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Organizational diversity of social-mission platforms: Advancing a configurational research agenda

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ABSTRACT

Social-mission platforms (SMPs), or platforms that facilitate the interactions between stakeholders across sectors and help them exchange resources to make progress on social and environmental problems, have emerged on a global scale. However, despite their prevalence, little is known about how SMPs organize to orchestrate collective efforts of social innovation. Taking stock of information systems and organizational literature on platforms, we identify four dimensions inherent in platform organizing (i.e., identity, boundary, governance, and technology). We then analyze three case studies to interrogate how these organizing dimensions manifest in SMPs. As a result, we offer a conceptual framework highlighting the trade-offs SMPs face, specifying the design choices they can make, and exposing the interdependences between dimensions. We further illustrate how these interdependences inform a configurational perspective of SMPs and suggest avenues to advance a configurational research agenda to deepen understanding of SMPs as effective vehicles to address Grand Challenges.

1. Introduction

Acknowledging the complex, ambiguous, and systemic nature of societal challenges, scholars have emphasized the need for collective and concerted efforts to pursue social innovation and affect social change (Mair, Gegenhuber, Thäter, & Lührsén, 2023; Pache, Fayard, & Galo, 2022). Such societal challenges, often referred to as ‘Grand Challenges’, are global in nature but also manifest locally. They entail social and environmental problems of public interest, such as environmental degradation, rising inequality, and declining democracy, but the specification of these problems is subject to social and political interpretation (for a recent review, see Seelos, Mair, & Traeger, 2023). Therefore, strategies to tackle these challenges need to account for processes to diagnosing problems, developing ideas, and scaling solutions to generate social impact (Seelos & Mair, 2017). Scholars have noted that the effectiveness of these strategies hinges on the collaboration and coordination of multiple stakeholders with different but complementary interests, skills, resources, and mandates (e.g., governmental bodies, non-profit organizations, social enterprises, companies, and citizens) (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015). For example, the proximity to challenges allows social enterprises to develop innovative and effective solutions, which philanthropic and public support can help develop and scale for them to reach their full potential (Mair & Gegenhuber, 2021).

Digital platforms are recognized as effective vehicles to orchestrate collective efforts of social innovation (Mair & Rathert, 2021;

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Snissar Lobo, Sie, & Zapata, 2022). Digital platforms¹ serve as an interface between different groups of users, suppliers, or customers and leverage digital technologies and governance mechanisms to facilitate their interactions, the exchange of resources or goods and services, or innovation (Gawer, 2014; McIntyre, Srinivasan, Afuah, Gawer, & Kretschmer, 2021). In the last decade, digital platforms designed to facilitate the collaboration and coordination of various stakeholders across sectors with the explicit mission to make progress on social and environmental problems, to foster social innovation, or to promote social change have emerged worldwide and have attracted a growing research interest (Wegner, da Silveira, Marconatto, & Mitrega, 2023). Scholars have used various encompassing terms to refer to this phenomenon such as ‘mission-driven platforms’ (Acquier, Daudigeos, & Pinkse, 2017), ‘platforms for social causes’ (Presenza, Abbate, Cesaroni, & Appio, 2019), and ‘digital platforms for social purpose’ (Caridà, Colurcio, & Melia, 2022). In this article, we follow Logue and Grimes (2022)’s terminology and consistently use the term ‘social-mission platforms’ (SMPs).

Despite their prevalence, SMPs remain poorly understood as an organizational form to foster the collaboration and coordination of stakeholders pursuing social innovation. Combining elements of traditional social-mission organizations as well as traditional digital platforms, SMPs share opportunities but also challenges associated with digital technologies and organizing in a social-mission context. Creating a (virtual) space for stakeholders, SMPs reduce transaction costs and help mobilize ideas and resources for social change that exist “but are unevenly distributed or remain idle” (Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024: p. 139). Yet the development of such (virtual) space requires capital investments, which SMPs may struggle to attract given that their primary purpose is not profit maximization but to help stakeholders make progress on social and environmental problems (Cossey, Dedeurwaerdere, & Périlleux, 2023). Moreover, the variety of stakeholders involved in tackling social and environmental problems and the loosely-coupled nature of digital platforms amplify coordination challenges (Logue & Grimes, 2022; Orton & Weick, 1990; Reischauer & Mair, 2018a). Therefore, designing an SMP involves organizational challenges and trade-offs. In this article, we discuss diversity in the organizational design of SMPs and offer a conceptual framework to inform future research to productively analyze and theorize SMPs.

To this end, we first take stock of literature on digital platforms and emerging literature on SMPs to search for the organizing dimensions and trade-offs commonly discussed by information systems and organizational scholars (Kretschmer, Leiponen, Schilling, & Vasudeva, 2022; McIntyre et al., 2021; Reischauer & Mair, 2018b). Scholars emphasize that organizing a digital platform involves making choices on four dimensions: the organizational identity of the platform signaling a social or commercial orientation (Grassi & Toschi, 2021; Zhang, Pinkse, & McMeekin, 2020), the boundary set by the platform to either open or close its access to stakeholders (Gulati, Puranam, & Tushman, 2012; Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018), the non-interventionist or (de)centralized interventionist governance of stakeholders’ joining the platform (Chen, Yi, Li, & Tong, 2022; Reischauer & Mair, 2018a), and the extent to which a platform relies on technology to coordinate stakeholders (Cennamo, 2021; Mair & Gegenhuber, 2021).

We then analyze three case studies to interrogate *how these organizing dimensions manifest in SMPs*. Given the novelty of the phenomenon and the paucity of field studies on SMPs, these cases serve a revelatory purpose. They vividly illustrate the diversity of SMPs and advance an organizational perspective of SMPs (Reypens, Lievens, & Blazevic, 2021; Yin, 2014). More specifically, iterating between literature on digital platforms and data from the three cases allows us to specify the organizing dimensions, trade-offs, and design choices for SMPs and to expose the interdependences between dimensions. By paying attention to how a choice on one dimension shapes and is shaped by a choice on another dimension, we illustrate the promise of applying a configurational perspective to SMPs. Such a perspective foregrounds the combination of design choices associated with different organizing dimensions instead of treating organizations as monoliths (Furnari et al., 2021; Muñoz & Cohen, 2017; Saadatmand, Lindgren, & Schultze, 2019). For example, the different configurations we uncover herein all reflect different types of SMPs.

We close the article with suggested research avenues to further develop the understanding of SMPs as vehicles to help stakeholders make progress on tackling societal challenges. We encourage scholars to further analyze and theorize the different configurations of SMPs and especially to investigate configurations with respect to their outcomes, their competitive and collaborative relationships, their temporality, and the institutional context in which they are embedded.

2. Dimensions inherent in platform organizing

Studies on digital platforms, and especially social-mission platforms, span different bodies of literature. To specify the dimensions and trade-offs inherent in organizing platforms, we reviewed and integrated insights from research on organizations and management as well as information systems (McIntyre et al., 2021; Reischauer & Mair, 2018b). We selected studies that helped deepen our understanding of digital platforms from an organizational perspective and supported our perspective on SMPs as an organizational form to foster the collaboration and coordination of stakeholders pursuing social innovation.

As digital platforms “occupy the nexus of multilateral relationships” (Chen et al., 2022: p. 148), scholars refer to digital platforms as meta-organizations or ecosystems (Jacobides et al., 2018; Kretschmer et al., 2022) encompassing three specific components: a technological architecture, a platform organization, and a set of loosely coupled stakeholders (Gawer, 2014). We organize our review along these three research traditions and are able to specify four dimensions of platform organizing relevant for this study.

¹ In this article, we use the terms ‘platform’ and ‘digital platform’ interchangeably. Yet we concur with Chen et al. (2022) that digital platforms are a particular type of platforms and that not all platforms rely on digital technologies to serve as an interface between different stakeholders.

2.1. Developing the appropriate technological architecture

What makes platforms particular meta-organizations or ecosystems is their use of a technological architecture to facilitate the interactions between different groups of stakeholders (De Reuver, Sørensen, & Basole, 2018; Gawer, 2014; McIntyre et al., 2021). Information systems scholars explain that the technological architecture reflects the “technological capabilities of the platform” (Cennamo, 2021: p. 273). Different platforms build on different “computing and network resources” (Constantinides, Henfridsson, & Parker, 2018: p. 381) to create a unique virtual space.

