

# **No Shared Vision for the Sharing Economy?**

Exploring the Transformative Potential of the non-profit Sharing Economy in Southern Sweden

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## **Abstract:**

Consumerism contributes to sustainability problems of social fragmentation and environmental degradation. In response to this the sharing economy is a relatively new and rapidly growing phenomenon. While the for-profit sharing economy has received considerable academic attention and critique, there is a lack of research that explores the alternative: the non-profit sharing economy. This paper addresses this research gap with the aim to contribute to future decision-making regarding how to unlock the sharing economy's potential to transform consumerism. To do so, we analyse how non-profit sharing platforms' (NPSPs) interaction with dominant institutions enables and constrains NPSPs' potential to transform consumerism. Specifically, we conduct a qualitative case study of the offline non-profit sharing economy in Lund and Malmö, drawing on both the Transformative Social Innovation framework (developed by TRANSIT) and the protective space concept from Strategic Niche Management. Based on qualitative in-depth interviews with the providers of nine NPSPs, and representatives of local government bodies, we find that: firstly, platforms providers and government bodies perceive different purposes of NPSPs. While platform providers see potential social and environmental benefits, government bodies also stress the need for economic benefits. Secondly, platform providers and government bodies perceive different enabling and constraining factors for NPSPs. Both agree that lack of financial self-sufficiency constitutes the biggest barrier, but while platform providers furthermore focus on small-scale barriers related to internal organisation, government bodies stress the influence of large-scale existing regulation and societal norms. Thirdly, and as result of the latter, platform providers and government bodies have very different visions of how to overcome perceived barriers. While platforms providers intend to improve internal organisation and inter-platform communication, government bodies predominantly perceive for-profit business models as the main solution. Furthermore, the findings point towards a communicative gap between platform providers and government bodies, hindering an effective exchange of their respective needs and wants. Currently, this gap appears to be substituted by the public and academic debate about the for-profit sharing economy. Consequently, current support strategies mostly take the form of short-term funding by the municipality and lack effective nurturing mechanisms to empower NPSPs. This hinders the non-profit sharing economy's potential to be a sustainable pathway to transform consumerism. In order to unlock its transformative potential, we suggest to enhance communication between platform providers and government bodies.

**Keywords:** sharing economy, collaborative consumption, non-profit sharing, transformative social innovation, consumerism, Southern Sweden

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## List of Abbreviations

B2P	Business-to-peer
EIA	Environmental impact assessment
G2P	Government-to-peer
NPSP	Non-profit sharing platform
P2P	Peer-to-peer
SNM	Strategic niche management
SI	Social innovation
SII	Social innovation initiative
TRANSIT	Transformative Social Innovation Theory (research project)
TSI	Transformative social innovation

*“Collaborative economy is at a critical juncture – a juncture where the potential of this concept in terms of economic, ecological, and social values it can bring could be realized along the lines drawn by the proponents, or end up wasted by a short-lived hyped concept with a shadow of the transformation and change it envisioned.”*

- Gruszka, 2016, p. 3

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Problem Statement

Current forms of consumption pose severe challenges to sustainability. Over past decades we have seen the development of a “throw-away society” characterised by over- and hyperconsumption (Bauman, 2007). Despite improving production efficiency this has contributed to increased resource depletion and environmental pollution, leading to a transgression of the planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009). This is exacerbated by an increasing world population, steady per capita growth and decreasing product lifespans. Importantly, adverse effects of consumerism extend beyond environmental degradation. Thus, it has been argued that consumerism has contributed to a society marked by increasing individualisation and social fragmentation (Bauman, 2003; 2007; Robison, 1996), phenomena especially observable in the urban context (Gerometta, Häussermann & Longo, 2005; Glennie, 1998).

The sharing economy is a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged as a response to these social and environmental challenges (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Commonly understood as an economic system in which goods and services are shared between people, the sharing economy is presented as one potential pathway to realise environmental, social and economic sustainability (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). By prolonging or intensifying the use of un- or underused assets through redistribution and communal use, this social innovation is argued to alter consumption practices, while at the same time fostering a sense of community among those who share (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Facilitated by the Web 2.0 and driven by an upsurge of environmental, economic and social concerns, the sharing economy has rapidly grown in the past decade, as reflected by the emergence of numerous different sharing platforms (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Owyang, 2016). Governments also increasingly show interest to use the sharing economy as a tool to achieve their sustainability goals (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015).

Despite potential benefits, the sharing economy has not gone unchallenged. Since the sharing economy is contradictorily framed as both a part of, and an alternative to, the capitalist economic system (Richardson, 2015), a key concern is whether “the sector will evolve in line with its stated progressive goals or devolve into business as usual” and become a “nightmarish form of neoliberal capitalism” (Martin, 2016, title; Schor, 2014, p. 1). Some sharing platforms have been accused for “sharewashing”, meaning that the term “sharing” is used as a catch phrase used, predominantly by

businesses, to describe actions which have little to do with sharing (e.g. renting) (Gruszka, 2016; Schor, 2014). Hence, the sharing economy is currently at a crossroad and Martin (2016) has argued that “if the sharing economy follows the pathway of corporate co-options it appears unlikely to drive a transition to sustainability” (p. 149). Thus, what we face is a “wicked problem” (Miller, 2013), in which a potential solution to consumerism poses new problems.

## 1.2 Research Gaps, Aim and Questions

The sharing economy presents one potential pathway to a more sustainable future and therefore deserves further attention from sustainability science research (Heinrichs, 2013). Much of the existing literature on the sharing economy has focussed on its definition, the reasons for its emergence, its potential sustainability impacts and increasingly also on the need to address legal uncertainties through regulation (e.g. Hartl, Hofmann & Kirchler, 2016; Iterian, 2014; Katz, 2015; Miller, 2016). In doing so, many publications concentrate on large, for-profit sharing platforms, such as AirBnB and Uber, while small-scale, non-profit platforms have received considerably less attention. From a sustainability perspective, this presents a serious gap in the literature, as the limited research that does exist on non-profit platforms suggests that they may have a significant potential with regard to environmental and social sustainability (Martin, Upham & Budd, 2015; Scholl, Behrendt, Flick & Gossen, 2015). Furthermore, numerous academics have highlighted the need for empirical environmental impact assessments (EIAs) of sharing platforms (e.g. Cheng, 2016; Daunoriene, Drakšaitė, Snieška & Valodkienė, 2015). Others, however, consider it more important to better understand the conditions that constrain or enhance the sustainability performance of sharing platforms (Demailly & Novel, 2014). We contend that both are necessary but that due to the ambiguities of EIAs and the “intangible benefits” of sharing platforms (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015, p. 255), the latter presents the more holistic and problem-solving perspective. Moreover, existing research has predominantly taken a user-centric approach, focusing on people’s motivation to (not) participate in sharing activities (Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2015; Lamberton & Rose, 2012; Nica & Potcovaru, 2015). Cheng (2016) argues that there is a lacuna in the literature regarding the analysis of the sharing economy’s barriers from a more structural rather than an individual perspective, which would be necessary to better understand their transformative potential (Cheng, 2016). Taken together, the literature gaps identified point to the need to analyse the *structural conditions* that enable and constrain the *non-profit* sharing economy’s potential to be a viable sustainability pathway. This translates into the main research question of this thesis: **What is the potential of the non-profit sharing economy to be a sustainable pathway to transform consumerism?**

Importantly, this question does not lead us to conduct an impact assessment of NPSPs. Instead, it advances a qualitative analysis of the conditions that currently influence NPSPs' viability and thereby their transformative potential. Haxeltine et al. (2016a) define the latter as "when an (...) idea or activity (...) displays inherent and/or intended qualities to challenge, alter and/or replace dominant institutions" (p. 23).

By partly closing the identified literature gap, the aim of our thesis is to contribute to future decision-making regarding how to unlock the sharing economy's potential to transform consumerism. We do so by conducting a single case study of the non-profit sharing economy in the urban context. More specifically, we focus on how the transformative potential non-profit sharing platforms (NPSPs) in Lund and Malmö are enabled and constrained by their interaction with dominant institutions. To find this out, we focus on the perceptions regarding NPSPs of two relevant actor groups: non-profit sharing platform providers<sup>1</sup> and government bodies<sup>2</sup>. To answer the main question, we first answer the following three sub-research questions:

**RQ1:** What is the purpose of NPSPs according to platform providers and local government bodies?

**RQ2:** How do platform providers' and government bodies' perceptions of NPSPs' barriers and enabling factors impact current government support strategies?

**RQ3:** How do these perceptions (RQ2) impact the envisioning of future support strategies?

To answer these RQs, we predominantly draw on the Transformative Social Innovation (TSI) theory that is currently developed in the TRANSIT research project (TRANSIT, n.d.). Since this is not yet a fully-fledged theory, but currently only a conceptual framework, our findings may serve to first, root the theory in new empirical data and thereby probe its current articulation, and second, add insights that emerge from our study. Thus, the secondary aim of this thesis is to contribute to the TSI theory development process.

We answer these RQs based on a case study of Lund and Malmö, southern Sweden, for numerous reasons: firstly, Sweden is considered one of the most progressive countries in the world regarding sustainability (RobecoSAM, 2016), and recent government publications point to a growing interest in

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<sup>1</sup> Platform providers are defined as actors who are involved in the daily running of the NPSP. Platform initiators are actors that originated the platform, but are not involved in its daily activities and can be government bodies too.

<sup>2</sup> Government bodies are defined as actors from city administrations who conduct executive, legislative or juridical functions.

the sharing economy (Swedish Official Report Series (SOU), 2017a; 2017b). Secondly, we focus on the urban areas, because the sharing economy fundamentally relies on distinctly urban conditions for much of its value proposition, i.e. density, proximity and specialisation (Davidson & Infranca, 2016). Thirdly, both cities are located in the Scania region, for which the national sustainability goals have been translated into visions that explicitly refer to sharing practices (e.g. Scania Regional Development Committee, 2017). Consequently, we expect more sharing platforms to pop up in this region, making it an important geographical area for our exploratory research. To answer our research questions, nine NPSPs have been identified in Lund (Bike Kitchen, FixaTill, Öppna Verkstad, Repair Café) and Malmö (Cykelköket, Cykelbiblioteket, Garaget, ReTuren and ToolPool). Next to interviewing the providers of these platforms, we have talked with civil servants from the economic, environmental, waste and city planning departments of the respective city administrations as well as with local politicians.

### **1.3 Thesis Structure**

In the next chapter we present a review of the salient literature regarding the sustainability challenges of the sharing economy. The aim of this chapter is twofold: to show the scholarly disagreement about what the sharing economy is and should be, and to examine which types of sharing platforms are argued to be least problematic from a sustainability perspective. In chapter 3 we introduce the TSI framework and the protective space concept that constitute our analytical framework. In chapter 4 we elaborate on our methodology, followed by a description of our case study in chapter 5. Chapter 6 contains our findings, organised based on the three research questions. In chapter 7 we discuss our findings in the light of three broader sustainability debates to then tie everything together in an answer to our main research question and suggestions for future decision-making. Before concluding and pointing towards future research, we reflect on our research and the TSI framework.

## 2 The Sharing Economy

### 2.1 Defining and Categorising the Sharing Economy

The sharing economy is a relatively new term and up until now no straightforward definition exists, something that is partly explained with the relative novelty of this research field (Botsman, 2013; Frenken & Schor, 2017). Nevertheless, the common fundamental idea underlying the sharing economy is to promote the reuse of unused products and the intensified use of underused products (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Accompanying its growth is a great variety of interchangeably used terms such as “collaborative economy”, “access-based economy”, “peer-to-peer economy”, “on-demand economy” or “the mesh” (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Gansky, 2010). Many of these terms overlap with each other, making a clear distinction difficult. Furthermore, the sharing economy is said to be part of what Avelino et al. (2015) call visions for a “new economy”, a “broad set of related and intertwined ideas that emerged from critique of mainstream economic thought and practice and reflect visions about alternative or complementary economic theories” (p. 5). Thus, the sharing economy shows overlaps with other strands of the “new economy” thought, such as the “solidarity economy” and the “social economy” (Avelino et al., 2015, p. 5). Due to these overlaps, Schor (2014) has argued that “coming up with a solid definition of the sharing economy that reflects common usage is nearly impossible” (p. 2).

However, in order to facilitate a definition of the sharing economy, significant efforts to develop typologies within it have been undertaken over the past decade (for an overview see Appendix I). One major distinction made is based on who is the platform’s initiator. Thus, sharing platforms can take the form of Peer-to-Peer (P2P), Government-to-Peer (G2P) and Business-to-Peer (B2P) models<sup>3</sup> or a hybrid between the three. Cross-cutting the different typologies are (at least) four communalities: first, sharing platforms prioritise the temporary access to goods or services over its ownership. However, some sharing platforms also enable a transfer of ownership for free or for a fee. Second, sharing platforms enable the reuse of unused assets and the intensified use of underused assets. Third, sharing platform redefine traditional business-to-consumer transactions by actively engaging consumers in the production, creation, financing and/or delivering of goods and

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<sup>3</sup> In each case sharing occurs among peers, the difference is through what kind of agent the sharing practices are facilitated. For G2P this is by the government, for P2P by private individuals or civil society, and for B2P by a business.

services. Thereby, consumers are turned into “prosumers”. Fourth, most sharing platforms make use of the Internet. However, the degree of Internet connectivity varies greatly, ranging from complete reliance to only very little use for advertising purposes.

## **2.2 Sustainability Challenges and Desirability of Sharing Practices**

In addition to a set of common characteristics, sharing platforms share an array of envisioned social, environmental and economic sustainability impacts (Lamberton, 2016). However, as detailed below, the achievement of any of these impacts cannot be lightly assumed and depends on the type of sharing platform (Augustinsson, Minoz & Solding, 2015; Demailly & Novel, 2014; Schor, 2014). Although we are aware that in their influential book *Sharing Cities*, McLaren & Agyeman (2015) argue that it is not of key importance to privilege one type of sharing platform over another, we agree with John (2017) that, “if we are to sustain a critique of the sharing economy [...] we could do this by considering the objectives of the sharing economy [...] and then asking whether particular instances embody that or not.” (p. 95). In the next three subsections, we follow John’s (2017) suggestion by reviewing the existing literature on the sustainability claims made for the sharing economy. Instead of attempting to precisely define the sharing economy, the aim of this chapter is thus to identify a specific type of sharing platform which we argue to embody the objective of addressing consumerism.

### **2.2.1 Environmental dimension**

The sharing economy is said to have a potentially positive environmental impact, but research to support this is not abundant (Cheng, 2016). Botsman and Rogers (2010) state that “the obvious environmental benefit of redistribution markets is that they keep stuff circulating, maximising use and extending the lifespan of individual items” (p. 129), thereby reducing the demand for new products and hence the resources and carbon emissions that go into these (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Martin et al., 2015). Although many intangible assets like money, time and expertise can be shared too, the sharing of physical goods, and the intensifying and prolonging of their use, is most directly connected to the environmental sustainability claim of the sharing economy. Moreover, the redistribution of physical goods also inspires more interaction between strangers (Richardson, 2015). Scholl et al. (2015) have even argued that platforms with prominent environmental protection objective have particularly high levels of community.

### **2.2.2 Social dimension**

As Botsman and Rogers (2010) state, “the second benefit and unintended consequence of reuse is community building” (p. 130) as “a vehicle for forming trust between strangers” (p. 134). Through the interactions generated by the redistribution of physical goods, strangers meet and connect with one another (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Furthermore, others argue that the access to, and benefits from, sharing practices are more equitable than the traditional market due to the lower costs involved in sharing compared to ownership (Martin et al., 2015). The causal connection between online activity on a sharing platform and offline interpersonal interaction is easily and often drawn (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; John, 2017; McLaren & Agyeman, 2015). Yet it is argued that “digital versions are better seen as a complement to conventional face-to-face collaboration” (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015, p. 52). Thus, sharing platforms that incite offline interaction between users are considered to hold a higher potential regarding community building and creating social capital. However, it is said that this cannot be lightly assumed when offline sharing is mediated through profit-seeking businesses (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014b; McLaren & Agyeman, 2015; Scholl et al., 2015).

