

Libraries of Things

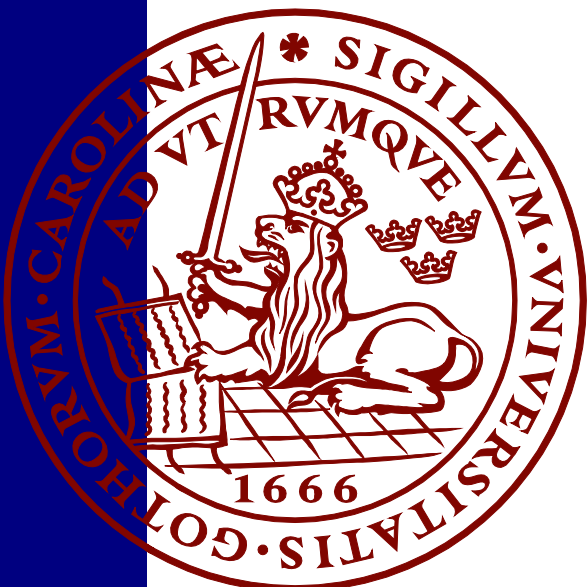
Drivers for a Sustainable Sharing Economy?

A Case Study of Circle Centre Lund

Florence Kunert

Master Thesis Series in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science,
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University
International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science
(30hp/credits)



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Lund University Centre for
Sustainability Studies



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Abstract

The gradual destruction of global ecosystems enhanced by the predominant growth paradigm and overconsumption, require social change and alternative practices. A sustainable sharing economy is one alternative pathway to challenge the current socio-economic system. This thesis explores the role of Libraries of Things in the transition to a sustainable sharing economy, particularly analysing the case of Circle Centre Lund. Using the concept of prefigurative change as a theoretical entry point, I analyse how Circle Centre Lund is establishing an alternative and which challenges and opportunities the organization faces in realizing its vision for a sustainable future. Semi-structured interviews of the organization's providers and an online-survey of its members revealed its transformative potential, but also concerns about dependencies on external resources or the risk of commodification and different demands of the community. Meanwhile, the organization's distinct experimental character and unique business model promote the establishment of a new norm and sustainable consumption practices while ensuring its future relevance.

Keywords: collaborative sharing, social change, prefiguration, sustainability science, non-profit sharing organizations, transformative potential

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1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

The increase of material well-being threatens the ecological well-being of our earth. Current lifestyles, especially in affluent societies, have severe impacts on our ecosystems and humanity itself. The distribution of material well-being is as unequally distributed as its impacts on certain parts of the world (Schlosberg, 2019). While affluent societies are responsible for highest emission rates due to unsustainable production and consumption patterns, poorer societies are affected the most by negative consequences of consumer and throw-away mentalities (Gullstrand Edbring et al., 2016).

In order to avoid further detrimental consequences, social change and a transition towards sustainable and equitable societies is needed (Loorbach et al., 2017). This change, along with other social movements and actions, requires a shift in our consumption practices. These alternative consumption practices among others include extending the lives of products, access based consumption, and collaborative consumption (McCormick et al., 2016). In research and practice different concepts emerged which aim to shift consumption patterns. The concept of the sharing economy emerged as one example for collaborative consumption. Enabled by information and communication technologies, the sharing economy aims at distributing resources among strangers (Zvolska et al., 2019).

In the last decades, the sharing economy has grown rapidly and a majority in affluent societies are willing to share more products (Ameli, 2017). But the concept has so far been unable to gain a substantial foothold in the current linear economy (Ameli, 2020), or at least not the original idea behind it.

As part of an alternative consumption model and thus assumingly contributing to social change, Libraries of Things (LoT)¹ are just one possible way to change current practices embedded in a (capitalist) linear economy. By combining elements of the circular economy with a sharing community, LoT can be a direct tool for communities to reduce their environmental and climate impact through the sharing of reusable goods, while also aiming at reducing waste.

¹ Broadly defined as a platform that enables collective access to assets and services provided by a collective (voluntary or remunerated)

At the same time, activities organized within these initiatives can create more communal spirit and raise awareness for sustainable lifestyles.

Therefore, this study aims to present and analyse a practical and solution-based example to contribute to the wider debate of shifting consumption patterns in the wider community. The concept of LoTs is recent and therefore not yet widely established. Although the number of those libraries has been growing dynamically since 2010 only 250 locations could be counted at the end of 2018 worldwide with tendency upward (Ameli et al., 2018). However, as important as this phenomenon is for several fields of research, it has insufficiently been studied so far. In response to this research gap I conducted a case study about the non-profit organisation “Circle Centre” (CC) in Lund. Since its founding in 2018, it functions as a LoT in Lund’s municipality, Sweden. This relatively young organization not been subject of an academic study, therefore findings of this research can provide valuable insights among the wider global and diverse network of LoTs and its contribution within the sharing economy.

1.2 Aim and guiding questions

Aim of this study on a broader level, is to explore the role of LoTs within a sustainable sharing economy. In a narrower sense, I want to create a clearer understanding of the values of CC in Lund’s municipality and demonstrate present challenges in order to give some guidance in future developments, specifically in terms of sustainability. The study is furthermore of particular interest for CC itself, other sharing initiatives, the civil society and local decision-makers of Lunds Kommun.

Therefore, this case study adopts a discovery-led approach, as it allows to focus on what is happening at CC (case study setting). At the same time it explores the key issues affecting the setting (e.g. challenges and opportunities) and its implication for the sharing economy. This leads to the following research questions:

Overall RQ: In what way does Circle Centre, as a Library of Things, contribute to a transition to a sustainable sharing economy?

RQ1: Which practices and strategies are used by Circle Centre to contest overconsumption?

RQ2: What is Circle Centre’s vision to ensure its future relevance in order to contribute to a sustainable sharing economy?

RQ3: What are challenges and opportunities for achieving that vision?

These questions emerged through the theoretical concern around the question of how social changes can be achieved. Therefore, this thesis operationalized prefigurative politics, drawing from Yates' (2015) definition and concepts of the integration of transition studies and social movements (Törnberg, 2021), which aims to describe and analyse collective efforts to bring about societal change by constructing alternative or utopian social relations.

To answer the research questions, the principal protagonists of CC are identified as the 'providers' (co-founder, board member, officer) and the users of CC's offers, here referred as the 'members'. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the providers and an online-survey about the member's perceptions concerning CC's contribution to the sharing economy. This data is complemented by literature about the sharing economy and LoTs as well as by reports and data from CC.

1.3 Contribution to Sustainability Science

Especially since the Brundtland report (1978) societies have increasingly acknowledged the importance of sustainability and sustainable development evolving into a broader awareness about the interconnectedness of humans and nature (Mathiasson & Jochumsen, 2022). Sustainability as a science is a problem-driven field of research and practice (Clark et al., 2003) seeking to understand and analyse wicked problems in nature-society interactions (Jerneck et al., 2011). The wicked problem and the underlying motivation of this study has been identified as the practice of overconsumption, particularly in affluent societies.

Accordingly, sustainability science is united in the goal to find ways of transformative change and solutions in social and economic spheres (Kates, 2011). The concept of sustainability is well-equipped to handle complex and interlinked developments of social and ecological systems (Heinrichs, 2013). Anchored in inter- and transdisciplinary approaches, sustainability science helps to holistically understand systemic issues like the sharing economy (Heinrichs, 2013). By placing the sharing economy into the bigger picture of sustainability science in my research, I want to exploit its sustainability potential and thus contribute to developments in transformative and social change.

1.4 Thesis Roadmap

In the next chapter, I will present the analytical framework and concepts used to analyse the case of CC. First, I shall present the theoretical entry point of prefigurative politics based Yates' (2015) conceptualization. After that, I will go on to outline the concept of the sharing economy and LoT that serve as a basis for the analysis and discussion. In chapter 3, the choice and use of research methods are introduced to ensure credibility of the results which are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in light of the presented concepts to answer the research questions of this study, followed by a final chapter drawing a conclusion.

2 Analytical Framework

Using theory when analysing social phenomena is crucial to understand how specific phenomena occur (Vacchelli et al., 2021). Yet, the researcher's personal experience also influences which theoretical lens is chosen to explain the observed outcomes which must be discussed transparently. In that sense, my personal experience influenced how I conducted this study. Being an active member and having had a position within the organization gave me an exclusive insight into the structures and happenings at CC while at the same time laid the foundation to dive deeper in the underlying factors and implications for its community and what this could imply on a societal level. In order to conceptualize the knowledge I could access due to my involvement at CC, further involvement with concepts and theories was needed to obtain conclusions and contribute to the wider debate.

Therefore, I first introduce the reasoning and relevance of the chosen theoretical concept for the case. In a second step, the sharing economy in terms of sustainability goals and LoTs will be conceptualized which combined with the theoretical basis allows to structure findings and draw conclusions on CC's impact within an aspired sharing economy.

2.1 Theoretical Basis: Prefigurative Social Change

Conceptualization

My theoretical concern emerged around the question of how to achieve a free, equal and democratic society while respecting planetary boundaries. This type of society has not yet been realized, and therefore it is susceptible that some form of (transformative) social change is needed (Schlosberg, 2019). Perspectives on what social change entails and how it can develop vary and have resulted in the emergence of different concepts and theories of social and transformative change (Brown, 2014; Massey, 2016). One of these concepts is *prefigurative politics* (used interchangeably with prefiguration) which this study builds upon.

Although prefiguration is often described as a 'new' form of doing political action and is increasingly used for analysing contemporary movements, often closely associated with certain strands of socialism (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020), prefigurative practices existed for several decades. The term in its current sense was first applied in the 1970s and can be broadly defined as collective attempt to create social change through the construction of alternative or utopian social relations (Yates, 2015).

Mainly, two dynamics evolved around prefigurative politics. The first related to the method of mobilization. It refers to the political logic of social movements' of everyday activities (Boggs, 1977; Graeber, 2002), as well as the understanding of mobilisations when the 'means' expressed by protesters reflect or are equivalent to the political 'ends' (Yates, 2015, p.3). A prominent example is the use of direct democratic mechanisms in the organisation of diverse groups to enhance egalitarian decision-making. The second dynamic stresses that prefiguration involves an experimental or 'alternative' projects alongside political mobilisation (Haenfler et al., 2012; Yates, 2015). In both cases, goals set by the movements are anticipated and implemented through practices.

