Chapter 2
Not Only For-Profit, Sharing Solidarity and Promoting Opportunities. A Case Study in Rome

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Abstract This chapter explores the issues and limitations of sharing economy cases that reproduce social inequalities, focusing on the potential of "sharing in" practices, i.e., sharing based on forms of circular solidarity that produce social capital. The focus is on initiatives targeting low-income populations in resource-limited settings. In particular, food-sharing practices, which proliferated in response to the Covid-19 crisis, are a way of addressing the challenges of hunger and reducing food waste. Some of these initiatives develop from the bottom up, promoting cooperation, trust, and solidarity. In many cases, these practices are characterized by co-management, with end users actively participating in their organization. Digital platforms, in their role as mediators, are essential facilitators of sharing processes. Our study is thus positioned in the body of work using a base of the pyramid (BoP) approach and analyzes a mutual-aid project in Rome aimed at supporting poor people outside of for-profit logic. Our results suggest that projects based on a collaborative ecosystem, a social mission, and the poor's active involvement in the value production process can reshape the sharing economy's pathways, directing them toward a more sustainable and inclusive community-centered system.

Keywords Sharing economy · Opportunity · Solidarity · Cooperativism

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2.1   Introduction

Practices of producing and consuming goods and services have changed due to multiple developments, including the 2008 global socioeconomic crisis triggered by the decline of the financial and real estate markets, urbanization and the transition to the postindustrial production system, resource shortages, and employment imbalances. With the transformation of traditional production models, technological innovation, and greater public awareness of environmental issues, sharing economy practices have been fostered and spread. In short, sharing activities have impacted different social organization levels, affecting the economic, environmental, and value spheres. These practices permeate contemporary cities, supporting their development and helping to redefine their organizational principles.

The "sharing city" or "collaborative city" seeks to integrate into its urban agenda the advantages brought about by the sharing economy in different sectors: mobility, hospitality, work, and services. Given the diverse array of sharing initiatives, it is difficult and even unnecessary to formulate a rigid and univocal definition of the phenomenon (Bernardi, 2017; Codagnone et al., 2016). In general, sharing projects use digital platforms and Web 2.0 to make shared use of untapped or surplus tangible and intangible resources: goods, services, data, and skills (Qiu et al., 2021; Qureshi et al., 2021a, b, c). Botsman and Rogers (2010) describe the sharing economy as a subset of the collaborative economy in which unexploited economic, environmental, and social value (idling capacity) is reintroduced into the production system for more efficient use. The potential of sharing economy practices commonly lies in the way they enhance economic, environmental, and social sustainability. First of all, this new socioeconomic paradigm represents an innovative way of producing earnings and creating opportunities for positioning in the entrepreneurial system. Second, shifting the focus from ownership to access and from purchase to reuse offers a way to optimize resource use, reduce waste, and limit human activity's impact on the environment. Third, it fosters bottom-up innovation, community networks, and social capital (cf Bhatt, 2017; Pillai et al., 2021b). According to Schor (2017), sharing economy projects are characterized by a different interrelationship between marketplace orientation (for-profit or non-profit) and supplier type (peer to peer, P2P, or business to peer, B2P). Sharing practices, especially peer-based and non-profit ones operating in a market driven by logics of collaboration, equity, and sustainability, seem to offer an alternative to business-driven exchange in neoliberal capitalism (Rifkin, 2014). For these recent theories studying the relationship between economics and poverty, the "base of the pyramid" (BoP) concept represents an important theoretical reference point (cf Qureshi et al., 2018a). BoP arose as a market-based perspective according to which poverty stems from unmet needs and simultaneously constitutes a business opportunity for the private sector (Prahalad, 2004; London & Hart, 2010).

The conceptualization of this paradigm has contributed significantly to the academic debate by drawing attention to the largest and poorest socioeconomic stratum of the population (i.e., the BoP) (Bruton, 2010; Streb & Janse, 2017). At the same

time, it has proposed new managerial strategies that incorporate the most vulnerable segments of the population, considering the poor as potential consumers, co-producers, and innovators (Simanis & Hart, 2008). Prahalad and Hart (2002) hypothesize that multinational corporations (MNCs) could create new market opportunities precisely by involving the poor, offering better living conditions, and stimulating local entrepreneurship. The opportunity to invest at the "base of the pyramid" could not only reinvigorate developing countries, they suggest, but also give rise to a form of "inclusive capitalism" that offers benefits in terms of growth and profit, representing a tool for combatting poverty, marginality, and the consequences of today's increasing inequality.

Is this "a prodigious opportunity, then, or a difficult challenge?" (Prahalad, 2012)

As the authors clarify, it is probably both. Prahalad and Hart identify this model as generating different forms of innovation, such as "creating buying power, shaping aspirations, improving access, and tailoring local solutions." As they themselves acknowledge, however, this paradigm implies the existence of a local base of political support, shared aspirations, economic development connected to traditional values and local cultures, and innovation in business processes. Such processes are lengthy and complex.

The ambivalence that often characterizes sharing economy practices has also triggered a debate on how equally the benefits of this model can be distributed. On the one hand, solidarity, non-monetized, and reciprocity-based practices such as TimeBanks are examples of a sharing initiative. On the other hand, large companies such as Airbnb, Uber, and TaskRabbit that ensure high profits by relegating smaller sharers to the margins of the market are also part of the sharing economy.

This model's problematic elements lead us to interrogate theory and definition: what should be considered sharing economy?

Belk (2010) refers to *pseudo-sharing* or *sharing out* to describe initiatives lacking in community relations or mutuality. The author uses *sharing in* to identify real sharing, projects in which the participants incorporate others into their aggregate and extended self in such a way that produces social capital and community empowerment. Rifkin (2014) and Mason (2015) imagine a socioeconomic structure similar to the system based on Ostrom's (2006) common good theories, aimed at progressively asserting the *collaborative commons* as the dominant economic model. Due to the diversity of contexts and the plurality of actors involved, however, the sharing economy's outcomes are hard to pin down, and this ambiguity sets the stage for a debate on the opportunities and risks to be found in emerging theoretical paradigms.

