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Planning for non-profit sharing

A case study of Gothenburg and Umeå, Sweden

FELIX SCHULZ

PLANNING FOR NON-PROFIT SHARING

A CASE STUDY OF GOTHENBURG AND UMEÅ, SWEDEN

ABSTRACT

The prevailing capitalist and growth-driven economic system has led to an increase in inequality, resource consumption, and environmental pressure on the earth's vital support systems. Cities face a number of sustainability challenges, and in view of overconsumption in affluent societies, particularly in the Global North, the question arises how alternative approaches can be implemented at the local level. The "sharing economy" is considered as having the potential to open a "new pathway to sustainability". To unfold the alleged sustainability potential of the sharing economy, the focus should be on non-profit sharing initiatives rather than for-profit sharing companies. This study analyses different modes of governance applied by local authorities in steering non-profit sharing initiatives, highlights the challenges local authorities face, and draws attention to more general conflicts of interest in developing the non-profit sharing economy. A comparative case study of Gothenburg and Umeå, Sweden, is conducted using qualitative research methods. The results show that some modes of governance applied by local authorities in steering non-profit sharing initiatives are more prominent than others. It becomes clear that the municipal involvement in the non-profit sharing economy as investor and host depends largely on the political will. The challenges for local authorities in developing the non-profit sharing economy are quite diverse, ranging from lack of political support to legal aspects, organisation of administration, local conditions, and structural problems. A conflict of interest between a for-profit and non-profit orientation in the sharing economy becomes evident.

Key words: sustainable consumption, sharing economy, sharing cities, non-profit sharing, urban planning, governance

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Name: Felix Schulz

Supervisor: Ola Persson

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KTH Royal Institute of Technology, School of Architecture and the Built Environment

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“As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it”
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Citadelle, 1948

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a major global challenge for humankind and other species. In the Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels scientists point out that unprecedented and urgent action is needed to avert climate change (IPCC, 2018). Despite the urgent need for deep and rapid reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the global atmospheric CO₂ concentration continued to increase in recent years (Friedlingstein et al., 2019; Global Monitoring Laboratory, 2020). The main causes of anthropogenic climate change are well-established and attributed to fossil fuel combustion and land use change (IPCC, 2013). In other words, the level of consumption and production is a primary driver of the GHG emissions (Alfredsson et al., 2018).

Overconsumption in affluent societies in the Global North can be considered from a social justice and sustainability perspective. Wiedmann et al. (2020: 1) claim that “consumption of affluent households worldwide is by far the strongest determinant and the strongest accelerator of increases of global environmental and social impacts”. Addressing overconsumption in affluent societies is therefore considered as necessary and not just greening it, because the level of consumption determines total impacts (Wiedmann et al., 2020). On the one hand, the prevailing capitalist and growth-driven economic system has increased affluence in the Global North, but on the other hand it has led to an enormous increase in inequality, resource consumption, and environmental pressure on the earth’s vital support systems (Wiedmann et al., 2020). For example, biodiversity loss is accelerating, environmental degradation and pollution are increasing, and social inequality is intensifying, amplifying vulnerability to climate change (Rockström et al., 2009; IPCC, 2018). Therefore, it is considered necessary that “we place on the global agenda the imperative of transforming whole systems of consumption and production, including both their carbon and material intensity” (Alfredsson et al., 2018: 3).

In the face of an increasing urbanisation ¹ cities are central to the Agenda 2030 and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level, to the compliance with the Paris Agreement, and other global development agreements. The sustainability challenges in our cities are manifold and the question arises how alternative approaches can be implemented at the local level to address unsustainable consumption patterns.

In the public and academic discourse on strategies to dematerialise and decarbonise the economy, “access-based consumption” (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), “collaborative consumption” (Botsman and Rogers, 2011), and the “sharing economy” (Heinrichs, 2013) are suggested as promising

¹ Globally, more people live in urban areas than in rural areas, with 55 % of the world’s population dwelling in urban areas in 2018 (UN, 2019). It is further considered that most resource consumption takes place in cities, as they account for an estimated 60-80 % of global energy consumption, 75 % of carbon emissions, and 75 % of the world’s natural resources (UNEP, 2013: 103).

approaches to alleviate the ongoing ecological crises. The dominant approaches of increased efficiency and technological innovations to dematerialise and decarbonise the economy appear to be incremental steps in view of our diverse and complex sustainability challenges (Mont and Plepys, 2008). As such, the sharing economy² is considered as having the potential to open a “new pathway to sustainability” (Heinrichs, 2013: 228).

In the academic literature, the sharing economy is widely promoted as offering access over ownership (Martin, 2015) and by leveraging the idling capacity of goods, services, and spaces (Harmaala, 2015) in order to decrease overall consumption and subsequent resource use (Ala-Mantila et al., 2016). However, the sharing economy is not a panacea, as its sustainability impacts remain understudied, especially with regard to environmental and social rebound effects (Hobson and Lynch, 2016; Frenken, 2017). Criticism is mainly directed against for-profit sharing companies, such as Airbnb and Uber, for “sharewashing” (Kalamar, 2013), facilitating tax evasion (Baker, 2014), and circumventing regulations (Pasquale and Vaidhyathan, 2015). In addition, precarious working conditions in the sharing economy are denounced, such as the widespread practice of companies to classify workers as independent contractors (Standing, 2014), and an increasing neoliberal commodification of daily life is critically questioned (Henwood, 2015).

Despite these criticisms of business practices in the sharing economy, new technologies of peer-to-peer interaction have the potential to enable social movements that focus on genuine practices of sharing and collaboration in the production and consumption of goods, services, and spaces. According to Schor (2014), a fundamental prerequisite for this is the democratisation of ownership and governance of sharing initiatives. Non-profit sharing initiatives³ are typically collectively owned and pursue social and environmental goals, whereas the overriding business objective of for-profit sharing companies is usually profit maximisation (Hinton, 2020)⁴. In this study, non-profit sharing initiatives are considered as social movements that focus on genuine practices of sharing and collaboration. Moreover, non-profit sharing initiatives may contribute to a more sustainable development by transforming systems of consumption and production at the local level (McCormick et al., 2013; Frantzeskaki et al., 2016). In the words of McLaren and Agyeman (2018: 322): “The nature of urban space enables, and necessitates, sharing, and the more we share the more we can - at least in theory - enhance ‘just sustainabilities’ by decreasing inequalities, increasing social capital, and decreasing resource use”.

² Some authors use the terms “collaborative consumption” and “sharing economy” interchangeably (Curtis and Lehner, 2019: 4). “Collaborative consumption” and “sharing economy” are similar consumption practices. In this study, the term “sharing economy” is used for the sake of consistency.

³ Hinton and Maclurcan (2017) further differentiate between not-for-profit businesses, which pursue to be financially self-sufficient through trade, and traditional not-for-profit organisations, which rely mainly on philanthropy, grants, and donations. In general, what can be considered as not-for-profit is quite broad, ranging from “cooperatives [to] community interest companies, government-owned corporations, social businesses and social enterprises” (Hinton and Maclurcan, 2017: 152). In this study, the term “non-profit” is used instead of “not-for-profit” for the sake of consistency, although the terms are similar.

⁴ Hinton (2020) does not specifically address “sharing”, but her conceptualisation of ‘relationships-to-profit’ of companies and ‘not-for-profit types of business’ are useful for the differentiation between for-profit sharing companies and non-profit sharing initiatives.

Although the sharing economy is promoted by practitioners, industrial associations, policy-makers, and academics, additional efforts are needed in order to realise the supposed sustainability potential of alternative modes of consumption (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). Local governments *or* local authorities⁵ are in a powerful position to govern the sharing economy at the local level, for example, to encourage or discourage certain types of sharing (Agyeman et al., 2013; McLaren and Agyeman, 2015). Consequently, municipalities can play a key role in facilitating non-profit sharing. Some local authorities recognise the need to develop sharing infrastructure and facilitate sharing initiatives proactively (Hult and Bradley, 2017), while others do not take a position on sharing and therefore the potential of the sharing economy remains largely unnoticed by several local authorities (Zvolska et al., 2019). Moreover, local authorities have so far tended to focus on for-profit sharing companies rather than alternative forms of sharing that go beyond formal market exchange and are not driven by the economic logic of profit maximisation (Zvolska et al., 2019). The focus of this study is to investigate different modes of governance applied by local authorities in steering non-profit sharing initiatives.

1.1 PROBLEM FORMULATION

The development and maintenance of public infrastructures is a traditional responsibility of local authorities, but so far the focus has been mainly on the provision of public transport, shared technical infrastructure, systems for recycling, and community facilities for access to information e.g. public libraries – and less on providing physical infrastructures for shared access to tools and space for collaboration among people (Hult and Bradley, 2017). In addition, the focal point of the current debate on sustainable urban development is predominantly on facilitating people to adopt more environmentally friendly lifestyles in terms of housing and modes of transport; in contrast, people’s consumption of other material goods appears to be a subordinate topic (*see* e.g. studies on urban sustainability by Haas, 2012; Wheeler and Beatley, 2014). Moreover, an increasing number of attempts are being made to create commercial space in cities, but space for non-commercial functions⁶ remains rather limited. However, low-threshold⁷, open and non-commercial places for meetings, discussions, learning, and socialising are recognised as an important building block for a progressive urban society (Rauth and Laimer, 2019).

Urban spaces are pivotal for the development of the sharing economy, and thus it is not surprising that the term “Sharing City” has already been coined. McLaren and Agyeman’s book “Sharing Cities: A Case for Truly Smart and Sustainable Cities” (2015) received much attention beyond academic circles. In describing the “Sharing City” as major catalyst for sustainable development, the authors highlight the significance of creating sharing initiatives, policy, and infrastructure to

⁵ Some authors use the term “local government” (Zvolska et al., 2019), whereas others use the term “local authority” (Hult and Bradley, 2017) to describe the administration of a municipality in the context of governance and urban sharing practices. In this study, the term “local authority” is used for the sake of consistency.

⁶ Non-commercial functions refer to functions that cannot be exploited in monetary terms, such as youth centres.

⁷ Low-threshold refers to the characteristic of a service or offer which requires little effort from users to use it.

foster social justice. However, the idea of the “Sharing City” can be best understood as an umbrella concept, as Martin (2018) states, who criticises it for being stretched too far (as the examples provided range from Uber to the Occupy movement). Previous research on governance of the sharing economy focussed mainly on metropolises such as Seoul (Fedorenko, 2017), Berlin, London (Zvolska et al., 2019) or Amsterdam (Mont et al., 2019) and on the regulation of for-profit companies in the sharing economy, such as Uber and Airbnb (e.g. Miller, 2016; Thelen, 2018; Nieuwland and van Melik, 2020).

Some research on governance of the sharing economy in Sweden has already been conducted. For example, Hult and Bradley (2017) investigate the potential role of local authorities in developing physical infrastructure for sharing in Malmö. In 2017, a national programme called “Sharing Cities Sweden” was launched by Viable Cities⁸, with the objective to develop “world leading test-beds for the sharing economy in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Umeå” (Sharing Cities Sweden, 2017: 2). The programme is scientifically accompanied and evaluated. In this context, the publications “Mobile Lab on Sharing in Malmö” (Voytenko Palgan et al., 2019) and “Mobile Lab on Sharing in Gothenburg” (Voytenko Palgan et al., 2020) were issued, among others. Palm et al. (2019) explore different modes of governance in urban sharing practices in a comparative study of major Swedish cities. Besides that, some student degree theses address the governance of the sharing economy in Swedish cities in one way or another (e.g. Sulkakoski, 2018; Kramers, 2019; Enarsson, 2019). While Enarsson (2019) is the only one that specifically addresses non-profit initiatives, the focus is more on the capacity of grassroots movements to contribute to post-growth transformations than on different modes of governance applied by local authorities in steering non-profit sharing initiatives. All in all, it becomes clear that further research on how cities govern the sharing economy is necessary (Zvolska et al., 2019), particularly the governance of the non-profit sector is insufficiently researched so far (Frantzeskaki et al., 2016).

1.2 STUDY AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this study is to analyse the different modes of governance applied by local authorities in steering non-profit sharing initiatives, to highlight the challenges local authorities face, and to draw attention to more general conflicts of interest in developing the non-profit sharing economy (*see Chapter 2.1.2* for a further discussion on what non-profit sharing constitutes). In addition, this study aims to contribute to the discussion on how local authorities can facilitate non-profit sharing at the local level, and thus possibly contribute to more sustainable consumption in cities.

In view of the study aim, the following research questions guide this study:

- I. How are non-profit sharing initiatives governed by local authorities?
- II. What are the challenges for local authorities in developing the non-profit sharing economy?
- III. What are the conflicts of interest in developing the non-profit sharing economy?

⁸ Viable Cities is a Swedish strategic innovation programme for smart sustainable cities, which is jointly funded by the Swedish Innovation Agency (VINNOVA), the Swedish Energy Agency, and FORMAS (Sharing Cities Sweden, 2017).

A comparative study of Gothenburg and Umeå, Sweden, is conducted to investigate the research questions. The City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality are both part of the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme. These cities are characterised by distinct ways of governance and engagement with non-profit sharing initiatives. Gothenburg is known for hosting several non-profit sharing initiatives and has clearly stated in its environmental programmes the intention to facilitate sharing (Göteborgs Stad, 2018; Göteborgs Stad, 2020a), whereas Umeå is known as a university town in northern Sweden where local authorities started to participate more proactively in the sharing economy a few years ago (*see Chapter 3.3* for a further description of the case study). The consumption-based GHG emissions per person are relatively high in both the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality, amounting to 7.4 tonnes CO₂-equivalent (Larsson and Bolin, 2014) and 11.5 tonnes CO₂-equivalent (Axelsson et al., 2018) respectively ⁹, which are indications for unsustainable consumption patterns (Alfredsson et al., 2018).

