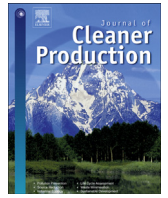


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Sharing cities and sustainable consumption and production: towards an integrated framework

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ABSTRACT

Calls for a transformation towards more sustainable consumption and production (SCP) have been intensifying. As urban populations swell across the planet, cities are faced with increasing pressure on infrastructure, economic and ecological systems. Yet, with their high population densities and ubiquity of information and communication technologies, cities are becoming breeding grounds for a new, circular economy driven by emerging and long-standing sharing activities. This research provides a comprehensive view of SCP systems in cities by integrating and examining sharing economy activities in the context of two continuums, i.e. SCP and private/public orientation. Based on these two analytical dimensions, the paper evaluates and plots five groups of 18 sharing activities to create a Sharing Cities-SCP Typology comprised by five ideal types. Each of these five types represents a unique form of SCP activity, with the potential to directly impact SCP systems in the context of urban environments. By enabling diversity and hybridity in the SCP analysis, we allow for a theoretical expansion of SCP models and a new way of understanding how they may play out in cities.

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“Building a sharing infrastructure and culture is quite simply one of the most important things cities can do to contribute to a fair and sustainable world”.

(Agyeman et al., 2013, p. 29).

1. Introduction

Much has been made of the historic milestone reached in 2008 when, for the first time in history, more people were living in cities than in rural areas (UNFPA, 2011). The number of urban residents, estimated at 3.5 billion today, is expected to approach 5 billion by 2030 (UNFPA, 2011) as more migrants seek improved employment opportunities, access to health services and better education in cities. In this process, cities can become major engines of economic growth that spill over to the region (Venkataraman, 2004) and to other cities (Jacobs, 1984).

Yet today, cities are also major contributors of environmental problems. While representing only one percent of the world's total land mass and housing just over 50 percent of humanity, cities represent more than 70 percent of all energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. This despite the efficiency benefits gained by denser forms of living. To sustain life, the global economy will need to transition to more sustainable consumption and production systems (SCP), and it is expected that cities will form part of the solution.

In SCP literature, there is an underlying assumption that changes in business activity towards sustainable development has the potential to positively affect either consumption or production systems (Blok et al., 2015). This dichotomous understanding of the SCP space has reduced the possibility of identifying alternative economic forms that can simultaneously deal with both sides of the SCP spectrum. Overcoming this limitation requires a broader view that not only treats SCP as a continuum but also considers the actual – public/private – orientation of the economic activity under examination. When the system is viewed through this lens, an impressive array of sharing economic activities emerge in cities that, by articulating a hybrid approach to value creation, have a potential combined effect on both sides of the SCP system.

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The sharing economy is a fast-growing sector disrupting mainstream industries, yet to date, there is a dearth of research on the sharing economy. Emerging streams such as business models for sharing, incumbent responses to sharing economy startups, the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an enabler of sharing, the importance of and mechanisms for the development of trust in sharing economy initiatives, and the potential social, economic and environmental benefits from sharing economy activity remain unexplored in management and sustainability literature alike. Scholars from the University of Utrecht sought to address this gap by hosting the First International Workshop on the Sharing Economy in June of 2015 where many of these topics were explored. While not exclusive to cities, the sharing economy is gaining more traction in urban areas because they are where dense populations and ICTs such as smart phones and high speed Internet coexist (Agyeman et al., 2013). We suggest that cities are also faced with scarce resources and insufficient infrastructure capacity (McClaren and Agyeman, 2015) which require innovations in consumption and production systems to maintain or improve quality of life for all.

Therefore this research is primarily concerned with the development of an integrated framework for theorizing about the role the sharing economy can have in accelerating sustainable consumption and production patterns in cities around the globe. It is worth noting that while the majority of recent media attention about the sharing economy has been focused on commercial, scalable sharing economy stalwarts like Airbnb and Uber, the historical roots of sharing in communities, and even many emerging approaches to sharing that leverage ICT are not even commercial endeavors. This aspect of sharing in cities is under-researched so we actively sought to explore the range of sharing from highly commercial to non-monetary, community-based in line with McLaren and Agyeman (2015) broader interpretation of the emerging space in the city context.

