



Sharing City

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Executive Summary

Current research indicates that sharing and cities are both highly relevant in current research. However, research literature provided sparse understanding of what a sharing city is or does. This case study aimed to understand the conditions that would need to be in-place for UK cities, towns or districts to become “sharing cities”.

What we did

To help us understand more about sharing in cities, we asked ourselves ‘What is a sharing city?’ We realised that while sharing and cities are two very current topics of research, there was no good understanding in the academic literature of what a sharing city is or does. We felt that greater clarity in this area would aid city decision-makers, city leaders and citizens rethink how cities, with all their resources (economic, cultural, physical, political and social), can grow, encourage and promote sharing. In order to find out more, we began by becoming familiar with sharing and collaborating in the cities where we live. We wanted to see what was going on locally with sharing that we did not already know about, or that we had not considered before, so that we could leverage local strengths and aspirations to explore possibilities for the future.

To carry the research forward, we organised two workshops with local citizens, both individuals and groups, who were already involved in sharing initiatives. The first took place in Lancaster with 28 people and the second in the ward of Moseley and Kings Heath in Birmingham with 22 people. At these workshops we mapped current, local sharing initiatives, discussed worst-case scenarios (worries about, dangers to and risks of sharing), and imagined future cities in which positive sharing initiatives could be amplified, new forms of sharing could be created and barriers to sharing could be destroyed.

The first task at the workshops was to ask the participants to

write down an example of sharing that they were involved in or were aware of locally. We then asked the participants to place their example on our map of sharing, either attached to a heading, such as sharing food or sharing skills, or on its own. We used the map to make the sharing city visible, that is, to see all the different kinds of sharing that were happening in each city. The mapping exercise was useful to us and all the participants, as we could use this information to classify what types of sharing were happening in the two cities, and where there were connections. What we couldn't use the map to understand, however, is why people were doing what they were doing, what they have learned from it and how things could be improved in the future. In order to know more from our participants, we divided them up into small groups of five or six, asked them to introduce themselves and then discuss their sharing examples with their group. We then asked them to think about and write down what they thought was the worst-case scenario for their city and the worst-case scenario for sharing in their town (they did this first on their own and then they shared their ideas with everyone at the workshop). This was a very important exercise, as it allowed participants to voice and acknowledge their worries and concerns. However, instead of holding on to the negative thoughts, we asked participants to dump their worst-case scenarios into what we like to call the crate of doom, which was stored away so no one could see the negativity again.

Moving on from this exercise, we asked the participants to think about their earlier examples of sharing and to work together in their groups to recognise connections or potential questions they had about sharing in their cities. We also asked the groups to think and talk about what they might learn, adopt or do differently based on the other people's examples or from possible connections. By asking these questions, we began to uncover how many of the examples of sharing were linked, sometimes by proximity, or by a particular group or person. It also allowed people to start thinking about how they could improve or change things in order to grow the existing sharing initiatives. Our final task was a design exercise. We asked all the groups to design the shared city, taking the ideas they had generated throughout the day, to think about how this might shape the city so that sharing was able to grow and become the norm. We specifically requested that the groups consider what they might

amplify, create or destroy in their city to create the sharing city.

What we discovered and what we recommend

We found that when we first looked across the examples of local sharing from our workshops in Lancaster and Birmingham, people at these workshops tended to share space, knowledge, objects, food and ideas more than any other type of sharing. Second, some of the examples were not only about just one type of sharing, but may involve several types. For example, if a person wrote about a community garden as an example of sharing, he or she might talk about sharing food, skills, knowledge, space and time. Third, people at the workshops did not mention examples of sharing that are more associated with the sharing economy, like Uber or AirBnB. Rather, they considered local sharing examples or local chapters of broader sharing examples, such as Incredible Edible Lancaster. It seemed like sharing in Lancaster and Birmingham centred on formal and informal meetings among people and groups in the key spaces in each city.

In addition to sharing in general, both cities had their own peculiarities. In Lancaster, food examples based on sharing were very popular, particularly when discussed in the context of helping the environment. Sharing knowledge around how to grow food, how to reduce the use of fossil fuels and so on were important parts of Lancaster's examples. This makes sense, as many community groups in the city have an environmental focus and there are two universities within the city's boundaries. In Birmingham, the Moseley and Kings Heath ward showed a slightly different focus. While food sharing examples were plentiful, the more frequent examples revolved around sharing skills, time and things. There also seemed to be a need to strengthen ties within and between different groups and communities. In these cases, having both events and spaces for people to come together and borrow, mend, swap etc. was key.

When we looked at the examples from our workshops as well as various project meetings we found three emerging themes about sharing in cities:

1. Hubs, both physical and digital, are key to sharing; (1) physical places where people can come together and share something; (2) digital spaces where people can come together and share something. Both are important in the 21st century for people to share. Physical and digital hubs act as centres for getting together, discussing issues and information and making decisions. From there, groups and communities can go out and do what they said they'd do. As such, hubs are incredibly important to sharing in cities, as they provide space and time to reflect on the nature of sharing.

2. Bridges, both infrastructural and relational, are also key to sharing; The bridge could be physical, but it also could be digital. And while the first one is more physical in terms of sharing in cities, the second one is more relational.
3. Sharing is a value that need to be explicitly promoted; local, regional and national governments aren't doing their part, as they need to recognise the important role that these sharing groups play in making cities what they are today. Without these forms of sharing, cities would not be able to function properly, so it is important that as many examples of sharing are known and promoted. One way to help people know more about sharing schemes in cities is to map or visualise sharing