The current health, economic, and social crisis caused by Covid-19 has highlighted new directions for sharing economy practices, revealing both emerging obstacles and opportunities. On the one hand, the field of sharing has slowed down and nearly come to a standstill, especially in specific strategic sectors such as tourism and catering. This situation has also triggered a crisis in dominant models of development and welfare. On the other hand, as Cellini (2020) points out, the conditions generated by the emergency have facilitated the spread of a host of practices, some directed toward alternative services (delivery) and others toward a paradigm of intense collective responsibility based on cooperation and mutual aid.

This chapter engages the latest literature on the "sharing economy" to present a qualitative study regarding the role and pervasiveness of sharing practices in Rome while also exploring the recent evolution of sharing practices during the ongoing pandemic. Our study focuses on the idea of *platform cooperativism* understood as the attempt to take sharing economy platforms that reject the capitalist model as the only commercial possibility and make them cooperative (Escobedo et al., 2021; Lampugnani, 2016; Mannan & Pek, 2021). Adopting Benkler's definition (2006) of sharing practices as a "non-reciprocal pro-social behaviour," we highlight the idea of sharing based not on ownership and the transfer of ownership, as in market transactions, but rather on the potential of so-called "sharing in" practices. By analyzing an interesting project in Rome, this study investigates the forms of integration and social cohesion that this model can trigger and how it can produce virtuous circuits that generate social capital, trust, and solidarity.

The main questions are as follows:

1. In a moment in which development is facing many challenges, what can the sharing economy learn, on a practical level, from a model of solidarity such as Nonna Roma's?
2. Can the sharing economy act as a catalyst for social change? How so?
3. Is it possible to build an alternative economy that generates better economic conditions, includes the most vulnerable members of society, and transforms them into agents of change?

The hypothesis highlighted in this study involves addressing poverty through an approach based on solidarity rather than charity (Streb & Janse, 2017). Such a move requires recognizing poor people and restoring their dignity and confidence. It presupposes shared responsibility, the creation of opportunities and, in particular, promoting solidarity so that all the actors involved are able to emancipate themselves from a situation of hardship and marginalization.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Base of the Pyramid

The base of the pyramid (BoP) refers to the four billion people living in conditions of poverty, earning less than 2 US dollars per capita per day (Prahalad & Hammond, 2002; Prahalad, 2004, 2012) in settings characterized by resource scarcity (Bhatt et al., 2019; Hota et al., 2019; London et al., 2014). Over the years, BoP has evolved from a predominantly economic perspective centered on the idea of "selling to the poor" (BoP 1.0) to become a more inclusive and purposeful model (Qureshi et al., 2021a, c). Although the theoretical concept of BoP has been developed mainly in relation to developing countries, the phenomenon it refers to can also be found in developed countries and Western metropolises, albeit with different contextual and historical-evolutionary characteristics. Advanced economies face increasing

poverty levels and disadvantaged conditions for low-income communities living on the margins of society.

The BoP concept was developed to describe the idea of disseminating business strategies among poor populations with the dual mission of creating economic value for the companies involved and generating social value for the target communities (Prahalad & Hammond, 2002). According to this logic, launching initiatives at the BoP can represent an opportunity for wealthy companies to increase their earnings and for poor people to aspire to prosperity by joining the market economy for the first time (Prahalad & Hart, 2002). In the literature on the topic, there are two prevailing approaches: "BoP as consumer" in which companies target the BoP segment as buyers for their products or services and "BoP as producer" in which companies involve low-income communities in the value chain as suppliers or employees (London, 2008; Iasevoli & Michelini, 2015). In the subsequent rethinking of this idea, called "BoP 2.0 strategy" or "second-generation BoP strategy" (Simanis & Hart, 2008), poor people are not merely the recipients of commercial services but instead active participants in the value creation process, innovated on the original BoP model by generating "mutual value" (cf Pandey et al., 2021; Parthiban et al., 2020, 2021).

The concept was transformed again with BoP 3.0, a paradigm involving more participatory governance structures based on the "wisdom of the crowd" (Cañeque & Hart 2015; Nerurkar, 2020). What began as a primarily economic theory quickly established itself as a field of study with a multidisciplinary appeal. BoP strategy has long been associated with business interventions but, as Dumalanède (2016) and Joncourt et al. (2019) point out, the concept could be extended to include the non-profit sector as well. If we adopt a different perspective, rejecting the assumption that governments and nongovernmental organizations are the only ones responsible for the population at the base of the pyramid, we can focus on cooperative logics involving a wide, diverse base of participants. One of the most exciting aspects of the "fortune at the bottom of the pyramid" approach is its ability to spotlight a "common cause" (Prahalad & Hart, 2002) around which the public, private, and civil society sectors can coordinate their actions more closely. In addition, populations at the BoP pose a crucial managerial challenge for wealthier companies: improving poor people lives while protecting the environment and ensuring profitability (ibid.). Anyone who sets out to directly intervene in this field, often through small-scale and locally delimited initiatives, is called on to rethink their aims and action logics (Kistruck et al., 2013). Deepa Prahalad (2019) highlights that the idea of BoP has thrown down the gauntlet in terms of fostering social innovation to create shared prosperity. However, the main idea emerging from BoP theories is that a new type of economy is possible, based on the coexistence of business and social benefits for the poor. As Prahalad (2004) argues, it is possible to eradicate "poverty through profits." This perspective framing the resource-deprived population as a vast new marketplace, a "giant laboratory" to forge business models and strategies, is connected to the critical discussion on global poverty governance. Building on BoP theories, Roy et al. (2016) suggest that market logics may be the piece of a larger "stubborn puzzle" representing the relationships between capitalism and

poverty. As the critical poverty studies' perspective reminds us, any analysis of strategies involving the BoP must confront this dangerous relationship.

2.2.2   The Sharing Turn: A Twofold Perspective Analysis

The "sharing turn," as the recent socioeconomic and environmental phenomenon of sharing economy has been defined,

> *has its roots in human nature and in cultural history, is media-technologically enabled* by networked computers *and is fueled by the rising anger over societal systems that fail to serve the public interest* (Grassmuck, 2012).

This model, which shifts the focus from ownership to use, from possession to access, and from the individual to the collectivity/community (Maggioni, 2017), was later expanded in its meaning to include social goals. The "economy of sharing" or "collaborative economy" comprises a wide range of interpretations and definitions, including diverse situations and some common features linked to the use of collaborative digital platforms (Bhatt et al., 2021; Escobedo et al., 2021; Mannan & Pek, 2021; Qiu et al., 2021).

