The Interconnection of Sustainability and Collaborative Consumption

- *A case study of clothing libraries* -

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Spring Term 2013

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Title	The Interconnection of Sustainability on Collaborative Consumption - *A case study of clothing libraries* -
Examination	Master's thesis (two year)
Term	Spring term 2013

Abstract: Collaborative consumption is a recently emerged consumption pattern based on the practice of sharing, swapping, lending, bartering and other similar modes of exchange, practiced instead of the conventional way of buying products and services. The unique character of this consumption practice suggests a shift in the idea of private ownership, where accessing products becomes more important than owning them. The scope of this thesis examines the factors influencing the emergence of these initiatives in relation to sustainability and attempts to recognize the possible changes occurring towards the perception of private ownership. For this purpose a qualitative case study approach examines the concept of clothing libraries in five cities across Sweden.

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Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

Overspent[1] western lifestyles represent the least sustainable lifestyles in the world. The inability to continue business as usual and the alarming factors pointing out the urgency of lowering our consumption appetites, remain just an acknowledged hypothesis. While the Earth is 'waiting' for our conscious to take the lead, other socio-economic factors may shape the dominant unsustainable consumption. In the past several years the lifestyle of an average Westerner has been trembled by the downfall of the global economy, forcing different prioritization and rethinking consumption necessities (Gansky 2010).

A number of different kinds of behaviour do indicate some responsiveness to the changing role of consumption. One such shift has contributed to the development of a new consumption practice bringing together consumers and enabling *sharing* instead of *buying* as a modality for acquiring goods. This practice is turning individualistic consumption into *collaborative consumption* (CC). One could claim that there is nothing new in the idea of sharing, but the scope of this trend and the diversity behind it makes it very new for capitalist, individualised societies. How can we understand what drives these new practices?

One of the best ways to touch the core of a new emerging phenomenon is to try to understand it through an example where its premises are shown in practice. For this purpose the study examines an example of such an alternative practice, where the notion of what is sharable goes beyond the common expectations – *clothing libraries*.

Clothing library is a recently emerged concept based on the same principles as a conventional books library where instead of books one can borrow clothes. Following the example of books libraries, the concept of clothing library has the tendency to satisfy the desire for diversity and novelty in one's personal dressing style, while at the same time maximising the potential of one garment, without necessarily pressuring the need for more production and resource exploitation.

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[1] See Schor, 1999.

As a phenomenon, and practice, several recently emerged in Sweden and in other parts of the world. The present paper presents research carried out on six clothing libraries from Sweden operating in different cities across the country.

This concept, unorthodox for western societies where one of the most individualist representations is the way we dress, will help on the way to recognize if the rationale behind CC is redefining, refreshing and in some way rediscovering 'sharing' of privately owned goods/services.

The following section continues with the aim of this study and presents the research questions that will be examined later on. Followed by motivation, the decision to examine CC as a research area will be introduced. Further on the methodology of the research will be outlined, explaining the methods chosen to address the research questions. In order the support the understanding of CC a theoretical framework is developed and explained. After this, the analytical discussion will present the findings of the research and develop arguments in line with the aim of the study. Finally, concluding remarks will enclose the discussion and suggest further research interests that can be addressed in the future.

1.1. Aim of the study

The area of research belongs to the study of a newly emerged connected to consumption practices, where the different examples belong to very diverse categories. Nevertheless one aspect stands clear, the course in this consumption practice touches upon the idea of sustainable consumption, if nothing else, simply because of the major tendency to reduce the need of newly produced objects, or better yet products aimed for multiple users, rather than single one (Botsman & Rogers 2010; Gansky 2010).

Deriving from this notion this study has a *primary aim* to recognize the driving factors behind the concept of CC and its relation to sustainability. To my personal interest it is intriguing to recognize if these initiatives are acknowledging *sustainability* as part of their triggering factors, or if their contribution to less consumption in society is just an unintentional, positive outcome.

The *secondary aim* of this research is to discover possible changes in the relation/attitude

towards the idea of private ownership. Considering the ground breaking driver of CC – preferring access over ownership, it is impossible to avoid questioning the idea of private ownership. However, the intention is to gain an initial overview if an attitude change is occurring, since in depth analysis on this matter would require a separate research study.

1.2.1. Research questions

Considering the primary and secondary aim of this study two research questions will be followed during the analysis:

> *1. In what way are the factors behind the collaborative consumption initiative related to sustainability?*

> *2. How is collaborative consumption influencing the idea of private ownership?*

1.3. Motivation

One could question the relevance of this social phenomenon and the actual novelty behind it, due to some of its characteristics that are deemed common in similar social phenomena. However, what cannot be denied is that we are strongly selective in the manner and level towards which we find sharing practices acceptable. Therefore several aspects are making it worth the attention: the core differences to individual hyper-consumption, the critical mass[2] generating the volume of CC (dominantly in western capitalist societies) and the period in which this trend is emerging.

While different factors can be related to the emergence of CC, the dominating drivers are considered to be, the economic burden and financial crises, the continuous pressures of the environmental resource scarcity and its rapid escalation, the emerging utilisation of smart technologies and peer-to-peer social networking (Gansky 2010). Gansky argues that the economic crisis has created a general distrust of the power of corporations, making the consumer rethink its system of values. Further on the rapid natural resource degradation and the pressure of

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[2] **Critical mass** in this context is regarded as a sufficient number of adopters of an innovation in a social system so that the social phenomenon/trend (in this case collaborative consumption) is acknowledged as existing (Everett, 2003). In history of theory of collective action the concept of critical mass was introduced as a term which in a metaphorical way refers "[...] to the idea that some threshold of participants or action has to be crossed before a social movement "explodes" into being" (Oliver et al. 1985).

environmentally stable behaviour are making the old way of consumption simply unbearable (ibid.).

The general principles of CC are neither revolutionary in their essence, nor it can be argued that they have the potential to become the new dominant consumption modality. In fact, to my belief based on the research done for this thesis, the CC communities were not initiated with the tendency to 'take over the market'. On the contrary, most of these examples were emerging from bottom up initiatives to fill in gaps burdening the consumer (Gansky 2010).

One such example is the research example of this study - the clothing library, a concept emerging side by side with one of the most influential industries on the market- the textile industry. The idea behind a clothing library is not to substitute completely the conventional way of how people purchase clothes and thus to challenge the textile industry itself. The idea is quite the contrary, being aware that fighting the 'big guys' would be a lost battle from the beginning, the clothing libraries tend to offer alternative to satisfying people's desire for diversity while at the same time decreasing their consumption habits.

These considerations are further considered in the concluding discussion of this thesis.

It is not excluded, however, that CC may have the potential of driving the dominant consumption premises into a different direction, at least partially if not completely. According to Lamberton and Randal (2012) sharing economies[3] can be lethally disruptive for ownership-based business and therefore represent both a big challenge and a prosperous opportunity which requires redefinition of their system of operation.

Car-sharing for example, with the help of a critical mass of customers managed to drive the car industry to the CC market – by offering cars with proprietary hardware differences meant to serve several owners instead of only one. This initiative represents a shift from cars for private to cars for collective use.

(Miller 2013).

To my opinion these aspects symbolize an intriguing representation of this trend where one could wonder why such initiatives would emerge in neoliberal societies where market competitive prices offer highly affordable goods. This has triggered my interest to reflect upon this social phenomenon and attempt to recognize sustainability driving factors (if any) behind a CC initiative. Botsman and Rogers suggest that CC initiatives do not hold sustainability as their

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[3] The concept of sharing economy will be introduced in section 3.2

primary goal, but yet contribute to lowering environmental degradation and reducing material production as their outcome. Through the example of *clothing libraries,* as a concept representing the premises of CC, this thesis will try to critically asses the emergence of this concept and to explain the driving factors behind it and by that recognize if sustainability is considered as one of them.

