO deliberately organize circulation through donation, lending, reuse, and non-monetary exchange.

At the same time, studies of care and community infrastructures show that socially useful exchange depends on supportive arrangements rather than intention alone [7, 8, 18]. Care is sustained through practical systems of coordination, trust, access, and resource movement. In operational terms, this means that the governance of alternative exchange is inseparable from organizational capacity. Community-based systems require actors who can validate needs, manage uncertainty, coordinate retrieval, and absorb friction when transactions do not proceed smoothly.

This makes intermediary organizations analytically central. In some platforms, trust is generated by peer-to-peer design; in others, it is stabilized by an institutional actor that filters participation and manages operational risk. The distinction matters because intermediation can simultaneously improve reliability and concentrate hidden workloads.

Planning, Logistics, and the Materiality of Exchange

Alternative exchange platforms do not manage abstract goods. They manage objects with weight, size, fragility, transport requirements, and spatial consequences. These material characteristics matter for planning and operations. A system circulating baby goods, strollers, appliances, or furniture faces issues of storage, pickup scheduling, fit with recipient dwellings, and delivery costs that cannot be solved by interface design alone [18].

From a planning perspective, this means that platform viability depends on the alignment between digital matching and physical fulfillment. Where goods are bulky and storage is limited, the organizational logic

of the platform must account for transportation, dismantling, and last-mile delivery. Where exchange is neighborhood-based, proximity may enable trust and responsiveness, but it may also limit participation and throughput. These tensions make CeloCelo and COSO particularly useful comparative cases for understanding the managerial, operational, and planning dimensions of alternative digital systems.

EMPIRICAL BASIS AND METHOD

This study develops a structured, source-grounded comparative interpretive analysis of two urban cases in Turin using qualitative evidence reported in the published case material on CeloCelo and COSO [2]. The empirical basis is intentionally limited to the evidence documented in that published account. For CeloCelo, the source study reports 17 semi-structured interviews conducted with the project manager and representatives of associations using the platform, together with direct access to the platform from the perspective of a registered association. For COSO, the reported evidence includes participant observation at two launch events, semi-structured interviews with members of the local association and researchers involved in the project, and direct engagement with the application in related research contexts [2]. Because the present article does not collect new field data, it treats these materials as bounded case evidence for comparative synthesis rather than as newly generated primary observations.

The method adopted here is a structured comparative case analysis designed to strengthen transparency and analytical restraint. Rather than generating new field data, the paper extracts only those organizational and operational features that are explicitly described in the published account and compares them through a common analytic matrix. The comparison focuses on five operational dimensions that are explicit in the case descriptions:

1. governance structure and access rules;
2. valuation and exchange logic;
3. trust and risk management;
4. logistical coordination;
5. spatial scale and service reach.

This procedure does not create new evidence, but it improves internal consistency by requiring that every cross-case inference be anchored in traceable, source-reported features. The analysis is therefore interpretive but deliberately conservative: it does not claim direct causal estimation, and it avoids conclusions that exceed the stated scope of the underlying qualitative material.

This design is appropriate because the two cases are not identical projects. They differ in maturity, technical architecture, territorial scale, and organizational objectives, and those differences are analytically important rather than methodological noise. COSO represents an early-stage, neighborhood-based model with strong rule formalization, whereas CeloCelo represents a more operationally mature, citywide model embedded in nonprofit service networks. The comparison therefore does not assume performance equivalence; instead, it isolates how contrasting institutional arrangements shape coordination, trust, and fulfillment under different operating conditions. Taken together, the cases illustrate two distinct ways of organizing resource circulation through digital means: one based on neighborhood lending and co-designed token rules, and the other based on citywide donation mediated by nonprofit organizations.

Table 1 summarizes the core characteristics of the two cases.

