

# Chapter 1

## Social and Solidarity Economy Web Information Systems: State of the Art

**Mariana Curado Malta**

*Algoritmi Center, University of Minho, Portugal*

**Ana Alice Baptista**

*Algoritmi Center, University of Minho, Portugal*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter presents the state-of-the-art on interoperability developments for the social and solidarity economy web based information systems. A search on the bibliographic databases showed that there are no articles on interoperability initiatives on the social and solidarity economy, so it was necessary to have other sources of information: a preliminary analysis of the platforms that support social and solidarity economy activities; and interviews with the representatives of some of the world's most important social and solidarity economy organizations. The study showed that the platforms are still not interoperable, but that there are efforts in this direction promoted by the social and solidarity economy organizations. It is clear that these organizations will need to find a common framework of understanding in order to implement interoperability among their platforms.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) can be broadly defined as a type of economy in which the goals are different either from the ones of the market economy or from the state's (Lechat, 2007).

Allegedly, these goals are neither centered in profit nor in individualistic needs. It is an economy that presents itself as a material and human alternative to capitalist economy (Cattani, Laville, Gaiger & Hespanha, 2009).

Social and solidarity economy organizations are composed of self-organized communities (e.g.

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geographical or sectorial). These organizations have machine-to-machine communication needs that are internal or external to them, for example to other kind of organizations like governmental organizations. In order to support these machine-to-machine communication needs, there is the need to provide interoperable solutions among the software platforms that support their activities.

According to the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative Glossary (Woodley, 2005), interoperability is the ability of different types of computers, networks, operating systems, and applications to work together effectively, without prior communication, in order to exchange information in a useful and meaningful manner.

As we are talking about exchange of information between machines (software), full compliance with international standards is essential.

The objective of this chapter is to draw the state-of-the-art on interoperability developments for the SSE area. This is part of the first phase of a larger project which aims to define an interoperability framework for the SSE. The search on bibliographic databases revealed no initiatives of interoperability between SSE platforms, so it was necessary to replace the literature review with two other sources of information: 1) Preliminary analysis of the platforms that support SSE activities; and 2) Interviews with the representatives of some of the world's most important SSE organizations. They showed that, in fact, the platforms are still not interoperable, but that there are efforts in this direction promoted by these organizations.

This article begins with this introduction, followed by a contextualization section in which the concepts of SSE and semantic interoperability are explained in more detail. The third section explains the methodology used for each of the tasks carried out in defining the state-of-the-art on interoperability developments for the SSE. The following section presents the state-of-the-art mentioned above. The article ends with the conclusions and future work, followed by the acknowledgments and references.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **The Social and Solidarity Economy**

The SSE reported in the literature as the “other economy” is a third way, distinct from the market economy and the central state power. It boils down in a pragmatic way to the union or association of people with a common purpose for the group and the society around them, where new values are born in opposition to practices of the capitalist world that are considered predatory. The SSE is characterized by solidarity and equality, the collective ownership of the work and its non-alienation (Cattani et al., 2009). The concepts of Social Economy and Solidarity Economy are quite similar but yet different, and because they are used by the organizations we studied to define themselves, we will detail them and their differences.

In the Social Economy the stress lies, as Cattani et al. (2009) stated, on the “search for an economic democracy associated to social utility” (p. 156). The Social Economy was born to solve social problems that the state did not manage to solve. This form of economy has its prehistory in the most remote human associations in Egypt, Greco-Latin antiquity, the Middle Ages in Europe, Imperial China or Pre-Columbian America. These were systems of mutual support, both professional and religious or artistic. Currently sociologists characterize the social economy in two ways: one from the standpoint of identifying the main legal and institutional forms found (cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations); the other by identifying the common features of companies and organizations (secondary profit, management autonomy, democratic control, the primacy of people and of the social object over the capital upon the distribution of surpluses) (Lechat, 2007).

On the other hand, Solidarity Economy is a concept broadly used in several continents, with varied meanings all around the idea of solidarity (Cattani et al., 2009). This concept spread at the

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