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Huybrechts, Liesbeth and van der Graaf, Shenja and D'Hauwers, Ruben and Pierson, Jo

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Belgium: Adoption of the Sharing Economy

Liesbeth Huybrechts

UHasselt, Faculty of Architecture and Arts
Hasselt, Belgium
liesbeth.huybrechts@uhasselt.be

Shenja van der Graaf

Imec-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Brussels, Belgium
Shenja.vandergraaf@imec.be

Ruben D'Hauwers

Imec-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Brussels, Belgium
ruben.dhauwers@imec.be

Jo Pierson

imec-SMIT, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Brussels, Belgium
jo.pierson@vub.be

Abstract

The debate on the sharing economy in Belgium has been mainly focused on its economic, quantitative, and digital aspects. Given the fact that the adoption of the sharing economy has accelerated lately, this report wanted to contribute to further open up the debate on the adoption of this economy in relation to an aspect that is too little discussed, namely (social and environmental) sustainability. Based on some smaller studies, this report identifies different drivers for concrete sustainable sharing economy initiatives to develop that situate themselves on the level of people's daily life practices, social and cultural developments, and policy developments. Next to these drivers, there were issues detected that interact closely with the further development of this economy. The report ends with a suggestion for more systematic research of the

drivers behind the initiation, adoption, and sustaining of sharing economy initiatives and their contributions to a more sustainable Belgian society.

Keywords: Sharing Economy, Belgium, Sustainability, Drivers, Adoption, Daily Life, Policy

Introduction

Belgium is recently very active in implementing different changes that increase the future adoption of the sharing economy. While the debate on this economy has long been dominated by its economic, quantitative, and digital aspects; Climate Marches—amongst others—that have been initiated by youth all over the country have made many Belgian citizens aware that the sharing economy can implement changes that benefit a more sustainable society (as defined in the Sustainable Development Goals 2017). The government supports these changes with the recognition of this economy fiscally and—indirectly—via climate-friendly policy initiatives such as the concrete stop plan (Departement Omgeving 2018). Additionally, several actions of the government are aimed at stimulating the circular and sharing economies, such as the examples of the network organization Vlaanderen Circulair (2020) and the Commons study in Gent (2017) show. Nevertheless, to date, Belgium is still lagging behind regarding the adoption of the sharing economy, with a low penetration rate compared to its neighbouring countries. This document will therefore be discussed the drivers are in Belgium in adopting the sharing economy and what the opportunities are for its further sustainable development. After formulating the core research questions, the report identifies different examples and how they can be understood in the context of people's daily life practices and broader social and cultural and policy developments that motivate people to initiate, organize or maintain concrete sharing economy initiatives. It also discusses the issues that further development of this economy needs to deal with and finds major players that can enable to steer these developments in more sustainable directions. The document is concluded with some suggestions for future research and a small summary.

Research Question

Starting from the idea that the sharing economy can benefit a more sustainable society, an important question is “What are the current drivers behind the adoption of the sharing economy that benefit a more sustainable society in Belgium?” and “How can we tap into these drivers in order to enhance the adoption of the sustainable sharing economy in Belgium?”

The research question of this report focuses on the best ways forward to accelerate the adoption of the sharing economy in Belgium. Therefore, the research looks at:

- What are the main drivers for sustainable adoption of the sharing economy?
- What are the opportunities for the sustainable development of the adoption of the sharing economy?

Definition

In Belgium, the Flemish government and the Federal Government play the biggest role in the move towards the circular and the sharing economy. The definition used in Belgium (Flanders, northern part of Belgium) for this purpose is based on a definition created by Idea (2017) for the Flemish government, which defines the sharing economy as an economic system that allows consumers and companies to make temporary use of underused property, good or service, paid or unpaid. There are certain transactions not included in this definition:

- Professional renting services. These fit under the product-service economy, where a consumer gives access to services using a product while the person offering the product remains the owner.
- Transactions where the owner transfers the ownership rights to the other (exchange, second-hand, etc.).
- Transactions where the owner provides permanent usage of the product (not temporary).
- Transactions without an online component happening outside of the digital sphere.