2. Methodology

The methodology applied is in line with the primary aim of this research attempting to determine the sustainability factors related to founding and governing a CC concept; and the secondary, to recognize the ways in which this consumption pattern is challenging the idea of private ownership. Encouraged by the novelty of the research area this study adopted an exploratory path with a qualitative case study approach. Aiming to better understand the phenomenon of CC, the qualitative approach provided fruitful data collected in the field.

In the process of portraying the aspects of interest different factors determined the selection of the research sample and the flow of the research process itself. Due to the importance of providing clarity for the decisions made throughout the research, the following chapter will outline the design of the research study, starting by defining the research area and demarcations of the context. Further on the methods used in the process of data gathering will be presented, followed by an introduction to the primary and secondary data of the research unit. Finally, the chapter will conclude by presenting limitations that occurred and ethical aspects of the research process.

2.1. Outlining the research process

The research period was stretched between mid March and mid April 2013, followed by visiting the clothing libraries in the field and conducting phone interviews with those impossible to reach within the research time framework. At the beginning of the research process a dilemma arose about choosing the direction of the study with regards to the research sample. The diversity of practice examples falling under the concept of CC is very broad. Therefore the opportunity to analyse several examples with different backgrounds or a single case and in-depth analysis required attention and careful decision making. However, being aware that examples from

different backgrounds may offer diversity in the analytical discussion, the advantage of detailed analysis of a single example prevailed as the right choice. As argued by Simmons (1996), in-depth study examples of a newly emerged area, such as the CC, often provide unique perspectives in understanding the phenomenon and contribute to developing further theoretical perspectives (Eishenhardt 2002).

Aspects taken into consideration when narrowing down the focus of this topic was choosing an example with unconventional characteristics in order to better display the alternative side of CC as a consumption pattern. The first delimitation of my research unit of analysis was the geographical location where I currently live. Being familiar with the region played important role for the possibility to visit the organisations of which I became interested in.

In pursuit for a suitable research unit the clothing libraries stood out as an example operating side by side with the textile industry highly related to boosting overconsumption in western societies (Farrant 2010). Considering the fact that clothes represent a very personal belonging, this example caught my attention with its very unconventional characteristic, operating in an area where one could think providing services cannot find its place.

In line with the aim and the exploratory nature of the research process, a descriptive multiple case study design was best suited in the attempt to map the clothing libraries on a national level in Sweden. The descriptive case study has the aim to complement the analysis of the phenomenon in its context, in this case CC. (Yin 2003; Sholz and Tietje 2002). The decision to provide data from multiple sources played an important role in strengthening the study argumentations and validity of the case (Yin 2003).

The purpose of the research sample has an exemplifying role to illustrate the arguments provided in the study. It is important to emphasize that the analysis is based on a complete sample of all the organisations around Sweden representing themselves as *clothing libraries* at the time when the research was conducted. Therefore there is a high validity of the comments made on behalf of clothing libraries, which can contribute to enhancing further theoretical generalizations (Eishenhardt 2002) on understanding the phenomenon of CC.

2.2. Research methods

The methods used in constructing the research sample where semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations conducted in the field. The interviews were conducted with representatives from the clothing libraries in five different cities around Sweden (Malmo, Gothenburg, Umea, Uppsala and Stockholm). A permission to visit the libraries and conducting research was requested prior the interviews took place. Upon approval of all the participants to take part in the research process, both in the field and telephone interviews were conducted. All of the interviews were recorded and lasted approximately one hour. Out of six in total, four were conducted in the field while two were telephone interviews, due to the difficulty to reach two of the cities in the considered time framework.

The choice of semi-structured interviews was done because of the open ended approach that this method is offering; where it was important for the interviewer to provide the freedom to the interviewee to express his/hers opinion (Warren 2001). A questionnaire[4] was used as guidance throughout the conversation. The interviews consisted of opening questions related to emergence of the idea of clothing libraries, external influence and inspiration; questions regarding the organisational system within the library, starting from the process of gathering garments and their distribution and the final stage where the clothes are no longer usable and ready for disposal. Further on the interviews covered the awareness of the concept of CC and the perceptions of the interviewees if the concept of clothing libraries can be regarded as part of this consumption practice. The attitude towards the premise "access is better than ownership" was also part of the inquiry. Finally the interviews covered future plans of the clothing libraries and the challenge to set a solid ground for operation, confronted with the powerful textile industry firmly based on principles opposite to the idea of sharing.

An important role in the data gathering for this study was the opportunity to do field observations in four of the clothing libraries from the research sample. While the interviews were the main source of information, the observation on the field helped me to understand better what they actually do and not barely to rely on the participant's descriptions and rationalizations (Bloor & Wood 2006). More importantly, having the opportunity to visit the libraries enhanced the quality

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[4] See Appendix: A

of the data for this research and provided me with invaluable opportunity to familiarize myself with the environment.

2.3. **Research sample**

The research unit of analysis, as explained earlier, is based on the newly emerged concept of clothing libraries. The focus of the research sample is guided by the dominant research inquiry and aims towards reviling the sustainability factors influencing an opening of a clothing library, as well as the reflections of the interviewees on the change towards the idea of private ownership.

2.3.1. Primary research sample

The selection of the primary research sample aimed to map the clothing libraries around Sweden. After managing to find information about the first library in Malmo the network started to spread. At the end six units in total were located in four different cities around the country.

The data in the primary sample are constructed from six semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives from each of the clothing libraries. The selection of the interviewees was done based on their role in the clothing library. Namely, all of the participants had a managing role and were present in the process of developing the library from its beginnings. This was a very important factor while doing the selection, due to the sustainability focus of this study. It was important for the interviewees to be familiar with the initiating motivation for opening the library and well acquainted with its operational aspects and member structure. Once the factors were determined, they were considered for all the participants in order to provide comparatively homogenous sample which shares critical similarities relevant for the research questions (McGracken 1999).

The four conducted interviews in the field covered the clothing libraries in Malmo, Stockholm and Gothenburg, while the conversation with the libraries in Umea and Uppsala were telephone interviews.

2.3.2. Secondary research sample

Due to the novelty of the concept of clothing libraries there is a lack of relevant literature related to the phenomenon. Therefore the secondary research sample for this study was extracted from information gathered from the official websites, social network profiles and other online forums related to the clothing libraries. The information gathered from these sources was mainly used to gain an initial idea of the concept itself through the information represented on the official media of the research units.

2.4. Limitations and ethical aspects of the research

During the research process certain limitations were faced that need to be pointed out. These limitations were related to factors such as time framework, location of the libraries, the chosen participants and the language used during the interviews. Namely, the limited time possibilities made it impossible to visit two of the libraries in the research sample - Uppsala and Umea. Since the participation of all of the participants was voluntary and their interest to take part was the only motivation they had, I felt the responsibility to respond to their schedules and make appointments suitable to their convenience. Nevertheless covering the libraries in Uppsala and Umea was crucial for the data quality. Therefore bearing in mind that this restricted the possibility to experience the libraries on the site, two telephone interviews were conducted within the research time framework.

The choice of participants in the interviews is another limitation that should be stressed. Once I managed to get in contact with the clothing libraries I requested if possible to interview the founders of the particular library. While this requirement was willingly fulfilled by the participants, once arriving on the field it was drawn to my attention that in few of the libraries there was a team of people and not only one person owning the library. Nevertheless the fact that all the interviewees were involved from the beginnings of the libraries this aspect did not affected the sample in a significant way.

