Pro SHARE | Enhancing Diversity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion through Practices of Sharing in Housing and Public Space

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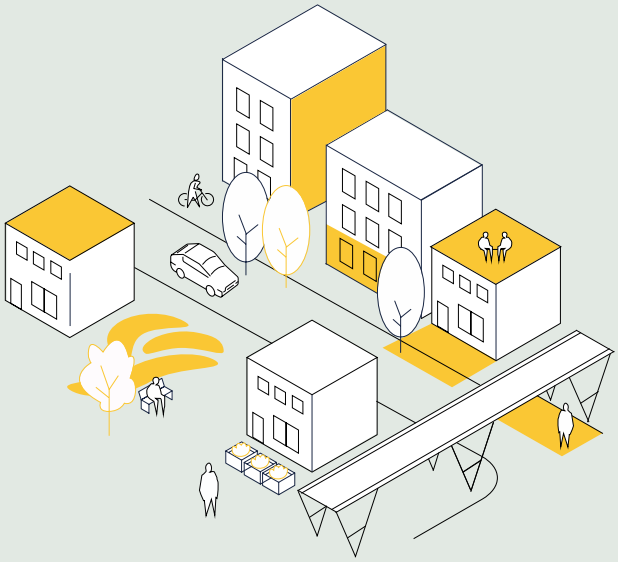

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Recommendations for non-commercial sharing in socially mixed neighbourhoods

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This policy brief summarizes transversally the main findings of our research and gives general recommendations for non-commercial sharing in inner-city and peripheral located neighborhoods. It has been developed cooperatively between all research partners and practitioners who took part in the research process. Main addressees of this policy brief are representatives of the local political-administrative systems, NGOs and activists from civil society involved in sharing practices.

1. About ProSHARE[1]

Within the framework of the large influx of migrants and refugees in recent years, debates about the future of European cities have referred to problems such as housing shortages, gentrification, segregation as well as unrest, protest, and violence. There have also been, however, expressions of solidarity and care across different social milieus and nationalities. In this context sharing could play out its role. For a more than a decade now, the concept of sharing has been gaining importance. The sharing economy is said to be growing rapidly internationally, which is associated with trends such as digitalization and a change in consumption and value patterns ("use instead of own", "sustainability"). While cross-regional commercial offers, particularly in the field of mobility and housing, as well as new business models like Uber and Airbnb, shape the image of the sharing economy, there is little known about non-commercial forms of sharing. Recent studies indicate, however, that the majority of sharing organizations and practices are locally and non-commercially oriented. At the same time, these forms of sharing are expected to have particular potential for sustainable and socially inclusive urban development.

The ProSHARE project has explored (a) forms and conditions in which practices of non-commercial sharing in the field of housing and public space take place in inner-city neighborhoods in Berlin, Stuttgart, Kassel, Paris, and Vienna, which are more socially mixed, and peripheral located neighbourhoods in Uppsala, Paris, and London and (b) the potential and limits of these practices for fostering participation and collaboration between diverse populations, including migrant and non-migrant communities.

Main objectives of the project have been expanding already existing research networks on the topic of non-commercial sharing and supporting practices of sharing among neighbourhood residents, particularly in assistance of established and newly arriving migrant communities. Methods used for reaching the project goals were a transversal quantitative survey with residents of the neighborhoods on forms and conditions of non-commercial sharing, mapping and qualitative expert interviews with NGOs, representatives of the local political-administrative systems, housing companies and associations and sharing activists form civil society. The results across cities have been jointly analysed and discussed, and informed the parallel implementation of the ProSHARE-Labs, which have been established together with local partners in Berlin, Paris, Vienna and London. Drawing upon the work on ULLs under the framework of the JPI Urban Europe Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda 2.0, ProSHARE-Labs have constituted testing grounds for exchange, knowledge co-production and co-creation. They have fostered this way innovation and transformation in real-world environments, and allowed translocal learning and the upscaling of results.

[1] ProShare was funded by the program JPI Urban Europe within the call “Urban Migration”; it started in March 2021 and will be finished at the end of 2022; project lead: University of Kassel, Department of Urban Sociology; project partners: University of Applied Sciences of Berlin (HTW Berlin) , KTH School of Architecture, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), Uppsala University, School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, Vienna University of Technology, Institute of Spatial Planning (TU Wien) (for further information: https://stadtteilen.org/proshare/).