1.3 DELIMITATIONS

The scope of this study is limited to Gothenburg and Umeå. It should be noted that Stockholm and Malmö are also part of the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme and thus potentially interesting case studies on developing non-profit sharing infrastructures in Sweden, but in view of the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) some of the planned data collection could not be carried out. The prescribed time frame for conducting this study is usually one regular study semester, and thus only two case studies are examined. For example, a planned study visit to Umeå was first postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent travel recommendations by the Public Health Agency of Sweden and finally cancelled. This made it more difficult to get into contact with suitable interviewees for this study in Umeå than in Gothenburg, where the initial contact was made personally in most cases (*see Chapter 3.1* for how these circumstances were dealt with). In addition, the validity of the results is context-specific to the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality at the time of data collection (*see Chapter 3.2* for further limitations regarding the validity and bias). This study only represents a part of ‘reality’ rather than gives a holistic view on how local authorities in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality govern non-profit sharing initiatives.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study is structured as follows. The underlying theoretical framework of this study is presented in *Chapter 2*. First, the concept of “sharing” and the sharing economy are thoroughly discussed,

⁹ The Swedish long-term goal is to reduce the total climate impact per person to one tonne CO₂-e/per person and year by 2050. In 2017, the consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions amounted to 8.87 tonnes CO₂-e per person in Sweden (Naturvårdsverket, 2020). The results of a study on consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions in Umeå municipality indicate that 11.47 tonnes CO₂-e were emitted per person in 2018 (Axelsson et al. 2018). Larsson and Bolin (2014) investigated in another study the consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions in the City of Gothenburg and the results indicate that 7.4 tonnes CO₂-e were emitted per person in 2010. However, the authors of this study add restrictively that this result is probably an underestimate. It should also be noted that different methods are used in the studies mentioned, and thus the comparability is limited.

particularly with regard to non-profit sharing. Second, an analytical framework for analysing the role of local authorities in developing the sharing economy is established based on Zvolska et al. (2019). In *Chapter 3*, the methodical procedure and the case study are described. The applied qualitative methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews, on-site observational research, and literature research. Qualitative content analysis was used to evaluate the data collected. Following this, the methodical procedure is critically reviewed. The case study comprises the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality, which are presented briefly, particularly with regard to the general conditions for sharing. *Chapter 4* provides an in-depth analysis of the case study with regard to the research questions. This is followed by a concluding discussion in *Chapter 5*.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this study. In the first part, the concept of the sharing economy is discussed in more detail. The various dimensions of the sharing economy are described, and for-profit and non-profit sharing models are distinguished from one another. Furthermore, the for-profit sharing economy is problematised and how non-profit sharing can be understood is further elaborated. In the second part, an urban governance model of the sharing economy is presented, which serves as analytical framework for the case study. In total, four different modes of government that local authorities may exercise are explained.

2.1 SHARING AND THE SHARING ECONOMY

The etymology of the term “sharing economy” is not entirely clear (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). However, some academics in the field of business and communication, such as Belk (2010) and John (2013), discuss the meaning of “sharing” in more detail. Belk (2010) conceptualises the nature of consumer sharing and distinguishes between sharing, gift giving, and commodity exchange. Already Price (1975: 3) has pointed out that sharing is “the most universal form of human economic behaviour, distinct from and more fundamental than reciprocity”. Similarly, Benkler (2004: 275) considers sharing as “non-reciprocal pro social behaviour”. Belk (2007: 127), meanwhile, defines sharing as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use as well as the act and process of receiving something from others for our use“. Although the lines between sharing, gift giving, and commodity exchange are vague, commodity exchange is usually reciprocal and gift giving involves transfer of ownership, which is not necessarily the case with sharing (Belk, 2010). John (2013) emphasises the different meaning of “sharing” depending on the context in which the term is used. Accordingly, sharing could mean to share 1.) as an act of division into parts, 2.) as an act of distribution, 3.) as a form of common ownership, 4.) as an act of communication, or 5.) as a form of emotional expression (John, 2013). The meaning of the term “sharing” has changed over time in the English language and presumably continues to do so, particularly with its frequent use on social media (Curtis and Lehner, 2019).

Considering “sharing” and “economy”, the words do not relate to each other in an obvious way. The term “sharing economy” is a neologism and emerged at the beginning of the 21st century (John, 2013). Although Benkler (2006) discusses sharing in the book “The Wealth of Networks”, the term “sharing economy” is not used. Following the work of Benkler, Lessig (2008) writes in a chapter of the book “Remix” specifically about the topic of “sharing economies”. However, the term “sharing economy” became known to a wider public with the publication of “What’s Mine is Yours” by Botsman and Rogers (2011) and the accompanying media attention that this book received (John, 2013).

Botsman and Rogers (2011: xv) consider sharing as a fundamental consumer behaviour that generally comprises “traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping,

redefined through technology and peer communities”. This definition is very broad and includes a wide range of different consumer practices. Nevertheless, it should be noted that sharing is nothing new in itself, as “sharing has probably been the most basic form of economic distribution in hominid societies for several hundred thousand years” (Price, 1975: 12). Furthermore, it is assumed that human beings have always shared both as tactic of survival and as expression of community (Belk, 2010). “Sharing is a phenomenon as old as humankind, while (...) the “sharing economy” [is a phenomenon] born of the Internet age” (Belk, 2014: 1595). Nowadays, sharing is becoming more attractive again, as traditional sharing is being reinvented and expanded by digital technologies (Botsman and Rogers, 2011).

The concept of the “sharing economy” has gained traction in academia and practice, but there are a number of definitions and the debate on what the “sharing economy” actually includes is ongoing (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). Moreover, “the academic discourse surrounding the sharing economy offers inconsistent conceptualisations of the phenomenon depending on the discipline and focus of research” (Curtis and Lehner, 2019: 2). This is, among others, due to the fact that the term “sharing economy” is a neologism, which comes along with semantic ambiguity. Quite generally, the sharing economy covers a wide range of different consumption practices and organisational models (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). The following definitions of the “sharing economy” (*see* Table 1) are only a sample that shows the diversity and differences in the types of activities attributed to the sharing economy.

Definitions of the “sharing economy” as ...

... “an economic activity in which web platforms facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges of diverse types of goods and services” (Aloni, 2016: 1398).

... “people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation“ (Belk, 2014: 1597).

... “traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping, redefined through technology and peer communities” (Botsman and Rogers, 2011: xv).

... “peer to peer sharing of access to under-utilised goods and services, which prioritizes utilization and accessibility over ownership, either for free or for a fee“ (Cheng, 2016: 111).

... “individuals exchanging, redistributing, renting, sharing, and donating information, goods, and talent, either organizing themselves or via commercial organization by social media platforms” (Heinrichs, 2013: 229).

... “consumers (or firms) granting each other temporary access to their under-utilised physical assets (“idle capacity”), possibly for money“ (Meelen and Frenken, 2015).

Table 1. Different definitions of the “sharing economy” from the literature.

To conclude, not least because of diverse activities, different organisational models, and various actors involved in the exchange of the sharing economy, authors describe the sharing economy as an umbrella term (Heinrichs, 2013).

2.1.1 DIMENSIONS OF THE SHARING ECONOMY

The sharing economy is widely understood as offering access over ownership (Martin, 2015). However, the dimensions of the sharing economy described in the academic literature are broader than this. Curtis and Lehner (2019) conducted a database search of academic articles on the sharing economy and synthesised its dimensions. The dimensions are of descriptive rather than normative nature. Curtis and Lehner (2019) consider the following dimensions to be helpful to define what constitutes the sharing economy: 1.) motivation, 2.) information and communication technology (ICT)-enabled, 3.) idling capacity, 4.) platform or organisational models, 5.) shared goods and services, and 6.) ownership.

In the literature, the dissemination of the sharing economy is attributed to the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-2008, growing social inequality, increased environmental awareness, proliferation of information and communications technology (ICT), and convenience, among others (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). Considering the ambiguous concept of the sharing economy, it is not surprising that authors ascribe differing *motivations* to actors engaged in the sharing economy. Economic motives are prevailing in the sharing economy, whereby a distinction is made between the perspective of users, providers, businesses, and the community (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). For example, providers see the sharing economy as a vehicle to generate an extra income (May et al., 2017). Some authors such as Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) argue that the sharing economy is increasingly a subject to an economic logic of profit maximisation rather than altruism. However, Bucher et al. (2016) conclude in another study that moral and social-hedonic motives have a greater influence on sharing attitudes than economic ones. Beyond the prevailing economic motives, users are socially and environmentally motivated to participate in the sharing economy. For example, users strive for a more meaningful social-ecological alternative to the traditional business-consumer paradigm (Tussyadiah, 2016). Last but not least, the sharing economy is largely supported on the basis of its alleged sustainability potential (Curtis and Lehner, 2019).

Although not generally valid, the sharing economy is widely described as being *ICT-enabled* (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). Sharing is not a new phenomenon, but the novelty of the sharing economy seems to lie in the use of technology to ease the mediation or exchange of goods and services between users and providers (Belk, 2014), as mentioned before. Curtis and Lehner (2019) found indications in the academic literature that the use of ICT enables the reduction of transaction costs associated with sharing among strangers by, for example, improving access to information, facilitating communication between providers and users, easier payments, enabling a reputation or review system, and increasing convenience. One should note, however, that sharing is not necessarily ICT-enabled, although many sharing initiatives use some form of technology (Curtis and Lehner, 2019).

The sharing economy is considered to leverage the excess, surplus, *or* underutilised capacity of idling goods, services, and spaces (Heinrichs, 2013). In defining the sharing economy, authors

commonly differentiate between “sharing” and other forms of consumption based on leveraging the *idling capacity* of goods, services, and spaces to facilitate access (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). The idling capacity is described as “the percentage of time the goods or services are being utilised” (Curtis and Lehner, 2019: 9). However, the extent of the idling capacity and its definition vary in the literature. Curtis and Lehner (2019) view idling capacity as the dimension most closely related with the sustainability potential of the sharing economy. “Leveraging the idling capacity of goods, in particular, increases the intensity of use leading to a reduction in the need to produce new goods” (Curtis and Lehner, 2019: 10), which supposedly reduces the total environmental impact associated with production and consumption.

Curtis and Lehner (2019) point out that the language used in scientific articles to describe the entity that facilitates sharing, which is commonly described as *platform or organisation*, is disputed. This is because the language used by authors “has implications [on] how the sharing economy is understood, implemented, and regulated” (Curtis and Lehner, 2019: 10). The platform models most widely discussed in the academic literature comprise business-to-consumer and peer-to-peer models. In a business-to-peer model, the platform or organisation mediates a two-sided market between businesses with idling assets and users, who in turn receive access to goods and services (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). This model can be understood as a “standard business-to-consumer dyad” (McArthur, 2015: 239). In contrast, the peer-to-peer model leverages ICT to mediate a two-sided *or* multi-sided market connecting peer providers to peer users. Curtis and Lehner (2019) also found business-to-business models within the academic literature, although discussed less frequently. Furthermore, their coding system included crowd and public-to-citizen models, among others. Interactions between multiple actors are also taken into account in the crowd platform or organisational model, whereas the public-to-citizen model refers to sharing platforms or organisations that are maintained or supported by local authorities (Curtis and Lehner, 2019).

In the academic literature, authors generally refer to *shared goods and services* as objects of the sharing economy, whereby a broad distinction can be made between tangible and intangible objects (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). Tangible objects include space, durable and non-durable goods; in contrast, intangible objects include service, time, knowledge, money, thoughts, and online content according to the categorisation by Curtis and Lehner (2019).

Several authors perceive the sharing economy as promoting exchanges of goods and services that do not result in a transfer of *ownership* (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). In this sense, the sharing economy is associated with the facilitation of access over ownership (Martin, 2015), as mentioned previously. However, there is inconsistency in the conceptualisation of the sharing economy in terms of ownership of goods and services (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). Some authors such as Heinrichs (2013) see the sharing economy as including redistribution and second-hand exchange of goods, which in turn leads to a transfer of ownership. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012: 895) claim that access-based

consumption is becoming increasingly popular, although “ownership continues to remain the ideal normative mode of consumption”.

2.1.2 NON-PROFIT SHARING

In sampling diverse definitions of the “sharing economy”, some tensions emerge, such as the role of money and transfer of ownership. For example, Aloni (2016) understands the sharing economy as an economic model, in which for-profit platforms facilitate peer-to-peer exchange of goods and services, whereas for Belk (2014) the sharing economy encompasses also activities that do not require monetary compensations, such as bartering, trading, and swapping. Building on this discussion, a distinction can be made between for-profit and non-profit sharing. This distinction is deemed necessary in two respects. First, the overall purpose of for-profit sharing companies and non-profit sharing initiatives differs fundamentally. Profit maximisation is usually the overriding business objective of for-profit sharing companies, whereas non-profit sharing initiatives typically pursue social and environmental objectives (Hinton, 2020). Second, for-profit sharing companies and non-profit sharing initiatives have different ownership structures, and thus are committed to different actors. For-profit sharing companies are usually in private ownership and first and foremost committed to their partners and shareholders to distribute profits (Hinton, 2020). In contrast, non-profit sharing initiatives are usually collectively owned and commit themselves to the common good rather than to advocacy groups (Hinton, 2020). However, this does not mean that non-profit sharing initiatives cannot earn money to ensure their operation. Under certain circumstances, non-profit sharing initiatives may also generate profits, but these profits are typically reinvested in line with the overall objective of the respective non-profit sharing initiative (Hinton and Maclurcan, 2017).

Criticism of the sharing economy is often directed against for-profit companies, such as Airbnb and Uber. For example, Kalamar (2013) accuses Airbnb of “sharewashing”, on the grounds that Airbnb is not “sharing” per se, but rather facilitating short-term room subletting and using “sharing” only as a buzzword for marketing purposes. It should be noted that the sharing economy as a whole is not entangled in “sharewashing”, but the risk of “sharewashing” is considered as comparatively high when monetary exchange is involved and profit maximisation the overall objective (Kalamar, 2013). However, the central question here is, where does the “sharing economy” begin? According to Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015), when “sharing” is market-mediated, then it is no longer sharing at all. In fact, consumers are paying for access to goods, services, *or* spaces of another person for a certain period of time. Hence, this is an economic exchange and not “sharing”, as consumers search after all for utilitarian rather than social value (Eckhardt and Bardhi, 2015). Using the example of Airbnb, Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) illustrate that most consumers choose to have the whole place for themselves, and thus they do not “share” the place with the owner at all. In another context, Baker (2014) draws attention to tax evasions, as many of Airbnb’s hosts are not paying the statutory taxes. As a result, regulatory measures are tightened to control for-profit sharing companies, such as Airbnb and Uber (*see* e.g. comparative studies on regulation of Airbnb *in* Nieuwland and van Melik, 2020; and Uber *in* Thelen, 2018). Nevertheless,

there are also media reports that for-profit sharing companies circumvent regulations, such as Uber (Pasquale and Vaidhyathan, 2015). Moreover, Peticca-Harris et al. (2020), for example, consider Uber as an example of a for-profit sharing economy platform that combines several forms of individual precariousness and economic insecurity to their economic benefit. Not least because of this criticism, some authors claim that the sharing economy is “simply a faster and up-to-date form of market economy” (Ukolov et al., 2016: 4269).

Previous research deals mainly with the for-profit sharing economy and criticism is frequently directed against for-profit sharing companies. Therefore, this study intends to contribute to the knowledge about non-profit sharing initiatives. This perspective is particularly important, because non-profit sharing initiatives based on social solidarity, ecological awareness, and open access are proliferating (Schor, 2015). Moreover, non-profit sharing initiatives pursue social and environmental objectives (Hinton, 2020), which cannot be expressed in monetary terms. For example, non-profit sharing initiatives may be seen as contributing to financial inclusion, because the lower the financial costs are, the more people can participate and leverage the idling capacity of goods, services, and spaces. Nevertheless, this does not mean that non-profit sharing necessarily leads to less consumerism, although it is questionable whether planned obsolescence would be a widespread phenomenon in a non-profit economy (Hinton, 2020).

In this study, non-profit sharing is understood as people, organisations, *or* businesses sharing goods, services, and spaces without monetary compensation *or* for a fee at cost price. A non-financial motivation for ownership of goods, services, and spaces is of central importance in this understanding of non-profit sharing, which entails “sharing” that is not aimed at maximising financial profits. In the literature it is widely discussed that the sharing economy leverages the idling capacity of goods, services, and spaces. This study argues that goods, services, and spaces should not be acquired *or* owned only for the purpose of monetary profit through sharing, if the sharing economy is to leverage the idling capacity.

