

Why do you share?

An explorative study on attitudes towards collaborative consumption among young adults in Malmö

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Abstract

Collaborative consumption – i.e. sharing, renting, trading and swapping things instead of owning them – has in previous years emerged as an alternative consumption mode, assumed by many to be less resource demanding and more sustainable than current consumption patterns.

It is suggested that younger adults have more positive attitudes towards collaborative consumption than older age cohorts. However, little is known about what, how and why this key consumption group in Sweden share with others. The purpose of this study is therefore to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the subjective attitudes towards sharing among Malmö-based young adults (21 to 36 years old) with experience of collaborative consumption. In addition to what and how they share, their sharing motives, the extent to which they perceive sharing as being environmentally sustainable, as well as what they believe might stimulate and hinder the development of collaborative consumption are addressed.

With data collected through 16 qualitative semi-structured interviews, the study shows a wide range of motivations to participate in collaborative consumption among the respondents. The study also finds a relatively high level of perceived environmental sustainability of collaborative consumption, believed to be catalysed by the decreasing demand on resources and behavioural changes. Increased awareness of sharing, making sharing accessible, and changes in how people live are among the perceived stimulating factors. On the other hand, lack of trust, people's comfort, and strong norms regarding private ownership are lifted as hinders. Suggestions for further research are presented in the discussion.

Abbreviations

B2P – Business-to-peer

CC – Collaborative consumption

P2P – Peer-to-peer

SE – Sharing economy

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Introduction

The sharing economy

Since the 1970s, humanity has been in ecological overshoot – the demand on resources has annually exceeded what the ecosystems can renew each year (Global Footprint Network, 2019). With an increasing global population, and an increasing number of people joining the middle class, current consumption and production patterns need to change in order to mitigate this unsustainable resource use and avoid severe environmental damage (United Nations, 2018).

In previous years, alternative ways of consumption have emerged that promise to tackle the aforementioned negative impacts: there has been a growing interest in sharing, renting, trading and swapping things instead of owning them. Belk (2014) even suggests that we may be on the verge of entering a “post-ownership economy”. These alternative ways of accessing goods and services can be described as collaborative consumption (CC) (Botsman, 2013), and are part of the sharing economy (SE) – an umbrella term hard to define (Acquier et al, 2017). For the purpose of this study, I define CC based on the three defining characteristics of the SE suggested by Frenken & Schor (2017): consumer-to-consumer interaction, temporary access and physical goods.

Shifting the focus from ownership to access, and thereby promoting a more efficient and sustainable use of resources, is one of the environmental promises of the SE (Heinrichs, 2013; Martin, 2016). However, even though the SE is assumed to have the potential to shift global and local economies toward sustainability (Daunorienè et al, 2015), there are also uncertainties and critiques with regards to its economic, social and environmental impacts. Frenken & Schor (2017, p. 6) argue that the “alleged sustainability benefits of the SE are [...] much more complex than initially assumed”. For instance, most environmental benefits seem to lie in ride and car sharing – but the environmental effects might at the same time be smaller than expected due to rebound effects (Frenken & Schor, 2017). Furthermore, it is suggested that some parts of the SE even might exacerbate social problems, such as discrimination and inequality (Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017).

Given the associated sustainability challenges of the rapid global urbanization growth (United Nations, 2014) as well as the possibilities densely

populated areas implicate with regards to sharing, urban contexts are often under the loupe in SE research. In a study on urban sharing in smart cities, Zvolska et al (2018) explore in what ways cities can engage with the phenomena of sharing, and propose a conceptual framework of four different modes of governance; the city can assume a role as regulator, provider, enabler or consumer of urban sharing.

Sharing in Sweden and in Malmö

Although not much research has been done on the SE in Sweden, sharing in Swedish cities has recently gained academic attention through the national program Sharing Cities Sweden, which aims to develop “world-leading test-beds for the sharing economy in Malmö, Gothenburg, Umeå and Stockholm” (Sharing Cities Sweden, 2019). Among the initial findings of the program are positive attitudes towards the SE among city representatives, as well as a perceived potential of the SE to contribute to the cities’ sustainability goals (Markendahl et al, 2019). In three of the test-bed cities, Gothenburg, Malmö and Umeå, consumption surveys have been conducted with the purpose of mapping the attitudes of citizens towards sharing, renting and swapping things with each other. The surveys indicate that most people have a positive attitude towards sharing: 83% of the respondents in Malmö (Malmö Stad, 2017), 90% in Gothenburg (Göteborg Stad, 2015), and 88% in Umeå (Holmström, personal communication, March 31 2019) are willing to share things with others. In addition, all three surveys indicate that young adults, in contrast to older age groups, share goods and services to a greater extent, are more positive towards sharing with their neighbours and find it less important to own things themselves (Göteborg Stad, 2015; Holmström, personal communication, March 31 2019; Malmö Stad, 2017). The attitudes towards sharing among this specific age group are not fully explored, however.