2. Transnational research: Results

2.1 Survey on neighbourhood forms and conditions of non-commercial sharing (Quantitative analysis)

To examine the local conditions of non-commercial sharing practices, an Online-Survey was carried out in the seven studied neighbourhoods of the project.

In Berlin, Kassel, Stuttgart, Uppsala and Vienna, postal letters were sent to 2.000 randomly selected residents; in London and the Paris region, the invitation to the online survey was distributed via stakeholders. Due to low response rates, alternative sampling strategies were carried out in Berlin, Kassel, Stuttgart and Vienna, targeting underrepresented population groups (with low formal education, with migration background) without using random selection. An acceptable response rate to the survey in Uppsala made the follow-up survey not necessary there; in London and the Paris region it was discarded because of a lack of resources. A total of 1.158 people aged 17 and older participated in the survey. Due to the different survey methods (random and purposive selection), the sample is only representative to a limited extent and, because of the different response rates, only allows statements to be made at the neighborhood level for Berlin, Kassel, Stuttgart and Uppsala. In the following, we highlight key findings for the overall sample.

The survey shows that the use of commercial sharing is not related to the practice of non-commercial sharing. Even though about a quarter of respondents indicate they use commercial sharing, this does not affect their non-commercial sharing practices, which most often consists of sharing activities, help, and information. Nearly one-third of respondents state they do this regularly, and one-fifth of respondents also share items at least monthly. Private spaces are shared least often. In many ways, the survey underscores that the neighborhood plays a critical role in non-commercial sharing of spaces, items, activities, and information. For example, the most important place for sharing is stated to be the neighborhood in one's own house, where at the same time contacts for sharing are most often made. Non-commercial sharing very well extends beyond one's own neighborhood and sometimes even beyond the city, but personal contacts are named as the most important resource for organization and not, for example, digital media, which appear in second place together with the neighborhood. Among personal contacts, friendships are the most important, but the more sharing practices exist in the neighborhoods studied, the more acquaintances and strangers are also included in these networks. A highly relevant finding is that for the respondents, the social status, gender or religion of their sharing partners have virtually no significance; common interests, cultural background and age of the peers are more likely to play a role. Social contacts are mentioned first as motives for sharing, but ecological sustainability and a moral, partly political, component are also important. Monetary and pragmatic reasons, on the other hand, are clearly secondary - in contrast to what surveys show for commercial sharing forms. According to the survey, the neighborhood can be described as a kind of nucleus for non-commercial sharing. Thus, the use of facilities and activities in the neighborhood such as neighborhood meetings, clubs, gardens, festivals and markets is also clearly related to the sharing activity of the respondents.

2.2 Qualitative analysis

Apart from the survey, qualitative interviews with experts have been carried out within the seven neighbourhoods, to examine the forms and conditions of non-commercial driven sharing practices. The guided interviews addressed experts from the municipality, housing companies, urban initiatives, NGOs and civil society. The guidelines used have been adapted for the different groups of interviewees. A total of 61 interviews were conducted – with, however, a variation of the numbers between the studied neighbourhoods. The transcribed interviews were coded for subsequent content analysis by the local teams and finally analysed together.

First of all, the interviews show that the concept of sharing as an alternative form of practice is not always a common frame of reference. In none of the quarters sharing is pursued as an overarching goal that controls or drives activities as a value in itself or in relation to the concept of 'sharing city'. Rather, sharing is addressed as a tool to reach other goals like social integration, empowerment, cooperation within anti-gentrification-movements, or urban redevelopment. Based on the interviews, three types of non-commercial sharing networks can be distinguished in the neighborhoods. On the one hand, sharing practices exist within the framework of offerings by municipal and institutional actors who organize spaces such as neighbourhood centres, various forms of courses, counselling services, cultural events and festivals. Within the framework of these offerings, which tend to be provided in the form of a top-down logic, networks can form between people. Second, sharing networks exist within the framework of bottom-up initiatives that organize events in the neighborhoods, set up meeting places, pursue specific political goals or realize cohousing projects. Finally, informal networks exist between residents in which different tangible and intangible goods such as tools and mutual services are shared. The three types of networks are associated with different actor constellations and motives. The institutional actors are following a public mandate to improve local living conditions and social integration. In the initiatives, sharing is framed as a transformative process in relation to economic and political structures. This transformative ideals touch on elements of social and ecological sustainability or tendencies towards resistance to capitalist market logics. The third major strand of motives is the satisfaction of needs through no or few monetary means. These can be needs for community and services, but also for tools, mobility, housing or autonomy.