### **2.2.3 Economic dimension**

A common framing of the sharing economy is that it inspires economic exchange activities that are more environmentally and socially just (Barnes & Matsson, 2016; Botsman & Rogers, 2010). In doing so, it is said to generate economic benefits on the individual level (i.e. saving or generating money as a micro-entrepreneur) and on the city level (i.e. save on service-provision costs) (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015). Hence, on both levels, sharing is said to become a cheaper and more convenient alternative to the regular market and “one could argue that it doesn’t matter whether the system leads to a change in mindset as long as it converts our consumption into positive outcomes (Botsman & Rogers, 2010, p. 216). The latter statement is contested for two main reasons. Firstly, the commercialisation of sharing is said to undermine some of its key social and environmental benefits (Martin et al., 2015). Thus, platforms with a high degree of commercialisation are argued to foster low levels of community feeling and pursuit of environmental benefits (e.g. Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014b; Martin et al., 2015; Scholl et al., 2015) while operating in a legal grey zone where environmental regulations, workers’ rights and liability laws are more easily evaded (Malhotra and Van Alstyne, 2014). Secondly, the framing of sharing activities as economic exchange is said to raise concerns for another two reasons.

First, it is argued that instead of problematising, disrupting and reconstructing people's values regarding consumption and community, the economic framing of sharing tends to foster default choices based on convenience (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015). The potential environmental impact of the sharing economy in particular relies on a value change (Demailly & Novel, 2014). As Dobson (2007) argues in his articulation of environmental citizenship, attendance to attitude change will result in more durable changes in behaviour. Furthermore, Demailly and Novel (2014) argue that if not accompanied with value change, "sharing models can be a vector of sustainable consumption, but also of a material hyperconsumption" (p. 22), because the gain in purchasing power can lead to increased consumption of other goods. Second, the commercialisation of sharing practices can be considered an extension of the market logic into exchange activities that were thus far guided by community values (Avelino et al., 2016b; McLaren & Agyeman, 2015). Thus, if through the commercialisation of sharing the powerful language and discourse of the latter is now instead used to describe what are actually market interactions (Belk, 2014a; Cockayne, 2016), the ideology of sharing may lose its transformative potential (Schor, Walker, Lee, Parigi & Cook, 2015). Then the question becomes whether goods which were until now freely shared will become assets with an exchange value and thus distort the cultural reproduction of the meaning of sharing (Belk, 2010). In other words, will the expansion of the commercialised sharing economy take place at the cost of already-existing sharing practices or address unsustainable consumption practices (Benkler, 2004)? Taken together these issues point to the possibility that the commercialisation of sharing practices negatively influences their potential sustainability impacts.

#### ***2.2.4 Non-profit offline sharing of physical goods***

Considering the foregoing economic social and environmental sustainability claims made for the sharing economy, the current literature indicates that the non-profit offline sharing of physical goods can constitute favourable sharing practices to address consumerism. Despite this, and as elaborated upon in section 1.2, this specific type of sharing platform is currently an under-researched branch of the sharing economy. Having identified this gap, the above reviewed body of literature has informed our selection of sharing platforms in Lund and Malmö, as elaborated upon in chapter 4 and 5.

### 3 Analytical Framework

Our analytical framework is inspired by the concept of social innovation (3.1). TRANSIT's framework for Transformative Social Innovation (TSI) serves as the backbone of our analysis (3.2) and is supplemented by the protective space concept (3.3).

#### 3.1 Social Innovation

The sharing economy has elsewhere been described as a social innovation (Avelino et al., 2015; Haxeltine et al., 2017; Longhurst et al., 2017). Social innovation can be defined as “new ideas [...] that simultaneously meet social needs [...] and create new social relationships or collaborations” and thus are “social both in their ends and their means”<sup>4</sup> (Hubert, 2010, p. 7). NPSPs can be considered social innovation initiatives (SIIs) as they address unmet human needs by creating new social practices through the act of sharing (Avelino et al., 2015; Haxeltine et al., 2017; Longhurst et al., 2017). It has been argued that the recent upsurge in attention to social innovation is due to the incapability of existing structures and policies to solve some of today's most pressing social challenges such as climate change and widening inequality (Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan, 2010). Social innovation is considered an effective way to meet growing social needs without creating great ecological and budgetary resource demands (Hubert, 2010).

Not being strictly bound to a single sphere, social innovation can take place in the public, non-profit and for-profit sector, and even more so at the boundaries between these sectors (Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan, 2010). This translates into a multi-actor perspective on social innovation where social change occurs neither as a purely top-down nor a purely bottom-up process (see figure 1). Rather, social change occurs through acts of pushing, pulling, conflicting and aligning between “the ‘bees’ (the creative individuals with ideas and energy) and the ‘trees’ (the big institutions with the power and money to make things happen to scale)” (Murray et al., 2010, p. 8). The emergence of P2P, G2P and B2P sharing platforms reflects the multi-actor perspective on social innovation.

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<sup>4</sup> Haxeltine et al. (2016a) argue that this is empirical question rather than a given.

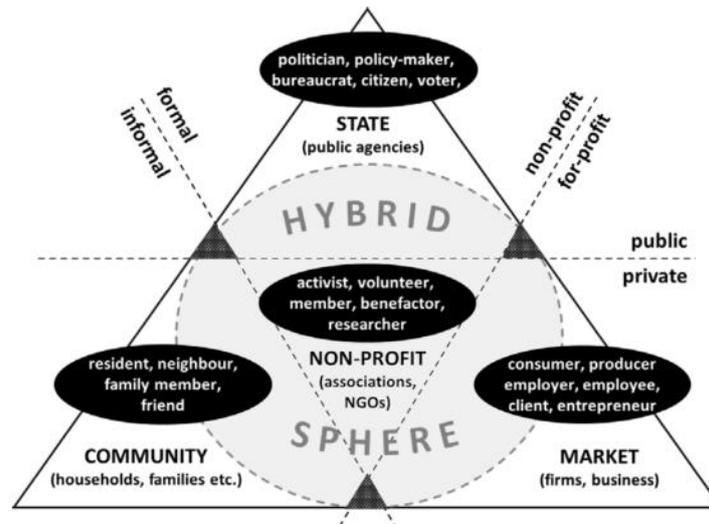
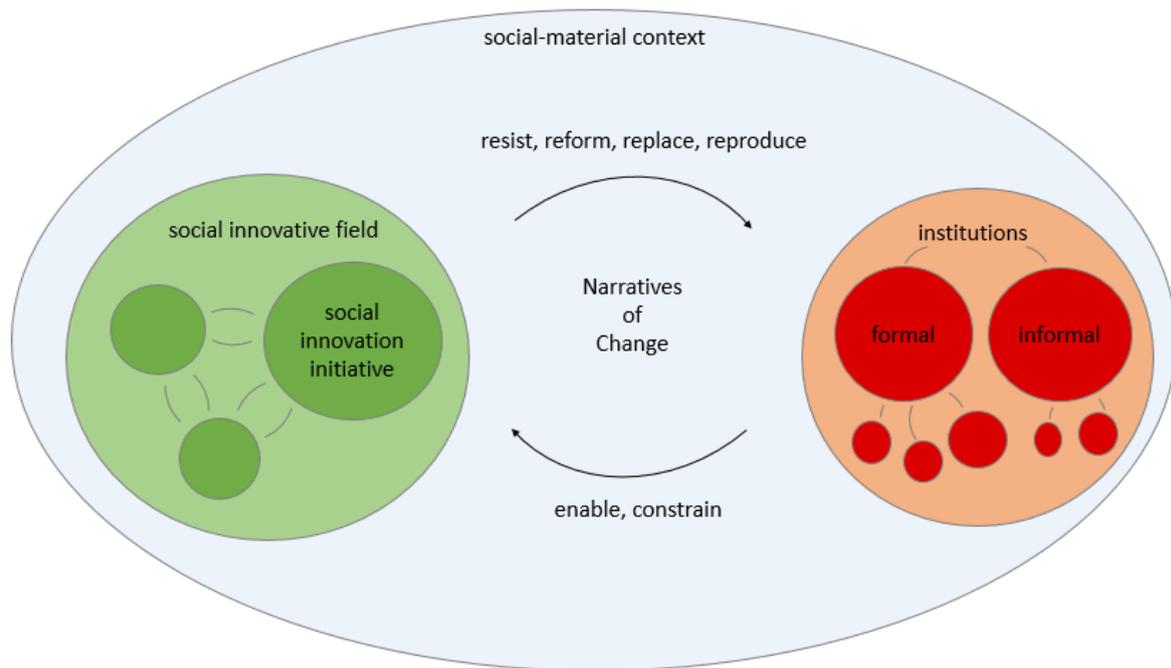


Figure 1. Multi-actor perspective on social innovation (adopted from: Avelino et al., 2015, p. 16).

### 3.2 Transformative Social Innovation

Despite being praised as a promising solution to address growing social needs, little is known about how social innovation can actually contribute to change in the world. Addressing this knowledge gap, the four year-long research project TRANSIT was started in 2014 to develop a theory of TRANSformative Social Innovation (hereafter referred to as TSI). The research is guided by the question of “how social innovation interacts with other forms of (transformative) change, and how actors are (dis)empowered therein” (TRANSIT, n.d.). Thus, it holds the potential to add important new insights into how societal transformations occur, and thereby presents a potentially relevant theory for sustainability science research. Although it is not yet a fully-fledged theory, the foundation for a middle-ranged process theory of TSI has been laid in the form of a framework which forms the basis of our analytical framework (Haxeltine et al., 2016a).

Briefly put, social innovations challenge, alter or replace dominant institutions and by doing so can engage in a process of societal transformation (Haxeltine et al., 2017, p.11). In the TSI framework the latter is understood as “fundamental and persistent change across society, exceeding sub-systems and including simultaneous changes in multiple dimensions” (Avelino et al., 2014, p. 6). TRANSIT builds on the foundational principle of relationality, meaning that transformation processes are characterised by a number of dialectical, co-producing relations between different actors. In TRANSIT working paper 7 (Haxeltine et al., 2016b), these relations are clustered and conceptualised into four relational categories and 12 propositions (Appendix II). In what follows we detail the specific propositions and concepts of the TSI framework that we draw on.



**Figure 2.** Basic dynamics of the institutionalisation-process of social innovation according to the TSI framework.

As illustrated in figure 2, TSI takes place within the *social-material context*, which is very broadly defined as the sum of all actors and institutions, and the social and material relations between them (Haxeltine et al., 2016a). Institutions are here understood as both formal institutions in the form of organisations and rules and regulations, as well as informal institutions in the form of norms and values (Haxeltine et al., 2017). The existing institutions shape human action but at the same time they are constituted through human action, therefore holding the possibility for change and modification of existing structures. It follows that, as *TSI proposition 7* states, existing institutional arrangements can enable or constrain SIIs, but that SIIs can also change existing institutions. Thus, actors might find novel ways to use existing institutions and resources but still challenge the logic that this institution is guided by (e.g. market logic).

However, as *TSI proposition 2* states, SIIs often face a lack of resources and over time this vulnerable existence is difficult to sustain. A (local) network of different SIIs can serve to foster learning processes to more effectively engage with change processes despite such straining resource availability (*TSI proposition 4 and 5*). Moreover, *TSI proposition 8* states that the need for resources also leads to the search for an “institutional home”, characterised by “permanence, support, secured resource flow, legitimacy and independence from the efforts of individuals” (Haxeltine et al., 2016b, p. 23). Because established institutions already have these features, (temporary) alignment between SIIs and such institutions may occur. The above are constituent parts of the institutionalisation of

social innovations which is understood as processes by which “changes in institutional structures [...] become more widely embedded” (Haxeltine et al., 2016a, p. 12).

Importantly, the institutionalisation of social innovations does not necessarily result in transformative change. In TRANSIT working paper 2, Pel and Bauler (2014) further unpack the institutionalisation dynamic by proposing that between the extremes of ‘capture by’ and ‘transformation of’ dominant institutions there is an unexplored grey zone of collaborations. SII might get captured, meaning that transformative impulses are being “channelled, encapsulated, domesticated and eventually stifled by the very institutional structures they were to change”, resulting in system reproduction rather than system change (p. 5). Thus, the TSI framework entails a dialectical view on institutionalisation in which a social innovation is pulled in both transformative and system-reproducing directions (Pel & Bauler, 2014, p. 12).

The above interactions between SII and dominant institutions are often mediated and negotiated through strategically mobilised “narratives of change”, understood as a set of storylines, metaphors and discourses that actors draw on to make sense of phenomena (e.g. the ‘new social economy’) (Avelino et al., 2014, p. 6). As reflected in our RQs, in this study we focus on three narrative subsets: NPSP’s purpose (RQ1), current challenges and opportunities (RQ2), and vision for the future (RQ3). In TRANSIT working paper 4 Wittmayer et al. (2015) further explore the role of narratives of change in the interaction between SII and dominant institutions. *TSI propositions 6 and 9* maintain that this is a fine line to walk, because a narrative of change itself can be captured and altered to a less transformative variety. Notably, as *TSI proposition 1* holds, in order for SII to contribute to institutional change, they do not necessarily have to explicitly express any transformative ambitions. Instead, their very actions can, consciously or unconsciously, contribute to institutional change. In other words, the mere existence of SII can challenge dominant institutions.

The above mentioned TSI propositions are developed as starting points for further research and do not comprise a fully-fledged theoretical framework. Thus, we complement the former by the protective space concept (Schot & Geels, 2008) to better understand the SII institutionalisation processes.

### **3.3 Shielding, Nurturing and Empowerment**

The protective space concept is part of Strategic Niche Management (SNM), which was developed to aid the management of innovations that are socially desirable and “face a mismatch with regard to existing infrastructure, user practices, regulations etc.” (Schot & Geels, 2008). Importantly, we do not

engage fully with the SNM perspective and all its underlying assumptions, but merely draw on its concept of protective space. Thus, we refrain from the conceptualisation of the niche as a discrete level, characterised by its extent of structuration or institutionalisation, but rather use the protective space concept to better understand the interactions between different agents in processes of structuration. We also refrain from the common focus on upscaling of innovations, because we agree with Pel & Bauler (2015) that “this upscaling motive may not be very well applicable to [...] ‘niches’ that only thrive on a small scale.” (p. 10).

In their systematic investigation of the concept of protection, Smith and Raven (2012) identified three properties of effective protection for niches: shielding, nurturing and empowerment. Because path-breaking innovations are at a structural disadvantage in the existing regime, they need *shielding* from mainstream selection pressures. Examples of the latter include existing underused market niches and proactive funding or lobbying efforts for a specific innovation. These spaces can permit the further development of innovation that Smith and Raven (2012) refer to as *nurturing*. This is generally understood as assistance in learning processes, articulating expectations, and networking processes. Because protective spaces are considered temporary and “conditional upon improvements to the innovation being nurtured in that space” (p. 1030), *empowerment*, commonly understood as diffusion enabled through developing competitiveness, is considered key.

