

Sharing what? The ‘sharing economy’ in the sociological debate

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Abstract

The opening essay aims to introduce the subject and the interpretative perspective of the monograph. It is divided into three parts: the first illustrates the evolution of the concept of sharing economy and the main analytical implications; in the second part, the main results of a systematic review of the literature on sharing economy are illustrated; finally, the third part places the contributions of this monograph in the context of other studies and summarizes the main content.

Keywords

Sharing economy; collaborative economy; on demand economy; systematic review

Introduction

In the space of little more than a decade, the rise of social network sites (Boyd and Ellison, 2008) has turned into a deluge of applications and platforms, which have become extremely important and begun to pervade many aspects of people’s everyday lives. From booking a holiday to choosing a restaurant, from taking a cab to engaging in romantic relationships right up to, and most peculiarly, working and earning a living, we are now accustomed to a popular narrative that stresses how important and necessary it is to share and collaborate. This has kept academics, policy makers and practitioners busy discussing the societal, psychological and economic implications of this evolution.

Increasingly, this has been framed in the argumentation that the participatory ethos of Internet culture (Jenkins, 2006) has somewhat risen to the status of a new mode of production of sorts, vouched to be the incoming dominant paradigm for economic accumulation in the aftermath of the 2007-8 economic

crisis. To borrow an iconic expression used by Robin Chase, founder of Zipcar, an automotive rental service, in an article in the online magazine Medium, “everything that can become a platform will become a platform” (Chase, 2015).

This has resulted in the popularisation of the term 'sharing economy'. It has been broadly and commonly intended as a new socio-economic model based on collaboration, access and the socialization of value production, facilitated by digital technologies. The idea of a 'sharing economy' finds its origin in the possibility of collaboration offered by Internet-based applications, and has become a buzzword thanks to a number of publications which, amongst others, celebrated the rise of consumption without ownership (Botsman and Rogers, 2011) and evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of matchmaking platforms (Roth, 2015). The popular arena rapidly and enthusiastically embraced this idea as one with revolutionary potential. The very own prospect of experimenting a 'different' mode of accumulation based on the sharing of common resources, principled on a broad and semantically hyperpositive discourse around collaboration, has come to occupy the hopes and expectations of many out of the disillusion of the post-crisis world and its heavy reliance on finance. Slowly, however, contradictory aspects also arose and more critical voices emerged. Slee (2016), for instance, has argued that the most fashionable examples of the sharing economy in fact do not enable any sharing practice, but are actually the result of the tech-driven Silicon Valley narrative around innovation, ultimately having very little in common with sharing.

On the other hand, these very same contradictions are of core interest for the scholarly debate that has emerged around the growth of the 'sharing economy'. From the academic side, the rise of sharing practices has attracted the curiosity of researchers across various disciplines, from the social sciences to the humanities, from economics to philosophy, mainly with the idea of looking into empirical examples of 'sharing'. One area in which attention has grown substantially is work. The diffusion of coworking spaces and other shared work environments (Gregg & Lodato, forthcoming; Gandini, 2015) coupled with the criticism for the rise of an on-demand 'gig economy' of workers, which is increasingly the object of analysis on the part of many academics and writers (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Kassi & Lehdonvirta, 2016; Huws & Joyce, 2015). Simultaneously, notions of 'datafication' (Van Dijk, 2014) and 'algocracy' (Danaher, 2016) have emerged as prominent in the critical media debate as an attempt to warn against the more digitally-empowered forms of collaboration and their dependence on the functioning of algorithms, that are argued to be 'black boxes' (Pasquale, 2015) of data appropriation. However, it may be argued that the scholarly debate on the topic has generally remained loose and heterogeneous.