2.2 URBAN GOVERNANCE OF THE SHARING ECONOMY

The urban governance model of the sharing economy applied in this study is based on the conceptualisation of Zvolska et al. (2019). In this model, a distinction is made between four roles that city governments may take on when working with administrative tasks, either by supporting or inhibiting specific issues: *city as regulator*, *city as provider*, *city as enabler*, and *city as consumer* (see Figure 1). Zvolska et al. (2019) suggest that these roles are pertinent in addressing how local authorities engage in the sharing economy. One should note, however, that city governments are not bound to a single role and are able to combine different roles to varying degrees. For example, city governments may support a specific type of sharing initiatives financially, whereas another type might be banned or restricted. Moreover, it is important to consider governance measures across these modes in order to understand how the sharing economy is being governed locally and the challenges encountered (Bulkeley and Kern, 2006).

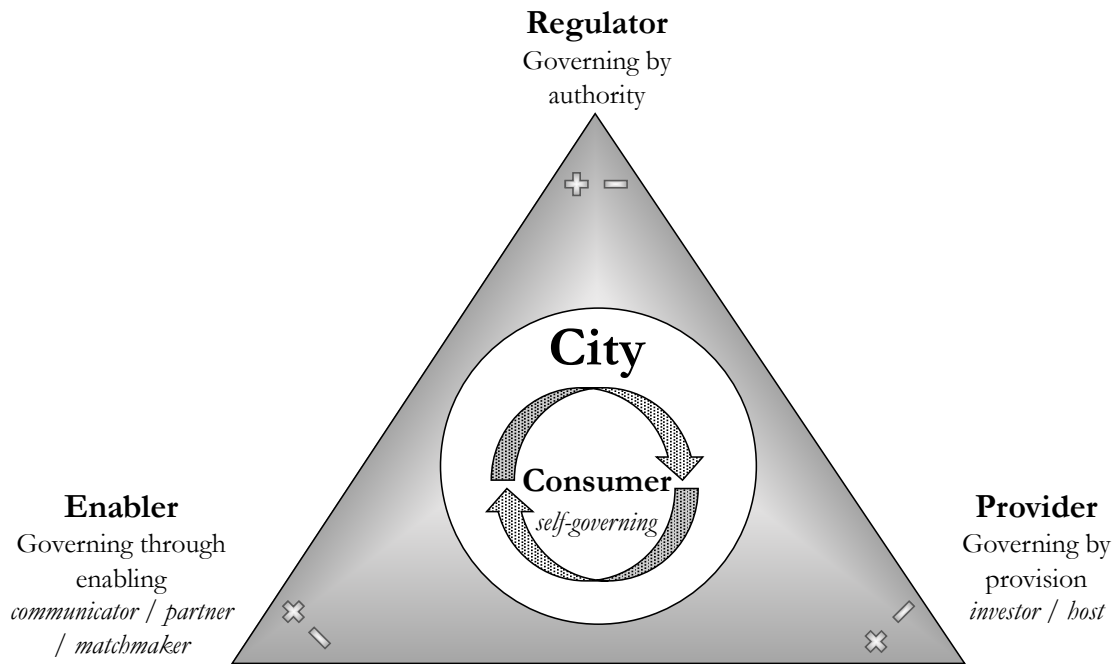


Figure 1. Roles and modes of local governance (authors' illustration following Zvolska et al., 2019: 631).

Before going into detail of the four roles that city governments may take on, the context of the urban governance model by Zvolska et al. (2019) is explained. In the social sciences, increasingly more complex and multi-layered methodological approaches are applied. An example of this trend is the shift from the study of “government” to “governance” (Cattacin and Zimmer, 2016). From an analytical standpoint, “governance” denotes *horizontality* in the sense of “non-hierarchical modes of co-ordination, steering and decision-making” (Cattacin and Zimmer, 2016: 23), whereas traditional top-down “government” stands for *verticality*. The term “governance” is not limited to government officials, but also includes a variety of private and public actors (Cattacin and Zimmer, 2016). Accordingly, governance processes are depicted as regulations through “networks of agents” (Powell, 1990).

The conceptual framework on urban governance of the sharing economy according to Zvolska et al. (2019) builds on Bulkeley and Kern's (2006) and Kern and Alber's (2008) frameworks that describe four distinct modes of urban climate governance. Firstly, *governing by authority* is the most traditional process of governance that is based on formal planning, regulation, and control. In the event of non-compliance, sanctions may be imposed by the jurisdiction to ensure that the regulatory measures are followed (Bulkeley and Kern, 2006). Kern and Alber (2008) term this governance mode more narrowly as *governing by regulation*, which includes the use of formal authority such as the adoption of laws and policies. Secondly, *governing by provision* refers to the role of local authority in delivering particular types of services and resources. In practice, this is realised through infrastructure and financial policy (Kern and Alber, 2008). Thirdly, *governing through enabling* focuses

on the coordination and facilitation of partnerships of public actors with private actors and encouragement of community engagement. Bulkeley and Kern (2006) point out that persuasion and incentives are most significant for this governance mode. However, it is quite obvious that this mode of governance is relatively “soft”, but also less resource intensive. This governance mode has various dimensions, comprising public education, public awareness campaigns, and advertising activities of local authorities. Moreover, the formation of external ties and facilitation of cooperation between different actors is often considered as central by municipalities, such as the establishment of public-private partnerships for the delivery of services and infrastructure (Kern and Alber, 2008). This governance mode is also described as *network governance*, in which “the municipality is a facilitator rather than commander and implementer” (Khan, 2013: 133). Local authorities might increase their legitimacy and implementation capacity of measures, on the one hand, but the lack of democratic legitimacy of networks (e.g. politics increasingly driven by closed elites) and its low transformation potential (e.g. networks of well-established interests tend to preserve status quo) are highly problematic on the other hand (Khan, 2013). Fourthly, *self-governing* can be understood as the ability of a local authority to govern its own activities (Kern and Alber, 2008). In this role, the municipality acts both as consumer (e.g. through public procurement) and as role model (e.g. through the implementation of pilot projects) (Bulkeley and Kern, 2006). The establishment of shared spaces in municipally owned buildings is an example of this governance mode. *Self-governing* “relies on reorganisation, institutional innovation, and strategic investments” (Kern and Alber, 2008: 174).

Although these modes of governance may overlap and participatory governance is not explicitly discussed in these earlier versions of urban climate governance frameworks, these distinctions can be useful for the analysis of urban governance towards a more sustainable urban development. In the following section, the four roles local authorities may take on according to Zvolška et al. (2019) are exemplified in the context of the sharing economy.

2.2.1 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS REGULATOR

Local authority as *regulator* adopts legislative acts and applies regulatory measures that comprise taxes, bans, and policies that regulate the foundation and operation of sharing initiatives (Zvolška et al., 2019). In the literature on regulation of the sharing economy most examples are given about for-profit sharing companies, such as Uber and Airbnb, and not non-profit sharing initiatives.

In the literature reviewed, only one example of regulation of non-profit sharing initiatives was found. In this case, a non-profit food sharing initiative in the district of Pankow, Berlin, which maps freely available fridges and food shelves, is regulated by the local health authorities (Zvolška et al., 2019). The basic idea of food sharing is to share surplus food instead of throwing it away. Despite much positive media coverage, the local health authorities criticised unhygienic conditions of fridges and food shelves, such as unpacked bread and torn open packages of sprouts (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2016). Accordingly, the non-profit food sharing initiative has not been able to meet the minimum requirements of the local authority in practice, and thus the freely accessible

fridges and food shelves were removed from public spaces in the district of Pankow (Zvolska et al., 2019).

2.2.2 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS PROVIDER

Local authority as *provider* refers to financial (e.g. local authority as *investor*) and infrastructural (e.g. local authority as *host*) support to sharing initiatives (Zvolska et al., 2019). The provision of sharing infrastructure by municipalities is generally considered to be significant. Some claim that “building a sharing infrastructure and culture is quite simply one of the most important things cities can do to contribute to a fair and sustainable world” (Agyeman et al., 2013: 29).

Hult and Bradley (2017), for example, conducted a case study in the City of Malmö, Sweden, on how local authorities can develop sharing infrastructure for citizens. One should note that citizens are not merely considered as consumers here, but rather as makers and sharers. In this study, STPLN, a multi-purpose maker space, and Garaget, a so-called urban living room, serve as examples of freely accessible sharing infrastructure. In the latter case, a building formerly used as a garage for electric buses was converted. Hult and Bradley (2017: 598) refer to the conversion of already existing public infrastructure, such as libraries and bus depots, for further purposes as “hacking into” traditional public infrastructure. In general, the provision of non-profit sharing infrastructure by the municipality in accessible locations for heterogeneous groups is important. Multipurpose spaces, such as STPLN and Garaget, have the advantage that they can be used intersectional and flexible, because a sewing workshop might be held on one day and a language café on another day. Municipalities have not necessarily to operate sharing infrastructures themselves as citizens or non-profit sharing initiatives may take on this role as well. However, long-term funding of well-established and functioning sharing projects is a general issue. In summary, local authorities of the City of Malmö take on the role as *provider* of sharing infrastructure and financial resources for the operation and staff (Hult and Bradley, 2017).

2.2.3 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS ENABLER

The role local authority as *enabler* includes a variety of ways to support sharing initiatives. For example, the municipality may facilitate collaboration among sharing initiatives (e.g. local authority as *matchmaker*), establish partnerships with sharing initiatives (e.g. local authority as *partner*) or raise awareness of sharing initiatives through public communication and information channels (e.g. local authority as *communicator*) to promote best sharing practices (Zvolska et al., 2019).

In a study on urban sharing in the City of Amsterdam, Mont et al. (2019) investigated the role of local authorities in governing urban sharing initiatives and identified the roles local authority as *matchmaker* and *partner*. For example, the City of Amsterdam organises workshops and network meetings for local sharing initiatives in order to facilitate collaboration between sharing initiatives, potential users, knowledge institutes, and investors. In collaboration with ShareNL, an independent professional organisation in the field of the sharing and platform economy, the municipality provides information and trainings e.g. on the organisation of sharing initiatives. The partnership

of the City of Amsterdam with Share a Meal, a food sharing platform, is given as another example. Low-income citizens are the focus group of this collaboration and get access to a subsidised meal. The aim of the municipality is to strengthen social cohesion and support digital literacy for marginalised groups. In summary, the City of Amsterdam is *enabling* the sharing economy in different ways, although the role local authority as *communicator* was not found in this study (Mont et al., 2019).

2.2.4 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS CONSUMER

Local authority as *consumer* can be illustrated by municipalities taking over urban sharing practices in their own operations e.g. through public procurement (Zvolska et al., 2019). There are only a handful of examples of this governance mode in the literature. One reason may be that only a few local authorities take advantage of this mode of governance so far.

An online platform where public organisations e.g. authorities, schools, and hospitals can share furniture and office equipment no longer used or surplus developed by the City of Malmö, Sweden, serves as an illustrative example for a local authority as *consumer* (Zvolska et al., 2019). Moreover, the municipality has recently reached an agreement with suppliers of second-hand furniture, who offer also repair and re-design services. For the City of Malmö, this agreement is an important step towards giving preference to second-hand furniture over buying new ones. The online platform and the agreement with suppliers of second-hand furniture provides the municipality economic benefits and reduces environmental pollution by increasing the idling capacity of second-hand goods (Malmö Stad, 2019).

3. METHODS AND MATERIAL

In the following, the methodical procedure of this study is presented. First, the methods of data collection, preparation, and evaluation are explained. Subsequently, limitations of the methodical procedure are critically reflected. Finally, background information about the case study of the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality are given.

3.1 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND PREPARATION

Primary and secondary data are used in this study, which is based on qualitative research methods. The primary data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews and field observations, whereas the secondary data were gathered through desk research. Secondary data were used to contextualise and substantiate primary data collected on the governance of non-profit sharing initiatives in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality. In the following, the methods used in this study are described in more detail.

Following the research aim and research questions, the focus group are the administrative employees of the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality working with the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme, because of their privileged access to information. Besides administrative employees working at municipalities, another focus group consists of employees working with *or* volunteering for non-profit sharing initiatives in the municipalities considered, as they hold information about the ongoing operations of non-profit sharing initiatives and cooperation with local authorities. Accordingly, this study is mainly based on work-related experiences and perspectives of “experts” with the non-profit sharing sector. According to Meuser and Nagel (1991: 433), an “expert” is a person:

- “who is in one way or another responsible for the design, implementation *or* control of a problem solution; *or*
- who has privileged access to information on a specific subject, group of persons *or* decision making process” (authors' translation).

After a preliminary search on the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme, the responsible persons in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality were contacted. The Consumer- and Citizen Service of the City of Gothenburg is mainly responsible for the development of the “Sharing City Gothenburg” project and is in close contact with local sharing initiatives, whereas the Environmental Department of Umeå municipality is mainly responsible for the “Sharing City Umeå” project. Subsequently, an administrative employee of the Consumer- and Citizen Service of the City of Gothenburg sent an invitation to a workshop on “Cirkulära ytor och fastighetsnära delningstjänster” (which means “Circular spaces and close-to-home sharing services” in English), which took place in March 2020. This facilitated personal contact with other participants working with *or* for non-profit sharing initiatives in the City of Gothenburg. In this study, the selection of interviewees was based on *purposive sampling*, which is typically performed at the beginning of the

research process and driven by practical and pragmatic considerations, and *snowball sampling*, which is usually carried out during the research process and based on asking well-informed people to name other people, who can provide insight into a specific phenomenon (Emmel, 2013). Administrative employees of the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality were selected through *purposive sampling*, whereas a mixture of *purposive sampling* and *snowball sampling* was performed in the case of employees working with *or* volunteering for non-profit sharing initiatives in the municipalities considered. However, a planned study visit to Umeå municipality was cancelled due to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) and subsequent travel recommendations by the Public Health Agency of Sweden. This made it more difficult to get into contact with suitable interviewees for this study.

The qualitative research interview is a well-established method of knowledge production in social sciences (Brinkmann, 2012). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted, as this method enables the interviewer to set the agenda according to the researcher's interests, but also leaves room for more spontaneous descriptions and narratives by the respondent (Brinkmann, 2012). Ayres defines semi-structured interviews as “a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions” (2012: 811). The predetermined questions serve as a guideline for the semi-structured interview and should facilitate the flow of discussion, but also allow the interviewer to ask further inquiries (Niebert and Gropengießer, 2014). Consequently, the interviewer has more control over the agenda of the interview compared to unstructured interviews. The main difference to structured interviews is that open-ended questions are asked in semi-structured interviews, which allows the interviewer to ask further inquiries and the respondent to bring up related topics as well (Brinkmann, 2012).