The language barrier between me as the interviewer and the chosen interviewees can be selected as another limitation that occurred. Both the participants and I spoke English as our second language which has possibly limited the opportunity of expressing certain reflections and

descriptions during the interviews. Nevertheless the level of language proficiency was high in every interview, therefore this limitation can be considered to be a minor one.

Finally several *ethical aspects* were taken in consideration during the research process. Making sure that the interviewees were informed prior to the interview regarding the topic and the research study aim. Once in the field the information on how the interview will be conducted was provided, and a permission to record the conversation was requested from each of the participants. As a final aspect it is important to stress that the data provided by the participants are used with their consent for the purpose of this research.

3. Outlining theoretical standpoints

Due to the novelty of the phenomenon, the literature available on the matter covers rather general explanations of CC without providing a strong theoretical background.

Therefore it is important to enhance the understanding of CC through a conceptual framework that is strengthened by empirical observation, and that in turn serves as an advocacy lens for the later analytical discussion (Carswell 2008). In this respect, the paper contributes the benefit of a more detailed, empirically-based study, which helps to fill this gap and provide a degree of robustness to the conceptual framework.

This chapter will start with unraveling the concept of sustainable consumption, as a dominant concept important to underpin the understanding of CC. Through discussing different theoretical standpoints related to sustainable consumption the correlation between conventional consumption habits and environmental degradation will be presented. This aspect is significant considering the interest of this research to discuss the sustainability factors in a new consumption practice. Further on the concept of CC will be portrayed explaining its constitutive parts and practice examples.

Finally a conceptual framework will be presented grounded in the *theory of governing the commons* reflecting upon the studied case and characteristics of CC as a consumption pattern.

The application of this theory will be done in a rather different setting than the one exemplified by Elionor Ostrom, the author of the theory to be used. Nevertheless, its applicability will be justified with suitable argumentations making an effort to expand the ground on which the theory is founded.

While Ostrom discusses different aspects of organization in governing common resources, the emphasis in this elaboration is placed on the point of design principles, where *interdependence reciprocity and collective action* are inevitable in the pursuit of sustainably efficient governance of the commons. Highlighting these principles is considered important because of the applicability of the theory to the phenomenon of CC. Moreover these principles will be represented in the further argumentation for the potential of CC and its influence on the consumption habits in a long run.

3.1. Understanding sustainable consumption

To be able to discuss CC and its relations to sustainable consumption habits, one must have a clear idea about what sustainability means in the first place. Bearing in mind that our social prosperity is increasingly considering development within the boundaries of our planet, it would not be wrong to say that everything we do can be evaluated by how sustainable it is. "Everyone talks about sustainability, but fails to implement measures to reduce our downward spiral, and we fail to even define what sustainability means or how we begin to get on a sustainable path" (Moran 2010:7).

Starting from there it is difficult to determine sustainable consumption when it is difficult to define what sustainability means in the first place. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to develop a clear definition of what sustainable consumption means and when a consumption pattern can be considered sustainable. For example as it is defined by the Oslo Round Table Convention describes it as:

"The use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials, as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations"
(Oslo Round Table Convention 1994).

or as Peattie and Collins define it:

"Sustainable consumption is whereby each person should consume only their "earth share" in order to make the consumption socially equitable and ecologically sustainable"
(Peattie and Collins 2009 in Huang & Rust 2010:44 emphasis added).

These quotes supply somewhat detailed description of the factors that need to be considered when one tends to consume sustainably. But on the other hand, in a similar manner as defining sustainability, these factors are generalized to an extent that makes them impossible to be identified. For example, satisfying "basic needs" is a vague determinant of what is considered to be a basic need. Further on, who decides on the parameters with which we measure whether we jeopardize the needs of future generations? And after all, who can estimate how big or small is one's "earth share"? These generalizations explain how vague the concept of sustainability can be, while at the same time covering many important factors that need to be considered in order to diminish our consumption footprint.

Another way of understanding sustainability is to understand what it is not, or in this case what is unsustainable consumption (Ehrenfeld 2008). In the neoliberal economy consumption has a crucial role and it is seen as the representation of capitalist society. In the spirit of neoliberal economic thought consumption is a universal panacea for the unstable global economy, or in other words the more we consume, the better our economy will be (Jackson 2005a). In other words, if we aim for a richer life we are helping society and economic stability, therefore the accumulation of material wealth is prioritized above everything else (Schor 1999). This notion has shifted the value judgment of our consumption habits, and instead of only regarding consumption as satisfaction of basic needs, our consumption habits have climbed higher on the hierarchy. The extent to which we consume today has been assigned with profound value and a tendency has been developed to replace *being* with *having* (Schor 1999; Jackson 2005b; Miller 2010).

Towards the end of the XX century, the well known social psychologist, Erich Fromm has discussed the shift in perceptions of *being* and *having*, and the consequences that come along with this change. Fromm (1976) argues that if one is what one has, then one's identity is based on what one holds in possession. Thus, the question arises "Who am I, if I lose everything?"

(ibid.) This reflection of the relation that people have towards possessions illustrates the extent to which consumption gains importance in people's lives.

In the same fashion Schor (1999) discusses the change of wellbeing criteria, relating ownership to status symbols and seeing those who have more as the privileged ones. Even if we argue that materialism is often something that we eagerly do not want to be related to, it is unavoidable to notice that over the past decades we have given a new priority and meaning to material possessions (Miller 2010). This new meaning is directly being related to our happiness, as we have adjusted our consumer value only on how much goods we can acquire in our life (Huang & Rust 2010). People have developed a relationship with commodities that alienates their wellbeing in the sense that the pressure of possessing material commodities is continuously increasing (Schor 1999).

 If we take into account the constraints of the assimilating capacity of earth and its limited resources, our consumption patterns and levels of affluent industrialized countries turn into a problem (Mont 2004b). Above all the relation we have developed in the pursuit of material comfort, and the constantly unsatisfied basic needs have placed our consumption proportions under question. If, for example, seven billion people consume with the same intensity like an average American does, about four Earth planets would be needed to provide the necessary natural recourses to reach the level of production (Wackernagel and Rees 1996). We have genuinely placed ourselves in a throw away mentality, what according to neoliberal economists would mean light future for the national economies. But once we consider that this also means accumulation of waste and scarce resource exploitation, it becomes obvious that consumption plays a controversial role for our prosperity (Mont 2004a; Jackson 2005a).

While it is generally accepted that the shift from conventional consumption habits is desirable, important and necessary, this accepted notion has not contributed towards encouraging sustainable behaviours (Jackson 2009). Our actions towards 'greening' consumption have only been assigned as modification of what we currently consume, but fail to contribute the preservation of the environment. In fact, as Jackson (2010) argues, the only thing that has managed to decrease our carbon emissions was recession. "Reusing, remanufacturing, and recycling end-of-life products, using the wastes of one production process as inputs to another, and redesigning products, processes, and supply chains for improved efficiency all offer clear

environmental benefits to industrial society" (Jackson 2005b:20). However, one could question if they trigger the needed behavioral change.

No matter if it is sustainable consumption, or like Fromm refers to 'sane consumption'[5], 'downshifting'[6] as Schor does, or 'meaningful prosperity'[7] which is the term that Jackson uses, all these concepts boil down to one thing, we need not to consume differently, but we need to consume less (Jackson 2005a). At this point the relation to CC can be noticed and the aspect of multiple users for one product places a logical inquiry if this could contribute to less consumption and less production at the end. However, this question is only one aspect that can be taken into consideration, before we go deeper into this the following chapter will first outline the concept of CC and it's underlying premises.