A notable exception can be found in the area of consumer culture theory. Sooner than other disciplines, this has found itself at odds with the emergent context as a result of the early popularisation of the sharing economy as a form of 'collaborative consumption' (Botsman & Rogers, 2011) and therefore has substantially challenged the notion of 'sharing' that was emerging from this evolution. Building on Price (1975) who framed sharing as the most basic form of economic distribution in society, Belk (2010) has argued that two principles of sharing can be distinguished in this emergent context. One is what he calls 'sharing in', which involves sharing with others in a process that extends the number of people who can enjoy or benefit from a commodity; the other is what he calls 'sharing out', which essentially consists of treating the commodity as a commons. In a subsequent article (Belk, 2014), Belk expands this argument by distinguishing further between what he deems to be 'true sharing', which characterises most of the non-market sharing sites, and the dynamics unfolding around so-called 'collaborative consumption', which he describes as a misleading term that actually identifies the market coordination of users/consumers and their activity to the aim of accessing a resource in exchange for a fee.

Building on the same theoretical framing, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) have extended this critique by defining emergent sharing practices as 'access-based consumption'. This is intended as a form of market-mediated transaction in which no transfer of ownership takes place. In their article, they outline a critical account of these practices, maintaining that a 'grey area' is developing across the

boundaries between sharing and market-mediated access and that it needs dedicated research. Their criticism developed further in an influential article which appeared in the *Harvard Business Review* (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2015) where, in analogy with Slee (2016), the authors warn against the 'sharing economy' actually not being about sharing at all:

“Sharing is a form of social exchange that takes place among people known to each other, without any profit. Sharing is an established practice, and dominates particular aspects of our life, such as within the family. By sharing and collectively consuming the household space of the home, family members establish a communal identity. When “sharing” is market-mediated — when a company is an intermediary between consumers who don’t know each other — it is no longer sharing at all. Rather, consumers are paying to access someone else’s goods or services for a particular period of time. It is an economic exchange, and consumers are after utilitarian, rather than social, value.” (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2015)

This brings us to the sociological debate. Analyses of the 'sharing economy' from a sociological perspective have multiplied quickly – however, so far this has produced a plurality of fragmented results. We believe sociology has to put itself at the centre of the sharing debate, and therefore up its stake accordingly to the aim of addressing, unpacking, understanding and theorising the 'sharing' turn. Across the current discussion, which we explore fully in the next section, it may be said that existing works address the popularisation of sharing practices mainly as a question on the nature of market exchange in society. However, this discussion has been contradictory at best. Initial analyses have in fact either focused on the development of peer-to-peer network exchanges (Bauwens, 2005; Benkler, 2006) which rely more on access than on property, on relations more than on appropriation, and describe their subjugation to market logics, or else they largely blend with the mainstream enthusiastic discourse of sharing and collaboration, thereby substantially avoiding the comparison with the broader sociological implications of this evolution.

Our stance in this respect is that the rise of what we call here a 'sharing economy' represents the utmost manifestation of an evolution in the relationship between society and the market – a question that has always been central to sociological thought, and that goes back to authors such as Polanyi, Marx and Sombart. More specifically, we contend that the widespread set of practices that characterise the 'sharing economy' is an indication of a broader process of re-socialization of economic exchange that shares a resemblance to the *Great Transformation* described by Karl Polanyi (1957) in his seminal book on the origins of industrial capitalism (Pais & Provasi, 2015). If we look at existing examples of sharing practices, we can see how a common denominator is often the rearticulation of the relationship between those that Polanyi identifies as the three forms of integration of the economic into the social: redistribution, reciprocity and market exchange. Sharing practices emphasise the relevance of reciprocity mechanisms, whereby exchanges of a commodity depend on individuals and their social ties, and of redistribution dynamics, which are regulated by a centralised entity. Through the primacy of reciprocity and redistribution, market exchanges come to be re-embedded in society in new and interesting ways. We will see these dynamics at play in many of the chapters contained in this book.

