

Networked Cultures in the Collaborative Economy

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Abstract This chapter charts diverse approaches to conceptualising the cultures of connection characterising the collaborative economy. To decode the “we-economy”, we revisit classic notions of coexistence, collaboration and bonding in communities. Informed by a multidisciplinary review (touching upon human ecology, sociology, anthropology and cultural theory), the chapter identifies distinct theoretical frameworks to describe the constitution of communities and discusses their relevance to the collaborative economy. These frameworks explain the drivers of communitarian behaviour and resource circulation, and together open up for multidimensional interpretations of social exchange in the collaborative economy. The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the challenges of understanding the collaborative economy in tourism, particularly when discourses are dominated by a communitarian logic that overshadows the presence of other, and more pervasive, capitalist logics.

Keywords Communities • Networked cultures • Peer-to-peer networks • Collaborative economy • Tourism • Hybrid forms of exchange

1 Introduction

Before the Industrial Revolution, people tended to cluster in small towns and farming communities, where citizens built tight-knit relationships over the course of many years. In an economic system like that, where everybody knows everybody else, there’s a natural incentive to treat people well [...] On a broader level, the members of these small, homogeneous communities knew that their neighbours probably saw the world in the same way they did, holding the same morals and belief systems, which made it easier to conduct business with them. The sharing economy [...] suggests a return to pre-industrial society, when our relationships and identities—social capital, to use the lingo—mattered just as much as the financial capital we had to spend (Tanz, 2014).

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The quote above illustrates a prevailing and optimistic suggestion about the radical societal transformative power of the collaborative economy. It conveys the vision of a closely-knit (g)local society, emerging as an alternative to the alienated market economy, driven by greed, egocentrism and calculative rationalism. The village community is resurrected and upscaled, thanks to mediating infrastructures and algorithms with warranties of transparency and equality. Contemporary social networking platforms enable exchanges and interconnectedness among complete strangers by institutionalising trust using sophisticated digital technologies. The proponents of the collaborative economy frequently refer to the widespread success of global tourism entrepreneurial phenomena (Airbnb, EatWith, Lyft, HomeAway) to prove their point of the advent of a new era of digitally enabled intimacy between fellow human beings.

Indeed, the most compelling narrative about the sharing economy is the utopian *return* to the times in human history where people lived in egalitarian communities—a utopia that has actually never existed (Sparks, 2015). Peer-to-peer networks on the social web appropriate the metaphors of face-to-face communitarian constellations by stretching and infusing new meaning into terms such as sharing, collaboration and symbiotic relationships. We must therefore address the implications of adopting an unsubstantiated, ahistoric and essentialist notion of the community as the central analytical concept to understand collaborative phenomena. This chapter challenges this naïve framing by adding critical insights into the momentum of the collaborative economy. Using a sociology of markets perspective, it addresses the question: How has the collaborative economy achieved such broad appeal so rapidly, expanding along the discourse of a disruptive force that will change the world?

To make sense of the collaborative economy (often called the “we-conomy”), the chapter disentangles analytical endeavors focusing on how communities are constituted via their transactions. In order to decode new cultures of connection characterizing the collaborative economy, it charts diverse disciplinary approaches to communities and networked societies and related conceptions of human coexistence, collaboration and bonding. Four distinct theoretical frameworks are identified to explain exchanges in the collaborative economy. To qualify and contrast these frameworks, two themes are addressed in depth: the drivers of communitarian behavior (i.e. what is the “glue” that binds networked cultures together?) and the characteristics of resource circulation (i.e. how do people trade commodities?). The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the challenges of understanding the collaborative economy in tourism, particularly when discourses are dominated by a communitarian logic that overshadows the presence of other capitalist logics.