The use of various technological features to enable the connection of stakeholders has also been highlighted by organization and innovation literature (Kirchner & Schüßler, 2019). Studies on the sharing economy show that some platforms strongly leverage technology (e.g., technology-enabled channels of communications, algorithms, automating processes, Application Programming Interfaces, location-based data, review systems), whereas others rely on physical spaces and offline interventions (Muñoz & Cohen, 2017). Similarly, discussing open and technology-enabled social innovation, Mair and Gegenhuber (2021: p. 32) differentiate between technology framed as “enabling the search for solutions or as a core component of solutions”.

These studies inform a first ‘technology’ dimension in platform organizing – that is, the extent to which a platform relies on technology to coordinate stakeholders.

2.2. Establishing the identity of the platform organization

One of digital platforms’ main characteristics is they loosely couple relationships among stakeholders while they remain legally independent and autonomous entities (Orton & Weick, 1990; Reischauer & Mair, 2018a). Nevertheless, loose coupling does not make digital platforms agent-less entities (Gawer, 2014). An organizational entity is necessary to provide, refine and operate the technological architecture (Reischauer & Mair, 2018b). Scholars have referred to such entity as ‘platform organization’ (Gawer, 2010), ‘architect’ (Gulati et al., 2012), ‘orchestrator’ (Blackburn, Ritala, & Keränen, 2023), or ‘hub firm’ (Rietveld & Schilling, 2021).

Studying digital platforms from an economic perspective, scholars demonstrate that platforms are capital-incentive organizations. The development and operation of a technological architecture require significant investments, notably in digital expertise (McIntyre et al., 2021; Täuscher & Laudien, 2018). This constrain raises challenges for platforms in terms of organizational identity. Indeed, platform organizations’ central and distinctive attributes need to be attractive for investors to provide their financial support and for groups of stakeholders to grow the user base, hence ensuring the platforms’ sustainability (De Reuver et al., 2018).

Scholars studying ‘technological social ventures’ (Grassi & Toschi, 2021), such as SMPs (Presenza et al., 2019) or sharing economy platforms (Blackburn et al., 2023), show that the position of such entities at the crossroads of social, economic, and technological logics heightens identity challenges. If these entities put a strong emphasis on their social orientation, they may risk driving away investors seeking a return on their capital, hence jeopardizing their survival. On the opposite, a search for growth and financial sustainability may lead them to prioritize economic aims and undertake actions inconsistent with their social orientation, hence causing them to experience mission drift (Cossey et al., 2023; Logue & Grimes, 2022). Accordingly, platforms are shown to vary in the extent to which they signal either a social or a commercial orientation (Wruk, Oberg, Klutt, & Maurer, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020).

Reviewing literature discussing aspects related to the organizational nature of SMP, allowed us to identify ‘identity’ as a second dimension in platform organizing – that is, platforms decide who they are as organizations.

2.3. Allowing access to loosely coupled stakeholders

Stakeholders – also referred to as ‘participants’ or ‘users’ (Blackburn et al., 2023) – are individuals or organizations that interact and exchange within the (virtual) space offered by the platform (Gulati et al., 2012; Saadatmand et al., 2019). Their mandates and stakes in joining such space might differ; they can provide or seek ideas, resources, or goods and services, or innovation (Gegenhuber, Mair, Lührsen, & Thäter, 2023; Reischauer & Mair, 2018a; Saluzzo & Alegre, 2021). Literature has predominantly portrayed stakeholders’ voluntary participation as a critical source of platforms’ value creation: the more platforms attract complementary stakeholders and the more these interact, the more platforms’ value increases (Constantinides et al., 2018; Liu, Li, & Wang, 2021). A key idea in platform research is therefore network effects; that is, the value of one group of stakeholders (e.g., project owners) joining the platform depends on the participation of another group of stakeholders (e.g., philanthropic foundations). The more the latter participate on the platform, the more the former will be attracted to the platform (Rietveld & Schilling, 2021). Network effects lead to “winner-take-all competitive dynamics, where the platform with the largest network is expected to eventually win the entire market” (Cennamo, 2021: p. 276).

However, literature has also shown that beyond a certain threshold of openness, stakeholders begin to increasingly compete, which decreases their capacity to innovate (Aghion, Bloom, Blundell, Griffith, & Howitt, 2005; Boudreau, 2010). Moreover, when stakeholders’ participation remains voluntary, there is no guarantee that once they access the platform they will not act contrary to its purpose (Kirchner & Schüßler, 2019). As openness increases levels of uncertainty, a platform’s best network is not necessarily the largest one, but one that comprises and attracts the ‘right’ kind of stakeholders, insofar as they act in accordance with the platform’s purpose (Boudreau & Hagi, 2009; Reischauer & Mair, 2018b).

Platform organizations’ control over their technological architecture gives them the power to set access criteria and deny entry (Gulati et al., 2012). Researchers have observed instances of platform organizations designing screening mechanisms or selection processes and closing access to specific stakeholders (Afuah, 2013; Cennamo, 2021; McIntyre et al., 2021). This allows us to single out a third organizing dimension related to the ‘boundary’ digital platforms set. In other words, platform organizations decide which

stakeholders can access their virtual space.

2.4. Governing loosely coupled stakeholders

The “technically enabled power position” (Kirchner & Schüßler, 2019: p. 145) of platform organizations not only gives them influence over which stakeholders are allowed to participate but also over the rules of participation (Schüßler, Attwood-Charles, Kirchner, & Schor, 2021). Scholars refer to this power as platform governance, defined as “achieving desired conduct of – and interactions between – platform participants once they [are] on board” (Boudreau & Hagi, 2009: p. 23), and identify two approaches: non-interventionism and interventionism (Constantinides et al., 2018; McIntyre et al., 2021). Platform organizations that opt for non-interventionism provide the technological architecture to enable interaction but do not over-specify what interactions are appropriate. This approach aligns with the logic of network effects. Giving stakeholders considerable freedom would encourage platforms’ growth and favor greater interactions (Boudreau, 2010).

On the opposite, platform organizations may choose to intervene in stakeholders’ interactions. Given that stakeholders’ voluntary exchanges of resources are a source of platforms’ value creation, interventionist platforms intend to ensure that stakeholders’ interests align with the platforms’ purpose (Blackburn et al., 2023; McIntyre et al., 2021). Nevertheless, too much influence risks limiting the scope of interactions and, thereby, of value creation (Constantinides et al., 2018). In observing how platforms manage this trade-off between neutrality and influence, scholars have identified a spectrum of governance arrangements between centralized and decentralized interventionism (Chen et al., 2022; Tiwana, 2013) and started to uncover the specificities of such arrangements for SMPs (Logue & Grimes, 2022; Prezenza et al., 2019). Accordingly, we identify ‘governance’ as a fourth dimension in platform organizing – that is, whether and how the platform organization influences stakeholders’ interactions within the virtual space.

The four dimensions characteristic of platform organizing – technology, identity, boundary, and governance – we identified in our review involve trade-offs. In this study we use them as an analytical anchor for showcasing SMPs’ diverse ways of organizing and further specifying their design choices.

3. Definition and illustration of SMPs

SMPs leverage the affordances of digital technologies to generate and drive collective and concerted efforts of social innovation. They connect a variety of stakeholders, who were previously unconnected or unable to collaborate directly because they are too diverse or barely organized, with social and environmental problems (Prezenza et al., 2019). By connecting and facilitating exchange between these stakeholders, SMPs mobilize underutilized resources and put them to effective use (Cossey et al., 2023; Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024). Furthermore, SMPs can improve the processing of data and promote open access and transfer (Gegenhuber et al., 2023). As such, they have the capacity to raise awareness on societal challenges, advance collective understanding of such challenges and their potential solutions, increase stakeholders’ accountability, and inspire more to participate (Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2023; Mair & Gegenhuber, 2021; Snissar Lobo, Sie, & Zapata, 2022). SMPs go beyond the focus on profit maximization of mainstream commercial platforms and aim to generate social impact by orchestrating others’ interactions and helping them be more effective in their progress toward solving social problems and affecting social change (Logue & Grimes, 2022; Wegner et al., 2023).

