1. INTRODUCTION. The starting point.

The sharing economy practices are growing up in typology and dimension. The ICT’s and the developments of platforms of any kind, as well as the improved collective ingenuity that is arising in more and more cities and context, have favored, and are favoring, its spread.

This disruptive innovation seems to have the potential to affect in a positive way the economic, the social and the environmental sphere (Rinne, 2014). The debate around the topic is becoming hot, divided into supporters and detractors, focuses on the unexpected drifts and on the forms of development that the phenomenon is assuming. If for someone the sharing and collaborative economy is fostering the mutual help, sociability and welfare cost reduction, improving the living environment of citizens and favoring a more cohesive urban fabric (Botsman and Rogers, 2010), for somebody else it is promoting a social and digital divide, reproducing old forms of deprivation for some social classes, rebuilding new corporations under the flag of the sharing, and reducing even more the welfare services (Kallis, 2013, Scholz, 2014, Morozov, 2014).

An aspect on which everybody seems to agree is the key role of the Public Administration. It represents a distinguished player within the framework of the sharing economy, particularly influential and of great value, since it usually interacts with citizens, businesses and other administrations and government levels. It has the power to support and let the sharing economy thrive as well as the power to slow down it or “rain on its parade”. It can promote the opportunities offered by the collaborative services, create awareness among citizens on sharing practices and simplify the processes of the new economic model, regulating it without slowing down and repress the phenomenon; or it can decide to limit the spread of the phenomenon adopting a close attitude, in terms of regulation too, and making difficult the integration of the sharing economy in the urban tissue. For some experts it has the power to enter in the process, in the movement of the sharing economy, and to play its role to the fullest: govern and push the spread of positive impacts for the communities (Foster and Iaione, 2015; Iaione, 2015). Public administrations can be an enabling and promotional platform that connects all the actors, the needs and the services in the processes of the sharing economy.
The present research refers to the concept of the sharing economy in its broad sense, combining collaboration and sharing, production and consumption, transitional forms and transformative forms of sharing (Gorenflo, in Scancarello and Mainieri, 2015), in order to highlight the variety of the practices that it can incorporate. At the same time this choice replies to the need of preventing a limitation of the concept in too strict boundaries and the risk to lose its range, diversity and multiplicity (Pais, 2013). On the contrary it allows to stand out where can be retraced its founding values (equity, justice, open access, collaboration, trust) and where no.

Using this type of frame we are considering the entire panorama of sharing and looking at all the stakeholders and actors involved in some way in the debate and in the practices, included the public administration: from experts, to practitioners, going through scholars, advisors, creative minds, activists, enthusiasts, startupper, policy makers, and so on. People that, all around the world, are debating and discussing the topic of the sharing economy, offering their own vision and ideas tied to their own background and origins.

The present work wonders if these people and subjects can be considered a kind of community, and what type of community they embody, asking directly to the people involved in the sharing economy what they think about the nature of this “community”. This part of the research allows to reconstruct the frame of this community and the relations that is generating, offering at the same time an insight on the directions that is taking and on the outputs that is producing. In addition, since the prominence of the PA, above briefly illustrated, the research investigates the community’s opinion on the role that the public authority should play in the sharing ecosystem, trying in this way to reconstruct the general idea of the community. The issue of the public institution’s role is gaining more and more space and attention and this article wants to collect the opinion of some of the main new “containers of sharing information” (online magazines, agencies, web platforms, but also academia…) and their experts. The work moves from the idea to understand the general address that the community of the sharing economy is taking dealing with this issue. What they think public administration should do to favor the positive development of the phenomenon in order to let the sharing economy benefit people and citizens?

2. A GROWING GLOBAL NETWORK OF KNOWLEDGE-BASED EXPERTS & PRACTITIONERS ON THE SHARING ECONOMY

2.1 State of the Art

The debate around the topic is fueling the conglomeration of a growing global network of knowledge-based experts and practitioners that all around the world are questioning, comparing, showing up on the issue of the sharing economy and its social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts. Experts, researchers, scholars, innovators, creative minds, simple citizens, policy makers, public administrators, members of consumer associations, are all dealing with the issues of sharing, collaboration, co-creation, co-management, co-design, co-planning… analyzing them from different points of view, looking at the processes that the sharing economy embodies, at its ongoing evolutions and perversions. They are monitoring its form of developments, mapping its typologies, business models and forms, and all the local experimentations that take shape in different socio-economic contexts, analyzing the unexpected drifts and the adverse effects. In this way they are creating incredible interconnections and they are producing the contents related to the SE, giving names, identifying paradigms and explaining processes.
Many conferences and forums, seminars and meetings, are taking place all around the world gathering and connecting all these people and actors. Just to name some of them: Collaborative Week in Milan, CC Global Summit in Seoul, Civitas Forum in Ljubljana, Digital Labor in New York, IASC Urban Conference of Commons in Bologna and the list could go on and on.

