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2021

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MPRA Paper No. 110242, posted 21 Oct 2021 13:34 UTC

Citation: Lukasiwicz, Agnieszka, and Aleksandra Nadolska. 2021. "Initiatives in the Sharing Economy Scheme: The Case of Poland." In *The Collaborative Economy in Action: European Perspectives*, edited by Andrzej Klimczuk, Vida Česnuitytė, and Gabriela Avram, 237–249. Limerick, Ireland: University of Limerick.

Initiatives in the Sharing Economy Scheme: The Case of Poland

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Abstract

In the chapter, there is an analysis of sharing economy development in Poland. It concerns both the big players on the market like the most known Airbnb and Uber, as well as smaller, local initiatives, flourishing especially in the food sector. Sharing economy is not a normative concept and is defined differently depending on the subject (i.e., products, services, ideas, models, or structures) to which it refers. However, the significance of the phenomenon is rising rapidly from year to year. Moreover, sharing economy brings many opportunities but also creates a lot of unsolved issues, such as regulations, tax regulations, labour law, competition, which often can lead to conflicts between diverse groups of actors. The new, unregulated, by law, model of the economy in some sectors has caused a lot of confusion, leading to conflicts (like between taxi drivers and Uber drivers), as well as a feeling of inequality.

Keywords: Sharing Economy, Social Trust, Local Initiatives, Social Issues, Crowdfunding

Introduction

For some time now, there can be observed the development of a cultural and social phenomenon, which is related to sharing goods. There is a belief that access to some assets is more important than having them. Such thinking has begun to be dominated among many consumers. The concept of the sharing economy still develops in Poland.

Definitely, there are more and more Polish citizens using platforms that allow them to share. Not only big businesses such as Uber and Airbnb, operating on the Polish market for several years, are growing, but also there can be noticed a kind of flourish of local initiatives, especially in the food sector. Nevertheless, there are many issues unsolved in the context of the sharing economy, such as regulations, tax regulations, labour law, competition. The new, unregulated, by law, model of the economy in some sectors has caused a lot of confusion, leading to conflicts (like between taxi drivers and Uber drivers), as well as a feeling of inequality. That is the reason for Polish Government decided to change the regulations related to passenger transport—the so-called “Uber-lex,” which came to force at the beginning of 2020.

Definition

Actually, the phenomenon of sharing economy is so complex, and it includes various aspects of organizational and business models as well as social changes that there is no single definition of sharing economy. Quite frequent is to put many notions into the same conceptual range as sharing economy. For example, collaborative economy, access economy, peer economy, peer-to-peer economy (P2P), circular economy, gift economy, gig economy, rental economy, on-demand economy, mesh economy (mesh/networking), and alternative finance. The most important is to highlight access rather than ownership.

One of the definitions, which is quite general, specifies the sharing economy as a change from a one-to-many model to a many-to-many model. The collaborative economy is a different business philosophy that changes the current “rules of the game” (Sokołowski et al. 2016). Another defines the sharing economy as a new form of organization of doing business via Internet platforms (the market model in which a specific exchange system applies), based on paid or unpaid use of available production resources being the property of other entities (primarily households). Sharing economy condition is not ownership of resources but only access to them. Technology (information and telecommunications technologies) is an inseparable feature of the sharing economy, which enables barter market creation (based on artificial units of account or not) or the traditional market (based on supply and demand relations with a working price mechanism) (Pietrewicz and Sobiecki 2016).

Subsequent definitions that are found in Polish literature depict the sharing economy as a social and economic model based on sharing material and non-material resources. It should be emphasised that the concept of sharing economy is not limited just to goods because people's resources also include their skills and free time that they can share with other people (Nadolska and Nadolski 2019).

Sharing economy involves three broad groups:

- 1) Service providers who share assets, resources, time and/or skills. These can be private individuals offering services on an occasional basis (“peers”) or service providers acting in their professional capacity (“professional service providers”).
- 2) Users of these services.
- 3) Intermediaries that connect them and facilitate transactions between them via an online platform.

Transactions in the collaborative economy generally do not involve a change of ownership and can be carried out for-profit or not-for-profit.

This business model covers a small but growing part of the economy. It provides new opportunities for people to offer their services (including on a temporary and part-time basis) and for entrepreneurs to reach more potential customers, as well as offering customers lower prices and greater choice (European Commission 2020).