Exchanges on SMPs can involve ideas, different types of resources such as money, time, or skills, but also specific solutions in the form of products or services. Two classic examples of SMPs are civic crowdfunding platforms through which “citizens, in collaboration with government, fund projects providing a community services” (Stiver, Barroca, Minocha, Richards, & Roberts, 2015: p. 249) and crowdtiming platforms that connect “volunteers with non-profit organizations and small volunteer groups to support people in need” (Caridà et al., 2022: p. 759). The former can be illustrated by the well-known UK-based Spacehive, which was launched in 2012 with the mission to “meet the needs of today’s local changemakers and enable local transformation quickly”, as stated on its website (see also Logue & Grimes, 2022) or the Italian Meridonare, which was created in 2015 “to promote and support different forms of collaborations among actors of the local community” (Prezenza et al., 2019: p. 197). The latter can be exemplified by the US-based Catchafire, which was created in 2009 and defines itself on its website as a “a network of volunteers, non-profits, and funders working together to solve urgent problems and lift up communities” (see also Iltén, 2015), or RomAltruista, which was launched in 2011 and is based in Rome (Caridà et al., 2022).

In this article, we draw from data on three SMPs: AllDonors, RaisingWiz and HelpPooling.² We secured access to and collected data on these SMPs in the course of a research project on the rise and nature of SMPs in Belgium. We conducted semi-structured interviews with founders or managers of SMPs, analyzed documents (e.g., legal status, platform websites, annual reports, media articles), and observed events at which platforms’ founders or managers were speakers. This project lasted from 2017 to 2021 and gave us the opportunity to observe and analyze closely the organizational life of SMPs. Given our conceptual interest in platforms’ organizing dimensions and their interdependences in this article, we purposefully selected these three SMPs because they illustrate different ways SMPs can be organized. Although they are all digital platforms pursuing social innovation and operating in Belgium, they made different choices on the dimensions identified by scholars as inherent in platform organizing (i.e., identity, boundary, governance, and technology) (McIntyre et al., 2021). We use the insights gleaned from the comparison of these three cases to ground and contextualize a configurational perspective of SMPs. We relate our findings to those from documented studies on SMPs (see, e.g., Caridà et al., 2022;

² For the sake of anonymity, we replaced the names of the platforms with pseudonyms.

Logue & Grimes, 2022; Presenza et al., 2019), to develop portable insights. The remainder of this section provides a description of the three SMPs, and Table 1 summarizes their key characteristics.

3.1. AllDonors

Originating from a private–public partnership, AllDonors was first launched in 2014 as an experiment to assess the potential of “crowdfunding to encourage new cooperation partnerships among individuals, organizations, authorities and businesses”, as stated on the platform’s website. After two years of successful operation, a non-profit organization was officially created. On its website, AllDonors specifies that its mission is to “bring people and resources together and support projects that make society stronger and more sustainable”. AllDonors is now a well-established civic-reward crowdfunding platform. According to its 2022 Annual Report, €4.2 million have been raised through the platform since its creation, supporting 500 projects with a success rate of 82% and the distribution of 46.895 rewards.

The platform strives to create collaborations with and between stakeholders whose mission is to generate social impact and who are to become “part of the [AllDonors] ecosystem”, as stated on its website. AllDonors connects social-purpose project owners seeking financial support not only with citizens willing to provide this support but also with social enterprises and philanthropic foundations through a match-funding logic. Match funders increase citizens’ contribution and build project owners’ capacities by sharing knowledge and networks. Not any societal stakeholder can become a match funder – only those that AllDonors deems appropriate. According to its Annual Report, 24 match-funding campaigns were successfully completed in 2022. In addition, AllDonors fosters solidarity between project owners, as they provide each other’s crowdfunding rewards.

These stakeholders are represented in AllDonors’ governing bodies. The platform’s board includes academics, non-profit organizations, social enterprises, and public bodies. Contributing citizens, match funders, and former project owners take part in the general assembly. The platform’s operating budget relies on a funding mix. Its general operation is supported by public subsidies. Philanthropic foundations, public bodies, and social enterprises co-finance part of the costs of coaching project owners and the maintenance of the website. On each successful campaign, 10% of citizens’ contributions are given as a donation to AllDonors (2022 Annual Report). Any surplus is reinvested in AllDonors’ social mission, according to its non-profit principle.

3.2. RaisingWiz

Benefiting from the support of a start-up accelerator program and impact investing funds, RaisingWiz was created in 2014 as a private company by four graduates in business management and web development. Described on its website as a “breath of fresh air in the Belgian digital landscape”, RaisingWiz specializes in the development of a wide range of customized technological tools to create virtual communities around social and environmental problems. As stated on its website: “Every organization has a crowd, let’s define yours and discover its value through our unique fundraising, crowdfunding & -sourcing tools”.

Although RaisingWiz mostly works with non-profit organizations, the platform assumes that all societal stakeholders should be concerned about societal challenges and that various technological tools can enable them to undertake critical actions. Tools are thus uniquely designed to fit the identity of the organizations for which they are developed and to meet their strategic objectives, be it to record votes and raise awareness, raise funds with or without rewards, promote volunteering, organize events to support good causes, or crowdsource ideas from large crowds and increase civic participation. RaisingWiz’s revenues come from the development and selling of these customized tools.

Table 1
Key characteristics of revelatory cases.

	AllDonors	RaisingWiz	HelpPooling
How do they define themselves?	Civic-reward crowdfunding platform	Unique fundraising and crowdfunding and crowdsourcing tools	Tinder for civic and social-purpose projects
What resources are processed through the platform?	Reward-based donations Expertise Network	Donations with or without reward Time Ideas Votes	Donations without reward Time Ideas Expertise
Year of creation	2014	2014	2018
Legal form	Non-profit organization	Private company	Non-profit organization
Funding and revenues	- Support from public bodies, philanthropic foundations, and social enterprises - 10% of citizens’ contributions are donated to AllDonors	- Capital from impact investing funds - Development and selling of customized technological tools	Initially: donations and volunteer work From 2021 onward: development and selling of customized technological tools
Stakeholders	Any organization whose mission is to generate social impact (social enterprises, philanthropic foundations, non-profit organizations, public bodies) Individual citizens willing to help tackle social and environmental problems	Any organization from the social, public, and private sectors (e.g., for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, cities, hospitals, schools)	Any project from any individuals, groups, or organizations if it fits the UN Sustainable Development Goals framework. Individual citizens willing to help tackle social and environmental problems

RaisingWiz states on its website that it has worked with more than 60 organizations from the social, public, and private sectors to date. For example, RaisingWiz created a crowdfunding tool for a philanthropic foundation that aims to support local social impact initiatives. The latter use this crowdfunding tool to raise funds from citizens. The foundation then doubles the amount of funds raised following a match-funding logic. Likewise, a crowdvoting tool was created for a non-profit organization that helps children suffering from long-term illnesses attend classes online. Every year, the non-profit organization organizes a ‘pajama day’, where students come to class in their pajamas as a show of support for their sick classmates. Group photos are taken and uploaded online where families and friends can vote for the funniest one. Each year, more than two thousand schools participate, resulting in a high-awareness campaign for the right to equal learning opportunities. Another example is the crowdinvesting tool created for a for-profit electricity supplier that offers citizens the possibility to invest in local renewable energy projects.

3.3. HelpPooling

Developed in 2018 by web developers, HelpPooling is a non-profit platform whose purpose is to “*help build a better society by matching talented people with the right projects*”, as stated on its website. In a 2019 press article, HelpPooling’s founders described their platform as the “*Tinder for civic and social-purpose projects*”. They decided to create such platform because they believe that change-makers – as they call them – need a space to meet. On one side, many individuals, groups, or organizations have projects that could have a positive social and/or environmental impact but lack human and/or financial resources to develop them. On the other side, many citizens are willing to donate, volunteer, or share ideas to contribute to tackling social and environmental problems but do not know how to do so.