On the one hand, the shared economy favors economic and entrepreneurial aspects, and its main characteristic is the ability to disintermediate the relationship between consumers, goods, and services. On the other hand, it also favors relational aspects, collaboration, and the production of meaning. The idea of market and enterprise is not only profit-driven; it also produces social innovation and manifests Ostrom's hypothesis (2006) that it is possible to create value by focusing on the management of common goods. As theorized by Botsman and Rogers (2010), the Nesta report (Stokes et al., 2014) collaborative governance defined as "new horizontal and participatory governance mechanisms, at the urban level or within companies" is a very relevant pillar of sharing economy's practices (Fondazione Unipolis, 2015).

However, the idea behind the sharing economy has not only disseminated a new idea for a better future; it has also appeared in all its dangerous deviations. Scholz (2017a) defines this as the "disruptive sharing economy." The phenomena often labeled as sharing economy, this critical voice suggests, are only one aspect of a new digital economic order, platform capitalism, built essentially on power. In this vision, platforms play a central role in setting game rules: they define, manage, and control business processes with harsh implications for work (Scholz, 2017b). There is a need to rethink, therefore, the process through which only a few actors are advantaged while many are "caught" in a system of exploitation. Rosellini (2017) points out that the sharing economy is not universally inclusive; rather, it often tends to cater mainly to the urban population. Perini (2013) identifies access to technology, the digital divide, low literacy levels, and cultural resistance as the main barriers to the growth of the sharing economy among the population at the BoP.

Some scholars have criticized the economic model of certain platforms, focusing on both their value-generating methods and their ownership structures. While workers

and users add economic value to the platform, a small circle of owners seize the resulting revenues without necessarily redistributing them (Qureshi et al., 2021a, b).

Such considerations form part of the ongoing debate about the relationship between sharing economy and inequality. There is no clear legislation regulating sharing phenomenon. This aspect represents a kind of trap, especially for some of the actors involved. Specifically, there is a risk of labor exploitation, precariousness, differential access at the expense of low-income communities and minorities, and unequal competitive leverage and capital accumulation by the leading platforms. The main point that emerges from this literature is a contradiction between traditional ideals of sharing and the currently dominant models. Prevailing models encourage the commodification of social capital (Baumgärtel, 2014), transforming individuals into "perpetual opportunists" (Morozov, 2016) in search of a way to connect with the global market. In light of these points, the sharing model needs to be revised in the direction of an "explicit policy of sharing" (Schor, 2014) guaranteed by regulatory instruments. It is not a matter of indulging in nostalgia for some rosy pre-technological past, but instead of rejecting a model in which people are companies, and sharing is privatized (Slee, 2017).

2.2.3   Sharing Economy at the Base of the Pyramid

Recent studies also explore the relative effectiveness of the sharing economy sector in offering opportunities for moving from the base of the pyramid upward. The mechanism of raising living standards by enhancing access rather than ownership could play a key role in overcoming development challenges for poor people. Hira and Reilly (2012) find that new forms of sharing can facilitate access to resources for populations that lack economic capacity and find themselves excluded from formal economies.

Digital collaborative solutions do not view the BoP as a "new market frontier"; rather, they build on the kinds of "self-help" and "solidarity" projects associated with the sharing economy that many communities have developed and tried out (Qureshi et al., 2021a, c). Such initiatives, often lying in the "nooks and crannies" of the dominant economy (Miller, 2010), foster values of pluralism, mutual support, and solidarity. The solidarity economy takes the form of an open-ended process spearheaded by communities attempting to "make the road by walking." In their study of food sharing in low-income, high-inequality neighborhoods, Loh and Agyeman (2019) suggest fostering a solidarity economy requires reforming neoliberal policies and institutions and building noncapitalist practices. This process implies a shift toward the kind of "transformational sharing" posited by Gorenflo (2015), a process in which power relations are reshaped, and greater attention is dedicated to community resources. The sharing economy has a significant potential to support sustainable development (Albinsson & Perera, 2012) and benefit populations at the BoP, but it is necessary to place individuals at the center of the model and avoid creating new inequalities. Rosellini (2017) argues that it is possible to maximize sharing economy's impact of the sharing economy in reducing poverty by

expanding its scope of application to include more essential resources such as food and health. This expansion would allow the sharing economy to better realize its potential to help the community's most vulnerable members. Sharing economy models such as Airbnb and Uber are not designed to meet the needs of the population at the BoP and instead tend to reproduce inequality.

Recent literature often examines the tangible reasons that lead consumers to share goods and physically services commercially. In contrast, our study focuses on the other side of services, that is, anything pertaining to the sphere of intangibility. We look at the role played by these tangible and intangible projects for sharing such services in a historical moment, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, when they have been rendered even more pressing and essential by today's challenging health, economic, and social conditions.

2.3   The Concept of Platform Cooperativism as a Social Way of Challenging the Crisis

Since Scholz (2016) coined the term platform cooperativism to refer to a possible new conception of platforms' role, this idea has garnered a great deal of support as a possible way of managing digital infrastructures and data democratically and collectively. Platform cooperativism indicates the move to reshape sharing economy technologies by combining them with models of peer collaboration (cf Bhatt et al., 2021; Escobedo et al., 2021; Mannan & Pek, 2021). In a cooperative enterprise, in fact, the key principles are those of shared ownership and democratic governance. Cooperating means sharing the tools to meet shared objectives: cooperation extends the concept of collaboration and, in a highly critical phase such as the current moment, offers the concrete possibility of providing new solutions to emerging needs (Venturi, 2020). The aim is to turn digital platforms into tools that connect individuals, removing intermediaries from the connection and focusing not on providing products or services but rather on fostering social relations and promoting the ever-scarcer resource of sociality and trust in others. The "platform cooperativism" model represents an alternative to the individualistic ethos underlying today's more widespread economy forms. Sandoval (2019) believes that platform cooperativism offers a concrete possibility for countering a system that only benefits the few; through this alternative model, she argues, we could promote solidarity and multi-stakeholder management, reformulating the concepts of innovation and efficiency with an eye to benefits for all.