This leads to a very particular view on what “sharing economy” signifies, leaving out offline transactions and not indicating the importance of capturing, processing and repurposing data linked to sharing economy interactions. The latter is, among others, stressed by van Dijck, Poell and de Waal (2018), discussing the role and meaning of this economy in the “platform society.”

The quantitative data on how driven Belgian people are to share shows that Belgium is not a leader in the sharing economy (PwC 2017). The adoption rate is 36% of Belgians who have taken part in this economy in the past year, which is lower than the other countries compared. Yet, the fact that 37% hopes to use it next year suggests a slight increase in adoption. Moreover, a study by the European Commission (2016) showed a penetration rate of only 8% of the total Belgian population who participated in some form of the sharing economy. This is considerably lower than the adoption of the neighbouring countries (the Netherlands 12%, Luxembourg 13%, and France 36%). This is also below the European average of 17% in a survey with 14,000 respondents. Yet, in the next years, 25% of the Belgian respondents indicated to be opened to utilise some form of the sharing economy in the coming year. The PwC study showed that 24% of the Belgian respondents knew about the sharing economy in 2015, and in 2016 this number grew to about one-third of the respondents. In 2018, PwC estimated, based on a survey, that the turnover of the sharing economy would amount to 2.0 billion EUR in the future, which would be 0.5% of the Belgian BBP in 2017.

The adoption study of the sharing economy of PwC (2017) compares Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, and Turkey and ranks Belgium last in terms of the overall market size of 2.0 billion EUR but expects it to grow by 71.5%. Next to that, Belgians also showed the lowest adoption rate with 36% of active users of the sharing economy. The adoption is expected to remain stable.

Given the focus on the economic, quantitative, and digital aspects of the sharing economy until now, this report aims to give more qualitative insight into the practices around this economy in Belgium that can benefit a sustainable society. It particularly

will further describe and discuss the drivers in Belgium in adopting the sharing economy and the opportunities for their further development with benefits for a sustainable society. In what follows, the document will discuss some Belgian examples.

Examples

In this part, we explore six examples of sharing economy with contributions to a sustainable society. These include examples of food production and distribution, food waste, bike-sharing, and health data.

Puur Limburg

This sharing network embodies one of the most typical forms of sharing in the Belgian region of Limburg. Here, local food production is an important activity, which has encouraged local producers and volunteering citizens to share their efforts in advertising, selling, and distributing their goods. It is “a cooperative of more than 30 Limburg farmers and producers. We believe in fair and sustainable products, and we proudly show who makes the product. By working together, we strengthen each other, and we offer a delicious assortment from our own soil!”

While the cooperative with the name Puur Limburg was founded in 2016, it builds on a cooperative with a long tradition, being the network of local food producers “Hartenboer” in collaboration with the logistical support of the social enterprise De Wroeter and the network of food distributors Voedselteams. For a long time—before the sharing economy was popular—this cooperative created a digital and physical network through which people in Limburg could order and collect locally grown and produced food, supported by a large group of volunteers who distributed the food through physical “depots.” Because this and other food-sharing networks were so strong in the region, it was difficult for commercial players in organic food to develop a market. It is only after five years that these commercial players have grown.

The drivers in the background of this form of sharing are mainly trade-based. Professional food producers, citizen volunteers and the regional government collaborate to generate more sustainable local food chains and economies. While the goals of the producers are partly economic, the goals of the volunteers are rather ideological.

“Zonder honger naar bed” and “Foodsavers”

In the European Union, food waste along the supply chain has been estimated at approximately 88 million tonnes, or 173 kg per capita per year, and is expected to rise to about 126 million tonnes a year by 2020 unless action is taken. According to a 2013 study, the highest food waste generators expressed as kilograms per capita are the Netherlands (541 kg), Belgium (345 kg), Cyprus (327 kg) and Estonia (265 kg). Therefore, several organizations are working in Belgium on reducing food waste. In this report, we discuss two different platforms that were set up in Belgium (“Zonder Honger naar Bed” and “Foodsavers”), which aim to eradicate poverty while utilising the amount of food waste as an advantage.