According to a report from Näringspolitiskt Forum (Felländer et al, 2015), the SE in Sweden mainly consists of international platforms such as Uber and Airbnb, and of smaller initiatives run by non-profit organizations or state institutions. In Malmö, Röjnert (2015) identifies 16 CC initiatives, including:

- Peer-to-peer (P2P) and non-profit (Skjutsgruppen, Kollektivhus, Stadsodling);
- Business-to-peer (B2P) and non-profit (STPLN, Garaget, ReTuren);
- P2P and for-profit (Grann saker, Delbar, GoMore, SnappCar, Airbnb, Couchsurfing, Swopshop, Retoy);

- B2P and for-profit (ToolPool, Sunfleet).

Röjnert (2015) concludes that the main barriers for a transition to CC in Malmö are funding, politics, regulation, trust and security, and consumption behaviour.

Previous research on attitudes towards collaborative consumption

Among the reasons why people share are factors such as sustainability, enjoyment of the activity and economic benefits (Bucher et al, 2016; Hamari et al, 2016). Increased community cohesion and sense of social belonging are also important (Albinsson & Perera, 2012; Bucher et al, 2016; Cherry & Pidgeon, 2018; McArthur, 2014). However, Hamari et al (2016) suggest that there might exist a gap between people's attitudes towards CC and their actual behaviour; having a positive opinion on sharing does not necessarily translate into action.

People's motivations and attitudes towards sharing vary depending on what is being shared (Böcker & Meelen, 2017; Edbring et al, 2016). There are also differences in the relative importance of environmental, economic and social motivations to share between socio-economic groups; while environmental motives are more important for women, economic motives are more important for younger and low-income groups, and younger, higher-income and higher-educated groups are less socially motivated (Böcker & Meelen, 2017, p. 36). Böcker & Meelen (2017) further suggest that this great diversity in people's reasons to participate in the SE might be one of the main reasons for why sharing practices have grown so rapidly; "These diverse benefits make 'that there is something in it for anybody', leading to adoption far beyond a group of environmentally aware citizens." (p. 15).

Studies on attitudes towards CC conducted in Finland, Poland and the Netherlands support the findings from Malmö, Gothenburg and Umeå that younger individuals are more positive towards CC than older age cohorts (Lindblom & Lindblom, 2017; Dabrowska & Janos-Kresto, 2018; Böcker & Meelen, 2017). Apart from being economically motivated to share, young people seem to put value in utilitarian benefits such as utility (Möhlmann, 2015), as well as the pleasure and enjoyment of sharing (Hwang & Griffiths, 2017).

Purpose and research questions

As discussed above, young adults seem to be more positive towards CC than older generations. However, the attitudes towards sharing among this specific age group, in Sweden, are not fully explored. This study fills a gap in the existing research on people's attitudes towards sharing by providing insights to why and how young adults share things with others in a Swedish urban CC context. Moreover, it gives a qualitative contribution to an issue most often treated quantitatively, through surveys (see e.g. Böcker & Meelen, 2017; Hamari et al, 2016; Lindblom & Lindblom, 2017). Since previous research on CC shows that it is not necessarily environmentally sustainable (Frenken & Schor, 2017), a special focus will be given to how young adults reason about sharing with regards to its environmental sustainability. Their thoughts on what might stimulate and hinder the development of CC will also be addressed.

The purpose of this study is to explore the subjective attitudes towards sharing among young adults based in Malmö who have experience with CC. I seek to answer the following research questions:

- What kinds of goods are young adults sharing with others, and how?
- What motivates young adults to participate in CC?
- To what extent do young adults perceive sharing as being environmentally sustainable?
- What stimulating and hindering factors to the development of CC are identified by young adults?

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, I define CC based on the three defining characteristics of the SE suggested by Frenken & Schor (2017): consumer-to-consumer interaction, temporary access and physical goods. However, since there exist several relevant B2P sharing services in Malmö (Röjnert, 2015), I will not limit my study to only P2P interactions. This means that I will define CC as sharing, renting, trading or swapping under-utilized goods with others – strangers, neighbours or friends – and include both P2P and B2P transactions as well as both profitable and non-profitable initiatives. However, sharing within the family or household, transfer of ownership and second hand markets fall outside the scope of this study.

Furthermore, the types of items explored will be limited to shareable goods, which are goods that “by nature provide owners with excess capacity, providing

the consumer with an opportunity to lend or rent out their goods to other consumers [...], including houses, cars, boats, clothing, books, toys, appliances, tools, furniture, computers, etc.” (Frenken & Schor, 2017, p. 5).

“Young adults” refers to people aged 21 to 36, in line with the age categorization used in the consumption survey on CC conducted in Malmö, where the respondents in the two youngest age cohorts (21-26 years and 27-36 years) had the most positive attitudes towards sharing (Malmö Stad, 2017).

Method

This study was addressed through an exploratory research design with data collected via qualitative semi-structured interviews. The choice of method is motivated by the aim of the study: to understand the respondents' subjective meanings and attitudes concerning CC. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher poses open-ended questions to the respondents in order for them to have the freedom to choose themselves what terms to use and to elaborate on the topics that are most meaningful to them (Roulston, 2011).

Data collection

During one week in April 2019, 16 interviews were conducted outside Garaget, one of the non-profit, B2P CC initiatives in Malmö identified by Röjnert (2015). Garaget is a community-based meeting place where people can borrow books, tools and board games (Malmö Stad, 2019). There are also computers, sewing machines and sewing equipment at the visitors' disposal (ibid).