2.4. Outlining Collaborative consumption

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, CC is a recently emerged consumption pattern based on the practice of sharing, swapping, lending, bartering etc. instead of the conventional way of buying products and services (Botsman and Rogers 2010). The term collaborative consumption was firstly introduced by Marcus Felson and Joe L. Spaeth in 1978, in relation to routine activities in daily lifestyles. In more recent times CC was mentioned by Ray Algar (2007) in the context of consumer power and the success of emerging online platforms for group discounts and crowd shopping. But the concept of CC as a socio-economic model, related to a so called *sharing economy* was most successfully popularized by Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers in their book "What's mine is yours". According to the authors this emerging trend is "redefining not only what we consume but how we consume" (Botsman & Rogers 2010: xvi).

Botsman and Rogers argue that the backbone of this concept lies in people's realisation that having access to products and services in different areas can be a better option than the traditional idea of private ownership. This rationale derives from the recognized change in consumers' behaviour, where the need to have immediate access to different services becomes more important, than to actually own the item outright. Examples supporting this argument, are

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[5] See Fromm, 1976.
[6] See Schor, 1999.
[7] See Jackson, 2009.

represented through different emerging initiatives around the world, all underlined by common principles of "critical mass, idling capacity, belief in the commons and trust between strangers" (ibid.xvi).

The scope of these examples varies from large to very small, from global to local initiatives, all tackling down the traditional notion of neoliberal consumption: from online communities for peer-to-peer home subletting, to initiatives connecting land owners and food growers in some of the most dense urban jungles in the world; from new types of businesses that offer services of car-sharing, to car-pooling communities where strangers share a ride; from free-shops where people bring stuff they do not need to get something that they do, to emerging time banks where one offers its free time, to a person living nearby to help with everyday tasks etc. All of these examples boil down to the initiative of collaboration in the pursuit of common interest between individuals, very often without a 'middle man' involved.

On a broader scale these different examples belonging to CC can be divided in two clusters, one where the exchange is still valued through money as a currency, and another where peers exchange goods for goods (Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Gansky 2010). Both of these clusters are building upon the principle of the *sharing economy*, which lately has been gaining attention with regard to its general relation to the concept of CC.

Namely, due to the novelty of the recognition of CC as a social phenomenon, it is debated that the sharing economy becomes a separate trend in itself, where sharing is practiced as form of oppressing the over-dependency of money in society (Makkonen 2013; Gorenflo 2013). However, according to some scholars, the sharing economy is a modality through which all of the CC initiatives are operated, relying more on social connections to help reallocation of goods and services (Benkler 2004; Botsman and Rogers 2010). On the basis of the conducted survey and the examples analysed in this study, the sharing economy will be regarded as a modality of CC, in the manner in which Benkler, Botsman and Rogers explain it.

These two clusters of CC can further be divided into three systems – *product service systems, redistribution markets and collaborative lifestyles* based on characteristics relevant in their organisational structure (Botsman and Rogers 2010). The following section will explain these systems and will discuss certain overlapping between them.

3.2.1. Systems of Collaborative consumption

1.2.1. Product Service Systems

Product Service Systems (PSS) are directly disrupting the nature of traditional business mindset and business-consumer relation, by proposing an alternative system where multiple products owned by a company would provide service usage to their customer, without actually selling the product (Mont 2000). The PSS could be characterized as the most market oriented system of CC, which has been influencing a shift from production for individual to collective use supporting the idea of a so called "leasing society" (Braungard 1999 cited in Mont 2002). Best supporting examples for this change are the car-sharing services (Zipcar; Wheelz), whose market has grown with immense intensity over the past few years (Steinberg and Vlasic 2013). "The most obvious environmental advantage of this system is that an individually owned product with often limited usage is replaced with a shared service that maximizes its utility" (Botsman and Rogers 2010:72).

1.2.2. Redistribution markets

Redistribution markets are systems of CC where the need of modern technological solutions is dominantly present. Here the emphasis is on peer-to-peer exchanges managing pre-owned goods to be distributed from a place "where they are not needed to somewhere or someone where they are" (Botsman & Rogers, 2010:73). These systems are mainly represented in online communities where the exchange is very often happening among anonymous actors directly exchanging goods without involving a 'middle men' in between. Redistribution markets are challenging the "... traditional relationship between producer, retailer and consumer, and disrupt the doctrines of "buy more" and "buy new" (ibid.). In the case of the redistribution markets the examples vary from using money as exchange value, like in the case of eBay, trading goods for goods, in the case of Swapshop for example, or a combination of both like in the case of Craigsilist.

1.2.3. Collaborative lifestyles

Collaborative lifestyles are representing an exchange of less tangible assets. The exchange within this system is mostly present on a small scale local level, where actors are exchanging time, space and skills. Time banks can be suggested, as best practice example, where people offer their free time to help others in daily tasks (TaskRabbit), or offering their space/land to others (Landshare). Moreover these initiatives can also happen on an international scale, where, for example people are offering their homes to tourists travelling in their city (Couchsurfing, AirBnB) or directly supporting start up initiatives by landing a certain amount of money through platforms such as Zopa or KickStarter. According to Botsman and Rogers(2010), collaborative lifestyles require a high degree of trust because the focus of the particular exchange is human-to-human interaction and not an object of interest.

These three systems are attempting to outline the different nature of examples of CC happening on a local and global level. Nevertheless, precisely because of the diversity among these examples, one could argue that the strict distinction between them could be easily altered. To my opinion, very often some of these examples are overlapping in their characteristics. Just as a comparison here is an example where the categorization cannot be easily made: Landshare is an online platform in the United Kingdom connecting people who like to grow food with someone who owns a piece of land. In the aforementioned systems this example is categorized as collaborative lifestyle. Wheelz on the other hand, belonging to PSS, is connecting private owners of cars with those who need a car temporarily. To my opinion both of these examples are only providing access to a certain asset from private owners to other interested participants, and therefore do not very clearly distinct from each other in order to be rigidly categorized as different systems.

What can be emphasized from the presented theoretical background is that this emerging consumption practice is based on already common exchange patterns, but the level to which they are spreading triggers attention about the potentiality that these practices can have. What can be outlined as specific is surely the social dimension that this consumption practice has. Here individuals need to collaborate in order to acquire certain goods or services, which obviously is different than the conventional and competitive mode of consumption. While it cannot be argued right from the start if this practice is more sustainable than other, it can be noted that this

dimension opens a new ground on how CC can be analyzed. One aspect that stands out is its premise where ownership does not have a primary role, but rather loses its importance, which as we could see from the previous chapter is one of the dominant factors that shape unsustainable consumption.

In order to better understand this phenomenon, a conceptual framework will be outlined in the section to follow. Here the organizational characteristics of CC will be placed into an existing theoretical framework attempting to provide ground for further analysis presented in this thesis.

3.3. Governing the commons – a conceptual framework

In the famously quoted article from 1968 "The tragedy of the commons", Hardin has emphasized the greed to pursuit individual interest as the essence of counterproductive behavior towards resources "opened to all". The commons as Hardin refers to, and later on so does Ostrom, consist of core resources that provide a limited quantity of extractable units (Hardin 1986; Ostrom 2009). The extraction capacity of the amount of units depends directly on the quality and level of maintenance of the common pool resources (CPR) (Ostrom 2009). Thus according to Hardin, an opportunistic behavior towards these CPRs is undermining their capacity for continuous extraction.

