Organizing, Mutual Aid, and Activism
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Slides downloadable at
thenexusofprivacy.net/data/fediforum-0607.pdf

Welcome! A few quick reminders

- We are dedicated to providing a positive, inclusive, and harassment-free experience for everyone – see the [FediForum Code of Conduct](#)

- No racism, ableism (including mental health shaming and stigmatization), sexism, microaggressions, gaslighting, sea-lioning, trolling, bullying, calling group members names, personal attack or harassment are allowed.

- If there are any problems, let me know – or the FediForum staff, via email at fediforum@proton.me or [@fediforum@mastodon.social](#) (Mastodon DM)

- We're using a riseup pad for notes. Please help if you can!

Goals

- Share learnings to date – and get feedback

- Identify successful examples, potential partners, barriers to progress

- Hone in on short-term opportunities – and add momentum to transformational "next generation" projects

- Kick off working group(s) and/or discussions on various networks

- Diversify participation - more Indigenous, Global Majority, European, anarchist, disability justice, youth, etc perspectives
  - Without losing existing diversity in race, gender, discipline

Agenda

- Background

- Discussion

  - Successful examples of organizing, mutual aid, activism on social networks

  - What are the *good* aspects of organizing on commercial social networks we want to keep?

  - Potential partners, barriers to progress

  - Short-term opportunities: how to leverage and improve current state of the art? What can make work in progress more effective? How to complement it?

  - Next generation platforms: How to complement and influence? How can we help?

- Action items and next steps

About the project

"Mutual aid. Organizing. Sharing, contextualizing, and making meaning of news and health information to counter propaganda and information overload. The use cases for alternative social networks – not controlled by techbro white supremacist CEO's working with their cronies in authoritarian governments – practically write themselves in today's world. And with so many talented social scientists, designers, systems thinkers, and developers directly impacted by DOGE, MAGA, et al, there are a lot of people with the right skills for these new networks to make rapid progress."

- <u>If not now, when?</u>

Some open questions in today's political climate …

- With protest getting criminalized, how long will public social network organizing be feasible?

- With dissenters getting targeted, how long will sharing news and discussions on public social networks be safe?

- With increasing surveillance, how long will private-but-not-encrypted social network organizing be safe?

- How can we use whatever time window we have effectively?

Progress so far

- [Notes (and thoughts) on organizing in the fediverses and the ATmosphere](#), focusing on perspectives of US-based progressive activists and the possibilities of current tools
- [More notes on Organizing, Mutual Aid, and Activism on decentralized social networks](#), where the first concrete actions started surfacing
- [Notes on genocide prevention and other kinds of organizing, mutual aid, and activism on social networks](#)

Short-term goals

- Prioritize some needs for key organizing, mutual aid, and activism use cases
- Present to partners incentivized to make progress

Social networks are only part of a bigger system

Tech stack

   secure messaging, collaborative editing, search, storage, video + audio streaming, hosting, etc

Social stack

   governance, norms, economic sustainability, onboarding, training, non-extractive collective/coop-based ecosystem …

The tech and social stacks we're using for this project and projects we partner with are prototype implementations with current technologies

   And we also want to catalyze next-generation implementations!

What do organizers use social media for?

Public communications

- getting the word out about events, action alerts, programs
- recruiting new people
- fundraising and asking for resources
- messaging
- sharing and contextualizing accurate news and information
- countering disinformation and propaganda
- connecting with journalists, politicians, civil society orgs

"Private" (ish) communications:

- within a group's leadership team
- between leadership and members
  - announcements
  - questions and answers
  - polls and surveys
  - discussions
- cross-group
  - coalitions of different groups
  - chapters in a distributed org
  - working groups of individuals
- sharing secure contact info
- initial contacts for "outsiders"

Social networks are **not** good for secure communications

- Use Signal!
- Make sure you check who's in your group chat!!!!!

