

Collaborative Economy and Tourism

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Abstract The digital collaborative economy is one of the most fascinating developments to have claimed our attention in the last decade. Not only does it defy clear definition, but its historical links back to non-monetised sharing and gift economies and its contemporary foundations in monetising idle assets and spare capacity make it difficult to theorise. In this chapter, we lay the foundation for a social science approach to the exploration of the collaborative economy and its relationship with tourism. We argue that “collaborative” and “economy” should be conceptualised in a broad and inclusive manner in order to avoid narrow theorisations and blinkered accounts that focus only on digitally-mediated, monetised transactions. A balance between individual and collective dimensions of the collaborative economy is also necessary if we are to understand its societal implications.

Keywords Collaborative economy • Collaborative consumption • Tourism • Critical studies • Sharing • Globalisation

1 Introduction

On February 2, 2014 Amsterdam launched its *Amsterdam Sharing City* campaign and officially became Europe’s first named sharing city. Since that time the City has embraced a diversity of sharing activities and has actively sought to facilitate both digital and non-digital forms of sharing economy. Amsterdam promotes the benefits of the sharing economy as a means of achieving the dual goals of economic innovation and sustainability. Following Amsterdam’s lead, other world cities including Paris, London and Singapore have also opened their doors to policy reforms that could facilitate the sharing economy. But it has been a complicated and politically volatile journey for many other cities.

Berlin, Barcelona, San Francisco and New York are just some of the cities that have sought to find policy solutions to a range of impacts emerging in different

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sectors, most notably the ride sharing and collaborative economy accommodation sectors. Debate has been highly political and marred in controversy. Most of the concerns being raised relate to the perceived impacts of extractive, profit-driven models of the collaborative economy such as Airbnb and Uber. However, whether responsibility can be directly attributed to these extractive collaborative economy models, or whether they have simply exacerbated pre-existing and historically-situated problems is a matter of debate (Dredge, Gyimóthy, Birckbak, Jensen, & Madsen, 2016).

For us, as the editors and authors of this volume, the collaborative economy is one of the most fascinating developments to have gained attention over the last decade. What is the collaborative economy? What are its impacts on and consequences for tourism? What does it mean for society at large? Is it desirable? How should we manage it? What can governments do? What can incumbent industry actors do to address the unfolding change? These questions have been raised numerous times in different fora and almost everyone has an opinion. Who then should we believe? And whose advice should we take? We cannot pretend to offer definitive advice given the highly contextualised nature of current debates and issues. However, in taking a social science approach, we seek to deepen understandings, provide alternative conceptualisations and ways of framing the problems and opportunities, and in the process uncover new and creative ways of addressing the issues at hand.

We start our explorations acknowledging that the collaborative economy is not a new phenomenon, but is linked to very old forms of economic exchange including the sharing and gift economies (Belk, 2010). However, in its contemporary digital form, wide reaching social, economic, environmental and political consequences cross sectoral boundaries and create contradictions and tensions that require considerable skill, patience and knowledge to unravel. Technology has sped up the rolling out of this digital collaborative economy, it has enabled everyone with a mobile device and an Internet connection to become a micro-entrepreneur, and it has facilitated global market access to a range of previously untapped products, services and experiences. In the process, in just 10 years, small start-ups with a virtual platform as their main asset have grown into global corporations dwarfing traditional competitors such as hotel chains, taxi and car rental companies. Such has been the scale and speed of the collaborative economy's development that governments, incumbent industry actors and communities are now grappling to unravel and understand the emerging consequences and to identify appropriate and acceptable actions (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015).

For researchers unafraid of the challenge and willing to transcend disciplinary divides, the collaborative economy represents a veritable playground. Rittel and Weber (1973) first coined the term "wicked problem" to describe policy problems that defy neat description, where there is no clear identifiable solution, and where addressing the problem requires actions on multiple fronts where no single actor has complete authority and control. Fast forward 40 years and Rittel and Weber could have written their seminal paper about the collaborative economy today. The collaborative economy epitomises the disruptive rescaling of economic structures

and practices of a postmodern, post-structural world (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989). It demonstrates individualisation in mass markets; the speed of global digital transactions exemplify time-space compression; and the global nature of digital platforms demonstrates a liquid organisation reminiscent of Bauman's liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000).