Drawing on Yates' (2015) conceptualization of prefiguration, two dimensions served to structure the sub-questions of this research. While RQ1 aims to answer the dimension of (I) experimental construction of alternatives at a micro-level in and through practice, RQ2 and RQ3 are answered by analysing (II) the strategic attempt to proliferate outcomes, while contesting power on the macro-political level.

Processes of prefigurative social change

In addition to the two dimensions, Yates (2015) developed five interrelated processes of prefigurative social change: experimentation, construction of perspectives, creation of a new social norm, consolidation and diffusion. These serve as reference points for my empirical study and combined with the two dimensions, I propose the adapted following framework for my analysis (Yates, 2015, p.13):

- I. Experimental construction of alternatives
 - collective *experimentation*
 - imagining, production and circulation of *perspectives*
 - creating of new and future-oriented social *norms* or '*conduct*'
 - *consolidation* in movement infrastructure
- II. Strategic attempt to ensure future relevance
 - *diffusion* and contamination of ideas, messages and goals to wider networks

These processes are inspired by ideas from social movement literature and can be seen in light of the development and functioning of a social movement (Yates, 2015). The first process contains an experimentation phase where practices are reimaged. Those aim to displace hegemonic social activities, followed by the establishment of political positions and perspectives. These are then further developed and debated to create a collective code of conduct and creates a new norm enhancing the nature of the experiment. In a next step, the new conduct is subsequently consolidated in the physical environment of the movement. The final process involves the diffusion of perspectives and the new norm to the wider society, allowing prefigured alternatives to persist in the future.

In contrast to theories of new social movements that centre on experimentation and new conducts, prefiguration also includes political '*perspectives*', '*consolidation*' and '*diffusion*'. Meanwhile, as a political approach, it can be distinguished from subcultural or countercultural movements as they miss collective visions or readiness to take action for greater societal change (Yates, 2015).

In conclusion of this theoretical outline, it can be stated that change does not happen by only contesting the status quo, but through building alternatives (Yates, 2015). While advocating for social change, old forms have to be contested and simultaneously concrete alternatives have to be articulated (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020; Törnberg, 2021). Concepts which have the potential to support the construction of alternatives and thus enhance social change are presented in the next two sub-chapters.

2.2 The Sharing Economy

2.2.1 *Conceptualization*

Sharing is defined as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use” (Belk, 2007, p.127). Despite this plausible definition, it remains difficult to define which offers are parts are included in the sharing economy and what exactly is to be understood by it. Nevertheless, as a relatively new and complex phenomenon, the sharing economy had an impact on society by disrupting industries and becoming part of people’s daily life and work (Cotrim et al., 2020). In 2010, the book *What’s mine is yours* by Botsman & Rogers contributed to international awareness of sharing and triggered enthusiasm for the sharing economy – driven to a significant extent by its expected sustainability impacts (Gerwe & Silva, 2020). As a result, it was assumed that the total number of newly produced commodities would decrease - and with it energy and resource consumption (Ameli, 2020). Within the domain of sustainable consumption and production, the sharing economy overlaps with other related phenomena such as product-service systems (providing access over product ownership) and can be seen as an extension of the circular economy in the context of slowing resource loops through sharing (Curtis, 2021; Witjes & Lozano, 2016).

Yet, there is a lacking conceptual clarity (Schor & Wengronowitz, 2017). In sociological debates, the emergence of the sharing economy has been envisioned as new economic model with a new economic paradigm that could potentially replace the incumbent models of capitalism and socialism (Acquier et al., 2020). A perhaps more tangible definition is proposed by Gerwe & Silva (2020, p. 71) who see the sharing economy as “a socio-economic system that allows peers to grant temporary access to their underutilized physical and human assets through online platforms”.

As much as definitions differ in the sharing economy, a variety of sharing practices have emerged which becomes evident in the existence of multiple sharing platforms² and business models. These common features of sharing organizations are reflected best by the mentioned definition of Gerwe & Silva and can be identified as the temporary access to goods or services over its ownership, the reuse of un- or underused commodities, the redefinition of traditional business-to-consumer transactions and the use of the Internet in different extents (Longhurst et al., 2016; Schor & Wengronowitz, 2017).

Types of sharing initiatives

In the face of the diversity of business models, one major distinction can be made based on the platform's market orientation. Kirchner & Schüßler (2020) highlight that the sharing economy includes both for-profit and non-commercial forms. This duality between individual profit maximization and a collective orientation constitute the main source of discussion among the academic community (Cotrim et al., 2020).

Traditionally, sharing platforms have been classified as Peer-to-Peer (P2P), Government-to-Peer (G2P) and Business-to-Peer (B2P) models or a hybrid between the three (Schor, 2014). All sharing occurs among peers. Intermediaries, however, are different agents that facilitate the sharing practice, which can be private individuals or civil society, the government or a business.

In recent literature, researchers have developed more sophisticated typologies embedded in different dimensions (Curtis & Mont, 2020). Curtis (2021) developed the currently most elaborated sharing economy business model framework (see Appendix I) with three value dimensions, 17 business model attributes and subsequent 93 configuration options. Furthermore, he analysed 63 sharing platforms and identified 29 clusters based on characteristics such as platform type, shared practice, or value orientation. The clusters were then merged into eight archetypes (see Figure 1). Each archetype represents dominant configuration options with possible overlaps between certain patterns. These archetypes as well as the framework serve as a reference to describe and analyse sharing economy business models. For my study the briefly outlined typology helps to situate the case of CC within a sharing economy business model.

² Here the terms ,platform', ,initiative', ,organization' are used interchangeably

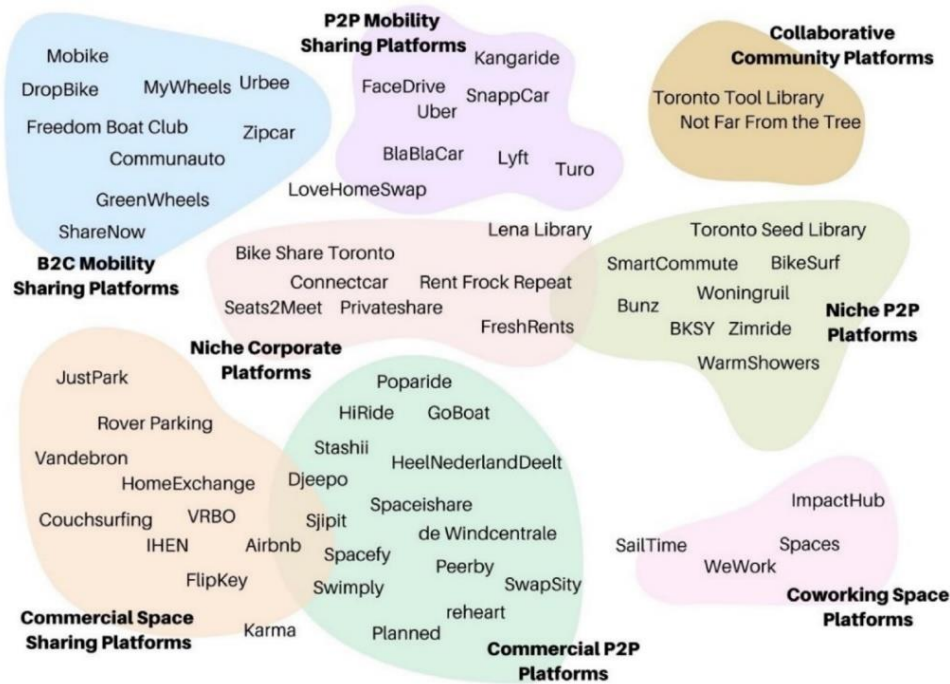


Figure 1. Sharing platform archetypes (Curtis, 2021, p. 1658)

2.2.2 Embeddedness in Prefiguration and Sustainability

“When it was launched, many believed that the sharing economy prefigured an alternative form of economic practice to neoliberal capitalism” (Schor & Vallas, 2021, p. 382).

In its early stages the sharing economy envisioned to transcend conventional market principles by consuming goods and services in a more sustainable, egalitarian and communal way, essentially creating an alternative to the dominant capitalistic model (Heinrichs, 2013). Seen as a “potential new pathway to sustainability” (Heinrichs, 2013, p. 231), the sharing economy saw the disruption with unsustainable practices and a shift towards a culture of sharing access to assets instead of ownership cultures.

However, scepticism arose whether sharing platforms truly represented an alternative or whether they were merely profit-driven (Bársony, 2017). Especially the success of profit-oriented companies like Airbnb or Uber that operate under the guise of “sharing” has started a debate about whether the sharing economy rather is the start of an alarming pathway that leads to “hyper-capitalism” and even reinforces the current unsustainable economic paradigm (Cotrim et al., 2020; Kirchner & Schüßler,

2020; Wruk et al., 2019). Various models found under the same 'sharing label' can instigate negative impacts on society by commoditizing social interactions, worsening working conditions, and consuming more natural resources (Cotrim et al., 2020).

It is a missed chance for sharing platforms to create value for sustainability-consciousness and opportunities for change by focusing solely on a bearish economic dimension of the sharing economy. As the world faces catastrophes such as the recent pandemic or economic crises, post-capitalist discourses around utopian alternatives to capitalism are increasingly important (Schor & Vallas, 2021). Indeed, Schor & Vallas (2021) argue that structural changes can create a truly sustainable and social inclusive sharing economy. Depending on the inherent business models, participation in sharing platforms can facilitate trust in other peers and the community and thus increase social cohesion (Curtis et al., 2020). Of particular interest in this context might be *Collaborative Community Platforms* (see Figure 1). This archetype gives precedence to environmental or societal value creation while relying on the efforts of its community. These platforms encourage collaborative governance and in-person interactions on a local scale.

To conclude this section, despite its "paradoxical nature" (Cotrim et al., 2020; Curtis, 2021), there is continued interest in the sharing economy as a mode to foster more sustainable consumption. In the context of the prefiguration of a sustainable future, the focus of this study remains on the original idea of the sharing economy which aligns with sustainability aspirations rather than profit-orientation. Therefore I propose the term of a *sustainable* sharing economy that as such involves "alternative" sharing platforms prefiguring this vision. One potential alternative platform constitute LoTs which are presented in the next section.

2.3 Libraries of Things

2.3.1 Conceptualization

Compliant to the previously described concept, the main principle behind LoTs lays in sharing resources. The act of sharing was common for most of human history as communities and groups cooperated to hunt, gather food, and pool resources (Baden et al., 2020; shareable, 2020). Libraries tap in this ancient tradition by sharing culture and knowledge and thus functioning as important institutions for centuries. Viewed as institutionalized forerunners of sharing practices, LoTs are based

on this model and oftentimes parallels to public libraries are drawn to explain the concept to people unfamiliar with it (Peekhaus, 2018).