Key Questions

Concerning the issue of the sharing economy, a lot of confusion arose, largely due to the lack of one coherent definition. Some researchers of the phenomenon believe that we can talk about sharing economy only when we are dealing with a spontaneous, non-commercial initiative whose goal is to reduce consumption through sharing. Undoubtedly, there is a difference between bottom-up projects based on sharing economy, such as item exchange groups, diverse types of cooperatives and often huge corporations using that trend for business purposes.

Nevertheless, the sharing economy is still regarded as strongly connected to ICT (information and communication technologies). The report “Information society in Poland: Results of statistical surveys in the years 2014–2018” (GUS 2018) includes the results of the survey about using the Internet for sharing economy (Table 1). In 2018, respondents in Poland were asked a second time about using websites or applications that they operate under the sharing economy as intermediaries between private bidders’ accommodation or transport service and people wanting to use these services. Questions were limited to the demand side, i.e., they concerned the use (paid or unpaid) of the parties or applications to organize (rent) accommodation or transport from another private person.

The study shows that more popular in the sharing economy is accommodation rather than transport (17.1% and 7.2% respectively). Websites or sharing economy applications were more often used by people from younger age groups than older people. Taking into account the level of education, services related to the organization of accommodation and transport within the framework of sharing economy were used mostly by people with higher education (respectively 38.2% and 14.6%) and taking into account professional activity—self-employed (34.6% and 14.3% respectively).

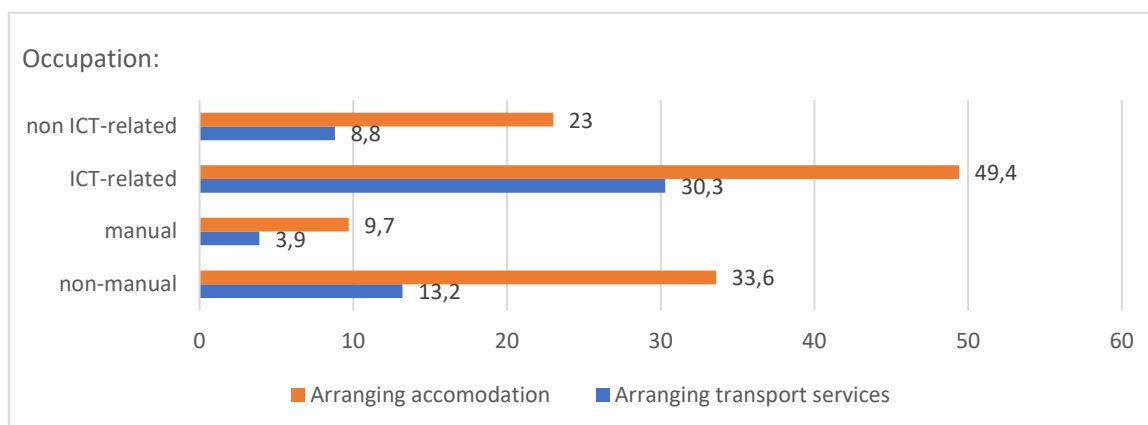
Very large disparities in the shares of people using websites or applications under the sharing economy were noted between various groups of professions. Definitely, a bigger percentage of using websites or applications as part of the sharing economy was observed among working people in non-worker occupations than in workers’ occupations. People associated with the IT and telecommunications industry (related to ICT) much more often used websites or applications as part of the sharing economy in comparison to the group unrelated to the ICT industry; in transport, there were 21.5 percentage points and in accommodation, 26.4 percentage points.