Who wrote has had the opportunity to follow the rise of the debate and witness the growth of the network, following the statements of the sharing experts and advisors, the academic reflections, the business experimentations and taking part to some of the meeting such as those mentioned. All the people that are gathering all around the world, are disclosing and comparing new practices and emerging models, local experimentations and potential prototypes. They are reasoning on how the cities can really become a shared places, a commons; on how people can be empowered and enter into the new models that overcome the old public-private dichotomies, state-market, profit; they are reflecting on the features of the new business models that are arising and on the elements that will allow them to scale; they are studying the changes that the sharing economy is bringing on the organizational schemes of work, on the education, finance, production sectors; ecc… in less words they are sharing knowledge, creating a kind of “meta-discourse” on the sharing and collaborative economy and on the new forms of co-creation of a city.

They often report to new agencies, platforms, online magazines born to follow the sharing economy developments and monitor its forms of expressions, and are marked by the contributions of activists and innovators. Just to quote some of the most renowned: Collaborative Lab, Shareable.net, Ouishare.net, P2P Foundation, LabGov, Collaboriamo.org, Nesta, ecc.

2.2 Can we consider them a community? What kind of community they embody?

The term community derives from Latin communis and it is used in many different disciplines. In a sociological sense the belonging to a community requires strong features, such as to create an identity of the members throughout a common story, shared ideals, traditions and customs, and it implies the sharing of a system of meanings, like behavioral norms, values, religions, the production of artefacts.

The use of the concept in the social science goes back to Ferdinand Tönnies that introduced the typology community-society (Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft) as fundamental tool to understand the social change. The “relations among human wills” create “associations” that can be conceived “as real and organic life – that is the essence of the community – or as ideal and mechanical formation – and this is the concept of society”. The community should therefore be understood “as a living organism, and society, on the other hand, as an aggregate and mechanical product” (Tönnies, 1887). The anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1985) has been one of the first to conceive the community as a conglomeration of normative codes and values from which origin the sense of identity of the members, moving the attention from the structure and function of the community to its meaning for its own members. Therefore is not yet the material and physical part of the community to define it, but also and overall are its members.

Here we are facing a community of shared knowledge and for this reason it can be associated in some way to an epistemic community (EC), the way that Peter Haas (1989) stated: “epistemic communities are associations of professional experts in a particular field”. He then adds that EC are “networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain with an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” (1992). The members of an EC may originate from a variety of academic or professional backgrounds, but all are linked by a set of unifying features that
goes in the direction of the promotion of collective amelioration and not collective gain (Sebenius, 1992). This is the “normative component” (Haas P., 1992) that the members shared (normative believes and values). In this frame, EC can be considered socio-psychological entities that create and justify knowledge. This is also the case of the community that we are dealing about. Besides the normative component, that provides a value-based rationale for the social action of the community members, there are other shared characteristics. Such as the shared casual beliefs about the link between policy action and their results; it derives from the analysis that the member make of practices that lead and contribute to a central set of problems in their domain. Another feature shared is the notion of validity that allows to assess knowledge in their area of expertise. Last, they share a common policy enterprise, or a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence. We can find a clear validation in our community, even if in this case there is not a connection between people involved and policy making or policy directions. In fact, the actors involved are so many and coming from different backgrounds that an homogeneity cannot be found. In addition not all are interested in giving political direction or don’t have enough authority to do it. In any case the purpose of all the debating and discussing at the end is the ability to address the administrative power in the best direction for them and for the sharing economy itself.

There is no doubt that the global community that is growing around the theme of the sharing economy has some of these features. Thanks to the interviews this aspect will be confirmed or denied.

In addition we can retrace other features. We are facing a social group that is producing quality organized knowledge, to which each members has free access; from this point of view our community can be described as a Community of Practices (CP) as well. In this type of community, individuals aim to continuous learning through awareness of their own knowledge and that of others. There is not an explicit hierarchy and roles are hired according to skills and needs of individuals. The concept of CP was first proposed by the cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and by the educational theorist Etienne Wenger in 1991. According to Wenger, author of the book “Communities of Practices” (1998), this type of community can emerge naturally (as our case) for the members’ common interest in a particular domain, or it can be created deliberately in order to gain and improve knowledge of a specific sector. Since the CP is described as a group of people sharing a concern or a passion for something they do and looking for an improvement of their situation and knowledge, we can associate our community to a CP. As Ardichvilli, Page and Wentling (2003) underline, the motivation to share knowledge is critical to success in CP. Their studies show that members are motivated to become active participants in a CP when they consider knowledge as meant for the public good, a moral obligation or as a community interest. In this type of community Wenger gives great emphasis to the learning process as central for the human identity. He focuses on learning as social participation and on individuals as active participants in the practices of social communities and in the construction of their identity through these communities (Wenger et al. 2002). He underlines that the structural characteristics of a CP are defined to a domain of knowledge, a notion of community and a practice. A domain of knowledge creates common ground, inspires members to participate, guides their learning and gives meaning to their actions (in our case sharing economy and related practices); the notion of community creates the social fabric for that learning, and inside the community members are encouraged to interacts and share ideas, that is exactly what we can observe on our community; the practice is the specific focus around which the community develops, shares and maintains its core of knowledge, while the domain provides the general area of interests. There are other
features of a CP that can be highlighted\(^1\), and that probably would not find a mutual correspondence in our community, but the aspects here underlined can be retrace also in our matter of study. The interviews will give us a confirmation in this sense and probably will add some extra features not yet emerged.

