REIMAGINING THE CITY AS A COMMONS

Local stakeholders' visions and practices for creating Sydney as a Sharing City

Inka Santala, 10.7.2019
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ACCESS
Australian Centre for Culture, Environment, Society & Space

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

Privatising and commodifying the urban commons

Profit-driven urban development

-> left little space for non-commercial activities

   and community building

Citizens feel disempowered and excluded

(Iaione 2016)

(Picture sources: https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2017/05/11/privately-owned-public-space; top one taken by the author)

Sharing as a way for the community to respond

Gain control and provide practical solutions

to contemporary problems

Communal sharing

- Local and mission-driven practices
- Value generated used for the common good

(Picture sources: https://medium.com/@aditya.vikram/the-rise-of-prosumers-and-what-it-means-for-consumer-companies-26d408325934; others taken by the author)
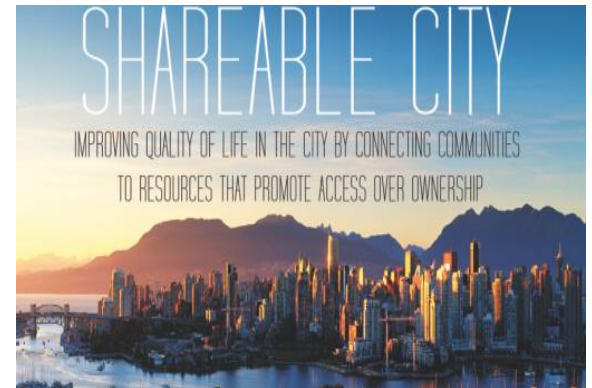
Transformative narrative of the Sharing City

Advocates see as progressive urban transformation

- Collaboration and citizen empowerment
- Socially just and environmentally sustainable
  urban futures (Agyeman & McLaren 2015)

Pragmatic, community-based solutions

- To build the city as a commons (Gorenflo 2017)

(Picture sources: https://virtualserver1.shareable.net/blog/the-complete-guide-to-hosting-a-mapjam-in-your-city; top one taken by the author)

Promises and pitfalls of "sharing as innovation"

- Practical answers to difficult problems (Manzini 2015, p. 4)

- Innovation in social relations (Moulaert et al. 2013, p. 2)

- Bring new economy and society into being (Gibson-Graham & Roelvink 2013, p. 463)

- Not always intentional or oriented towards social goals (Avelino et al. 2019, p. 197)

- Initiatives struggle to remain viable (Seyfang & Longhurst 2013)

- Potentially excluding micropolitics (Seyfang & Smith 2007)
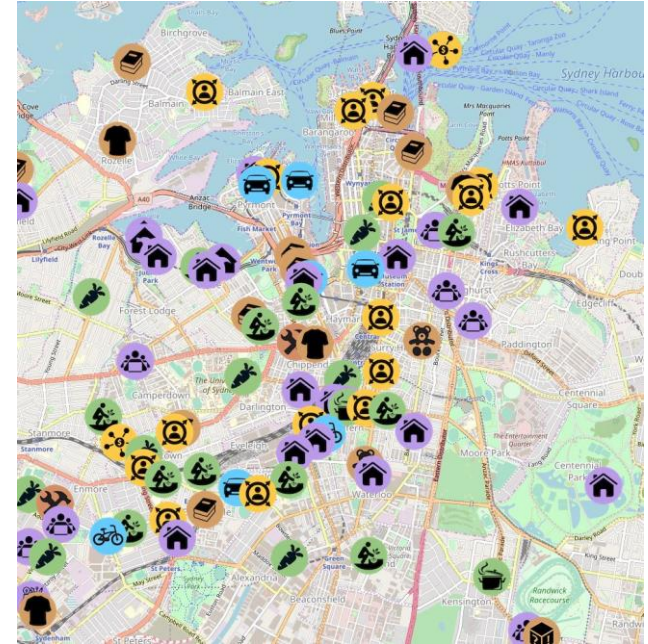
(Picture created by the author)

Mapping the sharing ecosystem in Sydney

Urban challenges

- Lack of community feel and trust
- Rising inequalities
- Food insecurity
- Housing affordability

Growing number of sharing initiatives offer alternatives

(Picture source: https://thesharingmap.com.au/)