Table 1. Using Websites or Apps for the Sharing Economy in 2018

Specifi- cation	Arranging Accommodation			Arranging Transport Services		
	total	via		total	via	
		dedicates websites or applica- -tions	other websites or applica- -tions		dedicates websites or applica- -tions	other websites or applica- -tions
		in% of total individuals in a group				
Employment Situation						
Students	14.4	9.9	6.4	12.8	9.1	5.4
Persons employed	23.7	18.8	8.8	9.4	7.5	3.0
Employees	24.5	19.4	9.2	9.7	7.8	3.0
Self- employed	34.6	27.8	12.3	14.3	11.6	4.9
Farmers	2.9	2.3	1.1	-	-	-
Unemployed	6.9	4.5	3.2	3.3	2.8	-
Retired or other not in the labour force	5.1	3.8	2.0	1.4	1.1	-
Domicile						
Large cities	27.6	23.2	9.2	12.7	10.4	4.0
Small cities	17.3	12.6	7.5	6.5	4.9	2.3
Rural areas	9.3	6.9	3.8	3.8	2.9	1.3
Degree of Urbanisation						
Thinly- populated	8.7	6.4	3.6	3.6	2.7	1.4
Intermediate	17.8	12.9	7.7	6.5	5.1	1.9
Densely populated	25.4	21.0	8.6	11.6	9.3	3.8
Regions						
Eastern Poland	11.8	9.0	4.3	6.0	4.7	2.0
Central Poland	19.9	15.6	7.4	8.2	6.5	2.7
Western Poland	16.3	12.7	6.8	6.3	4.9	2.1

Source: GUS (2018, p. 145).

Figure 1. Individuals Using Websites or Apps for the Sharing Economy by Occupation in 2018



Source: GUS (2018, p. 146).