2 The Constitutive Logic of Communities

Since the eighteenth century, social scientists have attempted to theorise the character of human co-existence, addressing the question: why and how do people organise themselves into communities? Why do we engage in joint efforts, build collectives and share resources? How have communities evolved over time and across societies? How are digital technologies shaping and shaped by collective human activities? Human ecologists, economic sociologists, social anthropologists and cultural theorists put forward fundamentally different views on the constitutive logic of communities, each framed by an evolutionary take on their representative empirical contexts: human evolution as a part of complex adaptive systems, the maturation and diversification of market exchanges, the rise and decline of capitalist societies and the progress of consumer cultures.

As a consequence, there exists an ontological disparity within social sciences; communities are being depicted along entirely different tenets and structural metaphors. In Table 1, and as described below, four frameworks or perspectives

Table 1 Conceptual approaches to communities in the collaborative economy

	Ecological-substantivist logic	Utilitarian logic	Symbolic interactionist logic	Communitarian logic
Ethos	Functionalist: coordinated performance to sustain populations	Opportunist: optimising the benefits for the individual	Positional: semiotic negotiation of societal status	Altruistic: care and giving out of moral responsibility
Type of social connectedness and resource circulation	Socio-economic teamwork for the optimal use of scarce resources or idle assets	One-to-one barter transactions to maximise value in exchange, diversified brokers	Complex socio-cultural ties to trade and co-construct symbolic capital	Shared sociality (mutuality) and inclusive relations
Value of connectedness	Joint survival	Individual prosperity through alliances	Bonding for distinction, belonging to a community positions identity	Collaborative care Reciprocity to level out social inequalities
Value-making logic	Subsistence: to survive through more efficient collaboration	Extractive: to maximise profit per transaction	Meritocratic: status positioning among peers	Distributive: collaborative commons
Metaphors to describe structural characteristics	Flat/mesh (similar to ecosystems and computer networks)	Circuits of commerce (similar to value chains with diversified actors)	Communities of consumption (similar to tribal hierarchies)	Inclusive communities

are identified (the ecological-substantivist, the utilitarian, the communitarian and the symbolic-interactionist) to illustrate this diversity. Each provides concurrent explanations regarding the constitutive logic and the forms of human co-existence. Taken together, these perspectives offer notions that may strengthen a more nuanced theorisation of collaborative economy, including its communitarian ethos, models of social connectedness and diverse forms of value creation underlying the joint use of resources. Attempts to theorise the collaborative economy may therefore start with exploring how seemingly incompatible ideas about community dynamics can be intersected and converged to better understand hybrid forms of exchange and collaboration (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015).

2.1 The Substantivist Perspective: Community as Self-organising Ecosystem

Amos Henry Hawley's seminal work on *Human Ecology: A Theory of Community Structure* (1950) provides an ecological framework to analyse aggregating patterns in human populations. His argument is that people would band together in symbiotic relationships to adapt to their environment and optimise the use of scarce resources. Hunter-gatherer societies were organised along smaller units (a clan of related families), each playing functional roles in sustaining the community. Inequalities within the boundaries of the clan would be leveled out, where those who had more capacity than needed shared with those who had not. This interdependence has led to joint activities, such as the pooling and hierarchical redistribution of resources and knowledge, and subsequently laid the foundations of complex social institutions orchestrating and coordinating livelihoods. As communities expanded in size, exchange structures become more complex, leading to the stratification of society. Market capitalism brought about an asymmetric accumulation of individual wealth, culminating in unsustainable growth trajectories on a global level. Hence, resource effectiveness and the pooling of spare capacity among individuals became yet again a fundamental priority of sustainable societies and in the discourse of collaborative economy (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). Ridesharing, for instance, is a case of collaboration for sustaining a society through more efficient use of resources that has implications on both individual and collective levels. Commuters sharing a ride instead of driving separate vehicles are not only saving money and time each, but also reduce their environmental footprint by releasing less carbon-dioxide into the atmosphere.