At the same time, Botsman and Rogers (2011) and Gansky (2010) argue that the collaborative economy responds to the need for alternative economies that address over-consumption and the unsustainable trajectories of modern capitalism (Harvey, 1996; Healy, 2009). While this argument is often cited, in the absence of evidence it has been increasingly questioned, and a very important distinction has been made between the extractive and generative collaborative economy models (Bauwens, 2005; Scholz, 2016). While this distinction is discussed below, these contributions flag a much greater level of critical engagement and more robust attempts to build a knowledge base about the collaborative economy. This book contributes to this larger project.

The aim of this book is to explore and theorise the nature, character and operation of the collaborative economy and its relationship with tourism. We seek to expand the narrow focus often taken on the collaborative economy that conceptualises it as a set of digitally mediated peer-to-peer transactions. Instead, we take a wider more holistic view of what collaborative economy might look in social and economic life in tourism settings. Our focus is deliberately broad in order to capture perspectives, ideas and intersections between “collaboration” and “economy” and “tourism”. For the editors and authors, the collaborative economy is a theoretical, conceptual and practical playground where we “play” with different ways of seeing, understanding and engaging with the collaborative economy and tourism. In the process we also encourage readers to play with the ideas and understandings that unfold, reflecting back to their own disciplinary framings, theoretical preferences and practical experiences. As a caveat, we do not claim that the following chapters provide a comprehensive analysis. Rather, their role is to prompt us to think critically and creatively about the collaborative economy so that we can crystallise these insights with our own experiences and understandings to develop a deeper appreciation of its problems and potentials.

2 What Is the Collaborative Economy?

Defining the collaborative economy is a much more slippery and elusive task than readers first imagine. The most commonly cited definition is that of Botsman (2013) who defines it as:

...an economy built on distributed networks of connected individuals and communities versus centralized institutions, transforming how we can produce, consume, finance, and learn.

But as discussed in a critical evaluation of definitions and key concepts in Gyimóthy and Dredge (2017), definitions of the collaborative economy have come under increasing scrutiny. Scholars and practitioners, anchored in different disciplinary perspectives and interests, have offered different definitions and terminologies and have attempted to categorise it in various ways and for their own purposes. Not surprisingly, there is a mounting number of definitions that emphasise various aspects of the collaborative economy including innovation and market growth; disruption to business chains; the ethical characteristics of the sharing transaction; or its contribution to economic transformation.

We see the challenge of defining the collaborative economy as something of a moving target. On one hand, the characteristics of the collaborative economy are on the move as new innovations emerge, as disciplinary contributions highlight various attributes of exchange, and as the consequences and implications become more apparent. On the other hand, for governments to understand and develop their positions, to undertake analysis, and to respond with considered policies, definitions are important. To this end, the European Commission (2016) has developed a definition that offers characteristics and dimensions that may be operationalised in research and policy:

...the term “collaborative economy” refers to business models where activities are facilitated by collaborative platforms that create an open marketplace for the temporary usage of goods or services often provided by private individuals. The collaborative economy involves three categories of actors: (i) service providers who share assets, resources, time and/or skills—these can be private individuals offering services on an occasional basis (‘peers’) or service providers acting in their professional capacity (‘professional services providers’); (ii) users of these; and (iii) intermediaries that connect—via an online platform—providers with users and that facilitate transactions between them (‘collaborative platforms’). Collaborative economy transactions generally do not involve a change of ownership and can be carried out for profit or not-for-profit.

While we see value in various attempts to define the collaborative economy for specific purposes, we are cautious that any attempt to offer a decisive definition will create boundaries around how authors engage with the two key words: “collaborative” and “economy”. We conceptualise the collaborative economy as a much wider phenomenon, it has a much longer history, and it includes a variety of collaborative transactions that extend well beyond the current focus on digital platforms, monetised transactions and the disruption currently caused by particular models. In our excavations of the collaborative economy and tourism, we see the collaborative economy as including, but not limited to, the digital collaborative economy. We include a range of different types of collaborative transactions (e.g. social transactions, monetised and non-monetised transactions, ethical transactions based on moral responsibility, etc.), and we embrace different models ranging from extractive for-profit models to commons or generative models (Kostakis & Bauwens, 2014; Scholz, 2014).