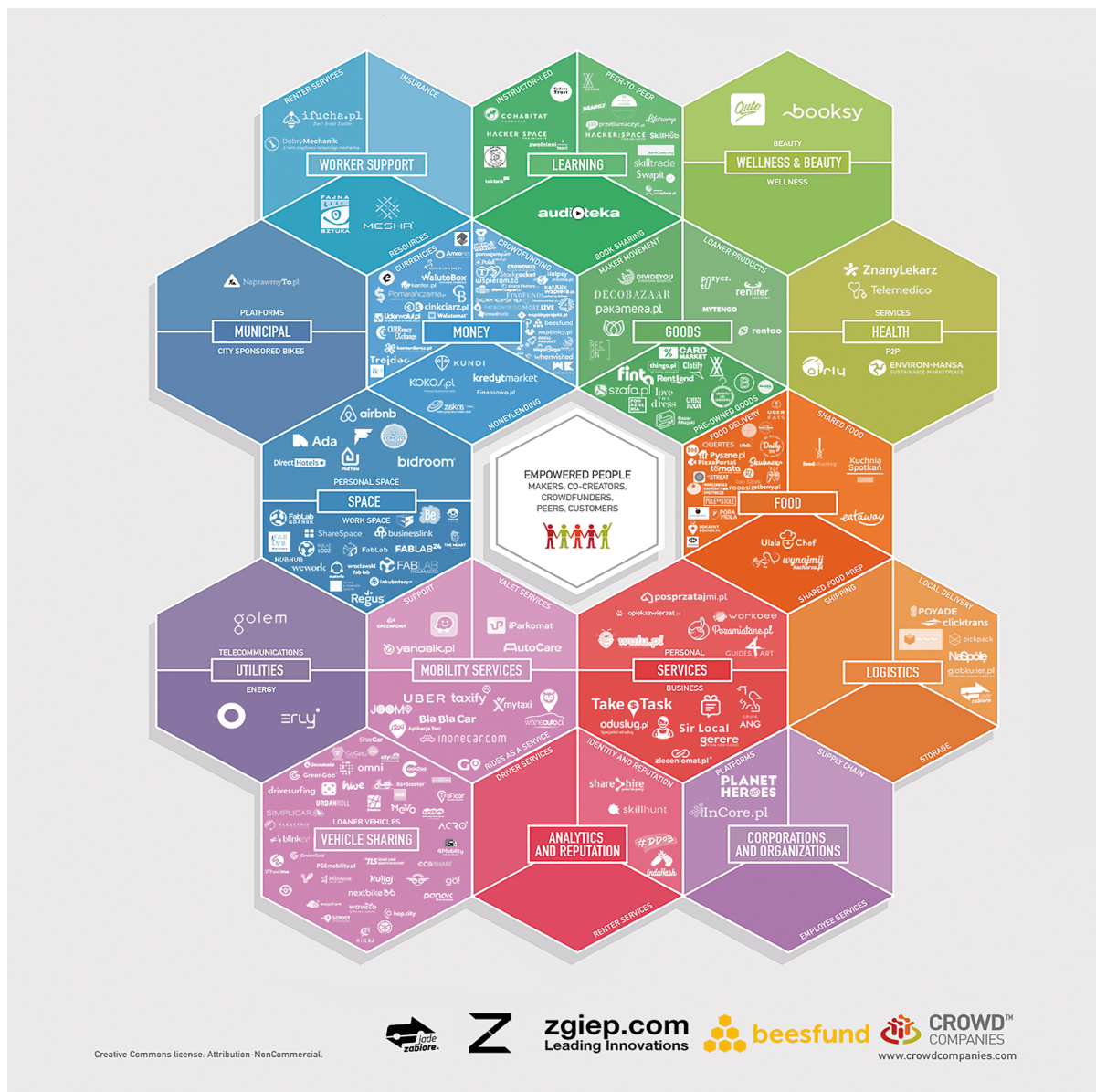
Examples

Accommodation and transport are the services regarded as the most commonly related to the sharing economy. However, the catalogue of sectors and included services is a lot much bigger.

Beyond, there are some examples of initiatives under sharing economy operating in Poland:

- Car and scooter-sharing in cities (e.g., Vozilla, Panek, jedenslad).
- Sharing bicycles (e.g., NextBike, Veturillo).
- Mobility services (e.g., Uber, BlaBlaCar, jadezabiore.pl).
- Sharing a flat or room (e.g., Airbnb, Couchsurfing, otodom).
- Online courses (e.g., Khan Academy, Coursera, Udsa, Skillshare).
- Provision of services by private persons (e.g., TakeTask, Freelancer.com).
- Shared office—co-working (e.g., MyMeetingRoom, Business Link and few dozen more).
- Co-financing of projects and loans from individuals (e.g., PolakPotrafi.pl, Kokos.pl).
- Sale of food products directly from farmers (e.g., Local-Rolnik.pl, food cooperatives—not applicable to bazaars).
- Sharing resources—znanylekaz.pl, ktomalek.pl
- Second-hand/second use—gratka.pl, tablica.pl—bought by Naspers NPN (JSE) and rebranded to olx.pl (olx=on line exchange).
- Local initiatives—platforms for participatory budgets in cities.

Figure 2. Polish Honeycomb 3.0



Source: Zgiep (2019).

Jadezabiore Case (Mobility and Logistics)

The jadezabiore.pl platform joins the drivers with people who want to deliver the consignment in the palace not only in Poland but also in some other European countries. The service, on the one hand, allows drivers to post announcements about the possibility of taking a consignment on the way of a planned trip, and on the other, it lets you see if someone is going to the place where the dispatcher wants to give their package. With search engine offers, portal users can quickly see if someone is planning a trip to the place, they want to send a shipment or if someone is trying to send a package where they want to go.

The service does not charge you any fees for registration, posting announcements or browsing. In the case of wanting to take advantage of the offer, users set between themselves a satisfactory rate for both parties, and the portal collects only a

commission of 5 PLN (around 1 EUR) for 24 hours access to detailed contact details of the carrier or dispatcher. Those who travel a lot or often send a package can purchase a monthly Premium subscription that gives access to all carriers and senders for 30 days (www.jadezabiore.pl).

Wymiennik Case (Social Service)

It is a social service allowing to exchange goods, services, or skills, where instead of money are used “alterkas,” a type of currency used to maintain a balance between giving and taking. Wymiennik is a community of people who exchange services and things with each other. It is also a place on the Internet where offers appear—from repairing bicycles through German lessons and vegetables from the home garden. Wymiennik is also an exchange system that gives you the ability to measure and record the value of all those things circulating between users and the services provided. Thanks to that, a healthy balance between giving and taking is maintained. In short, Wymiennik is a social, alternative exchange system.

The system is not the same as barter, meaning the exchange of goods between two parties (e.g., “I give you tomatoes, and you repair the tap in return”). When you purchase something on Wymiennik, you do not incur any debt with the person who gave you the item or the service. Your commitment applies to the entire community, so you can fulfil it later by giving something completely different to someone else.

Wymiennik is a non-commercial platform for exchanging information about the resources and needs of the local community, and its most important goal is to meet the needs of users. All decisions regarding the Wymiennik rules are made by users in a democratic manner.

They may be a private person over 13 years old, an informal group of people, as well as all organizations, institutions and enterprises operating in accordance with the provisions of Polish law. The limit of negative (debit) and positive (credit) points on users’ accounts is 500 and 1000, respectively. The exchange platform is managed by the administrator, performing ongoing activities related to system maintenance in cooperation with the Coordinating Team, the Enrolment Group, as well as Local Administrators (<http://wymiennik.org>).