Similar to the variety of sharing platforms, LoT take different forms and use various business models influenced by the demands of the particular place it is located in. According to Ameli (2020) a LoT is a product-service system that also depends on the actions of various actors, all of whom are related to each other and to the service itself. The general stakeholder system map demonstrates these interactions and the functioning of a LoT (see Figure 2).

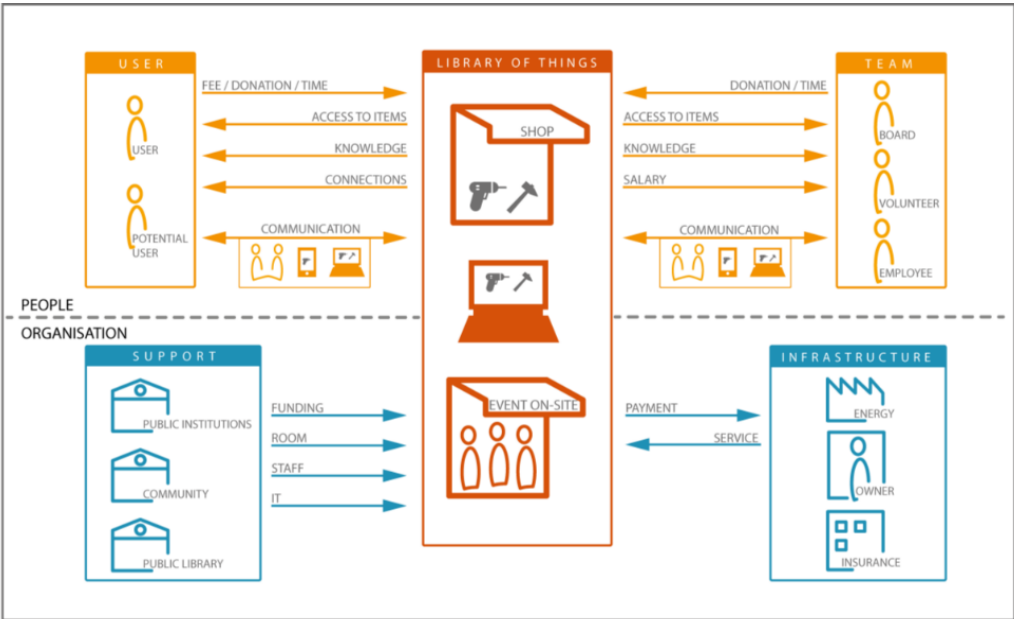


Figure 2. General stakeholder system map of a Library of Things (Ameli, 2017, p. 3299)

The heart of a LoT constitutes its service – in form of item provision or events on-site – and the members who use it. Donated or collectively acquired items are used by the members. In some cases, a donation is required in order to become a member, but non-members can also donate. Responsible for the management and maintenance of the items, compliance with the rules and ensuring opening hours is the (mostly volunteer-based) team of the initiative. The offer and service is promoted through online presence, for example website and social media activities, and by on-site activities such as workshops, conferences and events.

LoTs are usually well connected with initiatives having similar objectives, which gives the organization additional visibility. The sources of income of LoTs are diverse; and tend to be a mix of grants, subscription, per item fees or donations in form of money or resources like the provision of space

(Baden et al., 2020). In some cases, commissioned work is carried out and the premises are rented out to third parties for a fee. Nevertheless the initiatives are mostly dependent on third-party funds, as the above-mentioned sources of income alone do not always cover the costs (Ameli, 2020).

This description reflects the attributes of *collaborative community platforms* by Curtis (Curtis, 2021), including a local scale, collaborative governance, in-person interactions, the support from volunteers and revenue streams through dominantly membership, donations, as well as public and private funding.

2.3.2 Embeddedness in a Sustainable Sharing Economy

The debate around the potential of sharing economy organizations sustainably advancing economies - and thus constituting an 'alternative' - involves the question if the employed practices contribute to achieving sustainability goals. As demonstrated above, LoTs, by their inherent practices, can be categorized as collaborative community platforms which by definition pursue environmental and social sustainability goals.

In the face of increasing ecological problems due to mass production of goods, Ameli (2020) classifies LoTs as new kind of institution and as being representative of new economic practices. For instance, this is reflected by its potential to help those willing to share overcome the hurdle between wanting to share and actual action. The sharing and access to a single asset by many is likely to reduce the consumption of durable goods, which in turn reduces resource use.

Comparative case studies of LoTs in the UK (Baden et al., 2020) and Germany (Ameli, 2020) showed that LoTs challenge people to rethink their consumption patterns and unite members around a shared vision. Driven by their own sustainability concerns, providers of LoTs were considered as key agents for promoting the idea of access over ownership at an early stage of the organization's emergence (Baden et al., 2020). In addition to that, LoTs are considered to be more successful if activities go beyond the lending of items, by also e.g. creating a strong sense of community (shareable, 2020).

Hence, the initial conceptualization suggest that LoTs are well suited to act as drivers of a sustainable sharing economy. Then again, different LoTs vary in their business models and particularly the revenue stream differs from case to case (Michnik & Eriksson, 2014). While some entirely rely on donations or third-party funding, others generate income from membership and per-item loan fees. The latter

model is to be seen critical, as it suggests profit orientation and making the sustainability aspect obsolete. Therefore, each LoT has to be reassessed in their specific context and their distinct features.

In any case, it also remains unclear how persistent LoTs are, demonstrated by the few empirical evidence in academic literature which is due to their recent emergence. This gap will be scrutinized in the next steps by means of case study methods.

3 Methodology

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Basis

When it comes to conceptions about what constitutes reality (ontology), how we know what we know (epistemology) and how we study it (methodology) (Creswell, 2014), I draw on critical realism as my philosophical position in undertaking this research. Critical realists recognize that the construction of meaning and communication among human actors are both subject of investigation and medium of research and theorizing (Edwards et al., 2014). Furthermore, it acknowledges that there is an external reality of the natural order, events and discourses of the social world. At the same time, social action takes place in the context of pre-existing structures, which have both constraining and facilitating implications (Edwards et al., 2014). Therefore, the observable social action is a product of complex causal interactions, which can be identified through practical and theoretical work of the social sciences and analysed by a combination of theory, concepts and methods.

To shed light on empirical events and non-observable patterns behind the structures of the case, I apply a qualitative data triangulation approach using multiple sources of data (Yin, 2014). In addition to that, it is noteworthy that the case study combines field research with personal experience. Being a former officer at Circle Centre allows me to have a deeper understanding of the organization and a potentially increased access to uncover patterns in the setting. However, this needs to be reflected in my role as a researcher to avoid potential biases. In this regard and to avoid biases, the use of other data sources reveal perceptions that could confirm or contrast own interpretations.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 *Case Study Approach*

To explore if CC as a LoT is sustainably advancing the sharing economy, I used a case study approach combining different qualitative methods. Case studies pay attention to the relationships and social processes to unravel complexities within a given social setting (Denscombe, 2014). In this sense, I am not only interested in what goes on in this setting, but also in explaining why and to which ends those things occur.

For this case, I use abductive reasoning (Vacchelli et al., 2021) as the findings of the case influenced the choice for the theoretical basis and vice versa the structure of the analysis is deduced from the theoretical concept. During the research process, questions and aims had to be readjusted accordingly to new findings, understandings and revelations.

3.2.2 *Case Description*

Circle Centre is a non-profit organization which uses a distinct structure to promote the idea of sharing goods, ideas and skills and thus challenging existing norms (see Figure 3). It is physically located at Stenkrossen, a municipal centre that offers space for projects in art, culture and innovation in Lund and is run by the Culture and Leisure Department of Lund municipality. CC has been granted a place at Stenkrossen for three years with the possibility of extension by one year at a time. The main financial support is received by the interdisciplinary section of the Social Student Union in Lund (PLUTO) and the South Scania Waste Company (SYSAV). CC's main activities are based on three pillars: the provision of a Library of Goods, the organization of educational events and the disposal of common workspace.

The first pillar is the Library of Goods which comprises a diverse range of household and recreational goods. According to the organization's online booking system 'Lend Engine', over 1000 items are available to over 550 active members for either short-term (1 – 2 weeks) or long-term (up to one year) borrowings in April 2022. All items are either donated or purchased second hand. This means that sometimes the items require maintenance, repairs, or upgrading. For these items, members have to pay a small maintenance fee (1 - 100 SEK). The revenue of the fees is used for example to repair bikes and equipment and purchase consumables. The most popular items in 2021 included: camping equipment, sewing machines, air mattresses and bedding. Through its online booking system "Lend Engine", members can reserve and book items of the inventory in order to pick them up at Stenkrossen

during opening hours. Additionally, members can request missing items through a wish-list survey available online. The second pillar comprises the exchange of ideas and skills through educational events such as repair workshops, clothes swaps and panel discussions. The third pillar, a common workspace aims to create a sense of community and enables a free space to practice skills, such as repairing things.

The team of CC consists of the board, the officers and volunteer. Board members function as a supervisory and advisory instance for long-term decisions and determine the further development of the organization. The officers are in charge for daily operations. Currently, nine officers with different focus areas (inventory, team, internal/external relations, finance, technology, communication, events, and maintenance) are dedicating 4 – 10 hours per week unpaid/with voluntary work. Officers keep their position for one year and select the next generation through an open application process. The operational work is supported by volunteers who can apply throughout the year without any long-term commitment.