At the same time, the rise of the so-called 'sharing economy' brings under renewed scrutiny the notions of value and measure, which are also at the heart of another *Sociological Review* monograph (Adkins & Lury, 2012). In particular, the Marxian notion of value and the whole debate around value creation seems to be challenged anew. As outlined in Benkler (2006) and Bauwens (2005), a peer-to-peer economy is principled on the prominence of use value over exchange value and, in varying degrees, on the cohabitation between a peer economy and the market. However, the way sharing practices have arisen fundamentally calls into question what conception of value sharing practices are built around and foster, how value is formed and what relationship this has with digital metrics. In this regard, many (Arvidsson, 2011, Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2013, De Filippi, 2015 and Gandini, 2016) have started to argue that reputation might develop as a sort of 'general equivalent' of value within

the context of the peer or sharing-based economy. It is argued that formal or informal reputation systems implemented across algorithmically-regulated digital environments, form the backbone of the value production processes across contexts of 'common-based peer production' (Benkler & Nissenbaum, 2006). Research shows that reputation is deemed to be capable of representing a measure that translates affect into a form of exchange value (Arvidsson et al., 2016) and to operate as a sort of neo-Polanyian 'fictitious commodity' that determines a measure of trustworthiness and an approximation of risk among individuals who interact among each other as quasi-strangers (Gandini, 2016). Notions of social, cultural and economic capital, cooperation and competition, community and trust also emerge as central in the initial wave of research on the 'sharing economy' and, we contend, have not yet been addressed adequately for their importance. Put simply, we believe this evolution requires the attention of sociologists and their best 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959) for a comprehensive interpretation.

The suggested relevance of reputation in peer economies brings us to argue that a potentially distinctive feature of the sharing economy concerns the systemic process of integration between more ephemeral and less intense forms of sociality, and value creation. We argue that sharing practices essentially put in place the conditions to operationalise, metrify and standardise value production out of forms of socialisation that swing between a communitarian and a more publicity-oriented nature. If we look at examples that are also included in this collection, from Airbnb to coworking spaces and FabLabs, local and global cases of sharing, of an offline or online nature, we can see how an element of commonality lies in the 'compulsory' nature of sociality (Gregg, 2011) that sharing practices demand, and in the fact that either formally or informally the value creation process interlinks with the forms of sociality that sharing practices foster. We argue that this is what makes the argued resocialisation of economic exchanges a possibility.

The literature on sociality has arguably seen a revival over the last decade. Following the pivotal work by Gregg (2011), that underlined how a key feature of work in digitising economies is that of subjecting forms of intimacy and affect to valorisation processes in new and crucial ways, a number of authors (see for instance Kennedy, 2016) have examined how sharing practices sit at the core of an evolution in the forms of sociality that digitally-mediated communications, and particularly social media, propel. Bucher (2012) has discussed how algorithms intertwine with sociality, which she defines as 'programmed', whilst Wajcman (2014) has argued on the intersection between digital sociality and time, and demanded sociological attention to the role of time in the evolving relationship between technology and social relations. Nevertheless, the relationship between sociality and sharing is one that is currently overlooked and we think deserves more attention, particularly sociological attention, with the aim of increasing our understanding around the implications at stake as regards the argued resocialisation of economic exchanges that the diffusion of sharing practices seems to bring.

This collection aims to be an initial step towards filling this gap. Our endeavour unfolds as an attempt to move past the mainstream conception of the sharing economy as Airbnb and Uber, and look beyond the dichotomy that juxtaposes the mythologies of innovation that characterise Silicon Valley with alternative, local and grassroots, supposedly anti-capitalist, initiatives. We believe that within this middle ground, there lies a myriad of instances that encapsulate the nitty gritty of sharing practices, and make visible how they articulate and proliferate in their heterogeneity and specificity in close relationship with the environment they live in. We wanted to map these instances first and foremost, understand their plurality and richness, make sense of their features and assess their relevance.

The Sharing Economy: a systematic review

In order to systematically map the main aspects that characterise the sharing economy from a sociological perspective, as well as to have a better understanding of the issues and topics that have been made an object of attention by the existing literature on the topic, we have conducted a systematic review of the current state of cross-disciplinary research on the sharing economy.

The systematic review is a classificatory methodology that locates existing studies, selects and evaluates contributions, analyses and synthesizes data, and reports the evidence in such a way as to enable reasonably clear conclusions to be reached about what is and is not known (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009; Jesson et al., 2011; Webster & Watson, 2002, Lutz, Hoffman & Meckel 2014)¹.