PolakPotrafi Case (Crowdfunding)

PolakPotrafi.pl was created for all people who want to carry out interesting projects and realise creative ideas. It is the first and largest reward-based crowdfunding platform in Poland, which helps to get the necessary funds for the implementation of projects, such as films, animations, computer games, cards, boards, comics, music albums, as well as projects related to art, fashion, photography, journalism, theatre, dance, food, and modern technologies. Projects have to meet their funding goal (or exceed it) in order to receive money—this way of funding is called “all-or-nothing” funding. If a project fails to reach its goal, all payments will be refunded to the supporters. Every campaign has its funding goal (amount of money expressed in PLN) and the time limit set by the creator of the project. A campaign can last max 75 days, but most of them should not last more than 60 days. PolakPotrafi advises deciding on the duration of the campaign after submitting the project. There are two options after the end of the project: (1) You get funded: If the project reaches its goal or outdoes it, funds are submitted to the creator’s bank account; and (2) You do not get funded: If the project fails to reach its goal, all payments will be refunded to the supporters. As a creator of the project, you keep 100% of its ownership. You also decide about your

actions and oversee the implementation of its stages yourself. In thanks to funding, you offer the supporters the effects of your work (<https://polakpotrafi.pl>).

O4 Flow Case (the First Co-working for Women in Poland)

It is a quite new initiative, as it was open on October 30th, 2019. The first women's co-working in Poland, O4 Flow is a space for entrepreneurs, freelancers, business owners or ladies working in a corporation. In fact, for everyone who is interested in being in a new, different environment, which is created to help stimulate creativity, strengthen competencies, develop themselves and their business. It is a place where women are able to work whenever they want and as they want while having contact with people who share similar experiences and strengthening the competencies that are necessary today to increase competitiveness in the labour market. A lawyer and an accountant will be on duty at O4 Flow. They guarantee residents access to a platform with business and marketing knowledge. They focus on networking meetings and events, deepening know-how. There is also the Session Room designed, which is a space dedicated to individual meetings with a coach, personal trainer, psychologist, mediator, but also dietitian or speech therapist.

O4 Flow is therefore to be an inclusive space. The woman is to be in the spotlight; however, the support of men is welcome. For her needs, the Flow prepares an offer of workshops, inspiring meetings, and substantive training. In O4 Flow, there is a place for businesses run, managed or owned by women, but also men are their employees, clients, contractors, advisors, business partners (<https://o4.network/pl/nowosci/o4-flow-pierwszy-w-polsce-coworking-dla-kobiet/>).

Context

Sharing economy is not a normative concept and is defined differently depending on the subject (i.e., products, services, ideas, models, or structures) to which it refers. However, the significance of the phenomenon is rising rapidly from year to year. The importance of the research area is evidenced by the fact that on June 2, 2016, the European Commission presented a communication entitled The “European Sharing Economy Program,” which emphasised the growing importance of the platform economy and its impact on economics, competitiveness, and employment policies, including growth and jobs in the EU (European Commission 2016). In that document, the European Commission presented to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions legal guidance and policy orientations that may be useful to public authorities, economic operators and interested citizens and contribute to building a balanced and sustainable development of the sharing economy foreseen in the Single Market Strategy.

With those guidelines in mind, on May 11, 2017, the European Parliament adopted a motion for a resolution on the European program for the sharing economy (2017/2003 (INI)) to give it a legal framework and thus eliminate the so-called regulatory grey zone, enabling to enjoy the benefits of sharing economy while respecting the principles of fair competition, employee rights and tax laws (European Parliament 2017).

That project, first of all, emphasised that the sharing economy can be a source of significant opportunities for consumers, entrepreneurs, and citizens and generate new jobs, growth, and sources of income. At the same time, however, it was emphasised that in recent years the rapid and unregulated growth of that phenomenon had begun

many challenges and potential threats that should be considered and resolved. Based on that, the need for the European horizontal framework was recognised as a regulatory priority in this matter, combining general principles and specific provisions that would pave the way for an equal, uniform, and dynamic operating environment in the EU and avoid any possible negative impact on employees, the risk of unfair competition between traditional sectors and platforms for cooperation and tax avoidance.