In March 2017, “Foodsavers” in Gent was founded by the OCMW (a public centre for social wellbeing), other social organizations, local communes, volunteers, start-ups,

universities, and environmental NGOs. Foodsavers is a logistical platform that recuperates food waste and redistributes it. The project has three main goals:

- Climate change: Reducing the CO₂ output by reducing food waste.
- Social employment: Foodsavers Gent is employing 10 to 12 people with difficulties getting employed.
- Poverty eradication: The food waste is distributed to people in poverty.

Foodsavers distributes food through different distribution platforms, which are responsible for gathering food surplus at producers, supermarkets, and companies. These platforms redistribute the food towards different food banks and social organizations with temporary storage. These distribution platforms are crucial due to the perishability of the food products, which causes the need for central distribution points. Different projects have therefore shown that the regional distribution platforms ensure efficient and large-scale storage of food waste.

Less formalised but remarkable is the initiative “Zonder Honger Naar Bed.” The intention of this group is “to form a bridge between emergency and waste. People who have a bit too much share it with people who have a little less. This can be anything, such as tin, dry food, vegetables. (...) But we also have, unfortunately, candidates for your (frozen) leftovers from dinner. Also, adding something small to your shopping cart might make a small difference to you, but it has a lot of value for them. In that way, we can make each other happy in this society.” The group has developed at a rapid pace from a small local initiative to a large network of 1500 members in Hasselt. The food waste is stocked in three women’s—the founders—homes and distributed from there.

Initially, in 2016, the group was founded to reduce food waste. The group has grown via Facebook as a subgroup of people who were already active in the group Runkst Deelt, a neighbourhood group where people exchange their waste products (beyond food) with others. Later, it appeared that there was a lot of hidden poverty that could be addressed through this network. Now, in collaboration with the person who runs the local Buurderij (a local food market with close links to local farming), they are collecting money to rent storage and distribution space for the food. Particular for this form of sharing is that it is care-based. People share food waste without asking for an immediate return. But by being part of the network, they might get something in return when they have a more difficult time.

Bike-Sharing Initiatives: Fietsbib Hasselt “Op Wielekes” and Mob-it

The sharing economy that is genuinely flourishing in many cities in Belgium is bike-sharing. One example is the Mobitbike-sharing service, a recognisable green bike. It allows people to share bikes for short rides in the city centres. It promotes itself as being good for reducing CO₂ emissions. Furthermore, it provides people with a safe, well-maintained bike. Via a digital app, it gives access to people’s personal trajectories and payments: the distances, the routes, the calories that were used, the CO₂ that was saved, the payments that were done. Eight Belgian cities are currently using it. Other popular bike-sharing services are the blue bike network that supports people to take and return a bike at the train station.

In this area, there exist many small bottom-up initiatives. In Hasselt, the recent Bicycle library “on wheels” is an initiative of an engaged volunteering person who owned a large home and had room to collect and offer bikes to people who pay a yearly rent. Because her initiative is still fragile and small, she teams up with a larger network of

bicycle-sharing initiatives in Flanders. On a local level, she connects to the more developed repair café network in the city that opens up their repair service at the same moment as the library does. The communication of this library takes place via Facebook and via the Hasselt start-up Post-Buzz (now bought by the media group Roularta) that communicates news and events on a hyperlocal level via a digital peer-to-peer platform. This platform has the goal to reduce paper advertising and reconnect local entrepreneurs. This case demonstrates how complementary sharing initiatives can support each other's growth.

The bike-sharing network mob-it focuses mainly on people who temporarily visit the city for leisure or for work. However, also "locals" who do not own a bike, or are in temporary need of a bike, make use of them. "Op Wielekes" is focused on local children and has little to no touristic goal. Both initiatives have considerably contributed to a sustainable transformation in the way tourism and daily commuting to work take form.