In order to understand the range of sharing activity in cities, we classified 18 sharing activities into five key categories, to subsequently examine, evaluate and plot them according to two analytical dimensions: orientation of value creation (i.e. public or private interest) and the location of the activity on the SCP spectrum, embracing particularly diversity and hybridity in the analysis of the SCP space. From the results we derived a Sharing Cities-SCP Typology comprised by five ideal type, each of them representing a unique, hybrid form of SCP activity, with the potential to directly impact SCP systems in the context of urban environments. Our results allow for a theoretical expansion of SCP models and a new way of understanding how they may play out in cities.

2. Background literature

2.1. Sustainable consumption and production

The formal introduction of the sustainable consumption and production (SCP) concept occurred during the 1992 World Summit on Sustainable Development; emerging as a response to the sustainability challenges facing communities around the globe. It has been defined as “the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations” (Norwegian Ministry of Environment (1994). Twenty years later, at Rio+20, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development reaffirmed the commitment towards SCP via the creation of a 10-year framework of SCP programs.

In extant SCP literature, sustainable consumption and sustainable production are generally treated as two discrete constructs within SCP systems. Sustainable consumption is concerned with “raising awareness and changing consumer behavior, values, and motivations” (Barber, 2007, p. 500). Sustainable production is mostly concerned with “not only the volume and types of goods and services produced, but the process of making them, the natural resources extracted to make them, and the waste and pollution resulting from the extraction, production, and affiliated process resulting in a particular ‘good’” (Barber, 2007, p. 502). A rich stream of multidisciplinary research has developed since the SCP concept was introduced exploring how (e.g. Pusavec et al., 2010) and why (e.g. Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002) some companies engage in SCP activity as well as measuring the impacts sustainable production processes achieve (e.g. Veleva et al., 2001).

As sustainable consumption requires consumers to adopt different approaches towards their purchasing and use patterns, it has often been associated with social movements (Barber, 2007). Yet, sustainable consumption has been increasingly associated with improved health and quality of life as well (Jackson, 2005). The Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) marketplace has emerged as a way to frame and market the direct health and quality of life improvements obtained by consumers embracing sustainable consumption of goods and services.

Yet consumption and production systems are not necessarily discrete components. Although the notion of SCP has evolved through two different streams, we emphasize its integrity and the need for embracing the shades of gray between the C and the P. Scholars studying creative industries, for example, have implored researchers to consider consumption and production on a continuum (Mbaye, 2011). The sharing economy is further blurring these lines by supporting user communities that conceive of, co-finance, and co-create products and services. Therefore, we suggest that sustainable consumption and production, at least in the context of the sharing economy, be treated as a continuum from sustainable consumption to sustainable production, allowing for hybrid models which include both consumption and production at their core. We argue that the blurred lines create challenges for an accurate placement of some sharing models, particularly with peer-to-peer (P2P) activity. We have decided to make a distinction pertaining to asset use and additional services offered. Specifically we consider the pure sharing of a resource, without service production, to be part of the sustainable consumption model. Whereas sharing an asset with additional service becomes both sustainable consumption and sustainable production.

2.2. SCP, sharing economy and cities

Management scholars have been reluctant to research the sharing economy (Belk, 2010). Belk suggests three primary reasons for the dearth of research on sharing in management research: 1) sharing has historically been considered part of either a gift exchange or commodity exchange in conflict with rationalist perspectives of competing interests; 2) historically sharing was more associated with in-home activity; and 3) sharing is so ubiquitous that it has been taken for granted.

Yet, sharing is arguably “the most universal form of human economic behavior” and has been so for “several hundred thousand years” (Price, 1975, p. 1,12). Of course historically, sharing involved intimate relationships within families (Price, 1975) or local communities (Voelker and Flap, 2009). New forms of the sharing economy no longer rely on previously formed relationships with sharers. The sharing economy, driven by a convergence of numerous factors including the global economic recession, growing environmental consciousness and the growing ubiquity of

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