Before the semi-structured interviews were conducted, an interview guideline was developed and tested in advance. More specifically, two different interview guidelines were drawn up, one with more specific questions for the focus group of administrative employees and the other one for the focus group of employees working with *or* volunteering for non-profit sharing initiatives (*see* Appendix I for complete semi-structured interview guidelines). The interview guidelines were conceptualised in a way to facilitate answering the research questions. Recurring themes from the literature, such as the conflict between a for-profit and non-profit orientation and the conceptual framework on urban governance of the sharing economy by Zvolska et al. (2019) directed the development of the interview guidelines. Moreover, the experience gained during the first interviews was incorporated into the revision of the interview guidelines, which were designed in such a way that the interviews would last about 45 minutes, as experience had shown that concentration levels would decrease significantly after this point.

However, conducting the semi-structured interviews proved to be difficult due to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) and subsequent travel recommendations by the Public Health Agency of Sweden in March 2020. The interviews were therefore not carried out in person, but via

video telephony, such as software from Zoom and Skype, in the period from mid-March until mid-April 2020. In total, seven in-depth interviews were conducted in this study (whereof three with women and four with men). The audio tracks of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees using a sound recording device. In addition to the workshop on “Cirkulära ytor och fastighetsnära delningstjänster”, research on site was carried out at two non-profit sharing initiatives in the City of Gothenburg, namely Fixoteket Hammarkullen and Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg, during the stay in mid-March. Informal preliminary talks were held with responsible people on site. This may also explain why more interviews were conducted with employees working with *or* volunteering for non-profit sharing initiatives in the City of Gothenburg, namely four in total (*see* Appendix II for a complete list of interviewees). Consequently, this might lead to a distortion of the results. Therefore, secondary data is used to supplement the interviews conducted.



Figure 2. Fixoteket Hammarkullen (authors picture).



Figure 3. Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg (author's picture).

The participation in the workshop “Cirkulära ytor och fastighetsnära delningstjänster” and the research on site are part of the overall data collection process of this study, although the data are mainly used to supplement the interviews conducted. Observational research “involves collecting impressions of the world using all of one’s senses, especially looking and listening, in a systematic and purposeful way to learn about a phenomenon of interest” (McKechnie, 2008: 573). In this study, the method of observational research was applied to gain a better understanding how actors in the non-profit sharing economy interact and how sharing infrastructure is used. Data was recorded in the form of field notes and pictures. However, there are several ethical issues associated with observational research. For example, the role of the researcher and its involvement in the particular research setting has to be critically reflected upon (McKechnie, 2008). At this point it

should be noted that the researcher of this study was a participant in the workshop, although in an observational role.

Academic literature, such as books, journal articles, and conference papers, and grey literature, such as policy documents, reports from local authorities, project reports, websites, presentations, and other documents are used as secondary data to supplement the interviews conducted and to give a more profound insight into the case study. The theoretical framework presented in this study is based mainly on academic literature, whereas the analysis is largely substantiated *or* refuted by grey literature. Research on academic literature was mostly done via KTHB Primo (digital library of KTH) and was primarily conducted at the beginning of the study in February and March 2020. Grey literature was mainly searched for in the period between April and June 2020 to contextualise the primary data collected. The search for grey literature was supported by the search engine Ecosia.

After completion of the primary data collection process, the interviews conducted were transcribed using F4transkript, an audio transcription software. When preparing the data from the interviews conducted, particular attention was paid to the content of information. The interviews conducted were transcribed verbatim according to Kuckartz (2016)¹⁰. It should be noted that neither the author of this study nor the interviewees are native English speakers. Therefore, grammar and sentence structure of some direct quotations used in this study were subsequently corrected for better comprehensibility and special care was taken not to distort the content of the statement. Furthermore, interviewees occasionally used Swedish instead of English terms, when they had difficulty finding words. Consequently, Swedish terms were also verbatim transcribed.

The interview transcripts were then analysed using the method of qualitative content analysis. According to Julien, content analysis “is the intellectual process of categorising qualitative textual data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables *or* themes” (2012: 121). A software for qualitative data analysis is useful, as it facilitates creating codes, writing memos and summaries, and exporting quotation (Rettie, 2012). The qualitative content analysis was performed using F4analyse, a software for qualitative data analysis.

In this study, the interview transcripts were analysed following Kuckartz’ (2016) structuring content analysis. An abductive approach to developing the analytical categories was selected. Based on the theoretical framework of this study, preliminary analytical categories were developed. Accordingly, the roles and modes of local governance were used as analytical categories. More precisely, text sections of the interview transcripts were coded using e.g. the terms *regulator*, *provider*, *enabler*, and *consumer*. Keywords for further analytical categories were *challenges* for local authorities and *conflicts* in developing the non-profit sharing economy. In the first phase, the interview transcripts were coded according to these analytical categories, beginning with close reading and initial text-work.

¹⁰ See Kuckartz (2016) for a comprehensive overview of transcription rules, which were followed in this study.

Additional analytical categories were determined based on the data material, such as *actors*, *political support*, and *communication*. Identifying analytical categories is an iterative process (Kuckartz, 2016), and therefore the analytical categories were redefined and the data were analysed and coded over and over again. In addition, analytical sub-categories were determined for further differentiation. After this, the data material was evaluated and prepared for the thematic analysis, which was carried out using F4analyse. In the thematic analysis, similarities and differences in governance modes of non-profit sharing initiatives in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality became apparent and challenges for local authorities as well as conflicts in developing the non-profit sharing economy identified. Based on these findings, the analysis of this study was written.

3.2 REFLECTION ON DATA COLLECTION AND PREPARATION

Some limitations regarding the validity and bias of the study have to be made due to the methodical procedure. This study only represents a part of ‘reality’ and does not claim to be representative. For example, the sampling size of interviewees is relatively small and therefore some perspectives may not be included in this study. In this context, it should be noted that already the selection of interviewees may have been subject to personal bias of the researcher, as the selection of interviewees was based on purposive sampling and snowball sampling in this study. Furthermore, the validity of the results is context-specific to the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality at the time of data collection. Consequently, the results of this study are not generally valid. This means, for example, that the local authorities of other municipalities in Sweden or Europe may face quite different challenges in developing the non-profit sharing economy.

Also, the context of the qualitative interviews should be critically reflected upon. Brinkmann (2016: 522) emphasises that “the qualitative interview [...] must be considered not simply as a neutral instrument, allegedly representing a “natural” human relationship, but rather as a social practice with a history that provides a specific context for human interaction and knowledge production”. The qualitative interviews were conducted via video telephony against the background of the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), although the “face-to-face” interaction is described as “the primordial, natural setting for communication and interviews” (Briggs, 2007: 554). Nevertheless, the circumstances at that time for a “face-to-face” interview were unfavourable. Brinkmann (2016: 529) also stresses that “an interview is surely verbal communication, but it is also - especially in its face-to-face formats - embodied communication. Bodies are never neutral, but carry all their signs of gender, race, [and] class”. However, embodied communication proves to be difficult in videotelephony, because only a section of the body is shown, and communication takes places with a short delay due to data transmission. In addition, some interviewees preferred not to use the video function. Occasionally there were also technical problems. Although it is likely that the socially constructed interview situation via video telephony influenced the data collection process, it is not possible to assess how this affected the knowledge production.

Besides this, there are different ways of performing the roles of interviewer and interviewee. In this study, the researcher primarily sought the opinions and attitudes of the interviewees, but it can be assumed that the way the questions were asked may have influenced the interviewees in their answers. At the same time, the validity of the interviewee's reports becomes an issue, because it is difficult for the researcher to obtain descriptions of what was actually experienced (Brinkmann, 2016). For example, certain challenges for local authorities or conflicts in developing the local non-profit sharing economy were perhaps not addressed, because interviewees may have been bound by confidentiality obligations or may have had an interest in ensuring that the picture about non-profit sharing initiatives is positive. It is also possible that mistakes were made during transcription of the primary data, although best efforts were made. According to Brinkmann (2016), the transcription rather than the original oral interview serves as the primary source of data for the researcher when the interviews are interpreted and analysed. However, it is assumed that the actual statements were not substantially changed. The researcher's sovereignty of interpretation is another issue, for example, in terms of the relevance of interviewee accounts. It may therefore be that the analysis is distorted by the researcher's subjective interpretation. A systematic methodical approach was followed in a transparent way to prevent a distortion of the results.

3.3 CASE STUDY

The case study comprises the Gothenburg and Umeå, which are presented briefly below. The case study on the City of Gothenburg is suitable for studying whether a political shift has effects on the modes of governance in terms of non-profit sharing initiatives, as there has been a political shift towards a centre-right alliance in the last local elections; in contrast, Umeå municipality is characterised by relative political stability.

3.3.1 CITY OF GOTHENBURG

The City of Gothenburg is located on the Baltic Sea coast in south-west Sweden and has a population of around 579.281 people (Göteborgs Stad, 2020b). It is Sweden's second largest city. The downturn in the shipbuilding industry in the 1970s and 1980s posed major challenges to industrial cities, such as Gothenburg (Eriksson et al., 2016). In the sequel, the former shipyard areas Eriksberg, Sannegården, and Lindholm were restructured and new urban districts built. Today, the automotive industry is one of the largest employers in Gothenburg, which is traditionally a working-class city. The average income levels in Gothenburg are slightly below national average, but there are significant average income disparities between urban districts (Göteborgs Stad, 2020b). In the "Jämlikhetsrapporten 2017 – Skillnader i livsvillkor i Göteborg" (Göteborgs Stad, 2017) (which means "Equality Report 2017 – Differences in living conditions in Gothenburg" in English) is emphasised that the socio-economic segregation in Gothenburg is serious and differences in living conditions between urban districts have worsened since 2014. Compared to most other Swedish cities, Gothenburg has a larger percentage of foreign-born residents; about 27.5 percent were born abroad (SCB, 2020). There has been a political shift towards a centre-right alliance in the last local elections (Göteborgs Stad, 2018b).

Gothenburg is a stronghold of alternative culture and there are deeply connected grassroots movements (Enarsson, 2019). A variety of non-profit sharing initiatives exist in the city. In the City of Gothenburg's draft version of the "Environmental and climate programme 2021-2030" (Göteborgs Stad, 2020a) facilitating sharing is mentioned as part of the key strategy to create better conditions for sustainable lifestyles. The Consumer- and Citizen Service of the City of Gothenburg is mainly responsible for the topics of sustainable consumption and sharing.

3.3.2 UMEÅ MUNICIPALITY

Umeå municipality is situated on the Baltic Sea coast in north-east Sweden and northern Sweden's most populous municipality, counting 128.901 inhabitants (SCB, 2020). The town Umeå has a population of around 88.203 and is Sweden's 13th largest city (SCB, 2019). Umeå University is of central importance to the city. In 1965, Umeå University was inaugurated and since then the population of Umeå has doubled (Umeå Kommun, 2020a). The number of enrolled students is 34.237 (Umeå Universitet, 2020a). Accordingly, the average age of 38.9 years in Umeå municipality is well below national average (41.3 years) (SCB, 2020). Umeå is a university town and over time biotechnology, medicine, information and communication technology, environmental technology, and energy companies have established in the area (Umeå Kommun, 2020a). However, the average income levels in Umeå municipality are below national average (SCB, 2020). Compared to most other Swedish municipalities, Umeå municipality has a larger percentage of residents born in Sweden; about 87.4 percent (SCB, 2020). In 2014, Umeå was European Capital of Culture and has presented itself as a multicultural city. Umeå municipality is governed by Social Democrats for more than a decade and is characterised by relative political stability, as there was no change of government for a rather long time.

Umeå municipality is committed to the Agenda 2030 and works towards the strategic objectives at the local level. In the documents "Agenda 2030 i Umeå kommun" (Umeå Kommun, 2018), facilitating sharing is stated as part of the strategy to develop low-carbon places and create the conditions for sustainable lifestyles. Since the start of the "Sharing Cities Sweden" programme, the local authorities of Umeå municipality have given more attention to sharing (Interviewee 3). The Environmental Department of Umeå municipality is mainly responsible to facilitate sharing and work towards a more sustainable consumption. Today, some non-profit sharing initiatives exist in the city and Fritidsbanken Umeå is probably the best-known example.

4. ANALYSIS

The findings of the analysis are described below. This chapter is divided into three parts according to the research questions. In the first part, the governance modes of the non-profit sharing economy in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality are examined. The second part focuses on challenges for local authorities in developing the non-profit sharing economy. In the third part, some conflicts of interest in developing the local non-profit sharing economy are highlighted.

4.1 GOVERNANCE OF NON-PROFIT SHARING INITIATIVES

4.1.1 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS REGULATOR

In the data collected there is little evidence that local authorities in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality act as *regulator*. In the interviews conducted, administrative employees from both municipalities stated that the need to regulate non-profit sharing initiatives is low. This is attributed, to some extent, to the Swedish national law, which is perceived as relatively strict in international comparison.

“I like to see us as an enabler. [...] When I spoke to my colleagues in Amsterdam, Barcelona, and so on, [I realised] that they have been forced very much to a role where they regulate the sharing economy. [...] Swedish national law largely regulates [the sharing economy]. [...] So, in Sweden, I think, we have been quite fortunate, because we can take on a more positive enabling role [as local authorities]” (Interviewee 5).

This statement by an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg underlines that the need to regulate sharing initiatives in Sweden is generally considered to be low, although the example given is not explicitly related to non-profit sharing initiatives. Furthermore, the assertion that *enabling* is perceived as a more positive role of local authorities in the sharing economy could also be interpreted in the reverse sense, namely that *regulating*, such as the adoption of legislative acts and the application of regulatory measures, has a comparatively negative connotation. The literature at least points out that governing by regulation is the most traditional governance mode, but not the most popular one in urban climate governance, because local authorities try to avoid resistance and possible conflicts (Kern and Alber, 2008). These aspects may explain why the role local authority as *regulator* of the non-profit sharing economy is neither pronounced in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality nor in the literature reviewed.

Another explanation for the fact that the governance mode *regulator* is not clearly recognisable could be that the local impacts of sharing initiatives are largely unknown to local authorities. According to an administrative employee, Umeå municipality is monitoring the impacts of both for-profit and non-profit sharing initiatives in order to understand better how local authorities may alleviate negative sustainability impacts, and thus regulate the ongoing operations of sharing initiatives (Interviewee 3). In addition, the need for regulation is seen more in the context of larger sharing

platforms according to an administrative employee of Umeå municipality. So far, only a few larger platforms are present in Umeå, and thus

“we [Umeå municipality] don’t have an issue yet, but we have seen some interest [of larger platforms] and we are beginning to look into the possibility of regulating them if necessary” (Interviewee 3).

However, it has to be questioned whether it is only about *regulating* the scale of sharing platforms, e.g. to prevent a monopoly position, or rather the externalisation of social costs by for-profit sharing initiatives, e.g. to mitigate gentrification. It is not clear from this statement whether the need to regulate larger platforms applies equally to non-profit sharing platforms, such as Couchsurfing, and for-profit sharing platforms, such as Airbnb. Upon request, the administrative employee of Umeå municipality clarified in a follow up e-mail that:

“We [Umeå municipality] want to work with sharing initiatives to ensure that they are contributing to the sustainability goals of Umeå, regardless whether they are non-profit or for-profit. Regulation may be necessary, if the service uses public infrastructure, for example” (Interviewee 3).

Accordingly, the foundation and operation of non-profit sharing initiatives in Umeå municipality may be subject to stricter controls, if the role local authority as *regulator* becomes more important in the future.

