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Challenges of Collaborative Governance in the Sharing Economy: The case of free-floating bike sharing in Shanghai

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## Challenges of Collaborative Governance in the Sharing Economy: The case of free-floating bike sharing in Shanghai

#### Abstract

Most sharing mobility business models promise green and affordable transport in cities. However, their rapid scale-up processes have often caused significant disruption and stresses to urban governance. Free-floating bike sharing (FFBS) is highly-touted in Shanghai as a means to bring biking habits back to an overly car-congested city. Despite substantially changing the behaviour of Shanghai citizens to adopt shared bikes within a short period of time (2016-2017), the FFBS has hit a threshold of oversupply, under-distribution and user misbehaviour problems, which endanger the environmental and social sustainability of innovative urban mobility schemes. In this paper, we focus on the FFBS case study and examine how commercial, political and social actors interact in addressing the emerging public problems in the FFBS scale-up process from a collaborative governance perspective. We find that the lack of recognition and integration of new social actors, such as user groups, as agents in the scheme are key obstacles to a fully-functioning government-business-society collaborative regime. We argue that this hindrance is a function of the existing socioeconomic relations within the city. Our results suggest that the city's government needs to be more agile to accommodate, nurture and integrate emerging social actors as governance partners in the sharing economy, in order to ensure its efficacy, resilience and sustainability. We propose an alternative governance model to improve the effectiveness of the collaborative governance regime towards urban sustainability through engaging the society in better and smarter ways in the sharing economy.

#### Keywords

Collaborative governance, sustainability, urban, sharing economy, free-floating bike sharing

#### 1. Introduction

Sharing is a foundational currency of social capital (Putnam, 1993) and among the oldest values and means of exchange in human society (Belk, 2010; 2014). Digital technologies and commercial capital have enabled the sharing economy to mediate sharing in new and enhanced ways through digital platforms (Sundararajan, 2016; Ritzer, 2015). As the sharing economy develops and scales up in more cities and crucial urban sectors (i.e., transport, housing, food), the level and complexity of tensions between sharing practices, current socioeconomic systems and urban infrastructures increase. While the overall impact of the sharing economy in urban systems is still evolving, city governments have welcomed it as an injection of external investment and capacity into critical services, but have to a large extent failed to recognise and address the negative effects spawned by it (Davidson and Infranca, 2015).

Due to rapid urbanisation and high material consumption, cities have huge impacts on global greenhouse gas emissions (Kennedy et al., 2015). The recent rise of the internet-based

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