A first, somewhat expected result concerns the distribution of publications per year. Leaving aside 2017, whose results only map 5 months, we can see that the first spike in publications on the sharing economy occurred in 2013. In March of that same year, *The Economist* devoted a cover to “The rise of the sharing economy”² and we can see how this is the first time that journalists as well as the general public started to pay attention to this phenomenon. In terms of publication year, we decided to classify contributions into three categories based on the year of publication: ‘precursors’, which include publications prior to 2013 (31 hits), ‘peak’ contributions, which locate in the period 2014-15 (53 hits), and ‘strengthening’ contributions (2015-current, 92 hits).

Papers were then categorized, by titles and abstracts - the entire article was only checked in a few ambiguous cases, according to different variables: publication type; analytical perspective; field of inquiry, related to the ten areas used in Collaborative Economy Library and its sub-areas; discipline, according to the authors’ affiliation or the journal subject matter.

Though limited to a short period of time, a number of interesting insights emerge if we perform a longitudinal analysis of publications in relation to the variables listed above. The distribution by type of publication shows, as foreseeable, a peak of journal articles only in the more recent period, confirming the importance of ‘grey’ literature in the early, exploratory phase of the new phenomenon, and the need for more time for the development of analytical studies. Simultaneously, we note a decrease in the contribution from research institutes and governmental/think tank bodies, which confirms their role as ‘idea factories’ and early evaluators of innovation (McGann, 2016).

From an analytical perspective, it is interesting to note a steady growth in micro level analyses over the years. We can see how research has seemingly focused more on studying the local impact of sharing practices and their relationship with individual needs and expectations, as well as user behaviour, in the dual perspective between producers and consumers.

Just as interesting is what emerges from looking at the fields of inquiry. We have already highlighted the prevalence of market-oriented documents, a result that is consistent with the necessity to understand the contours and specificities of an unknown phenomenon, and we can see how this has not decreased (in fact, it has increased) in recent years. Yet, we can also note an expansion in governance studies in the two-year period 2014-15. This is probably due to the fact that this is the period in which significant questions around the regulatory frameworks of some of the most popular sharing economy platforms arose (e.g. Uber, Airbnb).

This can be further expanded by analysing the co-occurrence of terms in the abstracts of the papers considered. The thematic map (fig. 1) uses the MDS method (Sammon method) and represents the

¹ For the purposes of this collection, the systematic review of research on the sharing economy was conducted through the search phrase: (sharing OR collaborative OR peer-to-peer) AND (economy OR consumption), which was applied to the title and abstract of the publication. The search for literature was conducted at the beginning of June 2017 and did not set any time or geographic boundary. The only restriction we applied was the use of English language keywords. This means that we were able to track mostly articles written in English and only a marginal number of articles in other languages. The coding was subsequently conducted by the three authors with discussions and resolution of critical cases. The search comprised four databases: ISI Web of Knowledge, Scopus, Google Scholar and Collaborative Economy Library. On a practical level, in a first step the search resulted in 391 hits (ISI: 111; Scopus: 112; Scholar: 71; CE Library: 97). Subsequently, we scanned all titles and abstracts, removing 184 irrelevant papers (mainly related to mutual-aid groups and peer influence) as well as entries that were missing relevant information that we could not replace through an online search. This resulted in a sample of 207 papers (ISI: 56; Scopus: 17; Scholar: 37; CE Library: 97). We then merged the search results across the databases, removing 20 multiple entries, for a final database of 187 hits.

² <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21573104-internet-everything-hire-rise-sharing-economy>

relationship between the most recurring lexical units within the analyzed text, so the diameter of the circles indicates the likelihood of an appearance of terms related to the emerged theme, expressing the relative value. The colours represent the division for identified thematic areas.

The Green Quadrant is the most significant one in terms of occurrences and shows a peculiar attention towards the relationship between opportunities (with the co-occurrence of words like ‘sustainability’ and ‘development’) and challenges, especially on the regulatory side (with the use of terms such as ‘power’, ‘regulatory’, ‘city’). The attention towards issues – in relation to our previous classification – sits between market understanding and governance.