Given the complexity of societal challenges, HelpPooling believes that every willingness to help is necessary and worth supporting. Every project is welcome as long as it fits into the UN Sustainable Development Goals framework. Once projects are listed and visible on the platform, they are matched with citizens’ unique skills, profiles, and resources. At the time of this writing, the platform stated on its website that it has hosted 382 changemakers collaborating on 151 projects in 28 countries.

In 2021, HelpPooling’s founders reflected on the financial sustainability of their platform. While their initial idea to provide a free-access digital platform to help tackle societal challenges remained, they conceded that the cost of developing and maintaining such a platform was substantial and that donations and volunteer work were insufficient. To reach sustainability and its full potential, HelpPooling decided also to offer customized technological tools, alongside the free matchmaking platform. For example, rather than putting their projects on HelpPooling’s generic platform, large organizations could ask HelpPooling to design a tool that would best fit their identity and objectives.

4. SMPs’ diverse ways of organizing

Anchoring our analysis of the three cases—AllDonors, RaisingWiz, and HelpPooling—in the four dimensions of organizing we specified by reviewing relevant literature across research traditions allows us to provide a more nuanced perspective on the organizational life of SMPs and expose diversity across SMPs.

4.1. Identity: social or commercial orientation

SMPs pay particular attention to their organizational identity and vary in the extent to which they signal a socially or commercially oriented identity (Logue & Grimes, 2022; Wruk et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). For example, by adopting a non-profit legal status, relying on public subsidies and philanthropic support, and reinvesting its surplus in its activities, AllDonors projects a strong socially oriented image. Signaling such an identity sends SMPs’ stakeholders the message that social and environmental values are central and that interactions between stakeholders are fostered to primarily generate social impact (Grassi & Toschi, 2021). A social orientation has the potential to attract like-minded stakeholders and enhance a platform’s settlement within its surrounding community (Zhang et al., 2020). According to AllDonors’ manager, the platform’s social orientation “*pleases social entrepreneurs*” and its “*involvement with public authorities gives credibility to its crowdfunding campaigns, which creates enormous local social impact*”. Similarly, Banco di Napoli Foundation, which created the Italian civic crowdfunding platform Meridonare, provides the platform with financial and non-financial support (e.g., office space) and connects it with a network of experts (e.g., universities, policy makers). Meridonare’s relationship with the foundation helps “*create a reputation of trust and confidence for donors*” (Presenza et al., 2019: p. 195), which eventually fosters a strong ecosystem.

As the examples of AllDonors and Meridonare illustrate, giving SMPs a social orientation requires the platform organization to proactively engage with stakeholders sharing similar values and to mobilize non-market resources, such as philanthropic donations and public subsidies. Indeed, the non-distribution of profit imposed by the non-profit legal status and the relatively limited growth potential given the platform’s anchor in a community make the platform rather unattractive to traditional funders (e.g., venture capital funds, banks, institutional investors) (Cossey et al., 2023).

In the absence of (non-)financial support from value-driven stakeholders, signaling a social orientation might prove more difficult, and a transformation of legal status to attract traditional investments might be necessary (Zhang et al., 2020). Mikołajewska-Zajac, Márton, and Zundel (2022) notably document the transformation of the non-profit Couchsurfing into a B corporation in 2011 and the controversies and user withdrawals that ensued. In the same vein, HelpPooling reconsidered its initial non-profit, free access, and volunteer-based platform, as its founders realized that maintaining and developing it required more time and money than they could invest themselves. As they attempted to find support, they failed to secure philanthropic and public funding because their platform was

perceived as merely a technological tool. Turning to venture capital funds, they faced investors who only saw the platform's economic potential. Eventually, HelpPooling's founders decided to charge for the creation of customized technological tools while retaining free access to its matching platform. This decision gave HelpPooling a commercial turn, and a co-founder explained to us: *"We surrounded ourselves with advisers to make sure our business choices stay in line with our social mission"*. The use of 'external control' is one strategy to avoid mission drift (Cossey et al., 2023).

By contrast, signaling a commercially oriented identity can help an SMP attract investors and raise the capital needed to develop its technological architecture. Improving the platform's technological capabilities can in turn facilitate the collaboration and coordination of stakeholders, thereby increasing their contribution to address social and environmental problems (Grassi & Toschi, 2021; Schüßler et al., 2021). Yet pressure to commercialize may risk driving away non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, or other significant stakeholders for social change if they begin to question the genuineness of the platform's social mission (Wruk et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Studying the civic crowdfunding platform Spacehive and its incorporation as a private limited company, Logue and Grimes (2022) introduce the concept of 'multivocal identity claims' to explain that SMPs need to project an image that appropriately attracts diverse actors.

The example of RaisingWiz reflects these 'multivocal identity claims'. Aiming to build customized technological tools, RaisingWiz heavily relies on the development of new technologies. Therefore, the platform specifically chose a for-profit legal status to attract private investors and raise the funds needed to hire experts in web development. As RaisingWiz's co-founder shared, *"although it may be interesting to be a non-profit to work with other non-profits, our commercial orientation has given us a professional image, enabled us to grow big and fast, work with impactful organizations and make a good place for ourselves on a flourishing market"*. To counterbalance this commercial orientation, RaisingWiz emphasizes that its investors are impact investing funds. Contrary to unspecialized investment funds, these funds provide patient capital and do not pressure their investees for a quick return on investment (Schlütter, Schätzlein, Hahn, & Waldner, 2023). Furthermore, RaisingWiz makes sure to highlight on its website the social impact of its stakeholders and its technological tools, as an echo of its social mission.

4.2. Boundary: open or closed access

Following the logic of network effects, digital platforms are likely to have a highly permeable boundary to facilitate stakeholders' entry and stimulate the growth of their network and to include "a large set of potentially complementary innovative capabilities" (Gawer, 2014: p. 1246; see also Kretschmer et al., 2022). In a social-mission context, platform' openness and stakeholders' variety are also likely to increase the chances of reaching unexpected but meaningful and sustainable solutions (Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024).

Among our three SMP cases, HelpPooling illustrates this strive for growth. Relying on the assumption that the more its user base grows, the more innovative ideas for social change will emerge and the more desirable and collective actions will occur, the platform aims to provide a space where civic project owners can *"share their ideas with a vast network"*, as explained in a 2021 video presentation. Accordingly, HelpPooling has an open access and relies on a self-selection process. The criterion for eligibility to access the platform, as stated on its website, is large: *"a willingness to engage in social change and support collective and sustainable transition with a maximum of impact"*. HelpPooling takes no responsibility in deciding what projects can be displayed on the platform. The objective is to make it easy for stakeholders to join HelpPooling and thereby boost the adoption of the platform. This management of platform boundary echoes that of other SMPs as documented by extant literature. For example, the Italian crowdfunding platform RomAltruista highlights its "concept of easy clicking (e.g., 'I can choose when, for whom, and how I give my time')" as a key factor in supporting citizens' collective action (Caridà et al., 2022: p. 764). The UK-based civic crowdfunding platform Spacehive emphasizes its "mission of novel transformation of publicly accessible spaces" but only softly conveys "principles about the types of projects to be excluded" (Logue & Grimes, 2022: p. 678).

However, issues of access may take on particular importance in a social-mission context. Indeed, as SMPs rely on the interaction of stakeholders from multiple sectors, the diverging expectations of these stakeholders can lead to the failure of interaction and thus threaten the platform's social mission and very existence (Logue & Grimes, 2022; Presenza et al., 2019). While openness allows SMPs to grow and benefit from network effects, as shown by the HelpPooling and Spacehive examples, it also risks attracting stakeholders whose contributions do not align with the platform's social mission. To mitigate this risk, the Italian civic crowdfunding platform Meridonare uses specific criteria such as "project initiator's ethics, clear vision and mission of the project" to screen and select only projects oriented toward addressing social and environmental problems (Presenza et al., 2019: p. 196). Similarly, AllDonors opts for a closed access with a strict screening and selection process and strives to embed itself in a value-driven community. A manager explained that the platform's *"goal is not for a large number of project owners and backers to join our ecosystem, as on mainstream crowdfunding platforms, but to only grant access to stakeholders whose mission aligns with our social mission"*.