3. **THE KEY ROLE OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

As briefly disclosed, the Public Administration can be considered a distinguished player within the framework of the sharing economy and the issue is largely debated at global level. The administrative level of reference is mainly the city since cities have always been about sharing: shared spaces, exchange of goods and services, sharing of activities, and they are historically a shared entity; “all cultures across the globe share and have socially accepted code for sharing” (Agyeman at all, 2013, p.1). Cities are intrinsically built for sharing and, if well connected, they have the capacity to raise per capita production and innovation. Today, many experts underline that is time to rethink and reimagine politics and public intervention in relation with the private interests and the new forms of collaboration and cooperation that are spreading, that means that it’s time to redefine the function of cities as places for sharing and exchange (Rinne, 2014). In Johal and Zon’s opinion (2015), policymakers cannot just concentrated on the simply question of whether the sharing economy is good or bad, but they must go deeper in the topic, craft policies for the broader public interest and take into account the various actors and interests at play. The unfamiliarity with sharing economy models can hinder the ability of governments to recognize the potential benefits such as innovation, economic growth, more efficient networks for urban mobility and for social cohesion (Johal and Zon, 2015). For April Rinne (2015) “It is time to move beyond the binary debate about outdated rules. We are not stuck with a choice of regulating sharing economy platforms like traditional providers, or not regulating them at all. Rather, leaders should take a hard look at the needs of today’s cities, recognize how the sharing economy can help reach cities’ goals, and develop rules that maximize this potential while enabling new forms of business with social value to thrive”.

In Italy Forum PA\(^2\) is largely involved in the debate and in the last years is giving space to experts and experimentations in order to share best practices and point of views and find some efficient solutions for the Public Administrations. In particular it suggests some broad lines to help public administration in playing its full potential facing the sharing economy:

- Set the new realities finding collaborative solutions to cushion the impact on those categories that from these innovations may lose benefits (eg. taxi drivers).
- Training the administrative staff as a facilitator and not just as a provider of services.
- Promote the collaborative culture from the low school and through awareness-raising campaign.
- Open the data simplifying citizens and business in the conception and creation of collaborative services.
- Streamline the legislation around mobility, in particular for the Italian case the articles 82 and 84 of the Highway Code and the law 9/90 on the insurance dimension.

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\(^{1}\) To deepen the topic see: Wenger, E. (1998)

\(^{2}\) Forum PA is a company specialized in public relations and institutional communications. It was established in 2010 as a Istituto Mides srl subsidiarity company, that is specialized in the organization of expositions and meeting from forty years. Forum PA fosters meetings and debates among public administration, companies and citizens about innovation themes through the creation of communities, studies, researches, multimedia communications, events, meetings and training.
- Favor the tourist accommodation service redefining the current normative about contracts and services management.
- Favor the unbankable micro-entrepreneurship, thus the actors considered disqualified to use services and/or financial products, thanks to the PA intervention to guarantee the credit granted to new entrepreneurs.
- Map the collaborative services to know them and listen the new requests.
- Launch tables of contamination between traditional categories and start-ups.

The University of Toronto too, thanks to Noah Zon and Sunil Johal, proposed a report that identifies four key steps that can help policymakers in developing new approaches to the sharing economy: “Policymaking for the Sharing Economy: Beyond Whack-A-Mole”. The report highlights the necessity to establish a strategic operating framework, re-align the political and cultural incentives, modernize the government structures and adopt smarter regulatory responses.

Also Shareable.net3 has proposed, together with the Sustainable Economies Law Center4, a complete, deep and accurate guide to help administrations, urban policymakers and planner in building shareable cities, starting from the assumption that: “City governments can increasingly step into the role of facilitators of the sharing economy by designing infrastructure, services, incentives, and regulations that factor in the social exchanges of this game changing movement [...] so [...] we believe that fostering the growth of the sharing economy is the single most important thing that city governments can do to boost prosperity and resilience in times of economic crisis and climate change”. The guide wants to help cities to develop more resilient, innovative, and democratic economies, and for this reason it details 32 specific policy steps that local leaders can take to benefit from the growing sharing economy and to support innovations. For each sectors the guide proposes policy ideas to implement and examples of US cities that are going in these directions.

These examples show three subjects, with different nature, proposing directions and roadmaps to guide the public administration. There are examples directly coming from governments and public institutions, as the case of the government of the United Kingdom that commissioned a review on sharing economy to Debbie Wosskow, Ceo of Love Home Swap. The review, published in November 2014, makes over 30 recommendations on how the UK can become the global center for the sharing economy5. It recognizes the importance of the innovations and proposes the creation of an Innovation Lab, a kind of incubator and research center that should be led by the private sector investment and supported by Nesta6 and Innovative UK. To have a clear strategic framework that consider sharing services as an option to traditional market (see ride-sharing and carpooling as alternatives to trains and taxis and shared accommodations as alternatives to hotels and b&b) is a mandatory element. The consumer’s trust in online transactions is another element to work on, and the development and use of an identity verification system to check criminal records is suggested. As well as the creation of specific assurances that could be referred to the British Insurance Brokers’ Association. Taxation should become easier and a guide to tax in sharing

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3 Shareable is an award-winning nonprofit news, action and connection hub for the sharing transformation. Its mission is to empower everyone to share for a more joyous, resilient, and equitable world, as wrote in the site at the address http://www.shareable.net/.

