

transformative social innovation theory

Transformative Social Innovation: Shareable – Sharing Cities

A summary of the case study report on Shareable – Shareable Cities



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About TRANSIT:

TRANSIT is an international research project that aims to develop a theory of Transformative Social Innovation that is useful to both research and practice. It is co-funded by the European Commission and runs for four years, from 2014 until 2017. The TRANSIT consortium consists of 12 partners across Europe and Latin America. For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/>.

About this Document/ Disclaimer:

This is a summary of a case study report on Shareable Network. Both, the case study reports and this summary, were guided by empirical research questions based upon a preliminary conceptual framework of the TRANSIT-project. These questions concern inter alia:

1. Emergence of Social Innovation
2. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics
3. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation

This summary presents the interpretations of the researchers, and does not necessarily reflect the views and nuances of the initiatives and respondents themselves. For a full account of each transnational network and local case, including interview quotes and expressed nuances by respondents, we refer to the case study report, which is available via communication.transit@ihs.nl. Both the case study report, as well as this summary document, are the basis for future research activities and publications.

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1. Introduction to Shareable - Sharing Cities

Within 'Shareable – Sharing Cities', the concept of the 'sharing economy' or the 'sharing transformation', is recurring in the analyses of both the transnational network as well as the local manifestations. In other words, we suggest that these concepts are the actors' social constructions of reality, through which they aim to understand certain practices 'within' the network and the local manifestation. 'Sharing Economy' is based on the idea of 'collaborative consumption', which is defined by Bostman and Rogers (2010) as "an emerging socioeconomic ground shell" associated with ideas implying people coming together and practices such as sharing, bartering, lending or swapping. Collaborative Consumption enables people to access to products and services without actual ownership relations involved, thus creating forms of growth and prosperity previously unthinkable. Moreover, Collaborative Consumption has a multi-spatial dimension; it comprises both local face-to-face practices and digital forms of association gathered under the same umbrella of peer-to-peer interactions.

In the mid-2000s, with the creation of the first collaborative business structures centred on collaborative consumption and economics, especially in the digital industry (for example by PricewaterhouseCoopers) (Benkler, 2002) the term 'sharing economy' began to appear. Thanks to – or at least coinciding with – the development of ICT technologies, collaborative and sharing practices that can be understood as being part of the 'Sharing Economy', this emerging paradigm has experienced a growth internationally (Bostman & Rogers, 2010: 8). At the core of the sharing economy lies the concept of 'commons', a term adopted by modern economic theory in order to indicate broad set of resources that are self-managed by local communities and therefore made accessible to all members of society (Bollier, 2014). Therefore, it is possible to understand commons as an alternative resource management model, combining principles of cooperation and resource-sharing with a community-based self-governance and self-monitoring approach that is alternative both to public and private models (Bollier, 2014).

The aim of this report is to describe the emergence and development of Shareable, a transnational network and consequently the Sharing Cities Global Network inaugurated by Shareable in 2013. Shareable was co-founded by former corporate strategist Neal Gorenflo in 2009 in San Francisco, California. From there, Shareable created the Sharing Cities Network in the attempt to connect all sharing initiatives on an urban level (Marsh, 2013).

Two of the main activities of the Shareable can be resumed under two main categories: storytelling and community building. Indeed, it works both as an online magazine, promoting sharing practices among local communities through the means of storytelling, and as an action and connection hub organizing and coordinating the Sharing Cities international network. The Sharing Cities Network assembles representatives from all over the world. Roundtable initiatives such as the #MapJam, where local communities meet to discuss and map all the resources present on the community, are the main basis for the creation of the network that regardless of geographical or political boundaries has experienced an unprecedented growth over the last three years reaching almost 80 cities all over the world (Presentation by Neal Gorenflo at Sharing Cities Workshop, 7th October 2015).

As figure 1 visualizes, Shareable is what TRANSIT defines as a Transnational Network. The Toolkit, Community Mapping, the Festival and the Policy Guide are means through which Shareable’s Sharing Cities Network is taking shape. The Sharing Cities Network consists of various local initiatives worldwide, mostly concentrated in the United States and Europe. Nijmegen and Gijón were chosen as the local initiatives.



Figure 1: Case demarcation visualization for Shareable’s Sharing Cities Network and its relations to local initiatives.