As scholars of digital platforms have alluded, giving priority to a network's quality rather than size reflects a platform's desire to forge and preserve a distinct identity in a specific market (Cennamo, 2021; Chen et al., 2022). In contrast with HelpPooling and its open access, AllDonors' socially oriented identity is mirrored in stakeholders forming its ecosystem. This enables AllDonors to identify and attract key stakeholders (e.g., philanthropic foundations, public bodies) willing to provide (non-)financial support, beyond their support to project owners displayed on the platform. Conversely, given its philanthropic and public support, AllDonors is not subject to the same growth pressure as either commercially oriented platforms or socially oriented platforms relying solely on volunteering such as HelpPooling. This gives AllDonors the possibility to limit its access to stakeholders it deems inappropriate. Therefore, AllDonors' closed access and social orientation are mutually reinforcing.

While AllDonors' and Meridonare's closed space might generate a more homogeneous, mission-driven group, it might also slow their growth and exclude stakeholders whose participation is significant for addressing Grand Challenges (Caridà et al., 2022; Logue &

Grimes, 2022). To reconcile the inclusion of a high number and diversity of stakeholders with the preservation of its social mission, RaisingWiz positions its boundary management between wide open access and strict closed access. Much like HelpPooling, RaisingWiz aims for growth and innovation; much like AllDonors, RaisingWiz does not allow stakeholders' self-selection. Yet access to its customized technological tools is granted not on stakeholders' social mission but on their potential to bring innovative solutions for social change and on their strategic relevance for RaisingWiz's growth. This implies that RaisingWiz engages with a variety of stakeholders. As exemplified by the crowdinvesting technological tool created for a mainstream electricity supplier, while the tool served a social purpose (i.e., allowing citizens to invest in local renewable energy projects), the company for which it was created did not. As one of RaisingWiz's co-founders told us:

The definition of social impact is broader than merely the non-profit sector. Public bodies are now thinking about their relationship with their citizens. Companies are getting involved in corporate social responsibility actions, more than ever. [...] Every organization is different, and this is the reason why we are not a generic platform. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. We offer custom-made solutions, depending on the specific characteristics of an organization and its context.

Collaborating with a high number of stakeholders as diverse as companies and non-profit organizations raises issues (Pache et al., 2022). As a platform attempts to federate these stakeholders within the same virtual space, it might send a mixed signal and confuse (future) stakeholders about the platform's purpose. In turn, stakeholders might stop using the platform or decide not to join altogether (Mikolajewska-Zajac et al., 2022). Moreover, as explained previously, competitive dynamics might emerge between solutions to societal challenges (Aghion et al., 2005; Wegner et al., 2023). While competition may help select the best ideas, it can also be counterproductive to social innovation processes (Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024).

The creation of customized technological tools enables RaisingWiz to distance itself from potential controversies and remove competition. With technological tools, RaisingWiz gives a multilevel dimension to the notion of 'platform boundary'. First, while RaisingWiz decides which stakeholder can or cannot access its tools, it also creates a distinction between the stakeholder accessing the tool and RaisingWiz as a platform organization, since the tool is branded to fit the stakeholder's identity and not RaisingWiz's identity. Second, RaisingWiz demarcates each stakeholder's perimeter of action, as each possesses its own tool around which it can develop its own virtual community. While stakeholders are connected to RaisingWiz through the intermediary of the tools, they are not connected together. As each stakeholder's community individually grows, so does RaisingWiz as a whole. According to a 2016 press article, RaisingWiz aspires to be the "biggest platform in Belgium and a key player in the European market of digital technologies for social innovation".

4.3. Governance: non-interventionism or (de)centralized interventionism

Digital platform literature identifies two approaches to governance: non-interventionism and interventionism (Constantinides et al., 2018; McIntyre et al., 2021). HelpPooling embodies a non-interventionist approach. The platform's co-founder explained to us that "changemakers are best qualified to decide on the most appropriate type of support they seek and can provide". As this SMP takes on responsibility in granting or denying access, it decides neither what specific activities are allowed on the platform nor what linkages are to be created. HelpPooling's intervention is limited to its algorithmic matchmaking. The algorithm aims to ensure project owners find the support they need and citizens find projects in which they are helpful, but users remain free to seek other interactions and contribute to projects of their choice. If HelpPooling detects non-compliance with its social mission, it reserves the right to reactively exclude undesired users. As HelpPooling's co-founder explained:

Our platform is like a tool, a hammer, nothing more. Of course, it must be put to good use, but we will never replace coaching and expertise that social-purpose projects very much need to grow. And, fortunately, incubators and support structures exist. We are just a meeting space.

However, although stakeholders have an interest in platforms' purpose, they remain loosely coupled (Reischauer & Mair, 2018b). They are not legally constrained to interact in a certain way on the platform. Therefore, the appropriateness of their interactions cannot be taken for granted. As SMPs federate high heterogeneity of stakeholders and as each may have its interpretation of societal challenges and its priorities, SMPs may find it difficult to adopt and maintain a neutral position regarding the appropriateness of their stakeholders' actions and interactions and are likely to face heightened governance issues (Caridà et al., 2022; Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2023; Presenza et al., 2019).

While non-interventionism may be coherent with HelpPooling's search for growth and innovative ideas for social change, it involves a greater risk of deviating the platform from its social mission and its specific set of values. To signal its intended social values despite its non-interventionist approach, HelpPooling chose to rely on the pro bono endorsement of its platform by well-established public bodies (e.g., Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles), social enterprises (e.g., Ashoka), and other SMPs (e.g., AllDonors), which it promotes on its home page under the banner 'They support HelpPooling'. Emerging literature on SMPs have emphasized that when third-party endorsers coherently match the orientation of the platform, such endorsement can reduce information asymmetry between stakeholders and increase trustworthiness and legitimacy (Logue & Grimes, 2022; Saluzzo & Alegre, 2021).

On the opposite, as much as closing a platform's access might exclude significant stakeholders for addressing Grand Challenges, maintaining a tight governance risks slowing exchange and innovations needed for social change (Seelos & Mair, 2020; Zaggl, Malhotra, Alexy, & Majchrzak, 2023). In the face of this trade-off between neutrality and influence, SMPs develop a spectrum of governance arrangements. Governance can be tight and centralized. Decisions are taken by the platform organization to closely monitor stakeholders and intervene in their interactions by providing information, incentives, and nudges through communication

channels, guidelines and best-practice examples, or workshops and social events (Kretschmer et al., 2022; Reischauer & Mair, 2018b; Zhang et al., 2020). One example of centralized interventionist approach is AllDonors. The platform's closed access allows it not only to avoid unwanted stakeholders but also to negotiate the role of desired ones at their entry. Some stakeholders join AllDonors to provide financial support and contribute to match-funding campaigns, others have the responsibility to build project owners' capacities, and still others help screen and select projects.

Furthermore, AllDonors explains on its website that it aims to be more than a digital space and to embody "a place where people can inspire each other". In this sense, connection between AllDonors' stakeholders occur not only online but also offline. Through its 'AllDonors Academy', the platform organizes workshops covering basic principles of civic crowdfunding, teaching the tricks of a successful campaign, and providing personalized support to project owners (e.g., communication strategy, post-campaign evaluation). According to its Annual Report, 544 participants attended 38 workshops in 2022, and in 2020 the platform published a 'how-to' guidebook. AllDonors also built a brick-and-mortar 'House of AllDonors', which hosts an event space, a co-working space, and an incubator where project owners can co-create and test their ideas before setting out on their own. Social events are regularly organized for project owners to meet and help each other (e.g., provide rewards, give advice) or for match funders and partners to share best practices.