But a Signal-only approach isn't enough:

- Hard to catch up on if you're not online all the time
- Notifications are overwhelming if you're in more than a few groups (or in large groups)
- Not useful for public communications

A pluriverse: multiple social networks

See Engine Room's report on [Exploring a transition to alternative social media platforms for social justice organizations in the Majority World](#)
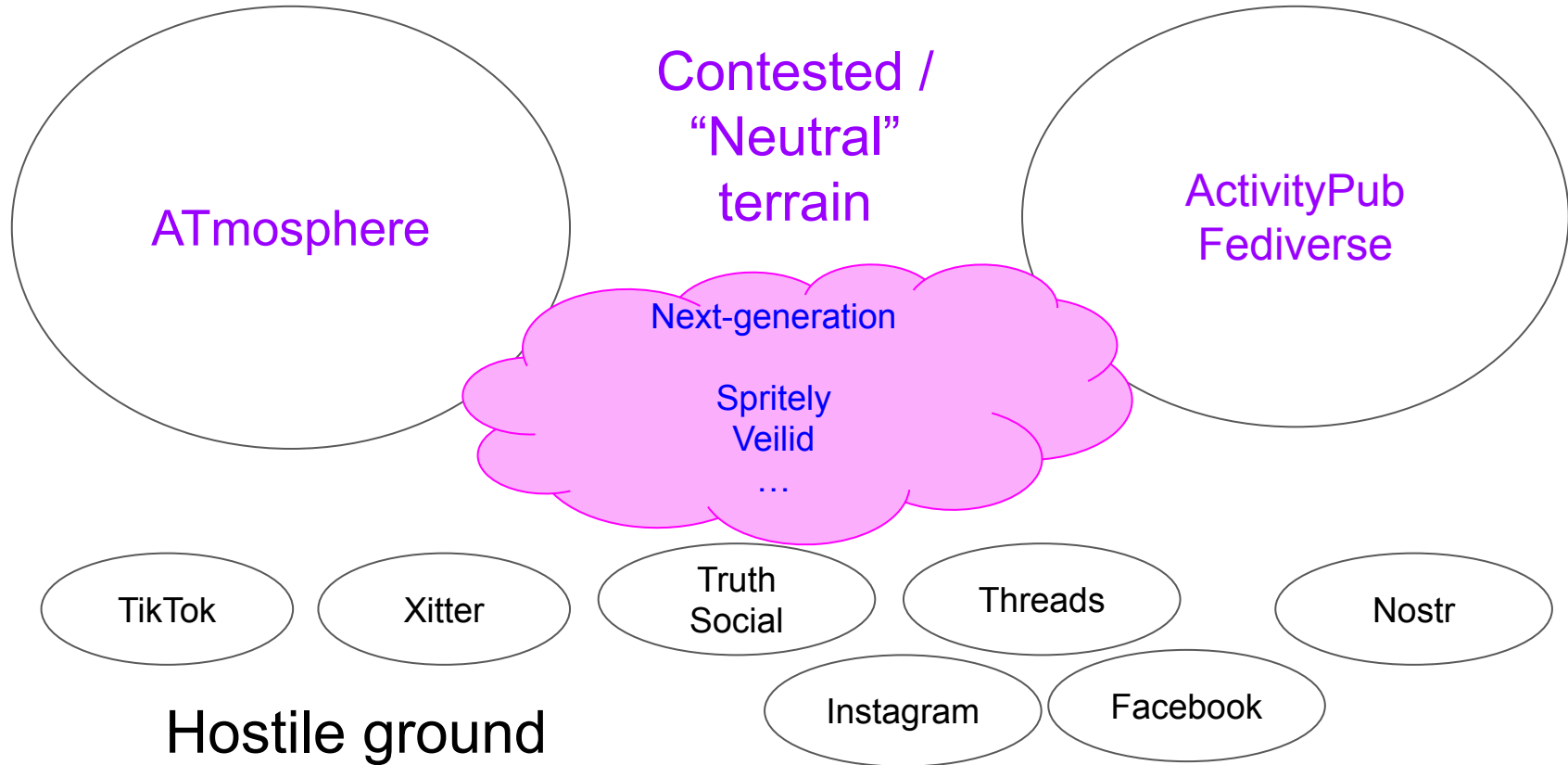
Need to think about operating in different kinds of spaces

