SHARING ECONOMY PRACTICES, DISCOURSES AND URBAN POLICIES: MILAN AND AMSTERDAM.

Abstract
This research project investigates the relationship between practices and initiatives labelled as sharing economy and the urban policies framework in a comparative perspective. We choose Milan and Amsterdam as cities in which investments and resources in the sharing economy are particular significant. Three dimensions are analysed: discourses and institutional narratives; type of sharing’s practices within the space; urban policies (actors and resources) and outcomes in terms of urban innovation, local economic growth and social inclusion. Both in Milan and Amsterdam the sharing economy is seen as part of strategies, which aim at achieving innovative urban development, in promoting urban policies nurture the development of “collaborative trend”. We expect that the two cities will show a specific combination of market and local community oriented policies and practices. Two diverse sharing practices will be analysed in details: Maker Movement and start-up’ projects (i.e. FabCity in Amsterdam and maker-spaces in Milan), the two public associations called City-makers agenda in Amsterdam and Milano-IN (Milano Innova e Include)

1. Sharing economy’ discourses
Within the academic debate, public discourses, social media there is a big momentum gathering behind the sharing economy theme, the way to engage households, individuals and their idle resources in collaborative production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, via online platforms and mobile application – as the widespread and mainstream definition states (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; 2013). The cutting edge of sharing is not just about the use of technology or commercialising the idling capacity to make profit, whereas the technological innovation implied in sharing mechanisms might generate distributed opportunities at various scale in which co-production of services and products are more pronounced. At a conceptual level, sharing economy’s initiatives require both socio-economic functions that could have different impacts on the urban fabric and local economy. Despite the global rhetoric and narratives about sharing economy emphasize concepts such as people’s well-being, urban innovation, local economic diversity, sustainable job creation and so on, looking at most popular Silicon Valley’ firms (i.e. Airbnb and Uber), we see centralised enterprises that seem to be not concerned with social cohesion issues. Sharing economy’ firms might offer new models of collaborative
consumption and co-production that are co-opted by private interests and venture capitalists, and increasingly geared towards affluent middle-class types or so-called “bourgeois bohemians”, but they often exclude those on low incomes resulting in a less equal society (Morozov, 2013).

At the current state, the policy discussion about sharing economy and other initiatives arose alongside it (i.e. Maker Movement, civic crowdfunding, etc.) show that are first and foremost urban phenomena. As a result, public authorities and stakeholders across cities are crafting their “innovative urban policy” according to (new) principles, discourses and practices. Through official statements and discourses the political actors can govern in a way, by opening up to unconventional organisational forms, promoting and allowing access to resources, the labour market and to services delivery, in order to fund public asset in the city. This is an optimal time to begin understanding the sharing economy’s potential for practical implications and its latent unintended effects in urban systems. For this to happen rigorous empirical research on the process and effects of urban policies is needed, hence this research must be framed by questions arising from social science theory, particularly in the field of urban studies.

2. Objects and theoretical framework

The objects of the research are: discourses, policies and practices of sharing economy. In this research project I explore if and to what extent the phenomena is a potential tool aimed at meeting the needs of social and territorial cohesion, favouring greater inclusion and distribution of resources in the urban system. In particular, we intend the sharing economy as part of urban development strategy that might be focused on the local community or on the market dimension. We investigate how decision-making processes relating to strategic urban projects (i.e. sharing economy) are framed in order to achieve innovative urban developments (Salet, 2008). The abovementioned three dimensions of framing are analysed: the framing of alliances in the metropolitan action space and the framing of the democratic process, understood as accountability and participation.

Firstly, I explore the building of discourses, the roles of different actors in the promotion, the institutions and resources engaged in the sharing economy. Secondly, I analyse the policy promoted within the phenomenon, examining how policies are formulated and implemented at the urban level, and how such (public) intervention vary in terms of fulfilling economic or social aspects. Applying the same research framework adopted by Kantor (et al., 1997; 2010S) the market