Babytheek

Babytheek is a lending service for baby products with a short usage time which young parents need in the first 12 months after birth. The Babytheek operates as a library of baby products. It gathers the different baby products that can remain for a long time in circulation, and people can borrow the products from the Babytheek.

Many young parents do not know what they need when they get children and need to constantly buy products that will be used only for a limited time. Yet, the baby grows very fast and thus, many products are not needed anymore. A lot of people keep these products in the house or in storage spaces, but it takes much space. Therefore, the Babytheek provides the opportunity to get access to qualitative and sustainable products which can be used only for a limited amount of time.

The goal of the Babytheek is to:

- Prolong the circulation of baby products with a short usage span.
- Bring young parents in contact with the concept of product usage versus product ownership.
- Reducing waste.
- Providing the possibility to test products.
- Creating a meeting space for young parents.

The Babytheek is being rolled out through subsidiaries located at the "Huizen van het kind." which are physical public spaces of the Flemish government where parents can learn about raising children. "Huizen van het kind" is a collaboration between the different organizations that help parents with day-care, health care, free time, or support on raising children and is present in most communes. The Babytheek has a physical space at the "Huizen van het Kind." where people can get to know the space. The Babytheek aims to provide support to the different locations by providing them with a starting package with concrete tips on how to get a branch of the Babytheek started in their location.

Curieuzeneuzen

Due to the decreasing air quality in Belgium, a cooperative group of Flemish citizens have started the "Curieuzeneuzen" study in 2018, which was the largest citizen science research ever regarding air quality, as the amount of NO₂ was significantly higher than

the European norm due to the traffic. The initiative was backed by the University of Antwerp, the governmental institute “de Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij” and the newspaper “De Standaard.” It was also supported by different research organizations (VITO, KULeuven) and a parcel service “Kariboo.”

The different citizens, schools, organizations, and companies could buy a simple (cheap) measurement tool sent at home, which could be hung at the window of their building. During one month, the concentration of NO₂ was measured.

Context

The previous examples are a small sample of sharing economy initiatives in Belgium. This contextual framing tries to make a short analysis of what the drivers are behind these initiatives, both on the level of the people who use them as on the level of the societal and cultural context.

Daily Life Practices Behind the Sharing Economy

In a study on sharing practices in the region of Limburg and more particularly Hasselt (the project “Iedereen Deelt/Everyone Shares in Hasselt;” Huybrechts, Yevchenko and Palmieri 2018), Genk (Huybrechts and Lens 2018) and several municipalities in-between Hasselt and Eindhoven (Studio NZL 2019) and how they contribute to a more sustainable future, we discovered that sharing is based on particular daily life practices.

Image 1. Everyone Shares in Hasselt @UHasselt



Source: Own elaboration.

In the region of Limburg and, by extension, in Flanders (as the PwC 2016 study shows), sharing spaces, goods, or resources, social practices, and traditions in economic—paid or non-paid—networks are not the general practice. People value their own space,

goods, and values. The above-mentioned studies wanted to turn around this starting point and do interviews and observations in the field in order to discover how people do share, even if it is often unconsciously. The studies showed that sharing is part of people's daily practice, but that is too little explored as a conscious strategy (see earlier definition: "the sharing economy as an economic system that allows consumers and companies to make temporary use of underused property, good or service, paid or unpaid") that can significantly contribute to a more sustainable environment.

In order to enhance people's awareness of how they share and could share in a more sustainable way in the future, the studies articulated five clusters of sharing practices in relation to spaces, goods, or resources. These are refined, supplemented, and adjusted via each new study done on this topic:

1. Care-Based Sharing

Care-based sharing is defined by people working collectively to care for their environment through sharing spaces, objects, and practices. The example of sharing food and goods via "Zonder Honger Naar Bed/Without Hunger to Bed" is based on a need for care for people in society.