- Friendly(ish) spaces, where we (mostly) control the platforms and maybe even the software
    - Can provide more safety and faster tech/social improvement here – but lower reach
- Contested and "neutral" terrain
- Hostile ground, platforms and software, controlled by and/or supporting fascists, eugencists, genocide perpetrators, white supremacists, etc
    - The technology and policies are stacked against us
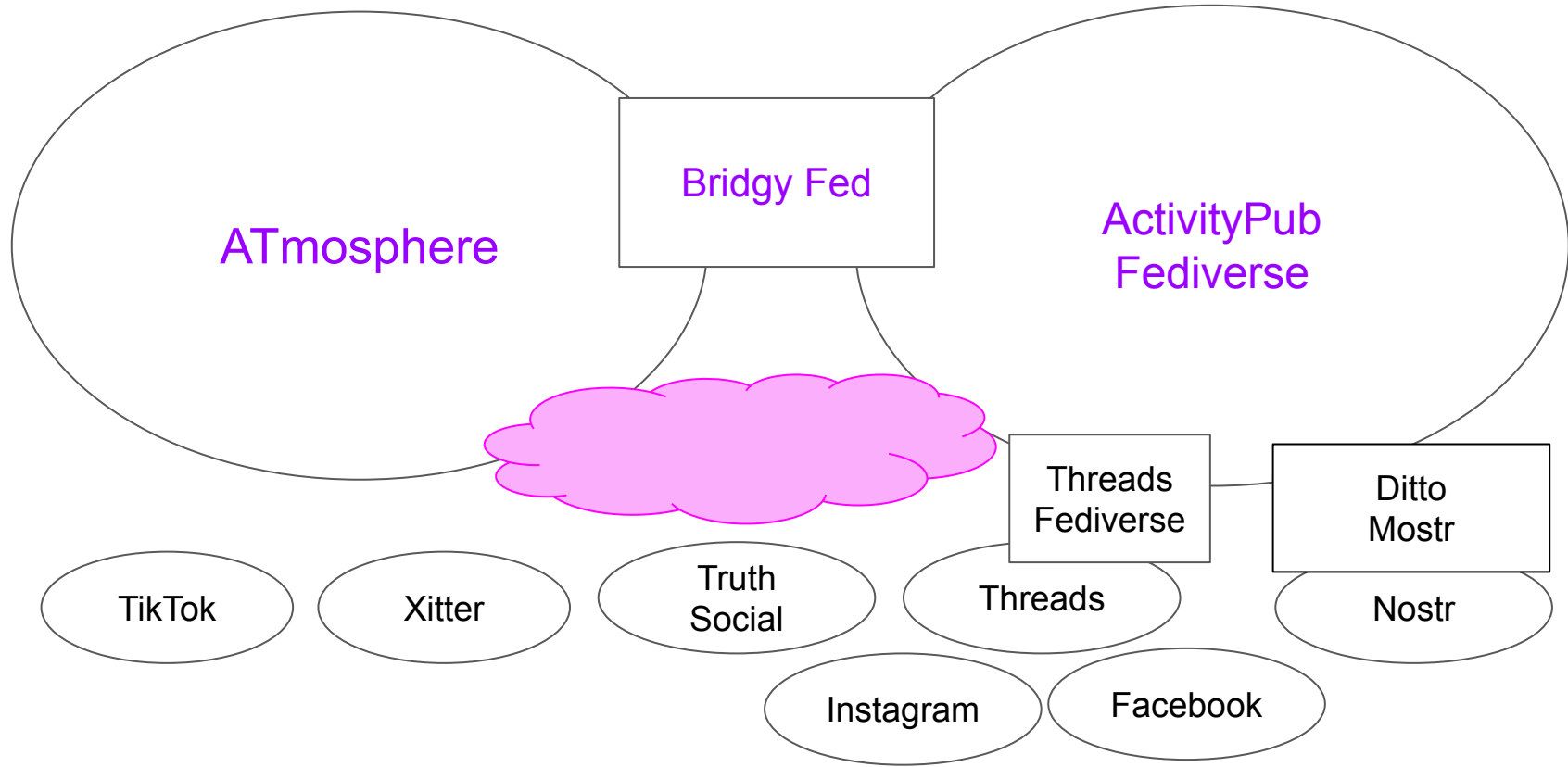   - It's where most people are today, so we need to operate there