Our commitment to adopting this wider interpretation is based on our belief that a narrow definition could limit a fuller understanding of what the collaborative economy in tourism might be and how it impacts economic, social and political life.

So, for our own purposes in the development of this book, we have deliberately sought not to define the collaborative economy in a clear-cut manner in these early stages, but to inductively return to this challenge in the concluding chapter.

3 Approach and Scope

The approach taken in each of the following chapters varies, however there are some common threads. In this volume, we have sought to encourage multi/trans/postdisciplinary approaches to explorations of the collaborative economy in tourism. While the disciplinary backgrounds and preferences of chapter authors have influenced their engagement with the subject matter, the hard and dirty work of translating, synthesising and making sense of the world of collaborative economy also comes with the challenge of recognising how one's own perspective and voice gets interwoven into the text (Anderson-Gough & Hoskins, 2005). To this end, authors have drawn upon and woven together different disciplinary influences and have used different methods of data collection and analysis.

In keeping with this approach, we have also asked the authors to adopt a critical stance. This criticality takes different forms. Some authors have been inspired by radical and Marxist interpretations and have been critical to the power relations, silenced voices and injustices that characterise aspects of the collaborative economy; they have sought to highlight the impacts of collaborative economy on class/labour relations; and they have excavated the manner in which collaborative economy capitalism has contributed (or not) to the redistribution of assets and wealth from the commons to private interests. Others have taken on a different approach to criticality, placing emphasis on the process of translating their data into stories and to the articulation of their perspectives and to those of others. In doing so, they have tuned in to the logocentricism of their own writing and positionality and have tried to balance this with respect for the voices of others (Fuller & Kitchin, 2004).

We have encouraged the investigation and interpretation of values, and how those values are transformed into decisions and actions in the collaborative economy. This direction has inspired a variety of quantitative and qualitative research approaches and methodologies, including surveys, descriptive statistical analysis, interviews and dialogic approaches, participant observation, reflective accounts and story-telling that have sought to question what is really going on. In addressing this challenge, we seek to examine the way that governments, industry and the public sphere can and are responding to the challenges presented by the collaborative economy and we discuss what these changes mean for the future of tourism as a set of social, economic, cultural, environmental and political practices. The collected volume thus becomes a varied account of collaborative economy and tourism and an ideal foundation for future research.

In setting out the broad aim, approach and scope in this way, our hope is that readers will start to appreciate the complexities of the collaborative economy and refrain from simply aligning it with Airbnb or Uber as the dominant market models. The collaborative economy is consistent with and symptomatic of broader meta-sociological trends including late modernism, post-structuralism, (post)globalisation and (post)neoliberalism. Understanding this broader context, and sharpening our theoretical as well as practical understandings of the collaborative economy, in its macro-micro interrelations, is essential for more informed and appropriate responses to the future challenges it presents.

4 Why Study the Collaborative Economy?

There are many reasons why greater focus should be given to researching the intersections of collaborative economy and tourism but three main reasons underpin the development of the approach and scope to this book. First, the collaborative economy has fuelled a range of disruptive innovations and understanding the nature and implications of this change is essential when contemplating the future of tourism. These disruptive innovations include *product innovations* that have, for example, increased the range and diversity of products and on-demand services available (e.g. guiding and personal services, health, recreation and leisure equipment sharing, etc.) that facilitate the delivery of customised services to mass markets (Owyang, Samuel, & Grenville, 2014; Rifkin, 2014). *Process innovations* have been unlocked by the matching of micro-producers and consumers via sharing mobile apps thereby cutting out intermediaries and improving cost efficiencies. *Management innovations* are demonstrated in, for example, online on-demand reservation and payment options that reduce friction in transactions and the need for and cost of labour (Stokes, Clarence, & Rinne, 2014). *Market innovations* can be found in the development of reputational mechanisms such as user feedback and ratings systems, which have been effectively used to build markets and customer loyalty (Belk, 2014). These innovations have wide-ranging effects, the consequences of which have not been fully explored, but are likely to have significant ramifications for the future of tourism.

