Outwards from the root

Desde la raíz hacia fuera by Silvia Oliva

What would life in cities be like if we we're largely freed from what we know as work today? I think we'd spend our time doing what we love with the people we love in the places we love. We'd spend our time contributing to our communities. I can't think of anything better. What else should cities be for?

If Humans are natural sharers, the future of humanity is urban and the city is the sharing place for excellence, Why can't we think of "Sharing Cities" with a collaborative economy?

More than anything the city is a public space for social interaction. If you stand at an intersection in an urban area, and consider for a moment the tremendous wealth of products you could buy, trade or share, skills you could learn, services you could contract, experiences you could have, people you could meet, and ideas you could exchange just within a block's radius, it quickly becomes mind-boggling.

We argue that a reinvention and revival of sharing in our cities could enhance equity, rebuild community and dramatically cut resource use. With modern technologies the intersection of urban space and cyber-space provides an unsurpassed platform for more just, inclusive and environmentally efficient economies and societies rooted in a sharing culture.

Nowhere in human culture is the centrality of collaboration and sharing more obvious than in the city. The city is not just a venue for the sharing of spaces, 'things' and services, but is historically a shared entity in itself; the product of shared creation or co-production. Demographic, economic and cultural forces are bringing us together in larger and larger urban regions. Around 53% of the world's population currently lives in cities (World Bank 2012). According to The Economist (2012) this will rise to 64.1% in the developing, and 85.9% of the developed world by 2050.

Like any other practice, sharing with equity and justice, can naturally shift cultural values and norms, in this case towards trust and collaboration. Benkler (2004 341 citing Kahan 2002) argues: "Both analytic models and empirical evidence support the proposition that as kind, sharing, and reciprocal behavior increases in society, so does the tendency to trust others, reciprocate, and behave pro-socially". In other words, "by practicing sharing people come to value it more, or come to learn to trust other participants".

The sharing economy, also referred to as the peer-to-peer economy, mesh, collaborative economy or collaborative consumption is a socio-economic system built around the sharing of human and physical resources. It includes the shared creation, production, distribution, trade and consumption of goods and services by different people and organisations. These systems take a variety of forms, often leveraging information technology to empower individuals, corporations, non-profits and government with information that enables distribution, sharing and reuse of excess capacity in goods and services. A common premise is that when information about goods is shared, the value of those goods may increase, for the business, for individuals, and for the community.

The collaborative consumption model is used in marketplaces such as eBay, Craigslist and Krrb, emerging sectors such as social lending, peer-to-peer accommodation, peer-to-peer travel experiences, peer-to-peer task assignments or travel advising, car sharing or commute-bus sharing.

The Mesh Economy is an economic model predicated on the sharing or meshing of talents, goods and services. This model is enabled by technology that makes connections between people, goods and services more efficient, resulting in new communities, organizations and business models for the public and private sector. Technologies such as mobile devices, social media, the Internet, networked communications, 3D printers and sensors allow individuals and organizations to directly share existing resources rather than wait for third-party businesses or governments to deliver the desired goods and services. These people-to-people or peer-to-peer models create a new opportunity for individuals, communities, governments and corporations to transact and collaborate.

In computer science, the term "peer-to-peer" refers to a network formed by a series of nodes that behave as equal to each other, acting both as clients and servers for the other network nodes, allowing direct exchange of information.

This is a theoretical movement, emerged from informal settlements and self-constructed architecture, considering these processes as beneficial for the evolution of the urban environment and returning to the user the participation and the decision making power that was lost.

It tries to accommodate the different practices that are currently appearing in the urban discipline, some of which I have spoken here before, as the tactical urbanism, the spontaneous city or crowdfunding, among others.
All of them based on a horizontal urbanism, bottom-up projects, with the common feature of requiring the commitment and participation of citizens involved in the process."

In Urbanism, the application of this term has led to a movement that draws on the principles of open source and is defined in 5 points:

> 1. The human being has the right to choose the built environment in which to live.
> 2. All citizens should have access to information regarding their environment in order to engage in processes of decision making.
> 3. Users should participate in all levels of co-design and construction of their city.
> 4. P2P Urbanism practitioners are committed to spreading knowledge about open source technologies and theories.
> 5. The owners of the built environment should be able to implement the development of knowledge, skills and practices on it."

"There are two types of smart city. The P2P smart city, which enables citizens to exchange information directly with each other. Then there's the panoptic smart city, in which data is centralised, manipulated, and then used to control city functions."

The sharing economy is not only reflected in a Urban scale but also in one smaller such as cohousing, which took root in Denmark and began to spread to other countries.

A cohousing community is a type of intentional community composed of private homes supplemented by shared facilities. The community is planned, owned and managed by the residents who also share activities which may include cooking, dining, child care, gardening, and governance of the community. Common facilities may include a kitchen, dining room, laundry, child care facilities, offices, internet access, guest rooms, and recreational features.
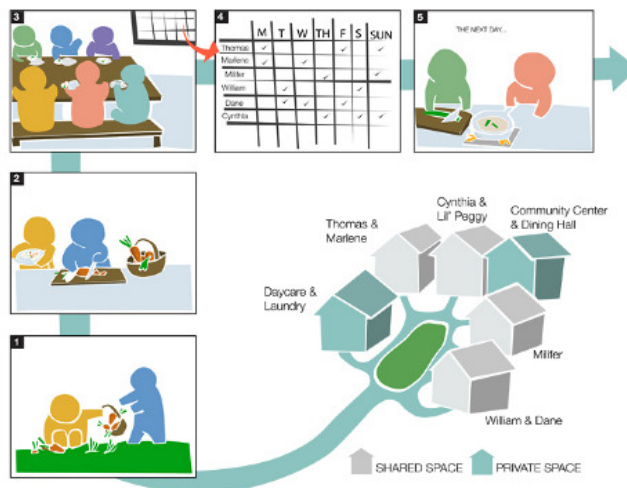Cohousing facilitates interaction among neighbors for social and practical benefits, economic and environmental benefits.