Communities span networks. So do apps, bridges, and "low-tech" tactics

- cut-and-pasting, sending a link to a friend, list of accounts to block in a file, taking notes on paper, in-person discussions
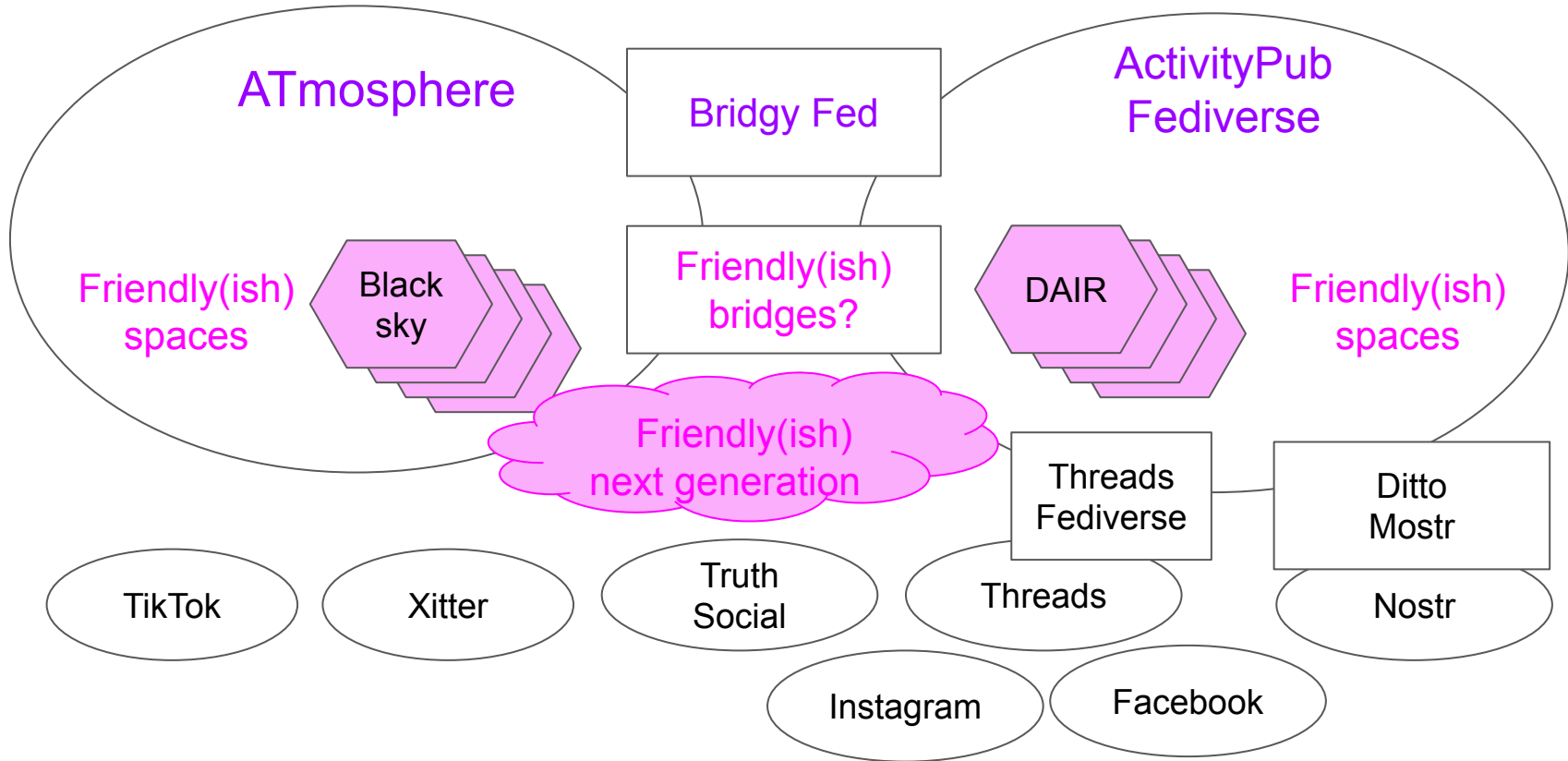
A simplified network architecture (not to scale)

ATmosphere

Contested / "Neutral" terrain

ActivityPub Fediverse

Next-generation

Spritely
Veilid
…

TikTok

Xitter

Truth Social

Threads

Nostr

Instagram

Facebook

Hostile ground

A simplified network architecture (not to scale)