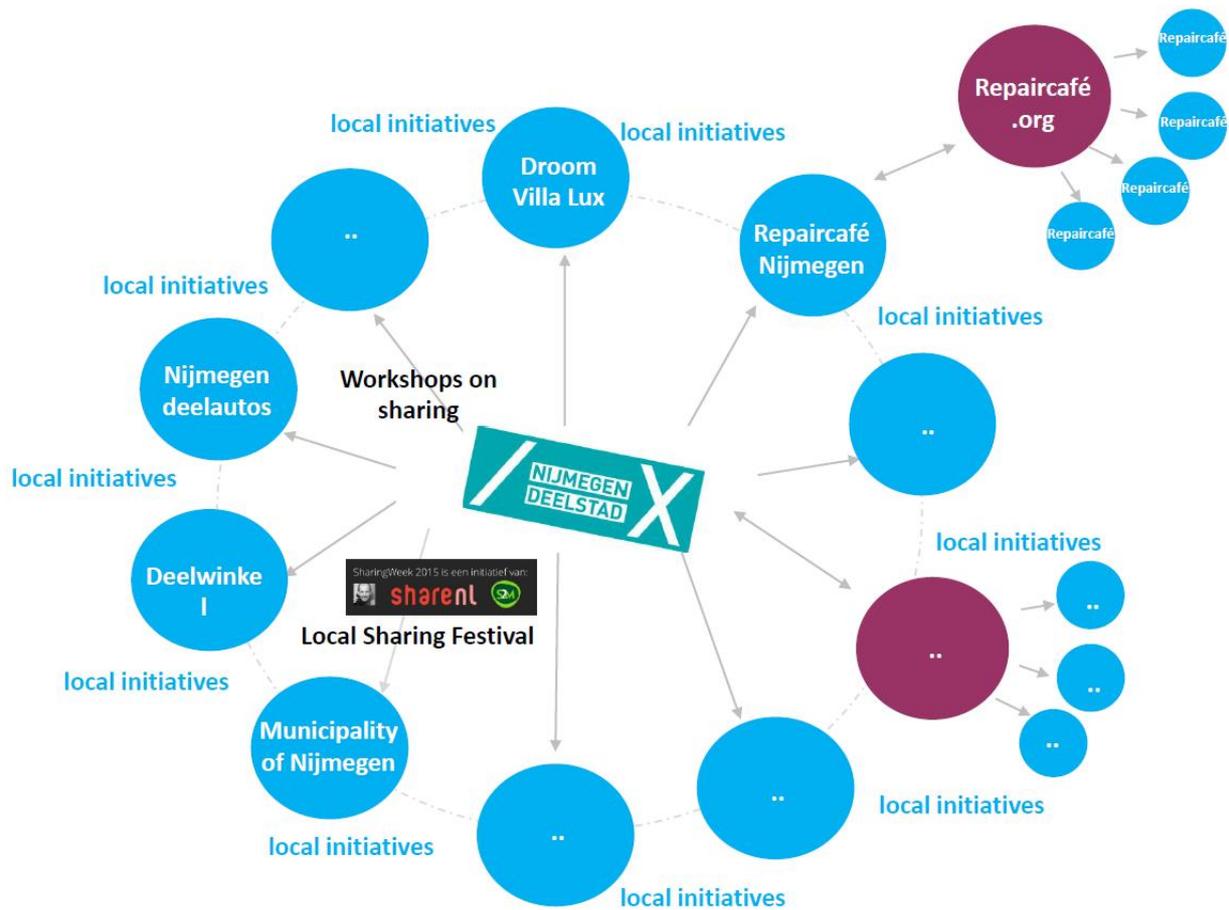


Figure 2: Case demarcation visualization for Sharing City Nijmegen. The same 'structure' applies to Sharing Gijon.

2. The Emergence of Social Innovation

Shareable partly originates from the vision of former corporate entrepreneur Neal Gorenflo, who realized the importance of sharing practices in a world characterized by profit-oriented economic discourses as well as the great potential of peer-to-peer platforms in creating a more democratic and distributive economic system. However, the genesis of the two studied local manifestations can be traced back to long time before the creation of the Sharing Cities Network, as the result of ideas and practices embraced by local communities and based on the idea of sharing. The historical instances that are characteristic to the countries as well as the cities of Nijmegen and Gijon are reflected in the origin of the two local networks.