The ecological-substantivist perspective defines the formation of human communities as coordinated performance to survive difficult conditions. It is perhaps more actual than ever, when contemporary societies are coping with economic and environmental pressures, and the depletion of Earth's resources necessitates effective teamwork for the subsistence of its over seven billion inhabitants. The functionalist ethos of optimal resource use and effective systems was

revitalised in early conceptualisations of the sharing economy. Benkler's (2004) notion of *commons-based peer production* and Botsman and Rogers' (2011) reclaiming of Felson and Spaeth's (1978) term *collaborative consumption* depicts communities as sociotechnical ecosystems. Resource scarcity and technological advances are identified as key drivers of emergent socio-economic systems enabling sharing on a broad geographical scale (Botsman, 2014; Lessig, 2008; Rifkin, 2000). Property regimes are being replaced by access regimes, where consumers are connected to suppliers through networks bypassing traditional intermediaries (Rifkin, 2000). In the past few years, digital network technologies have given life to vastly diverse CBPP-phenomena, ranging from crowdsourced software innovations to the swapping of homes and private accommodation. The rapid rise and scale of new peer production and exchange platforms provided Benkler with a plausible argument to conclude "social sharing and exchange is becoming a common modality of economic production" (Benkler, 2004, p. 278). In a similar vein, Lisa Gansky (2010) used a computer network analogy ("the mesh") to characterise the Sharing Society as a flat and fully interconnected digital global marketplace, enabling direct, on-demand interactions among individuals to optimise resource circulation.

There is a certain romanticisation about unmediated encounters within online communities that are collaborating for the greater good. As Sparks argues, discourses in the sharing economy reinstate the village and its neighbourly interactions, yet these invoked times never actually existed (Sparks, 2015, p. 30). Void of historical justification and context, the universal community is a hyperreal simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994), that is, a plausible projection of the past without any factual grounding in reality. Pre-industrial, feudal societies were not particularly egalitarian and peer-to-peer connectivity on a global scale was simply not possible before the rise of the social web and Internet technologies.

The sociotechnical ecosystem metaphors introduced above are built on a naïve understanding of interconnectedness without addressing the social dynamics as well as constraints of self-organizing systems among people. Equating human collaboration with production systems or with an interlocked mesh of computer networks distorts the notion of how people interact in groups. While computers are absolutely capable of negotiating ever-increasing quantities of digital data to find optimal and effective choices, the human mind has limited capacity to cope with complexity.

In 1992, Dunbar suggested that the size of the brain's neocortex imposes a limit to the number of stable interpersonal relationships people can handle. He conducted a series of experiments among human communities to establish the typical size of a social network, estimating a stable group size between 100 and 200 individuals (i.e. the Dunbar number). Dunbar's Number has been tested and validated in studies of online communities (Gonçalves, Perra, & Vespignani, 2011), confirming that our social and cognitive capabilities of maintaining social relations online do not increase with new technological affordances. Despite the possibility of being continuously connected with unlimited other individuals, online collaborative platforms do not automatically reproduce communities characterised by deep,

egalitarian and symbiotic social ties. The coordinated acquisition and distribution of goods and services among 50 peers or above necessitates a set of digital tools enabling sharing or exchanges on a larger scale. Socio-economic transactions are organised along intermediating algorithms, including modular search, connection, rating and review systems. Market mediated collaborative platforms list their best performing providers to facilitate consumer decisions, thereby obstructing the transparency of available offers. For instance, Airbnb search results always suggest available superhosts as first options. Rather than being flat and egalitarian, these constellations are organised along particular social hierarchies, coordinated by the commercial platform owner (the broker of online peer exchanges). This leads us to the second explanatory framework of networked communities, namely that of market exchanges and the problematisation of commercial brokerage.