Based on the interviews, we find more labelled sharing practices informal peer-to-peer organization and transformative motives in inner city neighbourhoods, whereas sharing practices with formal top-down organization and social service orientation prevail in impoverished neighbourhoods (three of them located at the periphery, on in the inner city). The experts often link a low willingness of residents to organize in the more impoverished neighbourhoods to socio-economic deprivation, but also to a lack of a neighbourhood-wide identity, which seems to be an important resource for sharing processes. As conditions of sharing, the availability of spaces to meet and organize, as well as mutual trust and trusted associations are repeatedly named. Also, initiatives and individual actors are described as very influential for sharing within the neighbourhood in case they have long-time access to resources and/or institutional support.

3. Urban living labs[2]

Within ProShare urban living labs have been carried out in selected neighborhoods in Berlin, Paris, London and Vienna. In Berlin, the lab has been located in a traditionally politicised central district which faces gentrification. In Paris and London, they have taken place in the context of two social housing estates, while in Vienna, the lab has been situated in a dense (central) neighbourhood whose housing stock remains affordable to young families and new migrants.

The labs have been mobilised to achieve three main goals: (a) to foster the co-creation (and critical evaluation of) a specific form of spatial knowledge, that is sharing and space-commoning knowledge, i.e., knowledge about specific spaces produced through situated experiences within sharing and space-commoning initiatives; (b) to support existing (and test news forms of) sharing practices in the neighbourhood(s) that put in common spatial resources; and (c) to facilitate the improvement and expansion of these towards far less represented groups. To avoid the pitfalls and shortcomings of top-down approaches to ULLs, the labs have been nested in existing local initiatives. This has ensured the situatedness of the spatial knowledge generated and has enhanced the prospects of continuity beyond the research project. The labs have been framed under the same methodological strategy based on action research and a user-centred participatory design approach.

3.1 ProSHARE-Lab in Vienna at Garage Grande

Setting, goals, methods, results

The Vienna lab has been anchored in the Garage Grande, a temporary use project (2020–2023) developed by the Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung (GB*West), a municipal urban regeneration agency. Located in the middle of the dense, inner section of Ottakring district, Garage Grande has been established in a former multi-store car-park space. The place currently serves as an open space for knowledge exchange and experimentation for different citizen-led DIY initiatives. Main goals of the lab have been the generation of knowledge about non-commercial sharing practices, their potentials and challenges and space commoning, fostering networking and knowledge exchange among the lab participants and the discussion of the expansion of sharing practices for persons from migrant communities. The lab activities have been structured in two phases, in which the following methods have been applied: interactive exhibition in the Garage Grande, mapping of sharing practices in workshops, expert interviews and group discussions. The results have shown that space-sharing has been recognised as relevant among a wide range of participants: It has been perceived to contribute to fostering senses of belonging, self-empowerment, and solidarity, to enhance mutual community assistance, and facilitate access to more (shared) resources. In particular, participants have shared the perception that places like Garage Grande, in which different types of urban communing practices and social networks can develop and become visible, need to be further facilitated, supported, and maintained. Furthermore, migrant communities have been relatively less represented in the discussed non-commercial sharing practices, but there is a general interest particularly by policy makers to make sharing more accessible for them.

[2] The texts in this chapter are mainly taken from: Petrescu, D., Cermeño, H., Keller, C., Moujan, C., Belfield, A., Koch, F., Goff, D., Schalk, M., & Bernhardt, F. (2022). Sharing and Space-Commoning Knowledge Through Urban Living Labs Across Different European Cities. Urban Planning, 7(3), 254-273. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v7i3.5402

3.2 ProSHARE-Lab in Paris

Setting, goals, methods, results

The Paris ProSHARE-Lab was located in Bagneux, a town of 40,000 inhabitants in the Parisian suburbs, with one of the highest social housing rates in the region. The lab was nested within Agrocité, a community-built and self-governed eco-civic hub and urban agriculture site founded in 2016, where many sharing activities are organised weekly. Agrocité is part of R-Urban, a participative strategy and network of civic resilience initiated by the architectural practice Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée in 2008.

Methods deployed included qualitative interviews, ethnographic observation, mapping, co-designing, and prototyping. Mapping was used as a way to generate spatial knowledge and as the basis for participatory workshops where participants corrected and expanded the information gathered by researchers. Workshops conducted sought to (a) create an inventory of available resources and foster collaboration between local initiatives (as co-production of empirical knowledge), (b) to enhance existing sharing practices within the hub (as activation of community and processual knowledge), and (c) to expand the group's capacity to include new members and develop wider sharing (as a normative vision based on the notions of inclusion, conviviality, and diversity).