Sharing City Nijmegen is first of all the result of the personal experience of Nils Roemen, a former consultant who realized the potential of sharing and collaboration practices in 2005 and worked to enact his vision consisting in reverting standard profit-oriented business models. His idea was to create new organisational arrangements to be able to address and solve important social problems by actively involving local communities. This idea is resumed in the concept of 'durftevragen' – dare to ask – developed in 2006 aimed at inspiring people to dare to ask for help – based on the general idea that most people have a surplus and will like to help others. The network is mainly coordinated by a core group of volunteers that include the initiator Nils Roemen, Juul Martin and Mieke Miltenburg, and that has grown to a wider set of volunteers over time, creating the main structure of Sharing City Nijmegen.

On the other hand, Sharing Gijon is the result of the joint effort of external actors such as Shareable, the Spanish cooperative group Las Indias and local initiatives such as the association for risk-youth inclusion Mar de Niebla. These actors fuelled the creation of Sharing Gijon by organizing and actively participating in the 2014 #MapJam, where a lot of initiatives present in the city were collected, especially those present in the former workers districts. The main aim of the #MapJam was to favour the revival of sharing initiatives in Gijon, creating resilient communities able to tackle current social and economic challenges without necessarily relying on institutions.

The three networks have different structures: Shareable can be defined as a 'loose network' whose relation to many local initiatives is mainly achieved through producing and disseminating narratives by coordination and alignment of story-telling. The network structures of Sharing City Nijmegen and Gijon are different. Sharing City Nijmegen's local initiatives are connected to each other through a common sharing vision based on collaboration, the pleasure of philanthropy and the concept of abundance. The initiatives of Sharing City Nijmegen include diverse sharing activities, such as: Car Sharing, Book Sharing, Repair Café, Bicycling without age. These activities have their own special foci but are mostly solving specific problems and strengthening the local social network.

As for Gijon, the network is mainly based on initiatives loosely connected by informal relations such as mouth-to-mouth processes, but homogenised by the past cooperative history of the city. In fact, local initiatives in Sharing City Gijon can mainly be divided in two categories: initiatives that are engaged in the promotion or facilitation of personal or

communal learning processes mainly by event organization, and initiatives aimed at achieving democratization of or facilitation of open access to various processes of production, consumption, ownership and learning.



Figure 3: Mapjamming in Gijon, 2014. Picture from Gorenflo (2014).

3. Transformative Social Innovation dynamics

While Shareable's focuses on engaging with society on a transnational level, Sharing City Nijmegen and Gijon present more locally based sets of relations and forms of interaction. Shareable explicitly addresses current social and economic challenges connected on a transnational level. Therefore it addresses issues, such as the worldwide economic recession started in 2008 with its devastating social impact and the consequent institutional crisis related to it. The main vision of Shareable is the redefinition of market from profit-led to peer-to-peer platforms aimed at creating a redistributive economy that is based on direct interaction between actors and promotes communitarian forms of resource management generally known as commons. Last-but-not-least, Shareable openly addresses current environmental problems by promoting no-impact resources and sustainable consumption. In addressing these issues, Shareable's main aim is to contrast individualization tendencies present with practices based on cooperation, promoting a feasible alternative to the mainstream contemporary trend of corporation-led smart cities with its sharing cities model.

As for local manifestations, it is worth noticing that both Sharing Nijmegen and Gijon present an agenda focused on the same issues – i.e. economic recession, social exclusion etc. – although the aim of their action is mainly focused on a local level. In the case of Gijon, the relationship between the network and the social environment is very complex given the many problems and challenges in which the city is currently involved. The city of Gijon presents a remarkable cooperative history characterized by traditions based on sharing that have permeated it for more than a century and have been consistently increased by its more recent industrial history. However, the deindustrialization process that has invested Gijon over the last two decades has produced several social problems, such as unemployment, social exclusion and risk youth, making urgency for the city to implement innovative practices that could inaugurate new developmental trends in the region. Therefore, the city has actively been engaged in practices with a social aim, such as rehabilitating marginalized communities, creating alternative forms of income through cooperative practices for unemployed people and helping risk youth to acquire the right tools for a better future. In implementing its ambitious agenda the city of Gijon mainly relies on the combination between emerging sharing ideas and practices and modern network technologies such as free software and decentralized networks in order to achieve social innovation. It is not a coincidence that this topic became the focus of the second Somero, held in Gijon October.

