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Sharing City Göteborg – Getting an overview of the sharing economy with the smart map

Tove Lund, Olle Bergman and Kes McCormick



Background

Gothenburg is a flourishing green city, with nearly 600,000 inhabitants, located on the west coast of Sweden. Gothenburg has a long tradition of a strong civil society and grass roots movement, which is also reflected when it comes to the development of the sharing economy in the city. Many of the sharing initiatives come from civil society organizations, but the local government has also taken an active role in both providing its own sharing services and to enable the growth of sharing initiatives from other actors. The cooperation with local sharing initiatives is constantly expanding, and with the use of a digital platform, the city has literally put the growing sharing economy on the map.

Solution

Early on, the City of Gothenburg set goals to reduce the environmental impact of consumption. This means not only to reduce emissions from their own operations, but also to inspire and engage citizens to make an effort and enterprises to offer sustainable solutions.

- *“We soon saw the sharing economy as an important strategy for the city and part of the solution towards a more sustainable consumption”*, says Tove Lund test-bed coordinator for Sharing City Gothenburg.

Just as in many other cities, the first initiatives in Gothenburg came from civil society almost a decade ago. An early example was the Bike Kitchen - a grassroots movement of do-it-yourself workshops where people can repair their bike. Also, property owners contributed by donating abandoned bicycles which could then be repaired. At the same time shops with products for free and clothes to lend as well as carpools started to emerge.

Back in 2014, one of the most important actors in the local sharing economy was established: the civil society organization called Collaborative Economy Gothenburg. They soon joined forces with the local government, which saw the sharing initiatives as an opportunity to promote a sustainable lifestyle. Both organisations saw a need to map out all the sharing activities in the city as a way to understand the growing trend. It resulted in something that is today called the Smart Map, a website and digital map showing more than a hundred sharing initiatives where you can rent, borrow, share, swap, and give in Gothenburg.

"We have continued to develop the Smart Map and over time it has become a natural platform for the sharing economy in Gothenburg. Here you can get a quick answer on for example where the closest toy library is located", says Tove Lund. Today the idea of the Smart Map has spread to several other cities and regions in Sweden and is open and available to any city that would like to map their own local sharing economy.

Although the sharing economy initially was mainly linked to sustainability from an environmental and resource perspective, the city government gradually realized that one of the most obvious effects from the sharing economy may be related to social sustainability, and more specifically trust between people.

- *"Trust is often said to be the currency in the sharing economy which is one of the reasons that the City of Gothenburg engages so much in this aspect",* says Tove Lund.

The sharing economy requires major behavioral changes among residents and consumers. In 2017, the municipality made a large market survey to explore the attitudes of the people of Gothenburg. What is the interest in participating in the sharing economy? What are motives for engaging in sharing? What are common barriers?

- *"An obvious reason for many is to save money",* says Tove Lund. *"But we also saw that there was a strong sustainability perspective - that many do not think it is reasonable that we consume so much. Here you see a difference between older and younger generations. In fact, among younger people it may be the status of not owning anything. You own your style, so you don't have to own the things."*

Researchers at the University of Gothenburg are part of the test-bed and are currently digging deeper into understanding different aspects of the sharing economy such as the user perspective, business models and the role of the city in the sharing economy.

The sharing economy, innovation and test-beds

It is a relatively new concept for the city to work with test-beds and urban living labs.

- *"I like the idea, because we work in an innovation process that help us keep the focus on really trying to solve core challenges in a systematic way. In the Sharing City Gothenburg*

test-bed we have identified a number of challenges where the sharing economy can be part of the solution. We develop ideas that we test and evaluate. In the cases they work well, they can be implemented permanently and, in some cases, upscaled to other parts of the city or nationally."

An idea does not become an innovation until it is realized, spreads and gives benefits. A good example of this is the Smart Map. As it is an open source platform, offered for free to other cities, it soon became a social innovation. It is currently spread to three other cities in Sweden, with more on the way.

- *"It's fantastic to see how something that started as a civil society initiative can create such a value far beyond the borders of Gothenburg"*, says Tove Lund.

In order to strengthen the innovative capacity on the sharing economy, a strong focus is placed on combining knowledge, cultures and experiences. A key focus in the test-bed is partnerships with a wide range of actors. The test-bed enables a stimulating environment allowing for more successful meetings between actors. Participants are encouraged to challenge each other, reshape their thinking about sharing cities, and make changes that would not happen otherwise.

One example of a sharing initiative being part of the test-bed is the Toy Library. It's Sweden's first toy library launched in 2018. The founder, a citizen living locally, was driven by the fact that there's an unsustainable consumption in general and not the least when it comes to children. According to a study a child in Sweden has on average 536 toys at home, while many parents also know that toys often remain unused as a child soon lose interest. The Toy Library is now developing and testing a concept where toys can be borrowed through a yearly subscription, exploring questions on motives and barriers among users and how to make a lending system financially sustainable to run over time.

The sharing economy as a tool in urban development projects

Gothenburg also has the ambition to explore and integrate the sharing economy as a tool in the city planning process and has a special focus on Masthuggskajen, which is part of one of the largest urban development projects in Scandinavia called Älvstaden. Here about 1,300 dwellings and 5,000 - 6,000 workplaces will be shaped in the coming years. It is a development project with sustainability and the sharing economy as core aspects in its vision and overall plans.

- *"We test the idea that the sharing economy initiatives has a certain value proposition to offer the city. In addition to the sustainable consumption aspect, they often also contribute towards a more vibrant and safer city when sharing initiatives move into premises located close to residential buildings"*, says Oskar Henriksson, project leader at the public owned urban development company Älvstranden Utveckling.

- *"We know that residents feel more secure in an area when there is life and movement throughout the day. This is therefore an important aspect also for the property owners."*

The challenge is that small sharing initiatives often have limited ability to pay rent in central commercial areas. To address this, one of the ideas to be tried out in the test-bed is a flexible rental model. There will be more than 30,000 m² new ground floor space when the

buildings are in place in 2027.

- *“It is a golden opportunity to make the initial development plans include the sharing economy as a dimension. For this area there is also a consortium of real estate developers, which has adopted a sustainability program to clarify that all partners should facilitate sustainable lifestyles and that the circular and sharing economy are key components”*, says Oskar Henriksson.

The real estate companies are working on a strategy to create a plan for lively streets in the area and it should also be possible to accommodate sharing initiatives that are not necessarily commercial, for example bicycle kitchens and toy libraries.

Lessons

1. Map out what is available in the city

Feel free to use our open-source platform the Smart Map (www.thesmartmap.com). It gives a good overview of which initiatives are available and which ones could be missing in the city.

2. Be the facilitator of the local sharing economy

Help create infrastructure such as premises, networks and meeting points.

3. Integrate the sharing economy in city planning

If we are to scale up the sharing economy, we must bring larger actors onboard. For this it is crucial to have an early dialogue. Right now, for example, many cities try to reduce the number of parking spots – and this is where bicycle and carpools can get a key role. Just as a city provide infrastructure for mobility, we can ask how we can provide space for a sharing and circular consumption of products.

Resources

For more information on Sharing City Gothenburg visit:

<https://www.sharingcities.se/goteborgtestbed>

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