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Can the sharing economy realize responsible citizenship behavior?

LPTransition Transdisciplinary research briefs on the sharing economy series #1

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Can the sharing economy realize responsible citizenship behavior?
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The challenge in striving towards a more sustainable society and an environmental friendly city is convincing people to act in a responsible way. Despite the numerous promising projects and actions in Brussels Region, although often resulting in grand success, there are still too many examples of unsustainable behavior by the citizens. Research shows that a single focus on knowledge sharing and creating awareness is insufficient to realize action (e.g. Bain et al., 2012). Another approach urges itself to realize responsible citizenship behavior.
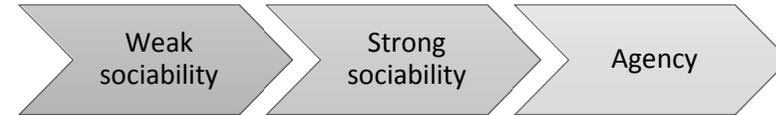
From sociability to agency

Agency doesn't stand separately form sociability, but partly overlaps this concept as being a higher, more intense form of it. We divide three different levels, from weak sociability (level 1) to strong sociability (level 2) to agency (level 3).
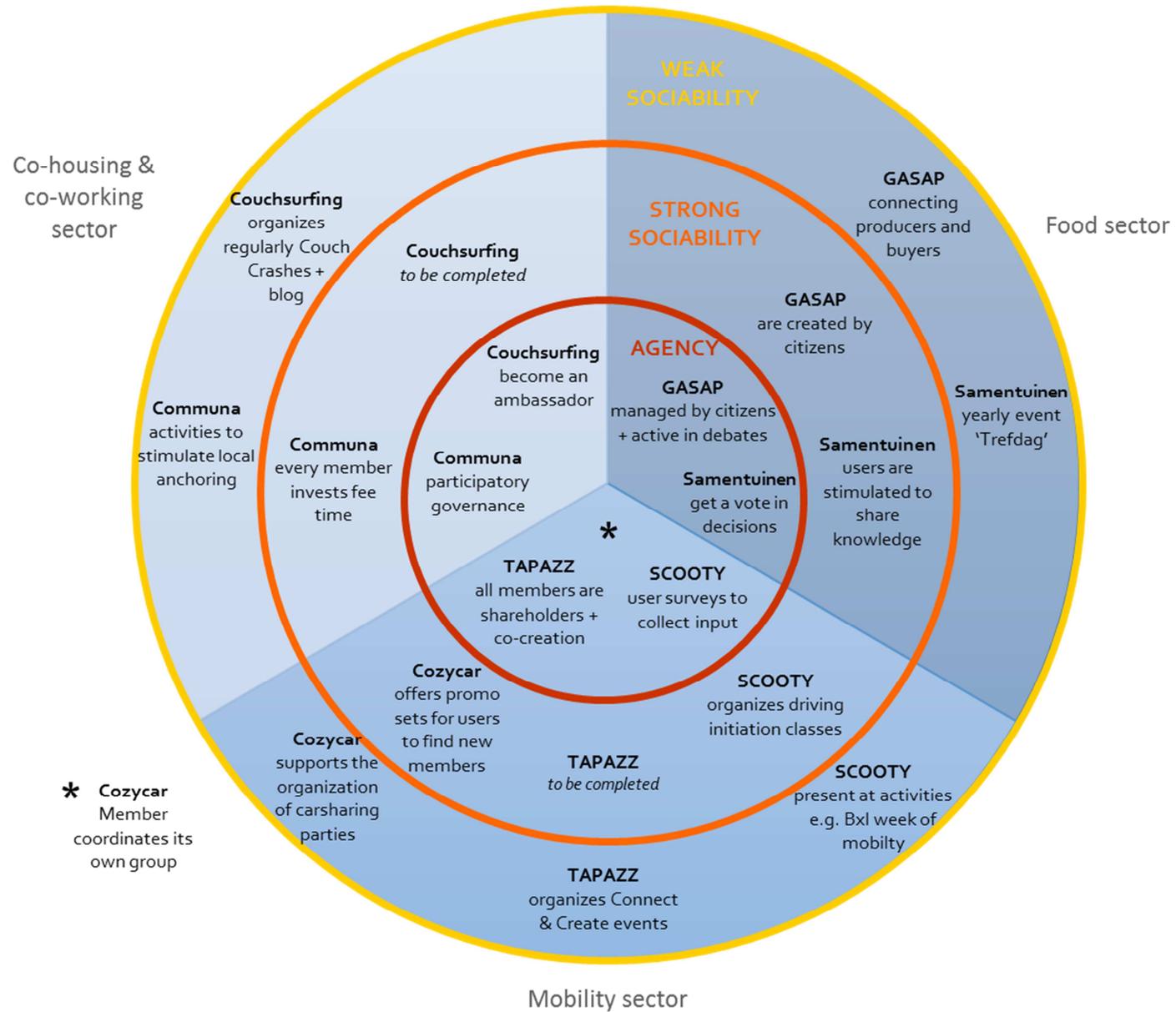

Weak sociability limits itself to actions where social connections are made in order to benefit the society. When these actions lead to the realization of a cooperation or mutuality, level 2 is reached. In level 3, citizens take up an active role, set their own goals and act upon them (Benkler, 2006).