2.2 The Utilitarian Perspective: Community as Market Exchange Platform

As argued above, communities in the sharing economy are complex constellations, which are being produced, regulated and connected within socio-economic systems termed “circuits of commerce” (Zelizer, 2010). The utilitarian perspective presents an alternative constitutive logic for communities, in which the “glue” binding human societies is framed through trade and transactions. The analogy of the pre-modern village prevails (Sparks, 2015), but this time collaboration between people becomes a means of economic progress and growth, rather than joint survival. The foundational myth of the sharing economy is thus also inspired by a neoclassic microeconomic ethos that has been around for over two centuries. Back then, the economist Adam Smith naturalised bartering (the most primitive version of market exchange) as a human trait: “There is certain propensity in human nature . . . the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” (Smith, 1776, p. 25). Market exchange denotes a transaction between two parts, when one part transfers the ownership of a commodity (or an intangible resource) to another part. The transfer of ownership is reciprocated by monetary or non-monetary compensation and hence conceptualised as a calculated and rational exchange, free of moral obligations transcending the transaction itself. The value of traded resources becomes marketised (as value-in-exchange), depending on their worth in a given transaction context framed by demand-supply configurations. Most collaborative platforms facilitating monetised exchanges follow the valuation practices of the market economy. For example, Airbnb’s or Uber’s prices are calculated based on the attractiveness and availability of a given ride or room at a specific time and location.

The utilitarian perspective adopts a marketplace analogy to understand human interactions, and implicitly suggests that there can be put a price tag on all aspects of human life. Derived from the tenets of social exchange theory (social

psychology), it is claimed that individuals are opportunistic in all social and economic transactions, attempting to optimise the benefits for themselves. The concepts of “rational man” and “reasoned action” have been the privileged departure point in consumer studies and economic analysis, also inspiring the egocentric notion of the extended self (Belk, 1988, 2013). This instrumental trading logic is also perceptible in Botsman and Rogers’ (2011, p. 73) analysis of emergent peer-to-peer sharing phenomena. Self-interest is identified as the main *raison d’être* for re/circulation of resources in the collaborative economy:

I lived in New York for 10 years, and I am a big fan of “Sex and the City.” Now I’d love to watch the first movie again as sort of a warm-up to the sequel coming out next week. So how easily could I swap our unwanted copy of “24” for a wanted copy of “Sex and the City?” Now you may have noticed there’s a new sector emerging called swap-trading. Now the easiest analogy for swap-trading is like an online dating service for all your unwanted media. What it does is use the Internet to create an infinite marketplace to match person A’s “haves” with person C’s “wants,” whatever they may be (Botsman, 2010).

Critics of the utilitarian perspective (Arnould & Rose, 2015; M.A.U.S.S., 1996) warn against making sense of human and social phenomena solely along a self-interested market discourse. Accordingly, this logic naturalises and prioritises egocentric motives and expectations of return in the analysis of peer-to-peer exchanges. As Arnould and Rose (2015) point out, utilitarianism not only reduces human life to economism and the rationality of markets, but also reproduces modernist dichotomies, which isolates market exchanges from gift giving, opportunism from altruism and generosity from self-interest. However, contemporary collaborative economy phenomena defy such clear-cut distinctions. For instance, the video testimonials of EatWith chefs (a dinnersharing platform) emphasise the gratifying experience of bringing people together and share the enjoyment of culinary delights:

[. . .] To get to see their faces and see their eyes light up when they take the first bite. . . . That’s just priceless. . . . that long mmmm-sound, that’s what I love. That’s what I cook for! (EatWith, 2014).

The gratification gained from guests’ compliments resonates well with Telfer’s (2000) notion of hospitableness, identifying it as a benevolent, compassionate action, driven by the desire for being with, pleasing and entertaining others. At the same time, EatWith hosts do get decent compensation for their efforts; hence, they represent both ulterior and altruistic motives. Collaborative phenomena, like dinnersharing, are partly governed by capitalist market logic and partly by social capital and collaborative values (Rifkin, 2015). In order to fully understand collaborative lifestyles and consumption, we must take note of cultural analytical approaches which consider utilitarian and altruistic perspectives simultaneously.

