

After the Crisis: The Sharing Economy Our Saviour?

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurocrisispress/2014/10/09/after-the-crisis-the-sharing-economy-our-saviour/

Eurocrisis in the
Press

By [Anne Kaun](#)

10/9/2014

The so called sharing economy is thriving. People increasingly use platforms such as airbnb, uber, TaskRabbit and Rent the Runway to rent or offer their sofa, a ride, services or a designer dress. Some pundits see this growing sector as an indicator for shifting norms: [Claire Cain Miller](#) argues that in the aftermath of the Great Recession sharing or renting emerged as new social ideals pushing back against overconsumption and the connected debt accumulation that seemingly caused the crisis in the first place. And most of the currently successful apps were launched around 2008/2009. Rather than owning a specific object, people increasingly value experiences which go hand in hand with the often discussed ephemerality of objects in the digital age and a focus on practices such as sharing. Airbnb and uber apps provide the necessary freedom and infrastructure for these – Claire Cain Miller argues – more sustainable practices. But are they really our saviours in the aftermath of the crisis?

There are many critical voices that have been raised, not least from branches directly affected by the sharing economy, e.g. [European-wide protests against uber](#). Besides the protests by labourers in fear of losing their jobs, a typical critique is the [heightened insecurity](#) for those that rely on incomes through the sharing economy. While airbnb and co. present themselves as neutral infrastructure to which [regulations do not necessarily apply](#), labourers in the sharing economy – and in times of high unemployment there is a growing number of people that make their income exclusively through these micro-businesses – are exposed to the quick fluctuations of the market and rapid changes of the algorithms themselves.



But there are also other points that could be addressed critically. Rather than providing a more sustainable form of consumption, the sharing economy could be seen as quite the opposite. One could instead argue that it accelerates the speed of consumption. Exchanges are conducted with ever greater ease, speed and frequency and are penetrating new parts of our lives, e.g. hiring a person to assemble your Ikea furniture or pick-up the dry clean. And as [Sascha Lobo](#) argues, the so-called sharing economy contributes to the commodification of all aspects in our lives including the practice of sharing that previously had nothing to do with a commercial exchange between consumer and producer. He argues instead that there is a need for an adequate regulation of this kind of platform capitalism.

Whether we consider the sharing economy platform capitalism, or not, the global financial crisis provided the necessary disruption that catalysed these practices, and it will most probably play a part in the next unavoidable crash if regulators do not react.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Euro Crisis in the Press blog, nor of the London School of Economics

Dr Anne Kaun is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Department for Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University, Stockholm

Related articles on LSE Euro Crisis in the Press:

[\(No\) Time for activism: the changing face of protest movements](#)