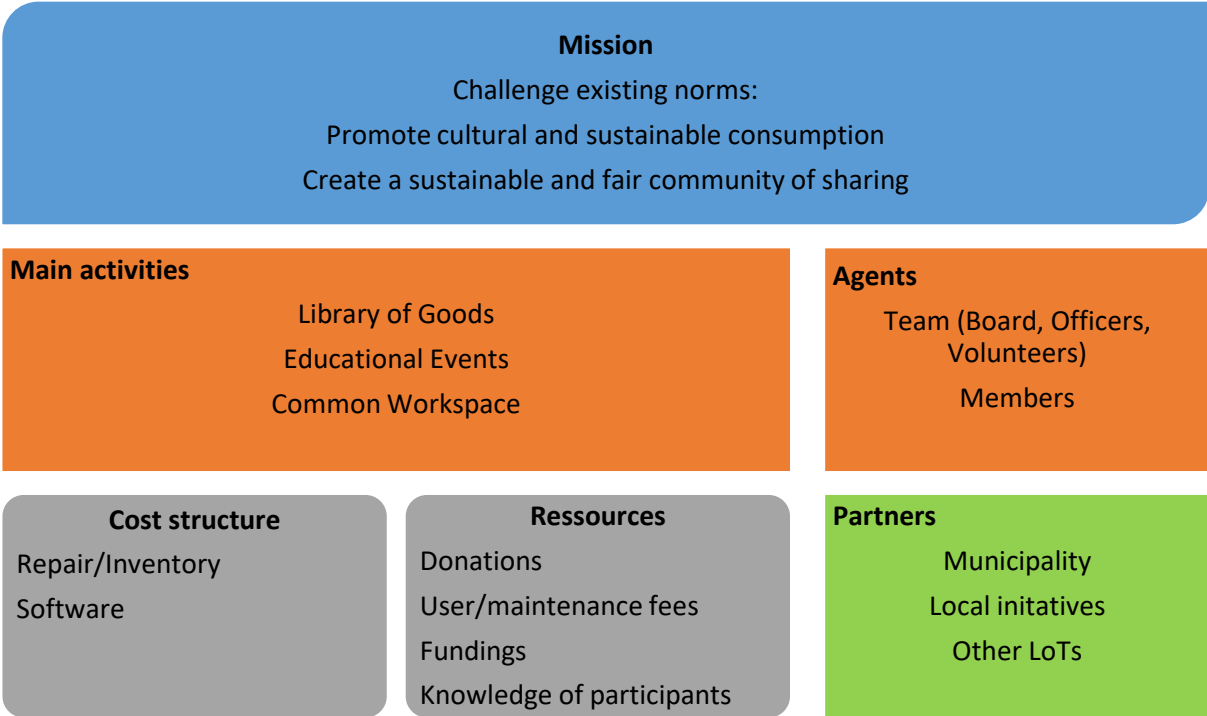


Figure 3. General structure of Circle Centre Lund (own graphic)

The described structures and activities of the case are analysed through the following methods.

3.3 Data Collection

The case study approach is well suited with the needs of small-scale research through concentration on one specific research site and the organization itself. As I attempt to cover all layers of CC, a holistic view and an in-depth look at underlying social phenomena are possible. At the same time, I use of a variety of research methods and different sources of data to capture reality under scrutiny and address the study's research objectives (Denscombe, 2014). I apply data triangulation by including semi-structured interviews, an online-survey addressed at CC's members and the organization's grey documents.

Interview and survey data was analysed together with information from the organization's own grey documents, building on the background information obtained through literature on the sharing economy and LoTs. Interviews were chosen as form of research inquiry to directly access to the point of view of interviewees, in relation to the attitudes they hold and their experiences (Edwards et al., 2014). Qualitative surveys might have less in-depth responses but similarly to interviews, they reveal perspectives of the respondents in a larger quantity. The use of data triangulation with multiple sources resulted in multiple measures for the same phenomenon, allowing to overcome potential gaps in validity construction (Yin, 2014).

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

In total four interviews with one co-founder, two board members, and a current officer of the organization were conducted between 09 March and 25 March 2022 (see Table 1). The interviewees were selected based on their role in the organization and with the aim to cover the different positions. All interviews took place online via zoom for pragmatic reasons (e.g. one interview across continents). Interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviewees participated and were only recorded after a written consent was obtained. All interviewees agreed that their names could be used. For convenience reasons, I will refer to their acronyms and role within CC during the analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1. List of interviewees (own graphic)

Name	Acronym	Role within CC	Interview Date & Place
Anna Gomes	AG	Co-founder	09/03/22, zoom
Anna Schallenberg	AS	Board member	11/03/22, zoom
Jessika Luth Richter	JR	Board member	16/03/22, zoom
Can Ymanoğlu	CY	Officer	25/03/22, zoom

The questions asked were compiled beforehand in an interview guide (see Appendix II). The semi-structured format of the interviews made it possible to address specific topics relevant for the research questions, while at the same time leaving the opportunity for emerging questions (Vacchelli et al., 2021). Throughout the data collection process, interview questions were slightly adjusted depending on the interviewee's role within the organization.

3.3.2 Online-Survey

The perception of users of CC has been retrieved through a conducted online-survey. The survey was sent out through CC's newsletter mail program and additionally shared via the organization's social media such as Facebook and Instagram. In total 54 members completed the questionnaire which was divided into four sections with respective questions related to demography, motivation, membership and perceived sustainability impact. Google forms served to create the survey and combines a mix of closed and open-end questions with different answers (checkboxes, multiple choice, multiple choice grid, linear scale, and paragraph) inspired by Vacchelli et al. (Vacchelli et al., 2021).

3.3.3 Ethical Considerations

As with any social science study, there are ethical considerations that the researcher must follow. Every interviewee and survey respondent was informed about the purpose of the research and was able to decide whether to participate or not. Participants were explained that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. The names of the respondents of the online-survey are not revealed or identified during any stage of this research. All data is stored in a password-protected folder on my personal computer and will be deleted at the end of the study.

3.4 Data Analysis

First, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed word for word and subsequently analysed by applying a combination of deductive and inductive coding (Vacchelli et al., 2021) with the help of the data analysis software NVivo. The interview guide served as initial framework to organize the data and define first themes. Thus, relevant quotes were extracted and colour coded based on respective interview questions and emerging categories were added to the code list during the process.

In a second step, I drew upon the Gioia's methodology (Gioia et al., 2013; Gioia & Thomas, 1996) to reorganize the coded data and make a data-to-theory connections. Based on this methodology I delineated categories of themes from the data in two steps, from data to themes to aggregated themes. At this stage, I further analysed the data including the five processes of prefigurative change by Yates (2015). Figure 4 visualizes a simplified version of this organizing process in a 'data-structure'. Hereby, each theme is supported by one in-vivo excerpts (i.e. language used in the interviews and survey) to keep the interpretations and experiences of all respondents in the foreground.

Similarly to the interview transcripts, the responses of the survey were added to NVivo and integrated in the already existing coding system. Although the (three) open-end questions were not mandatory, the majority of respondents answered to those and enabled therefore a qualitative analysis of the survey.

Combining both dataset of interview transcripts and survey responses in one software tool (NVivo) was found, accordingly to Braun et al. (2021), more productive in treating the data as cohesive and developing analytical patterns across the datasets. In addition to that, data was analysed together with information from the organization's own grey documents.

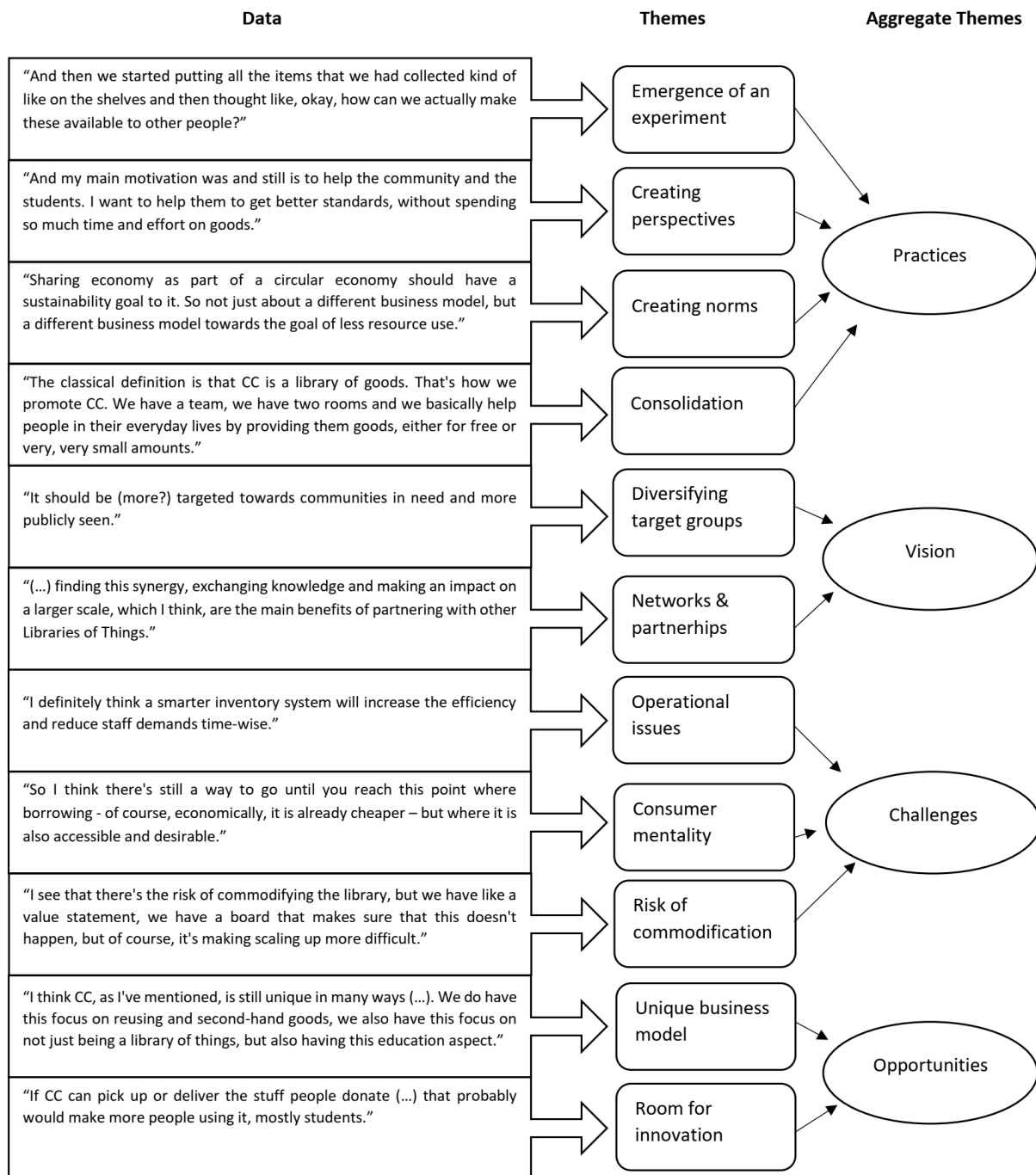


Figure 4. Data structure based on Gioia methodology (adapted from Gioia et al, 2013, p. 21)

4 Findings and Analysis

The chapter is divided according to the research questions and based on the five processes of prefigurative social change by Yates (2015). Each section combines and reflects the answers and perceptions of the respondents collected through interviews and the online-survey. Relevant quotes and graphs are integrated to support and visualize the findings.