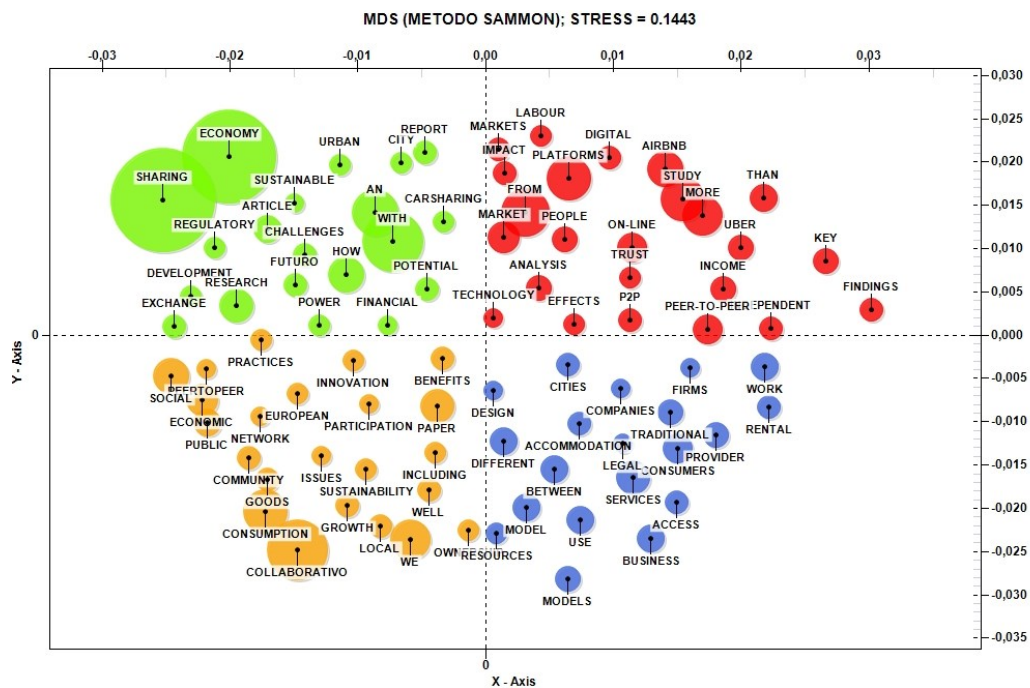
The Yellow Quadrant is dedicated to sharing as a form of social innovation, with recurrences such as ‘social’, ‘local’, ‘community’, ‘participation’, ‘including’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘we’. These issues have emerged from the analysis of abstracts more strongly than what has emerged from the analysis of the main documents. This is likely due to the fact that they appear in papers but are not the main topic or focus of them.

In the Red Quadrant, the focus is on labour market transformation (where we can find words such as ‘labour’, ‘digital markets’, ‘P2P’, ‘trust’ and, incidentally, ‘Uber’ and ‘Airbnb’), which are concepts that we have seen are also at the centre of the governance issue. Finally, the Blue Quadrant analyses the sharing economy as a new production / distribution / consumption model (co-occurrent words are ‘consumers’, ‘providers’, ‘design’, ‘access’, ‘use’), which in our classification falls into the sharing impact analysis across different sectors. On the whole, quadrants on the left focus more on macro analysis, while those on the right focus on meso and micro levels.

In terms of disciplines, we can see a limited number of sociological contributions to the debate on the sharing economy, and a more general trend that shows a prominence of economics over the social sciences. If in the early years of the sharing economy debate the technical perspective prevailed over the other ones (especially technology information for the design of multi-sided platforms), the economic perspective soon emerged as the most important one. We can see, however, a growth in the contribution from the social sciences in the last two years.

The systematic review of publication databases carried out here seems to indicate that the current scholarly production on the sharing economy from the social sciences, even in its ‘collaborative’ variation, is still in its early days. There is still a clear disproportion between the attention the topic has received in public debate and academic research which has focused mainly on economic and technical aspects, with little attention being paid to the social dynamics that characterize this approach. Also, more generally there has seemingly been an early focus on the macro level of analysis, which is now paired with a growing attention towards micro-practices and local adaptations. The sociological approach allows for interpretations to be made that overcome this dichotomy, offering theoretical models that enable micro and macro levels to be linked.