Scholz's (2017a) model has resonated quite widely, triggering a broad global debate on the role cooperative platforms could play as an antidote for the perverse effects of capitalism, a way of promoting healthy sharing that does not reject the market and redefines the idea of sharing economy and technologies. However, the very idea of combining social activism with entrepreneurship has generated points of conflict and contradiction between the political and entrepreneurial spheres,

democracy and the market, and collective goods and commercialization (Sandoval, 2019).

Benkler's (2006) idea of "peer production based on common goods," for example, is not exempt from being appropriated by companies with commercial interests precisely because it is based on voluntary and therefore unpaid work. Given this risk, platform cooperativism thus emphasizes the need for employment conditions that ensure fair wages for workers and involve them in platform-building processes while also guaranteeing data transparency and legal protections (Scholz, 2017b).

Platform cooperativism aims to bring about social change, but it cannot always be defined as a non-profit movement. For instance, some platforms such as Resonate, a music streaming cooperative, seek to promote social change from inside a cooperative organization. As Sandoval (2019) critically notes, these platforms promote cooperation, solidarity, shared ownership, and democracy, thus challenging the individualizing and competitive logic of capitalism; at the same time, however, they also operate as commercial enterprises and are thus subject to competitive market pressures. Nevertheless, there are some areas in which platform cooperatives are evidently successful. As Scholz (2017a) has pointed out, these are areas in which community ideals and a cooperative attitude enable participants to construct a new vision, one focused on solidarity rather than profit. Such a cooperative model generates a digital economy that works to everyone's and, above all, creates shared values.

2.4   The Case Study Research Context

In a global context in which the virus continues to spread relentlessly, a growing number of people are experiencing severe economic difficulties. This phenomenon is pervasive in the metropolises and no longer concentrated only in peripheral areas. A full 9.4% of the Roman population was recently found to be unable to cover sudden expenses or housing-related costs[1] (Caritas, 2020).

The 2019 Caritas Report spoke of "poverty tightrope walkers," people frequently on the brink, liable to fall into a state of overt poverty only to then climb back out as soon as some small opportunity materializes. As stated in the Report, poverty in Rome had an "oscillating" character; with the recent significant increase in absolute poverty indexes, it has now become persistent. The tightrope walkers were the first victims of the Covid-19-caused crisis (Caritas, 2020): workers without regular contracts, freelancers, and precarious workers in construction, domestic work and personal care, tourism, and catering. Besides, the economic gap has been exacerbated by a cultural and technological gap in a complex moment in which structural poverty often coexists with cases of temporary social exclusion. One characteristic

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[1] Caritas Report data refer to BES 2020 Report of the Ministry of Economy and Finance published in July that describes a "dramatic change in the scenario of Italian life and the country's economic prospects" after Covid-19 (http://www.dt.mef.gov.it/modules/documenti_it/analisi_progammazi-one/documenti_programmatici/def_2020/DEF_2020_Allegato_BES.pdf).

of this context is that institutions have proven ineffective in meeting the needs of the population and, at times, unable to reach people suffering from exclusion. However, state institutions are flanked by a dense network of informal groups and associations that mobilize from below to support marginal communities. "There is a form of sharing that comes from below, from communities, and aims to respond to needs" (Mainieri, 2020), more and more frequently in concert with the third sector.

Despite being so similar in their purposes and organization, the sharing economy and third sector have long struggled to communicate. However, recent initiatives show that unprecedented alliances are springing up between these two worlds. The challenge of the third sector is to bring social elements and considerations into the sharing economy and to valorize the relational aspects of the sharing economic model (cf Hota et al., 2021). Mainieri (2020), founder of Collaboriamo.org and curator of Sharitaly, notes that platforms' collaborative services are currently making their way into various spaces throughout the country. In Rome, the association Retake coordinates its activities through digital platforms, but its focus is caring for collective urban resources with local residents' active involvement. This trend to develop sharing practices based on a mix of technological and human spheres, human relationships, and cooperation could bring about real innovation in this sector. Community is at the center of these projects and co-design is at the heart of their strategy. The third sector is wrestling with the question of how to (re)build societies beginning from trust, that ingredient so precious for solidarity and essential for civic sense.

The city of Rome is a veritable laboratory of social and urban experimentation and, since the first half of 2020, has hosted a proliferation of projects focused on sharing goods and community services. In particular, a series of initiatives have been developed in Rome in response to the Covid-19 social emergency. For instance, one such project began in Municipio III, an area in the northeast of the city with more than 200,000 inhabitants. A network of solidarity has been activated in this area to support poor, elderly, and disabled individuals and families who cannot leave their houses. In a short time, these initiatives spread over most of the city. "Terzo a Domicilio" is a "network for solidarity" set up by the groups Nonna Roma, Grande come una città, and Lab Puzzle and social centers Csa Astra and Brancaleone in response to the recent crisis. The project involves making home deliveries of food and medications to people in vulnerable neighborhoods. These groups organize local supermarkets, citizens, and hundreds of volunteers in practicing "Spesa sospesa."[2] Shortly after launching this initiative, they organize a counseling phone line and a virtual space called "solidarietà vince" (solidarity wins) to aid in exchanging information and enlarging the network of active participants.

Nonna Roma is a non-profit association founded in 2017 and based at the border between Centocelle and Quarticciolo. It is focused on combating poverty and

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[2] Suspended shopping. The initiative is inspired by the traditional Neapolitan social custom of "suspended coffee" that is, leaving an already-paid-for but not consumed (suspended) coffee on the bar of the coffee shop. In the case of food sharing, it consists in collecting food products from supermarkets, sorting them in dedicated centers, and delivering the packages to people's homes.

inequality and filling the gaps not currently met by social welfare services. During the initial emergency period, Nonna Roma represented a point of reference for other local associations. The group termed a "call to engagement"; it brought in hundreds of volunteers and active citizens as new members.