In the face of current problems in qualifying some services present on the market, that is a desirable direction, especially in the context of the scope of responsibility of service providers and equal opportunities for doing business.

Considering the mobility sector and Uber case, in light of the law in force in Poland, the digital platform or Uber application, or more precisely its owner, acts as an entrepreneur—an intermediary in relation to Internet users. On the other hand, users of the application—passengers and usually drivers—do not operate as part of their own business activity, as in the field of urban transport, it would require obtaining the appropriate permit. Therefore, passengers can be regarded as consumers in relation to Uber because, on the other hand, a given legal Act is an entrepreneur within the meaning of art. 22(1) of the Civil Code. From the point of view of contract law, the relationship that arises between a passenger, an Uber platform and a direct user who performs the transport service must be qualified as a service contract (art. 755 of the Civil Code), i.e., a result contract of a consensual, payable, and mutually binding nature. However, it is transport; hence Uber should have the appropriate licence and meet other conditions specified for carrying out regulated activities. The national legislator has just filled the legal gap in this area, introducing the same legal conditions for entities operating in the field of brokering persons and mechanisms enabling more effective control of the correctness of business operations conducted by intermediaries and entities cooperating with them.

The Act of May 16, 2019, amending the Act on road transport and some other acts (Journal of Laws 2019.1180), which enters into force on January 1, 2020, namely the same rules were adopted for conducting activities in the field of passenger brokerage and equalisation opportunities for all entities operating on the market. That means from January 1, 2020, all passenger transport brokers require to obtain a licence authorising them to perform road transport in the range of brokering passenger transport. At the same time, the Act introduces the obligation to order a transport agent only by entrepreneurs who have the appropriate licence to perform national road transport. The changes also include the inclusion of economic activities in the field of brokering passengers by the definition of road transport. In addition, a definition of the agency was introduced, according to which it is an economic activity consisting in forwarding orders for the carriage of persons by car, a vehicle designed for transporting over seven and not more than nine people, including a driver or taxi.

As described above Uber-lex changes in the regulations of other economic sectors related to the sharing economy.

Developments

The collaborative economy is moving from the early youth phase, which began in 2009, to the maturity period. Over the past decade, many companies using this business

model have started and carried out global expansion. From promising start-ups, they have become global companies.

Zgiep Leading Innovations has monitored the development of Polish initiatives in the collaborative economy since 2016. In 2016, 36 companies operating on the basis of collaborative economy principles were identified. A year later, there were 123 of them in Poland. Over 250 entities of that type have been found recently. The growth rate has been 697 per cent in the last three years, and in the last year, the number of companies has doubled. The three fastest collaborative economy growing sectors in Poland are finance, transport, and real estate.

Among the financial companies operating in the collaborative economy model, the crowdfunding sector has grown most dynamically. Companies such as Patronite or Beesfund are growing particularly rapidly. The popularity of subscription crowdfunding is related to the increase in the content offer created by independent creators. In the mobility sector, mainly electric scooter sector development was noticed. Seven new systems have appeared in Poland (Lime, Bird, Hive, Quick, Blink, Hulaj, and CityBee), about entering the market think the next companies: Acro Bike, Hop.city or DAV. Electric scooters are still a topic for discussion, especially in a range of road safety and tax-paying (Zgiep 2019).

Except for the sectors described above, we can observe the rapidly growing development of local cooperatives, especially in the food sector. Those Cooperatives are entirely based on trust between consumers and suppliers. They want to buy food directly from farmers, without intermediaries. They want it to be organic, but it does not always have to be certified. Throughout the years of activity, they believe that their suppliers do not cheat. Such cooperatives are a way to shorten supply chains. A cooperative, such as Future Farms, is a way not to transport food from a distance and to decentralise crops. Monocultures are not good for the environment. Bringing food closer to consumers affects not only the quality of food but also the level of food waste. A lot of food goes to the basket already at the transport stage (Skiba 2019).

Issues

Still, in Poland, there is a lack of trust in Internet platforms noticed in comparison to other European countries. As the Eurobarometer (European Commission 2016) survey indicates the fact that collaborative platforms offer new or different services is identified as one of the main benefits by at least three in ten in Luxembourg (34%), Spain (33%), and Croatia and the Czech Republic (both 31%). Respondents are least likely to give this answer in Latvia (14%), Hungary (15%), and Poland and Germany (both 16%).