4 Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC) cultivates a new legal landscape that supports community resilience and grassroots economic empowerment, providing essential legal tools so communities everywhere can develop their own sustainable sources of food, housing, energy, jobs, and other vital aspects of a thriving community. See the site at: //www.theselc.org/.


6 Nesta is a UK innovation charity with a mission to help people and organisations bring great ideas to life.
The economy seems to be necessary. The review gives recommendations also in terms of re-use of public spare spaces, digital inclusion (to reduce the digital divide and reach new audiences), and creation of a trade body of sharing business across all sectors to represent the sharing economy to the government, to help attract investments and make use of the collective buying power of its members.

There are many other interesting works on the topic, that highlight how important is to include the public administration in the reflection on the sharing economy, and propose directions and suggestions to favor the creation of the best environment for the sharing economy to thrive, matching the needs of the society and replying to the main issues of the city.

4. METHODOLOGY

In the last three years we have followed the phenomenon of the sharing economy, reconstructing the different settings and fields that were increasingly dealing with the general topic of the sharing. Years by years we witnessed an increasing attention on the matter with more and more sectors called into questions and interested in a deep reflection, and we realized the raise and the existence of an international community guided by common or similar interests based on the emergence of the sharing economy and of the peer-to-peer phenomena. The present research starts from this recognition with the aim to investigate the features and the nature of this community, and to understand its point of view on the sharing economy and on the role of the Public Administration in supporting, steering and governing the sharing economy itself.

The first step has been the identification of the main sectors of origin of the “members” of the network. Then for each sectors some of the main relevant stakeholders has been invited to participate in this panel. The sectors interested are: academia, policy making, advising, new business models.

The interviews have been administered among June and September 2016, through skype call, and the people involved are:

1. Julian Agyeman (academia) – Professor of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, USA. Author, with Duncan McLaren, of the book “Sharing Cities”.
2. Ivana Pais (academia) – Professor of Economic Sociology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Sociology Department, Faculty Member, Milan, Italy.
3. Chris Martin (academia) – Environmental Social Scientist and Research Associate at the University of Manchester, UK.
4. Vasilis Kostakis (academia) – Tenured Senior Research Fellow at the Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, VU University Amsterdam and visiting Scholar at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology, Autonomous University of Barcelona. He is Founder of the interdisciplinary research hub P2P Lab and Research Coordinator of the P2P Foundation.
5. Neal Gorenflo (advisor) – Co-founder and publisher of Shareable Magazine, a nonprofit online magazine about sharing. Advisor for some cities like Seoul and Amsterdam.
6. Peter Baeck (advisor) – Researcher for Nesta, team Policy and Research. He lead much of Nesta’s research into crowdfunding and P2P.
7. Luca Bizzarri (policy maker) - Public Officer at the Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, Italy, with specific responsibilities linked to the enhancement of policies targeting young people and local development through cultural projects. He is part of the expert list edited by the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth.
They have been called to reply at questions related to:

- The existence of a global community of people related to the sharing economy;
- The sharing economy in general and the opinion of the community on the evolution of the phenomenon;
- The role of the Public Administration on steering, promoting and govern the sharing economy itself.

The results of the interviews are here reported in the following paragraph divided into sections: on the nature of the community; on the sharing economy in general and on the role that the Public Administration can play to integrate the practices of the sharing economy in the urban tissue.

The study has an explorative nature and it represents a first attempt to approach the topic of the sharing economy in its short and long nets of connections and relations. Further actors should be intercepted and more interviews collected to enrich the first reflections here presented.

5. THE PANEL: THE COMMUNITY REPLIES.

5.1 What kind of community? A self-reflection on its nature.

The presence of a growing global network of knowledge-based experts and practitioners engaged on the issue of the sharing economy is now a fact. As Kostakis underlines “more or less it was expected, is not something new, is something that is growing in the time” and the other interviewees agree on this. The invention of browsers and of the Internet has favored the proliferation of networks and we can observe a community also related with the sharing economy. The intensity of the phenomenon and its fast growth have spotlighted this topic increasing the generalized interest and the global attention.

Pais considers of great interest the evolution that this net is having. It started from advisors and consultants, like Botsman, Rinne, Owyang... with a strong consultation kernel, and with the consequences that the first experimentation and practices are born from startups and new businesses. The reflexivity has been anchored in practices and made by consultants that have been able to translate the experiences that they saw in possible prototypes to sell to companies. “This consulting genesis is interesting, also in terms of a comparison with other realities, such as the circular economy, born instead more from a theoretical reflection. In the case of the sharing economy the academia is following the consultants and advisors analysis, also at language level”. In Pais’ opinion at the moment there are not academic proposals that move the interpretation axis, but in general “the academia follows the consultant proposals and analysis, without giving a consistent added value”. This depends on the nature of the scientific analysis, that look at the phenomena trying to integrate them in bigger frames of theories, while at consultant level phenomena are magnified. Not to mention that to build a theoretical thought required time and, for the same configuration of the field, researchers and scholars have little access to data (platforms, especially the biggest, don’t share data easily). So for the academia there are some difficulties at interpretation level and in terms of data access.