The conducted interviews also reveal that there are some uncertainties within the municipalities regarding the regulation of non-profit sharing initiatives. For example, Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg, in Gothenburg, has previously collaborated with Solidariskt Kylskåp, a non-profit food sharing initiative, and hosted a freely accessible fridge at their premises. However, the collaboration with Solidariskt Kylskåp was terminated in early spring 2020 following a decision by the steering committee¹¹, despite positive user feedback (Interviewee 6). The reason for this decision was not publicly communicated by the steering committee. An employee of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg supposes that the steering committee

“was worried that we [Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg] were breaking some kind of law by having it [Solidariskt Kylskåp] there like some health law or some law about competition that we [Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg] are competing unfairly with restaurants inside the mall” (Interviewee 6).

This statement is interesting, because the steering committee of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg also includes representatives from the City of Gothenburg, who should know about the legal situation of non-profit food sharing initiatives, such as Solidariskt Kylskåp, as they have been present in

¹¹ Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg’s steering committee includes representatives from 1.) Fokus Förening, a network of sports associations, cultural organisations, churches, and the business community, 2.) Skandia Fastigheter, a commercial property management company, and 3.) the City of Gothenburg (Fritidsbanken, 2017). It should be noted that the organisational structures of Fritidsbanker in Sweden differ, whereas usually the municipality is the main provider (Fritidsbanken, 2020).

Gothenburg for several years. If the legal situation for non-profit food sharing initiatives is ambiguous in Sweden, then one can speak of *self-regulation* by Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg's steering committee in this case. However, Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg consulted, by its own accounts, the environmental administration of the City of Gothenburg and no legal restrictions for the operation of Solidariskt Kylskåp have been identified (Interviewee 6). This suggests that either the legal situation is ambiguous or the legal concerns of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg's steering committee were put forward to terminate the collaboration with Solidariskt Kylskåp for other reasons.

In another context, an administrative employee of Umeå municipality points out that the legal situation of the sharing economy is ambiguous, because there is

“some unclarity about the tax [regulation] and how to pay taxes [...]. How much can you earn without tax regulations and when should you be required to pay taxes as a company?” (Interviewee 3).

In Sweden “ideell föreningar” (which means “not-for-profit association” in English) can be exempted from paying some taxes, if they fulfil certain requirements (Skatteverket, 2020). But this depends how not-for-profit associations are structured, and thus this might be also relevant for non-profit sharing initiatives, if they earn money to ensure their operation.

In addition to national legislation, local authorities also have the legislative power to regulate non-profit sharing initiatives locally. For example, the City of Gothenburg has local regulations for the municipality concerning the use of public space, among others (Göteborgs Stad, 2019a). Thus, local authorities may regulate how non-profit sharing initiatives use public space for their activities. From the collected data, however, it is not clear how the local regulations are enforced by the City of Gothenburg and whether non-profit sharing initiatives have been affected in the past.

All in all, the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality are open to the entry of both for-profit and non-profit sharing initiatives into their municipalities. An administrative employee of Umeå municipality even emphasises this liberal approach:

“Of course, we are not banning anyone at the local level [to enter]” (Interviewee 3).

4.1.2 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS PROVIDER

The City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality both *provide* non-profit sharing initiatives financial and physical infrastructural support.

The project “Local recycling and reuse centres” by the City of Gothenburg, which is better known today as Fixoteket, serves as an illustrative example for this mode of governance. “Local recycling and reuse centres” is a project carried out by the City of Gothenburg between 2017 and 2019 in collaboration with some public housing companies, a tenant's protection agency, Chalmers

University of Technology, and other actors¹² (Energimyndigheten, 2019). Fixoteket is designed as a community space in residential areas (Ordóñez and Hagy, 2019) and can be described as a multipurpose makerspace. For example, it is possible to repair things, such as clothes, furniture, household electronics, or bicycles on site, but also to borrow various tools and machines to take them home, or to recycle consumer products (Bostadsbolaget, 2020). After the end of the project phase, Bostadsbolaget, a public housing company, decided to continue with Fixoteket and to provide premises in three different locations in the City of Gothenburg, namely Hammarkullen, Rannebergen, and Norra Biskopsgården. Fixoteket is open to the general public and the loan of tools and machines free of charge for the users (Interviewee 1). Furthermore, Bostadsbolaget covers the costs for new purchases, for example, tools and machines, and operational costs of Fixoteket, such as electricity:

“They [Bostadsbolaget] are putting everything necessary, everything we need to have to keep it going“ (Interviewee 1).

However, the staff working at Fixoteket Hammarkullen and Fixoteket Norra Biskopsgården is employed by the City of Gothenburg, or more accurately by the district administration of Angered or Västra Hisingen, respectively. Fixoteket Rannebergen, however, is dependent on voluntary work (Bostadsbolaget, 2020; Interviewee 4). The opening hours of Fixoteket in the three different locations differ, whereby Fixoteket Hammarkullen has by far the longest opening hours, namely 25 hours per week. In contrast, Fixoteket Norra Biskopsgården and Fixoteket Rannebergen are only open 9 and 10 hours per week, respectively (Bostadsbolaget, 2020), which is probably due to the lack of staff. Besides the regular operation of Fixoteket, workshops are held at Fixoteket Hammarkullen with financial and organisational help from Bostadsbolaget (Interviewee 1). An employee of Fixoteket Hammarkullen points out

“that you need to have space for workshops [...] and not every place has that” (Interviewee 4).

During the project phase, there was another Fixoteket in the district of Majorna, but neither Bostadsbolaget nor any other municipal enterprise decided to continue it. The question is whether non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fixoteket, become established over time. Hult and Bradley (2017), for example, emphasise that mere commitment and long-term financial support from municipalities is key for the outreach and stability of non-profit sharing initiatives. However, it should be noted that the “Local recycling and reuse centres” project was a comparatively large-scale project, but nevertheless initial public funding is important for the implementation of non-profit sharing initiatives. In another case study, Zvolska et al. (2019) illustrate that non-profit sharing initiatives attract more attention and support from local governments, if they are part of the waste prevention strategy or mobility solutions. In the interviews conducted in this study, it becomes also apparent that the operation of non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fixoteket and Fritidsbanken, depend on public financial support (Interviewee 4; Interviewee 6; Interviewee 7).

¹² The total costs for the project “Local recycling and reuse centres” were SEK 9.2 million (Energimyndigheten, 2019).

The financial dependence of non-profit sharing initiatives on municipalities can be an issue for the long-term existence, as the struggles of Fixoteket Majorna and Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg illustrate (*see below* for a brief description of the concept of Fritidsbanken). For example, public funding of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg ends by the end of 2020 (Interviewee 6). In response, the petition “Rädda Fritidsbanken i Göteborg” (which means “Save Fritidsbanken in Gothenburg” in English) was started, which is currently under review by the responsible public committee (Göteborgs Stad, 2020c). In the case of Fixoteket Majorna, a non-profit sharing initiative decided after some time to continue the operation after the project “Local recycling and reuse centres” ended. The City of Gothenburg provided the non-profit sharing initiative with the already purchased tools and machines. Fixoteket Majorna is dependent on voluntary work and the opening hours are rather limited (8 hours per week), but there is also a freely accessible fridge from Solidariskt Kylskåp and a so-called Free shop in the basement (Kollaborativ Ekonomi Göteborg, 2020a; Interviewee 1).

Located also in the district of Majorna is also Leksaksbiblioteket, a library of toys. The toys at Leksaksbiblioteket are mainly for children aged 0-7 years. In 2018, Leksaksbiblioteket became a test-bed of the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme, which is coordinated by the City of Gothenburg, but run by a non-profit initiative (Sharing Cities Sweden, 2020a). Leksaksbiblioteket is, by its own account, the first one in Sweden and funded by Allmänna Arvsfonden, a public inheritance fund, and “Sharing Cities Sweden”. However, borrowing toys at Leksaksbiblioteket is not free of charge as it requires an annual membership (costs are 300 SEK – 500 SEK) or a trial membership (costs are 100 SEK). An alternative to become a member is to work on a voluntary basis. Three part-time employees work at Leksaksbiblioteket (Leksaksbiblioteket, 2020).



Figure 4. Sports- and leisure equipment in the winter season at Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg (authors' picture).

The concept of Fritidsbanken is similar to Leksaksbiblioteket, with the difference that Fritidsbanken lends out sports- and leisure equipment free of charge. In the case of Leksaksbiblioteket, the local authorities have more a co-ordinating role, while in the case of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg the City of Gothenburg indirectly finances the non-profit sharing initiative by providing financial support to Fokus Förening, where the employees of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg are actually employed. Skandia Fastigheter operates the shopping centre Frölunda Torg and offers Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg the premises at a low rent (Interviewee 2; Interviewee 6). Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg's uniqueness is that it is situated in a shopping mall:

“It [Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg] is a well located, because it is close to other stores and highly frequented, so we get free marketing” (Interviewee 6).

In contrast, Fritidsbanken Slottsskogen, in Gothenburg, is basically just a container full of sports- and leisure equipment located in a park (Interviewee 2). The district administration of Majorna-Linné, which is formally part of the City of Gothenburg’s administration, provides financial and infrastructural support to Fritidsbanken Slottsskogen. However, Fritidsbanken Slottsskogen is only open on Saturdays and the existing range of sports- and leisure equipment is comparatively small (Kollaborativ Ekonomi Göteborg, 2020b).

Umeå municipality also *provides* non-profit sharing initiatives financial and infrastructural support, although the examples in the data collected are not as manifold as in Gothenburg.

Before Fritidsbanken was opened in Ålidhem, Umeå, in 2018, preliminary talks between representatives of Fritidsbanken and Umeå municipality were necessary:

“In Umeå [Fritidsbanken] was fortunate, because [...] already a few years ago the municipality had the idea to lend out sports equipment” (Interviewee 7).

Accordingly, Umeå municipality has originally considered providing sharing infrastructure for lending out sports equipment by themselves, but the plans were not implemented in this form. In fact, Fritidsbanken Umeå is a non-profit sharing initiative and is mainly financed by Umeå municipality and municipal enterprises. Additionally, Fritidsbanken Umeå receives financial funding from the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme. Nevertheless, Fritidsbanken Umeå is searching for further partners and other funding projects in order to ensure the financing of ongoing operations and to improve their service. Fritidsbanken Umeå has a few permanent employees, some volunteers, and offers job trainings to unemployed people in cooperation with the Swedish Public Employment Service (Interviewee 7).

Physical activity is also in the focus of U-bike. Umeå municipality is breaking new ground with U-bike, a public bicycle sharing system for electric cargo bicycles. In 2018, Umeå municipality opened two bicycle garages for electric cargo bicycles, in the city centre of Umeå and on the university campus (Interviewee 3). Although U-bike is a public and non-profit oriented bicycle sharing system, only members are entitled to access the bicycle garages (the monthly membership fee is 80 SEK). Users can choose between three different cargo bicycle models. However, the number of U-bike members is limited to 250 persons in the test phase and currently no new registrations are possible (Umeå Kommun, 2020b):

“We [Umeå municipality] haven’t had any specific interest from larger sharing platforms, so we did it ourselves and implemented it [U-bike]. Now other [sharing initiatives] are starting and we will see whether they can run it maybe later on“ (Interviewee 3).

In this sense, U-bike is a test-bed for mobility hubs in new districts and an example how Umeå municipality provides sharing infrastructure.

A few years ago, Umeå municipality saw the need to take a more proactive role in the non-profit sharing economy and developed sharing infrastructure by themselves. As such, sharing is perceived as contributing to a more sustainable development in Umeå municipality, but there were relatively few sharing initiatives at that time, let alone well-known sharing platforms (Interviewee 3). In the beginning, the intention of Umeå municipality was to act as a catalyst for the local sharing economy and provide sharing infrastructure by themselves, but within the local authority voices are being raised that:

“The municipality soon needs to have an exit plan, because I think we should not run that many sharing initiatives as a municipality” (Interviewee 3).

This is attributed, on the one hand, to the fact that providing non-profit sharing infrastructure by local authorities is not seen as a core task of municipalities and, on the other hand, to the lack of public funding for developing and maintaining such initiatives. Nevertheless, as expressed by one of the civil servants, Umeå municipality will not withdraw completely as provider of sharing infrastructure as the municipality tries to open up existing infrastructure, such as classes after the end of school for non-profit sharing initiatives (Interviewee 3).

There is also a controversial discussion in Gothenburg about the role of local authorities as provider in the non-profit sharing economy. For example, an interviewee draws attention to the political shift in Gothenburg and argues that local authorities should take a more proactive role and provide financial and infrastructural support to non-profit sharing initiatives in Gothenburg:

“But the politicians now say that the municipality should [step] back and they [the local government] don’t want to run things by themselves [anymore]” (Interviewee 2).

The effects of the political shift in Gothenburg are also addressed by an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg:

“The current local government is much more focusing on: We [local authorities of the City of Gothenburg] need to go back to our so-called core business, we should not do anything else what a municipality has to do necessarily. You know? It is like cutting down on expenditures, do as little as possible, let the private market do it instead” (Interviewee 5).

Accordingly, the political change in Gothenburg is already having an impact on how local authorities govern non-profit sharing initiatives. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the role local authority as *provider* depends on the local political context and can shift relatively quickly if there is a change of government.

4.1.3 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS ENABLER

The role local authority as *enabler* is distinct in the City of Gothenburg and present in Umeå municipality, based on the data collected. As mentioned before, the role local authority as *enabler* is quite broad and includes a variety of ways to support non-profit sharing initiatives.

As expressed by an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg, non-profit sharing initiatives have often difficulties in finding suitable premises for their activities, particularly in terms of location and affordability (Interviewee 5). Hence, the City of Gothenburg is aware about the current situation of non-profit sharing initiatives.

“Providing premises for [non-profit sharing initiatives] in a long-term and sustainable way is a key issue” (Interviewee 5).

Thus, the Consumer- and Citizen Service has recently started to actively seek partnerships with private and public housing companies for finding suitable premises for non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fixoteket and Fritidsbanken. For example, the workshop on “Cirkulära ytor och fastighetsnära delningstjänster” is part of a broader strategy aimed at achieving more stable funding against the background of less political support for non-profit sharing initiatives in the City of Gothenburg (Interviewee 5). Furthermore, it was discussed during the workshop “Cirkulära ytor och fastighetsnära delningstjänster” that both public and private housing companies have an interest not only in renting out ground floor space, but also in having people on the streets to increase the perceived safety in the immediate vicinity. However, private housing companies in particular strive to maximise profits and are therefore likely to offer only short-term leases for non-profit initiatives so that the lease can be flexibly terminated, if a more solvent tenant shows interest in the ground floor space. There have already been some partnerships formed. In the previous section, reference was made to Fixoteket Hammarkullen and Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg. The partnership between the City of Gothenburg, or more precisely the district administration of Angered and Bostadsbolaget, is exemplary for the role local authority as *partner*. In the case of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg, representatives from the City of Gothenburg, Fokus Förening, and Skandia Fastigheter sit in the steering committee (Fritidsbanken, 2017).