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2 Within this line of thought we have to conceive innovation as a diverse organization of space in a city and the re-organization of public services, which try to valorise social relationship in order to increase capabilities and opportunities amongst individual, as well as the way in which local authorities arrange available resources (Le Galès and Vitale, 2013).
conditions-positions (i.e. economic fortunes and obstacles) and the intergovernmental system of a city result as being independent variables, while the opportunities and constraints of the actors together with the role of leadership and their interconnections could be considered as variables intervening, specifically I seek to grasp the local political culture and the characteristics of political and social institutions (i.e. political obstacles, accountability and participation) in two cities. Finally, urban politics and policy establishment like the structure of governance and the modes of regulation are our dependent variables. Within the “shallow” existing body of literature, the sharing transformation that is emerging in cities around the world remains an unexamined proposition about “what sharing economy entails and whom it benefits, namely the idea – familiar from the sharing economy discourse – that its technologies and collaborative social infrastructure foster growth and democratize opportunity” (see Beauregard, 2014: 3). Starting from this assumption, we analyse the sharing economy through the lens of urban governance studies (Le Galès, 2002; Harding & Blokland, 2014; Pierre & Peters, 2012; Jessop, 2002). According to Salet (et al. 2003) the crucial challenge of metropolitan governance is the coordination of social and economic activities of institutional fragmentation and the resultant diversity of power coalitions. We claim that power coalitions and urban regimes should be conceived of as a culturally and historically specific model of urban governance (Pierre, 2005). More specifically, we draw attention to the political strategy of mobilizing a variety of strategic and resourceful actors in the urban territory towards a collective objective identifiable in the “sharing trend”, taking into account the potential contradictions and conflicts at local levels.

Within this theoretical strand, empirically we explore the relationship between the arrangements for decision-making process and urban policies within the frame of sharing economy, through an examination of two major city-regions in Europe - Milan and Amsterdam. The main objective is to analyse the inter-relationship between the formulation of strategic urban policies for the whole metropolitan area and the arrangements of governance that enable decisions to be made (Salet et al. 2003). Thus, we investigate what kind of arrangements have taken place in which power coalitions of actors are assembled and what were the public discourses to support them, taking into account the urban political process and national and European conditions to public and private actions in relationship to a particular urban context. The main analytical unit is the set of actors involved in decision-making process in sharing economy. In particular, we aim at mapping political élites and

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3 What matters is the balance of these pressures in particular urban regions. In some metropolitan areas local governments find more to share than in other regions if only because of differences in economic interdependencies (Kantor, 2010; Crouch, 2001$). Consensus and contestation among governments can vary from region to region as the mix of economic interests shifts.

4 Who you decide to team up with depends to a very large extent on what it is that you seek to accomplish, moreover political power in the governance perspective is highly contextualized (Pierre and Peters, 2012).
the pull of local knowledge (e.g. academics, informers, policy makers, etc.) that define several insights of urban policies.

3. Research questions
We aim at understanding the whole urban political process (Harding & Blokland, 2014) of the sharing economy in Milan and Amsterdam, hence we ask:

- **Discourses, interests and outcomes in the policies:**
  Which are the discourses in terms of involved actors and visions on the role of sharing economy within the urban economy?

- **Policies, resources and decision-making processes** (i.e. promoting the phenomena, the framing of alliances in the metropolitan action space and the framing of the democratic process):
  What policies have been formulated, and what other interests have influenced these policies in the agenda setting? Which urban policies do they establish and to what ends? Which outcomes have this process brought about in terms of urban innovation, social cohesion and local development?

- **Practices and tools of public interventions** (i.e. grassroots activities, urban commons production at an urban scale):
  What are the practices that obtain public supports and how do they are promoted through institutional rhetoric and settled by the policy actions? These policies may have a redistributive effect, who benefits and who is excluded?

Drawing together the results for each city, it is then asked:

- What are the similarities and differences in the governance arrangements and urban policy process between cities? How far these are influenced by national differences?

- What these sharing initiatives over a period of three years have brought about within the local context?

4. Choosing cities and case studies of sharing economy’ practices in Milan and Amsterdam
This research is focused on Milan and Amsterdam. According to Kantor (*et al.*, 1997) those two cities are in a favourable market position and they have an integrated intergovernmental system (structural conditions). They are different with regards to the local culture, the bargaining context, and the agency components; we expect that Milan is more business and market-oriented and Amsterdam establish redistributive and social-oriented policies (Fainstein, 2008). Comparing two different local settings, in which a constellation of actors has similar ‘weight’ in the urban arena,
may open up a discussion about pervasive national and local differences in the configuration of urban policy and economic and spatial development trajectories within the sharing economy. Since in Milan and Amsterdam\(^5\) local authorities have been devoted remarkable attention, regulation attempts, and policy-strategy towards the development of sharing economy, we have selected a few initiatives and projects in which the political entrepreneurialism of building coalitions is made to attain political, social and economic goals, as well as service delivery (Salet, \textit{et al.} 2003). We expect that Milanese and Amsterdam municipalities have different policy strategies although the projects in which they invest are pretty similar; it makes the difference the way in which the urban polity define the agenda setting, the relationship amongst heterogeneous actors, and the decision-making process within metropolitan governance mechanisms. Narrowing down the core issues of the research, at the empirical level, we have selected two diverse case studies: Maker Movement and start-up’ projects (i.e. FabCity in Amsterdam\(^6\) and maker-spaces in Milan), the two public associations called City-makers agenda in Amsterdam and Milano-IN (\textit{Milano Innova e Include})\(^7\). Compared to traditional urban policies issues (Dente, 1990, 2005; Della Porta, 2008, Mossberger, \textit{et al.} 2012) we have selected those projects primarily because they represent the examples of sharing practices in the urban system, furthermore those initiatives are considerable as the major policy direction within the sharing economy strategies. Those selected initiatives are analysed within a time frame of three years, so it is then asked to what degree they will be economically sustainable. As such, what have these initiatives brought about over a period of three years?