This situation echoes governance arrangements of other SMPs that emphasize the significance of enabling capacity building and feedback from a large range of parties. For example, the UK-based Spacehive cultivates "institutional blueprints by providing explicit scripts for action" (e.g., workshops on civic values, examples of successful projects) (Logue & Grimes, 2022: p. 681). The Italian crowdfundering platform RomAltruista establishes "face-to-face contact with voluntarism organizations to explain the new flexible volunteering model to them" (Caridà et al., 2022: p. 763). Meridonare adopts "a mentoring role, co-developing with fundraisers the different steps of the crowdfunding campaign" (Presenza et al., 2019: p. 198). Promoting interactions next to focal exchanges (of money, time, or ideas) serves to foster shared values, build trust and communal norms, and enhances cross-sector understanding (Pache et al., 2022; Reischauer & Mair, 2018a). In this sense, AllDonors develops a vast network of reciprocity, in which everyone can find information, support and endorsement, and a sense of belonging to a community. This reflects the platform's prioritization of its network's quality over size. As a manager told us:

When we do a partnership with a philanthropic foundation or a social entrepreneurship incubator, we serve as a guarantee of quality to them. And they serve as a guarantee of quality to us. We do workshops with project owners to teach them about crowdfunding. We always try to help them find funding solutions. Partners know project owners are not alone in their crowdfunding campaign. And on the other side, partners help project owners with their business model, some ethical issues, or their financial plan. So, we know these are sound projects. This is a beautiful synergy.

When governance is loose and decentralized, some decision rights are devolved to stakeholders who enjoy a sense of ownership and greater autonomy (Chen et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). For example, platforms can rely on online peer-review ratings to detect misconduct (Blackburn et al., 2023; Schüßler et al., 2021). They can also structure their technological architecture to delineate subcommunities operating according to their own rules (Reischauer & Mair, 2018a).

Decentralizations is exemplified by RaisingWiz. While AllDonors determines its stakeholders' roles and linkages, RaisingWiz retains some decision rights and decentralizes others to its stakeholders. The platform creates technological tools around which its stakeholders can develop their own virtual communities, thereby granting them freedom in their activities. RaisingWiz works with its stakeholders to define their targeted community and identify the most appropriate technological tool to foster the community's social commitment. RaisingWiz then fully develops the custom-made tool. Once tools are up and running, RaisingWiz follows a 'train the trainer' policy. It organizes workshops on digital strategy, civic crowdfunding, or online social commitment to build its stakeholders' capacities, but it does not manage the tools. Each stakeholder is in charge of launching crowdfunding or crowdsourcing campaigns, writing and sharing stories, and sending calls to action. While enjoying great freedom in the way they use the tools at their disposal, stakeholders remain responsible for their appropriate use and for ensuring that they achieve their social mission.

This decentralized interventionist approach allows RaisingWiz to grow and innovate in a way that attempts to avoid the risks inherent in non-interventionism. On the one hand, by enabling its self-reliant stakeholders to create virtual communities RaisingWiz grows its mission-driven user base without the cost of maintaining much governance arrangements. On the other hand, communities act as experimental spaces, giving RaisingWiz the opportunity "to work with unique organizations and test innovative ideas for social commitment", as a co-founder put it.

Our comparison of three cases of SMPs through the governance lens supports a relationship already suggested by digital platform literature: the more open the platform boundary, the more difficult it is for the platform organization to position itself on the interventionist end of the governance spectrum (Gulati et al., 2012). Indeed, favoring a smaller but qualitative ecosystem, AllDonors embodies a more interventionist approach to governance than RaisingWiz and, most certainly, HelpPooling, which seek to leverage network effects and opt for a permeable boundary.

4.4. Technology: strong or weak reliance

A strong reliance on technological features unlocks a significant potential for platforms to grow and scale and for SMPs to include a high reach and scope of stakeholders in social change (Mair & Gegenhuber, 2021). Technology can make resources more easily accessible and can increase the visibility and involvement of stakeholders beyond geographic borders and logistical constraints of physical spaces. With the creation of virtual spaces, individuals who were previously physically unable to join volunteering or fundraising events are now able to contribute according to their own capacities and rhythm (Blackburn et al., 2023; Gegenhuber &

Mair, 2024). Moreover, various technological features can ease the storage and sharing of data and thereby increase platforms' transparency and accountability (Gegenhuber et al., 2023; Wegner et al., 2023). Finally, a strong technology reliance offers multiple opportunities to tailor platforms' support to stakeholders' specific needs depending, among other factors, on their strategic objectives, local context, or size (Cossey et al., 2023).

Among our three cases, RaisingWiz embodies this strong technology reliance. RaisingWiz takes advantage of multiple technological features to create virtual communities around stakeholders pursuing a social-purpose project. Furthermore, beyond enhancing its own technological capabilities, RaisingWiz seeks to build the technological capabilities of its stakeholders by openly sharing its technological features with others. As stated on RaisingWiz's website: "get access to your tool and your users' data and manage them easily thanks to our API and back office". Technological tools can be created remotely, in large numbers, and for any stakeholders anywhere. This gives RaisingWiz a strong opportunity to scale, which is consistent with its commercially oriented identity. For RaisingWiz, technology is inherently part of the solutions for societal challenges.

Nonetheless, a strong and exclusive reliance on technology also raises issues. While virtual spaces have the potential to extend the inclusiveness of social innovation, they can also create a digital divide and exclude groups of stakeholders or discourage them from participating. Some stakeholders may not be familiar with the use of digital platforms, they may not feel deeply concerned about activities occurring on platforms, or access to platforms may be too costly (Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024). Yet the involvement of these excluded stakeholders might be essential in the support of social-purpose projects (Caridà et al., 2022; Snissar Lobo, Sie, & Zapata, 2022). For example, given the cost of developing customized technological tools and the skills needed to manage them, RaisingWiz's tools are not easily accessible to small non-profits.

Accordingly, scholars have investigated SMPs that "mix together online and offline strategies" (Presenza et al., 2019: p. 199). AllDonors is one example. Technology is not central in AllDonors' operation but complements its offline interventions. The platform uses its virtual space to gather and transparently display its stakeholders and their interactions, as mentioned on its website: "At [AllDonors], we have no secrets! We love showing you who we are, how we work and with whom". However, most interactions do not occur through the virtual space. As illustrated by the platform's centralized interventionist governance, stakeholders meet and interact mostly through the platform's offline extensions. Aiming to play an active role in its local community, AllDonors helps connect project owners with support organizations that are not directly involved in their crowdfunding campaigns but could provide them with expertise. AllDonors' weak reliance on technology is in line with its socially oriented identity, in which technology comes in support of the social mission.

Finally, upon its creation in 2018, HelpPooling neither relied strongly on technology, as RaisingWiz, nor provided additional offline services, as AllDonors. Comparing itself to Tinder, HelpPooling relied on algorithmic matchmaking to facilitate connection between users who interact in a single virtual space. The platform was a point of connection: once changemakers met, HelpPooling managers' work stopped. As such, HelpPooling offered less flexibility and opportunity for support than RaisingWiz and AllDonors. This model made it difficult for HelpPooling's founders to secure public or philanthropic funding to support the maintenance and development of their platform. This is consistent with Muñoz and Cohen's (2017: p. 31) configurational study of sharing economy platforms that highlights "a strong positive correlation between collaborative governance and alternative funding". Faced with the challenge to reach financial sustainability, HelpPooling's founders decided to transition from a weak to a stronger technology reliance, thus bringing HelpPooling closer to a model similar to that of RaisingWiz. HelpPooling now offers customized technological tools to stakeholders with specific and personalized technological requirements while continuing to provide others with a free and large access to its platform.

The contrasting examples of AllDonors and RaisingWiz emphasize the interplay between governance arrangements and technological reliance. Although these two dimensions have long been studied separately, researchers increasingly recognize that "governance principles and incentive structures, along with relevant decision rights, must mirror the technical architecture of the platform" (Constantinides et al., 2018: p. 385; see also Chen et al., 2022; Saadatmand et al., 2019). Whereas AllDonors uses its virtual space as a 'mere window display' and channels its efforts into developing a variety of governance arrangements, RaisingWiz relies on myriad technological features and leaves great autonomy to its stakeholders in managing their tool and governing their community.

As we show how four dimensions inherent in platform organizing manifest in SMPs, our analysis results in a conceptual framework highlighting the trade-offs SMPs face and specifying the design choices they can make. Table 2 synthesizes these choices.