2.3 *The Symbolic-Interactionist Logic: Community as Ideological Kinship*

Arguably, the collaborative economy is not just a technological and economic phenomenon, but also an ideological manifest and movement characterising the cultural economy of the new millennium. As such, it can be understood using cultural approaches to societal analysis, being sensitive to the sociocultural context of consumption phenomena. Consumer culture theory (CCT) conceptualises the integration of consumers into communities and takes inspiration in tribal metaphors to describe their social hierarchy and organising principles (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Maffesoli, 1996). Inspired by the principles of distinction and social stratification put forward by Pierre Bourdieu, consumer culture theorists would argue that consumption is a self-defining act in which individuals position themselves by exploiting the symbolic meanings associated with commodities. In this view, goods, services, tourism destinations, and even private homes, are accessories used to fabricate a compelling story of the self and enhance status among peers. Staying at a private Airbnb accommodation instead of a hotel room signifies a reflexive and daring traveller identity in opposition to that of the mass tourist (searching for authentic encounters away from the “beaten track”). The symbolic-interactionist perspective suggests that the worth of commodities is defined through the value added during the act of consumption (value-in-use), and hence, dependent on the semiotic fabric of a given cultural context. Status-enhancing symbols and meanings follow the trends of fashion and thus incessantly negotiated in social interactions among individuals, subcultures, commercial actors and other social entities. In contemporary tourism, “going local” (i.e. tapping into the everyday life of a place visited) is one of the most enduring narratives, through which individuals construct their traveller identities.

Consumption and consumer goods are not only a tool to construct a distinct identity that sticks out from the mass, but also a way to signal belonging and identification with like-minded others. Seen from this lens, the constitutive logic of consumer communities is an ideological kinship of people sharing a passion for a commodity, brand, leisure activity or lifestyle. For instance, urban hipsters made fairtrade products, vintage clothing and organic food fashionable, establishing a new regime of conscious consumption through their everyday market choices. Consumer communities are constructed around the identities, relationships, signs, rituals and everyday practices of members (Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007) who may converge on physical events or virtual platforms to nurture and intensify social bonds. Contrasted to a conceptualisation of the community bound to a certain locality (as in the ecological and utilitarian logic), this perspective sees communities as virtual, footloose and networked across geographical space.

It is quite straightforward to deconstruct the ethos of “new” collaborative lifestyles promoted by Botsman and Rogers (2011) with the help of symbolic-interactionism. The “global sharing community” exhibits remarkable similarities with the so-called Californian ideology (Barbrook and Cameron, in Sparks, 2015),

driven by visions of an egalitarian ecotopia, well illustrated in Airbnb's community compact:

Airbnb is a people-to-people platform—of the people, by the people and for the people—that was created during the Great Recession to help people around the world use what is typically their greatest expense, their home, to generate supplemental income. Airbnb creates economic opportunity [...] at a time when economic inequality is a major challenge. Airbnb democratizes travel so anyone can belong anywhere. [...] Airbnb is home to good travelers and good neighbors who contribute to their communities (Airbnb, 2015).

The Californian ideology is a cultural hybrid of San Francisco's hipster bohemianism, passion and colourful individual expressions and the maverick spirit of Silicon Valley's new high-tech startups. When in 2014 Airbnb relaunched its brand manifesto with the polymorphous logo "Belo", it subtly appropriated the values and ideals of the Californian ideology as well as those of backpacker subcultures to demarcate the company's brand community. In a similar vein, The Compact in Paris (2015) and the 2016 Airbnb Open Hosting Festival in Los Angeles was an internal branding performance (or corporate domestication) to strengthen hosts' sense of attachment and commitment to the company: "*At Airbnb Open, we celebrate the spirit of belonging through which we care for our guests and embrace them as part of our family.*" It has been suggested that part of Airbnb's success lies in carefully crafted narrative strategies to recruit and maintain their hosts. Douglas Atkin, the Global Head of Community and Mobilization at Airbnb is the author of the book titled 'The Culting of Brands: Turn Your Customers Into True Believers' (Atkin, 2004), which analyses and relates the social dynamics of cult brand communities (Apple, Harley-Davidson) to those of real cults (Unification Church and the Hare Krishna movement). He pointed out that cult brands address and engage with their devotees by invoking community identification and loyalty. "It's easy to see the same kind of cult-like enthusiasm for Airbnb among its users, a kind of evangelism, a sense that they are taking an enlightened path and even helping to change the world" (Strong, n.d.).