4.1 Creating alternatives through practices

In this section, I focus on answering the first research question of how the predominant paradigm of overconsumption is contested by CC. I do this by applying the following four prefigurative processes defined by Yates (2015): *experimentation*, creation of *perspectives* and *norms* and their *consolidation*.

Emergence and experimentation phase

The first idea to create CC was in 2018, when students in Lund were asked to find an innovative idea to reduce the environmental impact of plastic waste during a *Climathon*³. In this competition the team wanted to tackle the issue by looking at the drivers of the problem and creating a sharing place where items could be collected and reused instead of being wasted. After the idea first came up, the interested founders informed themselves about similar initiatives that had already been realised. Additional team members were sought in the personal environment and through a university project to implement the concept together. Potential users were interviewed in order to find interested parties, but also to get a feeling for how people think about the idea and under which circumstances they would participate.

At the same time, the interviewed co-founder (AG) contested the situation in Lund where leaving international/exchange student would dispose/throw away large amounts of items (in good shape) such as bed sheets and furniture. While not receiving any answer from the municipality on how to resolve this issue, AG started to collect and “save” these things from dumpsters. To store all these items, the initial team applied at Stenkrossen to receive a physical space. This was the key point needed that “just something” was implemented and to start a “counter-movement”:

³ Climathon is an international movement to engage cities and citizens in climate action with projects, impact-driven start-ups and conversations with decision-makers

“And then we started putting all the items that we'd collected kind of like on the shelves and then thought like, okay, how can we actually make these available to other people?” (AG)

The idea seemed improvised in the beginning. With about 60 members at the start, the first event was mostly attended by people coming from the personal environment of the founders and some opening hours remained unvisited (AG). However the concept had to be tried out in the first place and was inevitably modified and adapted to local needs:

“And we also didn't really have an inventory, because we would just get lots of things dropped off. And we weren't quite sure how to organize ourselves yet. So lots of that kind of just, you know, things to try to figure out and navigate.” (AG)

Creating perspectives and new norms

The initial idea to contest waste and linear consumption resulted in the experiment of creating in a first step a Library of Goods. While this experiment continued to develop, ideological positions and meanings evolved simultaneously. The awareness of the need to create and attach meaning to the project is expressed in the following:

“And we continuously kind of on the spot, tried to figure out like, okay, what are our value statements? And what are we trying? Like, what's the social change we're trying to make? And then how do we communicate that to our members? And how do we kind of convey that in a sense, that still makes everyone feel welcome to come in this new space.” (AG)

According to its website the organization aims to challenge existing social norms by promoting sustainable and cultural consumption and creating a community of sharing in Lund. In relation to the use of the Library of Goods, the founders realized that this ‘new perspective’ was not understood in the beginning and some viewed CC as “a trash bin for another trash bin”. The goal was not to become “another form of greenwashing”, but rather change the idea behind the use of items by taking good care “like they were your friends” and reuse them to increase their “life time” (AG)

On the other hand, the willingness or openness towards new perspectives can be reflected by current member’s motivation to become part of the project. When asked about their three main motivations, a majority opted for more overarching sustainability goals such as “sustainable lifestyle” and “fight over-consumption” as reasons, rather than concrete actions that CC would provide on the spot (see

Figure 5). Nevertheless, “saving money” as motivation in third place shows that economic reasons are equally important and thus indispensable component in sustainability debates and how to make sustainable alternatives attractive to everyone. This result confirms the interviewee’s statements that the participation of many students with no- or low-income play a significant role in the structure of CC.

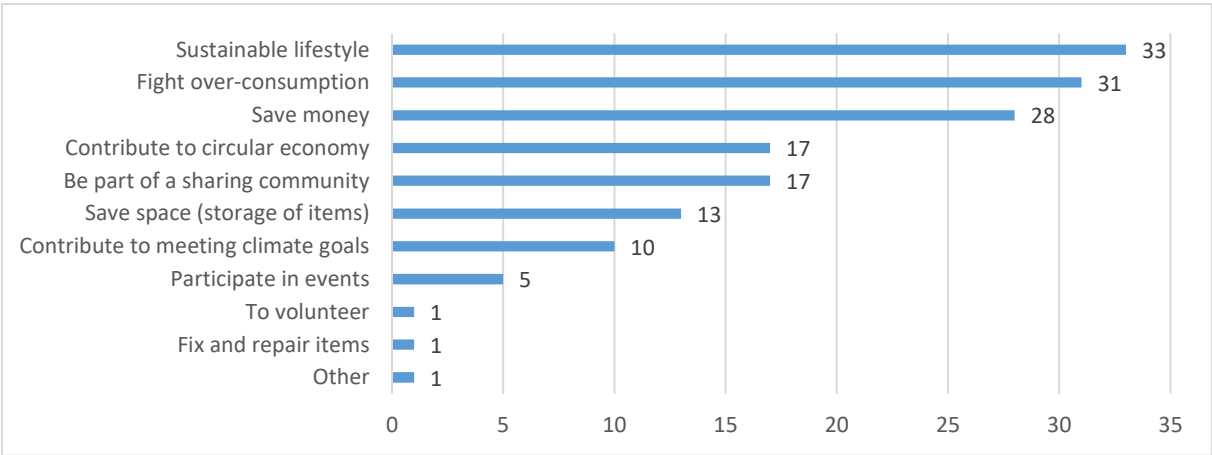


Figure 5. Main motivation to become CC member of survey respondents (own graphic)

These perspectives and motivations certainly challenge the existing norm, but creating an ‘alternative’ norm is even more important. According to the board member JR this entails “trying to make the idea of sharing a lot of things become more normalized”.

Consolidation of norms in physical environment

The new norm is finally established through its consolidation in material environments or social orders. In the case of CC this happens through concrete practices of the organization which are based on three pillars: Library of Goods, educational events and common workspace. The interaction of members with these practices show if and how extensive new norms are consolidated. A first indicator that can be taken into account when it comes to member’s likeliness to engage, is the fact that over 70% would rate their personal benefit of using a LoT like CC as significant or very significant.

Figure 6 reveals how frequent members have used the three inherent activities. Whereas the majority of the survey respondents frequent the Library of Goods a few times a year, about the same amount answered to be not using the common workspace at all. The amount of participation in educational events is almost evenly distributed between those who never and those who attend a few times a

year. Overall, the numbers suggest that the Library of Goods is the most popular activity, followed by educational events with the common workspace used the least.

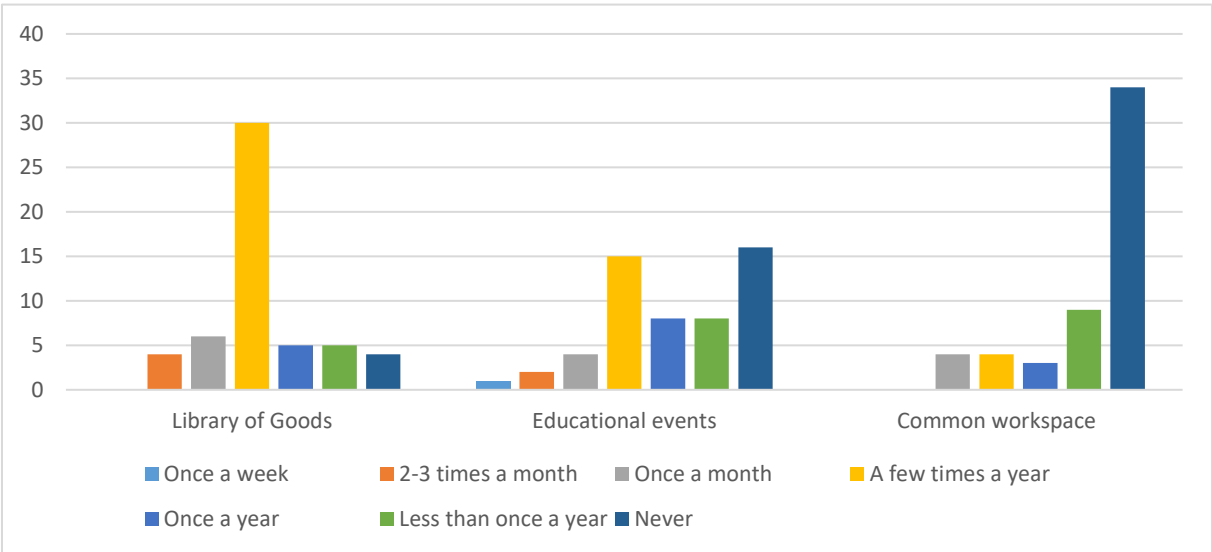


Figure 6. Use frequency of CC’s main activities by survey respondents (own graphic)

The focus on the Library of Goods is highlighted by borrowing trends of the members. Overall, reports from the online-booking system indicate that since December 2021 on average 87 items per month were loaned, while the total amount of available items has increased from 931 to 1105 in the same period. This trend can also be reflected in the form of borrowing that is used (see Figure 7). More members borrow items for short-term periods, which suggest that there is an increased engagement with the physical space of CC since members have to pick-up and return borrowed items in Stenkrossen and thus engage with other community members and happenings on the spot.