Results show that the continuous financial support from the local administration had boosted sharing activities organised by local organisations in the neighbourhood. Yet, there seemed to be only a few joint actions and very little space sharing despite their overlapping goals. Moreover, the proliferation of institutionalised sharing places seems to have absorbed spontaneous and tactical spaces where sharing happens informally and outside any organised structure. Another important factor seems related to the involvement of elected officials as volunteers in local associations—an overlapping of social and political networks that appears to have a strong influence on strategies and internal governance of sharing hubs.

These findings highlight the need for further collaboration and mutual support across organisations (rather than competition), in order to address key issues (ecological literacy, civic education, and urban exclusion due to gentrification) and scale their actions strategically to include key publics (youth and women from diverse backgrounds and low-income residents), but also to encourage spontaneity and to highlight the role the Agrocité hub could play in this.

3.3 ProSHARE-Lab in London

Setting, goals, methods, results

The London ProSHARE-Lab was located within the district of Poplar in the borough of Tower Hamlets, East London, within the Lansbury Ward, an administrative neighbourhood with about 15,000 inhabitants including a large Bengali community who emigrated since the 1970s. Poplar has a high density of social housing with 57.5% of housing tenure being social rent (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 2014), the majority of which is administered by the Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association (HARCA), a social landlord and charity, set up in the 1990s during the shift of housing provision from local government to housing associations.

The ULL was situated within one of the R-Urban eco-civic hubs on the Teviot Housing Estate, initiated by Public Works, an art and architecture collective, in partnership with Poplar HARCA.

In the context of the Teviot estate undergoing regeneration processes to increase the housing stock and provide new amenities and services, the objective of the lab was threefold: (a) to generate spatial knowledge of the existing socio-spatial dynamics in relation to the current and predicted state of housing and in particular to understand the existing situation of spaces of sharing, by focusing specifically on the role of community and non-governmental organisations; (b) to focus inwardly on the R-Urban Poplar Hub as an existing space of sharing and to engage local stakeholders in mapping the barriers to sharing for the hub; and (c) to take the learnings from the lab forward as a projection for the future estate, understanding the role of situated community knowledge(s) in the wider regeneration context and how to encourage diverse practices of sharing in its future planning.

The lab developed several participatory workshops. In the first one local experts generated knowledge on the connections between organisations along thematic lines. In the second workshop, Lab participants included Bengali food growers alongside other professional enterprises, with the aim of developing new governance models for sharing physical resources. The third workshop served as “trading zone” by bringing together participants from the first two actions alongside important strategic stakeholders within local authority planning and housing association development teams to better understand how the emerging community-based learnings could inform the normative vision of the future masterplan of the Poplar area.

3.4 ProSHARE-Lab in Berlin

Setting, goals, methods, results

The lab was located in the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district, in the Wrangelkiez and Reichenberger Kiez inner-city neighbourhoods and was interconnected with the StadtTeilen research network. From September 2021 to June 2022, the ULL developed actions to gain community and tacit knowledge on existing sharing practices in public spaces and to reflect on the ways in which existing and new (non-commercial) forms of space-sharing could be supported and expanded.

In the initial phase, participants explored and mapped spaces that constitute locations for sharing in the neighbourhood via a web-based open-source digital mapping tool developed by the NGO

Adhocracy/Liquid Democracy, which was later supplemented via analogue formats. The self-assessment of the generated knowledge served as a basis for designing and later prototyping (a) architectural interventions in public space that could potentially create new forms of neighbourhood space-sharing practices and (b) a digital space for sharing information, using MAZI, a toolkit for developing local intranets and facilitate digital collaborative processes and DYI networking.

The community centre Kiezanker 36 played a pivotal role in networking and multiplying the lab's impact, connecting its activities with local initiatives. Among its participants, there were representatives from local initiatives and civil society organisations. Less represented were however refugees, homeless and elderly people, who were therefore reached via face-to-face interviews.

Results show an important number of existing spaces in which sharing already takes place, mainly non-commercial places such as meeting rooms for the elderly, playgrounds, and locations in which migrant communities meet up. Also places where people share goods such as clothes, books, or domestic appliances. While some of those places have emerged with institutional support (e.g., public playgrounds), other spaces of sharing emerge more spontaneously through the everyday practices of inhabitants. These everyday experiences constitute a stock of situated spatial knowledge(s) that, in neighbourhoods facing gentrification, should inform and influence planners and public authorities.