Nevertheless, the attention on the topic is gathering experts and practitioners and opening at an interesting phase of multidisciplinarity. Bizzarri, from the Municipality of Bolzano, stresses this aspect has incredible useful and able to be generative of new solutions and ideas. Putting together academia, experts, practitioners, consultants, policy makers... allow a mixing of topics, points of view and languages, favoring a mutual enrichment. The same European Union is assuming this approach, at least at Youth Policies level that is the sector highlighted by Bizzarri. However, someone else, like Pais, even recognizing the benefits of this approach, underlines that is not so easy to take this road in a successful way, especially at academic levels, in fact some disciplines are still missing in the debate and others are still working in parallel ways. Anyway the mixing approach is more and more evident, even if sometimes disciplines struggles to find a way to integrate their languages and visions and more easily they work in a parallel way.
Of the same opinion is also Agyeman who underlines that inside this big community actually there are many different small communities, related to the field of belonging. In this way our starting assumption in terms of lack of homogeneity of the community is confirmed. The actors involved in the “community” are of course sharing knowledge on the same issue and domain, the sharing economy, but since they come from different fields they embody different aspects of the topic and they reason at different levels. Some aspects of an epistemic community, not all, are here represented. Another missing point is connected with the ability of the community’s professional experts to have an impact at policy level. In some cases we can register an open dialogue that can become planning and policies, since the purpose of all the debates is ultimately to address the administrative power in direction of innovative and fair policies, but it is not something always expected.

Someone place emphasis on the shift from a more traditional scholarly academic environment (not connected with the civil society) to a more active and participative environment. Today we can in fact observe the generation of more actions, more participatory actions licenses... Kostakis says “now I see that scholars at the same time are activists and participants and viceversa [...] we are experts, scientists, but we are participating in this sharing economy not just as observers, but as active participants. I think this is one of the most important contribution”. In this way for Kostakis the general debate is becoming more integral and fertile. Bizzarri too emphasizes the importance of mixing approaches and shared languages: “for years the scientific community has been in an ivory tower without interfaces with who deals with phenomena in practice, and on the other hand the practitioners need someone that show them the way of development of the concepts...”. So for them the current commingling among different knowledges is revitalizing and enriching the general debate.

In general our panelists agree on the fact that the members of this sharing economy’s community are generating contents and knowledge about the topic, building a kind of “meta-discourse” on the sharing and collaborative economy and on the new forms of co-creation of a city. In some way they can be considered a sort of “meta-mind of the sharing economy”, since they are a vivid community, active and proactive, source of knowledge unprecedented. They are not only generating contents and sharing knowledge: they are also generating new social relations and some specific solutions (such as the peer production licenses and the open cooperativism), through interaction and comparison. For Agyeman they are creating a vision too, a vision that contemplates inclusion and participation and promotes new innovative forms of intervention.

About the nature of the community some of its member can also be considered a kind of nudging actors (laione, 2015) able to drive in the direction of a real change of paradigm. As seen before the community is heterogeneous, composed by different subjects, related to diverse fields with diverse interests. Our panelists underline that among all the different actors, some groups can be considered more leading or, better, able to lead in the direction of a switch of paradigm. But the actors focused on the generation of profit will be probably less supportive in terms of paradigm change. For Bizzarri, in general, time smell of change, in a widespread way in all the social context we can retrace the stimulus to an improvement: the idea of citizens has changed, as well as the morphology of our communities and the relation between public and private. What is evident in his opinion is the appearance of somebody able to take the responsibility for change.

Last element, underlined by all the participants at the panel, is the importance for realities that are very different to enter in contact and to be connected. Imitation is a key point, “social innovation is to copy, is to see at national and international level what is happening and try to customized outside-experiences for the local and territorial context” (Bizzarri). So the growing network, in panelists opinion, is primarily a way to

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7 Kostakis is founder of the interdisciplinary research hub P2P Lab and Research Coordinator of the P2P Foundation. Further, he sits on the boards of commons-oriented start-ups (OpenBionics.org; Minds.com; Bitmind.co) and open access referred journals (TripleC, Journal of Peer Production and Engaging Science, Technology, and Society). P2PLab is a spin off of both P2P foundation and Tallin university. So he is at the same time a scholar and a activist and practitioner.
share knowledge and increase the opportunities of finding innovative solutions to social, economic and environmental problems, in an equal and fair way.

5.2 The “Meta-discourse”: what they think about the Sharing Economy?

All the interviewees agree on the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the topic. It is of course a global ongoing phenomenon with also different local inputs, and looking at its broad pictures it can assume different forms, from commons, to profit or no profit solutions, from cooperatives to more commercial forms that are monopolizing our attention and resources. Neal Gorenflo for example insists a lot on the definition that one choose to adopt in explaining the sharing economy. He speaks about a transformative and a transnational form of sharing economy. The former wishes for solid and enduring social connections, based on mutual support. Inside the corporations/communities, the resource management or the management of the corporation itself is collective and common, and the goal is to produce benefits for the whole community. Users are the reason why, and the corporation exists to answer to their needs. In the transformative corporations, citizens are called to work together in a cooperative way. The latter in his opinion fuels precarious employment and reinforces the existing inequalities, it is in line with the neoliberal market and its processes. These kinds of corporations are real commodities, managed by few, with the aim of obtaining the best results possible, where the users are just means to sell the business, and access to the services is possible with just one touch on the smartphone’s screen. This is the case with AirBnb and Uber. Some authors, such as Kallis (2013) consider these companies part of the rental economy rather than the sharing economy, where a rental economy is based on the rent of goods and services through proprietary and commercial technological platforms, far from the original meaning of sharing, a kind of adaptation of the capitalistic paradigm to the new economic trends. In Martin’s opinion “the original idea of sharing presented by Botsman and Rogers” in the book “What’s mine is yours” “has been a bit lost, since the initial idea was not that there were few such large platforms to create a monopoly, instead we are witnessing the spread of what has been called platform capitalism”.