His explanations derive from the socio-economic system in which the individual is encouraged to strive for limitless maximization of commodity while living in a limited world (Hardin 1968). Therefore if the destination towards we all rush is pursuing our own interest, while at the same time believing in freedom of commons, we are already undermining social prosperity by being guided into contradiction (ibid.). For this to be altered our society needs a "fundamental extension of morality" (Hardin 1968) where the imperative of individual progress would be replaced with common benefit.

Considering this notion people are characterized as incapable of maintaining a common resource for mutual benefit. However, the general idea about the 'doomed' commons is later challenged by Ostrom's argumentation where the potentiality of social prosperity through governing the commons lies in the individual involvement in the organizational structure (Ostrom 2009). She notices that the proposed managing models of CPR have dominantly a top-down organization,

and avoid the opportunity of involving all stakeholders in the process of maintaining these resources. In this manner the variations of a single ruling body in managing CPRs is seen as "the only way".

Arguing against the notion of self-interest on the expense of mutual benefit, Ostrom notices that "[w]hen multiple appropriators are dependent on a given CPR as a source of economic activity they are jointly affected by almost everything they do. Each individual must take into account the choices of others when assessing personal choices"(ibid.:38). Therefore the required "fundamental extension in morality" must be encouraged when the final result directly depends on the level and quality of collaboration between the co-appropriators.

Moreover "[p]sychologists also have conducted experiments to determine which conditions maximize the chances that individual resource users will limit their consumption even when trapped in the logic of commons. These experiments suggest that resource users are more likely to restrict their consumption when they receive prompt feedback on the impact of their extraction, when their behavior is visible to others, when they can communicate with their fellow resource users, and when the users share a group identity " (Thompson 2000:242) .

In the elaboration of the theory Ostrom, mainly exemplifying through cases of natural resources, emphasizes the need to rearrange the institutional structure designed to manage them. However, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, here the application of this notion is rather different. In the case of CC the need to rearrange institutional structures that manage common resources refers to a much smaller scale. Here the natural resources are not concerned per se, but managing, allocating and reusing already produced goods through a collaborative consumption modality.

The extension of Ostrom's theory to the area of consumption, where object themselves do not represent natural resources, is justified by the fact that the origin of their production depends directly on natural resource extraction. How one consumes or manages consumption represents a link to natural resource extraction, thus also requiring to be handled in a sustainably efficient way. Following the rationale of governing the commons, in the case of CPRs the emphasis is placed on the level of individual involvement in the managing structure, i.e. the sustainable

efficiency of governing CPRs should distribute responsibility among those who have the necessity to extract them.

At this point, the applicability of the theory of governing the commons in the context of CC becomes relevant. The importance of *interdependence, reciprocity and collective action* in the design principles represented in this theory is highlighting crucial aspects missing in different levels of social organization connected to influencing mass consumption and unsustainable consumption practices. When it comes to relating these principles to CC similarities can be recognized in the grounding principles of the phenomenon itself as an alternative consumption practice. In order to clarify the similarities the design principles need to be presented, which leads us to the following section.

3.3.1. Design principles - Collective Action, Interdependence and Reciprocity

Ostrom argues that distancing the user from managing CPRs results in estrangement and affects the sense of sustainably rational extraction. Taking away the responsibility to be directly involved in the levels of resource management provides a solid ground for developing indifferent behavior towards actions that users take.

Therefore the efficiency of managing a CPR in a sustainable way will be dependent on specific design principles, which in the core of their structure will trigger collective action through interdependence and reciprocity in the managing process.

These design principles are outlined in a framework of specific rules of allocation assigned by the appropriators. Here the users of the resources are enforced to be accountable to them; proposing suitable sanctions which will define the rights to use the resource; further on effectively assign costs proportionate to benefits; and lastly to provide suitable monitoring systems building mutual trust among the users (Ostrom 2000).

It is important to emphasize that the design principles on a community level of appropriation could follow proposed rules of law in a particular region, but it is more important that these principles would have the tendency to fill in gaps caused by the inefficiency of those legislations (Ostrom 2009). As Ostrom argues, many of the examples of successfully governed CPRs have

created an internal managing structure pursuing a different mode of resource use. "Such rules may or may not lead appropriators to manage their resource efficiently and fairly, but they will affect the strategies that appropriators perceive to be available to them and the resulting outcomes" (Ostrom 2009:55).

In managing distribution of goods through collaborative consumption, these principles are also highly recognizable and relevant. In the case of CC, consumers themselves have developed networks suitable for filling in the gap of the common practice of buying products to fulfill their needs, by only accessing the service that a certain product provides, without being obligated to own the product. Here the system of CC does not necessarily alter the dominant mode of consumption, but simply improves its structure through a new modality deriving from within and extends the possibilities of alternative access for satisfying different needs.

Considering that the imperative behind the efficiency or non-efficiency is the mutual collaboration of appropriators, it can be argued that at the center of these structures lies a lattice of interdependence (Ostrom 2009). Requiring participation in a *frequency-dependent* behavior triggers development of certain set of norms created by the participants, resulting in a system of reciprocity.

"[S]ocial norms, especially in a setting where there is communication between the parties, can work as well or nearly as well at generating cooperative behavior as an externally imposed set of rules and system of monitoring and sanctioning. Moreover, norms seem to have certain staying power in encouraging a growth of the desire for cooperative behavior over time, while cooperation enforced by externally imposed rules can disappear very quickly" (Ostrom 2000:147).

Deriving from this point the strongest arguments that Ostrom provides for the efficiency of the structure of self-governed common resources is the power of collective action, where individuals are triggered to act in favor of common benefit by being exposed to interdependence of actions driven by reciprocity. These arguments can be aligned to the organizational structure of CC examples, where the underlying principle of *mutual trust* is closely related to the logic of governing the commons. To illustrate this relation through the clothing libraries example, the interdependence of the members becomes obvious in the maintenance of the garments; here the

interdependence sets pressure on the member to preserve the good condition of the item in order to be ready for further use right away. The same logic can be applied through another CC example of land sharing mentioned earlier in the text. In this case one side provides the land and the other provides the crops, but both sides depend on the efficiency of the exchange since they both depend on the final result – the food to be grown. As it can be noticed in a similar manner the efficiency of the process depends on how dedicated are the involved sides to take care of the resource to be regarded as common. These considerations are further argued in the following chapter.

The social pressure and responsibility of the participants evolves in a network of individual behavior pursuing individual interest while at the same time not altering the mutual benefit. It cannot be denied that the western individualist societies suffer from isolation when it comes to governing resources important to everyone. As argued before this isolation does contribute to neither decreasing resource exploitation, nor bringing individuals together. Although the theory of governing the commons was not initially developed to be applied in the area of consumption, using it in CC exemplifies that the logic behind this theory can be applied in other areas which are directly connected to production, as well.

4. Analysis

This chapter will introduce the results and interpretations of the conducted field interviews. The analysis is divided in two sections encompassing the reflections of the interviewees about the idea behind the concept of clothing libraries, with specific focus on the influence of sustainability reasoning. The second part will reflect upon the conceptual framework introduced in the previous chapter and discuss the frequency dependent behavior within the organizational structure and issues related to ownership.

It is important to stress that the interviewees demonstrated high awareness of CC and the sharing economy, and recognized the model of clothing libraries as being part of this consumption modality.

4.1. Reflections on sustainability

As emphasized earlier in this thesis, one of the main aspects that can be asked about CC is the possible potential of this trend to lead western consumption habits into a more sustainable destination. Considering that one of the major problems of unsustainable consumption is accumulation of material goods, the sharing economy as a modality reflects a different perspective on how one can consume.