5. Interdependences of organizing dimensions and configurational perspective

Although we described the four organizing dimensions in a linear and stylized fashion to facilitate description, our analysis exposes the interdependences between the dimensions. Some design choices appear to mutually reinforce each other, while the combination of other choices seems to be a locus of tensions in the organization of the platform. Therefore, in this section, we shift the focus from the

Table 2
Organizing dimensions and design choices of SMPs.

Organizing dimensions	Design choices	
Identity	Social orientation	Commercial orientation
Boundary	Open access	Closed access
Governance	Non-interventionism	(De-)centralized interventionism
Technology	Strong reliance	Weak reliance

organizing dimension as a unit of analysis to an examination of the interdependent dynamics between dimensions. The insights gained from the analysis of SMPs' identity, boundary, governance, and technology allows us to pay attention to how a choice on one dimension influences the choices on another dimension.

The analysis of interdependences illustrates the promise of applying a configurational perspective to SMPs (Furnari et al., 2021). While scholars have investigated digital platforms through a configurational lens, these studies focused either on mainstream commercial digital platforms (Saadatmand et al., 2019) or specifically on sharing economy platforms (Muñoz & Cohen, 2017) and thus did not consider SMPs. We take a step in this direction and outline three configurations that our cases illuminate: (1) the SMP as the fulcrum of a social impact ecosystem, (2) the SMP as a repository of technological tools for social innovation, and (3) the SMP as a matchmaker. Table 3 summarizes the three configurations and their related choices on each dimension.

5.1. The SMP as the fulcrum of a social impact ecosystem

The case of AllDonors reveals the mutually reinforcing interplay of a social orientation, a closed access, and a centralized interventionist governance. The platform's social orientation sends (future) stakeholders the message that the generation of social impact is core to interactions created through the platform. Acting as a signal, the socially oriented identity helps AllDonors attract like-minded stakeholders, including philanthropic foundations and public bodies prone to support the development of the platform. With such philanthropic and public support, the platform is not constrained to grow its network of stakeholders to benefit from network effects and reach financial sustainability. Access can be restricted to stakeholders that align with its social mission. Conversely, a closed access allows the platform to be selective and form a homogeneous mission-driven group, which in turn reinforces its social orientation and further secures its supporters. As scholars of digital platforms have alluded, while the quality of a platform's network reflects its distinct identity, a platform's distinct identity affects the quality of its network (Cennamo, 2021; Chen et al., 2022).

Beyond limiting the platform's access to a small number of stakeholders, an impermeable boundary allows the platform organization to position itself on the interventionist end of the governance spectrum (Gulati et al., 2012). AllDonors assigns stakeholders a specific role in the platform ecosystem and closely manages their online and offline interactions. Providing support to its stakeholders and inciting them to help each other, the platform creates a sense of reciprocity between and within groups of stakeholders and thereby strengthens their communal ties. In this sense, a centralized interventionist governance also highlights the platform's prioritization of its network's quality over its size.

Finally, the platform's centralized interventionist approach is further enabled by its social orientation. Support by well-established philanthropic foundations and public bodies firmly settles AllDonors within its local environment and confers legitimacy on its governance arrangements. Simultaneously, a centralized interventionist approach allows it to strengthen its socially oriented identity. As philanthropic foundations and public bodies value such governance arrangements as a guarantee of AllDonors' social mission, they enable it to secure non-market resources (Muñoz & Cohen, 2017) and escape investors' growth pressure.

Accordingly, this configuration can be characterized as the fulcrum of a social-impact ecosystem. What is core is the social-impact nature of the collaboration between stakeholders; technology simply acts as a facilitator for reaching its mission of making progress on social and environmental problems. In line with Presenza et al.'s (2019) study, we argue that the Italian civic crowdfunding platform Meridonare, which, similar to AllDonors, embodies a social orientation, a closed access, and a centralized interventionist governance, also reflects this type of SMP.

5.2. The SMP as a repository of technological tools for social innovation

In the case of RaisingWiz, a commercial orientation, semi-open access, and a strong reliance on technology mutually reinforce one another. A commercially oriented identity and a permeable boundary is a prevailing combination in digital platforms' organizational design. As technological development requires financial investments, a typical platform business model depends on the platform's capacity to attract many stakeholders for them to interact and generate value for each other as well as for the platform (Boudreau, 2010; Cennamo, 2021; McIntyre et al., 2021). As RaisingWiz benefited from the support of impact investors, the platform is likely to eventually become profitable and pay a return on investment (even though impact investor are usually first concerned with achieving social or environmental goals; Schlütter et al., 2023). By opting for semi-open access, the platform makes sure to extend its reach to a large scope of stakeholders and sustain its growth and financial strength.

Moreover, beyond scaling the platform as a company, working with a variety of stakeholders allows RaisingWiz to scale its range of technological tools. This highlights the mutual reinforcement between permeable boundary and technology reliance. As RaisingWiz's trademark is to customize tools to fit stakeholders' identity and meet their strategic objectives, each new and different stakeholder is a

Table 3
Three configurations of SMPs.

	Fulcrum of a social impact ecosystem	Repository of technological tools for social innovation	Matchmaker
Identity	Social orientation	Commercial orientation	Social orientation
Boundary	Closed access	Semi-open access	Open access
Governance	Centralization	Decentralization	Non-interventionism
Technology	Weak reliance	Strong reliance	Weak reliance

Note: The design choices reinforcing each other for each configuration are in bold.

new challenge to innovate and amplify its technological capabilities. Combined with a decentralized governance, a strong technology reliance also acts as a safeguard against controversies that could be fueled by the platform's collaboration with contested stakeholders in a social-mission context (e.g., for-profit companies). The creation of customized and autonomous tools distances RaisingWiz from the stakeholders for which these tools are created. While the tools are created to serve social purposes, the stakeholders for which they are created can pursue different multiple and sometimes contradictory purposes.

Finally, technological innovativeness can make RaisingWiz more attractive to a high number of stakeholders, which furthers its growth and strengthens its financial sustainability. Given that stakeholders enjoy great autonomy in managing their customized technological tools to create and govern a community around a social or environmental problem, RaisingWiz's growth is not limited by the logistical constraints of offline interventions (e.g., workshops, social events). Tools can be developed for and used by anyone and anywhere, emphasizing the supportive relationship between a commercial orientation and a strong technology reliance.

Developing social-mission technologies, this configuration depicts SMPs as a repository of technological tool for social innovation. While we are not aware of similar platforms, we show how this type can occupy an important role in social mission value chains of large organizations or complement other types of SMPs.

5.3. The SMP as a matchmaker

The case of HelpPooling reveals a third configuration, which positions the SMP as a matchmaker. HelpPooling's founders believe that addressing social and environmental problems requires everyone to be a changemaker, contributing according to their capabilities (e.g., money, time, expertise) and matching their capabilities with those of others. Therefore, the platform opts for an open access. A platform's permeable boundary can facilitate stakeholders' entry, accelerate the growth of a platform's network, and thereby increase the chances that complementors match and develop innovative and meaningful solutions (Gawer, 2014; Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024). Given that the more a platform's access is open, the more difficult it is for the platform organization to intervene in its stakeholders' interactions (Gulati et al., 2012), HelpPooling also opts for non-interventionism.

Moreover, given the platform's social mission, HelpPooling's founders wanted to establish a socially oriented identity, to signal to the platform's (future) stakeholders that social impact is at the core of activities (Grassi & Toschi, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). They started their platform by relying on donations and volunteer work. However, as illustrated by the example of RaisingWiz and as demonstrated by extant literature, the creation and maintenance of digital platforms require financial resources (Cossey et al., 2023). Facing difficulties in reaching financial sustainability, HelpPooling's founders sought to obtain financial support; yet the platform's open access and non-interventionism gave philanthropic foundations and public bodies the impression that HelpPooling was a mere technological piece. Indeed, what allows AllDonors to secure support is its closed access and centralized interventionist governance.

Contrary to the AllDonors and RaisingWiz cases, which illustrate how interdependences between some dimensions can be mutually reinforcing, the case of HelpPooling shows how such interdependences can become a source of tension. Among other documented cases of SMPs, none combine a social orientation, an open access, and non-interventionism. While Spacehive and RomAltruista have a permeable boundary, both still manage to implement some kind of governance arrangements, and Spacehive opts for a commercial orientation (Caridà et al., 2022; Logue & Grimes, 2022).