Table 1: Comparative profile of the two Turin cases

Dimension	COSO	CeloCelo
Organizational form	Neighborhood-based community exchange initiative	Citywide donation platform supporting nonprofit redistribution
Lead actors	Local association in Borgo Campidoglio in partnership with a University of Turin informatics research group	Casa del Quartiere di San Salvario with Officina Informatica Libera and a network of nonprofit associations
Territorial scale	Small neighborhood (Borgo Campidoglio)	Multiple neighborhoods across the city of Turin
Operational status	Testing phase, supported by launch events and guided use	Established platform joined by new associations on a regular basis
Exchange form	Lending and borrowing of underused objects	Donation and redistribution of essential and second-hand goods
Digital architecture	Blockchain wallet app with tokenized object representation	Simple web platform structured as a sticker album interface
Access rule	Residents registered on the app can lend and borrow	Everyone can donate; only nonprofit associations can request and collect goods
Empirical basis	Participant observation at two launch events, interviews with association members and researchers, direct app engagement	17 semi-structured interviews, direct platform access as association, direct platform engagement

COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

COSO: Co-Designed Community Rules and Neighborhood-Scale Lending

COSO (*Comunita Organizzata Scambio Oggetti*) is based in Borgo Campidoglio, a small neighborhood in northwestern Turin characterized by strong local social ties and a history of neighborhood regeneration. It was launched by a local association already active in sustainable consumption, circular economy, and community cohesion, in partnership with a research group from the Department of Informatics at the University of Turin [2]. The system is built around a blockchain wallet app designed to support non-monetary exchange at community level. The case is analytically useful precisely because it captures an early-stage attempt to formalize neighborhood exchange through digital rules rather than through informal sharing alone.

From a management perspective, COSO is significant because it formalizes exchange through explicit, co-designed rules. The project was developed through meetings involving researchers, developers, association members, and potential users. In the source account, governance is not merely embedded in software; it is explicitly negotiated and translated into app functionality. This creates a relatively transparent connection between community values and operational rules.

The most distinctive feature of COSO is its valuation and incentive system. Each object is represented by a non-fungible token, and every object is assigned the same value: 1 coso. This flat value rule deliberately avoids replicating market hierarchies. The system also uses a complementary social currency (*cosi*) to support inclusion and continued participation. Users receive 30 cosi upon registration, objects made available generate additional credit, borrowing costs 1 coso per day, lending yields a reward, and undamaged return generates a further incentive [2, 22]. Within the reported evidence, the design therefore gives value to circulation and participation rather than to ownership alone.

COSO also adopts a distinctive approach to trust and accountability. The platform does not rely on deposits or punitive review systems. Instead, issues such as damage or non-return are expected to be addressed through the relationship between participants rather than through automated sanctions [2]. This reduces formal control mechanisms and reinforces a collaborative ethos. At the same time, it assumes a level of social willingness and community cohesion that may be difficult to sustain in broader or less cohesive settings.

Operationally, COSO is intentionally simplified despite its blockchain foundation. Users do not need advanced blockchain knowledge, because the technical complexity is mediated through interface design. Available objects are visible on the home screen, and coordination occurs partly outside the app: once an item is selected, the borrower uses the owner's email address to arrange collection. This reduces in-app complexity and allows flexible interpersonal coordination.

However, the same design that makes COSO normatively distinctive also limits its scalability. The platform remains in a testing phase, participation is still concentrated in a small local user base, and the research group retains technical control over core system design [2]. The available evidence therefore supports a bounded conclusion: the system is operationally coherent within its immediate setting but remains territorially and institutionally constrained. The neighborhood scale supports trust and local alignment, yet it also constrains throughput, expansion, and service reach.

CeloCelo: Nonprofit Intermediation and Citywide Resource Coordination

CeloCelo was launched in 2016 by the Casa del Quartiere di San Salvario (CdQ), a prominent community and cultural center in Turin that hosts both cultural activities and social services. The project emerged from an earlier physical swap-party initiative and was later developed into a digital platform with financial support from a local foundation. Its digital infrastructure was created by Officina Informatica Libera, a local association active in open-source culture and digital support [2]. In contrast to COSO's testing-phase configuration, this longer operating history gives the case particular value for assessing how digital coordination is sustained through established nonprofit routines.

