



Framing the collaborative economy –Voices of contestation



Katarzyna Gruszka

WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Welthandelsplatz 1, D5, 1020 Vienna, Austria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 February 2016

Received in revised form 2 September 2016

Accepted 11 September 2016

Available online 27 September 2016

Keywords:

Collaborative economy

Sharing economy

Q study

Framing

Sustainability transitions

ABSTRACT

Within the context of multiple crises and change, a range of practices discussed under the umbrella term of collaborative (or sharing) economy have been gaining considerable attention. Supporters build an idealistic vision of collaborative societies. Critics have been stripping the concept of its visionary potential, questioning its revolutionary nature. In the study, these debates are brought down to the local level in search for common perceptions among the co-creators of the concept in Vienna, Austria. Towards this aim a Q study is conducted, i.e. a mixed method enabling analyses of subjective perceptions on socially contested topics. Four framings are identified: Visionary Supporters, Market Optimists, Visionary Critics, and Sceptics, each bringing their values, visions, and practical goals characteristic of different understanding of the collaborative economy. The study questions the need for building a globally-applicable definition of the concept, calls for more context-sensitivity, exploratory studies, and city-level multi-stakeholder dialogues.

© 2016 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The magnitude of interconnected ecological, economic and social issues has become referred to as multiple crises (Haberl et al., 2011; Brand et al., 2013; Scoones et al., 2015). In multiple crises reality, challenges such as poverty, growing inequality, biodiversity loss, to name just a few, need to be addressed, with consumption-focused lifestyles among the key areas where change is necessary (see e.g. Raworth, 2012). To use Stirling's words: "the crucial challenge is not whether to achieve the necessary radical technological, political, economic and cultural changes, but how" (Stirling, 2015: 62). Regarding the how, attention is increasingly paid to the systemic nature of the issues in question, emphasizing the need for overall system transformation rather than its tweaking (Naidoo, 2014; Stirling, 2014, 2015). Researchers from sustainability transition studies community have been delving into the how through their insights into promoting, understanding, and governing "a transition towards sustainability, i.e. a fundamental transformation towards more sustainable modes of production and consumption" (Markard et al., 2012: 955). Within the context of potential sustainability transitions, a range of practices discussed under the umbrella term of the collaborative (or sharing) economy have been gaining considerable attention. It is this concept that the study in question is concerned with.

In his investigation of the current sharing economy discourses, Martin (2016) reached out to transition studies through employing the Multi-level Perspective, framing the discourses employed by niche and regime actors. The discourses in focus are of complex and contradictory nature, with a diversity of actors and interests involved (Stokes et al., 2014; Martin, 2016). Supporters build an idealistic vision of collaborative societies (see e.g. OuiShare, 2015; Shareable, 2015; Sundararajan, 2016). Critics have been stripping the concept of its visionary potential, referring to capitalism in new clothing, and portraying it more as a pipe dream (see e.g. Morozov, 2014; Eckhard and Bardhi, 2015; Cohen, 2016). The terminology itself is a

E-mail address: kgruszka@wu.ac.at

first step into the issues, since collaborative consumption, sharing economy and collaborative economy are often used interchangeably. In the paper, collaborative economy is mostly adhered to as intuitively most flexible of the terms, seemingly gaining followers in Europe (see e.g. Stokes et al., 2014; OuisShare, 2015).

In the whirl of definitional issues, and the voices of enthusiasts and critics, I look into the debates surrounding the collaborative economy, contextualizing the discourses in question with the aim of uncovering common perceptions among the co-creators of the concept in Austria's capital, Vienna (for more details on the case, see Section 4). Focusing on this particular group is exciting, taking into consideration the recent developments in approaches towards the collaborative and sharing practices, especially on the governance and regulation levels, and their role for the future pathways of this potential transition. Towards this aim a Q study is conducted, i.e. a mixed method enabling analyses of subjective perceptions on socially contested topics (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Q entails a set of statements representing the discourse in question. The statements are sorted by the group of interest on a relative ranking scale (here: members of organizations, companies, communities, etc. involved in the collaborative economy in Vienna; for more details see Section 3.1.2). Through factor-rendering, Q enables a better understanding of the concept on a local level, elucidating both areas of consent and contention in the underlying views. The factors are then interpreted and presented in a narrative form. As such, Q allows for "elicit[ing] individual perspectives systematically and analys[ing] the overlap and differences between them using quantitative correlation analysis" (Hermans et al., 2012: 74).