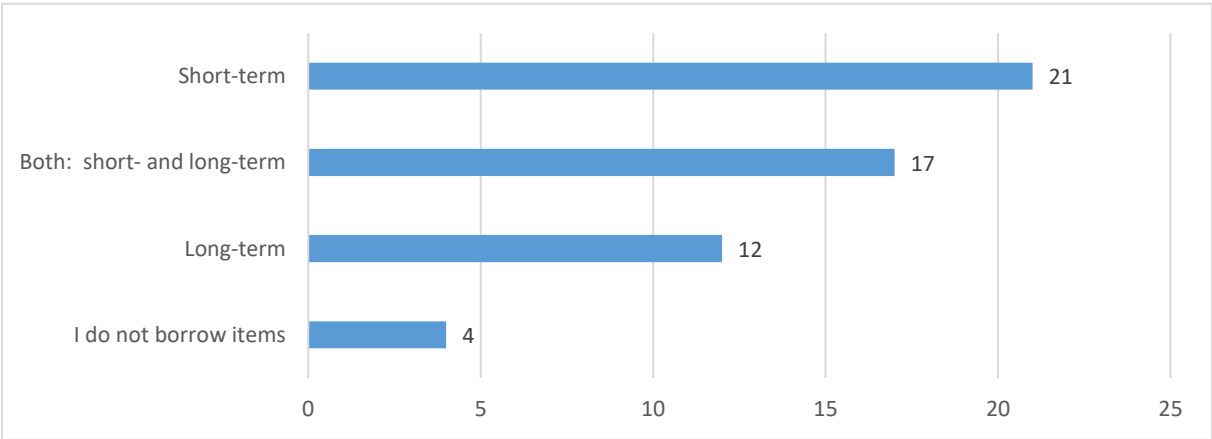


Figure 7. Most used form of borrowing of survey’s respondents (own graphic)

Another form to engage is by contributing to the Library's inventory. The majority of the survey's respondents (39 out of 54) have donated items to Circle Centre's inventory. So did one of the board members donate a drill (JR). In her opinion it is the "quintessential item", knowing as a researcher that the use of this item is limited to a few minutes of its life.

4.2 Vision of diffusion

This section refers to the second research question of which vision can ensure CC's future relevance to contribute to a sustainable sharing economy. Here, I base my findings on Yates' (2015) process of diffusion.

The vision is closely related to CC's 'prefigurative' establishment of a new norm through practices and consists in the further development of perspectives and norms. Simultaneously, the organization envisions the diffusion and sharing of its ideas and practices in order to become the aspired new norm in the future.

A common vision that all interviewees agreed upon, is that CC has the potential and should scale up while scaling down mass consumption. On one hand this means to improve the organization internally by enhancing organizational stability, operational sustainability and internal culture-building. On the other hand, one member stated that "what CC provides is great in its locality", but should be extended to other places in order to contribute to a sustainable sharing economy. This opinion is supported in the following notes of members:

"I view CC as a learning opportunity for all to see that a LoT approach can work and is beneficial. It is only a small library, but if such initiatives emerge everywhere, this will transform our societies."

"This is a ripple effect. As more people come to know about the Circle Centre we can change habits. It's good to engage a student population particularly as they are creating new habits for life as they are often newly out of home or at least open to new things."

To persist beyond the present, the following two strategies are envisaged: diversify target groups and extend partnerships and network of LoTs.

Diversifying target groups

As the demographic results (Figure 8) of the survey show, CC attracts a rather homogenous group of people: members are predominantly female, in the age between 18 and 29, student and residing in Lund.

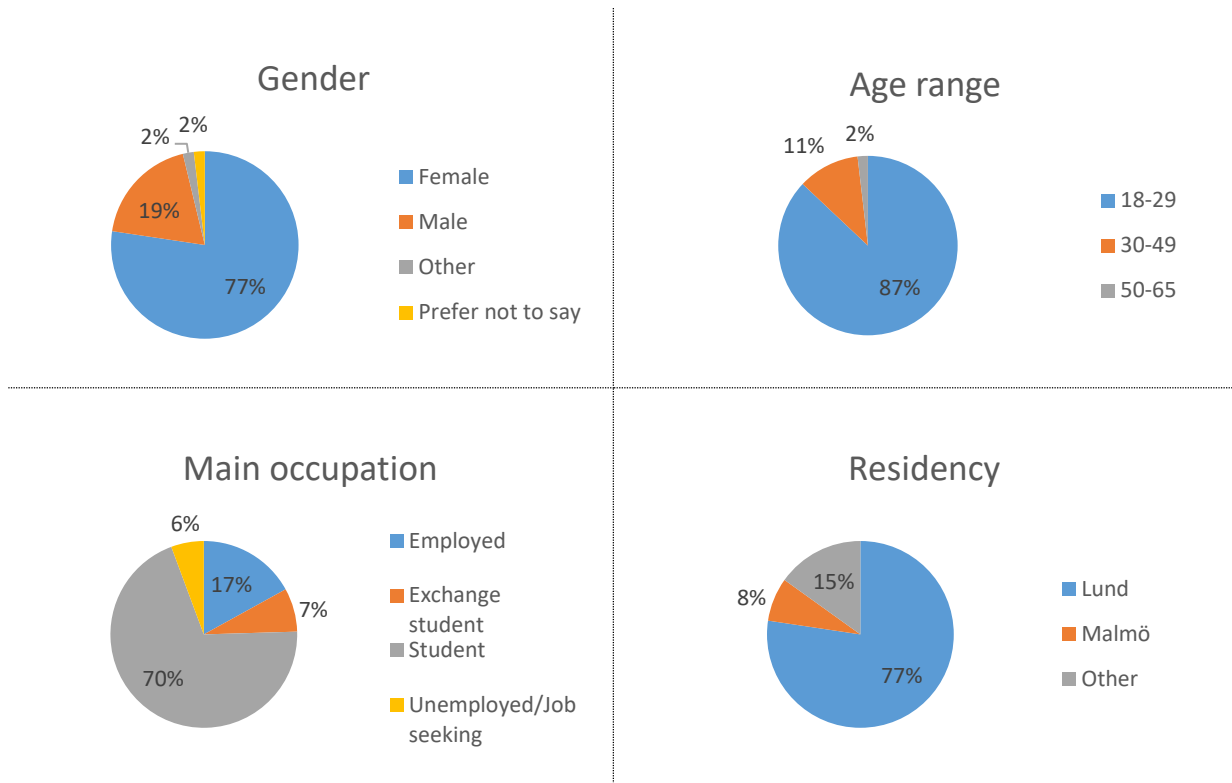


Figure 8. Demographic structure of survey respondents (own graphic)

Indeed, a survey participant draws attention to the fact that there is a strong focus on students “who have the least consumption impacts compared to other residents in Lund”. Other respondents preconceive a generational issue and that the willingness among older generations to share might be less pronounced as they are hardly addressed by CC’s offer.

However, to become more institutionalized, CC needs to include and cover all parts of society. CC wants to be particularly more attractive to people that are less open and flexible to try out alternative ways of doing things. Another respondent suggests that including some higher quality items “can attract even rich people” which can change their consumption mentality. Others point out that CC should be targeted towards communities in need and more publicly visible. To summarize, CC has to find out the diversity of needs and wants of potential new members and balance these out (JR).

Extending partnerships and LoT-network

The vision to extend the offer and include all groups of the community goes in hand with building and sustaining partnerships with local initiatives, the municipality and other LoTs. Particularly, collaboration with the municipality of Lund has been tried to intensify in finding and pursuing common goals. This relationship is perceived by interviewees as key to enhance sharing based consumption and create mutual support, for instance when collaborating on multiple pick-up locations in Lund. As CC developed into a more public known organization, the interest of the municipality in the organization equally seems to have increased, which shows the plan to collaborate on a survey which will interrogate citizens of Lund on their interest in sharing practices (JR). Furthermore, existing partnerships with local initiatives such as 'Repair Café Lund' or 'Fritidsbanken' are intended to be strengthened (JR, AS). Fritidsbanken, similarly to CC, lends items to Lund's citizen, but with a strong focus on sports- and outdoor equipment to CC. A stronger coordination between both entities is considered of use to avoid overlapping services to the municipality. As for the partnership with the 'Repair Café', both initiatives share the same mission within the goals of a circular economy. While skills of members of repair café are helpful in the maintenance of CC's inventory, events organized together spreads the awareness to reduce waste and lower the threshold for repairing broken electronics (JR, AS). Additionally, other initiatives are sought out with the objective to exchange best practices and increase visibility.

Meanwhile, respondents expressed the vision of a future with a network of LoTs in which no matter the location, members will be able to access what they want and need at a LoT. So far, one partnership with another LoT has been established with 'Share Oxford' in the United Kingdom. This is supposed to encourage the understanding of different business models and finding a synergy to make an impact on a larger scale (AS). Although nobody has yet taken the lead in building a global network, AS envisions an ideal future where all LoTs would be connected and could acquire funding together to influence policies and advocated for repair services accessible to everyone.

4.3 Challenges

In an attempt to realize these visions of diffusion and upscaling, I identified the three following challenges: consumer mentality, operational issues and the risk of commodification.

Consumer Mentality

Besides the generational differences mentioned above, which results in parts of society that do not initially trust a new unconventional concept, consumers have to go to a LoT for the first time and get to know about its idea. In the case of CC, about half of the respondents have not heard about the concept of LoTs before coming to Lund and becoming a member. The challenge remains in attracting people unfamiliar with the idea and allow them to imagine an alternative that deviates from the usual practice and mainstream.

Operational issues

As a small non-profit organization, CC is dependent on external sources to operate and cover expenses for the online-library software or the acquisition of second-hand items. These costs are partly covered by small fees that member have to pay for certain high-demand items. Another kind of indirect 'income' is the provision of space at Stenkrossen through the municipality without having to pay rental fees. Although, this three year contract is extendable, this represents uncertainty in future planning. For instance, one board-member sees a hurdle in the applications for larger funding as they oftentimes require a long-term plan and a fixed location (AS). This in turn represents a barrier to scale-up the organization.

Opening hours and accessibility of the Library of Goods

Due to the dependency on voluntary commitment, a reliably guarantee that opening hours are offered to all, or even to extend them - as desired by many members – represents a challenge for the operating team, as becomes clear in the following note:

“We had the opportunity to have a second place in Lund but we just don't have the people power to do it with being volunteer run.” (AS)

This limited access is perceived as inconvenient by users and hinders the interest of potential new members in the first place.

Offer and Maintenance of the items

To acquire items has not been difficult as the high willingness of members to donate and the rapid growth of items (over 1000 reached within 3 years) show. This being said, over 85% of the respondents are satisfied or highly satisfied with the selection of items in CC's Library of Goods. Nevertheless, a survey respondent expressed his wish of increasing the offer of items in order to not having to purchase things at all and only use LoTs.

However, the items provided may become an obstacle to the concept if their quality is inferior and/or are not of such a nature that they can be used well collectively. An item is considered well suitable for the context of a LoT if it is stable and applicable for as many different users as possible. According to the board member JR this is not the case:

“So we are looking at also increasing or raising the quality of the items too, because a lot of the items are donated but they might be in poor shape and there's some feedback from the members then that you know it's not working that great or needs to be better maintained.” (JR)

Risk of commodification

Particularly board members (JR, AS) expressed their concern about finding the right business model that on the one hand promotes the desirability of CC by trying to respond to what members want and on the other hand ensures the adherence to CC's values and influence a change of consumption behaviour. Instead of allocating items that members do not necessarily need in their daily lives, the focus should be kept on replacing privately owned things leading towards reduced consumption, or at least reduced impact from consumption (JR). For this purpose, the board compiled a 'value statement' that needs to be reconsidered and discussed along the evolution of CC. The challenge lies foremost in abiding to those values and to communicate decisions based on these in a good way (JR).