Taking inspiration from Pier Paolo Pasolini's film "Mamma Roma," the group seeks to act as a garrison of sociality, an opportunity for people to meet and become engaged around current problems by going wherever need manifests. The most common approach is to provide services at the homes of the most vulnerable categories, an approach defined as a "family first aid." Nonna Roma can be considered a "solidarity hub": supported by a more comprehensive, diverse network of social services-sector actors including Community of Sant'Egidio, Caritas, Baobab Experience, the Red Cross, and Italian Civil Protection, it has contributed to meeting the unmet needs of a population overlooked by local institutions. In keeping with a mutual-aid logic, the group runs a food bank that supplies 250 families a month, and, in collaboration with Casa Famiglia Pavoni, it distributes fruit and vegetables on a weekly basis. In addition, since the period of greatest need, Nonna Roma has been running its "suspended shopping" program with large local retailers' participation. The group has also organized a farmers' market project involving a network of growers donating fresh food. Finally, it has set up economic agreements with local companies to arrange for them to donate their goods or sell them for reduced prices. Since March 2020, Nonna Roma's food distribution service has delivered 10,263 crates, reached 9720 families, and helped 34,024 people. Among the families Nonna Roma serves, 554 receive structured aid in the form of a food crate once every month. Social services and the local network identify recipients, or they can sign themselves up for the service by telephone and e-mail or through social media.

The form of Nonna Roma's activism has changed over time: while its services were initially focused on users in absolute poverty since the pandemic erupted, it has extended support to the whole sphere of precarious employees and freelance workers whose earnings have plummeted. The "new poor" helped by Nonna Roma now include workers in sectors like tourism, catering, and entertainment, students who used to "round out" their income with odd jobs, and single-earner households. During the Covid crisis, activities have been organized according to self-management principles and on a local basis; participants have also divided themselves up into smaller, issue-specific workgroups to manage their various skills and interests more effectively. Nonna Roma's working methods and aims seem to converge toward a model of collaborative and cooperative sharing between producers and users that is based on the use of digital platforms as well as a physical site. The group's activities help construct a network among participating associations and encourage stable and long-lasting social ties.

In addition to its food bank, this association has set up a mutual-aid help desk that offers a counseling point, information, and social support services. To combat educational disadvantage, volunteers have set up a service called "suspended pencil" that collects and distributes school materials to students in collaboration with stationery shops, schools, and specialized stores. The educational support project

"Fuoriclasse" and the initiative "Device4all" help Nonna Roma provide IT devices for distance learning. The idea is to build an infrastructure around individuals and accompany them out of poverty, be it structural or temporary, in many cases involving users directly in the group's activities.

This project is characterized by cooperation among peers, a willingness to exchange mutual aid, the involvement of end users in the process, and a framework for circulating intangible resources such as time or skills. Eloa Montesel is one of the activists we interviewed who have put their experience at the service of the most fragile residents. She notes that "spreading solidarity is also a way to create community," thus becoming part of a circuit in which the principle of sharing becomes a driving force for development.

Nonna Roma has supported networking, the creation of synergies and collective practices to amplify the impact of this work. Community networks have been constructed by supporting, and sometimes replacing, local institutions. Simultaneously, the effervescent sense of civic engagement that animates these active citizens has also represented an opportunity for collaborating with the public sector through the initiative "Terzo Municipio mai soli" (Third Municipality never alone), launched by the city. This initiative has brought together voluntary associations in the work of distributing groceries to families in need.

2.5   Research Methodology

Our study aims to understand if and how the sharing economy can become a catalyst for social change and, at the same time, reflecting on and developing the concept of "at the base of the pyramid" on the basis of the possible outcomes of these theories.

To this end, we conducted qualitative research, understood as the result of "an iterative process involving both deduction and induction in which data, concepts and evidence are connected with one another" (Becker, 2017). Through a systematic review of the literature, we examined the theories and concepts characterizing the new economic models and the way they have evolved in light of recent events.

The first part of this study was carried out in relation to these theories and previous research and thus with empirical material. Our analysis of the existing literature and data collection was complemented by direct observation of solidarity practices in the city of Rome, relating in particular to the association's collection and distribution of food, medicine, and medical supplies. This research adopted the analytical approach proposed by Gadamer (2004), who claims that "a concept can only be fully understood by looking at a part in the context of the whole and the whole to the parts."

The research process was based on the main survey techniques in qualitative studies (Corbetta, 2003) using firsthand observation, secondary data, and participant observation, together with empirical analysis. The secondary data derived from recordings made in natural settings, documents, and artifacts were collected from a variety of sources: literature reviews, documents, materials collected from websites,

books, internal records, interviews, and international projects reports as well as academic institutional reviews and administrative documents. Such materials include, for example, the Caritas Report (2019, 2020) and BES Report (Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, 2020).

Participant observation was used in the moments dedicated to organizing work, involving volunteers, and presenting the association's work to the public, especially through meetings and public assemblies. As a result of the recent health emergency, the Nonna Roma organizers were obliged to make greater use of technological tools, and this shift allowed them to reach a very wide audience of participants interested in sharing their expertise for the cause. A segment of the documentary sources was from the web or social media platforms (journalistic articles and materials designed to explain the project), while another segment comprised interviews we carried out and meetings held in Rome. The second part of the research was focused on analyzing the case study, observing the ways solidarity and help projects were implemented in Rome, and evaluating their outcomes.

To gather information about the case study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with citizens or association members and experts involved in the digital sharing economy. The interviewees were informed about the research and provided the necessary information to contextualize it in relation to their activities. The method in-depth qualitative interviews following a semi-structured format allowed the aspects most relevant to our research questions to emerge from the individuals' social experiences. For example, "What are the value-based principles guiding the work of the organization's members?" "What drives individuals to the practice giving?" "What do volunteers receive in return?" Finally, "what is the 'idea of the city' underlying these activism initiatives?" This method proved useful not only to explore this field, reconstruct events, and reinforce our knowledge about the case study but also to delve into the intangible elements driving volunteers' motivations to form themselves into communities actively combatting poverty.

The association "Nonna Roma" was chosen as our case because of its characteristics, target, and objectives. Indeed, this organization models the components of an inclusive and sustainable sharing economy model, anchored in a context plagued by growing poverty and institutional weakness that has been further aggravated by the Covid-19 emergency.

This case study focused specifically on organization and communication methods. Nonna Roma uses to implement its projects, distribute goods and provide services, and manage its administrative procedures. We pay particular attention to methods of intermediation between supply and demand, and the way technologies are used to network with other associations and with municipal social services to deal with the current emergency.