ATmosphere

Bridgy Fed

ActivityPub Fediverse

Threads Fediverse

Ditto Mostr

TikTok

Xitter

Truth Social

Threads

Nostr

Instagram

Facebook

A simplified network architecture (not to scale)

Gaps across today's tech stack

- Accessibility (disability, income, language, Global Majority needs, …)
- Focus on safety for marginalized people (including threat modeling)
- Design Justice and Design from the Margins perspectives
- Consent-based architectures
- Communicating across differences (language, background, norms and customs, terminology, education/expertise)
- Offline-first
- Trauma-informed design
- Security and privacy
- "Distros" – packaged tech stack, with social support
- Ecosystem of coops, non-exploitative small business and individuals, community-focused non-profits, etc
- Focus on well-being and joy

Today's decentralized social networks are prototypes

Need to take a multi-pronged approach

- Find ways to leverage and improve the current prototypes
- Build whatever comes next
- Help people move from corporate social networks - without losing their support networks, ties to communities, and connections with friends and family
- Find ways to help organizers and activists who still need to operate on corporate social networks.

Fedi's strengths (at its best)

- "[The Fediverse was created by queer people](#)," very strong trans and non-binary presence
- Anti-fascist – [response to Gab](#), [anti-Meta FediPact](#) and the [Free Fediverse](#), reaction to Fosstodon
- [Focus on consent](#)
- [Alt text culture](#)
- [Networked autonomous communities](#)
  - DAIR's combination of PeerTube and Mastodon instances is a great example of *complementing* presence on commercial social networks
  - New structures like island networks, bubbles, [fedifams and caracoles](#) are paths forward

"Medium-sized Fediverse servers are especially well positioned to offer a model of high-context, culturally sensitive online community"

(From [Governance on Fediverse Microblogging Servers](#))

AT Proto's strengths (at its best)

- Large flat social networks and everything that comes with it
  - "A better Twitter" is useful even though it includes a lot of what so many people in fedi really didn't like about Twitter
- A different approach to "*high-context, culturally sensitive online community*"
- Lots of energy in the ecosystem including Brazil, Europe, Japan
- [Larger autonomous communities](#) (1-2 million people)
- In the US (and other geographies?), a critical mass of academics, organizers, progressive journalists and politicians are on Bluesky
  - Everybody knows how imperfect and fragile it is but it's a lot better than Twitter or Threads
  - And, everybody on Bluesky has an account for other AT Protocol apps as well
- Blacksky

High level use cases

- Genocide prevention in multiple languages
- Collective sense-making
- Safety and community defense – online, and helping in the physical world
- Mutual Aid
- Anti-fascist, anti-racist, pro-LGBTQIA2S+ organizing spaces
- Influencing broader narratives
- Amplifying public actions, events, media coverage, announcements, etc
- Developing, refining, and communicating strategy, plans, and priorities
- Inviting, recruiting, and onboarding new people (while remaining conscious of the risks of infiltration)
- Working in coalitions
- Disaster response
- Legislative and electoral activism
- Resisting authoritarian governments
- Finding community, support, respite, and joy

Key functionality from anti-genocide activists … and other use cases too!

- A safe online space, including
  - Context-aware moderation including languages other than English
  - Better solutions than blocklists
  - Quick intervention mechanism
  - Risk escalation level
  - Robust mechanisms for deplatforming bad actors
  - Non-public discussions
- Holding important information for longer periods so it doesn't get lost into the abyss – more than just pinning posts
- Widely disseminating information on commercial social networks, despite the intense censorship

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Fedi and ATmosphere potentially have major strengths here

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Huge gap today!

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"Design for pluriverse" including bridges and low-tech (manual) approaches

Keyword list working group

A specKeyword lists are imperfect, but useful!