Empowerment can be conceptualised as “fit and conform” and “stretch and transform”, where the former is understood as “processes that make niche innovations competitive within unchanged selection environments” and the latter as “processes that re-structure mainstream selection environments in ways favourable to the niche” (Smith & Raven, 2012, p. 1030). While in fit and conform strategies, shields are removed, in stretch and transform strategies, shields partly remain, facilitating the institutionalisation of change within the selection pressures, but at the same time holding the danger of turning into protectionism of poor innovation. Problematic with fit and conform empowerment is that those processes that make niche innovations more competitive within the incumbent regime, also entail the danger of disempowering the innovations with regard to sustainability, as alignment with existing norms and structures is likely to increase (Smith & Raven, 2012). Challenging for stretch and conform strategies is that changes in the selection environment does not solely rely on processes in the niche but also depend on processes of change from outside the niche, making effective competition more difficult (Smith & Raven, 2012). From a process perspective, *shielding*, *nurturing* and *empowering* are distinct from one another, but this does not mean that a single decision cannot enable or constrain these three functions simultaneously (Smith & Raven, 2012).

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Basis

The ontological and epistemological basis of this research is derived from critical realism. Ontologically, critical realism holds that reality can be stratified in three different domains: the empirical, the actual and the real. The *empirical* contains actors' experience of a phenomenon, for example the perceived lack of NPSPs long-term viability; the *actual* contains the mechanism that bring about these experiences, for example political disinterest in NPSPs as opposed to the for-profit sector; the *real* constitutes the "enduring structures and objects that cause the actual events" (Nastar, 2014, p. 12; Sayer, 2000).

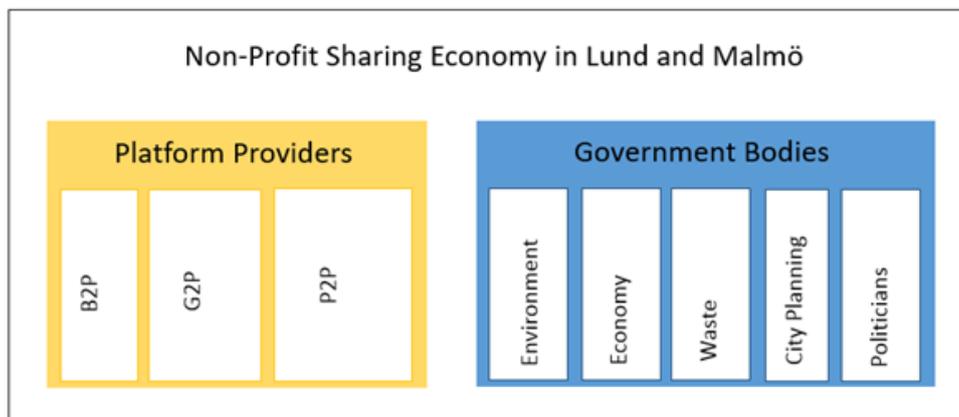
Epistemologically, critical realism contends that observed events cannot be fully explained with the help of one theory since they are products of complex causal interactions (Nastar, 2014). Therefore, critical realism suggests to employ different theories and methods to study a phenomenon. We follow this suggestion by making use of a combination of the TSI framework and parts of strategic niche management, and, as will be elaborated on below, by applying a qualitative triangulation approach. In our research, we access the empirical by obtaining interviewees' expressed perceptions of issues around NPSPs. By means of our analytical framework, to answer the three RQs we analyse empirical to shed light on the actual mechanisms that cause these perceptions. Finally, through embedding the former in discussions about the structures that bring about these mechanisms we attempt to grasp some of the real complexities. Yet, we contend that although we can create knowledge about the real, we cannot completely reflect it (Nastar, 2014).

Following a critical realist approach is beneficial for this thesis. Firstly, because it allows us to detect the underlying not empirically observable factors behind empirical events (e.g. actual barriers to and enabling factors of NPSPs). Second, it helps to outline recurring patterns that might be similar in other geographical settings (e.g. shed light on mechanisms of the non-profit sharing economy applicable in other regions and countries).

### 4.2 Research Design

Case studies are, in general, suitable to unravel not only relationships between variables, but also the causal mechanisms linking them (Gering, 2007). In our exploratory research, we conduct a single instrumental case study of the non-profit sharing economy in Lund and Malmö. It is instrumental

both in the sense that it is studied in-depth with the purpose of better understanding a particular phenomenon (i.e. the potential of NPSPs to transform consumerism), and in that it is used to contribute to the process of TSI theory development. This type of case study is considered appropriate both to shed light on a particular issue and contribute to theory building processes (Grandy, 2010) and thus allows us to address our primary and secondary aim. Our single instrumental case consists of multiple constitutive elements which we divide into two main actor groups: NPSPs (constituted of providers of P2P, G2P and B2P sharing platforms) and government bodies (constituted of representatives of different municipal departments) (see figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Overview of the two main actor groups that constitute the case study.

Although we do not conduct a systematic comparison between the different departments, types of NPSPs (P2P, G2P, B2P) and their respective locations, we contend that a comparative perspective can nevertheless be a “helpful element in discovery” (Liphart as cited in Levy, 2008, p. 6) and a thought-provoking tool (Stretton in Levy, 2008). In our analysis we therefore point to similarities and differences where they emerge from the data.

### 4.3 Research Methods

In our thesis we adopt a qualitative triangulation approach and as such make use of different qualitative research methods (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative semi-structured in-depths interviews form the primary data collection method of our research, backed up by participant observation and the analysis of official documents and grey literature.

### **4.3.1 Sharing platform sampling**

The case study of NPSPs in Lund and Malmö is comprised of nine different sharing platforms identified through purposive sampling (see Appendix III). Platforms have been selected according to the following criteria: 1. geographical location, 2. desirability from a sustainability perspective, 3. classification as an SSI. The geographical boundaries of this study have limited the number of platforms to those located in Malmö and Lund. The review of the existing literature on the sharing economy has yielded that those sharing platforms are least problematic in terms of sustainability which a) are non-profit, b) facilitate local offline sharing, and c) facilitate the sharing of physical goods (see chapter 2). All of the selected platforms can be considered typical cases in that they are representative of this broader category of desirable sharing platforms (Gering 2007). Furthermore, informed by our analytical framework, only those platforms have been included that can be considered an SII. Conventional sharing practices such as ordinary libraries have thus been excluded from our study.

### **4.3.2 Interview sampling**

Interview partners were identified through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012). We strategically identified providers of NPSPs rather than occasional platform users, because we expect the former to provide the most comprehensive view on the platform's current and future purpose, challenges and opportunities. During the data collection process, interviewees stressed the importance of certain actors as crucial to the platform's success or failure and proposed further potential interview partners for our research. Through snowball sampling we got in contact with additional platform providers, and specific government bodies. In total, we conducted 18 interviews, eight with providers of non-profit platforms<sup>5</sup>, two with the providers of a for-profit sharing platform, six with representatives from the environmental, economic, waste and city planning departments of Lund and/or Malmö municipality<sup>6</sup> (some of which were also involved in the start-up of the studied NPSPs), and two with local politicians from both cities (see Appendix III).

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<sup>5</sup> One interviewee is the provider of both, Cykelköket and Cykelbiblioteket (see Appendix III).

<sup>6</sup> In total, each department is represented by one representative for each city (except for city planning).

### **4.3.3 Participant observation**

Preceding the interviews, we did participant observation (PO) at some of the identified sharing platforms. PO is here understood to be a qualitative research method in which participants' activities and interactions are studied in their own environment and recorded in a field notebook (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). PO complemented our data collection in three main ways: first, by verifying the suitability of pre-selected interview partners and by pointing to better-suited interviewees; second, by informing our interview questions through which a better understanding of the phenomena under study is achieved; and third, by nurturing a good relation between the researchers and selected interviewees, facilitating further data collection (Mack et al., 2005). After the majority of interviews were conducted, we attended a conference on the sharing economy in Malmö organised by Scania Region and Sustainable Business Hub Malmö (Institute for Sustainable City Development, n.d.), to gain further insights into the interaction of platform providers and government bodies.

### **4.3.4 Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews were conducted after the evaluation of the PO notes between 21 February and 5 April 2017 (see Appendix III). All interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for one which was conducted via phone due to time constraints of the interviewee. Interviews were conducted in English<sup>7</sup> and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All interviewees agreed to be recorded and in total we gathered approximately 12 hours of audio recordings. Interviews were semi-structured, enabling us to address specific topics relevant for our research questions, while at the same time leaving the opportunity for emerging questions (Bryman, 2012). Since data collection was conducted by two persons, we made use of interview guides to ensure comparability of interviewing style (Bryman, 2012) (see Appendix IV). The structuration and formulation of the interview question was theoretically informed by the TSI framework as well as the preliminary findings from the initial literature research. Throughout the data collection process, interview questions were slightly adjusted depending on the interviewee's role, resulting in two main interview guides for a) platform providers and b) government body representatives (see Appendix IV). For the government-initiated platforms we used a combination of both.

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<sup>7</sup> For all our interviewees Swedish is the first language.

#### **4.3.5 Ethical considerations**

As interviews constitute the backbone of our data collection, we consider it important to reflect on our interactions with the interviewees. Bryman (2012) outlines four main ethical principles necessary to consider when conducting research. Thus, researchers shall avoid 1. harm to participants, 2. a lack of informed consent, 3. an invasion of privacy, and 4. any form of deception. Throughout the entire research process we have been attentive to the equal treatment of interviewees and transparent retracing of our findings. Interviews were purposely only semi-structured in order to give interviewees the space to express aspects that they consider relevant to the topic. Furthermore, interviewees were informed in advance about our background and what the data is to be used for. Preceding the interview, all participants were asked to fill out a consent form, giving them the option to decide on anonymity and recording (see Appendix V). Interviews were only recorded with the agreement of the interviewee. All interviewees are referred to as acronyms of the platform or government body they represent (see Appendix III). To overcome potential anecdotalism and prevent misrepresentation of the interviewees we indicate which statements are supported by which interviewees (Silverman, 2010).

#### **4.4 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Being aware that transcribing is “a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions” (Ochs, 1979, p. 44), we applied a combination of the “clean read transcript” and the “comprehensive protocol” outlined by Mayring (2014). Thus, most of the interview material was transcribed word for word, only omitting utterance like “uhms” and “ahs”, while those parts of the interview material which were considered as factual information were summarised by the researchers. Transcripts were analysed by applying a combination of deductive and inductive coding, suitable for research aiming to contribute to theory development (Bryman, 2012). As a first step, we created list of categories and subcategories derived from our RQs and the TSI framework, and extracted relevant quotes from the transcription protocols. Initial categories were especially influenced by the four relational dimensions that SIIs engage in, outlined in the set of propositions for the agency and dynamics of TSI, elaborated on in section 2 (Haxeltine et al., 2016b). During the extraction process, new categories and subcategories emerged and were added to the list. To facilitate further analysis, quotes were colour coded based on the interviewee’s role (platform provider, environmental department, economic department, etc.). Interview data was analysed together with information from the platform’s own grey documents and from local surveys and national reports on the sharing economy.

## 5 The Sharing Economy in the Context of Lund and Malmö

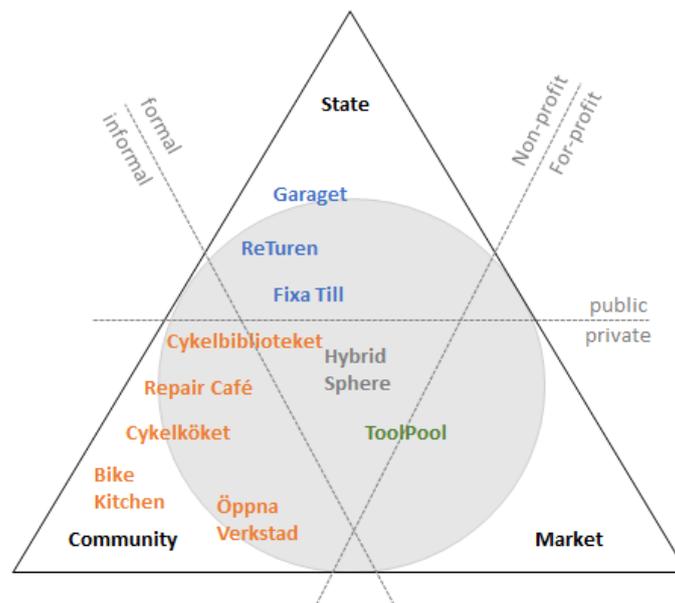
Recent reports by the national government point to a growing interest in the sharing economy in Sweden generally (SOU, 2017a; 2017b) and research suggests that especially urban areas have key characteristics that are conducive of sharing practices, such as density and proximity (Davidson & Infranca, 2016). Together, Malmö and Lund make up the third largest urban area in Sweden (MalmöLundregionen, n.d.), enabling sharing initiatives to benefit from labour pooling, reduced transportations costs and information spillover, and thereby to reach a critical mass necessary for survival (Davidson & Infranca, 2016). With Malmö being an industry city until recently and Lund a wealthy university city (Lund City, n.d.; Malmö City, n.d.), the cities have different histories and thus differ in terms of population size, composition and prosperity. Nevertheless, the two cities also show similarities, especially in regard to their sustainability efforts. Thus, both cities actively brand themselves as green cities and have set a list of municipal sustainability goals, inspired by national sustainability plans (Lund City Council, 2014; Malmö City, 2016). Furthermore, both municipalities cooperate in the MalmöLundRegion, a body for political cooperation, which focuses on development in physical planning and infrastructure, labour, education and business issues (MalmöLundregionen, n.d.). Some of the most recent plans targeted to reach the municipal and regional sustainability goals explicitly include considerations to make use of sharing practices (Malmö City 2016; Malmö City Council, 2015; Scania Regional Development Committee, 2017). However, so far, only very little research has been conducted in the area on the sharing economy in general and on NPSPs in specific (Bradley, 2016). Considering the high local political interest in the sharing economy as a potential pathway for sustainability, makes it an important geographical area to investigate.

Table 1 presents an overview of the nine NPSPs that have been identified in Lund and Malmö. As explained in section 3, platforms have also been selected according to 1. their desirability from a sustainability perspective and 2. their classification as social innovation. Thus, each of the platforms involve the non-profit offline sharing of physical assets. At most NPSPs, the sharing of physical stuff is accompanied by the sharing of knowledge and/or skills. The identified platforms can be considered socially innovative since they do not only address specific social needs but also create new social relationships through the act of sharing.

**Table 1.** List of the selected non-profit sharing platforms in Lund and Malmö, Sweden.

<b>Name of the platform</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Opening</b>	<b>Type of Platform</b>	<b>Short description of the platform</b>
<b>Fixa Till (FT)</b> (Fix again)	Lund	2016	G2P	A place where people can exchange clothes and small gadgets through a point system. A free workshop with tools and sewing machines are also provided. The platform also offers regular repairing or upcycling workshops. A small coffee place is also integrated.
<b>Öppna Verkstad (ÖV)</b> (Open workshop)	Lund	2015	P2P	An open workshop which provides access to different tools and machines such as sewing machines, 3D printers as well as an electronics, metal, and wood workshop.
<b>Bike Kitchen (BK)</b>	Lund	2014	P2P	A bicycle workshop, where people can get advice from volunteers and use tools and spare parts to fix their bicycles.
<b>Repair Café (RC)</b>	Lund	Planned opening: June 2017	P2P	The plan is to set up a meeting place where people can with the help of volunteers repair household electrical and mechanical devices, clothes, bikes, etc.
<b>ToolPool (TP)</b>	Malmö	2012	B2P	A tool library integrated in a for-profit hardware store, offering around 20 different tools free to borrow.
<b>Cykelköket (CK)</b> (Bike kitchen)	Malmö	2011	P2P	A bicycle workshop, where people can get advice from volunteers and use tools and spare parts to fix their bicycles.
<b>Cykelbiblioteket (CB)</b> (Bike library)	Malmö	2015	P2P	A bicycle library, where people can borrow e-bikes and cargo bikes. Meant for people who consider buying these kind of bikes but want to test them in their everyday life before buying them.
<b>ReTuren (RT)</b> (ReTurn)	Malmö	2015 - 2016, reopening in 2017	G2P	A place where people can bring all kinds of "waste" (e.g. electrical gadgets, chemicals, clothes, furniture), and exchange belongings which are still in good condition. The platform also provides workshops on upcycling and organises social events.
<b>Garaget (G)</b> (Garage)	Malmö	2008	G2P	In the place included is a library, a creative workshop with tools, freely available computers, and a coffee place. The platform organises workshops and organises social events. The location can be rented for free for an event.