The limits of the symbolic-interactionist perspective are related to the framing of collaborative phenomena as a *consumer* culture trend, opportunistically harnessed by venture capitalists. It equates the collaborative economy with a certain cluster of global platforms, connecting, driven and benefited by people with high cultural, digital and networking capital. It is capable of identifying contemporary narrative representations of the self or of analysing the situated value of symbolic transactions among members of consumer tribes, but it fails to provide a more holistic, socially grounded and generalised explanation of communitarian movements. This may be attributed to the fact that the symbolic-interactionist logic (similar to the utilitarian view) takes its point of departure in individual behaviour to explain larger social phenomena. We will now turn our attention to the communitarian logic, pinpointing the norm of generosity and inclusion as a driver of human coexistence.

2.4 *The Communitarian Logic: Community as a Solidaristic Cohesion*

The advent of free market economies and consolidating capitalist systems by the twentieth century has led to functionalist and meritocratic logic infusing all aspects of personal and social life. The consequences of individual interests, economic rationality and the spreading of utilitarianism greatly concerned modern sociologists. In particular, Emile Durkheim and his nephew, Marcel Mauss attempted to reinvoke social commitment (charity, solidarity and community care) to maintain social cohesion and long-term peaceful coexistence. In his seminal work *The Gift*, Mauss (1990 [1925]) conceptualised gift-exchanges as the social glue in society (Sleeboom-Faulkner, 2014), hence, defining the constitutive logic of communities along the pursuit of solidarity, reciprocity and congeniality.

The gift as a special form of moral exchange has been extensively discussed within anthropology and sociology (Mauss, 1990; Otnes & Beltramini, 1996; Sahlins, 1972). As already noted above, Marcel Mauss maintained that gift is central to maintain long-term social relationships “marked by the balance between generosity and obligation, self-interest and solidarity” (Sleeboom-Faulkner, 2014, p. 324), and as such, brings benefits to a larger group rather than between two individuals. Opposed to market exchanges, gift-giving is not a simple dyadic affair, with an ulterior motive of maximising benefits for the individual. Theories on gift-giving describe reciprocal relationships between giver and receiver, which are conditioned by mutual trust, intimacy or other types of proximities (e.g. kinship).

Mauss’ work is echoed in both early and recent analyses of moral economies as an emergent alternative to contemporary Western societal structures. For instance, Scott (1976) described the communitarian interests underlying peasant communities in Southeast Asia and contrasted them to capitalist societies thriving on self-interest. Later, proponents of post-capitalist social movements (Gibson-Graham, 2006), the moral economy (Bauman, 2003; Germann Molz, 2013; Gold, 2004) and the hybrid economy (Rifkin, 2015) envisioned new societal dynamics based on cooperation and generosity, involving a new type of generalised exchange, also referred as “mutuality” by Arnould and Rose (2015). The constitutive logic of communities in the communitarian perspective is pro-social, altruistic behaviour, where giving and caring is a moral imperative to maintain and reproduce a shared social vision (e.g. sustainability, social security and support). Market exchange and dyadic transactions are replaced by the distributive logic of collaborative commons, characterised by joint ownership, cooperative appropriation of resources and access-based consumption. Within collaborative commons, the sustainable limits to resource extraction are agreed upon by the community and surplus is reinvested or re-circulated among members.

The communitarian perspective suggests that patterns of social cohesion and kinship in small groups are also valid on a larger scale, and transferable to urban neighbourhoods or global virtual communities. However, a larger geographic scope will affect how members are related to each other, modifying the density, intensity

and proximity of personal relationships. It has been argued that social distance will have an influence on how we return a favour, so that people in closer relationships are more likely to act unselfishly than in remote ones (Sahlins, 1972). Consequently, the concept of reciprocity should be nuanced on three distinct levels. Generalised reciprocity or mutuality, understood as an altruistic act without expectations of direct return is typically observable among closely related individuals (*ibid.*). In contrast, relationships between strangers and distant individuals tend to be more opportunistic, where individuals benefit at the expense of others. Finally, balanced reciprocity denotes a direct exchange between equivalents. It can be argued that commercial collaborative economy models in tourism are designed to facilitate balanced reciprocity rather than generalised reciprocity. Platforms explicitly define the terms of transaction and exchange between the host and the guest, but there are no procedures for re-circulating the gains of individual transactions within the broader host community.