Basic idea

- People from targeted communities develop context-aware keyword lists
- IFTAS partners to make them available to volunteer moderators
- AT Protocol moderation services can auto-label / auto-report
    - Auto-report lets moderators investigate context (e.g. reclaimed slurs) – Blacksky takes this approach for "hard R"
- Work with Mastodon et al to get better support for keyword blocking
    - At instance level
    - Individuals upload filters

Next step: start up a working group

- Host discussions on IFTAS Connect (because it's where the moderators are)

Better solutions than blocklists

- Interaction controls help - Bluesky, GoToSocial (but not Mastodon yet)
- Limited-visibility posts help - local-only (but not Bluesky or Mastodon yet), followers-only (but not Bluesky yet)
- "Private profiles" would be very useful, but they're not supported
  - Key functionality: "going private" when under attack
- "Collective defense" tools like original Block Party

See also:

- "A Blocklist is a Boundary": Tensions between Community Protection and Mutual Aid on Federated Social Networks, with some solid recommendations
- Steps towards a safer fediverse

Nonpublic discussions: "Facebook Group" alternative

User view

- Join / leave group
- Post / reply / like / etc
- See posts in home feed
- See recent posts in group
- Search posts in group
- See group members
- See and add events to group calendar
- Invite people
- Report posts to group mods

Moderator view

- Set group guidelines / code of conduct
- Request info on application form
- Invite / approve / reject members
- Hide / delete posts, remove members
- Mute members for a time period
- Pin posts
- Screen posts / replies before publishing
- Lock threads
- Domain block / allowlist
- Send announcement to members

Inviting, recruiting, and onboarding new people (to a network, instance, community, …)

Some or all of …

- Public presence: website, social media accounts, feeds, etc
- Signup form / survey
- Invitations from current members
- Informational meetings
- Initial vetting
- Lobby with greeters
- "Starter pack"
- Welcome team
- Welcome meeting(s)
- FAQ & Q&A
- Knowledge repository

Discussion

- Thoughts on the framing and priorities?

- Successful examples or organizing, mutual aid, activism on social networks

- What are the *good* aspects of organizing (etc) on commercial social networks we want to keep?

- Potential partners, barriers to progress

- Short-term opportunities: how to leverage and improve current state of the art? What can make work in progress more effective? How to complement it?

- Next generation platforms: How to complement and influence? How can we help?

Action items and next steps

Appendix - background slides

Tech stack for organizing (etc)

- Private(ish) messaging: 1-1, small group
- Medium-to-large community discussions
- Sharing, discussing, discovering, and curating media, links, status, etc
- Moderation tooling
- "Verification", vouching, web of trust, etc
- Threat modeling
- Events, calendars, scheduling
- Video + audio: streaming, meetings/ rooms, archived
- Time-banking
- Offers and wants
- Marketplace
- Job board
- Contact sharing

- Search
- Surveys
- Collaborative editing: text, presentations, videos, etc
- Project management and facilitation
- Decision-making
- Budgeting and accounting
- Payments

Infrastucture:
- Identity
- Storage
- Translation
- Platforms like ATProto, Veilid, Spritely, etc
- Mesh networks + Offline-first tech

Social stack for organizing (etc)

- "Communities"
- Values, norms and community guidelines
  - Including mutual aid orientation: sharing what you can, getting what you need
- Organizing structures
- Governance and "federated diplomacy"
- Moderation
- Sensemaking
- Care work
- Learning (including training and tutorials)
- Knowledge repositories
- Decision making processes
- Inviting and welcoming newcomers who share values and find norms compatible, and helping them while also helping them find ways to contribute and help

Example organizing structures

- Different channels for leadership, trusted members, broader group, network
- "Lobby" for newcomers (with greeters), followed by inviting people to group channel(s)
- Shared calendar
- Curated feed (for important announcements, actions, events, news stories, etc)
- "Welcome packet", FAQ, and newcomer discussion group and meetings
- Status page (possibly with limited visibility) so everybody can see what's up

Technology-independent:

- channels + lobby can be implemented on Signal, Matrix, Discord, forums, multiple fediverse instances (if you're a masochist), …
- Status page could be a web page, GoogleDoc, CryptPad, pinned thread in forum or Matrix channel, …

Pro-LGBTQIA2S+ spaces (1)

Recommendations From GLAAD's [2025 Social Media Safety Index](#)

- Strengthen and enforce policies and mitigations that protect LGBTQ people and others from hate, harassment, and misinformation; while also reducing suppression of legitimate LGBTQ expression.
- Improve moderation by providing mandatory training for all content moderators focused on LGBTQ safety, privacy, and expression; and moderate across all languages, cultural contexts, and regions.
- AI systems should be used to flag for human review, not for automated removals.
- Work with independent researchers to provide meaningful transparency about content moderation, community guidelines, development and use of AI and algorithms, and enforcement reports.
- Respect data privacy. Platforms should reduce the amount of data they collect, infer, and retain, and cease the practice of targeted surveillance advertising, including the use of algorithmic content recommender systems, and other incursions on user privacy.
- Promote and incentivize civil discourse including working with creators and proactively messaging expectations for user behavior, such as respecting platform hate and harassment policies.