The above-mentioned selection criteria have yielded platforms that are initiated by civil society (P2P), business (B2P) and the government (G2P). Figure 4 illustrates where each of the platforms is located in the multi-actor perspective on social innovation (Avelino et al., 2016b). Thus, the majority of our cases are initiated by civil society. However, as elaborated upon in the following chapter, most of the P2P platforms are funded by public or private actors. This reflects “the melting of sector divisions” where “nonprofits, governments, and businesses are blending sources and models of funding to create sustainable [...] social innovations” (Phills, Deiglmeier & Miller, 2008, p. 41).



**Figure 4.** Classification of the selected NPSPs according to the multi-actor perspective on social innovation (adapted from Avelino et al., 2015).

The identified NPSPs cover a broad range in terms of maturity and success (see table 1). Thus, some NPSPs are about to open (Repair Café) or opened recently (Fixa Till, Cykelbiblioteket, Bike Kitchen), while others have been in place for several years already (Cykelköket, ToolPool, Garaget) or had to close down again (ReTuren).

## 6 Results and Analysis

In this chapter we present our findings from the conducted interviews in combination with an analysis of grey literature. The chapter is organised according to our three sub research questions. Thus, section 6.1 addresses the purpose of NPSPs, section 6.2 the perceived barriers and enabling factors, and 6.3 how perceived barriers are envisioned to be overcome. Each of the three sections first provides an overview of the perceptions by platform providers and government body representatives, before providing a combined analysis of the two.

### 6.1 Perception of NPSPs' Purpose

#### 6.1.1 Purpose according to platform providers

Our empirical data shows that among the different platforms there is not one common vision about their role in transformative change, here meaning that there are discrepancies regarding *what* they aim to transform and *how* they do so. Furthermore, a minority of providers also found it difficult to articulate what the purpose of their respective platform is beyond solving very local and practical problems they observe in the city (BK, G). The majority, however, emphasised the direct challenges that they are a response to (e.g. lack of places where to gain and use repairing skills), but did link these to different structural societal problems ranging from throw-away culture, to excessive waste production and a decreasing sense of community. Some of these providers indicated the hope to see more platforms like theirs emerging in other districts, cities and countries to spread the *idea* of sharing and repairing (RT, FT, TP, CK). In general, however, providers seemed more concerned about the continued survival of their own platform, than actively thinking about how to expand their own reach (FT, RT, CK, BK). Thus, rather than hoping for an upscaling of their own platform, they seemed more interested in providing inspiration for other SIIIs.

Despite the divergent specific self-identified purposes in relation to societal transformation, what they do have in common is the aim to inspire a value change of various kinds and offer the place, skills or other means for people to 'walk the talk'. The envisioned value change ranges from changing people's perception of the value of what is commonly perceived as waste (FT, CK), to inspire a Do-It-Yourself repair attitude (RC, BK, CK, TP) and values of inclusion and neighbourliness (G, FT, RT). By providing a platform that may both incite those values and function as an arena to act out these

values, both G2P and P2P NPSPs aim to offer something that they see lacking in the services currently provided by the municipality and businesses (ÖV, CK, RT, BK, TP).

When asked how they perceived their platform in relation to regular businesses, most platform providers considered their platform as supplementary rather than as competition to regular businesses. Furthermore, most providers saw their platforms as currently having only little impact on the local market, doubting that business could consider them as competition at the moment (BK, CK, ÖV). While one provider expressed that their platform could be perceived as competition (CK), more indicated that they did not even consider that (RC, FT, G). Moreover, some providers mentioned that they actively try to keep a neutral relationship with regular businesses (CK, BK). Thus, some providers engaged in an open discussion with regular businesses (RT), collaborate with them by making advertisement for each other (CK), or intentionally do not offer certain services to avoid potential conflict (RC). Only one platform provider stated that *"I'd love it to be competing"*, but at the same time stressed that the platform offers a service which is currently not provided by any business (ÖV).

### **6.1.2 Purpose according to local government bodies**

Government bodies mentioned potential environmental, social and economic sustainability purposes of the sharing economy as a whole, but emphasised different aspects depending on their respective roles in the municipality. Generally, they consider it as a chance to create jobs and economic activity in a manner that is more environmentally and socially just. All interviewees, but especially the waste- and environmental departments, stated that the sharing economy reduce resource use enabling the access to un- or underused products and services. Social and economic benefits, however, were deemed even more important. Thus, interviewees argued that the sharing economy fosters trust between people (EM), thereby creating a sense of community (SCD) and a feeling of safety within neighbourhoods (MF), while at the same time presenting a possibility for citizens to save or earn money (NM, EL, MF), to counteract financial poverty and inequality, to create jobs and to contribute to positive developments in socially problematic city districts (CP, EM, MF, SCD). Sometimes, and particularly in Malmö, this was mentioned with specific reference to the recent influx of non-Swedes (CP, MF, SCD). Lastly, some interviewees suggested that sharing platforms could become a part of, or even take over, certain services the provision of which usually is the municipality's responsibility, thereby contributing to a relief of the city's tight budget (EL, SCD).

Answers were notably informed by the interviewees' respective understandings of the sharing economy. Understanding of the former was mostly articulated with reference to large for-profit

platforms such as AirBnB and Uber. Whereas the latter's benefits were easily listed, when asked specifically about the purpose of NPSPs, governmental bodies had a harder time to answer (NM, SCD, EL, EM). This was especially so for the politicians and economic departments. Often identified were fostering trust, community and inspiration to reduce unsustainable consumption patterns. Furthermore, NPSPs were thought to contribute to the cities' sustainability goals. Some interviewees specifically referred to how the purposes they see for the NPSPs were based on how they could help achieving sustainable goals of the city, such as outlined in *LundaEko II* (Lund City Council, 2014) and *Environmental Programme for the City of Malmö 2009-2020* (Malmö City Council, 2009). Especially the goals of an inclusive society and sustainable consumption were mentioned (MSE, MF). However, for the leading politicians, despite referring to the sustainability goals and being able to list benefits of the sharing economy, they could not clearly articulate the connection between NPSPs specifically and the city's sustainability goals (SCD, NM).

When asked how they see NPSPs in relation to regular businesses, interviewees mentioned that they could imagine them to either compete with traditional businesses or complement the existing market. Most interviewees stated that until now they do not see existing NPSPs to have any or only marginal impact on local businesses due to their small scale (MF, MSE, NM). However, interviewees agreed that an upscaling and diffusion of NPSPs is likely to have a future impact on the local economy, both in a good and a bad way. It was mentioned that NPSPs could challenge existing businesses in a positive way by pushing local business to reconsider their business model (CP, MF, EM, SCD). Some interviewees saw this as an inevitable process (EL), and mentioned that they see this already happening, reflected in big companies' efforts to satisfy changing consumer demands by adjusting to more sustainable modes of production and circular product life cycles (MF). Other institutional actors, saw an upscaling of NPSPs as having potential negative impacts on local businesses due to reduced consumption, but at the same time pointed to newly emerging business opportunities in the sharing sector (CP, SCD).

### **6.1.3 Combined analysis**

For the joint analysis of the above, we draw on TSI propositions 1, 7 and 8 as well as TRANSIT working paper 2 by Pel and Bauler (2014).

Comparing the purposes mentioned by platform providers with those of local government body representatives reflects what Pel and Bauler (2014) call the "dialectical struggle" (p. 8) of the institutionalisation of SII, "with various actors attempting to make it [SII] instrumental to their

particular ambitions and seeking to promote their particular understanding of it” (p. 6). Platform providers and government representatives share the view that NPSPs could contribute to sustainability and that community building and inspiration to reduce unsustainable consumption are key elements of this. However, other purposes are not necessarily shared. While platform providers stress that they aim to solve practical local problems, government bodies rather stress how NPSPs can help the municipality achieve its sustainability goals, with a focus on the economic benefits.

TSI proposition 7 supports our observation that platforms differ in their transformative ambitions. While some SIs wish to challenge and replace particular institutions, others rather focus on meeting their own needs without a focus on broader system change. Our empirical data suggests that most of the NPSPs fall in the latter category and that, as TSI proposition 1 states, these “Social innovations emerge out of a desire to create a space where *pursuing certain values/ideals/principles and aligning them to practices/behaviours is possible*” (p. 7). Thus, platform providers seemed more concerned with contributing to local change rather than system change. However, since most platforms currently depend on governmental financial support, it is important to keep in mind that providers might have been careful not to articulate a specific desire for system change, being aware of the government’s reluctance to support potential competitors to regular businesses. Instead, platform providers said that their aim is to foster a value change regarding consumption and community that would ideally trickle down in other aspects of people’s practices (BK, CK). Lastly, as stated by Haxeltine et al. (2016b), “attitudes towards local versus system-level transformative ambitions can certainly change over time” (p. 21). Indeed, some hope to be competitive in the future (ÖV).

It has been argued that governments often perceive SIs as a beyond-the-state activity which operates in the shadow of or against the state, and that “governmental logic will always consider the desirability, accountability and lawfulness of any innovation” (Pel & Bauler, 2014, p. 10; Swyngedouw, 2005). Although the G2P NPSPs in our case call into question the former, our data confirms the latter, as most government representatives showed interest but also hesitation towards NPSPs, as reflected in their doubts about NPSPs’ viability and desirability within the existing economic system (NM, EL, EM). Nevertheless, they also considered them as “a possible source of energies to tap from” (Pel & Bauler, 2014) and thus as, TSI proposition 8 suggest, a potential “ally” (Haxeltine et al., 2016b, p. 23). This is reflected in considerations of how NPSPs can help reaching municipal goals or even take over services currently provided by municipalities (EM, SCD). The government-initiated platforms (FT, RT) can be seen as a pilot project to investigate how NPSPs can help achieve municipal goals. To what extent the institutionalisation of the G2P platforms affects their transformative potential remains to be seen.

In sum, our answer to RQ1 is that although the actor groups share the view that the purpose of NPSPs is to address aspects of consumerism, there are also important differences. Most notably platform providers focus on providing a space for its users and members to encounter and act out certain principles, whereas government bodies rather emphasised that sharing platforms can be an instrument to achieve the city's sustainable growth objectives.

## **6.2 Support Mechanisms: Barriers and Enabling Factors for NPSPs**

### ***6.2.1 Barriers and enabling factors according to platform providers***

Platform providers identified enabling and constraining factors regarding 1. finding an empowering economic system, 2. internal dynamics and organisation, and 3. contact with other social innovations. Whereas the former two primarily concern P2P NPSPs, the third concerns both P2P and G2P NPSPs.

#### ***Finding an empowering economic system***

All P2P NPSPs indicated that the main challenge is to find an empowering economic system that allows for the continued existence and development of the platform. Since the studied platforms do not generate profit (except for TP), questions regarding where the financial foundation should come from are high on the providers' agenda. Currently, platforms rely either on external funding or on paid membership and volunteers. Interviewees suggest that both options have their advantages and disadvantages, as will be outlined in this and the following subsection.

Most of the interviewees mentioned that external funding has been a crucial factor to enable the start-up and running of the platform. All of the platforms (except TP and RC) have received some form of municipal funding. Some platforms also benefit from a free location, sponsored by the municipality or a public company (BK, FT, RT, ÖV). Next to start-up funding, some platforms have received support from specific project funds or events (BK, CK, RC). The majority of providers mentioned that platforms could not have started up without some initial municipal funding. However, they also pointed to numerous internal challenges resulting from the reliance on external funding. First, providers mentioned that the application for external funding requires considerable time and resources (BK, CK). Second, if funding is received, it is often only for a short period of time, usually in the startup phase (ÖV). This is problematic because once start-up funding ends, there is a financial vacuum (CK) that creates insecurity (CK, ÖV) and inhibits long-term planning (CK). Therefore, Öppna Verkstad referred to a "good" but very "fragile relationship" with the municipality and

expressed ambitions to reduce dependence as much as possible. Surprisingly, reliance on initial external funding can also hinder processes that foster financial independence, as the case of Cykelköket shows:

*“When we just lost our base funding [...] we didn’t have a very big volunteer basis, because we always had a project leader and you didn’t really need volunteers [...] How to keep it open on a volunteer basis, we kind of forgot how to do that.” (CK)*

The previous illustrates that external funding has been key to the start-up of most platforms, but is often perceived as unstable and in itself does not guarantee an internal organisation that enables the continued existence of the platform.

### ***Internal dynamics and organisation***

Our empirical data suggest that a lack of *users* is not perceived as a problem by any of the studied platforms, instead, especially, P2P platforms indicate that a lack of *committed volunteers and members* is the problem. Due to unstable external funding, NPSPs rely heavily on the commitment of their volunteers which fosters financial independence but entails its own challenges. First, lack of prolonged commitment from volunteers and members presents a major barrier to a smooth running of the platform (BK, CB, CK, ÖV). Although often the initial momentum is high, it is a challenge to find volunteers that are committed for a prolonged period of time:

*“In the beginning everyone loves a place like this and we get super many members and everybody wants to do something. And then at some point when you start running into problems and difficulties and you have to decide how the volunteering organisation should work [...] it flattened out.” (ÖV)*

The resulting discontinuity of volunteers was mentioned to hinder effective learning processes from past experience and thus future development of the platform (BK, ÖV). Second, platform providers indicated problems to create a sense of collective ownership and responsibility among members (BK, CK, ÖV). Thus, Öppna Verkstad stated that it is hard to *“make members understand that you are actually part of this, you are not just a member like in a gym, you actually become part of the whole organisation”*. In this context, platform providers also referred to difficulties in finding members who are willing to take over administrative tasks that are necessary to run the platform. Platform providers apply different strategies to overcome these barriers. Some employ a project leader to ensure continuity in building on experience (ÖV) and administrative tasks (CK). However, as indicated above, a heavy reliance on external funds without future stability has proven to pose a problem in its

own right. Others mentioned communal events, such as regular member nights and workshops, to create a sense of community and ownership over the project (CK, BK).

### **Contact with other Social Innovation Initiatives**

While the lack of a self-sustaining economic model and committed members have been mentioned as barriers exclusively by P2P platforms, an important factor mentioned by both, P2P and G2P, platforms is contact with other NPSPs. For G2P platforms, contact mainly took place before the starting-up of the platform, whereas for P2P platforms, contact has been held also after the platform's opening. The majority mentioned that during start-up the contacts are valuable to foster mutual inspiration and learning processes (RC, BK, FT). Later in the process, it is said to (re)gain confidence in their work (CK, ÖV) and to help overcome emerging challenges (BK, CK). The latter is for example evident from the inspiration that Cykelköket drew from the financially independent Bike Kitchen in Gothenburg. Contact mostly takes place between similar NPSPs (FT and RT, and CK and BK), but to a limited extent also between platforms active in different sharing sectors (FT, TP, RT). Being located at an incubator space such as Stpln in Malmö (CK, CB) or the cultural centre Stenkrossen in Lund (BK, ÖV) was mentioned to help mutual inspiration between projects. Although considered as beneficial, providers mentioned that current inter-platform communication is unfortunately only very limited, mainly due to a lack of time and resources (ÖV, CK).