Kostakis on the other hand underlines that there are many different models of production and distribution that lead to different social and technological behaviors. For this reason “the sharing economy initiatives can be very different and even contradict each other”. In his opinion there are some genuine sharing economy initiatives and other just called sharing economy. Kostakis with Bauwens developed a two axis-system that creates four scenarios around two generic models. They used a polarity based on centralize control and distributed control of the peer-2-peer infrastructures and a polarity based on the orientation, that can be profit or no-profit. So they reason on extractive models, called netarchical capitalism, and on for benefit generating models, called common based peer production. In addition, in terms of business models of the sharing economy, he invites to consider the open cooperatives, a model that merges the best elements that commons based peer production movement has with the best aspects that the cooperative movement has. It is a new form of business organization alternative to the traditional startup linked to venture capitalist for their growth and exposed to a risk of be distorted and transformed in for profit extractive business. Of the same opinion is also Gorenflo who speaks of platform cooperativism, a concept introduced by Trebor Scholz. For Gorenflo there are five things that platform cooperative can do to beat what he calls “Death Stars” (2015) (big companies of the sharing economy, netarchical capitalistic platforms, platform capitalists): incubate the templates, offer a better service at a competitive price, take cooperation to a next level, create an ecosystem to distribute wealth and build a mass movement. A prominent expert such as Janel Orsi of the Sustainable Economies Law Center recently suggested that cities should cooperate with each other and with platform coops to mold the sharing economy in the public interest (2013). Among our panelist the same Agyeman support this ideas.

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1 Trebor Scholtz is an Associate Professor of Culture and Media at the New School in New York City. He put the concept of platform cooperativism on the agenda, underlining that “platform cooperativism is about cloning the technological heart of online platforms and puts it to work with a cooperative model, one that puts workers, owners, communities, and cities – in a kind of solidarity that leads to political power”.
Always Agyeman invites to look at the sharing economy not only as an economic notion, since “sharing” is a deeply human trait and our cities are all about share spaces, resources, knowledge... In this sense “the concept can be considered a more cultural-communal-personal community issue”.

5.3 The community’s opinion on the role of the public administration.

As already mentioned the Public Administration could play a crucial role in promoting, steering and governing the sharing economy, and all the actors agree with this statement.

What emerges first is the necessity to cover the existing gap on the understanding of the meaning and nature of the sharing economy. All the actors interviewed underline the importance of understanding that gap, understanding what is the sharing economy and what are its main aspects. This is the first step in order to deal with the topic.

Second point: “listening”, a Public Administration should do a great action of listening. As underlined by Pais, the PA should first of all “listen” in order to better know the big frame in which the sharing economy ties and the necessity to which it can reply. This means to open at the civil society and its potential. Kostakis adds that “the PA should realize the great potential that lies within the civil society, supporting and strengthening the direct production of social value, and creating and sustaining infrastructures that enable people to cooperate and share and distribute shared value”. The interviewees highlight that the civil society has always been considered a less category, “something inferior” compared with government and market. The same language uses to refer to it does not put the civil society at the center and does not realize the creative potentialities that it has. As Kostakis remembers, in our common language and in the mainstream language of the PA, we say “no-profit”, we don’t say “commons oriented”, we say “non-governmental” and not “commons oriented administration” or civil society organization, stating a negative inclination of the language that reflects the inability to recognize the creative potentialities of the civil society. But some sharing economy initiatives make evident the dynamics of the creative capacity of the civil society; the point, for Kostakis, is to put the civil society in equal base with the market and the state. What the PA should do is to recognize the civil society capacities, mutualize data knowledge, culture, ecc... creating participation in infrastructures, since “the civil society can very well co-produce and co-create meaningful values”; of course the support of the state is instrumental, since the civil society cannot become an alternative at the state and the market, but a complementary actor, working in synergy with the other actors. What matters most, using Ivana Pais’ words, is the ability of the PA “to define its role and to identify innovative policies”, including citizens and giving them space of expression. The issue of an active involvement of the civil society has been underlined also by an advisor like Gorenflo, who states that a PA “should assumes a broader perspective and empowers citizens and residents to freely and voluntarily organize”.