2. Value-Based Sharing

Value-based sharing is defined by people who share values locally and commonly. These values become tangible in the way they behave collectively, use spaces, or deploy resources. The example of sharing distribution and sales via Puur Limburg or Foodsavers are based on a set of values that foregrounds locally produced and waste food as a sustainable practice.

3. Need-Based Sharing

Need-based sharing refers to bottom-up initiatives that arise from urgent needs that are present in the community and that aim to find solutions together to fulfil them. Often, the observed sharing practices were related to an urge to improve the living environment. For instance, when there is a lot of obvious traffic or pollution, people suddenly start working on initiatives together that improve their environment. The "Curieuzeneuzen" study is a good example of need-based sharing.

4. Trade/Work-Based Sharing

Trade/Work-based sharing is defined by people who use spaces and objects or develop practices to collaborate, produce or trade goods, services, knowledge on a monetary or non-monetary basis. For example, some economic venues appear to have more value than being places where people buy or rent things. They support the exchange of goods and community building. The bicycle-sharing service and the Babytheek are an example of this.

5. Meeting and Leisure-Based Sharing

Meeting and leisure-related sharing are defined by how people use space and objects together or develop practices for the purpose of meeting each other for leisure and recreation. Bike-sharing initiatives are the most popular example of this. They invite people to visit a place, make use of a shared bike in order to make a touristic tour, instead of using a car.

Societal Climate: “Climate March”

People’s daily life practices co-define the sharing economy in Belgium today, but also the social climate is an important factor. At the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, several climate protests have happened in Belgium, including school children and students (Youth for Climate) and private companies and civilians (Sign for my future) protesting. The protests started out of dissatisfaction of the public due to the non-signing of Belgium in the High Ambition Coalition at the Climate Change Conference in Katowice and the alleged limited actions of the Federal and regional governments in Belgium.

Belgium has four different ministers of Climate (Federal, Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia), which have shown, based on the opinions of the protesters, limited effectiveness. Resulting from these protests, the minister of Climate of Flanders has resigned. Climate change was expected to be a major topic during the elections of May 2019, but in the end, it had too little significant impact on the adoption of the sharing economy in Belgium in future governmental legislations. Still, with the increasing drought in Belgium of the latest years, the climate remains on the agenda and is today a driver for further development of the sharing economy.

Culture: Agriculture

Finally, studies show that a certain cultural context co-defines the way sharing economy develops. In Flanders, like in other countries, lands were jointly managed and cultivated up to the nineteenth century. All these grounds were later privatized. In Limburg and other parts of Flanders, sharing initiatives have built on this heritage, as we see in the initiative of Puur Limburg, for instance. However, they do this in contemporary ways (Kuhk, Holemans and Van Den Broeck 2018).

Developments in Policy

The previous part was able to detect the drivers behind the sharing economy-related to daily life, societal and cultural developments. There are also a few developments (e.g., De Morgen 2018) that structure its adoption on a more institutional level. One is the recognition of sharing platforms by the Federal Government in 2017, and another is the discussion on the concrete stop.

Recognition of Sharing Platforms by the Federal Government

In March 2017, a Law on the sharing economy was produced, which was valid as of May 2017 (Digimedia 2017). The federal government (2018) recognises three categories of sharing economy players: providers of access, time, or skills by private persons (peers) or professionals, the users of the services and the intermediaries of the online platforms which facilitate the transactions.

As a user, one can use a recognised sharing platform as an occasional income source based on an advantageous tax scheme and with limited administrative requirements. If a user earns less than 6,000 EUR in one year, only 10% of the tax is due. To date, 33 different sharing platforms are recognised by the federal government (2018) as official sharing economy platforms. Bigger names, such as Uber and Airbnb, are not yet integrated, as they do not fall under the current legislation. They claim the high complexity of the legislation and the uncertainty of the services by the service providers are the reason. We can also note that these larger platforms follow the global strategy of the organization. The sharing economy platforms have a complex legal status that makes their inclusion difficult to legislate. To date, only platforms allowing users to earn

additional money are accepted, and thus situations in which the user uses them as their main source of income have not yet been legalised (so far, these are governed by a lenient policy).