### **6.2.2 Barriers and enabling factors according to local government bodies**

Barriers and enabling factors identified by representatives are 1. existing regulations and municipality structure, 2. dominant norms and values, and 3. strategic communication.

#### **Existing regulations and municipality structure**

The barrier most often mentioned by representatives of the local government bodies also was NPSPs' inability to financially sustain themselves. All government representatives stressed that long-term governmental financial support for NPSPs is neither viable, nor necessarily desirable for them. In terms of viability, interviewees pointed to existing municipal legislation that could prevent financial support for NPSPs. Referring to the municipality's duty to avoid unfair competition, Lund's economic department stated that "[...] ... if we support one organisation, we are, according to the law, obliged to give the same support to every organisation. It must be fair.". Moreover, multiple interviewees pointed to potential conflicts with the existing tax system (EL, NM). Although NPSPs currently do not generate any actual money, it was thus argued that "as soon as there will be some considerable value

*in it, there is a question of taxation in it"* (NM). Civil servants furthermore pointed to constraints resulting from their department's mission and the specific long-term goals set for them by the politicians (MSE, MF, RHV, EM). Support of NPSPs appears to heavily depend on whether a department can justify how a project is contributing to its goals (MSE, MF, RHV, EM). Illustrative is the statement that the not-mentioning of the sharing economy in the municipality's current budget plan explains the absence for a strategy to support it (EM). Despite having some leeway in how to reach goals, civil servants pointed to their duty to not transcend their area of responsibility:

*"We have to watch out all the time. As the law is written right now, we have as a goal that we should prevent waste. So we are allowed to take the material out of the waste circle and to look what can be done with it ... The municipality has this position that if we find a business solution our goal is to find someone who can make that business."* (RHV)

Furthermore, some government units are restricted to facilitate projects' start-up but excluded from maintaining them - something that in the past has led to project failure (MSE). Lastly, as NPSPs are said to address cross-cutting problems, departments struggle to reinvent their roles and responsibilities in supporting the platforms, especially as there is no 'existing guide book' on how to go about this (RHV, MSE, RT). For example, projects that were mainly initiated by the waste departments (RT, FT) actually turned out to rather address a variety of social problems in the area. This raises questions regarding who is responsible for a service like this (RT) and insufficient communication regarding appropriate role division was a key cause for the close-down of ReTuren.

Next to doubts about viability, interviewees also questioned the desirability of financial support. Thus, concerns were raised about negative effects on already existing, self-sustaining sharing businesses, such as local second-hand shops (NM). Interviewees also disliked the ephemerality of initiatives: *"I don't really like this concept of injection of money in things because often it's just a project that starts and then it ends. So there has to be some kind of long term viability to it."* (EM). Moreover, interviewees referred to a fear of a growing unregulated economy, causing potential criminal activities: *"the authorities are quite afraid what is going to happen if we do not have control over the economy"* (EL). This indicates that if NPSPs were to gain scale, they are feared to pose similar problems as large-scale for-profit sharing platforms.

### ***Dominant norms and values***

Two key sets of dominant values are also identified as key enabling or challenging factors. Firstly, some of the interviewees considered it a problem that growth is still seen as a key determinant of societal wellbeing by the government institutions (EL, MF). They argue that *“if you look at it from the macro perspective ... everything we do is related to financial growth ... that growth is necessary for achieving welfare”* (EL). Related to this, interviewees considered it problematic that welfare is predominantly measured in purely monetary terms (EL, MF, SCD). Since NPSPs’ impact cannot currently be adequately measured in economic terms, interviewees pointed to difficulties in obtaining governmental support. Consequently, they questioned how NPSPs could fit in such a macroeconomic system (EK, MF, SCD) and pointed to possible co-option by business (CP).

*“If you have the vision that growth is good and that everything should be measured in money and monetary values, it’s going to be a mismatch as long as we have that system, I’m afraid. [...] If there is no way to actually make money [...] I think a lot of people would actually not support that system in the end, it’s too much interests in it. But nice thought.”* (EL)

Despite the persisting pro-growth economic paradigm interviewees also mentioned that institutional change is visible in this respect (NM, SCD, RHV). Thus, the Swedish government’s recent publications on the circular- and sharing economy (MF) and developments at the EU level, such as the introduction of the waste hierarchy, are considered as enabling factors (RT).

Secondly, government bodies adopted a user-centric approach and pointed out that individualisation and consumer values could hinder citizen participation (MF, EM, NM, MSE, SCD). Illustrative is Malmö’s environmental department’s statement that *“Sweden is one of the most individualised countries in the world. I mean we’re used to sharing stuff, like where you wash your clothes and libraries, but many things we want to keep to ourselves”* and that *“It is hard to make people see that we can live good lives with less things”*. Furthermore, interviewees mentioned people’s negative attitude towards used goods (RHV, MF, SCD), referring to a recent consumer survey in Lund (Ählström, 2016). However, government representatives also pointed to changes in consumption behaviour that are favourable for NPSPs. For example, NM stated that: *“[...] it was also some kind of status that you could have a lot of stuff but today [...] it’s not like this anymore. People want something else.”* More often, government representatives referred to people’s interest in sustainable consumption choices in Lund (RHV; MSE; Ählström, 2016) and sharing practices in specific in Malmö (MF; Malmö Environmental Department, 2016).

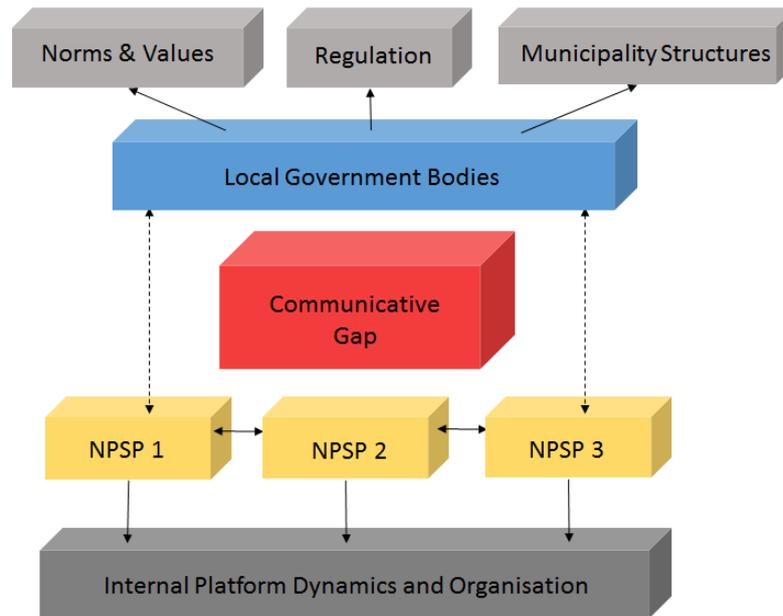
### ***Strategic communication about NPSPs***

In the above-detailed context, government bodies considered the way of communicating about NPSPs as a determining factor for mobilising potential government support, and was thus seen as both a possibly enabling and constraining factor. Interviewees revealed that they make use of different narratives when asking for governmental support of projects in general and NPSPs in particular (MSE, MF, SCD). Thus, narratives are adjusted depending on the attitude and goals of the institution from which support is asked for (MSE): *“To get all these people [the politicians] together on this is not easy, because then you need to present the sharing economy with benefits from their point of view”* (MSE). The environmental departments mentioned that stressing the environmental benefits of a project is often not enough or even hindering potential support (MSE, MF). Rather, they try to show that a project is positively contributing to job creation and the local business climate (MSE, MF). Alternatively, they help NPSPs adjust budget applications so that they are more closely connected to the city’s (sustainability) goals, making it more likely to get start-up funding (MSE).

### ***6.2.3 Combined analysis***

In the following analysis we draw on TSI proposition 2, 5 and 7, TRANSIT working paper 2 by Pel and Bauler (2014), and the protective space concept.

A comparison of the above reveals that both actor groups perceive heavy dependence on the municipality for funding as a barrier, but that there are inconsistencies regarding what they think causes the dependency on external funding to be problematic. Whereas P2P platform providers focussed on the challenges resulting from financial dependence on the municipality, government bodies rather focussed on constraining institutional settings and societal norms that made it problematic for them to *be* the source of funding. P2P platform providers showed limited awareness of the constraining factors that cause government funding to be unreliable, whereas government bodies displayed limited knowledge about the specific challenges that this uncertainty brings to NPSPs. Instead, government bodies focussed on problems commonly identified for the for-profit sharing economy (e.g. unregulated market space). This further stresses the finding in RQ1 that the government bodies’ knowledge of the sharing economy is influenced by the for-profit sharing economy debate and that knowledge about NPSPs in specific is limited. Together, these dynamics appear to result in the government bodies’ focus on ‘bigger picture’ issues, and the sharing platforms’ focus on their internal organisation and communication with other platforms. This leaves a communicative gap between the two actor groups (see figure 5).



**Figure 5.** A visualisation of the communicative gap that we observe between the local government bodies and the NPSPs. The grey boxes contain the enabling and challenging factors identified by the interviewees. The arrows represent interviewees’ reference to the identified factors. The dashed arrows indicate the interaction currently missing between the actor groups.

The apparent outcome of this communicative gap is an interaction between the municipality and sharing platforms that is mostly marked by short-term ‘seed money’ to start up project, something that can lead to a *“graveyard of projects”* (EM). Although the problem of steady funding is clearly stated and the need for some form of support beyond initial seed money evident for both actor groups, their current interactions do not lead to this being a main point on their agendas. Using the terminology of Smith and Raven’s (2012) articulation of the protected niche space, there is a strong emphasis on shielding, but not on nurturing and empowering (see chapter 3). In this study, a more salient conceptualisation of empowerment is NPSPs’ independence from municipal funding to the extent that the currently experienced negative consequences of this dependence are overcome.

Although current shielding efforts by the municipalities are indeed essential, these do not necessarily translate into the necessary nurturing processes for NPSPs’ empowerment. Schot and Geels (2008) have more detailed hypotheses regarding the nature of these processes. Firstly, they found that the articulation of expectations contributes to successful furthering of the innovation when they are robust (shared by many actors) and specific, a key point also emphasised in TSI proposition 5. As the findings from RQ1 indicate, the expectations of NPSPs’ purpose differ among and between platform providers and government bodies, and especially for the latter expectations are rather unspecific and

informed instead by the for-profit sharing economy debate. Secondly, Schot & Geels (2008) point out that social networks contribute to nurturing when their membership is deep, meaning substantial resource commitments by members. As the findings from RQ2 indicate, contact between NPSPs was viewed by platform providers as an enabling- but currently underutilised factor. TSI proposition 2 supports our finding that reasons for this stem from the problem of lacking human resources. Especially when membership is nominal and more pressure is put on a few individuals it is a challenge to balance members' motivation and needs, and the necessary organisational efforts for platform survival. TSI proposition 5 states that especially networking across SIs is key for learning processes, even when the narratives of change differ. Specifically, Schot & Geels (2008) state that learning processes contribute to nurturing if they are not merely about accumulating facts and data but also inspire different attitudes to valuing and supporting the innovation. Platform providers indicated that the latter type of learning results from contact with other NPSPs, particularly when it concerns internal and financial organisation of the platform (CK, BK, ÖV). In this regard, some interviewees indicated the importance of written material to help analyse the challenges and articulate the vision of the platform for others to learn from (CK, RT, RC) (e.g. Björk, 2013). For G2P NPSPs, the platform initiators referred to the importance of monitoring mechanisms to indicate the success of the platform (FT, RHV). Overall, a common and clear articulation of expectations as well as a strong network is currently lacking, and efforts to support learning processes are emphasised as valuable but currently insufficient. Taken together, these circumstances make for a sub-optimal nurturing mechanism.

The above illustrates that support mechanisms by the municipality are a key factor in the initiation and development of NPSPs. As TSI proposition 7 suggests, "TSI journeys are generally not frontal oppositions or zero-sum battles against dominant institutions, nor do they develop in complete isolation from dominant institutions" (p. 22). Shielding processes in the form of funding and provision of a location strongly depend on current institutional constellations. Especially because NPSPs often lack the resources to be fully independent, they may well challenge one institutional arrangement (e.g. a resource-intensive consumption culture), but not without reproducing other institutional elements. This is not to say that TSI agency is not possible in such a constellation, but rather that, as TSI suggests and the NPSPs demonstrate, "existing institutions and resources are used by SI[social innovation]-actors to perform practices in novel ways – resulting in a dialectic of change that leads (eventually) to transformations in institutional arrangements" (Haxeltine et al., 2016b, p. 22). Indeed, government bodies themselves already do refer to the need for renegotiating their role in relation to sharing practices in the future, as we will explore in the next section.

In sum, our answer to RQ2 is that the actor groups both identify NPSPs' financial instability as a barrier, but focus on very different things that are problematic about this dependency. The actor groups' limited knowledge about each other's perceptions on this points to a communicative gap. Currently, this coincides with a support mechanism that is marked by a lack of nurturing mechanisms, compromising the empowerment of NPSPs.

## **6.4 Visions for Overcoming Barriers**

### ***6.4.1 Envisioning by platform providers***

The findings for RQ2 show that platform providers perceive a lack of economic independence as one of the main barriers faced by NPSPs. Their suggestions on how to overcome this barrier mainly focus on mobilising new sources of external support, creating a strong base of committed volunteers and connecting with other social innovations. Since it is mainly the P2P platforms which are currently faced with economic instability, it is also mostly them who expressed these visions.

To overcome the dependence on municipal support, some P2P providers contemplate the possibility to mobilise financial support via crowdfunding (ÖV) or by applying for special regional funds provided by private actors (CK). Öppa Verkstad furthermore considers to open the platform for companies, offering access to their equipment for a fee, and Repair Café plans to work together with an established NGO to benefit not from their financial and human resources. Although most of the P2P platforms seek to reduce dependence on the local government, some plan to continue striving for municipal support, either by participating in short-term projects or by applying for funds to employ a project leader to explore other funding options (BK, CK, RP).

P2P platform providers furthermore mentioned plans to run the platform without any external financial support by creating a stronger member base (CK, BK, ÖV). To recruit committed volunteers and create a sense of ownership among members, providers intend to organise social events, e.g. in the form of regular member nights and courses (CK, BK). Furthermore, P2P platforms stressed the importance of enhancing contact with similar platforms. ÖV, for example, expressed the desire to become part of the transnational FabLab network to share ideas and experience. Cykelköket, which is already part of such a transnational network, mentioned that it would be useful to create a handbook with experience from other bike kitchens. Moreover, others suggested to create a local or regional networking platform for similar initiatives and businesses (ÖV, TP).

#### **6.4.2 Envisioning by local government bodies**

The findings from RQ2 indicate that government bodies, too, consider financial independence as one of the biggest challenge for NPSPs. Interviewees disagreed on whether the municipality has a responsibility to help overcome this barrier. However, the majority of government bodies saw the main responsibility lying with the platforms themselves. Due to doubts about long-term commitment, interviewees showed themselves rather sceptical towards self-sustaining models based on volunteers and instead predominantly suggested switching to a for-profit model:

*“I mean if people are willing to do things in that [non-profit] way, I mean that’s so good. But we also have to think about the sustainability when you look at the business model. If you want to sustain this a lot of years and want to make it a business model that works, you maybe also need to encourage companies to make this their model.” (MF)*

Although most government bodies consider the platforms themselves to be responsible for achieving financial independence, many interviewees still expressed the will to support NPSPs within the limits of their possibilities. In this context, Lund’s economic department said that *“It would be nice to find out how we could support without sort of being violent to the system”*, and Malmö’s environmental department stressed that *“It’s so important to see how we can help them, [and] maybe that’s not the right word, but like push them in the right direction and uplift them.”* Although showing interest in supporting NPSPs overcome the barriers they face, only few had concrete visions how to do so. Malmö’s environmental department seem to have the most advanced ideas in this respect, when mentioning concrete plans to get in contact with local NPSPs. Other than that, interviewees mentioned to continue with start-up funding (MSE), to set up research projects (EM), to set up a formal platform for exchange (EM, MF), and to foster visibility of platforms through advertisement (MF, SCD). Importantly, interviewees also expressed that they expect NPSPs to take the initiative in communicating their needs (SCD).