In addition, Agyeman stresses the fact that a city, through its administration, should encourage projects able to increase social justice and equity, focusing on people with low income. The way to approach the sharing economy in this frame seems to be a path that looks at the human and social capital, and at the involvement of citizens in an optic of maximum inclusion possible. Martin too, talks about a PA able to promote activities and forms of grassroots activities, highlighting the necessity of extending the sharing over the digital world. Additionally he underlines the importance of mediate between private businesses and other forms of sharing. With the same view also a policy maker like Bizzarri, who believes that the PA “should try to govern the transition from private interest to public interest and to intervene in order to transform the specific in general”. Both Gorenflo and Pais stress the necessity to promote and implement innovative policies, supporting the new sharing services in an intelligent way, providing funds, matching grants, organizing social campaigns, ecc. (even if we are in a period of deep austerity and it is not simple). To do this is important to design specific form of regulation.
The regulation issue is another very important key point emerged during the interviews. In fact, in the opinion of our interviewees, another action that the PA should implement is related to the possibility of regulate the sharing economy initiatives and realities, especially those became huge like Uber and Airbnb, and for this reason more impacting on the society. The phenomenon is growing fast and assuming different forms that sometimes leave wide doubts about the nature of a service and make difficult distinguish sharing economy activities from conventional business activities. For this reason a request of regulation is coming from different arenas and sectors. As noted by Sundararajan “there is a sort of misalignment between newer peer-to-peer business models/roles and older guidelines developed with existing ways of providing the same or similar service is mind. For example, an entrepreneur (‘host’) who provides short-term accommodation occasionally via a platform like Airbnb is not a traditional ‘hotelier’. Similarly, individuals who occasionally offer rideshares via a platform like Lyft or Sidecar are not traditional ‘taxi drivers’” (Sundararajan, 2014). Boundaries between personal and professional in the provision of commercial services are blurring, so for government becomes difficult understand if we are moving at professional level or personal level, with the consequence that is challenging to apply the right rules. At the same time, as remembered by the Business Innovation Observatory already in 2013, there is a lack of “tailored policy framework” for regulating new sharing economy businesses, that, as result, keep moving in a grey normative zone. If there are not uncertainties and is not clear who has the liability, individuals can be unmotivated to pursue new form of production or consumptions, as remembered by Sundararajan (2014). Moreover, without clear frameworks, some innovative ideas could be stopped or hold back and social innovation would result slowed down. Lacking a frameworks, companies can try to exploiting loopholes in the legislative vacuum with the result of damaging consumer trust. Also the advisor of Nesta, Baek, consider the huge importance start to study regulative solutions suitable for the new services, aware that it is not possible apply the same conditions to different services.

Moreover, a part from the big renowned companies, like Uber and Airbnb, all the other initiatives are often at their first stage and a regulation could be more harmful than beneficial. As Kostakis underline: “in their very beginning the sharing economy initiatives can contradict what regulation says, better to wait and see what new startups suggest and then regulate” (Kostakis). In general they call for calm and reason, since the phenomenon is new, is not completely discovered, developed and clear. To avoid the risk of suffocating its development and stifling down potential good perspectives is better to collect more information, study and follow extensively its evolution and still wait before to apply a strict regulation, as also Pais underlines.

In addition, from the first evidences emerged through the interviews, there is no doubts that the public sector should change approach to integrate the sharing economy in the city-system in the efficient way possible. Everybody knows that the public sector is usually characterized by closed processes, rigid hierarchies and a sort of aversion for innovations that are exactly the opposite features of sharing economy, in which openness, collaboration, empowerment and humanness are the main elements (Pick, 2014; Galley at al., 2013). Usually politicians tend to move slowly and in environment that dislike risks and innovations. But the general debate, here symbolically represented by our interviewees, highlights that it is time to change address and open to new possibilities, accepting that regulations need to be modernized and new actors need to be taken into account. Tenders and calls for innovation subsidies should be tailored and designed with great accuracy, to be more in line with the new sharing economy approach.

Another interesting aspect is highlighted by Kostakis, who believes that one of the strong political forces for commons related policies could be “a coalition of cities, that can create a transitional scale for commons and transition”. At the Peer-2-peer Foundation it is called the grand coalition of the commons and Kostakis reports Barcelona as a good example as a city that solved this distinct possibility. Also for Gorenflo “cities need to work together... cooperating on open source software for taxi for example-- taxi regulation, taxi coops to offer better condition for workers, ride sharing.... Cooperating and offering services that can be adopted by other cities... in order to reduce resource consumption, increase social capital, create fear jobs...”. 

Kostakis put emphasis also on the importance to develop the existing commons oriented legal infrastructures, such as creative commons, general public licensed, etc. In his opinion, “better licenses are needed today in order to enable commoners and people who contribute to commons oriented initiatives to create technical barriers for big firms who very often exploit rights that can be corporately created”. He speaks about new legal tools, such as Peer production licenses and Open hardware licenses.

Last element emerged is the absence, by date, of processes of evaluation especially related with innovative policies. In particular Pais underlines a lack of planning on the assessment, even by the most advanced and lucid administrators. “The coverage of the assessment is missing, not only ex post, but as a process. If you want to do innovative and bottom-up processes, you must have a strong project focus, you can not engage the single task ... it is a constituent part of an even more important process”. At this point many initiatives, policies, experimentations, regulations, trials have been implemented, but we are not yet in a modelling phase (Iaione, 2015) and to critically reflect on what has been done till now is becoming mandatory. A strong planning attention is necessary to implement innovative processes from the bottom, since is not enough to launch single activities if there is not a strategic framework and a comprehensive vision. Planning towards evaluation should enter in the process. That’s because the evaluation allow to measure the work done till now and to better understand the phenomenon, acquiring and creating the tools that permit to change direction or to adjust the initiatives and the interventions (Johal and Zon, 2015).