The cooperation between Umeå municipality and Fritidsbanken Umeå has also to be seen as a partnership, albeit in a different form than in Gothenburg. For example, Fritidsbanken Umeå offers job trainings to unemployed people in cooperation with the Swedish Public Employment Service, as previously stated (Interviewee 7). Umeå university and Akademiska Hus, a state-owned property company, are other partners of Umeå municipality in the non-profit sharing economy, as the example of U-Bike shows (Interviewee 3). UMIGO, a local sharing platform, was recently developed in cooperation with Umeå university as well as Viable Cities and is currently in the test phase (Umeå Kommun, 2020c). On the university campus is also a FabLab, which is basically an open makerspace offering digital fabrication and part of the Science Park Curiosum in Umeå since 2020. The FabLab Umeå is open to the general public and supported by Umeå University (Umeå

Universitet, 2020b). Umeå municipality supports the Science Park, for example, by promoting different projects and initiatives (Interviewee 3).

The “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme itself can be considered as a multi-stakeholder process (Interviewee 3), which brings together partners from the public sector, business, academia, and civil society (Sharing Cities Sweden, 2020b).

Despite the engagement of the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality in the non-profit sharing economy as *providers* and *enablers*, there are calls for more commitment by municipal enterprises:

“The City of Gothenburg with all their companies [...] have to support and spread non-profit sharing initiatives more” (Interviewee 4).

At the local level, the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality facilitate collaboration among non-profit sharing initiatives in connection with the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme. In this sense, the role local authority as *matchmaker* is reflected. In the past, some stakeholder meetings were held in Gothenburg and Umeå. For example, the City of Gothenburg hosted “Samtal Delningsekonomi i Göteborg”¹³, a stakeholder meeting, in March 2020. In the foreground were the questions how the sharing economy can be normalised and scaled up. The role of local authorities in the sharing economy, more specifically how local authorities may facilitate and promote the sharing economy, were also discussed (Göteborgs Stad, 2020d). Umeå municipality organised, for example, the conference “Cooperative Cities” on the topic of the city as a co-owned sharing platform in March 2019. The conference was aimed at entrepreneurs, sharing initiatives and citizens who want to contribute to develop the sharing economy (Umeå Kommun, 2020c). Several non-profit sharing initiatives and municipal enterprises were represented at the conference. The conference “Cooperative Cities” was not only an information event, but also a networking event. Umeå municipality intends to host another conference “Cooperative Cities” with workshops in September 2020 (Interview 3).

Another interviewee describes how important a local network is for establishing non-profit sharing initiatives:

“Through a local network and an ongoing project, there were a lot of engaged people that helped us, so that we could establish the first Fritidsbanken in the region of Västerbotten and Umeå. [...] Financial support is the most important thing for us, but networking, facilities, and other support are essential [as well]” (Interviewee 7).

Besides organising matchmaking events, Umeå municipality is breaking new ground with UMIGO, creating and testing user-centred digital sharing platform, as a *matchmaker* between providers and

¹³ “Samtal Delningsekonomi i Göteborg” can be translated into English as “Discussion about the sharing economy in Gothenburg”.

users (Umeå Kommun, 2020c). For example, the lending service of Fritidsbanken Umeå is intended to be digitalised with the help of UMIGO in 2020 (Interviewee 3).

The example of Smarta Kartan, which is basically a map of sharing initiatives in a geographically defined area, shows the blurred boundaries between the role local authority as *partner*, *matchmaker*, and *communicator*. To begin with, Smarta Kartan was developed in cooperation between Collaborative Economy Gothenburg, a non-profit sharing initiative, and the City of Gothenburg, or more precisely the Consumer- and Citizen Service. Furthermore, Smarta Karta aims to encourage new encounters by mapping non-profit sharing initiatives as well as facilitates access to goods, services, and spaces over ownership (Kollaborativ Ekonomi Göteborg, 2020c). Finally, Smarta Kartan provides information about the location, type of operation, and opening hours of non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken and Fixoteket.

Collaborative Economy Gothenburg and the Consumer- and Citizen Service defined some criteria for sharing initiatives to be shown on Smarta Kartan, such as small-scale and local presence of sharing initiatives. Additional criteria, such as non-profit sharing initiatives, which are free of charge for users *or* operate at cost price, are endorsed but not mandatory (Kollaborativ Ekonomi Göteborg, 2020d).

Smarta Kartan serves also for Umeå municipality as a model to map local non-profit sharing initiatives. Weekly “map jam” sessions are organised in cooperation with Coompanion Nord and take place during the year 2020. Map jams are a participatory approach to collect information about local sharing initiatives and preparatory work for Umeå municipality’s upcoming Smarta Kartan (Umeå Kommun, 2020c). According to an administrative employee Smarta Kartan is envisioned to increase the visibility of non-profit sharing initiatives in Umeå municipality and to support alternative consumption behaviours, such as sharing (Interviewee 3).

Public information events are traditionally held by municipalities to communicate with citizens. For example, Umeå municipality organised a public information event in February 2020 and presented preliminary results of the “Sharing City Umeå” project and local non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken and Smarta Kartan (Umeå Kommun, 2020d).

Besides public information events, the City of Gothenburg, or more accurately the Consumer- and Citizen Service communicates online via GreenhackGBG, a channel for sustainable lifestyles, about sustainable co-creation, action in everyday life, and some local non-profit sharing initiatives, among others. Information is published in a blog on a website and shared on social media (Göteborgs Stad, 2019b).

Finally, it should be also mentioned that the role of the City of Gothenburg in the non-profit sharing economy is perceived as mostly *enabling* by administrative employees at the Consumer- and Citizen Service, which is underpinned by the following statement:

“The aim [of the City of Gothenburg] is only to try to enable the sharing economy that we think can help us reaching a sustainable city” (Interviewee 5).

Nevertheless, it should be added that the interviewee is aware that local authorities have different roles in governing the non-profit sharing economy. In contrast, an administrative employee of Umeå municipality perceives the role local authority as *enabler* as one of several:

“I see that there are different roles of course in the sharing economy. One is that we [Umeå municipality] are enabling sharing” (Interviewee 3).

These different views may explain to some extent why the role local authority as *enabler* is more distinct in the City of Gothenburg than in Umeå municipality.

4.1.4 LOCAL AUTHORITY AS CONSUMER

In the data collected there is little evidence of the role local authority as *consumer*. This is in line with previous research (*see e.g. Zvolska et al., 2019*), as only a few examples of local authorities as consumers are given.

The City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality both adopted a sustainable purchasing and procurement policy (Göteborgs Stad, 2020b, Umeå Kommun, 2016). Nevertheless, the respective policies aim to establish environmental, social, and ethical requirements in the public purchasing and procurement procedure rather than implement sharing practices in their own operations through public procurement. The City of Gothenburg recently concluded a new framework agreement for reuse of furniture in offices and public environments (Göteborgs Stad, 2020f), which might provide the municipality economic benefits and reduces environmental pollution by increasing the idling capacity of furniture, but does not per se include sharing of furniture among public organisations.

Umeå municipality incorporated sharing services, such as car sharing, in their own operations according to an administrative employee.

“For many years [Umeå municipality] has done public procurement for our own car-fleet [...] and Sunfleet has been the contracted company in the last period. The car-sharing fleet is also open for public use” (Interviewee 3).

Although this is an illustrative example for the role local authority as *consumer*, the company Sunfleet is part of the for-profit sector. However, the examples given are the only ones found in the data collected. To sum up, the role local authority as *consumer* in the non-profit sharing economy is neither in the City of Gothenburg nor in Umeå municipality pronounced.

4.2 CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN DEVELOPING THE NON-PROFIT SHARING ECONOMY

In general, local authorities are in a powerful position to govern the sharing economy at the local level (Agyeman et al., 2013). The right of self-government is guaranteed to the municipalities in the Swedish constitution. The City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality exercise the right of self-government, as already described in the previous chapter on governance of the non-profit sharing economy. The basis for administrative action is the Swedish administrative law, in which public procurement is regulated. Chapter 4 of the public procurement act (Lag (2016:1145) om offentlig upphandling) lays down the general provisions, such as §1 stipulating that procuring authorities have to treat suppliers in an equal and non-discriminatory manner and conduct procurement in an open process and §2 which states that a public tender may not be designed for the purpose of restricting competition, so that certain suppliers are favoured or disadvantaged in an improper manner. On the one hand, the public procurement act ensures equal treatment of suppliers; but on the other hand, local authorities are restricted in their scope of action to develop the non-profit sharing economy. An administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg describes the dilemma as follows:

“I think one of the challenges for local governments is that we [local authorities] have to treat all private companies in an equal way, so we cannot give favour to one company, then we must also offer the same opportunity to others [...] and that is why it is difficult for us [as local authority] to give free rent to some sharing initiatives, because if we start doing that, [then] we have to offer that to other [sharing initiatives] as well. In that case it might be easier for private landlords to open up a premise for Fritidsbanken” (Interviewee 5).

The scope of action for local authorities is wider when it comes to implementing only a temporary non-profit sharing test-bed, according to an administrative employee of Umeå municipality.

We can do it [implementing a non-profit sharing project] in a test-bed. But if they are successful and should be implemented after the test period, then we have to do some public procurement or another kind of partnership agreement. This is possible of course, but [...] it is a lengthy process, because we have to make sure that we comply with all legal requirements (Interviewee 3).

Ultimately, the public procurement act restricts unqualified support for non-profit sharing initiatives by local authorities in Sweden. Rather, the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality have to develop the non-profit sharing economy in accordance with the legal framework.

Another challenge for local authorities is to define their own role in the non-profit sharing economy. By its own accounts, Umeå municipality joined the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme with a limited understanding of the sharing economy. At the beginning of the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme, the question of how Umeå municipality should engage in the non-profit sharing economy was central for the daily work of local authorities (Interviewee 3). In contrast, the Consumer- and Citizen Service of the City of Gothenburg recently posed this key question about

the role of the municipality in the sharing economy (Göteborgs Stad, 2020d). This question has to be seen in the wider context of the local conditions, such as political power relations and culture of sharing. In the case of the City of Gothenburg, it seems to be more of a reorientation towards a less proactive role of the municipality in the non-profit sharing economy.

As mentioned before, there has been a political shift towards a centre-right alliance in the City of Gothenburg in the last local elections. An administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg explains how the political shift affects their daily work.

“We [Consumer- and Citizen Service of the City of Gothenburg] are not that much in contact with for-profit companies, because [...] what is unique for Gothenburg is that we have big local ecosystem of many initiatives from the civil society that are non-profit. [...] It has been natural that we have mainly focused on enabling them [non-profit sharing initiatives] the most, but currently we are looking into how we can help small [for-profit] entrepreneurs. [...] I think it is a difference, because since 1 year ago we have a new political government in Gothenburg [...] and they have a slightly different approach than the previous local government, which was the Social Democrats and the Left. So, we also have to look what the politicians want” (Interviewee 5).

Consequently, this political shift towards a centre-right alliance in the City of Gothenburg seems to result in a different working approach of local authorities engaging in the sharing economy, namely from focusing on non-profit sharing initiatives towards entrepreneurialism for-profit.

Fritidsbanken serves as a good example for illustrating some consequences of this political shift. A full-time position with the task of promoting Fritidsbanken in the municipality was created under the previous government. However, a person assigned to this task emphasises that there is a lack of political support for non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken, under the present government.

“What I need from them [local government] is to [...] decide whether [...] they are behind it [Fritidsbanken] and what we are going to do, what is the goal” (Interviewee 2).

In contrast, Umeå municipality is governed by Social Democrats for more than a decade, and thus characterised by a relative political stability. An administrative employee of Umeå municipality stresses that it was a political decision to join the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme in 2017. Furthermore, the political support for local authorities engaging in the non-profit sharing economy is generally perceived as positive (Interviewee 3).

There are other local conditions, besides the lack of political support, which may pose a challenge to local authorities developing the non-profit sharing economy. In the interviews conducted, different people underline the importance of a strong culture of sharing, because local authorities are to some extent dependent on an active civil society and a network of local non-profit sharing initiatives (Interviewee 3; Interviewee 5; Interviewee 7). This is because the governance of the non-profit sharing economy includes, among others, government officials, civil servants, and civil

society actors (Cattacin and Zimmer, 2016). An administrative employee of Umeå municipality points out the difference between Gothenburg and Umeå in terms of grassroots movements and culture of sharing:

The Gothenburg scene of exchange is much more grassroots oriented, they have these libraries of things already up and running and this kind of ideas that do not yet exist on this scale in Umeå. I hope that we will see this in Umeå too” (Interviewee 3).

This suggests that an active civil society and grassroots movements are important for the upscaling of the non-profit sharing economy.

Other local conditions mentioned as challenges for local authorities developing the non-profit sharing economy are, for example, geographically spread out municipalities. At least it is claimed that a dense municipality offers better conditions for sharing (Interviewee 3). On the other hand, socio-economic conditions are considered as important factors when developing the non-profit sharing economy. For example, Fritidsbanken Umeå and Umeå municipality jointly decided to set up Fritidsbanken in the district of Ålidhem, as the level of sporting activities among children and young persons is lower than in other districts of Umeå (Interviewee 7). In addition, an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg mentions positive social side effects of physical non-profit sharing infrastructure, such as Fixoteket.

“Fixoteket has become a meeting place for people. [...] It wasn’t the main idea of Fixoteket to be a social meeting place, but many young people are hanging out there. And maybe this just shows that we have a lack of this kind of non-commercial places in many cities today and people are longing for them. A place to be where you don’t have to spend money” (Interviewee 5).

This is not per se a challenge for local authorities in developing the non-profit sharing economy, but it shows the need for non-commercial physical infrastructure in cities. Nevertheless, segregation remains a challenge for local authorities, as living conditions in cities are often unequal. At the same time, physical non-profit sharing infrastructure, such as Fixoteket, may somewhat improve the living conditions, for example, as social meeting point. Local authorities have to take into account the overall urban development but working towards an equitable distribution of non-profit sharing services is a challenge. In general, the establishment and maintenance of non-profit sharing services in attractive retail areas, where rents for premises are comparatively high, is a challenge, as discussed at the workshop “Cirkulära ytor och fastighetsnära delningstjänster”. Masthuggskajen, for example, is a new urban development project in central Gothenburg planned by Älvstranden Utveckling, a municipal company, and a test-bed for the integration of the sharing economy, where also non-profit sharing services are considered (Sharing Cities Sweden, 2020a). At the same time, however, well-established non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Solidariskt Kylskåp and Cykelköket, a do-it-yourself bicycle repair initiative, fear that they will be pushed out of the district when the building “Kommersen” is demolished for the development of Masthuggskajen, as they will probably not be able to afford the rent for premises in the new urban district (Herold,

2020). Although the establishment of non-profit sharing initiatives in Masthuggskajen is endorsed by Älvstranden Utveckling, the dilemma for the municipal company is that they have to charge customary comparable rents, according to a project manager (Herold, 2020).

