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Food For Thought: Citizens As 'Part-Time' Entrepreneurs

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But it isn't just through agreements with companies that cities can act. Cities themselves have a wide-range of opportunities to support the development of the collaborative economy.

Support can come in many forms. Assessing how current regulations and licensing impact on collaborative economy activities, using planning to promote car sharing through the provision of parking spaces, providing information to the public on the collaborative economy and opportunities within their area to participate, are all important steps. But if cities want to support the collaborative economy to create inclusive economies then they will

need to participate directly. By linking public assets into the collaborative economy cities are also offering those with fewer assets opportunities to benefit.

Cities will also need to think small. The big companies and organisations are important, but so are locally based not-for-profit organisations. 'Social Streets', which started in Bologna (Italy), brings people on the same street together to share what they need. These sorts of activities aren't going to necessarily create jobs, but they are going to build the inclusive, resilient communities that are so crucial to successful cities. If the focus of cities is only on the direct local economic potential of the collaborative

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: CITIZENS AS 'PART-TIME' ENTREPRENEURS

 **By Willem van Winden**

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In a growing number of economic branches, citizens are becoming more active, as part-time producers, service providers, suppliers or even entrepreneurs. They compete with traditional companies, but often operate through new business models.

Here is a list of industries where citizens have become more active, and some examples:

- **BANKING:** Crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending has grown very fast in recent years. Banks are by-passed by sophisticated online platforms that enable anyone to do so.
- **CAB DRIVING:** Through uberPOP, any citizen with a driving licence may become a cab driver and earn some extra money (unless the judge decides otherwise...).
- **CAR RENTING:** By joining SnappCar platform (or similar ones) anyone who owns a car can rent it out when it is not being used and earn some extra money.

- **HOTEL & ACCOMMODATION:** Airbnb makes it very easy for anyone with a spare room, an apartment or house to rent it out.
- **MANUFACTURING:** In many cities, 'community maker spaces' have opened, where citizens can design and make products, fuelled by the maker movement, the culture of hacking and Do-It-Yourself (DIY). In the FabCafe¹ (Barcelona) for example, citizens can use machines and 3D printers to make products, and there are all sorts of training courses, seminars and events to connect 'maker enthusiasts'. In Holland, repair shops have opened to repair household electrical goods as an alternative to throwing them away.
- **FARMING:** Urban farming has become a trend in the last years. Most citizens that do urban farming produce only small quantities for their own or community use, others sell their surpluses.
- **RESTAURATION:** Homecooks can sell their meals to neighbours using online platforms². Pop-up restaurants exist for short periods based anywhere from homes to car parks.
- **ENERGY:** An increasing number of European citizens are in the energy business: they have solar panels on their roofs, and sell the surplus back to the network (which itself, in more and more cases, belongs to the community). In Germany, a frontrunner in this field, there were 888 registered renewable energy co-operatives by the end of 2013, and 90% of their members were individual citizens (Julian, 2014).
- **RETAIL:** Citizens buy and sell to each other using online platforms: on ebay and craigslist, but also national sites like Subito (IT), Marktplaats



economy, much of the important, longer-term developments such as strengthened social capital that underpin what makes cities prosper will be missed.

The collaborative economy is young and it's still developing. Traditional ways of doing business are being disrupted by collaborative economy organisations – and we might also see traditional models of business disrupted as people turn to more mutual business forms, such as co-operatives and associations, to create inclusive collaborative economy businesses. But the collaborative economy will not necessarily make cities more resilient, trusting and inclusive. In some versions,

collaborative economy organisations and companies actively seek to build those attributes within cities. But they are not part of the DNA of every collaborative economy organisation and company.

The potential of the collaborative economy to create stronger communities and cities is real, but it is not a short-term fix to the challenges cities face. ●

(NL). The barter economy is also growing through forms of alternative currency and old favourites like flea markets have shown a renaissance during the crisis years.

QUESTIONS & DILEMMAS

The list can be extended. Many of the most dynamic entrants have emerged around new digital platforms; others are born out of necessity as resilient responses to the economic crisis. Many commentators agree that this type of entrepreneurship is growing, and will continue to do so. Jeremy Rifkin even speaks of a shift “from hierarchical to lateral power that will impact the way we conduct business, govern society, educate our children, and engage in civic life”³.

But all raise a number of questions that are largely unanswered:

- Regulation: should entrepreneurial citizens be subject to the same strict regulations – think of demands on workplace conditions, quality control, food safety and health and safety rules etc. – as the traditional companies with which they compete?
- Consumer Rights: What rights do consumers have when things go wrong?
- Taxation: to what extent should these citizens be treated as businesses and pay business taxes (VAT, taxes on profits, and tourist taxes)?
- What are the longer-term implications for urban labour markets? New jobs and incomes are generated but older sectors may be

placed under threat (e.g. taxis and hotels).

- What do cities know about what happens in their own city in these fields?
- Should cities empower their citizens to become part-time entrepreneurs? ●

REFERENCES

OuiShare is a global community and think and do-tank. Its mission is to build and nurture a collaborative society by connecting people, organisations and ideas around fairness, openness and trust. In 2014, OuiShare launched 'Sharitories', aimed at helping local governments seize the potential opportunities offered by the collaborative economy.

More at:

- <http://magazine.ouishare.net/2015/01/sharitories-look-at-your-territory-with-new-eyes/>
- http://ouishare.net/en/about/collaborative_economy

1 <http://fabcafe.com/barcelona/fab>

2 For example www.shareyourmeal.net

3 <http://www.thethirdindustrialrevolution.com>