The first stage will be the building up of a data set (cfr. 4.1) about the abovementioned “sharing projects” that have been developed in the two cities selected. The aim is to collect in a systematic way the information about both successful and failed project. These are the main dimensions that should be covered in the building of such data set: year of beginning of the project, promotion and closing (with the reason why); role of public and private actors; level of government involved; public policy instruments that have been used (tender, planning, public consultancy, negotiation, etc.); which kind of conflict have taken place; what actors have participated in the development of “sharing urban policy”; type of public and private actors involved; business amount of their economic activity in freight and financial terms, economic sector involved in the operation. At the end of this data collection we will be able to provide dynamic perspective of the phenomenon, looking at type of actors involved in the development and regulation, the role of each level of

\(^5\) From a European hierarchy viewpoint of cities, Neil Brenner (2000: 61) identifies two key dimensions that are driving the reordering of the urban hierarchy: the shift from Fordist to flexible specialization systems and the varying degrees to which cities exercise “control capacity”, for instance, as financial centres or key locations for corporate headquarters in the European economy, Milan and Amsterdam are ranked as European urban regions and “vast urban corridors”.

\(^6\) See the FabCity Amsterdam (2016).

\(^7\) Those examples are considerable as “urban laboratory” to inform public policies. See the City-makers agenda (2016) and website of Milano-IN association (2016).
government in their achievement, management and regulation. The two actions of the first stage will be constantly focused on the role of the urban government. The second stage consists in a comparison between the two selected units of analysis in the local contexts. The theoretical framework presented above will drive the field research. To sum up, the operations that we will carry out throughout the research in the two local contexts are the following (cfr. Grodach & Silver, 2013): *actors* (power coalitions; private business; development lobbies; political leaders and public managers; community activists; non-profit organizations; public agencies); *resources* (specialized expertise and experience budgets; “sharing buzz”

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<td>Discourses</td>
<td>Analysing discursive materials: (i.e. written texts, open calls, manifestos, influential book, blogs, etc.)</td>
<td>Digital ethnography, Critical Discourses Analysis, etc.</td>
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<td>Policies</td>
<td>Observing institutional context and political organization (public speeches, policy-making process, planning documents, etc.)</td>
<td>Qualitative interviews With selected actors: founders of sharing economy firms, leaders of non-profit organization, community groups. With intermediaries, producers, political actors, etc. (use of narratives of sharing origins &amp; evolution; internal and external relations).</td>
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<td>Practices</td>
<td>Investigating types of practices (consumption, production, services delivery) and their political &amp; economic relations, investment and planning strategy → socio-spatial dynamics.</td>
<td>Previous mapping (GIS tool) and participant observations (public hearing, events, etc.) Mapping key stakeholders and their social networks (networking). Different types of interaction, structure and functioning in these networks.</td>
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5. Expected outcome

We expect to find some dimensions that can be considered useful to drive a more systematic comparison on the metropolitan governance of specific projects within the sharing economy phenomenon in two important European city-regions. This research project has the potentiality to give important insights for the definition of explanatory model of urban governance that can

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Sharing economy as an electoral instrument, in Milan next election of the mayor – 2016. (see sharing economy as political co-opations, cfr. Holloway).
account for the urban policy process that have sustained or prevent the development of particular sharing economy initiatives. The articulation and implementation of sharing economy related discourses, power coalition of actors, and different modes in urban governance provides an excellent case at the complex dynamics involved when buzzwords and hyped notions (i.e. creative city, smart city, making, resilience, etc.) find their into the sphere at urban politics. In these terms, the research project is not just about the sharing economy but an important contribution to our understanding at contemporary urban governance in Europe.

Finally, this study pushes the analysis of the sharing economy beyond a level of generic critique and instrumental mapping exercises and towards a critical assessment about actions carried out by the metropolitan governance and its urban policies within two important city-regions in Europe.

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<tr>
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<td>Mapping of sharing practices</td>
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Time-table of the research.

References


Secondary references

- Airbnb agreement Amsterdam (2014):

- Airbnb agreement Milan (2015):

- FabCity Amsterdam (2016):

- Milano-IN (2016):

- City-makers agenda (2016):

- Milan’s sharing city policy strategy (2015):
  http://p2pfoundation.net/Milan%27s_Sharing_City_Policy_Strategy [Accessed 28th April 2015]