The many sharing activities carried out by volunteer associations in Rome support economically disadvantaged people at risk of poverty and social exclusion; the associations also try to interact productively with governmental institutions, though this is sometimes challenging.

Nonna Roma, Grande come una città, Csa Astra, Brancaleone, and Lab Puzzle represent a part of the larger constellation of associations, organized in a network,

which acts horizontally and collaboratively to provide support to the economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized residents of Rome. Their bottom-up initiatives show the potential social value of relationships between the sharing economy and the third sector. The sharing economy may look to the third sector to find the drive for fostering a new culture of sharing. Following these hypotheses, this chapter explored in depth the trajectories of sharing economy projects positioned outside the usual accumulation models for the few. We traced the condition that allows the social value and innovative power of such initiatives to find expression. Finally, the relationship between sharing economy and bottom-up movements raised some considerations about the potential role of "sharing cities" in the integrated management of this phenomenon, to ensure sustainable and inclusive local development (Smorto, 2016). The final objective was to analyze the information provided by the interviews to develop a knowledge of the case sufficient to identify macro and micro areas of potential intervention in the area of the inclusive sharing economy.

The analysis is based on those practical aspects of social infrastructure that promote community, social network, solidarity, and the relationship between these elements and the local socio-institutional sphere. Contextualized as part of the body of literature using the BoP approach, this study included an analysis of solidarity-oriented practices and explored how they might help face development challenges. In the research process, the theoretical concept of "sharing in" (Belk, 2014) and the model of platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2016) constituted key supporting elements.

Platform cooperativism, in particular, may support sharing economy practices, but these initiatives only seem to produce added value when they are rooted in local areas. Moreover, it seems that a sustainable cooperativism model is most feasible when the support toward disadvantaged groups extends beyond material aid. Alongside food distribution, the associations such as Nonna Roma offer free services and legal protection to individuals and focus on issues such as access to education and entrepreneurial coaching: for example, by organizing recreational events designed to foster community empowerment. Therefore, successful projects should combine locally rooted practices with a principle of multidimensional, multilevel, and multi-stakeholder integration. In these associations, members often act outside of the institutional framework, using crowdfunding and sharing platforms in some cases to reintroduce resources into the system and involving end users in their activities. These practices are reminiscent of the digital cooperation platform model and collaborative economy principles (Martinelli & Tamascelli, 2019).

The final part highlighted the critical aspects of these economic theories and some hypotheses for rethinking economic models in the direction of mutual aid. The summary of the results and related discussion indicate new directions for future inquiry.

2.6   Findings

Nonna Roma is a non-profit organization that uses a collaborative sharing model designed to meet poor population's needs made more fragile by the Covid-19 socio-economic and health emergency. The organization has adopted an integrated and sustainable solution based on user participation in the development process. The project is an innovative example of resource circularity and food waste reduction that has grown and expanded during the lockdown. This initiative fosters new possibilities for the sharing economy model and asserts a paradigm of collective responsibility.

The case study displays some key elements that tie into the collaborative sharing model discussed in this chapter. These elements bring the association's activities in line with "sharing in" (Belk, 2014) and position them in opposition to the reproduction of inequalities; thus, they appear to be effective in meeting the needs of the population. Our analysis of the literature, observation of the case study, and empirical investigation suggest some points that are significant for the focus of this research:

- The relationship between the sharing economy and the third sector can be interpreted as the pursuit of a new culture of sharing with the qualities needed to foster a new "sharing turn," that is, to reposition the sharing economy model outside the logic of profit-for-the-few and help curb the process that "catches" many actors in a system of exploitation. As members and volunteers of Nonna Roma argue, "active engagement" on the part of civil society is a civic approach to managing poverty based on reciprocity and the idea of community. Through such engagement, the social world can enhance and bring to the fore the cooperative and inclusive aspects of the sharing economy model.
- Complementarity among the local dimension, territorial roots, and technologies come about when space represents a resource for social interaction (Simmel, 1908) and an opportunity for re-embedding and (re)building social bonds (Bianchi, 2019). In these cases, physical space is leveraged alongside the network, with Internet platforms serving as an essential tool for facilitating processes (cf Qureshi & Fang, 2011; Qureshi et al., 2018a). Technological innovation seems to be characterized by certain contradictions, rendering it both a potential catalyst for development and a dangerous trap at the local level. If we analyze the spatial distribution of digital interconnection, we find that it has the antithetical character of being "globally connected and disconnected locally, physically and socially" (Castells, 2000). In Nonna Roma, the copresence of spatial and technological conditions speaks to the need for social proximity in an era of physical distancing. The rapid way the association's initiatives have spread through much of the city of Rome demonstrates the power of the network's multiplier effect and the decentralized, widespread character of the project activities. Digital technologies vehiculate the internal organization of Nonna Roma, helping the organization locate resources, construct local networks, and reach people in difficulty. At the same time, the element of proximity proves indispensable when carrying

out their activities of "family first aid" in the local area, at people's homes, and in direct contact with local needs and stakeholders.

- The role of the "sharing city" in the process of integrated management of the phenomenon represents the key challenge for sustainable and inclusive development at the intersection of urban space and platforms. This concept of the city brings together technological-infrastructural, organizational, spatial, and human components. In this process, emphasizing on a "common cause" involving public, private, and civil society actors in a shared project can play a decisive role. At the same time, a participatory organizational structure that integrates recipients into the chain of production of collective well-being has the potential to address the challenges of sustainability. In light of our analysis, certain conditions – transversal, integrated, and mutually related – appear to enable the sharing economy's social value and its innovative potential to find expression.

- The first such condition is a collaborative ecosystem and cooperative logic whereby members and associations, organized in a network, act according to a horizontal, equal, and mutually supportive approach. The structure of Nonna Roma is decentralized and symmetrical, according to the interviewees, based on the concept of "self-managed solidarity from below," spontaneous mobilization on the part of volunteers, and cooperation among peers. The group's activities prove beneficial in large part, thanks to its interaction with a context made up of diverse actors such as associations, local logistics and transportation operators, small-scale producers, farmers' markets, and the food bank. Furthermore, the organization's intense relationship with social services is an example of experimenting with a principle of subsidiarity that can help institutions learn new ways of operating and adopt new organizational logics.