Another important finding is that government bodies’ visions are notably influenced by the for-profit sharing economy. Thus, when asked about their vision for how NPSPs can overcome barriers, they articulated visions more applicable to for-profit than to non-profit platforms. These visions focused mostly on ways to transform consumer choices and on legislative changes necessary to regulate platforms that are now operating in a legal grey zone. Closely related to this, some interviewees advised us to contact the municipal departments for business development since they thought them to have more concrete plans regarding future support strategies for the sharing economy. However,

the respective departments of Lund and Malmö, as well as the chamber of commerce in Malmö, refused to talk to us, one of them justifying this with a lack of responsibility for the topic.

### **6.4.3 Combined analysis**

For the analysis to answer RQ3 we draw on TSI propositions 8, TRANSIT working paper 4 by Wittmayer et al. (2015) on narratives of change, and the protective space concept.

The above shows that the actor groups have very different visions for how NPSPs can overcome barriers of economic dependence. Thus, as TSI proposition 8 holds, it is a challenge to find an appropriate ‘institutional home’ for NPSPs. Looking from a strategic niche management perspective, government bodies envision *fit and conform empowerment*, whereas platform providers envision *stretch and transform empowerment* (Smith & Raven, 2012). For envisioning in more detail how empowerment is to happen, Wittmayer et al. (2015) outline three “ideal narratives of change” used by SII: 1) “Entrepreneurs will save the world”, 2) “Communities rely on themselves”, 3) “Dominant institutions need to be challenged” (p. 15). From our empirical data we detect that not only SII but also government bodies make use of these ideal narratives of change.

Because of the insecurity regarding funding, most P2P platform providers express the desire to be able to sustain themselves by a strong member base and some consider themselves as the main agent of change to find such a self-sustaining economic model. This points towards the *communities rely on themselves* narrative. By enhancing the SII-network, providers expressed hopes to foster learning processes regarding strategies to achieve financial independence. However, they also emphasised that more reliable shielding efforts by the government are key to do so and indicated that in the near future they strive to maintain existing sources of external support and/or to mobilise new sources of external funding to facilitate independence-fostering processes. Reliable external support is thus envisioned to help mobilise resources to achieve long-term independence and for this the *Dominant institutions need to be changed* narrative is deployed. Taken together, these visions suggest a tendency towards *stretch and transform empowerment*, as they envision institutional changes regarding shielding mechanisms.

Our findings show that government bodies respond to the current institutional homelessness of NPSPs with a combination of what TSI proposition 8 names “accommodative/supportive” and “repressive/capture” reactions (p. 23). Although specific strategies are lacking, government bodies express a willingness to discover how to support NPSPs (SCD, EL, MF). Yet, as evident from RQ2, long-term shielding is currently neither viable nor desirable for government bodies as it does not fit well

with the current monetary accounting of benefits. Instead, by suggesting a for-profit business model as a promising solution to financial dependence, government bodies indicate that they see social entrepreneurs as the main agent of change and deploy the *Entrepreneurs will save the world* narrative. With this narrative, sharing platforms' survival is placed outside the responsibility of the government and merely reflects willingness to support NPSP development in a way that aligns well with the current economic- and taxation system. Importantly, however, two additional interviews that we conducted with the providers of the for-profit sharing platform Swop Shop in Malmö yielded that social entrepreneurs also receive very limited support and face financial challenges due to high tax rates. This indicates that for-profit sharing business models do not automatically guarantee economic self-sufficiency either and that legislative changes might be necessary to promote sustainable businesses. Taken together, the preceding suggests that government bodies' visions for how to overcome barriers show a tendency towards *fit and conform empowerment*. However, as illustrated by the recently initiated G2P NPSPs, government bodies are experimenting with novel institutional constellations and collaborations between departments and public companies – thereby they are also adopting a specific version of a *Dominant institutions need to be challenged* narrative.

Comparing the visions of government bodies and P2P platform providers reflects the communication gap identified in RQ2. While government bodies predominantly focus on retrofitting NPSPs to fit into the current economic system, P2P platform providers focus on internal reorganisation and inter-platform communication. So far, no or only little attention has been given to the communication between P2P platforms and government bodies. This is unfortunate because as the findings of RQ1 show, although government bodies and platforms providers see different purposes of NPSPs, they do share the aim to address consumption practices and foster community. Thus, non-communication between government bodies and platforms hinders NPSPs in overcoming their barriers and thereby also hinders both actor groups in reaching their respective aims. How problematic this communication gap can be is shown by the example of ReTuren, where a lack of early communication between the platform providers and the municipal stakeholders was mentioned as a determining factor for the closing down of the platform. The problem of a communicative gap is exacerbated by the fact that first, platform providers and government bodies lack concrete strategies for implementing their respective future visions and second, government visions for how to overcome barriers is notably influenced by their understanding of the for-profit sharing economy. Taken together, this might negatively affect the survival of NPSPs and as such their transformative potential.

In sum, our answer to RQ3 is that actor groups' diverging focus on what NPSPs' challenges stem from (RQ2) translate into the adoption of also diverging narratives of change for the future empowerment of NPSPs to address consumerism.

## 7 Discussion

This chapter embeds our findings from the previous chapters in three broader sustainability debates (section 7.1) to answer our main research question (section 7.2). Furthermore, we reflect upon our contribution to sustainability science (section 7.3) and the TSI framework (section 7.4), before we end by shedding light on potential limitations of this study (section 7.5).

### 7.1 Embeddedness in Sustainability Debates

The findings from RQ1, 2 and 3 show that platform providers and government bodies have quite diverging perceptions of the purpose, the enabling and constraining factors, and of future visions for NPSPs. To understand why perceptions are so different and what potential implications this can have not only in this specific case but for the sharing economy in general, we discuss our findings hereafter in the light of three broader sustainability debates.

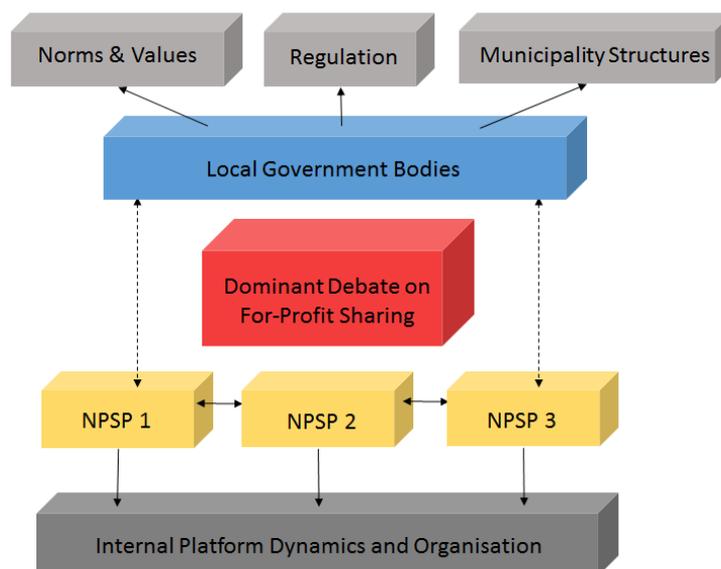
#### 7.1.1 *Who sets the agenda for the sharing economy?*

Our findings indicate that the dominant debate about the sharing economy is heavily influenced by the activities of a few large for-profit online sharing platforms, which has negative implications both, for NPSPs and for the sharing economy as a whole. The literature review preceding our data collection showed that a large part of the academic literature deals with the for-profit sharing economy and its particular challenges (see chapter 1 and 2). AirBnB and Uber are two of the most (if not *the* most) frequently mentioned examples of the sharing economy within academic literature (e.g. Belk, 2014; Gruszka, 2016; Pargman & Eriksson, 2016; Puschmann & Alt, 2016). Moreover, the myriads of online newspaper articles and blog posts on the topic, suggest that the public debate is also centred around the for-profit sharing economy (e.g. Agnew, 2017; Frenken, Meelen, Arets, M & van de Glind, 2015; *“Peer-to-peer”*, 2013). Gruszka (2016) has therefore argued that “the power within the collaborative economy as presented by the media and reinforced by many of the engaged voices rests within the hands of powerful key players” (p. 10).

Our findings suggest that the dominant debate which is shaped by the for-profit sharing economy influences the national, regional and local decisions about the sharing economy in Sweden. The government bodies’ perceptions of NPSPs are indeed shaped by the activities of a few large for-profit sharing platforms. This is illustrated by the government bodies’ unanimous reference to AirBnB and

Uber as the main platforms and practices that they associate with the sharing economy, as well as by their focus on the regulations necessary to avoid tax evasion and negative impacts on local businesses. This is also reflected in the source and content of recently-published national and regional reports on the sharing economy in Sweden (Augustinsson, Minoz & Solding, 2015; Axelsson, Söderström, Bern, Johnsson & Jeanrond, 2017; Felländer et al., 2015). These also mention AirBnB and Uber as key illustrations of the sharing economy, while non-profit offline sharing platforms are not at all or only marginally mentioned. The majority of the reports emphasise the economic potential of the sharing economy, focusing on social entrepreneurship as a tool for growth-creating innovation (Felländer, Ingram & Teigland, 2015; Scania Regional Development Committee, 2017; SOU, 2017a), the potential challenges thus created (Felländer et al., 2015; Scania Regional Development Committee, 2017; SOU, 2017a), and the need for appropriate regulation (Felländer et al., 2015; SOU, 2017a; Swedish Tax Agency, 2016). Considering that some of the above Swedish reports were produced by the commerce department and the tax authorities perhaps makes these observations unsurprising, yet simultaneously this points to who sets the terms for the current debate about the purpose, challenges and opportunities of the sharing economy. These observations notably coincide with two main framings that Martin (2016) identified for the sharing economy, which present the sharing as a) an “economic opportunity [...] providing employment and fostering economic activity” (p. 153), and b) “a growing network of unregulated digital marketplaces that pose a threat to regulated businesses and a risk to consumers” (p. 155).

The dominance of the for-profit sharing economy on the national, and thus, local governments’ agenda is problematic as it negatively affects decision-making on NPSPs. Firstly, since NPSPs do not seek to make profit, there are good reasons to assume that their needs and wants differ fundamentally from those of for-profit platforms. Secondly, the danger exists that NPSPs’ needs and wants are overlooked by the government, thereby hampering their survival and as such their potential contribution to sustainability. This problem is reinforced by the communicative gap that currently exists between government bodies and NPSPs (see section 6.2.3), as an active exchange of needs and wants between the two actor groups is lacking (see figure 5). Thus, arguably, the communicative gap between governments and NPSPs is filled with the dominant debate on the for-profit sharing economy (see figure 6). We suggest that governments’ focus on shielding in the form of start-up money, instead of providing needed nurturing processes, are first signs of potential negative implications for NPSPs. Consequently, even where governments’ and NPSPs’ goals are aligned, the dominance of the current debate hinders productive cooperation.



**Figure 6.** A visualisation of how the identified communicative gap between government bodies and platform providers is currently filled with the dominant debate on the for-profit sharing economy.

The observations that a) the academic and public debate on the sharing economy are dominated by the for-profit sector, and that b) this influences the national, regional and local decision-making in a way that is problematic for NPSPs’ transformative potential, feed into the larger debate on who has the power to set the agenda for sustainability pathways and, importantly, why. We argue that the setting of a political agenda, and keeping potential issues off this agenda, consciously or unconsciously, are acts of power (Lukes, 2005). The latter may appear paradoxical, but what it refers to is not individual and intentional power acts per se, but rather that government bodies’ agency is distributed and thus constrained and enabled by structural factors.

### **7.1.2 Measuring non-economic values**

Our findings indicate that the government bodies’ focus on the for-profit sharing economy goes hand in hand with the predominance of the growth paradigm that frames their agency. The growth paradigm is here understood as characterised by the “strengthened responsibility of governments to increase economic growth and the related emergence of economic approaches to social problem” (Schmelzer, 2016, p. 190). One way that this manifests itself is in current government accounting practices. One barrier to support NPSPs identified by government bodies is that well-being is predominantly measured in monetary terms. Consequently, financial investments on the part of the government are determined by how much they contribute to the city’s economic well-being. This poses a problem for NPSPs since they do not generate tax revenues nor economic growth, but

instead bring environmental or social benefits which are currently not structurally integrated in economic accounting (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015), making it difficult for government bodies to justify financial support for NPSPs. This is problematic in terms of sustainability for which the “intangible benefits [of sharing] are potentially of much greater significance than the tangible ones” (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015, p. 255). It follows that the effective realisation of NPSPs’ benefits are hindered by the current growth paradigm. As such, the case of NPSPs is embedded in the much broader discussion about the incommensurability of plural values (e.g. Martinez-Alier, Munda & O’Neil, 1998).

Avoiding the complications of assuming a common (i.e. monetary) factor to compare multiple dimensions of value (Martinez-Alier et al. 1998), government bodies instead focus on those aspects of the sharing economy that are already easily measurable in monetary terms. This is reflected in their focus on social entrepreneurs as agents of change and the sharing economy’s claim to potentially generate more jobs and economic activity decoupled from negative social and environmental impacts<sup>8</sup>. What this both reflects and perpetuates is the dominance of the growth paradigm of which consumerism itself is a key component (Barry, 2012). Although NPSPs themselves are part of transforming this logic that underpins consumerism, it is important not to underestimate the extent to which they are constrained by it too. As our case illustrates, in an institution whose actions are framed by a growth paradigm, it is not unproblematic to support sharing platforms that enable post-growth practices. This may be especially the case now that growth-generating practices that fit under the very same umbrella term are growing so rapidly and driving the dominant discourse around sharing.

### ***7.1.3 Between capture and transformation***

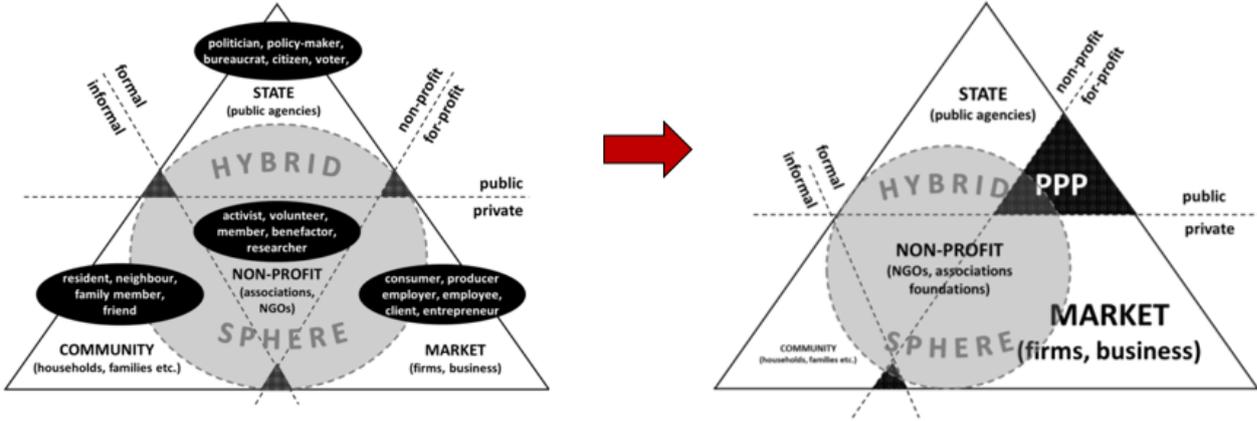
NPSPs engage in capture- and transformation dynamics with both the market and the government. According to TSI proposition 7 (Appendix II) this is a key aspect of the institutionalisation of SIIIs (Haxeltine et al., 2016b; Pel & Bauler, 2014). As illustrated by the diversity of the selected NPSPs, ranging from government-initiated NPSPs to government-independent NPSPs, a ‘grey zone’ stretches between the extremes of capture of and transformation by SIIIs (Pel & Bauler, 2015). These dialectical processes play out in the dimensions of the state, civil society and the market, the relations between which are also changing (Swyngedouw, 2005). Specifically addressing social

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<sup>8</sup> Especially product-service systems are argued to have a key part to play in this regard (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Mont, 2004; Wolfson, Mark, Martin & Tavor, 2015).

innovation, Swyngedouw (2005) argues that the externalisation of state functions, or “destatisation” (p. 1998), through privatisation “inevitably implies that non-state, civil society or market-based configurations become increasingly involved in regulating, governing and organising a series of social, economic and cultural activities” (p. 1998).