In order to make the sample as random as possible, every third person at the location assumed to belong to the age group of interest was approached and asked if they would like to take part in a short interview. I assumed that everyone I approached had experience with CC. However, if they were willing to participate, they would, after having been briefly introduced to the purpose of the study, have to confirm that they had such experience and were between 21 to 36 years old. The interview would then be conducted in Swedish or in English depending on the wish of the respondent. In order to facilitate the data documentation and analysis, all interviews were recorded.

All interviews followed the written interview guide (Appendix A) that, based on the four research questions, had been developed and tested prior to the data collection. As is often the case for question-based guides meant for semi-structured interviews (Morgan & Guevara, 2012), it contained a number of basic questions as well as suggestions of possible probes and follow-up questions.

Since the interviews would be conducted directly on site, they had to be short enough for people to be interested in participating. Balancing the qualitative

approach of the study with a pragmatic length of the interviews was therefore one of the main factors taken into consideration when developing the interview guide and conducting the test interview. Apart from simplifications of some of the interview questions, the test interview resulted in the time frame being decided to 10 minutes.

The test interview also suggested that it might be hard to think of all the goods one share off the top of one's head. Therefore, a sheet with examples of common shareable goods was developed (Appendix B), to be shown to the participants as inspiration when answering question a.

In addition to questions referring to the four overarching research questions, the participants were asked about their age, highest degree of education and which part of Malmö they lived in.

Data processing

Upon transcription, the responses from all interviews were sorted and categorized into sections corresponding to the interview questions. Statements that clearly fell outside the scope of the study, e.g. thoughts on sharing services or buying second hand clothes, were not included in the transcripts. Each section was then processed separately and translated to English.

Since the responses to the interview questions were relatively short and mostly resembled lists of shared goods and ways of sharing them, they were analysed through the creation of a word cloud with help of the website wordclouds.com. In such a word cloud, the size of the words corresponds to the frequency in which the words are used. This visualization of the frequency of the words was used to analyse the discourse surrounding CC. To make the word cloud more accurate, all words except proper names were written in lowercase letters and no differences were made between the plural form and singular form of nouns (i.e. in the word list generated by the website, I changed words such as "bike" and "library" to "bikes" and "libraries").

In the rest of the sections, the responses were coded by being sorted into categories. I read each section thoroughly multiple times and listed recurring themes. All ideas and arguments were then sorted into categories based on those themes. Each category was summarized, with illustrative points highlighted in citations. In the result section below, translations in original language of the statements made in Swedish can be found as footnotes.

Ethics

When doing research involving humans or human experiences, it is important to consider the integrity and ensure the free, prior and informed consent of those participating. This study did therefore follow the ethical principles of Vetenskapsrådet (n.d.); prior to each interview, the participant got information about the purpose of the study and how it would be conducted, that their participation would be completely voluntary, and that the material collected and the personal data of the participants would be treated confidentially and only be used for scientific reasons. The participant was further informed that they could chose to cancel their participation whenever they wanted during the process, that they had the right to remain anonymous and that the interview would be recorded. The participant then got the chance to give their informed consent orally by agreeing to participate and by confirming that they understood their rights and the purpose of the study. After the interview, the participant received a slip of paper (Appendix C) with additional information about the study and my contact details, in case they would like to be sent the full report, or the transcription of their own responses in order to comment if anything seemed incorrect.

Result

Below follows a summary of the responses from the interviews. Each section corresponds to one of the four research questions. As the answers to interview question d and e both refer to the last research question, they are presented in the same section. See Table D1 in Appendix D for information about the 16 participants of the study.

Sharing habits

As is shown in the word cloud in Figure 1, goods such as books, clothes and bikes appeared frequently in the respondents' answers regarding what they share with others. Tools, cars, house, furniture, equipment, machines and drills were recurring as well, but to a lesser extent. The words "friends", "borrow" and "libraries" were also frequent, which indicates that the respondents mainly participate in CC by borrowing things from friends and from libraries. While some of the respondents came up with their answers by themselves, others did not remember all the goods they share until they had been shown the list of shareable goods.

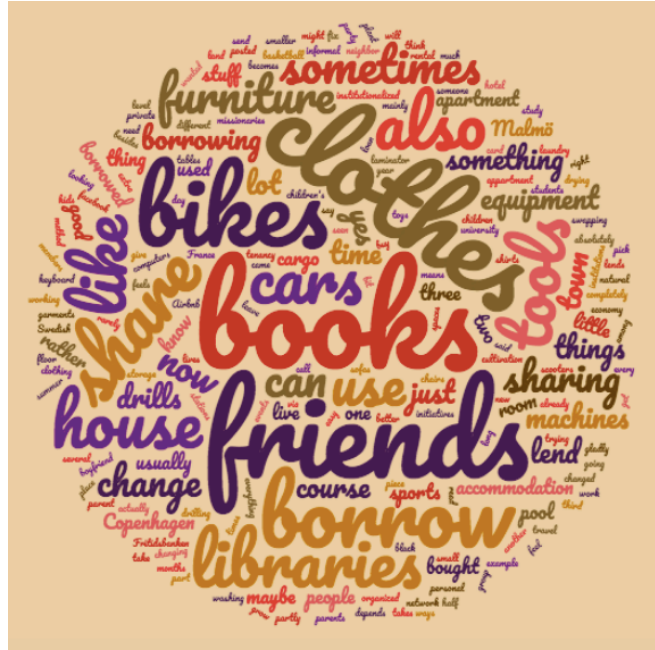


Figure 1 World cloud

Word cloud composed of the 16 responses to interview question a. All words except proper names were entered in lowercase letters and no differences were made between the plural form and singular form of nouns.