What stood out during the conversations was the profile structure of the founders of the clothing libraries. In every occasion the group was represented of people with already preconceived interest in environmentally cautious behavior and in four out of six interviews, with educational background in sustainability issues. On a general level the acknowledgment of sustainability reasoning was regarded as a very important factor for starting this initiative:

> *"The environmental factor and sustainability was a very big issue for us, really important, the original group that started, we were all really aware of that. We were really into second hand and swapping. Not only from a personal economic point of view, but for the bigger picture of sustainability as well."(Sofia Klädbiblioteket - Umea 2013)*

> *"I studied Fashion Management, and the last course we had was about sustainability and consumption. When I realized how the industry works and how much we consume it was something that got me thinking. After I finished my studies I started working in the second hand business, and got to know a lot about how it works and how important it is to rethink how we get our clothes and how we consume. This made me feel that I need to reflect upon this and that is how the idea about a clothing library started" (Sara Klädoteket – Goteborg 2013).*

> *"Lånearderoben initially started as an art project about raising awareness around the debate about the volume of consumption. This remained the maxim of the library till present day" (Gaya Lånegarderoben 2013).*

From these statements it is evident that the imperative of sustainability was not only recognized as a triggering factor, but also as an opportunity to influence individual behavior in a long run, through engaging people in borrowing instead of buying clothes. An interesting point brought up was that this

concept provides ground for more cautious consumption even when the awareness of the members is not necessarily high:

> "... [P]eople have an agenda on how they want to live their life, and this idea about renting things and not buying helps them in lowering their environmental footprint" (Sofia Klädbiblioteket-Umea 2013).

> "[The clothing library is] a very small illustration of a concept that we show it works. It's not a lot of people but every person that will join us will start to think differently how he/she consumes, or maybe not change completely, but also to have an alternative way and the chance to make a choice"(Gaya Lånearderoben 2013).

> "...[O]ur members, maybe not all of them are concerned about the environment, maybe they just want to have clothes, and that is fine, you don't necessarily have to have an interest in sustainability in order to do things in a sustainable way. I think it's great that the concept itself provides this opportunity anyway" (Elin Klädbiblioteket 2013).

The aspects of shaping unsustainable consumption patterns were mainly seen through lowering the volume of one's clothes consumption. What one could borrow, use and return takes a full advantage of the garment life cycle, which, as argued in the interviews, is the exact opposite of what the textile industry is striving for. Nevertheless, the ambition of the clothing libraries is not to compete with the powerful industry, in fact it was argued that abandoning the conventional way of consumption could be regarded as utopian and very unrealistic.

> "...[O]ne should be able to combine this [referring to clothing libraries and mainstream consumption] and to see that it is possible to do things differently. ...We would like to consider ourselves as a source of information and inspiration; here you can actually talk about different ways of how to consume. ... We can't stop to consume completely, this will not be good for the society, I think, but we need to consume more carefully" (Sara Klädoteket – Goteborg, 2013).

> "This is a prototype for social innovation, there is potential in this idea and I believe that a clothing library is a step forward towards establishing more sustainable consumption in fashion. We can't compete with big companies, but we can make this more interesting for people", (Paulina Plaggiat, 2013)

"I think it's different, some of the members think they really can rely on this concept and they don't need to buy clothes as much anymore, others combine it, and some of them see it as an opportunity to try out new things but continue to shop as usual" (Gaya Lånegarderoben, 2013)

While indeed the importance of increasing the level of awareness and the contribution towards more sustainable consumption was emphasized on different occasions, the practicality of this concept was outlined as equally important. On the questions related to the purpose of such system, the answers reflected a general agreement that there is something very convenient about being able to try out things one is not sure he/she wants to buy, cannot afford or is simply in pursuit of new experiences.

"We think it's great that you can be part of something that doesn't require new production, but it's still nice to satisfy your interest in fashion. It's good for people to try out new styles. Some of the people come here because they want a new wardrobe and that is great, there is also some kind of relief about being able to get your clothes in this way" (Elin Klädoteket - Malmo 2013).

"People feel the pressure to look in a certain way, and this is important to them, this kind of service is very convenient for just getting something that you will use once or twice. ... In fact we need more of these services in other areas, people like it" (Sofia Klädbibliotek – Umea 2013).

"This is not only about the environment it's also about fashion, and about how you express yourself. "(Gaya Lånegarderoben 2013).

Lastly, what is important is not only the notion that this service is ground breaking in contrast to what is regarded as common, but the extent to which these libraries believe that these kinds of systems have potential to develop. The goals set for the future can be categorized as trying to bring this closer to something already very normal – books libraries, to expand this on a larger level, and the attention that this initiative attracts shows potential to be developed further.

"We need to prove that this is not abnormal at all. If people can share food, tools or buy anything they don't use from each other, then why not bringing this to another level? Our attempt to bring it closer to the people was through the conventional library, we have collaboration with

Garraget[8] where every member with a library card can borrow clothes as well, they are all in the system, just like the books" (Elin Klädoteket-Malmo 2013).

"I think you still can express your personality without having many clothes at home. If we were a big place with a lot to offer people would love it, they wouldn't think that it matters if you would borrow it or buy it. ... This is new, but there are more of these services to come" (Sara Klädoteket – Goteborg 2013).

"...[T]his concept is part of a new innovation that could develop to many different directions, it depends on the synergy we create and the networking. ... Unfortunately, I don't think we have the time, but we do have the competences to develop this" (Gaya Lånegarderoben 2013)

4.2. Reflections on organisational aspects and issues of ownership

As discussed in the conceptual framework, the robustness of these systems relies on several principles crucial to the organisational efficiency. What stands clear at the level of organisation of this CC initiative is the frequency dependent behaviour occurring within the process of managing the clothing libraries. Different aspects have been brought up during the interviews which can be underpinned with theoretical argumentation. Using the conceptual framework as a roadmap, the role of the members, the interdependence, reciprocity and collaboration will be explained through illustrative comments from the interviews.

The importance of the member's involvement through different aspects in the organisational structure was regarded as essential. This dependency was recognized as positive and desirable, and according to the representatives, this process is reflecting the very idea behind the concept of clothing libraries, where members are willing to be responsible over a shared resource. The most illustrative aspect was represented through the supply of new garments and their maintenance.

"There is something very cool about having collective responsibility over something. People take the responsibility when they share something, they treat it better, and they treat it well"
(Gaya Lånegarderoben 2013)

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[8] Garaget is an interactive forum for different kinds of workshops, as wall an open library, located in the city of Malmo.See: http://www.malmo.se/Medborgare/Kultur--noje/Garaget/Garaget.html (Swedish only)

"We need for people to be eager to donate clothes this makes them more engaged in the process. It also helps us to refresh our offer and keep the clothes neat and interesting. It's better if the members are doing it, because if they take care of their own clothes they will take care of the borrowed ones as well"(Sara Klädoteket – Goteborg 2013)

"We liked the idea to rely on the members, because there is a certain understanding between them and they know that this initiative is completely voluntary. I think that once they get a membership they become part of this community and they understand that. I don't see why the clothing library would take care of the maintenance of the clothes at all. For example the ordinary library leaves the responsibility to the members as well" (Elin Klädoteket – Malmo 2013).

But they also admit that they did not know what to expect in this respect, in fact they feared that people may regard personal involvement as unacceptable and that a general distrust will emerge. This fear was triggered by the fact that the items rented represent something very personal.