3.5 Conclusion labs

ProSHARE-Labs have stressed the importance of places where processes of exchange, negotiation, and co-creation of spatial knowledge can take place between a diversity of stakeholders—often adopting hybrid roles within complex stakeholder constellations—from urban renewal offices and developers to professionals, policymakers, civic organisations, and inhabitants from different cultural backgrounds, including recently arrived migrants. Preliminary insights from all labs posit that having more sharing and space-commoning in a neighbourhood can support communities to become more resilient towards threats of gentrification and increase their wellbeing. Also, the labs have raised the question of the sustainability of temporarily produced urban commons, during neighbourhood transformation processes, highlighting the necessity of supporting existing spaces of communing. The labs also have advocated for better integration of the added value of co-creative and experimental methods of spatial knowledge production in mainstream planning processes. However, as the research also has shown, these co-creative methods can sometimes exclude and therefore fail to capture the full diversity of spatial knowledges. The methodological approaches adopted by the ProSHARE-Labs have seek to identify forms of exclusion in sharing (via survey, interviews, and mapping) to later attempt to contribute to their remediation via co-designing and prototyping of propositional actions addressing these forms of exclusion directly. As such, we have tried to demonstrate that carefully inclusive methodologies and long-term processes can make ULLs become a real tool for contributing with situated spatial knowledge(s) to further democratic practices of planning.

4. Policy recommendations for non-commercial sharing

Practices of non-commercial sharing and space-commoning can support communities to become more resilient and enable a more sustainable and socially inclusive urban development. From our research and the ULLs we have distilled the following policy recommendations for non-commercial sharing:

Conditions of Sharing:

- Discussions about the benefits, challenges and goals of non-commercial sharing seen as a policy approach should be initiated by policy actors on the neighbourhood and city level. As a fundament for these discussions empirical studies about non-commercial sharing practices have to be carried out, which not only make sharing practices visible for policy actors and inhabitants, but also give an idea about the manifold forms and actors of sharing in different neighbourhoods. Policy actors should initiate also an analysis of the neighbourhoods in terms of networks and connectedness of the inhabitants before they realize interventions for supporting non-commercial sharing. The reason for this is that neighbourhoods differing in these regards also need different state interventions.
- The neighbourhood is the central place for non-commercial sharing. Providing freely accessible spaces in the neighborhoods for the inhabitants to meet, organize themselves and use it according to their needs helps for initiating and realizing sharing activities. This could be done by intermediate organisations in the neighbourhood like neighbourhood/urban renewal offices, which could also help sharing initiatives in terms of organisation and information (eg. concerning legal frameworks).
- Identification with the neighbourhood is a factor positively influencing sharing activities. Thus, measures like neighbourhood meetings, festivals or common markets, but also more importantly participations processes in neighbourhood development should be regularly undertaken by the responsible policy actors in order to increase the identification of the inhabitants with their neighbourhoods.
- Informal forms and spaces of sharing, which are particularly relevant for migrant communities, but also other non-commercial forms of sharing should be supported financially by policy actors e.g. through policy programs. This could contribute to partially solve the problem of temporality, with which sharing activists are often confronted.
- Improving the legal frameworks in the context of housing and planning in order to foster particularly cross-property sharing and the temporary use of spaces in the neighbourhood contributes to more easily initiating sharing activities, e.g. zoning exceptions, building laws that could be adapted to foster cross-property built solutions (elevators, parking lots), renting law (find options beyond the landlord/tenant model, find options beyond the building of streets to explicitly protect space for the “common good”)

Urban Living Labs and sharing:

- Urban Living Labs, in which knowledge about sharing practices, their conditions, forms and challenges is co-produced and in which sharing practises are co-developed and co-implemented by different actors, have to be part of urban/neighbourhood planning processes because they can inform planning and public policy on how to protect, support, and co-create a diversity of forms of sharing.

- Urban Living Labs should also be initiated because they contribute to a more inclusive urban development. Existing limitations, such as inclusion of less represented populations, can be partially addressed with long-term involvement of engaged professionals and local experts (designers and social and cultural workers) and with empirical studies (s. above); this seems to improve the capacity of labs to include and meditate processes across different stakeholders and population groups.

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