Other problems, such as the structuring of the administration and defining areas of responsibility, are self-inclined by municipalities. For example, the administrative structure of the City of Gothenburg is to be reorganised by the end of the year on the basis of a decision by the local government. The project is called “Ny nämndorganisation 2021” (“New administrative organisation 2021”). As a result of the reorganisation, the districts will be dissolved and replaced by specialised administrations. This reorganisation is meant to enable rationalisation and efficiency improvements in the administrative apparatus to meet the economic challenges (Göteborgs Stad, 2020g). What impacts the reorganisation of the administrative structure of the City of Gothenburg will have on non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken and Fixoteket, is currently not foreseeable. As an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg puts it:

“Yes, that [the reorganisation of the administrative structure of the City of Gothenburg] is a big challenge now, because the reorganisation is happening in a very short time. It is basically this year and we have corona to deal with now. [...] The district administrations have been the ones who cooperated with Fritidsbanken and have also been part of Fixoteket in some cases. So, we are trying to figure out where this can now fit in other departments from next year” (Interviewee 5).

The reorganisation of the administrative structure of the City of Gothenburg is likely to affect the development of the local non-profit sharing economy. For example, the district administrations in the City of Gothenburg function often as first point of contact for non-profit sharing initiatives in the respective districts. As a result of the reorganisation and centralisation of the administrative structure, these established structures are likely to change. Furthermore, the district administrations in the City of Gothenburg are also important actors in the non-profit sharing economy, as exemplified above by the cooperation between the district administration of Angered and Fixoteket Hammarkullen.

Furthermore, local authorities depend on political leadership in their daily work. An administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg expresses frustration about a lack of political leadership and illustrates this with the following examples.

“In the city budget and in the strategic business programme there is talk of growth, sustainable growth, but what is sustainable growth? That is a conflict I think, because we interpret that [sustainable growth] very differently. [...] The political documents are very vague [written], so we can interpret them how we want to. So, I guess we continue in our different departments and in the city administration to work towards our goals, but we [...] know that there will of course be conflicts” (Interviewee 5).

At the same time, this vagueness of political documents gives local authorities, such as the Consumer- and Citizen Service of the City of Gothenburg, some leeway to set the focus of their work.

With the emergence of non-profit sharing initiatives, local authorities are faced with the question of which department is responsible. Defining areas of responsibility is sometimes accompanied by conflicts that burden cooperation. As mentioned previously, a full-time position with the task of promoting Fritidsbanken in the City of Gothenburg was created under the previous government. A person assigned to the task considers that:

“In my case, the department of sports made me sort of like feel in some sense that they wished to keep the assignment. [...] They [department of sports] are a little bit afraid of letting go [of this assignment] and losing control of it [...], because they are unsure about how Fritidsbanken should develop” (Interviewee 2).

Accordingly, the collaboration between departments of the City of Gothenburg and other actors, such as sport federations, in the non-sharing economy is now and then difficult.

There are also cases where collaboration between departments within the administration proves difficult. However, the sovereign interpretation of “sharing” is less controversial in Umeå municipality than in the City of Gothenburg. From the perspective of an administrative employee of Umeå municipality

“the business development department begins to figure out [...] why sharing is good for sustainable growth” (Interviewee 3).

The interviewee makes it clear that

“the sharing economy is part of the circular transition [in Umeå municipality] and a mean to reach sustainable growth basically” (Interviewee 3).

In contrast, an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg takes a much more critical view of sustainable growth and questions the meaning of the term (Interviewee 5), but also mentions this fundamental discussion about sharing between the Business Department and Consumer- and Citizen Service. Put simply, the Business Department aims to promote companies to grow, whereas the Consumer- and Citizen Service seeks to decrease overall consumption (Interviewee 5). This points towards an existing ideological conflict of interest between the Business Department and Consumer- and Citizen Service, which can make collaboration difficult.

Improving the internal and external communication of local authorities is perceived as another challenge. An employee of Fixoteket Hammarkullen points out a lack of public communication:

“As we speak now, we know that [...] the local government has problems reaching most groups here, because here in Hammarkullen or Angered half of them [the population] is not speaking Swedish” (Interviewee 4).

Overcoming languages barriers is a general challenge that local authorities face e.g. in order to inform citizens about local non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fixoteket.

There are also challenges that local authorities have only limited influence on *or* that can only be met in the long-term, such as behavioural change. In an interview with an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg behavioural change towards more sustainable lifestyles is considered as one of the biggest challenges for local authorities engaging in the non-profit sharing economy.

“I think one of the biggest challenges for the sharing economy in general is that it takes time [...]. It is about changing norms and behaviour, so that people turn away from buying things to get used to the idea of having access to things. This requires a bit more work, if you have to pick up a thing that you rent or lend and return it later” (Interviewee 5).

In the current debate on sustainable urban development the focus is mainly on enabling people to adopt more environmentally friendly lifestyles in terms of housing and transport, while the consumption of other material goods seems to be a secondary issue (*see* e.g. studies on urban sustainability Haas, 2012; Wheeler and Beatley, 2014). This notion is confirmed to a certain degree by the following statement made by the administrative employee of Umeå municipality.

“I think that mobility, facilities, and energy are in some sense easier for us to deal with and we [Umeå municipality] have more control over them to steer. I think we will have [some control] over other things like goods and services as well, when we built up our service hubs in new districts that show that you can share” (Interviewee 3).

However, it is reasonable to assume that local authorities are more familiar with traditional planning than planning for sustainable consumption. Therefore, some local authorities may have difficulties in providing physical infrastructure for sharing, which is particularly the case when local authorities have only been dealing with sharing for a shorter period of time. This may explain why an administrative employee of Umeå municipality perceives local authorities as having less control over physical infrastructure for sharing than traffic infrastructure, for example.

Municipalities evidently have considerable influence on public enterprises, such as Bostadsbolaget and Familjebostäder, but their influence is not unlimited. In the case of Fixoteket in the City of Gothenburg, for example, Bostadsbolaget still continues to provide premises for Fixoteket, whereas Familjebostäder withdrew after the project “Local recycling and reuse centres” ended. The reasons for the withdrawal of Familjebostäder are not publicly communicated (Interviewee 4). However, this example shows that local authorities have to persuade even potential partners in the public sector, such as municipal enterprises, to engage in the non-profit sharing economy, although sometimes unsuccessfully.

Other mid- and long-term challenges for local authorities are financing and upscaling of non-profit sharing initiatives. Non-profit sharing initiatives are usually designed to provide close-to-home

sharing services, but nowadays non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken and Fixoteket, only operate in a few city districts. In the interviews conducted, it is pointed out that distance is a decisive factor for the attractiveness of a non-profit sharing service (Interviewee 4). In addition, the number of potential users in the catchment area must also be taken into account, as

“there are many ideas popping up, but they have difficulties to scale up, because they need a certain user base in order to thrive” (Interviewee 5).

Moreover, upscaling of non-profit initiatives is tied to higher financial expenditures, staff costs, and dependent on easily accessible premises (Interviewee 4). Administrative employees from the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality argue that a key issue is to develop financing models for non-profit sharing initiatives and attract new cooperation partners to establish a broad support structure (Interviewee 5; Interviewee 3). In addition, a discussion on the long-term funding of non-profit sharing initiatives by local authorities is deemed necessary according to an administrative employee of Umeå municipality. After all, if non-profit sharing initiatives are not financially self-sustaining, the question arises as to how much public funds can be used to support these initiatives and whether additional taxes are needed (Interviewee 3).

Finally, non-profit sharing initiatives being financial dependent on public authorities is perceived as a challenge for local authorities by an administrative employee of Umeå municipality.

“We [Umeå municipality] are trying to support them [non-profit sharing initiatives] and to develop an idea how to become sustainable without being heavily supported by the municipality or just one stakeholder. I think that is the main challenge we are trying out right now with some counselling and business development. They don't have to earn money from it, [...] but they need to be self-sufficient and not depend that much on funding from the municipality” (Interviewee 3).

Thus, non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken and Fixoteket, would have to operate at cost price and would not any longer be free of charge. Moreover, if local authorities provide fewer financial resources to non-profit sharing initiatives, then it would be likely that low-threshold sharing services that are open to all disappear over time.

Furthermore, non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken, are dependent on political decisions of the local government of Umeå municipality to receive funding for their activities. In view of financial crises and strained public budgets, financial dependence of non-profit sharing initiatives on public authorities is seen as problematic:

“In financially good times it should of course not be a problem and we [Umeå municipality] see benefits of it, but there is a risk if something happens like in these days, the those funding can be cut off and they cannot sustain their operation as non-profit [sharing initiative]” (Interviewee 3).

4.3 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN DEVELOPING THE NON-PROFIT SHARING ECONOMY

Besides the challenges faced by local authorities in developing the non-profit sharing economy in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality, more general conflicts of interest have also come to light. The most obvious conflict of interest in developing the sharing economy is between a for-profit and non-profit orientation.

The predominant economic system of capitalism is based on the expansion of production and consumption as rapidly as possible to increase profits (Rosa et al., 2015). Critique of the rise of consumerism in the 20th century is multifaceted and directed, among other things, against consumer culture (Baudrillard, 1998) and destructive forms of industrial production (Schor, 2010). However, rooted in this logic that the predominant economic mode is based on consumption, an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg concludes that:

“The sharing economy cannot only be non-profit, it has to be based on models of renting out, where companies can obviously still earn money and make a living from it” (Interviewee 5).

According to this understanding, the sharing economy does not represent an alternative to capitalism but has to be seen rather as part of the predominant economic system, in the sense that primarily the use of goods is optimised. It should be noted, however, that non-profit sharing is not the same as non-monetary sharing, according to the understanding of non-profit sharing in this study. An administrative employee of Umeå municipality considers that non-profit sharing initiatives do not have to make profits, but also stresses that non-profit sharing initiatives should develop business models to be economically independent of external funding (Interviewee 3). This would mean that non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken and Fixoteket, would have to offer their services for monetary compensation at cost price.

Moreover, the interviews conducted also show that the mainstreaming of the sharing economy even requires the inclusion of the conventional business sector. The main argument is that this would lead to the breakthrough of the sharing economy. According to an administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg:

“Some things are starting to happen in Sweden. Last year we saw that companies like Scorett rent out shoes [...], Åhlens and H&M are also trying to rent out clothes in their shops on a small scale. I think we will need this help from these big companies that can help us change the norms and make this [sharing] more mainstream” (Interviewee 5).

On the one hand, financial capital might be needed to provide effective services and mainstream the sharing economy in order to change norms, but on the other hand, “that is how, in most cases, for-profit sharing economy companies have outgrown their free [non-profit] counterparts” (Griffith, 2013). However, at this point it is really only about the economy. Using the example of Fritidsbanken, an employee of the National Sports Federation Västra Götaland gets to the point:

“[Although] Fritidsbanken clearly has a social win, there is no industry behind it, because Fritidsbanken does not make a [financial] profit” (Interviewee 2).

In addition, a connection is made between the population density of a municipality and the conflict potential in developing the non-profit sharing economy. An employee of the National Sports Federation Västra Götaland reports that the conflict between for-profit companies and non-profit sharing initiatives in small municipalities where, for example, only a small number of sport stores are operated has recently intensified with Fritidsbanken. For this reason, the central organisation of Fritidsbanken specifies that the loan period is two weeks (Fritidsbanken, 2020).

“The two week loan period is [in place] because you should try out [the sports equipment] and if you find out that you like this sport, then you go and buy your own stuff; not to compete with sport stores, which has been an important thing in smaller cities lately, if there is only one sports store [...] or you don't want to compete with [sport stores] as municipality” (Interviewee 2).

Therefore, it could be argued that the municipal support for non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken, would be lower, if they competed with for-profit companies. For example, the municipality has an interest in collecting business taxes. In this case, explicit reference is made to the potential for conflict in smaller communities, while the literature often cites examples of conflicts from large cities (e.g. Zvolska et al., 2019).

The example of Fritidsbanken reveals yet another conflict in developing the non-profit sharing economy, which is ultimately about sharewashing. In the literature, Anthony Kalamar (2013) refers to “sharewashing” in reference to the debate on “greenwashing”, meaning that the rhetoric of sharing is used to disguise conventional economic activities. To return to the example of Fritidsbanken, it is about the financing of non-profit sharing initiatives by private companies. For example, the central organisation of Fritidsbanken prohibits sponsor walls to prevent sharewashing, which in turn makes it more difficult for Fritidsbanken to acquire funding from the private sector (Interviewee 6). An employee of the National Sports Federation Västra Götaland critically questions the financing of Fritidsbanken by the private sector:

“I hope that they [the City of Gothenburg] will continue with this concept [of financing Fritidsbanken], because another way of financing it [Fritidsbanken] would be [...] to work closely with the private sector, but they use sponsorship to make money in this way. [...] That's a continuous conflict. Experience shows that this doesn't work” (Interviewee 2).

Accordingly, public funding of non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken, is perceived as important to prevent sharewashing.

In the academic literature, the sharing economy is widely promoted on the basis of its alleged sustainability potential (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). In the interviews conducted, however, reference is also made to so-called rebound effects or negative side effects that the development of the non-profit economy entails. An employee of the National Sports Federation Västra Götaland points

out that users' choice of means of transport has an impact on the environmental balance of non-profit sharing initiatives, such as Fritidsbanken.

“A challenge for Fritidsbanken is that many people go by car. On the one hand, we want to get people to spontaneously just come in, borrow something and go to the park, but [on the other hand] the winter season is very big, so people come in and borrow skis, and [thus] might need a car [to transport the skis]” (Interviewee 2).”

This assessment is supported by a study that analyses the environmental impacts of Fritidsbanken (Tekie et al., 2020). The authors of the study conclude that the choice of transport mode by users is a burden on the environmental balance of Fritidsbanken, since the car is used primarily. As a result, the positive environmental impacts of Fritidsbanken, such as a leveraged idling capacity, extended life span, and replaced purchases of sports- and leisure equipment, are reduced by users' choice of means of transport (Tekie et al., 2020). This is an illustrative example of a rebound effect of a non-profit sharing initiative.

In addition, the academic literature on sharing refers to a rather evident rebound effect of the non-profit sharing economy, namely that

“by increasing users' access to goods and services [free of charge or] at a reduced price, users have the ability to access things they otherwise could not afford, leading to increased purchasing power elsewhere in the economy” (Curtis and Lehner, 2019: 7).

In the interviews conducted, no reference is made to this rebound effect of the non-profit sharing economy or it is said that no statement can be made due to the lack of available data. Finally, it is not possible to make a general statement about the rebound effects of the non-profit sharing economy, as rebound effects remain understudied (Hobson and Lynch, 2016; Frenken, 2017).

Also, in the examples given above, it becomes apparent that several non-profit sharing initiatives depend on the unpaid work of volunteers. An administrative employee of the City of Gothenburg addresses this negative side effect of voluntary work by its name:

“The non-profit [sharing initiatives] are nice small local initiatives, but they are based on voluntary work, and we [the City of Gothenburg] know that many of these people get involved in a particular sharing initiative for one or two years and then move on and do something else. [...] Because at the end of the day, if you have a sharing initiative where you have no income, you can't really live on that, or people do it as a hobby, as something besides their ordinary jobs [...] I would say it's not for living, it's something you do in your free time” (Interviewee 5).

Consequently, the establishment and continuity of non-profit sharing initiatives that depend on voluntary work might be difficult in the long-term. The dilemma situation of many non-profit sharing initiatives offering services without monetary compensation is quite obvious, because either they depend on voluntary work or they demand monetary compensation for their services to pay

wages. Although precarious working conditions in the sharing economy have been problematised (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020), it would be too much to speak of exploitation of volunteers in non-profit sharing initiatives considered in this study. However, the dependence on voluntary work might be a structural barrier to the development of the non-profit sharing economy sector in the long term.