Second, the collaborative economy has attracted significant media attention. It has been hotly debated and self-proclaimed experts are multiplying at an astonishing rate. Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015) have argued that this new and highly volatile space has become characterised by a large number of experts who have diagnosed the problem and applied their own lens to identify potential solutions. Asymmetries of information have emerged depending on the (self)interests of these experts. The scholarly voice has largely been missing from these debates. As editors, we believe that it is important to add scholarly analyses into these debates, to introduce alternative ways of problematising and analysing the issues and to deepen understandings.

Third, and related to the above, Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015) have identified a number of myths that have emerged and that require deeper and more balanced assessment including:

- That collaborative economy social technologies unlock hidden wealth.
- That the collaborative economy embraces openness, inclusivity and the commons; it reallocates wealth across the value chain, and it carries the seeds of a more fair, just and equal society.
- That the collaborative economy focuses on community lifestyle and living local movements, it is an antidote to the failures of capitalism, and it contributes to a moral turn in consumer decision-making.
- That the collaborative economy represents a free unfettered and more efficient market place where producers and consumers exchange goods and services and without the heavy-handed regulation.
- That the collaborative economy possesses the capacity to self-regulate and address market failures.

These myths are variously addressed by chapter authors and will be reflected upon in the conclusions.

5 Collaborative Economy Actors

The collaborative economy is characterised by a number of stakeholder groups that can be broadly divided into the following interdependent and overlapping groups described below (see Dredge et al., 2016). These groupings are not exclusive: actors may belong to more than one group and move between groups over time. Their interests may also converge or conflict depending on the social, economic, political and environmental factors at play. While these groupings are indicative, they are nevertheless useful in conceptualising the relational setting¹ of the collaborative economy.

Consumers Consumers are those that purchase and consume the goods and services offered in collaborative economy.

Providers Providers are a large and diverse group of stakeholders, motivated by a variety of reasons, who offer the use of their assets, resources, expertise, knowledge and labour to a collaborative network for their consumption. The resource, asset or service that providers offer may not necessarily be idle or spare, but may be a specific investment made for the purposes of offering it on a collaborative platform as an alternative business model.

¹To our knowledge there is no research examining the network characteristics of collaborative economy tourism accommodation stakeholders to date. The conceptualisation in this chapter will therefore be useful in future studies of this nature.

New Service Entrepreneurs New service entrepreneurs are often small and micro-business operators who provide goods and services that support the collaborative economy sector and in the process contribute to new ecologies of entrepreneurship and business opportunity. These may include, for example, meet and greet hospitality services, destination concierge services, cleaning services and key exchange services.

Local Residents and Community Local residents may be directly or indirectly impacted by the collaborative economy. These are, for example, the residents in neighbouring houses and apartments that must deal with local impacts (e.g. noise and nuisance caused by tourist behaviour, loss of community cohesion, impacts of community facilities, impacts on rental and property prices, etc.) of collaborative economy accommodation. This group of stakeholders may also take other roles from time to time, including Consumers and/or Providers.

Incumbent Operators Incumbent actors or industry operators are those traditional providers (e.g. hotels, taxi companies) that, as a result of the growth in the collaborative economy, face pressures such as increased competition, inequitable regulatory burdens, and traditional business models and supply chains are being challenged. These stakeholders include individual businesses, destination management organisations and other interest-based organisations (e.g. rental agencies, B&B associations, etc.).

Collaborative Economy Platforms or Networks Collaborative economy platforms take a variety of organisational forms. They may include both digital platforms and non-digital peer-to-peer networks, and may be extractive or commons-based.² Regardless of organisational form, collaborative economy platforms/networks add value by providing the context and forum for the transaction. This value adding may be in terms of administrative services, customer verification procedures, advertising and peer rating mechanisms.