Sociability and agency: 2 key concepts to enhance ecological behavior

Recent research shows that school's sustainability education should not provide only ecological experiences, but more importantly connect pro-social and agency experiences through an approach that emphasizes pro- environmental values and self-efficacy for general ecological behavior (Uitto, 2015). As such, we come across two important concepts, both having an important role in the realization of responsible environmental behavior: sociability and agency.

SOCIABILITY	=	To engage in social activities that benefits the society.
AGENCY	=	The ability of an individual to set own goals and act upon them (Kabeer, 1999).

Governance mechanisms to realize agency in collaborative communities

Category	Mechanism	Description
Mutual monitoring	- Transparancy	Openness, communication and accountability
	- Peer review	Involvement of and feedback by peers
Membership restrictions	- Membership restrictions	Rules, requirements and processes to join
Values and rules	- Shared purposes and values	Agreement on mission and conditions
	- Rules	Clear formal/informal agreements
Property rights and incentives	- Property rights	Control of resources
	- Incentives	Monetory or non-monetary reward structures

Table 1. Governance mechanisms (Kolbjørnsrud, 2017).

Figure 1. Mapping of peer review actions in the sharing economy.

Co-housing & co-working sector

Food sector

Mobility sector

WEAK SOCIABILITY

STRONG SOCIABILITY

AGENCY

Couchsurfing
organizes regularly Couch Crashes + blog

Couchsurfing
to be completed

Couchsurfing
become an ambassador

Commuta
activities to stimulate local anchoring

Commuta
every member invests fee time

Commuta
participatory governance

TAPAZZ
all members are shareholders + co-creation

SCOOTY
user surveys to collect input

Cozycar
offers promo sets for users to find new members

Cozycar
supports the organization of carsharing parties

TAPAZZ
to be completed

SCOOTY
organizes driving initiation classes

SCOOTY
present at activities e.g. Bxl week of mobilty

TAPAZZ
organizes Connect & Create events

GASAP
connecting producers and buyers

GASAP
are created by citizens

GASAP
managed by citizens + active in debates

Samentuinen
get a vote in decisions

Samentuinen
yearly event 'Trefdag'

Samentuinen
users are stimulated to share knowledge

* **Cozycar**
Member coordinates its own group

2

A focus on peer review in the sharing economy

The 'peer review' mechanism is an important mechanism on which we focus in this policy brief. By illustrating different actions in how to involve and activate citizens, the value and multiplicity of this mechanism will be evident.

Examples:
- being able to plan the own work schedule
- receive feedback on the own accomplishments
- share ideas and feedback through surveys
- co-create
- organize sustainable actions
- participate in debates
- participate in decision making
- involve in the government/management

Figure 1 contains a mapping of actions related to the peer review mechanism and illustrates the tendency from weak sociability to strong sociability to agency. Examples are taken from multiple initiatives which have a focus on sociologic and/or ecologic mission driven sharing economy. Three sectors are taken into account: co-housing & co-working sector, food sector and mobility sector.

Learnings from the mapping: sociability and agency in practice

Initiatives with a sociologic and/or ecologic mission are able to develop actions in all three levels, but this can be in varied degrees and with varied publics. Several dimensions can be identified to illustrate this broad variety in impact, e.g.

a few persons	⟺	large community
local	⟺	international
direct users	⟺	citizens
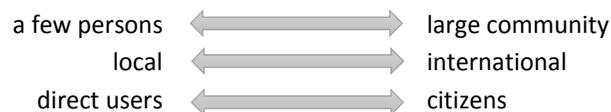
The circle diagram offers a practical tool for initiatives to analyze their current actions and to identify on which levels they are currently active and where not. The outcomes can result in mutual learning among initiatives by sharing and gaining knowledge and expertise from each other.

Responsible citizenship behavior through the sharing economy

By using a combination of social economical mechanisms, responsible citizenship behavior can be promoted and thereby enhance the contribution of the sharing economy to sustainable regional development.

HYPOTHESIS If an organization is capable of stimulating sociability by using the right mechanisms, agency will be realized within or outside that organization, at that moment or later on. This can lead to effective behavioral change with direct user till a broader group of people.

Policy guidelines
- Support activities to stimulate weak sociability, strong sociability and agency in the initiatives/ organizations active in the sharing economy.
- Integrate modules on responsible citizenship behavior in training models for young entrepreneurs.

Some caveats
- Sociability alone is of course not enough, it can lead to a "HALO" effect (striving towards good feeling of the users without real increase in responsible citizenship)
- Agency comes with a cost: is it doable to give every stakeholder an active role?