Sharing motives

Table 1 Answers to question b

Recurring themes in the 16 respondents' answers to interview question b regarding their motivations to participate in CC, listed in no particular order.

Recurring answers
It is practical.
It makes sense from an economic perspective.
It leads to a more socially sustainable society.
It feels nice.
I do not want to be part of an unsustainable consumption system.
It is better for the environment.

As can be seen in Table 1, one of the recurring motives among the respondents for why they participate in CC is its practicality; owning things that only are used sometimes takes up space and complicates moving to new places. Many

respondents state that they do not see the point of owning goods that only are used from time to time.

“It’s practical. I don’t feel the need to own everything. A book for instance I’m glad to borrow and read, and then I feel no need to keep it as some kind of paraphernalia, an object. I have no use for it.”¹ [respondent 16]

Another recurring motive is that sharing makes sense from an economic point of view. For many, saving money seems to be an important part of their involvement in CC. Several of the respondents consider this reason to be their main motive to share. One of them is respondent 4:

“Often I think I have pretty much environmental consideration in how I act. But here I guess I haven’t thought that much about the environment, it has rather been economics. It has felt unnecessary, both when it comes to taking the full cost for tools and such, but also when it comes to clothes it feels like it’s wiser to just spread out [the cost].”²

Some of the respondents explain that they share things with others because they believe that sharing increases the trust between people and creates a sense of community, which would lead to a better and more sustainable society. That it feels nice to share, take part in CC initiatives and borrow things from others is also lifted in several of the interviews. Respondent 1, one of the respondents with social motives for sharing, explains why they want to share their car with others:

“My boyfriend is going from Malmö to Copenhagen every working day. And [...] we are trying to share it, to share the car! Because... he is going alone, so it’s nice to have someone to talk to.”

Others state that they share since they do not want to be part of a production system based on high consumption levels. Instead, they want to use and reuse what is already made and see CC as an alternative to overconsumption and capitalism. Many are also motivated by the belief that sharing is better for the

¹ ”Det är praktiskt. Jag känner inget behov av att äga allting. En bok till exempel går jag gärna och lånar och läser, och sen har jag inget behov av att ha den kvar som nåt slags attiralj, ett objekt. Jag har ingen nytta av den.”

² ”Ofta tänker jag att jag har ganska mycket miljöhänsyn i hur jag agerar. Men just här har jag nog inte tänkt så mycket miljö, utan då har det nog mer varit det ekonomiska. Det har känts onödigt, både att ta kostnaden själv när det gäller verktyg och liknande, men också när det gäller kläder så känns det som att det blir vettigare att bara sprida ut [kostnaden]”

environment than buying new things. The environmental motives to share will be further elaborated in the section the below.

Perceived environmental sustainability

All respondents believe CC could have a positive environmental potential. However, while some of the respondents are convinced that CC would decrease the stress on the planet, others are more hesitant. The most common arguments in their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Answers to question c

Recurring themes in the 16 respondents' answers to interview question c regarding to what extent they perceive sharing as being environmentally sustainable, listed in no particular order.

Recurring answers
Sharing could lead to decreased resource use and/or behavioural change.
Not all forms of sharing are desirable from an environmental point of view.
The current economic system is too strong for CC to have any impact.

Respondent 14 is one of the respondents who argue that the environmental benefits of sharing are twofold, since it has potential to both decrease the demand for resources and to induce behavioural change:

“I really do think sharing has potential. Both to reduce the factual production of products, but also to change behaviours, the way we look upon the “wear and tear consumption society” in general.”³

The rest of the respondents use either both or one of the two arguments exemplified by respondent 14 when explaining their thoughts on the environmental sustainability of sharing. Several of the respondents stress that humanity's resource use must decrease, and that they have started thinking twice before consuming new things:

³ ”Jag tänker verkligen att delande har potential. Både för att minska den faktiska produktionen av produkter, men också för att ändra beteenden, hur man ser på slit och slängkonsumtionssamhället i stort.”

“I think you get reminded about that very much, I have started to think twice before buying something if there are environmental alternatives. It feels like one is nudged in that direction. Like with libraries, which are pretty institutionalized, I believe more things like that will come.”⁴
[respondent 6]

That all forms of sharing not are desirable is lifted by some of the respondents; there might be potential in CC, but it depends on the underlying structures and business models. Several of the respondents also differentiate between different kinds of goods; sharing things that only are used during short periods are considered more impactful. Cars are lifted as examples of goods especially important to share from this perspective.