Governments Supra-national agencies, national, regional and local governments have a role in protecting public interests, in facilitating innovation and societal

²The extractive collaborative economy is a model where approximately 15% of the value created is diverted to the platform company and its investors and 85% is earned by the provider. Extractive platforms do not invest back into the provider's asset, product or labour, earning criticism that they are merely extracting and redistributing wealth from the commons rather than generating sufficient new value for a host or community to thrive, be socially fair and sustainable. The commons collaborative economy is based on three broad social movements: (i) sustainable citizenship; (ii) fairness based around the creation and distribution of value that is shared; and (iii) the commons movement which embeds a commitment to open source and sharing for a vibrant society. The commons collaborative economy is more often a ground up initiative and any profit is invested back into the commons (Bauwens, 2005).

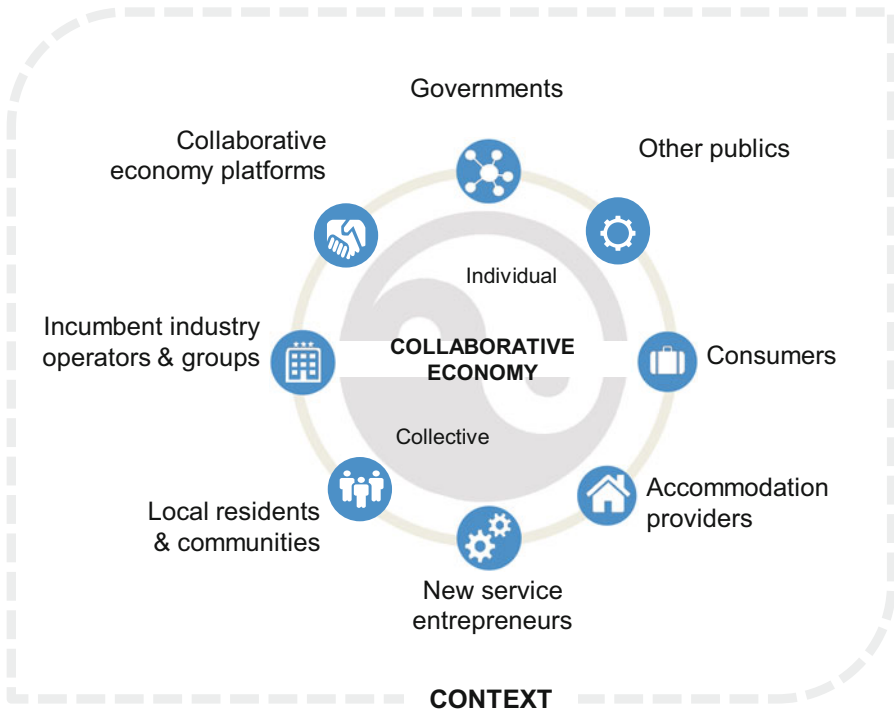


Fig. 1 Relational approach to studying the collaborative economy

interest. Roles and responsibilities vary, and government approaches are also influenced by institutional cultures and historical policy decisions.

Other Publics There are a range of other (future) stakeholders and interests that may not yet be apparent, whose voices may not yet have emerged, and these may vary from location to location. These interests may be important in the future, and for this reason, these stakeholders are acknowledged here in order to prompt policy makers and regulators to think beyond the immediate discussions taking place about regulating the collaborative economy.

Figure 1 shows a visual representation of this relational setting, raising attention to the context in which these relations play out. It also seeks to acknowledge both the individual dimensions (such as individual motivations, peer-to-peer transactions between individuals) and the collective dimensions (such as the formation of networks, tribes, platforms and the impacts on other publics) in the collaborative economy. The chapters that follow highlight the diverse relational characteristics of the collaborative economy at theoretical, pragmatic and contextualised levels.