The study develops a growing branch of transition research focusing on the role of discourse, narratives and framings in ongoing transitions further (Sengers et al., 2010; Geels and Verhees, 2011; Nicolini, 2012; Franceschini and Pansera, 2015; Hermwille, 2016; Martin, 2016). Here, Hermwille (2016) has called for a stronger employment of Q as a methodology suitable for exploring contextualized discourse in ongoing transitions. The study responds to this call, thereby enriching the discourse-focused strand of transition research with Q as a further methodological tool of exploration. It also adds to the budding literature on the collaborative economy (Martin and Upham, 2015; Martin, 2016). Importantly, though, with Q relying on a small sample, the study stands for a conceptual and contextual contribution to the developing field of literature, rather than operational or generalizable one.

In Section 2, I bring a selection of voices present in the debates to the fore to outline the heterogeneity inherent to the collaborative economy discourses. Next, I relate to the narrative and framing research in transition studies, and point to how the current study adds value. Section 3 guides the reader through the essentials of Q methodology, and presents the identified factors. The ambivalent and nuanced nature of the collaborative economy is discussed, with key overlaps and discrepancies among the emergent framings. Concluding remarks point to further research directions, focusing e.g. on the use of exploratory city-scale studies.

2. The collaborative economy—discourses in the making

2.1. The collaborative economy—a concept in trouble

Those fond of the topic often embark on their journey with Botsman and Rogers (2010), who adhere to the term collaborative consumption. They define it as sharing, bartering, swapping, lending, trading, renting, and gifting, redefined through technology and peer communities, changing both what and how we consume (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Ageyman et al. (2013) criticize this approach for focusing on goods and services relevant predominantly for affluent middle-class lifestyles. They emphasize that the "cutting edge" of sharing and collaborative practices is often not only of commercial value, but relates to shared use of infrastructure, public services, or even informal behaviour like unpaid care and support. The question of drivers behind the increased propensity to share and collaborate is less contested, spanning from a renewed belief in the importance of community, peer-to-peer social networks and real time technologies, growing environmental awareness, and the realities of the global recession (see e.g. Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Ageyman et al., 2013; Botsman, 2013; Parsons, 2014; Stokes et al., 2014).

In an attempt to capture the diversity of voices in sharing and collaboration related debates, Juliet Schor (2014) defines sharing (or collaborative) economy as a range of digital platforms and offline activities centred on the highly contested concept of sharing. The word broadly is of key importance, since relevant activities span from financially successful companies like Airbnb, carsharing platforms (both peer-to-peer level and provided by companies well-established in the car industry), to smaller initiatives such as repair collectives, makerspaces, or tool libraries, to take just a few of examples. This diversity and fuzzy boundaries drawn by both participants and initiatives render "coming up with a solid definition of the sharing economy that reflects common usage nearly impossible" (Schor, 2014: 2). Schor (2014) suggests four categories of the collaborative economy: 1) recirculation of goods (with eBay and Craigslist at its origin); 2) increased utilization of durable assets (functioning well among the better-off possessing e.g. space or means of transport to be used more intensively via car- or lodging-sharing platforms, as well as bringing non-monetized initiatives usually on neighbourhood level to the fore); 3) exchange of services (originating from time banks, yet both monetary and non-monetary in character); and 4) sharing of productive assets (e.g. hackerspaces, makerspaces, co-working spaces, open and peer-to-peer educational platforms). In Schor's take, collaborative initiatives are both for- and non-profit regarding market orientation, and P2P or B2P in terms of market structure, each of these being critical in determining the visions and goals e.g. regarding organizational growth. In terms of drivers, she adds the trendiness of collaborative platforms, along with a deeper commitment to social transformation.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6464249>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6464249>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)