The current economic system being too strong for CC to have any impact is another recurring theme, here exemplified by the answer of respondent 9:

“I’m a bit cynical. I think it’s hard to fool capitalism within the frames of capitalism. It’s hard to fool a steamroller having all the resources. [...] But I guess sharing has enormous potential in a sense. But it’s so small in comparison to the giant capitalism, which has set the rules.”⁵

Identified stimulating and hindering factors

Stimulating factors

As is shown in Table 3, the respondents identify a number of different factors that would encourage sharing.

⁴ ”Jag tycker man blir påmind om det väldigt mycket, jag har börjat tänka två gånger inför att jag ska köpa nånting om det finns miljömässiga alternativ. Det känns som att man nudgeas i den riktningen. Som med bibliotek, som är ganska institutionaliserat, jag tror det kommer komma mer såna grejer.”

⁵ ”Jag är lite cynisk. Jag tror att det är svårt att lura kapitalismen inom kapitalismens ramar. Det är svårt att lura en ångvält som har alla resurser. [...] Men delande har väl enorm potential på ett sätt. Men det är så pass litet i förhållande till bjässen kapitalismen, som satt spelreglerna.”

Table 3 Answers to question d

Recurring themes in the 16 respondents' answers to interview question d regarding what they think could stimulate the development of CC, listed in no particular order.

Recurring answers
Increased knowledge on the environmental potential of sharing.
Learning about sharing initiatives.
Sharing becoming easy, accessible and “the new norm”.
Changes in how people live and interact.
Economic drivers.

Some of the respondents believe that increasing people's knowledge on the environmental potential of sharing would spur CC. Several of the respondents also consider learning more about CC initiatives in general, either through advertising or by seeing friends and people around use them, a stimulating factor. Respondent 15 thinks sharing would become easier if it scales up:

“I think we influence each other very much, so if you see that there is a bike kitchen down your street you might go there and learn more [...]. In cities, we live so very close to one another, so it should be possible to share more than we do. The more initiatives that pop up, the bigger I believe it will become.”⁶

A majority of the respondents believe that CC would be spurred by making sharing more accessible, easier and the new norm. Making sharing as simple as buying new products is mentioned by many, as well as to “somehow make it tap into what's socially acceptable” [respondent 12]. One way of making CC part of what is considered normal is lifted by respondent 4:

“Build it into institutions where it feels normal, so that you have to find out as little as possible by yourself. Just as naturally as you can to go the library

⁶ ”Jag tror att vi påverkar varandra väldigt mycket, så om man ser att det finns ett cykelkök på sin vanliga gata så kanske man kommer dit och lär sig mer [...]. I städer så bor vi ju som himla nära varandra, så vi borde kunna dela mer än vad vi gör. Ju fler initiativ som kommer upp, desto större tror jag att det kommer bli.”

to find a book, as natural should it be to have this broad arsenal of things there to borrow.”⁷

Several of the respondents talk about the need for good structures in order for sharing to take place. It should be easy to find what one needs while using online sharing services or visiting physical places such as Garaget. One respondent points out that urban planning could be a driver for CC too, if public spaces are devoted for other activities than consumption, and open courtyards are built where people can meet and share things with their neighbours. Another respondent also sees changes in the way people live as something that would spur sharing:

“That we live closer to one another. In a family, you often share things [...], so if you then live close to other people you will start sharing things with them as if they were your family.”⁸ [respondent 8]

These more fundamental changes to the way people live is a recurrent theme in the respondents’ reasoning about factors that could stimulate CC. Apart from living closer to one another and having access to spaces where people can meet and share, some respondents believe that sharing would be enhanced if people became more open and helpful towards each other.

Economic benefits are also mentioned. One respondent suggests that people might start sharing out of self-interest: lending out their own things in order to be able to borrow from others. Two others believe that the provision of good quality products would make people share more.

⁷ ”Att man bygger in det i institutioner där det känns självklart, så att man behöver ta reda på så lite som möjligt själv. Lika självklart som du kan gå till biblioteket för att hitta en bok, lika självklart borde det ju kunna vara att det finns hela denna breda arsenalen av saker som går att låna.”

⁸ ”Att man lever närmare varandra. I familj delar man ju ofta saker, så om du då lever nära andra människor så börjar du ju dela med varandra som om dom vore din familj.”

Hindering factors

Table 4 Answers to question e

Recurring themes in the 16 respondents' answers to interview question e regarding what they think could hinder the development of CC, listed in no particular order.

Recurring answers
Lack of trust between people.
Sharing being more complicated and inaccessible than private ownership.
Strong norms regarding private ownership.

Lack of trust is one of the barriers to CC identified by the respondents. Several of them underpin this argument by pointing out that sharing involves human interactions and letting go of the control.

“That you don't get back what you have lent. That what you have lent gets broken. [...] Getting coffee on a book, that people you lend things to are not careful. That's why you're picky with whom you lend things to.”⁹
[respondent 3]

That sharing feels complicated and inaccessible is another recurrent theme in the participants' responses. Many of the respondents identify the comfort of private ownership as a barrier.

“I have to admit that when we bought a house [...], you become a lot more like a regular “Svensson”. Around that time, we bought a car as well. That makes having a house and kids so much smoother. [...] We even got ourselves our own impact drill when we renovated.”¹⁰ [respondent 4]

One of the respondents states that since sharing is considered inaccessible, lack of support from the municipality to CC initiatives could be a barrier to its enhancement.