Pro-LGBTQIA2S+ spaces (2)

Recommendations from Article 19's [Queer Resistance to Digital Oppression](#)

- Ensure privacy and data security, especially for highly marginalised users
- Create and use contextualised and nuanced methods to authenticate and verify users
- Delete all content from both devices after a user is blocked
- Remove real-name requirements and ensure rights to anonymity and pseudonymity
- Do not allow apps to save photos taken or received in the main device photo gallery by default
- More control and privacy with tagged photos
- Do not expose and out users through 'friend recommendations'; do not expose unintended information
- Combat hate speech, implement robust, contextualised reporting systems, direct lines of communication
- Implement app icon 'stealth mode' options (app cloaking/discreet app icons)
- Implement stealthy self-destruct/panic button (or similar) options for emergency situations
- Provide PIN and locking features, and added stealthy locked folders for the most sensitive content/chats
- Provide ephemeral, delete for all, and 'view once' text and media messaging options
- Provide methods and features to prevent non-consensual screenshotting of users' information
- Provide in-app video and photo blurring options
- Provide options to allow notifications to be paused for pre-set periods.
- Have an option for incognito mode (a mode only to be seen by people a user wants to be seen by)

Amplifying public links / actions etc.

Tactics for people to finding links to amplify:
- Private(ish) groups, chats, email lists
- Well-known account
- Feed or hashtag

Tactics for sharing
- Many people sharing the link + boosting others shares
  - Public (on various social networks)
  - In private(ish) groups, chats, email threads
  - 1-1 via texting, messaging, etc
- Algorithmic manipulation
- Get people with large audiences to share / reshare
- "Earned media"
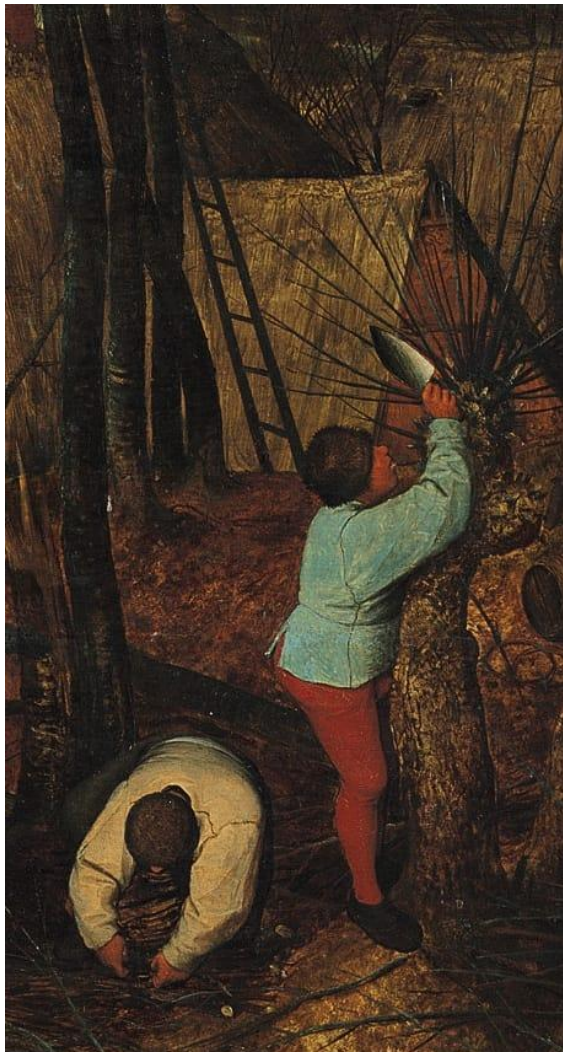
Collective sense-making