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Building a better sense of community within an ecological
and socially sustainable neighborhood

Because each cohousing community is planned in its context, a key feature of this model is its flexibility to the needs and values of its residents and the characteristics of the site. Cohousing can be urban, suburban or rural. The physical form is typically compact but varies from low-rise apartments to townhouses to clustered detached houses. They tend to keep cars to the periphery which promotes walking through the community and interacting with neighbors as well as increasing safety for children at play within the community. Shared green space is another characteristic, whether for gardening, play, or places to gather. When more land is available than is needed for the physical structures, the structures are usually clustered closely together, leaving as much of the land as possible"open" for shared use. This aspect of cohousing directly addresses the growing problem of suburban sprawl.

Cohousing differs from some types of intentional communities in that the residents do not have a shared economy or a common set of beliefs or religion, but instead invest in creating a socially rich and interconnected community. Individuals do take on leadership roles, such as being responsible for coordinating a garden or facilitating a meeting.

Cohousing differs from standard condominium development and master-planned subdivisions because the development is designed by, or with considerable input from, its future residents. The design process

invariably emphasizes consciously fostering social relationships among its residents. Common facilities are based on the actual needs of the residents, rather than on what a developer thinks will help sell units. Turnover in cohousing developments is typically very low, and there is usually a waiting list for units to become available. All in all, they stand as innovative and sustainable answers to today's environmental and social problems.

This growing form of economics turns passive consumers into collaborators and active consumers. It provides efficient models of redistribution (AirBnB), person to person banking and crowd-driven investments (Paypal & Indigogo), free education and peer to peer learning (Coursera), trading of skills and space (Taskrabbit), and renting instead of owning (Zip Car). All of these changes begin to build trust between strangers, a habit lost with cosmopolitan urbanism. Also, in Web 3.0, these could all be combined, and your preferences/habits from each one remembered, so it would be even easier to participate in the sharing/distributive economy. It is the most inclusive way to bring a generation of digital-born people together and to turn their "me" culture into a "we" culture.

BEFORE

AFTER

COLLABORATIVE LIFESTYLES
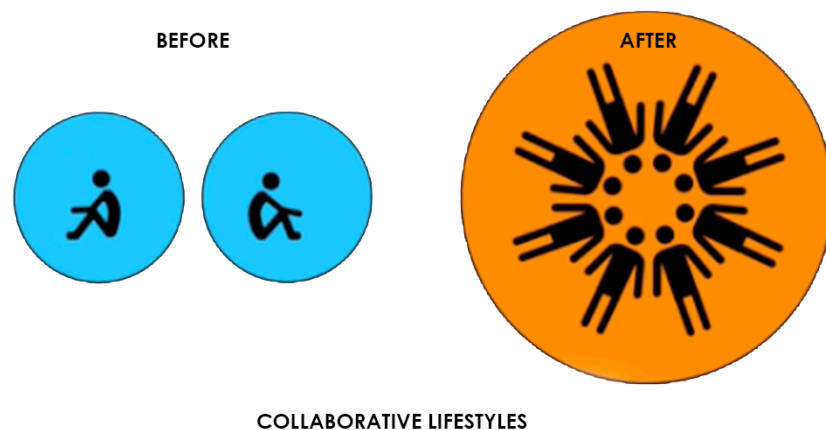
The average person throws away as much as 30% of their food per year. Imagine if they instead went to Feastly to invite anyone in the region over for dinner to share that food. Sure, you might get a weirdo, but you may also find a new friend with interests in creating local community and sharing good food – all while helping to limit food waste. The same sort of argument and related environmental messages can be connected with carpooling.com, the Toronto Tool Library, fruit sharing groups, Bixi bikes, and (my favourite) makerspaces. The sharing economy is redefining how we socialize (Snakes and Lattes Cafe), opening up education (Coursera), and creating an economic disruption.

While the disruption of the economy is, to me personally, one of the greatest advantages of the sharing economy, fewer taxes means less money devoted to social spending. The convergence, in collaborative

consumption, of new community and organization tools (open source, peer-to-peer), technologies and the internet, and new micro and macro fabrication technologies (3D printers) are helping to create a community-based economy which combines artisanal craftsmanship and innovation. This goes in line with reskilling and preparing for a world in which we become more self-sufficient. In this kind of world, it could be argued that as much social spending is not required. Yet, this is difficult to foresee.

However, collaborative consumption likely offers one of the best alternatives to current economic systems. Mainstream approaches to create a green economy do not address the larger issues of scale (energy flows and materials flow), instead prioritising technical changes (renewables, creating hybrid cars). National strategies are not easily amenable for local community implementation strategies to larger scaling of the sharing economy. Without taking into account the sharing economy, the larger economy could get left behind. The smartest move for the government is likely to participate in the sharing economy.

Clonclusion:

I think we spend life giving answers to problems when the real solution is to think outwards from the roots.

Quotating

Michael Mehaffy

David Week, FB 30/9/2014

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