Moreover, the attempt to assess the popularity of the sharing economy in the world is the Sharing Economy Index, prepared by the Swedish think tank Timbro. The index has been compiled using traffic volume data and scraped data and provides an insight into the driving factors behind the peer-to-peer economy. Monthly traffic data was collected for 286 services in 213 countries. For 23 of the 286 services, a complete count of active suppliers was done using automated “web scraping” techniques (<https://timbro.se/allmant/timbro-sharing-economy-index/>).

According to the Timbro Sharing Economy Index, Poland is ranked 92nd. The top has been occupied in big part by the countries with tourism as a leading sector, where accommodation is offered within the sharing economy. Nevertheless, there is still a

high potential for the development of the sharing economy in Poland, not restricted to tourism itself, but also in transportation, financing/funding, food-sharing, social services.

Due to the specifics of that segment, it is difficult to estimate its value in Poland. There are many companies that operate in this market, but it is difficult to indicate reliable numbers. The problems with estimating the value are partly due to the fact that in the case of sharing economy, it is very difficult to talk about the place of providing services. For example, PwC estimates that Airbnb publishing private accommodation publishes 11,000 announcements regarding Poland, which constitutes about 10% of the national hotel database. In turn, bike-sharing systems only use about 20% of the market potential in Poland, which is estimated at PLN 100–120 million annually (PwC 2016).

Other Major Players

The subject of sharing and collaborative economy has become more and more popular in Poland. It is under the interests of researchers from numerous universities and research institutes in Poland. Among many others, there is Koźmiński University, www.kozminski.edu.pl/en/, a private institution of higher education with full academic rights, located in Warsaw. The subjects the researchers are focused on are mainly tourism, accommodation, Airbnb, and Couchsurfing. The University realised the project focus on the growing phenomenon of virtual organizations offering accommodation—payable or for free, offering “a place on a couch” or whole houses/flats www.kozminski.edu.pl/en/facultyresearch/research-projects/management-science/. Also researchers from Wrocław University of Economics, www.ue.wroc.pl, public research university, located in Wrocław, are interested in sharing economy focusing on legal aspects; consumer trends, which can be found in Research Papers of Wrocław University of Economics, e.g., www.dbc.wroc.pl/dlibra/publication/102412. Describing more research units can be said that almost every bigger university or economic/business school has on its account some research projects, papers, conferences related to sharing economy, including the Poznań University of Economics <https://ue.poznan.pl/en/> concentrated on economic aspects and trust in collaboration economy business, and Katowice University of Economics www.ue.katowice.pl/no_cache/en.html, which interest is about trust, consumers, business models.

Moreover, also individual entrepreneurs, NGOs, private businesses, and public bodies conduct research and promote the new business model among the sharing and collaborative economy in Poland. Between them are Zgiep Leading Innovations—private initiative <https://zgiep.com/category/sharing-economy/>, PricewaterhouseCoopers Poland, Polish Agency for Enterprise Development <https://en.parp.gov.pl>, Centre for Social and Economic Research (CASE) www.case-research.eu/pl, who elaborated the working paper: “The Collaborative Economy in Poland and Europe: A Tool for Boosting Female Employment?” (Beaumont 2016).

Summary

Over the past decade, many companies using this business model have started and carried out global expansion. From promising start-ups, they have become global companies. However, there are still issues unclear and unregulated, which is why

causing the feeling of inequality. The need for the European horizontal framework was recognised as a regulatory priority in this matter, combining general principles and specific provisions that would pave the way for an equal, uniform, and dynamic operating environment in the EU and avoid any possible negative impact on employees, the risk of unfair competition between traditional sectors and platforms for cooperation and tax avoidance. In the face of current problems in qualifying some services present on the market, that is a desirable direction, especially in the context of the scope of responsibility of service providers and equal opportunities for doing business.

Concerning the issue of the sharing economy, a lot of confusion arose, largely due to the lack of one coherent definition. Some researchers of the phenomenon believe that speaking about sharing economy is only while dealing with a spontaneous, non-commercial initiative whose goal is to reduce consumption through sharing. Clearly, there is a big significance between bottom-up projects based on sharing economy, such as item exchange groups, diverse types of cooperatives and often huge corporations using that trend for business purposes.

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Suggested Readings

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