This destatisation is illustrated by government bodies’ emphasis on the role that the for-profit sharing economy in particular could play in providing services to the citizens for whom the municipality would otherwise be responsible. For-profit sharing platforms are emphasised due to their expected scalability as a default consumption option (Botsman & Rogers, 2010) and in order to prevent protectionism of suboptimal SIs that pose unfair competition to existing circular businesses (e.g. second hand stores). As shown in figure 7, Avelino et al. (2015) argue that, consequently, one can observe a shift of institutional logic, whereby market logic encroaches upon that of community. This fit and conform response to SI empowerment is problematic in its own right (see chapter 2): Instead of the sharing economy being an expansion of a community rational that humanises the economy (Kemp et al., 2016), through commercialising social interactions that were previously not monetised, it may well be an expansion of the profit-seeking market rationality (Avelino et al., 2015; Belk, 2014; Habermas as cited in Thomassen, 2010).



**Figure 7.** Shift of institutional logic with increasing dominance of market logic over community logic (adapted from Avelino et al., 2015, p. 16, 19).

Next to destatisation and market-capture dynamics, we also observe a capture- and transformation dynamic between the non-profit sharing economy and local governments. As illustrated by the G2P

NPSPs, the local government departments consider the non-profit sharing economy as a tool to realise their respective goals. Thus, we observe that institutional change is occurring but that, as suggested in TSI proposition 6, ambitions are reframed into meeting societal challenges rather than transforming a system (i.e. consumerism in our case). However, as Moulaert, Martinelli, González and Swyngedouw (2007) have argued with specific reference to SIs, institutional change itself is path-dependent and “in the course of their implementation new discourses must often comply with existing institutions and agencies” (p. 206). Indeed, government bodies make strategic use of different narratives of change to align the G2P platforms with municipal goals and thereby enable the necessary support. However, TSI proposition 7 suggests that this raises the question of whether the SI is transformative or rather a product of capture dynamics. Our findings indicate that the ‘institutional home’ and stability provided to the three G2P NPSPs of our case study currently enables rather than compromises their ability to transform consumerism. However, considering the government bodies’ for-profit future vision for sharing practices, this may change over time.

## **7.2 The Transformative Potential of NPSPs**

### ***7.2.1 Answering our main research question***

Bearing the above findings in mind, this section aims to answer our main research question: “*What is the potential of the non-profit sharing economy to be a sustainable pathway to transform consumerism*”. This is not a question that we can, nor intend, to answer on a scale from 1 to 10. What we can do, based on our empirical findings as discussed in the light of larger sustainability debates, is to provide a set of factors that we expect to positively or negatively impact the viability of NPSPs and as such their transformative potential. Importantly, in line with the TSI framework, we assume that in order for SIs to contribute to institutional change, they do not need to explicitly articulate any transformative ambitions. Rather, their very activities and thus their mere existence can challenge the dominant institutions. Following this argumentation, we consider everything which influences the sustained existence of NPSPs, to also have an influence on their transformative potential, both in positive and negative ways. What follows are the main factors that we found to influence NPSPs sustained existence and thus also the non-profit sharing economy’s potential to be a sustainable pathway for transforming consumerism.

Firstly, one factor that has enabled the start-up of the NPSPs is the alignment of its practices with similar goals of the municipality (RQ1). These goals can often be considered a reaction to game-changing developments in society such as the economic- and environmental crises as well as the

recent influx of refugees and the need to create an inclusive climate in the cities. Through funding of various sorts, the shielded space that this alignment allowed for has been a determining factor for the continued existence of many NPSPs - a prerequisite to be a transformative agent.

Secondly, however, we observe that discrepancies between actor groups' perceptions of what the current problems and enabling factors are (RQ2) can lead to an interaction that is characterised by successful initial shielding but a lack of mechanisms that support networking, social learning and articulation of shared expectations that nurture and empower the NPSPs to be more (financially) independent. It also results in diverging future visions for NPSPs, in particular the different agents and scales of change that are deemed important (RQ3). Haxeltine et al. (2016b) argue that commonalities in the framing of visions and narratives across SII networks foster the transformative potential of SII groups, but we found that a common vision between NPSPs and representatives of dominant institutions is also key to finding an empowering 'institutional home'.

Thirdly, the discrepancy of the actor groups' visions and lack of awareness of each other's visions points to a 'communicative gap' between the actor groups, unsurprisingly specifically for P2P NPSPs. In the light of the above sustainability discussions, we propose that the dominant debate around the for-profit sharing economy currently 'fills' this communicative gap instead. However, the sharing economy conference in Malmö where two NPSPs as well as government representatives were present, points to the first steps in bridging this gap. We argue that government bodies' reliance on the dominant sharing economy debate hinders effective decision-making for NPSP support mechanisms.

Fourthly, we suggest that financial reliance of NPSPs on a government whose actions are determined by a pro-growth paradigm hinders the transformative potential of NPSPs. That is not to say that financial support is redundant -on the contrary- but rather that the dominance of the growth paradigm makes it difficult for governments to be a reliable source of external funding. This is especially so in a climate where social entrepreneurship is granted more legitimacy than non-profit and voluntary activities.

Fifthly, the capture- and transformation dynamics between NPSPs, the market and the government may influence NPSPs' transformative potential. Whereas the government adopts a positive attitude to scalable business models run by social entrepreneurs, the literature indicates that marketisation can compromise the transformative potential of NPSPs (Martin et al., 2015). Whereas the literature points to the risks of close collaboration with dominant institutions (Haxeltine et al., 2016b), in our case the stability offered to G2P NPSPs was an enabling factor. Thus, although capture and

transformation are presented as opposites, our findings support the standpoint that enabling collaborations can be formed in the grey zone in between.

Lastly, we found that communication and collaboration among sharing platforms is currently experienced as contributing to mutual inspiration and learning processes (RQ2). It was also envisioned to be a desirable pathway to more independence in the future (RQ3). This was perceived to be empowering both when referring to international networks of the same sharing practices and across different sharing platforms. However, we found that this collaboration is limited and that, despite contact existing there is no shared vision among platforms. This may hinder effective nurturing processes such as building a strong network and mutual learning opportunities. Hence, we suggest, in agreement with the current TSI propositions, that strong inter- and cross-platform communication is crucial for the transformative potential of NPSPs.

Taking all these factors as a whole, it seems that under current conditions the potential of the non-profit sharing economy to be a sustainable pathway to transform consumerism is limited. This is not because of the activities that make up the platforms (i.e. the kind of sharing practices and social interactions), nor because there is no political will to support NPSPs' transformative potential (at least to a certain extent), nor because there is not enough interest among citizens. Rather, it is a product of a number of structural restrictions of the current social-material context that they exist in, especially those resulting from the persistence of a growth paradigm within the dominant institutions.

Importantly, we draw this conclusion based on the findings from the case of Malmö and Lund. Generalising our findings to other geographical areas is problematic, as, like other TSIs, the non-profit sharing economy's transformative potential is context-specific (Haxeltine et al., 2016a). Not only will other contexts differ in terms of the factors identified, but some factors may not even be applicable at all while others are missing. What we do expect to stretch across contexts is the dominant place of the for-profit sharing sector in debates about the sharing economy. Due to global interconnectedness and the strong online presence of the sharing economy, we could expect the former to impact local decision-making regarding NPSPs too.

### ***7.2.2 Suggestions for future decision-making***

From the above we deduce a number of suggestions to increase NPSPs' transformative potential and thus help to realise the sharing economy's claim to address consumerism. For government bodies we

suggest that, in order to account for the intangible benefits of sharing platforms, there is a need to move beyond purely monetary success measurements of investments. Furthermore, we propose that governments should actively focus on the nurturing of platforms over and above the present shielding efforts. Since platform providers indicated inter-platform communication as contributing to nurturing processes, we propose that governments facilitate this kind of communication, for example by organising regular meet-ups and the creation of inspiring guidebooks. Platform providers are advised to engage in activities that make them less dependent on unstable external funding. Creating a strong member base and improving contacts with other SIs is crucial in this respect. To overcome the communicative gap that currently hinders the above activities, we suggest to consider a “boundary organisation”, mediating between the two actor groups (Clark et al., 2003). A lesson learned from transition management is that this boundary organisation could take the form of a “transition arena” which fosters joint knowledge production between scientists, decision-makers and other stakeholders and as such promotes communication, translation and mediation between the actors involved (Clark et al., 2003; Kemp & Rotmans, 2009).

### **7.3 Doing and Contributing to Sustainability Science**

Sustainability science is a problem-driven field of research and practice (Clark et al., 2003) that deals with wicked problems in nature-society interactions (Jerneck et al., 2011). Problem-driven in the sense of critically analysing problems in complex nature-society interactions, but also in attempting to solve them and guide transformations along a sustainable trajectory (Kates, 2011; Wiek, Farioli, Fukushi & Yarime, 2012). We have taken a predominantly problem-solving approach, but the starting point of our endeavour was to critically question how the currently dominant debates about the sharing economy address the wicked problems posed by it. Our contribution to the sustainability science field is both, theoretical development (see next subsection), and the furthering of knowledge and practice. Regarding the latter we have shed light on an understudied part of a for sustainability science relevant research topic and in doing so, have created knowledge and insights that are valuable both within and beyond academia. The existing literature mainly draws attention to the risk of commercialisation of sharing platforms (e.g. Martin et al. 2015; Schor, 2014) and on how to regulate the for-profit branch (e.g. Dyal-Chand, 2015; Miller, 2016). Our findings suggest that for NPSPs *additional problems* are posed by their dependency relationship with the government which is influenced by the dominant debate on the for-profit sharing economy. However, our observations also carry relevance outside of academia. The government representatives expressed great interest in our research and in finding a novel and durable way to support NPSPs’ independence and

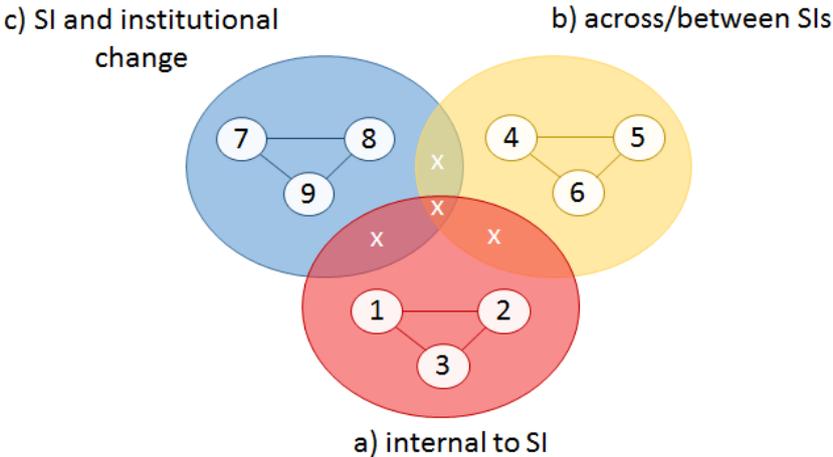
indicated that research projects on the role of the sharing economy in the city of Malmö will be initiated in the near future (EM). Our findings may serve as a pointer to additional aspects that are important to consider in such a research project.

#### **7.4 Reflections on the TSI framework**

Next to supporting future decision-making on the sharing economy, the secondary aim of this research was to contribute to the process of TSI theory development by applying the latter to new empirical data. The TSI theory is currently being developed based on case studies connected to transnationally networked SIIIs and because the majority of the by us selected NPSPs are not (yet) part of such a network, one part of our contribution to the TSI theory development is to ground the latter in new empirical data on localised SIIIs. A second part consists of suggestions on additional concepts to consider in the future articulation of the theory. Generally, we found that examining a relatively new phenomenon such as the sharing economy with a not yet fully-fledged theory such as the TSI framework to be enlightening and challenging at the same time.

The different concepts introduced by the TSI framework (see chapter 3) have proven to be helpful in analysing our empirical data to answer our research questions and thus to move beyond merely empirical observations. The narratives of change concept was especially helpful in this respect as it allowed us to not merely compare actors' perceptions of the purpose and envisioned solutions for NPSPs, but also to detect mechanisms and structures influencing these perceptions. Speaking in critical realist terms, the concepts introduced in the framework have provided us with the analytical tools to move beyond the empirical domain and to better understand (yet not completely reflect) the underlying actual events and real structures that bring about the actor groups' experiences. Although the concepts themselves have been helpful in specific parts of our analysis, the framework as a whole has proven to give little to no guidance in structuring this analysis and identifying key elements in the data. We argue that this can be explained both by the broadness and inclusiveness of the framework, but also by its current explanatory weakness in how its concepts relate to each other. The propositions on the agency and dynamics of TSI (see Appendix II), outlined in one of the most recent working papers (Haxeltine et al., 2016b), present a first step to fill this explanatory gap, and the clustering of interactions around four relational dimensions of SIIIs (a. relations within an SII, b. across/between SIIIs, c. to institutional change processes, and d. to the broader social-material context) have been helpful to identify enabling and constraining factors.

Besides highlighting which parts of the framework were helpful and which less helpful, a number of suggestions for the further development of a TSI theory emerged from its application in our study. Our findings point to the need for complementary propositions that more explicitly relate the relational clusters (listed above) to one another. To give an example, it would be valuable to develop propositions on how the relations between the SII and the dominant institutions impact the relations within and between SIIs (see figure 8). Thus, our findings indicate the need for more emphasis on the relations between propositions from different clusters. In the present study we have attempted to do so by drawing on the shielding, nurturing and empowering mechanisms outlined by Smith and Raven (2012). Doing so served to shed more light on what Pel and Bauler (2015) call the ‘grey zone’ between capture and transformation dynamics of SIIs and dominant institutions (TSI relational cluster c). It also pointed to how the former results in unsteady funding that impacts nurturing mechanisms in the internal dynamics of the SII (TSI relational cluster a) and the networking with other SIIs (TSI relational cluster b).



**Figure 8.** A visualisation of our suggestion on how the current TSI propositions could be complemented. The relational clusters (a, b, and c) and specific propositions therein (numbers 1 to 8 have been taken as examples) are adopted from the existing list of propositions (Haxeltine et al., 2016b). The white crosses indicate potential points of overlap where additional propositions are needed to explain the interactions across the relational clusters.