Local stakeholder's visions and practices

Participant observation and semi-structured research interviews

- Sharing advocates

- Practitioners

- Local administrators

Focus on

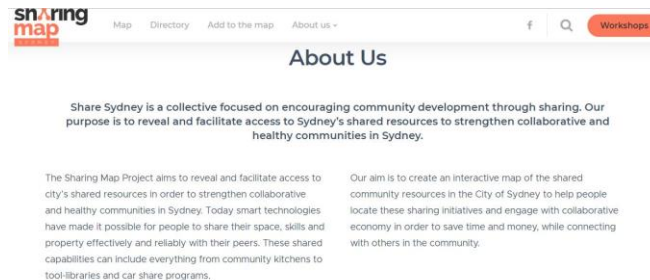- Framing and governance

-> Affirm or undermine "sharing as innovation"

(Picture source: https://www.incollaboration.com.au/catalysing-the-sydney-commons-lab)

Advocates drive for community-led social change

"One of the things I really love about sharing is that there is something in it that automatically places it outside of the old economy ... There is altruism in it, there is compassion, there is empathy, there is all the positive stuff that make us human beings. It is the best of what makes us a human being, in sharing."
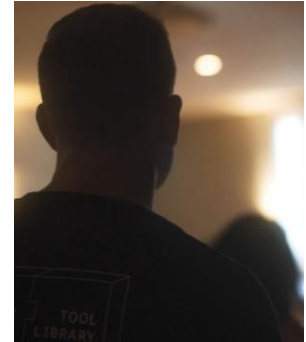
– member of Share Sydney

(Picture sources: https://thesharingmap.com.au/; https://www.incollaboration.com.au/catalysing-the-sydney-commons-lab)

…yet challenge in managing the micro-politics

"We're interested in sort of an emerging area. We're kind of writing the script as we go." – co-founder of the Sharing Hub

"…there's not that many people from diverse communities that are involved in New Economy. When you go to the New Economy Conference, people are mostly white … You know mainstream isn't so good at inclusion. So, even New Economy may not be so good at inclusion."
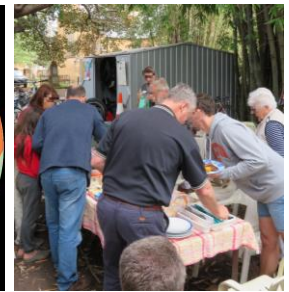
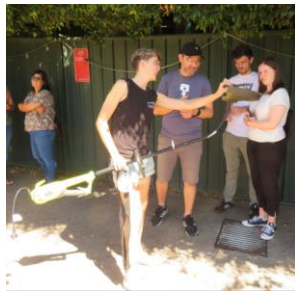*– member of the New Economy Network Australia*

(Stills captured from video material: https://thesharingmap.com.au/, credit for Sherman Lo)

Practitioners seek for community and access

"I'll be selfish and say it's going to benefit myself because I can access it. My friends can access things. It's accessing not only the tangible things, but accessing more the connections, I suppose."

– founder of the Inner West Tool Library

…often with little plans for the long-term

"…at the very beginning, we didn't have a plan to create such a big initiative. We were just doing what we could at the moment." – founder of ShareWaste

"…it did start by three people in Newtown. They were just cycling around finding bikes, like just to spend time together. And then they saw that the idea got more interest in the community, so they started organising meetups…"

– volunteer at Cycle ReCycle Club

(Picture sources: https://donorbox.org/sharewaste?default_interval=m; bottom one taken by the author)

Local administration as the enabler of sharing

"We've got to be able to support the bottom-up activities of people who live and work in the city. That's the best way that we can help, I think ... there's a lot of knowledge and there's a lot of capacity in the community. You know, people who are very active. I don't think it would make sense for us to come on top of that and impose something."

– City of Sydney Councillor

Sydney2030/Green/Global/Connected   CITYOFSYDNEY

A City for All

Towards a socially just and resilient Sydney

(Picture source: https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/304214/Social_sustainability_policy_and_action_plan_20182028.pdf)

…yet, push responsibility to community members

"I don't think government currently has the capacity or the speed or agility to provide useful, meaningful, every need that a community has … We don't have the luxury of moving things and breaking fast or acting first and asking permission later, you know what I mean? We have to do everything by the book, whereas the community can do all of those things."

– City of Sydney Councillor

(Stills captured from video material: https://thesharingmap.com.au/, credit for Sherman Lo)

Social innovation towards a Sharing City

- Practical, bottom-up solutions to contemporary problems

- Transforming social relations by creating new connections and social mixing

- Preconfiguring postcapitalist futures in the present (Santala & MᶜGuirk, in press)

- Might start unintentionally and have a very pragmatic approach

- Lack of time and resources create challenges to stay viable

- Conflicting ideas and values can lead to unforeseen implications and exclusion

(Picture created by the author)

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