The upgrading of a district is another side effect ascribed to the establishment of non-profit sharing initiatives, according to an administrative employee of Umeå municipality.

“[For example], Fritidsbanken [Umeå] creates great value for the district [of Ålidhem] and for property owners, because it is now more socially sustainable, [...] because this neighbourhood now feels in some ways a better place to live [and] it got more structure” (Interviewee 3).

The improvement of the spatial structure in Ålidhem may prove positive, for example, in terms of quality of stay, which is accompanied with beneficial side-effects for property owners, if the housing prices eventually rise. At the same time, rising housing prices may have negative consequences for current residents of Ålidhem, if they are displaced from the district. Sociologists describe this phenomenon as gentrification, which will not be further elaborated at this point (*see e.g. Holm, 2012 for more information on social effects of gentrification*).

The improvement of the spatial structure in Ålidhem may prove positive, for example, in terms of quality of stay, which is accompanied with beneficial side-effects for property owners, if the housing prices eventually rise. At the same time, rising house prices may have negative consequences for current residents of Ålidhem.

Finally, a fundamental question is what is shared. In the academic literature on the sharing economy, shared goods and services are generally regarded as objects. A broad distinction is made between tangible objects, such as space and goods, and intangible objects, such as service and knowledge (Curtis and Lehner, 2019). However, it is controversial what the sharing economy ultimately comprises and what it does not, as the discussion about ride sharing shows (Meelen and Frenken, 2015). According to an employee of Umeå municipality, it makes a difference what is shared regarding the potential for conflict:

“In some sectors there are more conflicts [...] Where does sharing fit in, when we [Umeå municipality] also push growth to support local businesses. I think in this field it is a bit more complicated with more conflicts. When we look at mobility, there is a general agreement that this [public transport, streets etc.] should be shared, so there are fewer conflicts” (Interviewee 3).

Hence, it is not only a question of what is shared, but also of weighing up for municipalities in which fields there is less conflict potential for sharing. It must be objected, however, that public transportation or public libraries may be taken for granted nowadays, but historically many town libraries were not open to the general public (Botsman and Rogers, 2011). The retail sector may be

critical of library of things, such as Fritidsbanken, but today bookshops and public libraries also coexist.

However, some interviewees also claim that they do not recognise any conflicts of interest in developing the non-profit sharing economy. For example, an employee of Fixoteket Hammarkullen states:

“I haven’t experienced this [interest of conflicts in developing the non-profit sharing economy in the City of Gothenburg]. What I have experienced so far is a quite open community, where everyone shares” (Interviewee 4).

A similar assessment is made by an employee of the National Sports Federation Västerbotten for Umeå municipality:

“No, not as far as I know [with regard to interest conflicts in developing the non-profit sharing economy in Umeå municipality]. Not even in our case from sport stores. They are all happy that Fritidsbanken Umeå creates interest in sport activities and movement. [...] Everyone thinks that this [concept of Fritidsbanken] is really good, as far as I know” (Interviewee 7).

This assessment is not entirely consistent with the feedback that Umeå municipality received from a local sport store:

“[A provider of] downhill ski rental services mentioned that, for example, Fritidsbanken makes it a bit more difficult for them to operate the rental service, because Fritidsbanken is free of charge and there [at the downhill ski rental service] you have to pay money for it. So, we [Umeå municipality] monitor these types of effects, but mostly we get positive feedback” (Interviewee 3).

Even though some interviewees argue that the establishment of non-profit sharing initiatives is largely free of conflicts, the analysis illustrates that there are actually several conflicts of interest related to the governance of the non-profit sharing economy. Moreover, it seems to be an illusion to reconcile the for-profit and non-profit sharing economy, if the business model of for-profit companies is affected.

5. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This study shows that some modes of non-profit sharing governance are more prominent than others. The role local authority as *regulator* is neither pronounced in the City of Gothenburg nor in Umeå municipality. Although there are a handful of examples of financial and physical infrastructural support for non-profit sharing initiatives in both municipalities, there are signs of a trend reversal towards a lower involvement of local authorities as *provider* in the non-profit sharing economy, in particular, in the City of Gothenburg. For example, public funding of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg ends at the end of 2020 and it is uncertain whether the lending of sports- and leisure equipment continues in its present form. It becomes clear that the municipal involvement in the non-profit sharing economy as *investor* and *host* depends largely on the political will. Not least because of the municipal council decides about the financial budget and determines the framework for its use. In contrast, the role local authority as *enabler* requires less financial expenditures from municipalities and is quite prominent in the City of Gothenburg and at least present in Umeå municipality. There are some strategic projects, such as “Local recycling and reuse centres” by the City of Gothenburg, that promote non-profit sharing and contribute to a sustainable consumption, and some organised events, such as the conference “Cooperative Cities” by Umeå municipality, that facilitate collaboration among non-profit sharing initiatives at the local level. Only one example of local authorities as *consumer* is found, which means that there is clearly potential for improvement in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality, if the local authorities are interested to adopt non-profit sharing practices in their own operations and act as role models.

The challenges for local authorities in developing the non-profit sharing economy are diverse, ranging from lack of political support to legal aspects, organisation of administration, local conditions, such as the activity of civil society, and structural problems, such as the financial dependence of many non-profit sharing initiatives on public funding.

This study clearly demonstrates the importance of political support for developing the non-profit sharing economy. Not only does the municipal council set the financial budget, but the local government also determines the strategic direction for the overall municipal development and is in a position to significantly influence the organisation of the administration. All this became apparent after the last local elections in the City of Gothenburg. The political shift towards a centre-right alliance in the City of Gothenburg adversely affects the local development of the non-profit sharing sector, as the new local government pursues a neoliberal policy approach. For example, the reorganisation of the administrative structure in the City of Gothenburg aims to streamline the administration to reduce public administrative expenditure in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society. Moreover, non-profit sharing initiatives are obvious partners for the Consumer- and Citizen Service working towards sustainable consumption, but the political shift results in a different orientation of the City of Gothenburg in the sharing economy from focusing on non-profit sharing initiatives towards entrepreneurialism for-profit. The pursuit

of a free market economy policy by the new local government becomes particularly evident in the case of Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg, for example, as public funding is blocked beyond 2020.

In contrast, Umeå municipality is characterised by relative political stability, as the Social Democrats lead the local government for over a decade. The political support for the development of the non-profit sharing economy is generally given. However, the financial dependence of non-profit sharing initiatives on public funding in both municipalities is seen as problematic, in particular, in times of public budget consolidation the continuity of non-profit sharing initiatives is at risk. Consequently, there is a justified demand that non-profit sharing initiatives become less dependent on political decisions of local governments and public funding. At the same time, however, the risk of “sharewashing” may increase, if private investors or companies financially support non-profit sharing initiatives. In addition, the nature of non-profit sharing initiatives may change, if monetary compensation is charged for sharing services rendered.

The upscaling of non-profit sharing initiatives is a general challenge in both municipalities and depends not only on political support, but also on an active civil society. Although local authorities of the City of Gothenburg lack political support for developing the non-profit sharing economy, there is an active civil society and grassroots movements. While political support is given in Umeå municipality, civil society involvement in the non-profit sharing economy is relatively low compared to Gothenburg. Local authorities cannot develop a culture of sharing per se, but they can in their role as *enabler*, for example, empower citizens to become active in the non-profit sharing economy.

A further relevant aspect for the development of the non-profit sharing economy is the legal framework, in particular, the public procurement act, which prohibits to favour non-profit sharing initiatives over for-profit sharing companies. An amendment to the public procurement act could be justified on the grounds that non-profit sharing initiatives do not make financial profit, but rather pursue social and ecological objectives in the public interest, which cannot be expressed in monetary terms. The amendment to the public procurement act would allow local authorities to support, in particular, non-profit sharing initiatives. However, the public procurement act (Lag (2016:1145) om offentlig upphandling) is based on the Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and the Council on public procurement, and an amendment to the public procurement act has to be in accordance with European law and is a lengthy process, a directive amendment is therefore not likely in the near term, and thus local authorities in the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality have to develop the non-profit sharing economy on the basis of the current legal framework. It should be noted that the public procurement act significantly affects the role local authority as *consumer*, because non-profit sharing initiatives are in direct competition with for-profit sharing companies when it comes to submitting the most favourable bid in a public tender. In this sense, non-profit sharing initiatives are subject to the market logic.

This study describes some general conflicts of interest in developing the non-profit sharing economy. The conflict of interest between a for-profit and non-profit orientation in the sharing economy is most evident. Although there are indications that the operation of non-profit sharing initiatives is occasionally accompanied by environmental rebound effects, and there is a risk of “sharewashing” as well as a structural problem with the dependence of non-profit sharing initiatives on voluntary work, these conflicts of interest are less obvious. Some claim that the establishment of non-profit sharing initiatives has the potential to contribute significantly to the structural improvement of an urban district, but there is no evidence that non-profit sharing initiatives trigger upgrading processes or gentrification. However, some maintain that there are no obvious conflicts of interest in developing the non-profit sharing economy.

There is a tendency in both municipalities that it is comparatively easier for local authorities to develop the for-profit than the non-profit sharing economy. One reason for this is that a number of different stakeholders are interested in the business prospects of for-profit sharing companies and therefore the funding perspective by private actors is better.

In view of the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) and the dynamic pandemic situation, it is likely that the challenges for local authorities and conflicts of interest in developing the non-profit sharing economy will intensify, particularly if austerity measures are taken in response to the economic downturn. As a result, the financial leeway of local authorities to support non-profit sharing initiatives financially might be restricted. Non-profit sharing initiatives that are dependent on public funding would be especially affected. In times of economic crisis, the maintenance of grown non-profit sharing structures is important from the perspective of social justice and the participation of people from financially weak backgrounds in society. There are a number of non-profit sharing initiatives in both the City of Gothenburg and Umeå municipality, such as Fixoteket and Fritidsbanken, contributing to social inclusion and it can be argued that the social costs will be much higher for municipalities if these grown structures collapse. Therefore, municipalities should explore ways to ensure basic funding of non-profit sharing initiatives. One possibility would be to establish a minimum budget for providing financial and physical infrastructural support to non-profit sharing services that are of general public interest. This would require that providing physical infrastructure for non-profit sharing is seen as a core task of municipalities, comparable to other public infrastructure, such as public libraries. A minimum budget has to be determined by the competent financial committee at the local level.

Some attribute the dissemination of the sharing economy to the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-2008, thus it is possible that the current economic downturn will lead to a further proliferation of “sharing” as a consumer practice. Currently, there is a trend in several Swedish cities that the vacancy rate of commercial space in city centres and shopping malls is increasing. Given this situation, some non-profit sharing initiatives may be able to rent vacant premises for a relatively low rent. In any case, local authorities should not rely solely on private actors to provide

space for non-profit sharing initiatives, but rather take a proactive role in governing the sharing economy. Although the role local authority as *regulator* of the non-profit sharing economy is neither pronounced in the City of Gothenburg nor in Umeå municipality, governing by authority on the basis of formal planning and regulation could be more distinct in the future. This could mean, for example, that local building regulations are amended to impose property developers the obligation to make a certain percentage of commercial space available for non-profit sharing initiatives. In addition, local authorities can also provide space to non-profit sharing initiatives in cooperation with their municipal companies.

Local authorities should also evaluate the need for public sharing infrastructure at the local level and plan for facilitating close-to-home non-profit sharing services. Building on already existing public infrastructure in urban districts, such as public libraries, and an integration of additional non-profit sharing services is recommended. For example, it is already common practice for public libraries to have a children's corner, where also a library of toys could be established. Other non-profit sharing services, such as tool libraries, could be set up at public transport stations. In cities are numerous public sport facilities, where non-profit sharing services, such as Fritidsbanken, could be integrated so that people can lend out sports- and leisure equipment on site. All in all, there are several possibilities to integrate non-profit sharing services in formal planning processes.

6. REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Local authorities

- To start with, I would like to ask you what your personal background is and in what context you are working with the “sharing economy”?
- What is your understanding of the “sharing economy”?
- What makes a city a “sharing city”?
- If you look back, since when is the topic of sharing on the agenda in the municipality?
- What are the reasons for the municipality to deal with the sharing economy?
- What is the municipalities’ aim in the sharing economy?
- How would you describe the role of the municipality in the sharing economy?
- What are the conflicts of interest in developing the sharing economy in the municipality?
- In which respect has the municipality a responsibility to steer the sharing economy towards a sustainable development?
- What are major challenges for the municipality to foster sharing initiatives, in particular non-profit?
- Do you think the sharing economy is contributing to social inclusion and democratisation in the municipality?
- What are the future opportunities for the municipality in the sharing economy?
- What is your interim conclusion on the “Sharing Cities Sweden” programme? In other words, what lessons can be learned, in particular regard to non-profit sharing initiatives?
- I would like to ask you to take a look on the future development of sharing infrastructures non-profit in the municipality.
- Is there anything else you would like to mention or something you would like to know from me?

Non-profit sharing initiatives

- To start with, I would like to ask you about your role in the project.
- If you look back, how was the project initiated?
- How would you describe the sharing initiative you are working with?
- Please, describe the process of building up the project. What have been difficulties?
- How is the sharing initiative supposed to work? For whom is the sharing initiative intended?
- Why is the sharing initiative situated where it is?
- Do you think your project is contributing to social inclusion and democratization in the municipality?

- In what way has the municipality been part of the project? Please, give an example how the collaboration with the municipality is working.
- What is your opinion on the involvement of the municipality in the project? Is there anything that could be improved?
- How do you see the role of the municipality in the sharing economy e.g. Sharing Cities?
- What kind of support is needed from the municipality?
- Are there interest conflicts in developing the sharing economy in the municipality?
- What specific challenges and opportunities exist for your and other sharing initiatives in the municipality?
- What do you think is the impact of sharing initiatives in the municipality?
- I would like to ask you how your sharing initiative could be developed further?
- Is there anything else you would like to mention or something you would like to know from me?

APPENDIX II: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

#	City	Organisation	Date
1	Gothenburg	Fixoteket	12 th March 2020
2	Gothenburg	National Sports Federation Västra Götaland (RF-SISU)	23 rd March 2020
3	Umeå	Environmental administration, Umeå municipality	24 th March 2020
4	Gothenburg	Fixoteket	27 th March 2020
5	Gothenburg	Consumer- and Citizen Service, City of Gothenburg	2 nd April 2020
6	Gothenburg	Fritidsbanken	3 rd April 2020
7	Umeå	National Sports Federation Västerbotten (RF-SISU)	20 th April 2020

APPENDIX III: LIST OF STUDY VISITS

#	City	Organisation	Date
1	Gothenburg	Workshop “Cirkulära ytor och fastighetsnära delningstjänster”, Consumer- and Citizen Service, City of Gothenburg	11 th March 2020
2	Gothenburg	Fixoteket Hammarkullen	11 th March 2020
3	Gothenburg	Fritidsbanken Frölunda Torg	11 th March 2020