4.4 Opportunities

Despite some difficulties, the collected data revealed three chances in the development and diffusion of the organization: identification with the idea of CC, its unique business model and room for innovation.

Identification with the idea of CC

All interviewees emphasized that they identify with the initiative and are intrinsically motivated to support the idea, which is perceived as beneficial in daily activities and has a positive effect on the development of the organization. An intact group dynamic is important to overcome challenging times when different tasks need to be carried out at the same time. The team consists mostly of students with various backgrounds, which is aimed to diversify and include also non-students. Nevertheless, a unifying conviction of the value of sharing and multiple competencies of the team allow a smooth division of tasks so that the burden is distributed evenly, while still being open to help each other mutually.

Unique business model

When it comes to defining CC as a business model, interviewees recognize the organization certainly as non-profit oriented, but an “experiment” of a new model (JR). Although, it is not a publicly funded organization, part of its resources originate from the public sector. Another distinctiveness is the strong sustainability aspect, combining elements from the sharing as well as from the circular economy concept. In terms of sustainability goals, the vast majority (over 90%) of the survey respondents believe that as a CC member they can contribute to sustainable development and a sharing economy. About the same amount (87%) considers CC as contributor to confront global challenges and sustainable development. Compared to other LoT-business models, JR highlights that CC is unique in many ways, since there is also “this focus on not just being a LoT, but also having this education aspect.”

Room for innovation

The experimental nature of the project leaves room for new ideas, such as one respondent suggests:

“If CC can pick up or deliver the stuff people donate (...) that probably would make more people using it.”

Indeed, in order to become more effective, adding a delivery option to the service offering can retain or attract new user groups. Previously such an offer was available at the end of a university semester as students would leave a lot of things when moving away. In cooperation with the municipality, a cargo bike was provided to facilitate collecting donations. The idea is to have a permanent cargo bike in the future.

The conviction is that by remaining innovative, LoTs potentially advance into the centre of society, transform collective consumption practices and the consumer society, drive the (sustainable) sharing economy, and make the current dominant economy no longer appear without alternatives.

5 Discussion

5.1 Answering the research question

This chapter discusses my findings from the previous chapter through the lenses of my analytical framework and will further reflect on potential limitations of this study.

5.1.1 Circle Centre as alternative sharing organization

Closely tied to the debate over the sharing economy's sustainability potential, is the discussion about which organizational model is best for accomplishing desired goals (Wruk et al., 2019). Departing from a *sustainable* sharing economy in the sense of being an alternative project to the current linear market economy, this would mean that organizations following that concept would need to fulfil the requirements of being and establishing an 'alternative'. The analytical framework of this study suggests that alternative organizations evolve along social movements, and are capable to integrate into market niches as contenders to for-profit sharing platforms, and hence forming a countermovement to the current sharing economy.

Referring to the various sharing economy business models defined by Curtis (2021), I identify CC as *collaborative community platform*. The characteristics of this business model qualify CC as a progressive movement, developing within the sharing sector that explicitly challenges linear overconsumption (existing norm) and advocates for an anti-capitalist alternative (new norm).

The building of that new norm, and thus contesting the wicked problem of overconsumption, could be demonstrated by the analysis of CC's practices. These practices include the experimentation of an alternative project, the creating of new perspectives and norms and their consolidation in a physical

environment. The findings show that all processes evolved quasi parallel to the evolution of CC. While the mission of CC was quite clear from the beginning, ideas and goals were rapidly implemented – thus resulting into a project where the ends are reflected by the means. Although the findings revealed, that the focus of commodification remained so far in the Library of Goods, all three pillars of CC have the potential to address the sustainability demands of the organization and are envisioned to be further promoted.

5.1.2 Potential to overcome barriers and ensure future relevance

From a prefigurative perspective, being merely an alternative project is not sufficient. The initiative needs also to ensure its future relevance by diffusing to wider networks. This aspect is contained in the second and third sub-question of this study asking about the vision of CC. The results showed that CC aims to scale-up in the long-term and thereby plans to enhance established partnerships as well as expand its network with other potential partners and LoTs. In this context, the exchange of best practices has been perceived particularly valuable. Additionally, results of the survey demonstrated that there is a need to diversify target groups including all social groups to achieve broader change. This issue in turn can be combined with the strategy to work closer with the municipality. This implicates however enhanced communication in the quest for common goals.

At the same time, CC faces internal and external pressures in the realization of its vision. These have been identified as operational issues, conventional consumer mentalities, and the risk of commodification. As the case of CC displays, the dependency on external sources constitutes a major uncertainty. The organization relies on volunteers and public support e.g. in the form the provision of free space, which consequently means that is it also not financially viable. This arguably indicates that sharing platforms like CC are hindered to preserve their sustainability aspirations. Meanwhile, it also raises crucial questions about the future of LoTs and whether they can proliferate into the mainstream in order to make a more meaningful contribution to a sustainable sharing economy. Therefore, I suggest further effort to empirically study respective business models of LoTs and its potential to overcome inherent barriers.

While the identified challenges might pose an important barrier to the further development of the organization, I argue that opportunities and previous accomplishments of the organization have the potential to outweigh those. As especially interviewees specified, CC is unique the way it is organized,

as an alternative social movement and containing a distinct business model as collaborative community platform. This structure is perceived to be able to respond to current challenges. Especially its experimental character, which allows to redefine and reconsider values and goals, implies a flexibility that is also important to react and adapt to a changing environment or other external pressures such as the pandemic, which e.g. influenced access to CC's physical space. This can also be useful to resolve the issue of commodification that some interviewees were concerned with. To "commodify" and the vision to become more mainstream seems to be in contrast with sustainability aspirations and the envisioned norm itself. Here again, the findings indicate that the specific structure has the potential to find the right balance between making CC offers more desirable and convenient while avoiding a drift to a commodified and, "in the worst case" profit-oriented sharing platform.

In order to make circular sharing the new norm and in order to become more desirable and accessible, CC needs to remain innovative. This involves for instance discussions about delivery services, a 24/7 accessibility, a "one-stop space" with services of all kinds through cooperation partners or the opening of new locations. Hence, LoTs like CC could take more and more functions within a community, develop their *raison d'être* and consequently become steadily resilient and well-known. However, these possibilities have to be further explored, also considering the risk of commodification.

To answer the overarching question if a LoT such as CC can contribute to a collaborative consumption in the sense of a sustainable sharing economy, the response cannot be answered unambiguously. Certainly, the sharing economy alone has proven to be unable to bring about a sustainable society, rather on the contrary, the trend points towards profit-driven platforms and market capitalisation. This phenomenon suggests the exploration of new opportunities. LoTs have the potential to become a cornerstone of a different pathway, towards the "real sharing economy". I draw from my findings that LoTs designed like CC, have the potential to enhance social change based on the potential of LoTs establishing a new norm – a sustainable sharing economy. However this covers only the first dimension of the proposed concept of prefiguration. To be truly prefigurative, the second dimension, which contains future relevance, must be equally fulfilled. The findings demonstrated that the vision of CC aligns with the prefigurative process of diffusion of this second dimension. CC's vision to proliferate faces different challenges, but at the same time this vision has the potential to create resilience and seize opportunities in order to direct and embed the establishment of a new mainstream into sustainability aspirations.

Summa summarum, LoTs, like CC, have the prerequisites to persist and become the new norm, however this depends on inherent distinct characteristics of each case and the ability to respond to internal and external pressures when scaling up and building a global network.

5.2 Reflections on this study

5.2.1 *Reflections on prefigurative social change*

Prefiguration in the political context can have a broad understanding and the concept is only clear about the aim to establish an alternative to current practices. However, it is not defined in which direction and might include various strands and ideological positions. As a sustainability scientist and being appealed by the 'futuristic' component of this concept, I defined this alternative as being sustainable. It was found that the concept of prefiguration is a useful tool to analyse solution-oriented attempts and movements for sustainability issues and social change.

The analytical framework of this study is based on Yates' (2015) five processes of prefigurative social change. I applied these processes in the analysis of my findings which show that the organization started as an 'experiment', followed by the consolidation of its 'perspectives' and 'conduct', and the attempt to diffuse its vision. After applying the concept in a rather linear process, the findings indicated that it involves an interrelated circular process. For instance, the constant debate about values or the need of flexibility to react to certain needs or circumstances, especially in light of attempts to scale-up, I perceive the processes as overlapping and reoccurring in order to be redefined. Hence, I believe it need to be considered that in the analysis, processes are oscillating possibilities in achieving social change.

While the focus might lie on the creation of alternatives, the problems at hand and circumstances need to be identified as well in order to produce and formulate counter-actions and know what specific kind of change is needed. I would consider further analysis through an additional framework useful, which guides the researcher to look at alternative projects and the factors that determine behavioural patterns to current or changing circumstances. In fact, Törnberg (2021) developed five transition pathways which integrates transition studies and social movement theory to determine the circumstances under which prefiguration happens. These pathways are based on multi-level interactions and suggest three main factors that define the outcome of prefigurative attempts at social change: landscape change; degree of preparedness of prefigurative innovations to scale-up, and

regime reactions and configurations to prefigurative movements. This framework might be useful in further research as they discuss and explain, combining different levels, if and why a movement or alternative project might be successful.

5.2.2 *(De)limitations*

The limitations of my study can be found in the nature of a case study. One typical limitation is the relatively small sample size of case-based research. To draw general conclusions from that might be seen as high objective, but is rather an attempt to fill a research gap with an in-depth analysis of an unprecedented case. In that sense, the findings of this ‘individual experiment’ are not final and absolute, but can be seen as a starting point, serving as descriptive and exploratory foundation that can be used to the development of concepts around LoTs as part of a sustainable sharing economy. In this context, an initial idea of this study was to also include non-members of CC. This would have allowed a better understanding of local needs and possible instructions for the organization in order to better react to local needs. However, this focus would have deviated from the aim and research question of this work. A citizen survey to give further insights regarding needs for an initiative like CC in Lund is currently developed in cooperation with Lund municipality.

