DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES

Cédric Gossart

Muge Ozman

Université Paris-Saclay, Univ Evry, IMT-BS, LITEM, 91025, Evry-Courcouronnes, France

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Platform-based social organisation
Definitions

- We take "social organisation" as those that take social and environmental problems at the heart of their activities

- Platform-based social organisations (henceforth "PSO") use special algorithms enabling people to exchange, access and provide data (or information, opinions, views, resources, skills …), and help them find similar others, participate in the governance of their communities, or communicate with other stakeholders.

Types of PSO
with respect to sector of activity

Nature of social issue addressed (& sub-categories)	Explanation	Examples
Civic engagement **(city, political, volunteering, petition)**	Participatory systems that incentivise citizens to engage in decision making processes (civic-techs)	Better Reyjkavik, Decide Madrid, Liquid democracy, Writetothem, Fragdenstaat
Finance **(civic crowdfunding, genre-specific crowdfunding)**	Crowdfunding for community projects or for projects that focus on a particular excluded group (like micro finance)	Co-city, Goteo, Buonacausa, Spacehive
Science	Participatory open science involving citizens (like citizen science)	Artportalen, Sauvages de ma rue
Sharing **(swap, recycle)**	Free swap, recycling, services, online time banks	Freegle, Olio, Peerby, No Lo Tiro, Graines de troc
Social inclusion **(homeless, immigrants, women, youth, disability, aged population)**	Platforms that aim to empower a certain group of society	Ruuti, Calm by Singa, Streetlink
Transparency and information disclosure	Participatory open data systems	Open Corporates, Wheelmap

Research question

- Although there is considerable literature on the practices of scaling in social enterprises in general, our knowledge of scaling strategies in PSOs are not developed.
- This is important so as to
  1. Provide manegerial insights to practitioners
  2. Form an initial step in understanding the dynamics of PSOs in general, in different environments
  3. Understand how the technology aspect changes the working of social enterprises
  4. Open the way for possible evaluations of their performance

Scaling and social organisations

- Scaling has been considered an important indicator of performance for social organisations (Dees et al, 2004; Bloom and Smith, 2010)

- Described as the extent to which the solutions generated by the organisation can be replicated in other sites to broaden social impacts (Heinecke and Mayer, 2012).

- According to the SCALERS model developed by Bloom and Chatterji (2009), there are seven critical capabilities associated with the successful scaling of social enterprises: Staffing, Communications, Alliance building, Lobbying, Earnings generation, Replication, and Stimulating market forces (Bloom and Smith 2010).

- But most scaling models do not fit the reality of operating primarily by means of a digital platform.

Challenges faced by PSO in scaling

- Although the existence of a standard algorithm may speed up scaling, there are many problems and challenges for PSO:
- Integration into the existing technological and socio economic context
- Uncertainty and skepticism from users
- Encapsulation in digital bubble, cut-off from the offline sectors
- Enhancing civic engagement, especially from vulnerable people
- Existing digital divide among users
- Locating digital skills

How do PSO scale up?
Method

- Initially selected popular platforms (Global Alexa ranking) (see appendix)
- Carried out a qualitative research aimed at identifying relevant themes in strategic orientations by analysing the activities of the digital platforms.
- Scan cases, prepare 1 – 2 page documents for all.
- Identify themes by recursively going between data and literature on scaling and digital platforms.
- Expanded the data if necessary
- New themes detected, by including the enterprises' blog posts, news and events, and partnerships and sponsors, and published information about them in the news outlets and their twitter feeds.

	GEOGRAPHIC IMPLANTATION	TECHNOLOGICAL REPLICATION	DATA BASED GROWTH
INDICATORS	• Close real space monitoring of individual encounters • Participation to Social movements • Real world foci • Strong local networks	• Provision of technical services to other platforms with the same social goal • in -house development of core technology	• Excessive focus on diffusion of the platform among final users
FOR WHICH ORGANISATIONS ?	• Embedded, historical links with sectoral networks • Founders often from sector • orgs facilitating encounters in real spaces • strong geographical differences in the social issue • strong founder or backing up organisation	• Founders often from digital sector • Encounters are predominantly online and/or on the spot • strong founder or backing organisation as tech development and coordination is expensive	• Mostly start-ups, new entrants in the sector • Resource constraints • Focus on efficiency
BENEFITS	• Better adaptation to local contexts • Could be better reach to target populations	• Technical and algorithmic control and standardisation	• Resource requirements often low
CHALLENGES	• Costly monitoring processes in local sites • Loss of technical proximity • Loss of algorithmic control	• weak links with sectoral networks • access to digital skills • costs of maintaining platform • technical (interoperability, verification of data, etc) • Difficulties in adaptation to the local context • Standardisation of algorithm	• Entrepreneurial difficulties • Maintenance of steady income flow • Access to sector specific networks • Mismatch between volunteers and beneficiaries
EXAMPLES	Diffuz, FREEGLE, La compagnie des Aidants, NQT, STREETLINK, Tousbenevoles	DECIDEMADRID, FIXMYSTREET, OPEN CORPORATES, Open street map, WHATDOTHEYKNOW, WHEELMAP, WRITETOTHEM, Entourage	• CALM BY SINGA, CO-CITY, Expertes, FORYOURNEIGHBOURHOOD.NL, GRAINESDETROC, HANDIVALISE, I-boycott, Jaccede, JEMENGAGE PARIS, OLIO FOOD SHARE, Open Food Facts – France, SPACEHIVE, STREETBANK