Urbanisation and the Concrete Stop

The second policy change that has triggered a further development of the sharing economy is the concrete stop. Belgium is a dense area with a population density (people per sq. km) of 374 sq. Km, thus Belgium consists of large regions with urbanised areas, especially between Brussels, Antwerp, and Gent. Traditionally, Belgium is seen as a fragmented country, with a lot of ribbon development. This caused significant impacts on the mobility patterns in Belgium, the amount of water penetration in the soil due to the high amounts of concrete and a lack of green areas and forest. Due to this reason, the “Beleidsplan Ruimte Vlaanderen” (BRV) or the “betonstop” (concrete stop) defines that as of 2040, no more new open space can be utilised for new housing developments. The plan aims to reimburse people who own space, protect forests, prohibit building in certain areas and allow to decrease the procedures for building windmills (Departement omgeving 2018).

This trend will significantly alter the spread of living areas in Belgium and will increase urbanisation. This will result in less available space for housing and the potential need to share this available space more. In the main cities in Flanders, the cities were already densifying, and the need for sharing has increased. In some parts of the country, such as Limburg, this limitation has not been sensed as strongly, and the need to share has stayed limited. This example shows that until now, the sharing economy is mainly providing answers to the frustrations of people living in urban areas (Davidson and Infranca 2016), such as people who want to avoid parking problems by sharing a car. Thus, the trend in Belgium towards urbanisation will further make the need for a more sharing economy tangible. At the same time, it is interesting to look deeper into how the sharing economy fills in the needs of people in less urbanised contexts.

Issues

We identified the drivers and the policy developments that can give the sharing economy in Belgium a boost. Next to these, there are some issues that this economy is confronted with and needs to get more acquainted with to further develop its potential for co-shaping a more sustainable society. These issues are situated on the level of employment, impact on pricing and markets, on privacy and the issue of commons.

Impact on the Employment

A more flexible way of working can be useful for people willing to work but who are not able to work within 38 hours working scheme. According to the “Hoge Raad voor Werkgelegenheid” (2016), the sharing economy can provide possibilities for people whose competencies are not recognised in the regular employment market. On the other hand, the fluctuation of employment is significant uncertainty, which complicates the status. A study of the European Parliament (2017) showed that most people work on sharing platforms according to a self-employed statute, while they miss the protective measures in place for employees (such as time of employment, night labour, and holidays) and most of the 1,200 surveyed people perceived their job on the platform as the main source of income. Thus, policymakers are aiming to adapt the different statutes of an employee and a self-employed person in order to sustain the

social protection of the person working on the collaborative platform. Yet, how this is executed in practice is not fully clear.

Impact on Pricing and Markets

The sharing economy, especially when not tempered, can have a significant impact on the pricing of regular markets. An example is the housing market, where the increase in the usage of Airbnb can have a significant impact on the rental prices of houses (Lee 2016). In Los Angeles, 64% of the supply of Airbnb houses are never being used by the actual owners. As renting a house on Airbnb can generate higher profits, many people opt to rent their apartment or house on Airbnb instead of the regular markets. Thus, a large part of the houses/apartments which were initially used for traditional usage is now being rented out to tourists, which decreases the market size of traditional houses and might significantly increase the prices for regular usage.

Privacy

With the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in force, new actions are required by data controllers and processors of personal data (European Parliament 2016). Depending on the type of data collected, a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is necessary for certain operations. While there is broad agreement on the general process (which consists of three parts, that is, a data mapping, an assessment of the mapping and proposed solutions for identified risks), and the fact that the GDPR is a continuation of previous legislation, many sharing economy organizations and employees, are uncertain how to implement the GDPR into their new systems. This uncertainty hampers the development process as data protection authorities can only refer to the Article 29 Working Party (WP29) guidelines and wait for sector-wide codes of conduct to apply the GDPR to specific cases. This is a “chicken and egg” situation since entire sectors are waiting for national data protection authorities to present standardised definitions and processes. Secondly, even if standardised solutions that comply with the GDPR exist, the sharing economy will have to work on transparency in terms of privacy statements, icons, and other forms of visualisations to explain the often complex data flows between different actors in a sharing economy framework.