The city of Nijmegen presents a less explicitly politically formulated agenda, also in relation to wealthier socioeconomic context and a less devastated overall economic scenario. The vision is a change from a pure focus on monetary economy to a gift based economy. However, despite its relatively wealthy condition, Nijmegen has been impacted by the economic recession. It is not a coincidence in this sense that just like in Gijon, many activities in sharing have been conceived in order to engage citizens with less employment opportunities to better connect to the labour market and improve their competencies. These projects involve citizens from problematic social contexts such immigrants, former criminals and people with poor qualifications. In practical terms, initiatives range from very

basic employment to more advanced projects that help people gain more specific skills and therefore be more valuable for the labour market.

As for relationships with institutions, identifying dominant discourses and engage in dialogue with major actors, constitutes the privileged strategy of the Shareable network. The most significant example of successful dialogue with institutional actors is probably the municipality of Seoul, where former activist and current mayor Park Won-soon has initiated a fruitful cooperation with Shareable co-founder Neal Gorenflo in order to turn the metropolitan city of Seoul into the sharing core of the world.

As for local initiatives, both Nijmegen and Gijon are promoting sharing practices in a context of progressive public decentralization and demise of institutional actors, seeking alternative forms of empowerment for local citizens and communities. However, whereas in Nijmegen disentanglement from institutions is happening in the context of a national plan for decentralization and redefinition of the tasks of civil society, in Gijon the decentralization process presents a lot of controversies: as new initiatives are conducted and pushed forward by civil societies members, institutions continue to play a role in providing their support under different forms – i.e. economic and logistic support witnessing a strong historical attachment to the surrounding social context. Evidence of this process is provided by the fact that Jacinto Santos, a member of the Spanish socialist party sitting at the opposition in Gijon’s municipality took part to the 2014 #MapJam and later on members of the majority including the right-wing conservatives and Podemos supported sharing initiatives in Gijon such as Somero 2015.

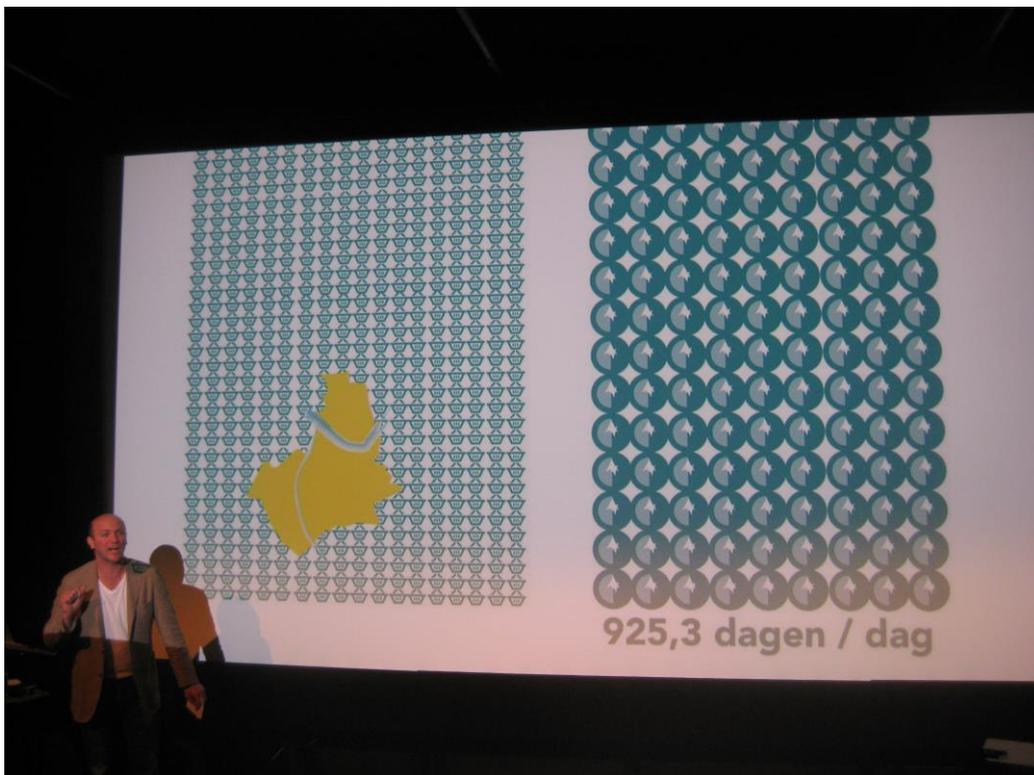


Figure 4: Juul Martin, co-initiator of Sharing City Nijmegen, introduces the potential time saved in Nijmegen by sharing (Photo: Morten Elle).