Concluding Remarks

- PSOs are different from traditional social organisations due to the existence of the technology at the heart of their operations
- There is a trade-off between idiosyncratic local dynamics and standardised global algorithms, which can interfere with the nature of their work
- To deal with these, PSOs use a range of activities that have both geographic dimension and global technology dimension
- In particular three types of strategies seem at the core: geographic, technology, and data driven.
- For future work we plan to look at the interplay between these orientations in more detail.

Activities of PSO

activity	With the technology (digital)	Real space
Working with volunteers	Online trainings Delegating some users the voluntary task of checking content	Offline trainings Working with volunteers in local sites
Managing partnerships	Aliances with other digital platforms Adding different sides for creating network effects (multisided platform dynamics)	Local partnerships / lobbying
Organising relations between users, beneficiaries, volunteers	Publishing user reputation Providing clear technical guidelines to users (open source) Online voting systems (crowdsourcing especially) Promoting information entry by users Invite audience networks	Participation to social movements and awareness rising Offline matching of audience Organizing events cafes and forums

Appendix: Initial cases analysed

NAME	FOUNDATION YEAR	STATUS	TYPE	COUNTRY
38 DEGREES	**2009**	**For profit**	**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**	**UK**
ARTPORTALEN	1999	Alliance	SCIENCE	SWEDEN
ARTSOBSERVASJONER	2008	Alliance	SCIENCE	NORWAY
BABYLOAN	2008	Non-profit	FINANCE	FRANCE
BEMYEYES	2014	For profit	INCLUSION / EMPOWERMENT	DENMARK
BETTERPLACE	2007	Non-profit	FINANCE	GERMANY
Buonacausa	2012	For profit	FINANCE	IT
CAMPACT	2005	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	GERMANY
CARENITY	2013	For profit	HEALTH	FRANCE
DEREV.IT	2013	For profit	FINANCE	ITALY
DOIT	2013	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	UK
FIXMYSTREET	2007	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	UK
FRAGDENSTAAT	2013	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	GERMANY
FREEGLE	2009	Non-profit	SHARING	UK
FREELYWHEELY	2014	For profit	SHARING	UK
GOTEO	2011	Non-profit	FINANCE	SPAIN
GRAINESDETROC	2012	Non-profit	SHARING	FRANCE
MIGRANODEARENA	2013	Non-profit	FINANCE	ES
Miimosa	2014	For profit	FINANCE	FRANCE
Health Unlocked	2010	For profit	HEALTH	UK
I-boycott	2015	Non-profit	DATA AND TRANSPERANCY	FRANCE

NAME	FOUNDATION YEAR	STATUS	TYPE	COUNTRY
NO LO TIRO	2010	Non-profit	SHARING	SPAIN
NQT	2006	Non-profit	INCLUSION / EMPOWERMENT	FRANCE
OLIO FOOD SHARE	2015	For profit	FOOD WASTE	UK
OPEN CORPORATES	2010	For profit	DATA AND TRANSPERANCY	UK
Open Food Facts - France	2012	Non-profit	DATA AND TRANSPERANCY	FRANCE
Open street map	2004	Non-profit	DATA AND TRANSPERANCY	UK
PEERBY	2011	For profit	SHARING	NETHERLANDS
SMIILE	2014	For profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	FRANCE
SPACEHIVE	2012	For profit	FINANCE	UK
STREETBANK	2010	For profit	SHARING	UK
STREETLINK	2012	For profit	INCLUSION / EMPOWERMENT	UK
TOO GOOD TO GO	2015	For profit	FOOD WASTE	DENMARK
Tousbenevoles	2011	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	FRANCE
VINSPIRED	2006	Non-profit	INCLUSION / EMPOWERMENT	UK
WEMOVE	2011	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	EU
WHATDOTHEYKNOW	2008	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	UK
WHEELMAP	2010	Non-profit	INCLUSION / EMPOWERMENT	GERMANY
WRITETOTHEM	2004	Non-profit	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	UK