Fig. 1 – Thematic Map based on co-occurrences in the abstracts



Source: graphic elaboration by the Authors

In addition, the literature on sharing economies - as highlighted - is predominantly produced by researchers and referred to the Anglo-American context, with a particular focus on platforms promoted by US multinationals. However, sociological contributions detected through the systematic review - albeit limited in quantitative terms - are an interesting exception because they include also articles published in Spanish and French sociological journals. Sociology, more than other disciplines, lends itself to highlighting the local specificities of the sharing economy and to promoting comparative approaches that are increasingly needed to analyze the varieties of sharing economics from the institutional, organizational and cultural point of view.

In the next section we expand on how this book is an initial attempt at filling this sociological gap, and what the individual contributions included in this collection bring to the advancement of the scholarly work on sharing practices.

The structure of the book

As already indicated by the reflection on existing literature, the concept of sharing economy, despite a growing attention, continues to be scientifically fluid. It appears that the technical-economic literature has far more weight than sociological literature. In the context of the social sciences, sociology has been somewhat reluctant to challenge directly the rise of the sharing economy and its implications. The sociological contribution to the sharing debate, we argue, has not been suitably developed and coherent, with current analyses often being descriptive (Botsman & Rogers, 2010) or apologetic (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010; Gansky 2010; Rifkin, 2014). Existing research largely focuses on local experiences (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015; Edelman & Luca, 2014; Dubois et al., 2014) and comprehensively falls short in providing the much needed, global sociological perspective this topic deserves. In addition, as already noted, there seems to be little account of the variety that the phenomenon can take within the various institutional contexts. The monograph compensates for this gap calling into question the need to define clearer theoretical-disciplinary boundaries, showing also the wealth of the sociological research approach. Moreover, the researches presented in the book focus not only on the most well-known platforms (i.e. Airbnb) but also on less well-known practices,

combining macro and micro perspectives and looking at a plurality of sociologically relevant dimensions: culture, practices, values, governance and agency.

The aim of this monograph is therefore to devise a response to the need for a sociological thoroughness. We do so, by bringing together a selection of contributions that help identify the analytical categories and indicators needed to interpret this phenomenon from a sociological perspective on a global scale. Through a collection of original essays and empirical research from Western and non-Western contexts, by both established and junior scholars, this monograph is designed to expand the themes, methods and issues that characterize the rise of “sharing” as a socio-economic model and a new frontier of sociological research.

In particular, this monograph aims to answer the following questions: what do we mean by “sharing economy”? What kind of positive innovations or possible criticalities might this socio-economic model bring? Does “sharing” really represent an alternative to capitalism or an example of its transformation? In which areas, and how, is the way of doing business in society changing as a result of the diffusion of “sharing economies”?

The content of the book is organized into three parts.

In the first part, entitled *Sharing: concepts and boundaries*, we try to reduce the elasticity of the concept of ‘sharing economy’ and, at the same time, we try to limit its boundaries. As argued by Juliet Schor (2014), the sharing paradigm may be represented by a sprawling variety of digital platforms and off-line activities with different organizational structures, governance models, and aims. The first paper, by Adam Arvidsson, stresses the structural ambiguity between value and virtue within the paradigm of sharing, underlining the risk of sharing storytelling that creates more opportunities for “business as usual” companies to engulf codes and organizational models from collaborative paradigms. The following two papers develop this critical approach further by providing a perspective that combines sociological analysis with an explicit activist angle, as these come from scholars who are also active protagonists in the popular debate around sharing practices. The second contribution is by Michel Bauwens and Alekos Pantazis, and deepens this ambiguity by discussing the variety of peer-to-peer systems within the technological infrastructures of sharing, presenting a sort of dilemma between two faces of the “same sharing coin”: common-based peer production and profit-driven production models. The third paper, by Nathan Schneider, closes this section, discussing the possibility of ‘platform cooperativism’ as a new model of governance and an alternative form of ownership design in which the ‘prosumers’ (Toffler, 1980) or ‘producers’ (Bruns, 2008) appropriate and redistribute equally and equitably, the value generated by sharing practices, in order to avoid the risk of expropriation by extractive and exploitative business strategies.