3 Towards a Hybrid Understanding of Networked Cultures

Networked cultures and communities are often highlighted as the backbone of the collaborative economy, engaging in new social practices transcending the boundaries of public and private spheres. In order to address this complexity, four perspectives were introduced above, each providing a distinct conceptualisation of communitarian ethos, dynamics and resource circulation. As single analytical approaches, their polarised interpretations may be partially inadequate to fully understand the collaborative economy, where social dynamics are equally characterised by substantivist, utilitarian, symbolic and communitarian logics. Economic sociologists (Granovetter, 1985; Polányi, 1968) were early to point out that all economic activities, including exchange are embedded in a non-economic context, such as cultural values, social relationships and moral concerns. This complicates the theorisation of resource circulation, which conceptually distinguishes between gift-giving, market exchange and sharing. The hybrid character of collaborative economy blurs such distinctions; the emerging forms of “sharing” and “pseudo-sharing” (Belk, 2014) cannot be understood independently of gift-giving and market exchanges.

In order to address the social embeddedness of collaborative economic phenomena, we must develop frameworks that are sensitive to capture overlapping motives behind resource pooling mechanisms (Fig. 1). These may entail pragmatic reasons (convenience and resource scarcity) suggested by the substantive-ecological perspective; symbolic statements related to identity construction (distinction and belonging) as well as communitarian imperatives (altruism and reciprocity), where giving is an act of shared sociality. Networked cultures in the collaborative economy governed simultaneously by these six motives, solicit analytical



Fig. 1 Hybrid motives of joint use of resources

frameworks from previously incompatible domains. These are: (1) models of economic systems (circuit, regime, networks and ties, transactions, relationships); (2) cultural and moral perspectives on human coexistence (negotiation, lifestyle, stewardship, pro-social behaviour, collaborative symbiosis) and; (3) ideas of efficiency and enhanced value creation (zero marginal costs, full interconnectedness, direct exchange, optimised capacity use, recirculation of idle resources). To qualify emergent social and communitarian practices in the collaborative economy, future studies must look into the intersections of these domains. Such an approach can problematise how utilitarian, eco-ethical and solidaristic ideals are balanced in market-community relationships on different geographical levels, and how are they negotiated and institutionalised in emergent disruptive business models.

4 Conclusion: The Red Herring of Sharing

The collaborative economy has been labeled as a disruptive force that will change the world (Walsh, 2011). The four perspectives introduced in this chapter offer an explanation for the rapid global diffusion and appeal of tourism and travel related collaborative businesses. Airbnb and other platforms harness the communitarian ideals of sustainable, eco-ethical and solidaristic co-existence, and emphasise

personal bonding and social cohesion instead monetised market exchanges. In this fuzzy context, the term “sharing” is a red herring (a misnomer) that has been misappropriated to occupy a market position by tapping into consumers’ need for caring, connection and communitarian values. Epitomised by neologisms such as “sharing economy”, “sharing platforms”, “sharewares” and so on, the term of sharing has been re-imagined and reinvigorated across different domains, denoting widely different social practices, some of which having actually very little to do with sharing.