The location of this study also plays a significant role as it influences the circumstances on which niche innovations like CC can evolve. Since CC is locally focused on Lund municipality in Sweden, it may not represent the experience of other countries where sharing and library-based models are emerging – particularly in North America and Europe. Sweden as “progressive” country might offer a better environment for initiatives like CC than in other places. The “luxury” of having volunteers to invest their time in such a project or get support of the community in form of donations and funding is a decisive factor for the opportunity to create a LoT in the first place. Here, I propose to apply a framework such as the above mentioned one by Törnberg (2021) to analyse systemic factors that influence the development of LoTs. It will also be of interest to investigate whether LoTs will begin to resemble one another, or if their response to local environments allows them to diversify in design and strategy.

6 Conclusion

In the face of a socio-economic system that has detrimental effects on humans and the planet, a transition towards sustainable alternatives is needed. As a possible alternative the sharing economy has gained increasing attention in recent years, however its transformative potential has been limited by commercialization through profit-driven business models. By contrast, I identified a sustainable sharing economy as possible counter-narrative for a different future pathway. Through the lense of prefigurative social change, I characterized this concept by inherent collaborative sharing models that reject user ownership and instead aim to realize sustainability goals.

LoTs can be accounted for fulfilling criteria of collaborative sharing, but in consequence of the existence of various sharing business models, different LoTs adhere to specific features that enhance different aspects. Using CC Lund as a case study, I analysed a LoT that incorporates sustainability aspirations and has the potential to challenge dominant framings. This is shown in CC's practices which promote a model of sharing that includes a Library of Goods, offering educational events as well as a common workspace. My findings point towards several challenges which need to be overcome to realize CC's vision of gradually becoming mainstream and turn these collaborative practices into the new norm. At the same time, the distinct structure of CC allows it to seize opportunities in favour of its ambition to extend its wider network, partnerships and diversifying target groups by spreading its ideas to all types of consumers. Hence, CC presents a positive example that does not only contest overconsumption, but offers a bottom-up alternative to bring about social change while offering a degree of resilience and community cohesion.

To conclude, LoTs like CC are possible driving forces for disruptive transitions. But despite its appeal to environmentalists, due to the relative recent emergence of LoTs and the fact that the process of changing collective practices takes time, a real ecological impact through LoTs remain marginal to the present. This is potentially changing in the future, wherefore further empirical research on the impacts of a sustainable sharing economy is needed. Prefiguration is considered as a valuable contribution to enhance research in this direction and to critically analyse its varied forms and business models.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Sharing Economy Business Model Framework

Attribute		Configuration Options												
Value Facilitation	Key Activity	Platform mediation allowing for access to under-utilised goods												
	Platform Type	Peer-to-Peer	Business-to-Business	Business-to-Peer	Crowd / Cooperative	Business-to-Consumer	Public-to-Citizen							
	Practice	Shared Space		Shared Mobility		Shared Goods		Shared Consumables		Shared Resources				
	Intellectual Property	Open Source				Communal				Proprietary				
	Governance Model	Cooperative				Collaborative				Corporate				
	Price Discovery	Free	Pay What You Can	Negotiation / Bargaining		Auction	Bartering	Set by Resource User	Set by Resource Owner	Set by Platform				
Value Delivery	Key Value Proposition	Reduction of transaction costs in sharing												
	Mediating Interface	Smartphone App			Website			Third-Party App or Integration			Other			
	Venue for Interaction	Offline			Hybrid			Online			None			
	Review System	Resource Owner Reviews			Resource User Reviews			Platform Reviews			None			
	Geographical Scale	Existing Community		Local		Regional		National		International		Nodes		
Value Capture	Value Orientation	Societal / Public				Social				Environmental				Commercial
	Revenue Streams	None	Transaction Fee	Commission	Subscription Fee	Membership	Advertisements	Data Mining	Sponsorship	Donations	Public Project Funding	Private Project Funding	Fines or Fees	Lead Generation
		Usage Rates	Convenience Fee	Promotions	Buy-Out	Credits, Tokens, or Digital Currency	Additional Services	Service Retainer	Verification	Franchise	Revenue Sharing	Ownership Share	Registration Fee	
	Pricing Mechanisms	None			Static Pricing				Dynamic Pricing			Differential Pricing		
	Price Discrimination	None		Feature-Based		Location-Based		Quantity-Based		User-Based		Access-Based		Market share-Based
	Revenue Source	None		Volunteer		Other		Resource Owner		Resource User		3rd-Party		
Sustainability Performance	Operates as a platform			Leverages idling capacity of an existing stock of goods			Possesses non-pecuniary motivation for ownership			Facilitates temporary access over ownership				

Figure 1. Sharing economy business model framework (Curtis, 2021, p. 1657)

Appendix II: Interview Guide

Circle Centre – sharing platform „providers“: founders, board members, operating team, volunteers

Theme	Questions
Background information	<p>Please describe yourself, your motivation to take part in CC and your role within CC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do/did you do at CC? • How and when did you get involved at CC? <p>How would you shortly describe the idea of CC to a new person?</p>
Emergence of CC (for founders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why was CC created? (initial idea of purpose and aims/ vision back then and now) • How did CC started? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Who was involved in starting it up? 2) How was CC financed in the beginning? 3) What were the challenges back then? • Do you know what happens at CC currently?
Development of CC & current challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has CC changed since its opening in 2018? If yes, how? • Have you or are you currently facing any problems or challenges? If yes, how?
Relevance for members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion, what do users like the most about CC's offer and why do they become a member? • Do you think CC can meet their demands?
Sharing economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “sharing” in the context of our society mean to you? • What is your understanding of the sharing economy? • How do you view CC in relation to the sharing economy?
Sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to you, in which way is CC meeting its stated mission and aims?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is, in your opinion, the impact of CC in relation to achieve sustainability? • How do you see your role within the organization/platform to contribute to a sustainable future? • Do you think CC can help to establish alternative ownership models in our societies? • How do you view CC's potential in achieving broader social change in terms of daily practices and consumption patterns (of the individuals), but also in terms of sustainability transition (on a more institutional level)?
External Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is CC connected to the municipality (Lunds Kommun)? • How is CC's relation to other sharing platforms and initiatives? • How is CC connected to other LoT? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Are there existing partnerships? 2) How does CC position itself among other LoTs? Is it representative or even more innovative? • What are the benefits of collaborating with other sharing initiatives and building a network?
Challenges & Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think CC can help to confront global challenges? • Which problems do you see in a future where CC should contribute to sustainable development on a larger scale?

Appendix III: Online-Survey

Online-Survey for Circle Centre

Members

This survey is part of my Master's Thesis in "Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science" about Libraries of Things (LoT), specifically Circle Centre in Lund and is addressed at members of Circle Centre. The participation is voluntary, anonymous and by submitting this survey you give your informed consent to participate in the study.

By answering the following questions, you can support my research on Circle Centre's sustainability impact and its perceived contribution to a sharing community.

Duration: Approx. 5 min

About Circle Centre:

With its Library of Things, common workspace and educational events, the non-profit sharing platform aims to reduce unnecessary consumption and encourages a community of sharing in Lund.

Website: <https://www.circlecentrelund.org/>

***Required**

1. Are you member of Circle Centre? *

This is to make sure that only members of Circle Centre are answering this survey. Please do not proceed if you cannot answer with "Yes".

Tick all that apply.

Yes

Background

2. 1) Please indicate your age range *

Tick all that apply.

Under 18

18-29

30-49

50-65

Over 65

3. 2) Please indicate your gender *

Tick all that apply.

Female

Male

Other

Prefer not to say

4. 3) Where do you currently live? *

Tick all that apply.

Lund

Malmö

Other

5. 4) Please indicate your main occupation *

Mark only one oval.

Student

Exchange student

Employed

Unemployed/Job seeking

Other

Membership

6. 5) When did you become a member of Circle Centre? *

Tick all that apply.

- 2018
- 2019
- 2020
- 2021
- 2022

7. 6) Had you heard of "Library of Things" before becoming a member of Circle Centre? *

*Library of Things (LoT) as overarching term for libraries where all kinds of things can be borrowed. There are different forms of LoT in different countries, Circle Centre is one of them.

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Motivation

8. 7) Which of the following options motivated you to become member of Circle Centre? Please select up to three options. *

Tick all that apply.

- Save money
- Save space (storage of items)
- Contribute to meeting climate goals
- Sustainable lifestyle
- Fight over-consumption
- Contribute to circular economy
- Be part of a sharing community
- Meet new people
- Fix and repair items
- Use the workspace
- Participate in events (e.g. clothes swap, panel discussion, repair workshops..)
- To volunteer
- Other

9. 7b) Please specify if you selected "Other"

10. 8) Have you yourself donated any item to Circle Centre? *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
- No

11. 9) How frequently do you usually use the following offers by Circle Centre? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	More than once a week	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	A few times a year	Once a year	Less than once a year	Never
Library of Goods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Common Workspace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational Events (e.g. clothes swap, panel discussions, repair workshops,...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. 10) Which form of borrowing do you use most for items of Circle Centre's Library of Goods? *

short-term= up to 2 weeks, long-term= up to 1 year

Tick all that apply:

- Short-term
- Long-term
- Both: short- and long-term
- I do not borrow items

13. 11) How satisfied are you with the selection of items in Circle Centre's Library of Goods? *

1= highly dissatisfied, 2= dissatisfied, 3= neutral, 4= satisfied, 5= highly satisfied

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5
Highly dissatisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Highly satisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. 12) How important are the following aspects of accessibility to Circle Centre for you? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Unimportant	Slightly important	Neutral	Important	Very important
Opening-hours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online-Library of Goods (Lend Engine)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Location	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Free membership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. 13) How significant would you rate your personal benefit from using a Library of Things like Circle Centre? *

1 = very insignificant, 2 = insignificant, 3 = neutral, 4 = significant, 5 = very significant

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very insignificant Very significant

Sustainability Impact

16. 14a) Do you think, you as a member of Circle Centre, can contribute to sustainable development and a sharing economy? *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

17. 14b) In your own words, please describe in what way and why you think/don't think that as a member of Circle Centre you can contribute to sustainable development and a sharing economy.

18. 15a) Do you think Circle Centre can help to confront global challenges and contribute to sustainable development? *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

19. 15b) In your own words, please describe why you think/don't think Circle Centre can help to confront global challenges and contribute to sustainable development.

20. 16) Can you think of any improvement in the offer and service of Circle Centre in order to increase its contribution to sustainable development?