6 Structure of this Book

Based on the above outline, our explorations of the collaborative economy and tourism can be loosely grouped into three major themes. Following this introduction, the first set of chapters engages in theoretical explorations of the collaborative economy and tourism. In the chapter “Definitions and Mapping the Landscape in the Collaborative Economy” (Gyimóthy & Dredge), the foundation is laid for the broad interpretation of the collaborative economy and tourism that we adopt in this book. In the chapter “Business Models of the Collaborative Economy”, Gyimóthy explores the diversity of collaborative economy business models helping to build a deeper appreciation for the various motivations underpinning collaborative transactions. Dredge (see “Responsibility and Care in the Collaborative Economy”) then examines moral responsibility in the collaborative economy and tourism arguing that we need to slow down the speed at which we move from problem identification to response and to nurture ethical decision-making that cares for the various interests at play. In the chapter “Sociology of the We-economy: Understanding Networked Cultures”, Gyimóthy takes as her starting point, the networked relations of the collaborative economy by examining the sociology of the “we-economy”. The final chapter in this section, “Politics, Policy and Regulatory Perspectives in the Collaborative Economy” (Dredge), examines the political landscape, the path dependencies created by previous industrial policy approaches, and the influence of neoliberal ideologies on policy and regulation in the collaborative economy.

In Part II, the second set of chapters explores the disruptions, innovations and transformations of the collaborative economy from a kaleidoscope of perspectives. In the chapter “Regulating Innovation in the Collaborative Economy: An Examination of Airbnb’s Early Legal Issues”, Guttentag captures the complexity of regulatory issues characterising the world’s largest accommodation sharing platform and lays out the challenges for both the company, regulators and incumbent industry actors. Shifting the focus to free walking tours, (see “Free Walking Tour Enterprises in Europe: An Evolutionary Economic Approach”), Leal Londoño and Medina explore free walking tours as a manifestation of collaborative economy in tourism, and they pay particular attention to way in which these companies are embedded in traditional capitalist models of tourism production and consumption. In the chapter “Airbnb: Turning the Collaborative Economy into a Collaborative Society”, O’Regan and Choe ask why critical questions are not being raised about the collaborative economy, and they explore what the authors consider to be an unbalanced, short-term and ahistorical rhetoric fostered by collaborative economy evangelists. Richards opens up a discussion of the collaborative economy and tourism from a geographical perspective in the chapter “Sharing the New Localities of Tourism”. In this chapter, the way that the collaborative economy is contributing to the co-creation of tourism spaces and contributing to the restructuring of tourist cities is examined. In the chapter “Working Life in the Collaborative Tourism Economy”, Megeed and Christensen explore how workers in the collaborative tourism economy craft meaning and identity in work and discuss transformations

in the established labor market induced by the collaborative economy. Day then draws our attention to the impact of the collaborative economy on destination management organisations (see “Collaborative Economy and Destination Marketing Organisations: A Systems Approach”) identifying key challenges for the future.

Part III examines the encounters and communities in collaborative economy and tourism. In the chapter “Embedding Social Values in Tourism Management: Community Currencies as Laboratories of Social Entrepreneurship?”, Cannas takes us to Sardinia. She explores the Sardex mutual credit system and its role and value in tourism. From Sardinia we travel to Iceland where Jóhannesson and Lund (see “Improvising Economy: Everyday Encounters and Tourism Consumption”) explore an improvised collaborative encounter in the Icelandic Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft. In the process they open up the notion of collaboration and how collaborative encounters affect the growth of tourism economies. Hardy (see “Community and Connection: Exploring the Outcomes of the Collaborative Economy Through Recreational Vehicle Use”) continues along these lines by exploring the tribal characteristics of collaborative encounters of RVerS drawing attention to the importance of non-monetised transactions in the collaborative economy. In “Collaborative Consumption in Tourism in Latin America: The Case of Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Columbia and Chile”, Clausen and Velázquez challenge our understanding of the collaborative economy in the Global North. They frame the collaborative economy as an extension of historical economic models in Latin America and argue that understandings of collaborative phenomena are currently limited by its framing in post-industrial societies. In the last chapter in this Part, Pesonen and Tussyadiah (see “Peer-to-Peer Accommodation: Drivers and User Profiles”) return to the digital collaborative economy, offering insights into the users and non-users of P2P accommodation services and how they differ from each other in terms of the personal and behavioural factors.

The insights and understandings of these chapters contribute to an unravelling of a collaborative economy landscape that extends well beyond the current and relatively narrow discussion of the digital collaborative economy and the dominant extractive models that we are familiar with. In the final chapter, (see “New Frontiers”), Dredge and Gyimóthy identify and confront these challenges offering insights into the myths previously identified and a research agenda for the future.

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