"At Unbreaking, we'll be spending the foreseeable future dredging up the knowledge from which we can build a durable and coherent sense of what is happening to us—collectively, and at scale."
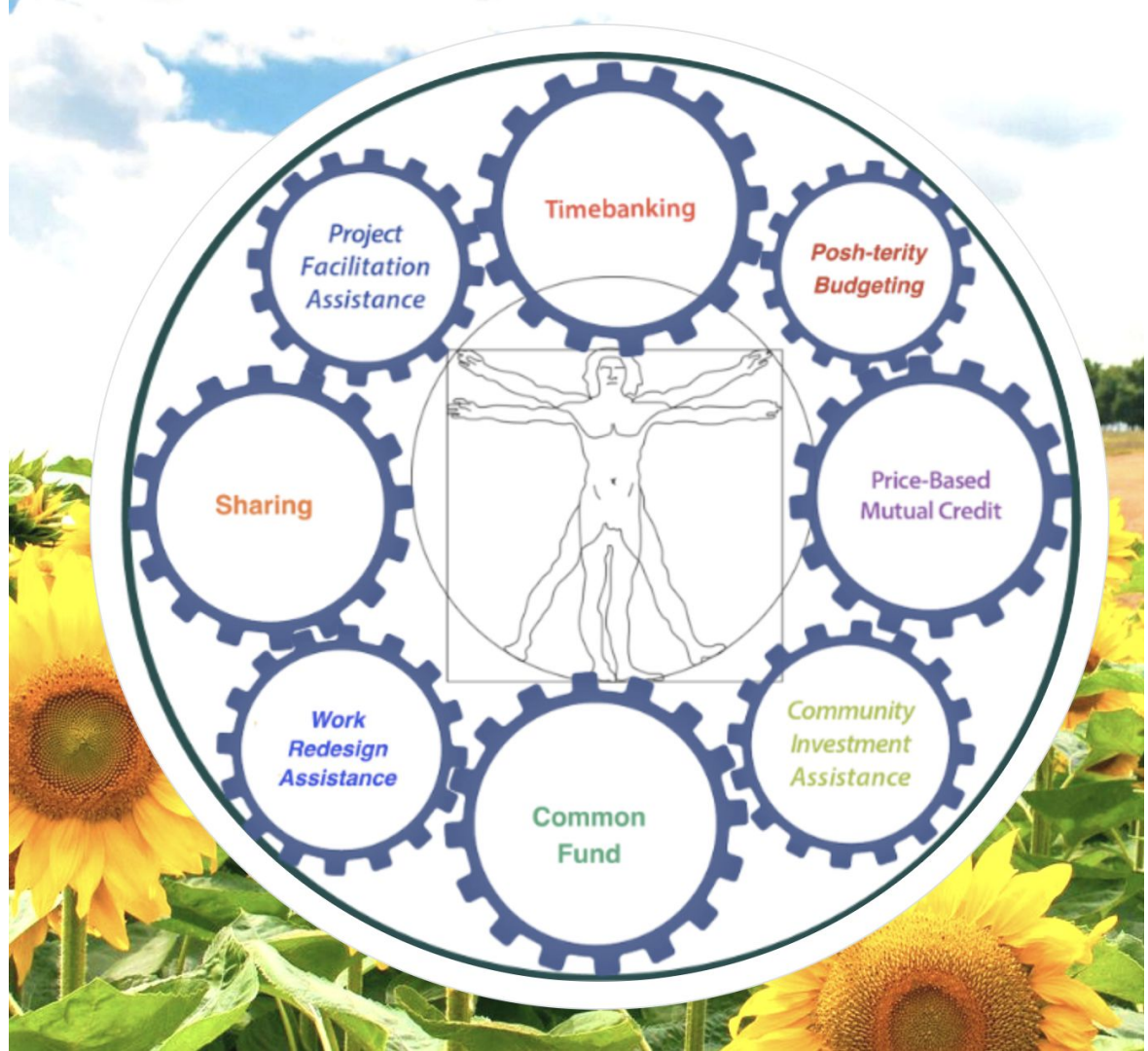
– Erin Kissane in The work at hand

Some clear overlaps with Anti-Genocide needs

- Holding important information for longer periods so it doesn't get lost into the abyss
- Widely disseminating on commercial social networks
- Tactical but useful: connections to tools like Canva for infographics and easy scheduling of content (e.g. Canva)

Mutual Aid

From

mutualaidnetworks.org

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