- The association's social mission drives its projects to support economically disadvantaged populations in danger of social marginalization. As evaluations of BoP strategies suggest, the pivotal factors in successfully meeting sustainability goals are the organization's mission and the concept of poverty it espouses. However, the crucial point is whether or not such organizations can create a genuine "social infrastructure" around the recipients of their support, the people they seek to gift with the tools for rebuilding their lives. The members of Nonna Roma are driven by specifically social motivations and consider solidarity a way of generating community by contributing to the personal and collective empowerment of excluded populations. In our opinion, these elements represent a virtuous model of active solidarity that could serve as a model and be transferred to other projects and settings.

- Involving poor people in the process of value production bolsters the group's work, creating new opportunities to establish social ties that feed individual and community empowerment. Such involvement is also an implicit principle in the model of platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2016); indeed, this model revolves around workers' and users' participation in a mechanism of co-government of collective goods (cf Nungsari & Chuah, 2021). This change is not only organizational; it is also social, based on community ideals in which encounters between people can generate shared values and benefits. Many people who use Nonna

Roma services make themselves available to "pass on the help they received" by offering their skills, from linguistic mediation at the "mutual-aid help desk" to unloading goods for food distribution.

The case study analysis did reveal some risks and weaknesses of bottom-up community-based solidarity practices, however. Since these projects are founded especially to compensate for the failings of state actors in a context of emergency response, the virtuous process might remain limited to welfarism unless it is supported by structural policies and long-term investments. Without a precise programmatic vision, the potential for innovation inherent in bottom-up practices cannot be fully realized. On the one hand, a sharing system like the one proposed by Nonna Roma can encourage the transition to a "social economy" by redefining the model's key principles; on the other hand, it can foster development opportunities among the poor in a context of scarce resources.

Nonna Roma is one of the multiple projects that have reshaped food distribution channels in response to the Covid-19 emergency. As Michelini et al. (2018) have shown, alternative ways of sharing food play a critical social role as a means of reducing waste and alleviating poverty; at the same time, however, they illustrate the persistent limits of a utilitarian drive to profit-making (*sharing for money*). Food sharing entails a complex combination of practices that are difficult to position in a clear conceptual framework (Davis et al., 2017). Nonetheless, an in-depth examination of several recent examples of food sharing in urban settings suggests some new and emerging hypotheses (cf Pillai et al., 2021a). In response to the current crisis, there has been a proliferation of new food donation, collection, and distribution services, including for instance the kind of "suspended shopping" project organized by Nonna Roma. These practices involve communities and transform citizens into active participants in the process of change. Furthermore, the technologically mediated sharing of food[3] may prove useful in tackling the challenges of hunger and food waste in general, "within and beyond cities" (Davis et al., 2017). Our case study shows that technologies support Nonna Roma's activities in different ways. The relationship between the organization and the digital world has some traits in common with the idea of platform cooperativism theorized by Scholz (2016). According to the author, "platform cooperativism" describes technological, cultural, political, and social changes (cf Bhatt, 2021). This model introducing alternative sets of values, Scholz continues, "is a rectangle of hope. It is not a concrete utopia; it is an emerging economy." However, this model likewise runs the risk of being co-opted by the same capitalist system it aims to combat. The idea is to employ the same technology instead of setting a cooperative and mutually beneficial business model. Cooperative platforms aim to use the people's Internet to bring about social change by replacing company-owned platforms with user-owned cooperatives (Sandoval,

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[3] For instance, the "Regusto" food-sharing platform allows local producers to donate their surplus or expiring goods and sell their merchandise at affordable prices. The same is true of other innovative projects such as Spesa Sospesa.org, a service that digitizes donations from citizens, municipalities, local non-profit organizations, and food companies.

2019). Such cooperatives "share value with the people who make them valuable" (Gansky, 2014).

This case study offers a critical perspective on the neoliberal economic and political trends that benefit business, undercut the workforce in an "ultra-free market" (Schor, 2017), and create anti-sustainable impacts (Curtis & Mont, 2020). Practices of sharing organized from below, based on mutual aid, horizontal participation, and continuous activity in disadvantaged areas, would seem to exemplify Belk's (2010, 2014) idea of "sharing in" with its core of circular solidarity generating social capital. As Agyeman et al. (2013) argued, the key to keeping sharing economies socially just is to emphasize shared urban space and collective and public forms of sharing, as well as adopting an explicit sharing policy. Finally, as Schor and Fitzmaurice (2015) stated, the sharing economy's growth can also be associated with people's desire to connect with others and humanize a market sector that has become dysfunctional and antisocial.

2.7   Discussion

Our study has addressed the sharing economy and this model's potential to catalyze social change, analyzing the implications emerging in fragile contexts. The "sharing in" paradigm (Belk, 2010) seems to be the most suitable for achieving this purpose and fostering genuine improvement in the population's living conditions. The study results suggest that sharing practices linked to a principle of solidarity help to reposition the values of sustainability that inspired its development at the center of the model. This seems particularly true in contexts of crisis such as the one striking all our societies since the beginning of the pandemic. We have also examined the organizational and managerial methods that would be most effective in guiding this change-oriented model and concluded that "platform cooperativism" (Scholz, 2016) could be particularly suited to enhancing collective well-being. The in-depth analysis of this case study has indicated some conditions that favor social transformation through the sharing economy in contexts of poverty (cf Qureshi et al., 2018b), namely, a collaborative ecosystem based on cooperative exchange, a social mission oriented toward the collective good, and the active involvement of poor people in the development process. Such conditions appear to encourage individuals to emancipate themselves from conditions of marginality by giving them the tangible and intangible tools to activate themselves in the economic and social context. This study also finds that relations between the sharing economy and the third sector can reinvigorate the sharing's model social component. Additionally, this case suggests that the coexistence of a local arena, socio-geographical roots, and the use of technological tools in a real union between the human and digital dimensions may represent a recipe for success (cf Qureshi et al., 2021a, b, c). Finally, we found that the broader and more complex paradigm of the "sharing city" offers new possibilities for integrated, inclusive, and sustainable development. Rome is an example of this trend: characterized by a fragile economic model and welfare system that is often

incapable of meeting many of the community's needs, it is also a city with a widespread solidarity network.