The second part of the volume is entitled *Sharing actions: social practices between innovation and tradition*. Our aim here is to address in depth some specific sharing experiences and practices in different social contexts. This section highlights how the innovation discourse around this new economic paradigm could be misleading, and the relationship with tradition represents a core issue in order to understand its real disruptiveness (Kovács et al., 2018). The analysis by Francesco Ramella and Cecilia Manzo on Fab Labs shows very well how experiences of space sharing represent the construction of an “area” of contamination and hybridization of practices, which relies on specific and traditional structures of socially constructed norms and sense. This conclusion is further confirmed by the analysis of knowledge and sharing in Delhi’s electronic bazaars presented by Maitrayee Deka. In this paper, it is highlighted how the embodied knowledge created and shared in popular bazaars combines with specific forms of sociality, and informal and strongly embedded trade arrangements combine with co-creation and collaboration practices. The last contribution of this section, by Isak Ladegaard, draws a picture of Airbnb hosts and proposes the concept of the ‘comfortably exotic’ to explain the phenomenon of homophilous hosting, which has emerged also in other local studies (Edelman & Luca, 2014; del Moral & Pais, 2016; Arcidiacono & Podda, 2017). His conclusion relies on the same considerations of the previous papers: despite the popular narrative,

the inclusiveness and the innovative power of sharing should not be taken for granted, whilst resilience and path-dependence processes are still relevant.

The last section, entitled *Sharing rules: governance and institutions*, focuses more closely on the institutional dimension of sharing practices. The section is opened by a paper by Lucia del Moral and Manuel Fernández, in which the authors debate the “varieties of sharing” from a local perspective, trying to map collaborative and sharing enterprises in a specific socio-institutional context. In particular, the role of specific institutional actors in shaping the features and aims of sharing firms provides particularly interesting evidence that contributes to defining some of the key drivers that empower the sharing paradigm in the economy, such as the role of university spin-offs among digital startups, or the role of public administrations in promoting the growth of coworking spaces. The following contribution, by Eleni Katrini suggests that we need a shift in focus from sharing economy to ‘sharing culture’, and proposes an original taxonomy that could be useful for political intents and service design activities. The final paper, by Lindsey Carfagna, examines the way sharing can be taught and learned: the need to adopt a pedagogical perspective becomes mandatory, she argues, for a better understanding of the differences in the sharing practices, their aims and outcomes.

In conclusion, the ensemble of these contributions clearly demonstrates that the sharing economy is an extremely challenging phenomenon that requires better, specific sociological understanding. Its semantic ambiguity and its entrepreneurial diversity do not simply express the aim to “hack” the dominant economic systems or advance (if not supercede) the neo-liberal capitalist model, but rather an attempt to hybridize it and contaminate it with a mix of innovation and tradition. The account of sharing that we provide in this collection portrays not only an indecisively cohesive model, but actually one that shows how the sharing economy may represent an interesting experimentation laboratory for social innovation, which can contribute to redefining new boundaries and opportunities of economic and social development. However, it also shows the array of criticalities and issues by which the rise of sharing is characterized, their replication and scale. More issues still remain to be addressed, from gender inequalities to the impact of the diffusion of sharing practices on ethnic and social minorities, the long-term sustainability of platform work models as well as relations of production among subjects, including a question of class relations and the cultural implications that surround it. We hope this collection may stimulate the appearance of further research in these areas, which we believe is opportune and necessary.

As a whole, the sharing economy continues to be a paradigm “lost in transition” and its innovative and generative capacity cannot be taken for granted. If regulating the sharing economy is perceived as a priority, obviously this target needs to be based on an adequate understanding. It is in this shared purpose that an unprecedented possibility of collaboration between sociologists and policy makers might materialize, in order to avoid the risk of premature and ‘coercive’ regulation, in the Durkheimian sense, which might be inadequate and counterproductive if it does not come with an adequate counterbalance between the economic opportunities and the rights of protection and security for users, workers, citizens and other stakeholders.

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