Unlike COSO, CeloCelo is not primarily designed to create a new currency system or a novel model of peer-to-peer exchange. Its main purpose is operational: to match supply and demand for useful goods while reducing the storage burden associated with physical donation. The platform acts as a coordination interface between private donors and nonprofit associations already working with vulnerable populations. In managerial terms, this makes CeloCelo a platform for service support rather than a platform for direct reciprocal exchange, and it shifts the center of platform performance from interface design to organizational execution.

The platform is organized around a sticker-album metaphor. The section *CELO* allows any user to post an item for donation, while *MANCA* allows only registered associations to post a request for an item needed by one of their beneficiaries. Additional sections such as *Players*, *Rules*, and *Winners* reinforce the game-like design. Once a user posts an item, the platform generates a sticker with an image and label; additional details include the donor's contact information, item dimensions, further photographs, and transport-related notes [2].

This interface design serves two operational purposes. First, it makes the platform simple and intuitive for users with varying levels of digital experience. Second, it embeds a clear governance asymmetry: everyone may contribute goods, but only nonprofit associations may receive them. This asymmetry is fundamental to the platform's practical reliability. Associations do not merely collect items; they serve as guarantors of legitimacy, fit, and need. In other words, CeloCelo stabilizes trust through institutional intermediation rather than through peer-to-peer transparency or automated reputation systems.

The source account emphasizes that this model improves the practical reliability of donation. By channeling booking through associations, the platform reduces ambiguity over recipients and lowers the risk of direct transaction disputes. It also incorporates an expiration date for listed items, which discourages the use of the platform simply as a passive disposal mechanism [2]. The platform therefore reshapes donation into a more selective and coordinated process.

The organizational advantages of CeloCelo, however, are accompanied by substantial logistical demands. The platform is especially valuable because many requested goods are difficult for associations to store, including furniture, strollers, and other items for babies and children. Yet precisely these goods are also difficult to move. The case evidence shows that CeloCelo does not routinely provide dismantling or transport services; instead, associations rely on church vans, informal helpers, and ad hoc arrangements to inspect, collect, and deliver large items [2]. The physical size of donated furniture, and the mismatch between large donor-side items and small public-housing units, creates a persistent operational constraint.

Thus, CeloCelo achieves broader spatial reach than COSO because it connects donors and associations across multiple parts of the city. Within the limits of the reported evidence, however, that reach depends on the ability of nonprofit actors to absorb hidden logistical work. The platform itself is digitally simple; the operational system surrounding it is not. Its effectiveness relies on organizations that can transform digital listings into real delivery.

Governance Comparison: Access, Trust, and Operational Capacity

The comparison between the two cases highlights two distinct governance models for alternative digital exchange. The contrast should not be read as a simple ranking of better and worse design; rather, it clarifies how different rule systems distribute trust, workload, and operating capacity.

COSO emphasizes participatory rule design, egalitarian valuation, and neighborhood reciprocity. It encodes community values directly into the exchange mechanism through flat object valuation, complementary social currency, and non-punitive conflict handling. Its strength lies in normative clarity and coherence. On the available evidence, its main challenge is that the system remains dependent on a small user base and on continued technical stewardship by the research group.

CeloCelo emphasizes administrative clarity, organizational mediation, and citywide functionality. It uses a much simpler technical architecture, but its operational model is institutionally richer because associations validate need, manage booking, and carry out the physical work of retrieval and redistribution. Its strength lies in practical reach and continuity. Its main challenge is the burden of logistics, especially when handling large or spatially awkward items.

Table 2 summarizes the core governance and planning differences.

Table 2: Governance and planning comparison

Dimension	**COSO**	**CeloCelo**	**Management and planning implication**
Access	Registered neighborhood residents can lend and borrow	Open donation, but only nonprofit associations can request and collect	Access design determines inclusiveness, control, and administrative reliability
Exchange logic	Lending supported by complementary currency and tokenized objects	Donation and redistribution through nonprofit channels	Alternative systems may prioritize reciprocity or welfare-oriented transfer
Value rule	Every object valued at 1 coso	No internal currency; items categorized and matched by need	Valuation design shapes perceived fairness and user incentives
Trust management	No deposits or reviews; problems handled through relationships	Associations act as guarantors and operational filters	Trust can be socialized through community norms or delegated to institutions
Coordination channel	Digital listing plus email-based collection arrangements	Digital listing plus association-led booking, pickup, and redistribution	Off-platform coordination remains essential in both systems
Logistical burden	Relatively lighter object-flow model at neighborhood scale	High burden due to furniture, strollers, transport, and storage constraints	Physical fulfillment capacity is a critical determinant of platform viability
Spatial reach	Strong local cohesion, limited territorial expansion	Citywide relational reach through networked associations	Scale expands service scope but usually increases coordination complexity

Operational Workflow Comparison

The two cases also differ in the sequencing of their workflows. Figure 1 illustrates the basic coordination logic in each system.