In this challenging emergency period, many associations committed to supporting people living in conditions of absolute invisibility have stepped to the fore. Working from the bottom up, they have developed sharing practices capable of promoting cooperation, trust, and solidarity. As in Nonna Roma, these initiatives are distinguished by co-management, with end users becoming active participants in the organization. Such community-based projects, which are becoming widespread in urban settings in response to the need to ensure adequate food and social support for the weakest sectors of the population, provide a good example of how dominant sharing practices can be redefined in contemporary cities.

The Nonna Roma example quickly spread and took root around the city of Rome, particularly in areas where pre-existing precarity was being exacerbated by the multidimensional array of issues generated by the virus.[4] However, these activities will need to be observed over time to see if they generate any local-scale externalities, negative effects on particular segments of the population or specific urban areas. Nonetheless, this ongoing initiative of urban experimentation could succeed in triggering a political-administrative challenge that will engender greater awareness of the social value of sharing.

In terms of positive effects, the sharing model changes the social order of the city and urban governance. The logic of horizontal solidarity imbuing Nonna Roma could stimulate interesting processes of social and institutional innovation. The kind of bottom-up community-based and collaborative management of excess resources modeled in the projects we have described offers an excellent chance to reflect on the issue of urban governance and how it might evolve to seize opportunities better and deal with the risks of the sharing model (Nestor Davidson & Infranca, 2016; Alvisi et al., 2019).

The "sharing cities" idea evokes not only the various manifestations of the sharing economy but also new ways of imagining urban policies of cooperation from below. These projects, raising issues of equality, justice, and social inclusion, involve activating the community in terms of civic engagement and, more broadly, shifting the priorities of the prevailing development model.

As for the BoP paradigm, although it proposes a valid and desirable model for addressing global poverty and inequality, it does not yet seem to offer much in the way of concrete solutions. Rather, the focus is predominantly on the way businesses are done (Streb & Janse, 2017). There are numerous studies on the topic and successful projects oriented along these lines, but there has yet to be concrete evidence of the model's effectiveness outside of individual success stories (ibid.). Nestlé Pakistan, for example, engages the poor by empowering them as consumers and producers. Several successful initiatives have shown that poor people need to be granted value in the marketplace in such a way that goes beyond simple profit-making strategies by private individuals (Hall et al., 2012; London & Anupindi,

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[4] Nonna Roma. (2020). *Sostieni Nonna Roma*. https://nonnaroma.it/dona. Accessed 20 Dec 2020.

2010). With these criteria in mind, we can reflect on the concepts of trust, responsibility, and involvement between businesses and the BoP community, factors that give rise to co-creation and co-development solutions with some potential for success (Maritz et al., 2013). Moreover, although studies recommend creating alliances with poor people or researching them as a population, in reality such studies rarely address their needs and almost never their aspirations. The BoP concept is mainly directed at the economic arena, although it does seem to hold the potential for interesting future developments in the social arena as well. The most interesting theoretical aspect is that the poor are positioned at the center of the process. No longer seen as victims, in this vision the poor in contemporary societies are recognized as subjects capable of participating in the development process (Thomas, 2015). This idea represents a shift from a paternalistic approach to empowerment (Gordon & Awad, 2008) in marketing services and practices that require development and innovation.

However, there are still some doubts and uncertainties about how these visions might be implemented. How can this social transformation be brought about without running the risk of establishing exploitative relationships? How can we act in different contexts with interventions that meet these individuals' actual needs?

Some authors have proposed that emerging economic theories should be reworked by recognizing the cooperative dimension's value to contrast the dystopia of profit-oriented corporate platforms and revisit certain analytical interpretation frameworks that seem to have become entrenched. In the most recent literature, some critical voices (Hall et al., 2012) note that BoP studies on resource-poor contexts have focused on entrepreneurship as the optimal solution for ensuring inclusive growth and local innovation. They have often neglected the social impact this type of action has in poor communities. A vision that does not look beyond economic data can generate devastating effects, such as encouraging crime and social exclusion. Although policies that address both economic and social perspectives may be less economically rewarding, they are often more effective in fostering fruitful entrepreneurial outcomes (Hall et al., 2012). To paraphrase Beck (2016), decision-makers would do well to consider not only "the negative side effects of goods, but the positive side effects of evils." They have to tackle growing social and economic inequalities by supporting sharing economy-type projects that have the power to engender trust and solidarity by generating opportunities and placing the idea of community at the core. Indeed, what it seems to be gaining ground in this period is a civil culture of responsibility built on a form of emancipation achieved by activating both public and private social groups and organizations, and reorganizing production to free it from the logic of deregulated profit.

2.8   Conclusion

Studying sharing economy projects aimed at supporting local populations in resource-poor contexts offers an opportunity to reflect on and potentially rethink today's dominant development models, especially in light of current events. These

models, often based solely on profit-making, give rise to policies that neglect the social, human, and environmental costs implementing and relegating fragile populations to a dimension of invisibility. The analysis of a case in the city of Rome has identified some of the conditions under which the social value of sharing economy practices can be unlocked and disseminated. Such projects, based on a collaborative ecosystem, social mission, and active involvement of the poor in the value production process, could realign the sharing economy trajectory in the direction of a more sustainable and inclusive community-based system. In this process, the use of new technologies and the cooperative platform model have the potential to serve as drivers of development. As this case study shows, digital platforms and Web 2.0 can be useful tools for amplifying the virtuous effects of sharing practices in a context in which physical space continues to represent an essential resource for social interaction (Qureshi et al., 2021a, c). The sharing economy model may be most effective when an alliance between the technological and human components and urban policies is designed clearly.

As Pope Francis emphasized in presenting the "Economy of Francesco," the world urgently needs a different economic narrative that goes beyond the logic of a profit-only economy. According to Francis, we must "give voice and dignity to the poor and the excluded, allowing the poor to participate in our meetings and discussions" overcoming the logic of "welfarism" alone.[5] The goal is to create an inclusive economy that promotes social justice and brings "people back to the center."

Such a vision of a new economy requires, in the words of Francis, urgent work "to launch processes, chart paths, broaden horizons, [and] create belonging." The call of the Pope marks the beginning of "a necessary and urgent trajectory and collective engagement by all," beyond philanthropy and charity, toward the common good and solidarity.

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