"That was one of the biggest fears we had at the beginning, but once we started that was the last problem we experienced" (Gaya Lånegarderoben 2013)

"In general people are suspicious that other people don't take care of the garments, but this is only until they take part in the library and realize that what they do themselves and feel the responsibility is what the others do as well. Of course, we also inspect the items upon return"
(Elin Klädoteket – Malmo 2013)

The potentiality behind this concept is the idea that people prefer to be part of something where they can recognize their contribution, which brings us back to Ostrom's rationalization about governing CPRs (Ostrom 2009). In the stage at which the actions become visible to others, the users become exposed and therefore strive to act more cautiously. This relation becomes stronger when supported with rules of involvement which always drives the focus to the manner a garment has been taken care of and creates a sense of reciprocity.

"... [W]e have rules and people know that they have to follow if they want to keep the library fresh. They could also pay extra if something gets destroyed or if they don't wash it. It's like a books library, you are not allowed to destroy the book, and you have to return it in a certain period of time. We never put out rules that our members can't follow, they need to feel that it is also up to them how this will work"

(Sara Klädoteket – Goteborg 2013)

"When you say to someone you borrow this, wear it, but you give it back and make sure it's clean so the next person can wear it, people do it extra well. People are very susceptible to that, they listen" (Gaya Lånegarderoben 2013)

"We are creating our system like that so that the members can be connected, they can re-loan, return and reserve, they need to be able to collaborate between each other" (Sara Klädoteket - Goteborg 2013)

Even though doubtful at the beginning, relying on the members for the maintenance of the garments seemed to be the best option for all the libraries. What was continuously emphasized was the sense of belonging, creating experiences and being freed from the pressure that one needs to make a purchase to fulfill certain social expectations. Coming back to the rationale of governing the commons the sense of creating trust in the process of interdependence becomes crucial for these systems to become convenient for all the participants.

What comes after that is a collective experience shared by different individuals driven by personal satisfaction. This was the last specific aspect emphasized as being inevitable to occur during the process of shaping this system. Apparently the personal aspect of a garment could be retained even when shared with others; it is about the abstract aspects that relate one's personality to a particular garment and not the garment itself.

"The experience that you have and the stories you make, they will still be there if you maintain being a member, but you don't have to own it. We did a campaign on Facebook where we posted a picture of a garment and the serial number, and we said: Item number 36 went to Berlin this weekend! It's quite interesting, when people return the clothes they say "I wore this on my sister's wedding" for example, the memories and relations are still there and they are more important. It's about weaving stories into items, and people are interested in becoming part of something bigger" (Gaya Lånegarderoben, 2013).

This last comment leads us to the question of private ownership and suggests that the entire experience, both at a conscious and even at a subconscious level can influence the perception of the importance of private ownership. Potentially these arguments bring about change in the

attitude towards private possessions and emphasize the symbolic meaning rather than the object itself. If it could be assumed that this would be prioritized, the desire of acquiring garments will fall under the premise that "access becomes more important than ownership" (Botsman and Rogers 2010). Following Schor's arguments on symbolism behind commodities, it is the meaning we give to objects that ultimately is the most difficult one to be abandoned. The quotes illustrate intriguing aspects related to the secondary research aim of this study and although the issues touched upon will be further argued in the section to follow, it is obvious that the personal experience related to clothing libraries changes, to a different extent, the attitude towards ownership does as well.

5. Discussion

5.1. Aiming for sustainability

Through the analysis of the collected data some key issues stood out and were found to be pivotal in answering the research questions of this study. Aiming to understand the driving factors behind this CC initiative it can be noticed that the environmental factor and contribution towards more sustainable consumption have been highly influential. What has to be taken into consideration is the interviewees' preconceived profound interest in sustainability issues. This aspect is important for the initiative itself, but must not be taken for granted when discussing the degree of sustainability. What was emphasized in the conversations is that the driving factors were almost equally underpinned by the idea to offer a concept, where both the environmental aspect is addressed and the consumer's economic burden is decreased. The practicality of the concept was regarded as very significant, which was illustrated with the reasoning how the clothing libraries are being used. On different occasions the motivation of the members was not related to sustainability issues at all, but simply for the convenience of the concept.

The contribution to the premise for more environmentally cautious consumption should be understood in the context most often mentioned during the interviews. Here the context was rather general and mostly referring to diminishing the volume of consumption in the textile area. Some of the expected collateral aspects are the possible prevention of impulsive consumption, satisfaction for novelty through borrowing and maximization of the potential of the garment's life cycle. According to a recently conducted study in the area of second hand clothing, reusing

garments significantly reduces the environmental burden in relation to the resource extraction in the textile production (Farrant 2010). The prevention of resource extraction for new production of virgin textiles has immense differences in relation to the impact of all the other factors related to redistribution of second hand clothing. (Woolridge et al. 2006) The argument referring to the extended life cycle is very often due to the good condition in which the garments are disposed (Farrant 2010). Similar argumentation was given in the interviews about the donations received by members and the perceptions one has of what is old and not usable anymore. Therefore it can be assumed that the impacts of a garment used as a service could contribute to lowering resource extraction by extending the potential lifecycle.

At the beginning of this study it was questioned if this CC initiative is acknowledging sustainability considerations or if its contribution towards lowering consumption is an unintentional outcome. It can be argued that this is not a mutually exclusive causation; in fact it is a matter of interlinked factors whose outcome depends on the individual behavior of the person using the service. Thus even though the reasoning of significantly extending the life cycle is undoubtedly more sustainable than disposing the garment (ibid.); the positive outcome could be efficient when the conventional habits are combined with collaborative combination practices and not used as an additional opportunity for more consumption.

The estimation of the environmental impact is significant and should be further developed and explored. However a CC concept like the clothing libraries imply changes that reach behind the immediate sustainability benefit and extend their influence in a more complex way. It is equally important that they are connected to a social change that could have a far reaching consequence reflected in the manner in which the consumer relates to material possessions.

5.2. Owning the experience

Woven into the idea of a clothing library is the potential of raising awareness and triggering change in one's way of thinking towards acquiring clothes. This is one of the strongest arguments behind this concept. In one of the several principles that Schor (1999) is suggesting on how to 'downshift' the consumer, she mentions the potential of becoming a *borrower* and a

lender. Believing that the settled mentality is accepting the system of a conventional library provides ground for assuming that these cooperative efforts can succeed (ibid.). Apparently after more than a decade, the concept of CC is announcing such shift in implementation of this kind of practices, in areas where one could think the system would never work.

As Botsman and Rogers (2010) argue, the consumer in the era of CC is eager to get the access to what the product provides, over the desire to own the object. From this perspective one might wonder, what is it that we need to access?

What stood out from the argumentations provided during the interviews was the reasoning that people are eager to maintain the stories and not the object attached to them. Coming back to the last quote in the analysis, we are faced with possibly the most groundbreaking aspect of the concept of clothing libraries: *"The experience that you have and the stories you make, they will still be there if you maintain being a member, but you don't have to own it" (Gaya, Lånegarderoben 2013).*

If we take into consideration that a number of factors have been pointing out the burden that material consumption is setting on the individual, a possible change would trigger rethinking of *wants* and *needs*. While the present mass consumption has somehow switched the meaning of these two terms, it is important to discuss that what is considered to be the actual need is also represented through a non-material existence and should always be considered in a specific context, and not as independent domains of human nature (Ehrenfeld 2008).

Referring once again to what Fromm defines, as modes of *being* and *having* the dominant mass consumption relates the capitalist consumer to the mode of *having*. Even though these modes are not a matter of either or, but occur in a manner of quantity, what is required then is a moderate combination of the two (Fromm 1976). Since our society is based on the concept of private property, the emotional relation towards our possessions is thus consequentially related to our wellbeing (Schor 1999; Miller 2010). The emotions and symbolism we assign to possessions depend on ourselves, the environment around us and the context in which we are using them. Once again the accent is on the experience and not a tangible asset.

