

## **Sharing is the new owning – subjectivities of the maker culture**

### **Long abstract**

Since the advent of mass-consumerist society enabling many, but far from all, to cheaply consume more than they need of clothes, toys, electronics, furniture, vehicles, etc., critics have decried the social inequities and natural resource depletion that this involves. With increased awareness of climate change and peak oil as well as insights into the difficulties of reaching globally binding agreements, contemporary European and American socio-environmental movements are pushing for less as well as localized consumption (Hopkins, 2011). Concerned groups and citizens are striving to share, swap, and redesign items in order to move away from the take–make–dispose society. In recent years what is termed “the sharing economy” has grown, i.e. sharing and swapping of tools, clothes, spaces and services. Sharing practices are indeed not new but have been reinvented in contemporary contexts characterized by economic decline and/or environmental concerns, often facilitated through the use of digital technologies (Botsman & Rogers, 2011).

Parallel to this critique of mass consumption and global corporate exploitation of human and natural resources, other struggles are being fought over the control of digital resources. The open source movement is home to a plethora of activism—political hacking, campaigns for personal integrity on the Internet, construction of free information platforms for the public such as Wikipedia, the open source operating system Linux, and other free collaborative information-sharing platforms.

The green consumption critique and the open source movement differ in several respects, often taking place in different fora, being driven by different people and relying on different theoreticians. In this paper I argue, however, that these two movements share a critique of corporate rule, proprietary technology, and capitalist economic dynamics and also share a vision of another more participatory, fairer, and more resource-conscious economy. Though open source philosophy is not generally framed as green or motivated by ecological rationales, I will demonstrate how open source philosophy has much in common with the work of eco-theorists such as Elinor Ostrom (1990, 2010) and Murray Bookchin (1971, 2007), who advocate decentralized self-governing beyond the state and the capitalist market. Based on law professor Yochai Benkler’s (2006) analysis of digital open source production, more specifically, in the form of “commons-based peer production,” and on his assertion that such production is spreading to the physical world, I will use examples illustrating that this is indeed happening.

Empirically, this paper deals with the ethics and motives of peer-to-peer sharing in the form of clothing libraries and makerspaces, exploring questions as why these platforms have been initiated, what needs or desires they meet, who participates and how the sharing and

co-production of common pool resources effect identity formation. The case studies consist of clothing libraries and makerspaces in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Barcelona.

The paper argues that the sharing practices embody different rationales, some primarily framed in environmental terms forwarding eco-friendly lifestyles and others framed as critiques of corporate/state control of production and societal organization. The paper however suggests that the environmentalist critique and the hacker critique of corporate control are both theoretically and empirically coming together in what may be called a do-it-together *maker* culture with subjectivities characterized by collaboration, sharing, co-production and co-managing of resources.

Peer-to-peer sharing appears to have grown in countries and groups of people hit by the post-2008 recession,<sup>1</sup> as have the maker culture and makerspaces (Harris & Garenflo, 2012).<sup>2</sup> In the book *Share or Die: Voices of the Get Lost Generation in the Age of Crisis*, Harris and Gorenflo (2012) have gathered stories from the twenty-something generation in cities like Detroit and Amsterdam about their strategies for coping with a stagnating economy and resource depletion. In their narratives one can trace the contours of a do-it-yourself-culture with collaborative consumption and sharing as central themes. If the DIY maker movement and peer-to-peer practices grow in situations of economic decline, they might have considerable potential impact. In addition, the fact that sharing practices are being reinvented through the use of contemporary technologies and new concepts makes them attractive and helps them function as symbols of belief in a different and better future.

The DIY maker movement and peer-to-peer practices have the potential to gather diverse groups of people, driven by ecological or social justice concerns or basic economic pragmatism. This means that there might be a coming-together of hackers, pirates, green consumers, corporate critics, jobless, and people on tight budgets. Hence, perhaps the emerging peer economies and spread of DIY production can be seen as early signs of a new logic, beyond profit-driven capitalism, that might gradually steer the economy in a fairer and more resource-conscious direction.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> See Fresnada (2013) and the Collaborative Consumption site entry “Collaborative consumption grows despite crisis in Spain,” at <http://www.collaborativeconsumption.com/2013/04/07/investments-in-collaborative-consumption-in-spain-q1-2013>, retrieved 18 May 2013.

<sup>2</sup>

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