⁹ ”Att man inte får tillbaks det man lånar ut. Att det man lånat ut förstörs. [...] En bok som man får kaffe på, att människor man lånar ut till inte är försiktiga. Det är därför man är petig med vem man lånar ut till.”

¹⁰ ”Det måste jag erkänna att när vi skaffade hus [...], man blir mycket mer Svensson-aktig. Det var då vi skaffade bil också. Men hus och barn blir det mycket smidigare. [...] Vi skaffade till och med en egen slagborr när vi renoverade.”

The strong norms regarding private ownership are also lifted by several respondents. They describe an individualistic society driven by consumption, where everyone constantly buys new telephones and cars, and private ownership is closely related to high status.

“But the conclusion is probably after all to maybe change people’s norms and behaviours regarding how they look upon owning things, I think. That’s not a little thing, but I think that might be one of the main things that hinder people from [sharing] today.”¹¹ [respondent 13]

¹¹ ”Men slutsumman är nog ändå att kanske ändra folks normer och beteenden kring hur man ser på att äga saker, det tror jag. Det är ju ingen liten sak, men det tror jag kan vara en av de främsta grejerna som kan hindra att folk [delar] idag.”

Discussion

In light of humanity's ecological overshoot (Global Footprint Network, 2019) and the expectations on the SE of being a less resource demanding alternative to the current consumption system (e.g. Belk, 2014), studying people's attitudes towards CC is of relevance. This study fills a gap in the existing research on the topic by providing insights to the subjective attitudes towards sharing among young adults (21 – 36 years old) based in Malmö with experience of CC. In addition to what and how this key consumption group share with others, their motivations to participate in CC, the extent to which they perceive sharing as being environmentally sustainable, as well as what stimulating and hindering factors to the development of CC they identify were explored. However, given the qualitative nature of this study, as well as its limited empirical material, it is not possible to draw any generalizable conclusions from the result. Instead, the findings of the study should be understood based on its aim; to explore the respondents' subjective meanings concerning CC.

Discussion of results

When it comes to how and what kinds of goods my sample share with other people, this study shows (Figure 1) that they mostly share books, clothes and bikes, either in quite informal ways (with friends) or in quite institutionalized ways (through libraries). Such a width can be found not only in the respondents' answers to how they share, but even more so in their responses regarding why they participate in CC (Table 1). In line with previous research on young people's motives to share (Hwang & Griffiths, 2017; Möhlmann, 2015), my sample lifts the pleasure of the activity as well as economic and utilitarian reasons to participate in CC. In addition to pointing towards its practicality and utility, several of the respondents state that they share since they see it as a step towards a better world. It seems to be close to hand for many of the respondents to, when discussing motives to participate in CC, start talking about societal questions concerning how people live and behave towards each other, what is important in life and what is wrong with humanity's current way of consuming. My result suggests, in other words, that sharing engages the respondents. However, I cannot

reject the potential existence of an attitude-behaviour gap (Hamari et al, 2016) in my sample, even though experience with CC was one of the prerequisites of those I interviewed. It might be possible, given the rather engaged answers indicated by my findings, that the respondents' attitudes towards sharing are stronger and more vivid than their actions.

When comparing the result of this study with previous research on sharing motives, similarly wide spectrums of motivations are found in the literature. Bucher et al (2016), for instance, employ a motivational model of moral, monetary and social-hedonic motives when exploring people's reasons to participate in internet-mediated sharing in the US. Even though my study has another scope and was conducted in a different context, the same three types of motives could be said to frame the attitudes of my sample. Moreover, the wide range of sharing motives indicated in my study could be relevant to take into consideration if trying to spur sharing in the city, since the great diversity in people's reasons to share is suggested to be among the reasons for why such practices have grown so rapidly (Böcker & Meelen, 2017).

Regarding perceived environmental sustainability, my findings suggest that young adults believe in the potential of CC, albeit with some hesitation (Table 2). The hesitations are largely the same as the uncertainties lifted in the literature on the sustainability impacts of the SE. The respondents believe that the environmental sustainability of sharing depends on what is being shared. This finding is supported by previous research (e.g. Frenken & Schor, 2017). Another heavily debated topic in the existing research is what forms of sharing that are desirable from an environmental point of view (see e.g. Cohen & Kietzmann, 2017; Martin, 2016).

Worth noting, however, is that the respondents not only see promises of CC when it comes to its potential to reduce the demand on natural resources. A recurring belief is also that sharing with others can lead to new behaviours and changes in the way people perceive consumption. The findings of this study could, in other words, indicate that an important part of the environmental sustainability promises of CC lies in its potential to change people's attitudes towards consumption in general.