Commons

The sharing economy is currently underexplored in favour of the commons. Sharing economy initiatives can take on a complementary role in-between the market and public sphere. This was indicated by Bauwens (2018) based on his study of Ghent. He detects a potential for cities and regions to make alliances in creating platform cooperatives that can manage and sustain very diverse initiatives and steer them into a more fair and sustainable direction. “Commons are at the basis of a new model for urban employment. Through public purchases and anchor institutions, they can strengthen the local economy and create inclusive jobs (Bauwens 2018).” Bauwens refers to the thinking of Trebor Scholz about platform cooperatives where taxi drivers themselves develop their own platforms, sometimes with the support of existing trade unions who are also concerned about freelancers (Vandaele 2017).

Other Major Players

To develop the potential of the sharing economy for a more sustainable society, there is a great need to include organizations with expertise in sustainability. We already

mentioned the study of the commons of Bauwens (2018) that has articulated the role of this economy for a more socially sustainable society. OVAM is also an important player that can contribute to the debate on the sustainability gains of the sharing economy.

Transition Circular Economy

The government plays an active role as a facilitator in Belgium (mainly in the Flemish region). In particular, the governmental organization OVAM emphasises the importance of the circular economy, under which the sharing economy fits. The circular economy is an important transition priority for the government, and the OVAM plays a significant role with the department “Vlaanderen Circulair.” The Federal Government play the role of regulator, mainly for legalising the sharing economy and for ensuring the sharing economy is taxed in a similar fashion as other businesses.

Vlaanderen Circulair is a network organization aimed to inspire the circular economy in Flanders. It is a partnership of governments, companies, NGOs, and research organizations in order to activate the ecosystem. It works on three areas: circular purchasing in companies (Green Deal Circulair Aankopen); the circular city, which aims to create a circular city within the (smart) city ecosystem; and circular entrepreneurship, which aims to support companies to work in a circular fashion.

Future Directions of Research

This document made clear that the attention for the sharing economy in Flanders has been defined and researched mainly in its economic, quantitative, and digital aspects. It detected too little attention for the aspect of sustainability, both in a social and environmental sense: what drives sharing economy initiatives to develop and to be sustained, based on people’s daily life practices? How can the sharing economy benefit common knowledge exchange on issues at stake today (e.g., sharing of air quality data)? How do the sharing initiatives benefit small and larger-scale sustainability gains? How are current evolutions such as the concrete stop, climate change (and the current drought in Belgium) and—even more recently—the corona crisis; drivers for sharing economy to further develop in Belgium in more sustainable ways? We conclude that more systematic research into the daily life and institutional drivers for initiating, adopting, and sustaining the sharing economy and how these drivers can be tapped into with specific benefits on the level of sustainability deserves more attention in the future.

Summary

This contribution has shown that the sharing economy in Belgium is not as active as in many countries, but that during the latest years, it has been developing more quickly. The report has detected some drivers that have contributed to the more rapid adoption of the sharing economy. The goal was to develop a better understanding of how these drivers can enable further develop the sharing economy’s benefits for a sustainable society. These drivers appeared to be situated on a very daily level and rooted in the fulfilling of care, value-development, needs, trade and leisure, but they are also located on a policy level, such as the concrete stop and climate debates. The report also discussed the issues that the sharing economy is confronted with on a daily basis that

led to exercises in small reorientations. These related mainly to this economy's fair contribution to a more sustainable society, more specifically on the level of employment, pricing, and markets, privacy, and commons. Some larger players, such as OVAM, can play a substantial role in tapping into the detected drivers and in these reorientation exercises—taking into account the encountered issues—towards a Belgian sharing economy that significantly contributes to sustainability goals.

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