6. CONCLUSION

The panel has involved some of the experts, advisors and researchers part of the big and growing network that is orbiting around the topic of the sharing economy, allowing allowed to collect information about three aspects:

1. The sharing economy in general and its current evolution.
2. The role of the Public Administration in terms of management, steer and govern of the sharing economy.
3. The very nature of what we have identify as the community of the sharing economy.

As regards the first point, the sharing economy is still perceived as a complex and sometimes ambiguous concepts. The interviewees invite to not consider it only in its economic aspect and to promote a knowledge and an approach based on its social aspect and on its commons oriented nature.

On the theme of the Public Administration’s role the opinions seems to converge on two main positions. One is more oriented on the civil society and on the importance to integrate its visions and needs on the definition of policies, favoring sharing and participative processes. In fact, all our interviewees agree on the importance of giving voice, space and structures to the civil society, empowering citizens and residents and using the tools of the sharing economy to promote a better quality of life in terms of more equity, inclusion and justice. The second position is oriented on the hot topic of the regulation. As underlined by many experts and researchers in the general debate, the phenomenon is still in an evolution phase, and because of its nature it is important to intervene with forms of regulations. Nevertheless the regulation should concern especially the big companies that are growing behind the flag of sharing and solidarity (but that actually have aspects typically capitalistic) in order to integrate them in the social system, without creating new forms of precariat, increase forms of injustice, reduce social trust and favor illegal practices. At the same time the regulation should be able to not stiff down the development and the insurgence of sharing solutions really oriented to cooperation, collaboration, altruism, equity..., including where possible forms of specific funding and support. These key elements have been stressed also by our participant to the panel.

In addition to these two position also the evaluation has emerged as an important step to implement in order to analyze what has been done till now and with what effects, and redirect the efforts.
In terms of networks there is no doubt that we are facing a community, but the starting assumption of an epistemic community is confirmed only partially. We have professional experts coming from different fields and sharing knowledge on the same domain, so on the basis of the definition of epistemic community given previously we can consider our network of attention an epistemic community. Nevertheless this community is composed by many small different communities, and there is not homogeneity in reason of the diverse background of belonging. This last aspect for someone can be considered a strength since it opens to the possibility of interdisciplinary reasoning, even if the difficulties of integrating different languages and visions can obstacle a fast and efficient understanding of new solutions. In the same way also the normative component typical of an epistemic community here assumes different faces, as if from one side it provides a value-base rational for the social action of the community and in a broad sense the members share the same normative believes and values, on the other side we must realize that of course the goal of a startup will be different from the goal of a policy maker or of an advisor... They are instead confirmed the notion of validity and the aspect of the common policy enterprise, since the former allows to access knowledge on the theme of sharing, and the latter is related to the set of problems to which the professional competences of the members are directed. On the contrary on the aspect of the shared causal belief there is not a completely conformity, since there is not yet a connection between the members and the policy directions. Actually in some cases we are witnessing an increasing dialogue between government and policy makers on one side and the other actors on the other side, but there is not a casual relation that bring the solutions identified in the debate at the political desks. So it’s clear that our community has some relevant aspects that lead to consider it an epistemic community. But through our interviews also elements more typically of a community of practices are emerged: first of all the presence of a group that produces quality organized knowledge and to which each members has free access (even if in the case of the big companies the interviewees underline the difficulties to access data). Second element is the absence of an explicit hierarchy: in our community actually there are not roles to assign and the community itself has a more informal nature. In any case, members are all encouraged to interacts and share ideas, in order to maintain open the debate and the dialogue on the issues of the sharing economy, find sharing solutions to social, economic and environmental problems and co-planning innovative policies.

To conclude we can consider our community a kind of hybrid community that embodies aspects and features of both the epistemic community and the community of practices. The present work, nevertheless, is a first preliminary step of analysis of this growing global-network and does not pretend to run out all the aspects related to the topic. But it has the advantage to bring to the attention the topic, opening a reflection. More contributions should be collected in the future, expanding the panel in order to implement and deepen the analysis of the topic, realizing the different positions included in the big global network that is emerging. Shaping a network analysis would be relevant to investigate the patterns of relationships that connect the social actors involved in the net and reconstruct the social structure of this network. Analyzing the scheme and modalities by which the nots enter in contact and the different “streams” that they follow, as well as the backgrounds from which they come from, would allow to better understand the nature of this growing global network. In addition, sociometry could help also in the study of the quotes prosody (indegree), showing what are the more and less topics and opinions supported in the academic system for example. The social network analysis, looking at the social relations and at information fluxes can reveal strong ties and clusters and the thematic affinities too, showing new ecosystems of relations and guiding matters (Jacob Levi Moreno, 1980). A quite important aspect is to bring out the position and the links of the Public Administration with the other nods inside the network, having revealed a crucial role of the local authorities and institutional actors in promoting or limiting the development of the sharing economy services and platforms. This type of in-depth analysis can favor a critical approach to the study of the “hybrid community” of the sharing economy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