4. Agency in (Transformative) Social Innovation

In terms of actors involved in the network's agency processes, all the initiatives present a similar configuration. Indeed, the networks core is composed by a few very motivated individuals, whereas the majority of the people involved in Shareable actions and campaigns are people who embrace the values of the sharing transformation and act on a voluntary basis in order to improve their lives and those of their communities without necessarily obtaining economic returns. In the case of Shareable, despite its transnational horizon, the network's core staff is composed only by three people, co-founder Neal Gorenflo, organizing director Tom Llewellyn and communication coordinator Ambika Kandasamy. To these, a small team of writers is added, thus ensuring a certain amount of articles published on the network's online magazine. The same applies in the case of Nijmegen whose core group is formed by the initiator Nils Roemen, Juul Martin and Mieke Miltenburg, while a wider set of volunteers have added over time to this small group. The same applies to Gijon, although with some differences. In fact, although Sharing Gijon is the result of the initiative of transnational actors such as Shareable and Las Indias and local actors such as Mar de Niebla, given the long-standing tradition of co-operatives present among the initiatives within the city, different actors have developed a loose network based on informal relationships that has a great potential in terms of future expansion and growth, enabling more and more people to take part in the initiative. Therefore, if on the one hand, the core of the network originates from external actors, it also displays a great potential for growth and future expansion.

In terms of agency processes, the three networks work with the same mission – that is empowering both communities in making them more self-reliant and independent. However, all the networks display relevant differences in terms of action, although they follow the same theoretical patterns – that is the accomplishment of a 'sharing transformation' both on a community level and among individuals.

In the case of Shareable, its agency processes are mainly divided in storytelling practices – that is the creation of stories aimed at rewriting the narrative of the sharing economy promoting distributive markets based on commons – and contribute to policy-making processes by actively networking and cooperation with institutional actors. A good example of the combination of these two agency strategies is Policies for Shareable Cities – a guide for urban policy makers and planners edited by Shareable and aimed at implementing transformative practices based on the principles of sharing.

The agency-making action of Shareable can also be directly engaged with local networks through some of the initiatives conceived in order to favour agency processes that can contribute to relevant social transformations within the cities. Relevant examples include first of all #MapJam initiatives, where local members of communities meet in order to map all the resources and initiatives based on sharing on their territory to which occasionally members of Shareable itself take part such as in the case of Gijon in 2014. A second example is constituted by ShareFests, where local sharing communities present the

results of their works to other members of the city and possible to people from abroad, such as in the case of Nijmegen on October 2015.

As for local manifestations, both Nijmegen and Gijon share the purpose of fostering grassroots forms of participation and developing self-government practices disentangled from major institutional actors. In Nijmegen many initiatives are directly aimed at improving environmental sustainability as well as social cohesion in challenged groups; people that are retired, disadvantaged or unemployed. In Gijon the focus is on unemployment, social exclusion, digital divide within the community and risk youth education. The final aim of both agency processes is to allow the inclusion of normally marginalized social groups and foster the circulation of transformative cognitive and cultural processes. Even in terms of strategies both networks display a certain degree of analogies; they both seem to draw their inspiration from external successful narratives from other cities trying to adapt them to their own socioeconomic context.

Both local network manifestations in Gijon and Nijmegen as well as Shareable as coordinating concept are developed in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008. Many of the concrete initiatives that contribute to these networks hence suffered from public budget cuts. Sharing as a model of organisation can thus to some extent be seen as a practical response to this withdrawal of concerns of the welfare state. The retraction of state leaves room alternative social organisations and empowerment of the individual citizens through these new configurations. At the same time, sharing as a concept is intrinsically linked to the fundamentals of sustainable economy.

As for disempowerment processes, the network and local initiatives present the same problems that are embodied in the social texture of contemporary sharing initiatives. The possible interpenetration of profit-oriented forms of business can potentially disempower the whole network. A second disempowerment element addresses the systemic structure of the sharing movement itself – that is in the excessive interdependence between processes of personal development and community resourcing. The demise of one can lead to the decline of the other, bringing the whole system to collapse, as Shareable, Nijmegen and Gijon are significantly dependent on the continuous efforts of specific key actors.

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