

ABSTRACT

“COOPERATIVE PLATFORMS IN A EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY”

By Como, Mathis, Tognetti, Rapisardi

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In the past years we have assisted to the rapid spread of what is now commonly called the “sharing economy” in various sectors, adopting different forms frequently based on the use of the Internet and digital platforms. Looking at the underlying discourses of the sharing economy (collaboration, solidarity, sharing), we find many elements in common with the vision and experience of the cooperatives. Because of these common elements, but also challenging that narrative on the field of governance and democracy, cooperatives themselves are becoming interested in the phenomenon and are trying to understand which forms of convergence they can develop.

Moving from a recent pioneer experience of research conducted in Italy, LAMA Agency and Cooperatives Europe expanded and explored the perspective and experiences on the sharing economy of cooperatives at European level. The research explored the level of awareness, the interest, practical cases, opportunities and barriers of the cooperatives approaching the sharing economy topic. The two organizations interviewed the representatives of national cooperative associations in 9 different EU member states and launched an online mapping survey collecting 38 sounding empirical cases from 11 European countries, plus 3 initiatives from outside the EU. The study demonstrates that cooperatives can contribute to the collaborative economy promoting models of community based on membership rather than usership, supporting new initiatives to manage the commons, but also getting the business model transformation opportunities enabled by digital platforms and internet technologies. The paper provides also suggestions for further research and work at EU level.