In this fashion what the concept of a clothing library could provide is still satisfaction of the need for diversity in one's dressing style, but through an alternative way which decreases the pressure of possessions as status symbols. Triggering this collaborative way of consumption will then

influence our relation towards private possessions and in a long run could increase the preference of access over ownership for certain commodities. Schor (1999) argues, and later so do Botsman and Rogers (2010) that learning to become a borrower and a lender will decrease the economic expenses, preserve environmental resources and increase the level of collaboration in a community. One cannot deny that mass consumption and capitalist society results in distancing the consumers, rather than in bringing them together.

What is certainly intriguing is how the potential of these changes can be regarded in society and if at all CC has the capacity to prevail into a consumption practice which will trigger social change. As it was illustrated through the example of the clothing library, the shift happens once a member takes part and does not feel the pressure of competition, but rather collaboration. Supporting this aspect is the organizational structure of these initiatives where, as argued in the analysis, the members become engaged in an interdependent chain of actions which mitigates self-oriented decisions on the expense of mutual benefit. While the logic of this kind of structures has often been evaluated as unsuccessful (Ehrenfeld 2008), the clothing libraries and other examples supporting the opposite give confidence that people still organize collaborative communities even in a capitalist system strongly encouraging individualist aspirations.

6. Conclusions

We began this research into the phenomenon of CC with the intention to answer questions related to the primary and secondary research areas which aimed at recognizing the driving factors behind the concept of CC and its relation to sustainability; and at discovering possible changes in the relation/attitude towards the idea of private ownership. The answers to these questions were based on the insight into the theoretical background and areas connected to CC and the shared economy. Referring to the theory of governing the commons offered an adequate advocacy lens for analyzing the researched CC initiative and deepening the understanding of the interdependent levels of the organizational structure.

It can be concluded that choosing the clothing libraries as a recently emerged example of CC was a right decision although it revealed its advantages and disadvantages during the research process. The advantage in this case resulted from the fact that the concept of clothing libraries

has expanded the range of CC in the textile industry in a manner that until recently has not been considered possible. The fruitful collection of data in the field provided an opportunity for an in depth analysis and understanding of existing and revealing of new aspects of the phenomenon of CC. On the other hand, the novelty of clothing libraries was to a certain extent a disadvantage, as the concept of has not yet fully demonstrated its potentials and its shortcomings.

The results supplied by this research can be treated only as indicative, due to the limited scope of the study, but the case of clothing libraries clearly shows that CC has both direct and indirect influence on sustainability. As argued in this thesis, the direct impact is recognized through maximizing the potential of already produced garments and extending their life cycle, lowering the need for newly extracted resources and offering an alternative that can contribute to less consumption in the textile market. This concept also is indirectly influencing the behavior of the consumers seen through their involvement in the managing structure. As Ostrom (2009) argues, the indirect effects are noticed through the inevitable need for collaboration in the pursuit of achieving common interests.

Despite the fact that the modalities of CC are various and have different characteristics and effects, their most important consequence is that they bring about change in attitudes and mindsets that alternative ways of consumption are viable and beneficial to the end user. This aspect of CC becomes even more important than the immediate consequences in the environment, as in the long run it could result in much bigger effects and bring change in managing already produced goods, until recently considered inadequate to be organized as common resources.

At the same time the influence of CC on the perception of private ownership in contemporary society can also be envisaged. Indeed it would be naive to argue that this change will be of such an extent that private ownership would lose its significance. However, it would be sufficient to witness a development which could show that consumers have acknowledged the advantages of other forms of ownership as alternative and beneficial ways of consumption in satisfying their needs. Thorough understanding of the various aspects of CC will show its advantages not as the only, but as an important alternative or even equal way of consumption to the one we are familiar with at present day overspent society.

6.1. Further research

For further research in this area, an in-depth analysis of other examples of CC can be suggested focusing on the similarities and differences of their possible environmental impacts. These studies could expose aspects of CC that have not been evident in this case. Further on a follow up on the conducted study could be considered as another suggested research opportunity, analyzing the emerging changes of consumption habits from the perspective of the consumer. Finally, insight into the influence of the rising service concepts, such as the clothing libraries, on the entire industry sector, in this case the textile industry would also enrich the understanding of the scope of change that CC can bring.

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APPENDX

Appendix A: Questionnaire used during the interviews

General questions:

1. What is a clothing library?
2. Why is a clothing library necessary?
3. What are the organizational aspects around the management of a clothing library?
4. How are you financed?
5. How do you attract your customers?
6. What message do you want to spread?
7. What is the potential for this concept in contrast to the textile industry?

Sustainability aspects:

1. What were the most important factors that influenced the initiative to open a CL and why?
    a. Why is clothing library a sustainable choice?
2. What would be the environmental benefits from using clothing libraries instead of conventional stores?
3. What does a clothing library means for the textile industry?

Maintenance:

1. How do you decide that a garment is no longer usable?
2. What do you do with the garment afterwards?
3. Who takes care of the maintenance?
4. How do you ensure that a garment is washed in an environmentally friendly way?

Collaborative consumption and Ownership questions:

1. Are you familiar with Collaborative Consumption?
        a. Would you categorize this concept as part of Collaborative Consumption?
2. What does Collaborative Consumption means to you?
3. Why should people borrow instead of buy clothes?
4. Based from your experience so far, what is the most often reactions to the concept of clothing libraries?
5. What is your opinion about not owning personal things like clothes but instead borrowing them from a service like this one?
6. What changes might this concept affect in the future?

Appenfix B: Organizational aspects of the clothing libraries

Garments supply

Acquiring an initial capital to start a clothing library was a challenge that all of the clothing libraries were facing. Considering the fact that the triggering inspiration for starting each of these libraries was related to offering a more environmentally sound 'common wardrobe', the origin of the clothes ought to be in line with that inspiration.

The supply with new garments in all of the clothing libraries, except for Lånegarderoben in Stockholm, is received by donations from members and second hand stores. Receiving donations from already used clothes is considered crucial in the attempt to make a statement that what is old to some may be new to someone else. To be able to acquire initial assortment different donation events were organised where members were encouraged to bring old garments. Today, all of them rely on the stock they have created from previous and current random donations which allow them to continuously renew their offer.

Unlike the others, Lånegarderoben is strictly determined that gathering donations from members due to the limited storage place they own. Their attitude therefore is that this is a way of piling waste and they doubt the proper disposal of these garments once worn out. Instead Lånegarderoben has managed to acquire an initial amount of garments from the team founding the library, and later on established collaborations with several local designers, specifically chosen by their environmentally friendly working principles, who supply them with new garments from time to time. Their idea is to offer fewer goods with better quality.

Maintenance and disposal

The maintenance of garments is mainly done by the members, every member is asked to return the item in a good condition ready to be borrowed once again. Before borrowing, the members are advised on how the take care of the item in a more eco-friendly way where most of the time ironing is not encouraged. When it comes to garments that require special care some of the clothing libraries have collaboration with dry cleaning services, these kinds of garments are exceptions. Upon return each item is inspected before being offered to other members.

Once clothes are worn out or simply not borrowed any more all of the libraries make donations to charity organisations or second hand shops.

Funding and Finance

The libraries are mainly supported by local municipalities and/or other non-profit organizations encouraging socially responsible start up initiatives. The support is either in a form of receiving funds for covering operational costs or being sponsored by getting a location. An additional funding is received by membership fees, paid on every 3 or 6 months depending on the library's rules.

In the case of Lånegarderoben, the clothing library is completely self-financed with no help from local institutions. Currently all of the clothing libraries are non-profit and the team involved works on voluntary bases from the very beginning.