Similarly to the rather high environmental sustainability of sharing perceived by sample, one of the initial findings of the Sharing Cities Sweden program is that city municipality representatives in Malmö, Gothenburg, Umeå and Stockholm believe sharing to have potential to contribute to the cities' sustainability goals (Markendahl et al, 2019). This finding is also interesting in relation to the stimulating and hindering factors for the development of CC identified by the respondents in my study (Tables 3 and 4). Several of them do namely point towards the role of cities when reasoning about what might have an impact on the future of CC. The fact that people in cities live very close, and thereby easily can influence each other, is considered a stimulating factor. The same goes for the

potential of planning cities with the purpose of creating physical spaces for sharing. Moreover, lack of support from the municipality is lifted as a potential hinder. Out of the four specific roles that Zvolska et al (2018) suggest that cities might undertake when governing urban sharing, the respondents of this study seem, in other words, to mainly refer to the “city as enabler”.

Apart from creating enabling structures, making sharing part of what is considered normal is lifted as one of the factors that could stimulate people to start sharing more. Norms are likewise among the identified hindering factors as well. Several of the respondents believe the development of CC is hindered by the strong norms regarding private ownership and consumption. A question arises whether participating in CC has the potential to change people’s behaviours and views on the current consumption system in such a way that the existing norms would be weakened. While not directly answering that question, it is suggested that “shared consumption seems to provide positive feedback reinforcing an individual’s commitment to take responsibility for others and the environment” (Roos & Hahn, 2017, p. 121). It would be interesting to explore if such a commitment also could mean becoming a driving force in weakening the strong norms regarding private ownership (see section on suggestions for further research below).

Another identified hindering factor is lack of trust between people. This finding is supported by what Røjnert (2015) concludes are the main barriers for a transition to CC in Malmö. Moreover, in a quantitative study on the likelihood of choosing a sharing option again, trust was found to be the strongest determinant of the satisfaction with a sharing option (Möhlmann, 2015). Similarly to the discussion on ownership norms above, it might be possible to draw a connection between a perceived hindering factor – lack of trust, in this case – and what is suggested to be a positive outcome of taking part in sharing activities. One of the findings of Roos & Hahn (2017) is namely that the more people are engaged in shared consumption, the more altruistic they get over time. The counterforce to many of the norms and attitudes that are believed by the respondents of this study to hinder people from sharing, seems, in other words, to correspond to what is suggested to be the very effects of sharing on people’s attitudes and norms.

Sources of error

Since the persons I approached outside of Garaget could chose to say no to participate in an interview, there is a risk that this study is affected by selection bias (Larson, 2011); the attitudes and motivations among the persons who chose to participate might, by their very willingness to take part in the study, differ from those of the population of interest as a whole.

The findings might also be impacted by the choice of sampling location. Even though I used a rather broad definition of CC as I looked for attitudes towards sharing in general, I only approached people at a specific place – a B2P, non-profit CC initiative (Röjnert, 2015), where only certain kinds of goods (mainly books) are available for lending (Malmö Stad, 2019). Young adults who visit that specific CC space might have attributes that differentiate them from CC participants of the same age who are not users of Garaget. One way of mitigating that potential bias could have been to also contact people through, for instance, an online sharing platform. However, this was not possible due to the limited time frame of this study.

Moreover, the way I described CC might have affected the respondents' answers. Since the interviews were conducted outside Garaget, I pointed to the kind of CC happening there to exemplify what I was exploring. What things I had decided to include on the list of shareable goods, as well as the order in which they were written, might also have impacted what came to the respondents' minds during the time the interview lasted. The relatively limited time frame of the interviews might in itself also have affected the result, by not letting the respondents get the chance to lift all their relevant thoughts on what, how and why they share.

Lastly, it should be said that my subjectivity as researcher might have affected the outcome of the interviews. As a young adult based in Malmö with CC experience myself, I share many attributes with the respondents of the study, which might have had an impact on the way the respondents interpreted and answered my questions.

Suggestions for further research

The findings, as well as the limitations, of this study pose many new questions. Extending the scope of this study to include other cities and more people would naturally be of interest to gain more generalizable insights. But to be more specific and stick to the context to which my findings are bound, I have three suggestions for further research.

First of all, given the diverse sharing motives among young adults in Malmö indicated by this study, it would be interesting to look further into for how long they have participated in CC, why and how they started, and if their motivations have changed along the way. Learning more about what tend to be the entry points to CC and how motivations change over time, possibly through a longitudinal study, would be of relevance to better understand under which conditions people get stimulated to start sharing.

The wide range of motivations to participate in CC might also be a consequence of potential differences within the sample. Building on the research by Böcker & Meelen (2017) and studying how and why different socioeconomic groups in a city such as Malmö participate in CC would therefore be of interest. A specific focus could, just as is the case of this study, be given to the role that environmental sustainability plays in relation to their motivations and attitudes. How do groups with different ecological footprints perceive the environmental sustainability of CC? Are specific expectations, concerns and motivations more prevalent in certain groups?

As already mentioned, another topic to further explore could be the possible connections between what the respondents of this study consider hindering factors for the development of CC and what is suggested to be the effects of sharing on people's attitudes and values. Does sharing with others make people more trusting and less influenced by norms about private ownership and high consumption levels? Would nudging people into getting CC experience therefore have a multiplied sustainability impact, by both inducing new attitudes and by contributing to the degradation of some of the perceived hindrances for increased sharing?