**7.5 Reflections and Limitations**

Just like the sharing economy itself, in the process of this research we have encountered numerous crossroads that determined its direction. Working as a team has proven to be advantageous for the research process in many different ways. Being two people allowed us to engage with a great

amount of literature and to collect a sizeable amount of empirical data beneficial for exploratory studies like this one. However, a greater amount of information does not automatically make for a better research. Communication between the researchers is key to unlock the value of conducting joint research. Thus, the key benefit of working together has been that it forced us to make explicit the rationale and underlying assumptions of any argument in favour of and against a decision. By verbalising our thoughts to one another we had the chance to better interrogate the logic of them and to detect underlying assumptions that would have otherwise maybe not been revealed. Coming from different academic background has proven to be another advantage in this respect as it made us look at things from different perspective and question things which the other thought to be obvious. Thus, we believe that working in a pair has allowed a more critical engagement with our data. Nevertheless, a joint research process is not without challenges either. This study's analysis is based on a sizable amount of collected empirical data. Identifying patterns in them without losing the overview has been a demanding task and to streamline it among two people has required ample coordination.

A key aspect of doing research is the reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of its methodology. In chapter two we have provided our reasoning behind the methodological decisions made. In what follows we briefly reflect on the weaknesses. Firstly, the identified sharing platforms that comprise our case study share a set of common denominators, but are at the same time diverse. They are located spread over two cities with notable demographic and historical differences and the sample includes P2P and G2P examples. Although we acknowledge the importance and pitfalls of this, due to the explorative character of our main research question, we consider the diversity of NPSPs that comprise case sample also a valuable asset. Secondly, the NPSPs were purposively selected based on the type of sharing practice they *embody* rather than based on *self-identification* with the sharing economy. Because the sharing economy is prone to semantic and definitional confusions, interviewees were given the chance to express their own understanding of the phenomenon, followed by a presentation of our understanding. This was done to reach a common understanding in reference to which interview questions could be answered and later on analysed. However, the extent to which we managed to do so and how we thereby influenced the interviewees' responses is not easily judged. Thirdly, representatives from the local government were selected based on analytical considerations and snowball sampling, but this does not exclude the possibility that important actors were overlooked. Both cities' departments for business development and the business associations declined to be interviewed which could potentially have provided crucial insights into the topic. Fourthly, the interview guides served as a basic structure for the transcripts, meaning that to facilitate further data analysis answers were sorted according to the respective

interview questions and in emerging categories where applicable. Although specific reference to the audio file was kept to facilitate later retrieval where necessary, this transcription method may have compromised the identification of links among excerpts from the same interview.

## 8 Conclusions

As expressed in the opening quote of this thesis, the sharing economy is currently at a critical juncture where its potential to contribute to a more sustainable future could be realised “or end up wasted by a short-lived hyped concept with a shadow of the transformation and change it envisioned” (Gruszka, 2016, p. 3). Bearing this in mind, the primary aim of our research has been to contribute to future decision-making regarding how to support the sharing economy’ potential to transform consumerism. Unlike for-profit sharing platforms, NPSPs are an understudied phenomenon, despite the fact that available literature suggests that they have a high potential to help achieve the sustainability claims made for the sharing economy. Therefore, the main question this thesis has addressed is *“What is the potential of the non-profit sharing economy to be a sustainable pathway to transform consumerism?”*.

Our findings are, first, that government bodies and platform providers see similar but also different purposes of NPSPs. Both share the view that NPSPs can contribute to local sustainability. However, while platform providers stress to offer a service currently not provided, government bodies stress the need for potential economic benefits. Second, we found that platform providers and government bodies perceive different enabling and constraining factors for NPSPs. Although both agree that financial dependence on the municipality is the main barrier NPSPs currently face, platform providers focus more on internal barriers that result from this, such as the lack of committed volunteers while government bodies focus more on institutional barriers, such as existing regulations and norms. Third, our results indicate that platforms providers and government bodies have very different visions for how to overcome perceived barriers. To achieve financial independence, platforms providers aim to create a stronger member base and enhance inter-platform communication, while government bodies see the future in for-profit sharing models. Due to doubts about desirability and viability of NPSPs’ long-term support, current and envisioned support strategies mostly take the form of short-term start-up shielding but lack effective nurturing mechanisms which are necessary for empowerment.

Our findings point towards a communicative gap between platform providers and government bodies which is currently influenced by the dominant debate on the for-profit sharing economy. Specifically, we observe that government bodies’ perceptions of NPSPs’ barriers and potential solutions are significantly influenced by the debate which is currently centred on the (negative) impacts of a few large for-profit platforms. In addition, we see that current accounting norms within

the government bodies do not allow for sufficient incorporation of the intangible benefits of NPSPs, which hinders potential support. Taken together, this implies that NPSPs' continued survival, and as such their current potential to be a sustainable pathway to transform consumerism, is limited. We suggest that in order to increase the transformative potential of the non-profit sharing economy, more attention needs to be paid to the communicative gap between governments and platforms to facilitate future nurturing processes.

Our findings point to a number of areas interesting for future research. First, as the sharing economy is rapidly expanding across Europe and beyond, now is the time to also investigate the transformative potential of the non-profit sharing economy in other geographical settings. Second, because our findings indicate that the debate that guides local decision-making is heavily influenced by the for-profit sharing economy, we suggest that more in-depth and targeted research on the specific challenges that this poses and how to overcome them is needed to improve decision-making. For such research we consider Lukes's three-dimensional view of power, with a particular focus on control over the political agenda, as potentially useful in this respect (Lukes, 2005). We also suggest to then draw on Habermas's colonisation theory to explore more in-depth the challenges posed by the dominance of the for-profit sharing economy. Insights from such research could also contribute to a further development of the TSI framework, especially with regard to the narratives of change concept. Third, our findings indicate that P2P and G2P platforms experience different barriers and as such may have a different transformative potential. A more systematic comparison between these two types of platforms could shed further light on their respective needs for support and potential to transform consumerism. Last, we suggest that future research of less exploratory character and specifically aimed to address the problem of financial dependence of NPSPs, could benefit from drawing more heavily on the existing social innovation literature to complement the TSI framework.

As of yet, we observe that relevant actor groups' narratives of change regarding the purpose (RQ1), current challenges and opportunities (RQ2) and future vision (RQ3) for NPSPs show discrepancies that currently hinder the empowerment of these platforms and thereby their potential to be a sustainable pathway to transform consumerism. If we are to transition to more sustainable consumption practices and interpersonal relations by means of the sharing economy, it is of pivotal importance to continue to critically examine its future possibilities that sprout from the crossroad it is currently at.

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## 10 Appendices

### Appendix I: Typologies of Sharing Platforms

Unit of Analysis	Reference	Categories
Type of ownership or access	Botsman & Rogers, 2011	Product service systems Redistribution markets Collaborative lifestyles
	Demailly & Novel, 2014	Redistribution (reselling, giving, swapping) Mutualisation (renting and short-term lending) Mobility
	Schor, 2014	Recirculation of goods Increased utilisation of durable assets Exchange of services Sharing of productive assets
	Scholl et al., 2015	Prolonged use of products Intensified use of products
Platform orientation	Schor, 2014	Non-profit For-profit
	Cohen & Muñoz, 2016	Public benefit Private benefit
Actors	Schor, 2014	Peer-to-peer (P2P) Business-to-peer (B2P) Government-to-peer (G2P)
Sector	Stokes et al., 2014	Collaborative production Collaborative consumption Collaborative learning

		Collaborative finance
	Owyang, 2014	<p>Worker Support</p> <p>Learning</p> <p>Wellness and beauty</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Goods</p> <p>Money</p> <p>Municipal</p> <p>Space</p> <p>Food</p> <p>Logistics</p> <p>Services</p> <p>Mobility services</p> <p>Utilities</p> <p>Vehicle sharing</p> <p>Corporations and organisations</p> <p>Analytics and reputation</p>

## Appendix II: TSI Propositions

### Set of propositions about the agency and dynamics of transformative social innovation clustered around four relational dimensions adopted from TRANSIT Working Paper #7 (Haxeltine et al., 2016)

Cluster a) **Relations within individual SIs.** How do SIs come about? How do they emerge and perform? Addresses the relations within SIs, including: organisational issues, group dynamics, individual motivations and basic needs, etc. Also addresses how the social-material context enters into micro-level relations through e.g. prevailing norms and values.

- Proposition 1: On how and why SIs emerge
- Proposition 2: On internal tensions and how SIs are sustained
- Proposition 3: On the importance of changing social relations within the initiative

Cluster b) **Relations across/between initiatives.** This covers what we refer to as ‘networks’ but also cross-network relations. How do different types and forms of social innovation activity interact with each other? How do they challenge or conflict with each other and their goals? This cluster also addresses the relations within the ‘social innovation field’ of which an individual SIs or network is a part of.

- Proposition 4: On the role of transnational connectivity between SIs.
- Proposition 5: On the interactions across transnational social innovation networks
- Proposition 6: On the importance of relations to external actors within the social innovation field

Cluster c) **Relations of SIs to institutional change processes.** Addresses the specific types of institutional change processes that SIs are engaged with, but also the (de)politicising aspects of TSI, and, the importance of the relations within the ‘social innovation field’ to institutional change processes. How do SIs and networks engage (individually and collectively) with processes of institutional change? What relations are important in achieving institutional change?

- Proposition 7: On the interplay of TSI with dominant institutions
- Proposition 8: On finding or creating an institutional home
- Proposition 9: On the remaking of institutional logics

Cluster d) **Relations of SIs and networks to the broader social-material context.** Addresses both the enabling and the constraining relations with a transforming context; here we address how TSI can be explained in terms of historical trends and developments, including but not limited to an explicit focus on how SIs themselves frame, experience and relate to the context. Here we also address how societal crises and chance events may play a role in TSI.

- Proposition 10: On the social-material evolution out of which TSI emerges
- Proposition 11: On the ebb and flow of socially innovative practices
- Proposition 12: On the construction of crises and problematic trends

### Appendix III: List of Interviewees

Sharing platform or Institution	Acronym	Name	Actor Role	Interview Date & Place
Bike Kitchen	BK	Bart Oostenrijk	Platform provider	21.02.17, Lund
Fixa Till	FT	Anonymous	Platform provider	22.02.17, Lund
Öppna Verkstad	ÖV	Gustav Lindholm	Platform provider	09.03.17, Lund
Repair Café	RC	Louise Linné	Platform provider	29.03.17, Lund
Cykelköket & Cykelbiblioteket	CK & CB	Jesper Berséus	Platform provider	22.02.17, Malmö
Garaget	G	Lisa Jansson	Platform provider	04.04.17, Malmö
ToolPool	TP	Matti Jokela	Platform provider	07.03.17, Malmö
Swop Shop	SS	Jane Olsson	Platform provider	06.03.17, Malmö
Swop Shop	SS	Clarissa Grace Change & Danica Caganic	Platform provider	06.03.17, Malmö
ReTuren & VA Syd (water and waste company)	RT	Annika Sevrell*	Head of waste department & Platform initiator	23.03.17, Malmö
Renhållningsverket (waste department), Lund municipality	RHV	Lena Wallin**	Communications & Platform initiator	01.03.17, Lund
Miljöstrategiska Enheten (strategic environmental unit), Lunds	MSE	Kristina Fontell	Civil servant	09.03.17, Lund

municipality				
Miljöförvaltning (environmental department), Malmö municipality	MF	Emma Börjesson	Project Manager Innovation Arena	28.03.17, Malmö
Ekonomiavdelning (economic department), Lund municipality	EL	Henrik Weimarsson	Director of Economy	20.03.17, Lund
Ekonomiavdelning (economic department), Malmö municipality	EM	Susanna Jakobsson & Jenny Theander	Sustainability economists	31.03.17, Malmö
Stadsbyggnadskontoret (city planning office), Malmö municipality	CP	Christer Larsson	Director of city planning	15.03.17, Telephone interview
Nya Moderaterna Lund	NM	Mats Helmfrid	Politician	22.03.17, Lund
Socialdemokraterna Malmö	SCD	Carina Svensson	Politician	05.04.17, Malmö

\* Annika Sevrell both represents the public company VA Syd and the platform ReTuren

\*\* Lena Wallin both represents the public waste company Renhållningsverket and the platform FixaTill

## Appendix IV: Interview Guides

### a) Interview guide: platform providers

Theme	Questions
<b>Facesheet information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What is your name and what you do at X*.</li> <li>b) How, when and why did you get involved in X?</li> </ul>
<b>Emergence of the sharing platform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What happens at X?</li> <li>b) Why did X come into being?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Is there a specific problem that X addresses?</li> <li>ii) If yes, what problem(s)?</li> </ul> </li> <li>c) How did X come into being?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Who was involved in starting it up?</li> <li>ii) How was X initially financed?</li> </ul> </li> <li>d) Were there any challenges to X's start up? If yes, which?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) How did you deal with these challenges?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Development of the sharing platform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Has the platform change since its opening? If yes, how?</li> <li>b) Are you currently facing any problems? If yes, which?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) What do you think are the sources of these problems?</li> <li>ii) What do you think needs to be done to overcome these challenges?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Going back to the purposes we talked about, do you think X is meeting these aims?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Which factors help/prevent the achievement of these aims?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Relationships to others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) How is X related to the municipality?</li> <li>b) How do you perceive X relates to regular shops?</li> <li>c) How is X related to other sharing initiatives?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Do you work together with other sharing initiatives?</li> <li>ii) If yes, how does this collaboration impact X?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Sharing and sharing economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What do you understand as sharing?</li> <li>b) Do you know what the sharing economy is? What is it according to you?</li> <li>c) How do you see X in relation to the sharing economy?</li> </ul>

\* X refers to the respective sharing platform the interviewee is involved in

**b) Interview guide: government body representatives**

Theme	Questions
<b>Facesheet information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What is your name and what you do at X*?</li> <li>b) What are the tasks of X?</li> </ul>
<b>Sharing Economy in general</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) How would you define the sharing economy?</li> <li>b) What practices do you associate with the sharing economy?</li> <li>c) What values do you associate with the sharing economy?</li> <li>d) What do you see as the purpose of the sharing economy?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) What problems do you think the sharing economy addresses?</li> </ul> </li> <li>e) Is the sharing economy a much-discussed topic in X?</li> </ul>
<b>Non-profit sharing platforms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Can you give examples of non-profit sharing platforms in Lund/Malmö?</li> <li>b) Is X currently involved in the support of any non-profit sharing practices?</li> <li>c) What do you see as the purpose of non-profit sharing platforms?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) What problems do non-profit sharing platforms address?</li> <li>ii) What are the potential benefits non-profit sharing platforms?</li> </ul> </li> <li>d) Which potential challenges do you see for non-profit sharing platforms in Lund/Malmö?</li> <li>e) How do you see non-profit sharing platforms in relation to regular businesses? As competing or as complementary?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Do you currently see any impact of non-profit sharing platforms on regular businesses? If yes, which?</li> <li>ii) What potential impacts do you think could an upscaling of non-profit sharing platforms have for the local business climate?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Future plans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Are there any plans in X to support the sharing economy in general?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Are there plans to support non-profit sharing platforms in specific?</li> </ul> </li> <li>b) Do you think non-profit sharing platforms should be supported by X?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Why / Why not?</li> <li>ii) If yes, how would you envision future support of the non-profit sharing economy?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

\* X refers to the respective department the interviewee works at

## Appendix V: Consent Form

Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies

Informed Consent Form



LUNDS  
UNIVERSITET

**LUCSUS**  
Lund University Centre for  
Sustainability Studies

*Researchers: Annabel Schickner and Sanne Raggars*

We, the researchers, are Master's students of Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science at Lund University.

For our master thesis, we are conducting semi-structured interviews of around 30 - 60 minutes.

At any point of the interview, you can ask questions or decide against taking part in the interview. Furthermore, you can demand that certain statements are not published.

By signing this form, you agree to participate in the interview. Your anonymity will be ensured during the entire research process if wished for.

Do you agree to being recorded?

Yes

No

Do you as an individual want to remain anonymous?

Yes

No

The results of our research can be shared with you if you are interested.

Thank you very much for your time!

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_