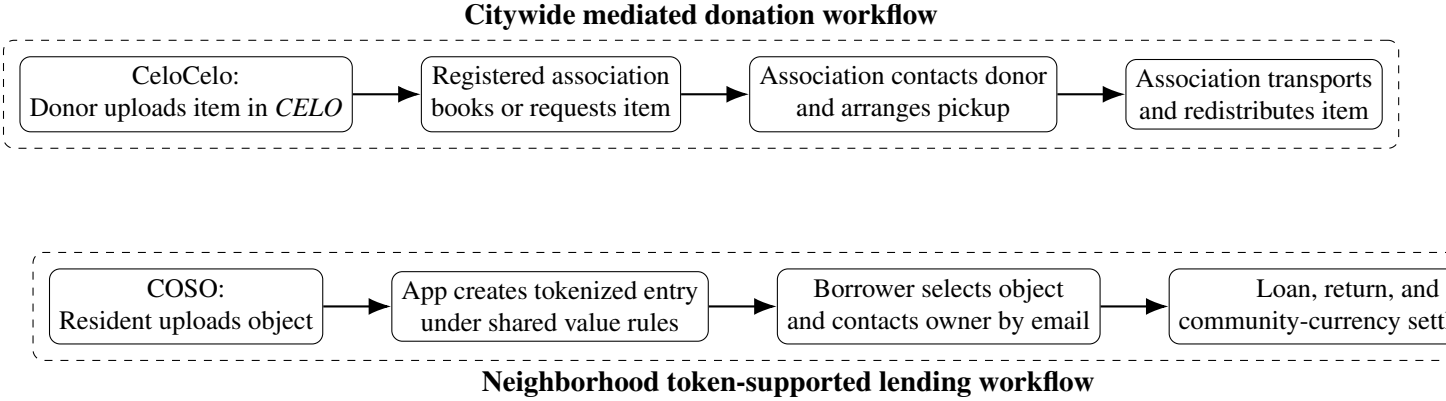

Figure 1: Source-grounded workflow comparison of the two platforms

The figure underscores that both initiatives depend on hybrid coordination. In neither case is the digital interface sufficient on its own. Read alongside the comparative evidence, the workflow makes clear that the decisive coordinating labor is simply allocated differently: in CeloCelo, it is concentrated in nonprofit associations and transport arrangements; in COSO, it rests on the joint operation of local norms, technical rules, and neighborhood user participation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING RESEARCH

Platform Design as an Organizational Decision

A first implication of the comparison is that platform design should be analyzed as an organizational decision rather than as a neutral technical choice. In both cases, software architecture is inseparable from governance architecture. The design of access rights, matching procedures, and conflict-management rules determines who participates, how accountability is defined, what workloads are created, and what kinds of failures can be absorbed.

COSO indicates that participatory design can be used to embed fairness, inclusion, and reciprocity directly into the exchange mechanism. This is a strong example of value-conscious platform governance. Yet the same case also shows that normatively rich design does not automatically produce operational reach. Without sufficient user density and broader institutional stabilization, the system remains territorially bounded.

CeloCelo indicates the opposite configuration. It uses simpler technical means, but the platform is embedded within a stronger organizational network. This makes the system more durable in practical terms. For management research, the comparative lesson is not that sophistication is unimportant, but that effective platform governance depends on the fit between system rules and the administrative capacities of the organizations surrounding the platform.