Eventually, in 2021, HelpPooling's founders decided to rely on their web development skills and to charge large organizations and communities for the creation of customized technological tools. Yet, to preserve the socially oriented identity of the platform, HelpPooling's team sought the endorsement of public and social-purpose organizations. Relying more strongly on extended technological features but maintaining a social orientation, HelpPooling initiates a transition from an SMP as a matchmaker to an SMP as a repository of technological tools for social innovation. The weak alignment of this third configuration sheds light on the emerging nature of the phenomenon. SMPs are still experimenting with the combination of design choices, and research is still in its infancy.

6. Avenues for future research

Iterating between literature on digital platforms and emerging literature on SMPs on the one hand and data from our three case studies on the other hand, we illustrate how four organizing dimensions commonly discussed by information systems and organizational scholars manifest in SMPs. We show SMPs' organizational trade-offs and specify their design choices with respect to each dimension. The insights gained from our analysis expose the interdependences among the four dimensions. We further argue that these interdependences constitute the core of organizational configurations. The configurations we uncover are illustrative of the richness and diversity in the organizational design of SMPs. Our objective was to allude to the potential of applying a configurational lens to SMPs to further theorize and empirically assess this diversity. We close this article by suggesting avenues to advance a configurational research agenda and to deepen the understanding of SMPs as vehicles to address Grand Challenges.

First, we suggest that applying a configurational perspective to SMPs can deepen the understanding of both SMPs and digital platforms in general. On the one hand, a configurational approach based on a larger sample of SMPs than the one investigated in this article would allow scholars to further theorize distinct archetypes and systematically evaluate the mutual reinforcement or incompatibility of design choices (De Reuver et al., 2018; Furnari et al., 2021; Muñoz & Cohen, 2017). On the other hand, SMPs' trade-offs, design choices, and interdependences can shed new light on and refine our understanding of digital platforms. This could be fruitful given that mainstream digital platforms have recently implemented corporate social responsibility strategies, as Presenza, Panniello, and Messeni Petruzzelli (2021) illustrate with the example of Airbnb's pursuit of social and environmental purposes in local tourist industries.

Second, as scholars identify different configurations of SMPs, we suggest that each configuration be analyzed in relation to the

social impact it generates – that is, the outcome an SMP creates to make progress on social and environmental problems. While all SMPs aim to drive collective efforts of social innovation, the way they organize is likely to influence the outcome of such process (Mair et al., 2023; Seelos & Mair, 2020). From our analysis, two distinct outcomes seem to emerge. As RaisingWiz builds stakeholders' capabilities by providing them with a repository of technological tools, the platform's social impact results in an aggregation of the positive outcomes achieved by its many stakeholders. Conversely, AllDonors supports a small number of stakeholders throughout the social innovation process for them to achieve positive outcomes, but also generates its own social impact by establishing a supportive ecosystem. Investigating the type of social impact each configuration generates would subsequently help identify which SMP is more suitable for which stakeholders and for which social and environmental problems (Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024). While some stakeholders might need a technological boost to make progress on societal challenges, some problems might be best addressed by strengthening communal ties between stakeholders across sectors.

Along these same lines, we encourage further research to assess the success of SMPs. Given that SMPs are at the crossroads of technology, social innovation, and, for some of them, market activities, their assessment is likely to comprise multiple criteria and to differ from the assessment of traditional social-mission organizations and traditional digital platforms (Grassi & Toschi, 2021). While digital platforms' success is usually evaluated considering their network size and effects (Chen et al., 2022; McIntyre et al., 2021), SMPs may favor the quality of the network over its growth. What is then the specificities of network size and effects in a social-mission context, and what are the other markers of success for SMPs? What are SMPs' unintended outcomes and potential downsides that might (re)produce societal challenges rather than tackle them (Gkeredakis, Lifshitz-Assaf, & Barrett, 2021; Mair & Gegenhuber, 2021).

Third, configurations of SMPs could be studied according to their competitive and collaborative relationships among them as well as with other stakeholders. While competition between platforms and the effect of platforms' entry into established fields have been the subjects of many studies (Chang & Sokol, 2022; Rietveld & Schilling, 2021), SMPs' competitive and collaborative dynamics have not yet been investigated. What unique challenges does a social-mission context raise for platforms' competition and collaboration? Would similar types of SMPs tend to collaborate but different types compete with one another? How do SMPs affect the existing power relations within established fields? Would some incumbent organizations (e.g., philanthropic foundations, public bodies) tend to collaborate with some types of SMP and not with others?

Fourth, we suggest that scholars adopt longitudinal research designs (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013) to investigate SMPs' life cycle, as illustrated by Mikolajewska-Zajac et al.'s (2022) study of the platform Couchsurfing. Our analysis shows that SMPs – like any organization – make design choices at a particular point in time and later revise such choices. By deciding to offer customized technological tools, HelpPooling is moving toward a configuration resembling that of RaisingWiz. However, as our three cases are snapshots of configurations, they only touch upon SMPs' evolution processes. We cannot claim that HelpPooling's choice to strengthen its technology reliance will help the platform eventually reach financial sustainability. We also cannot infer whether the matchmaker configuration is doomed to fail or evolve toward one of the other two configurations. Making such a claim requires studies that address questions such as the following: Which conditions favor or constrain SMPs' evolution? Does SMPs' evolution occur as piecemeal changes, going from a social orientation to a commercial one, for example? Or does changing one dimension require reconsidering the whole configuration, given dimensions' interdependences? From what configuration to what other configuration is the evolution process likely to unfold?

Beyond considering time as a research method, scholars could consider time as a research lens to theorize configurations of SMP (Blagoev, Hernes, Kunisch, & Schultz, 2023). Grand Challenges refer to long-term and global societal problems, but they manifest in local and urgent crises (Seelos et al., 2023). Social innovation processes thus require short duration projects as well as enduring initiatives. While short-term periods favor the lively generation of novel ideas necessary to find solutions to complex problems, the long-term perspective allows the implementation and scale of these solutions (Gegenhuber & Mair, 2024). Moreover, societal stakeholders act upon different temporal orientations: companies are bound to short-term reporting, non-profits are dependent on the time frame of public subsidies, and public bodies are organized around the rhythm of election campaigns (Hilbolling, Deken, Berends, & Tuertscher, 2022). With their capacity to bring a large set of stakeholders together, SMPs may offer an inspiring opportunity to strategically embrace different temporal orientations (Fayard, 2023). Do some configurations of SMP favor idea generation and pragmatic mobilization of resources to quickly work toward solutions to local problems? Do other configurations offer a suitable basis for lasting community building to address problems on a more global scale? What are the configurations that can combine short-term and long-term initiatives?

Finally, we suggest that scholars analyze configurations of SMPs with respect to the institutional context in which they are embedded. SMPs' explicit mission to enable various stakeholders to interact and make progress on problems of public interest implies that attention to SMPs' contextual dynamics is required. Research already emphasizes that platforms' organizing processes align with the cultural, social, and political context in which they operate (De Reuver et al., 2018; Reischauer & Mair, 2018a). For example, Mair and Reischauer (2017) explain that US sharing economy platforms are mostly socially oriented while German platforms are more commercially oriented. Although we aim to develop portable insights by comparing our three Belgian cases with SMPs embedded in other contexts, our understanding of these contexts remains limited, and cross-country comparative research is necessary to expand our conceptual framework. Do some contexts favor or hinder certain configurations of SMPs? Are some organizing dimensions similar in different contexts? Studying SMPs' embeddedness will help understand if there is room for a global archetype of SMPs and whether there should be a global regulation. In this sense, such studies would contribute to current efforts by national governments and international institutions to regulate the platform economy (Schübler et al., 2021).

Overall, our study helps advance knowledge on digital platforms as effective vehicles to orchestrate collective and concerted efforts of social innovation by integrating extant literature in a novel way and by providing revelatory illustrations. We hope the conceptual framework we offer and the research agenda we suggest will pave the way for further theoretical and empirical research on the rapidly

emerging phenomenon of SMPs.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Elodie Dessy: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Johanna Mair:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Virginie Xhaufclair:** Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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