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the subjective attitudes towards sharing among young adults based in Malmö with experience of CC. The result shows a wide range of social, economic and environmental sharing motives among the respondents, in line with previous research on people's motivations to engage in sharing activities. Although some concerns about the environmental implications of sharing were raised, the overall view among the respondents is suggested to be that sharing has potential with regards to sustainability. When it comes to what might impact the development of CC, increasing people's knowledge on sharing and building enabling structures are lifted as stimulating factors. Lack of trust, people's comfort and strong norms regarding private ownership and consumption are considered to be potential hinders.

Given the research design, scope and limitations of this study, the result cannot be used to draw any generalizations about the population of interest as a whole. However, my findings indicate that the respondents consider CC an engaging topic, as it both relates to everyday practicalities and to big, societal questions. It would therefore be of interest to further explore the attitudes and behaviours of this specific age group to better understand what role sharing could play in the transition to a more sustainable consumption system.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview guide

Hej, mitt namn är Josefine Henman, jag kommer från Lunds universitet och skriver min kandidatuppsats om delandekonomi. Jag undrar om jag skulle kunna få ställa några frågor?

Jag gör en studie som handlar om unga människors (21 till 36 år) attityder till att dela på saker, som man gör här på Garaget till exempel. Om du vill delta kommer intervjun ta ungefär 10 minuter. Om det är okej med dig spelar jag in den. Dina svar kommer vara helt anonyma i rapporten, och ditt deltagande är helt frivilligt – du får när som helst avbryta ditt deltagande om du vill. Hur låter det?

Intervjufrågor:

a. På senare tid har det blivit allt mer populärt att dela på saker istället för att köpa dem för att äga själv. Detta kan ske genom att byta, låna, hyra eller dela saker med andra genom digitala plattformar eller andra sorters initiativ som exempelvis Garaget. Så det handlar inte om att dela på saker i familjen, utan snarare om ”nya sätt att konsumera”. Finns det varor som du i dagsläget delar med andra på detta sätt? Om ja, vadå? Hur då?

Låt först personen tänka fritt, visa sedan en lista med så kallade ”shareable goods”.

b. Varför delar du de sakerna du nämnde tidigare? Vad driver dig? Varför? Varför är det viktigt för dig?

Leta efter hur personen resonerar kring sociala, ekonomiska och miljömässiga skäl till att dela på saker och varför det är viktigt för hen.

c. Vilken potential tänker du att delande har i relation till miljömässig hållbarhet? Varför?

d. Vad tror du kan göra att människor börjar dela mera? Vad skulle kunna få dig att börja dela mera? Varför?

e. Ser du några möjliga hinder för att människor skulle börja dela mer?

Några avslutande frågor:

i. Ålder?

ii. Vad är din högsta avslutade utbildning? (grundskola, gymnasium, universitet/högskola)

iii. Vilken stadsdel bor du i? (Centrum, Fosie, Hyllie, Kirseberg, Limhamn-Bunkeflo, Oxie, Rosengård, Södra innerstaden, Västra innerstaden)

Det var alla mina frågor. Något annat du skulle vilja tillägga? Har du några frågor till mig?

Här är kort information om studien och mina kontaktuppgifter. Hör av dig om det dyker upp några frågor, vill läsa igenom dina transkriberade intervjusvar eller läsa hela rapporten sen när den är klar.

Tack igen!

Appendix B – List of shareable goods

Bilar

Båtar

Böcker

Cyklar

Datorer

Hus/boende

Leksaker

Kläder

Möbler

Utrustning

Verktyg

Appendix C – Information to participants

Tack för ditt deltagande! Dina svar kommer vara av stort värde för studien.

På senare tid har det blivit allt mer populärt att dela på saker och ting istället för att äga själv. Detta sätt att byta, låna, hyra eller dela exempelvis kläder, utrustning, verktyg, böcker och bilar med andra genom digitala plattformar eller andra sorters initiativ kallas ofta för kollaborativ konsumtion. Studier från både Sverige och andra länder har visat att yngre människor är mer positiva till delande än äldre generationer. Därför är syftet med den här studien att undersöka varför och hur denna åldersgrupp (21-36 år) deltar i kollaborativ konsumtion samt vilka drivkrafter och hinder de ser för ökat delande.

Studien är en kandidatuppsats i miljövetenskap vid Lunds universitet. Hör gärna av dig om du har frågor om studien eller vill läsa den färdiga rapporten.

Kontakt:

Josefine Henman.

Mejladress: nat15jhe@student.lu.se.

Telefon: 0739 98 64 73

Appendix D – About the participants

Table D1 The participants

Age, highest level of education and residential district of the 16 participants in the study.

	Age	Highest level of education	Residential district
1	25	University	Centrum
2	36	University	Fosie
3	21	University	Hyllie
4	36	University	Fosie
5	22	Gymnasium	Södra Innerstaden
6	24	University	Västra Innerstaden
7	29	University	Rosengård
8	23	Gymnasium	Centrum
9	36	HVE (Yrkeshögskola)	Södra Innerstaden
10	23	Gymnasium	Södra Innerstaden
11	21	Gymnasium	Centrum
12	21	Gymnasium	Centrum
13	32	HVE (Yrkeshögskola)	Södra Innerstaden
14	25	University	Södra Innerstaden
15	25	University	Södra Innerstaden
16	28	Gymnasium	Södra Innerstaden