Nonprofit Intermediation as Hidden Capacity

A second implication concerns the role of intermediaries. In many discussions of digital exchange, platform design is imagined in peer-to-peer terms. The Turin cases show that this is only one possible model. In CeloCelo, nonprofit associations are not peripheral participants; on the evidence reviewed here, they are the core operational mechanism through which trust, eligibility, booking, retrieval, and final distribution are

managed.

This has two consequences. First, intermediary organizations make scale possible. Because they are already embedded in local welfare and community networks, they can connect supply with verified need across multiple neighborhoods. Second, intermediary organizations also absorb hidden costs. They carry the burden of coordination, travel, inspection, and delivery. Thus, intermediation increases platform reliability, but it also shifts operational strain onto organizations whose resources may already be limited. In this sense, scale is achieved less by software alone than by the capacity of existing institutions to absorb work.

For planning scholars and practitioners, this means that civic platforms should not be assessed only by interface usability or transaction volume. They must be evaluated in terms of the institutional workloads they create and the support structures required to sustain them.

Material Logistics as a Core Planning Variable

A third implication is that the material characteristics of exchanged goods are central to planning outcomes. This is particularly visible in CeloCelo, where the success of the platform is tied to the circulation of bulky and difficult-to-store items. The very types of goods that make the platform socially valuable also create substantial logistical constraints.

This insight has wider relevance. Community platforms dealing with furniture, appliances, mobility aids, child-related goods, or other space-intensive items require planning for transport, storage, scheduling, and recipient-side compatibility. In such systems, digital matching cannot be treated as the endpoint of service delivery. Matching is only the beginning of a larger logistical chain, and the quality of that chain determines whether a platform produces real provision rather than only nominal coordination.

For operations and planning research, the implication is that platform evaluation should incorporate fulfillment feasibility. A platform that efficiently matches donors and recipients but lacks delivery capacity may perform well at the interface level while underperforming at the level of real social provision.

Scale, Reach, and the Trade-Off Between Cohesion and Capacity

The final implication concerns scale. COSO benefits from neighborhood proximity, which supports community alignment and relational problem-solving. However, the same proximity also limits the size of the exchange pool. CeloCelo reaches across a larger urban geography through a network of associations, which increases the scope of service and the diversity of available goods, but also increases coordination complexity and workload.

This suggests a trade-off with direct relevance for planning. Smaller-scale systems may achieve stronger cohesion and clearer social norms, while larger systems may achieve broader reach but require more formal coordination and stronger institutions. Effective design depends on recognizing this trade-off rather than assuming that scale expansion is an unqualified good. In practical terms, the comparison indicates that expansion is sustainable only when governance rules and operational capacity grow together.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined two alternative digital exchange systems in Turin through a structured secondary comparison of published qualitative case material. Although both CeloCelo and COSO organize non-market

exchange through digital means, they do so through distinct governance architectures.

COSO is built around co-designed community rules, a complementary social currency, flat object valuation, and non-punitive exchange. Its major contribution lies in demonstrating how digital infrastructure can encode reciprocity and inclusion at neighborhood level. Its main limitation is that operational capacity remains tied to a relatively small territorial base and to continued technical stewardship.

CeloCelo is built around a simpler interface, asymmetric access rules, and strong nonprofit intermediation. Its major contribution lies in showing how a platform can improve citywide circulation of socially useful goods by connecting donors to trusted organizations already active in welfare provision. Its main limitation is that logistical difficulty—especially transport, storage, and fit of large items—remains concentrated in the organizations that make the platform work.

Taken together, the cases show that the viability of alternative digital platforms depends on the alignment of governance rules, institutional intermediaries, and material delivery conditions. Ethical orientation matters, but it is not enough. Durable performance requires operational clarity, credible coordination structures, and attention to the spatial and physical realities of exchange.

Because the analysis is intentionally limited to source-reported evidence, the conclusions should be read as bounded analytical propositions rather than as universal performance claims. Even with that restraint, the broader lesson for management and planning research is that digital community platforms should be analyzed as practical organizational systems. Their effectiveness depends not only on participation and interface design, but on how they distribute responsibility, manage risk, and connect digital coordination to real-world service delivery. This perspective opens a productive agenda for future work on civic platforms, nonprofit operations, urban logistics, and community-based digital transformation.

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