Let us therefore revisit the notion of sharing and review its conceptualisation in the study of communities and networked cultures. Social anthropologists have long acknowledged the structuring role of sharing in social relationships and in societies at large. Since the rise of the social web, it has gained renewed interest by sociologists (Belk, 2007, 2014), linguists (John, 2013) and social anthropologists (Arnould & Rose, 2015). They all agree that the contemporary use of the term is fraught with ambiguity and complexity. In a recent etymological essay, John (2013) differentiates between no less than five contemporary meanings of sharing, including, among others; acts of distribution (e.g. sharing a box of chocolate), acts of communication (sharing experiences) and acts of participation. Jenny Kennedy (2015) explores the conceptual boundaries of sharing in relation to other social theories of exchange. Based on a synthesis of various streams of literature she suggests that there exist three distinct ontological perspectives on sharing (economic, distributive and social) when describing the practices of networked communities practice. Accordingly, sharing is simultaneously used to denote an economy driven by social capital (i.e. the sharing economy/collaborative economy), a mode of online resource distribution (i.e. sharing platforms) and a site of social intensification (symbolic exchanges and bonding among community members).

The return of authentic relationships with private hosts has a particular allure in contemporary tourism (Russo & Richards, 2016), where local cultures are commoditised, packaged and distributed by multinational tour operators. The disruptive impact of new tourism collaborative platforms can also be attributed to a skillful manipulation of the communitarian discourse, promoting sharing and belonging, while disguising the capitalist fundament of their business model (Slee, 2015). They position themselves in opposition to the incumbent industry (travel intermediaries and corporate hospitality chains), who are framed as uncaring opportunistic players that contribute to, rather than alleviate, socio-economic inequality across the world (Millard, 2016). As Strong (n.d.) notes: “The sharing economy has cleverly made established brands dangerously out of touch. If they do attempt to criticise the business model then they can appear like dinosaurs out of step with the hip new economy”.

Sharing is positioned as a “morally correct act”, transporting its rhetoric and positive associations to companies facilitating peer transactions against a fee. In the book, “What is yours is mine” Slee (2015) demonstrates how the ideals of community, generosity and participation are hijacked and twisted to scaffold extractive business models, for instance, that of Airbnb. Hosts are recruited through the company’s founding myth of some poor guys renting out their air beds to

supplement their income, while prospective guests are seduced by the illusion that their peer purchase will benefit locals. With slogans such as *Belong anywhere* or *Live like a local*; tourists are invited to take on the role of reflexive citizens and contribute to build strong communities and good neighbourhoods. In reality, Airbnb is a hyper capitalist venture, which does not redistribute the benefits from idle property rental among community members. Despite allegations of contributing to housing pressures and gentrification, the company is reluctant to take civic responsibility to deal with local problems arising from illegal rental and tax evasion in European cities hit by a tourism boom (Dredge, Gyimóthy, Birckbak, Jensen, & Madsen, 2016).

The collaborative economy in tourism is more than a circular marketplace allowing peers to trade physical commodities and private hospitality. It also reconfigures conventional actor constellations and respective roles previously assigned to local hosts, local governments, transient visitors and footloose global enterprises. Armed with professional lobbyists advocating for the cult of sharing, innovation and peer-to-peer trust, the new commercial platforms have been successful in persuading local decision makers to legalise them on favourable terms (Slee, 2015; 2016). They claim that their algorithmically enhanced business models are more effective to regulate their service providers, and the free market will ensure quality control more effectively than public administrations would do. As a result, analytical portrayals of the sharing economy tend to equal it with hyper-capitalist, extractive business models, and disregard communitarian models. Nonetheless, there is a vast number of small-scale initiatives (tool libraries, dinnersharing, toy and garment swaps) that are conceived around genuine sharing, serving the needs of a community rather than maximising revenue.

This chapter has explored the roots and dominance of the communitarian discourse in the collaborative economy, pointing out that present sharing phenomena are driven by multiple competing logics. In order to move beyond oversimplified and romanticised notions of collaboration, solidarity, sustainability and social responsibility, we need to break apart the sharing economy discourse and be more critical to the claims of its cult brands. Strong (n.d.) offers a pragmatic approach to distinguish between extractive and communitarian endeavors. This includes exploring the propagated cult philosophy and identifying potential inconsistencies between strategic communication and actual deeds. Special attention is required to monitor the organisations' ethical practices regarding worker's rights, health and safety, payment of taxes and recirculation of benefits.

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