

Special Issue
Enhancement, Management,
and Sustainability of Tourism in Italian
Small Villages

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Ilaria Marotta

Salvatore Monaco

Marina Novelli



Editor in Chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Managing Editor: Carmine Urciuoli

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From Sharing Economy to Sharing Cities Networks: Collaborative/Collective (Re)Actions of Cities to Urban Platformization²

Introduction

The sharing economy (also known as the collaborative platform economy) is used as a floating signifier for interactions among dispersed groups of people supported by digital platforms that enable them to exchange (matching supply and demand), share and collaborate in the consumption and production of labour and activities by leveraging capital goods and assets. It is a rapidly and exponentially growing phenomenon which has attracted a great deal of interest; it has become a top priority for governments around the globe (Voytenko Palgan, 2021; Codagnone et al., 2016; Hernández Bataller, 2014), since its development and impact mainly occurs in cities (Gurran et al., 2020; McLaren & Agyeman, 2015).

The paper addresses the evolution of the sharing economy in relation to cities, and the (re)actions of cities to the phenomenon. To provide a robust theoretical foundation, it is imperative to delve deeper into the role of urban governance in shaping cities' responses to the sharing economy phenomenon. Urban governance structures play indeed a pivotal role in regulating and managing the complexities of the sharing economy within urban contexts, influencing the strategies and actions undertaken by city governments (Andreotti, 2019).

The article opens by reflecting on the spread of the phenomenon in the urban context, highlighting how the narratives have changed over time, followed by an examination of local governments' involvement. In the last decade, cities themselves have begun to reflect on the topic, and since Seoul Sharing City in 2012, the number of so-called sharing cities has increased. Today, hundreds of sharing cities are engaging with the topic, trying to minimize negative impact, maximize positive outcomes and fuel the rebuilding of communities through sharing. Interest has become so intense that, from a single-city ("within-city") approach, we began to observe the emergence of a multi-city ("between-cities") approach: hundreds of cities worldwide that are already exchanging best practices and policy solutions, and joining forces in sharing cities coalitions.

Nevertheless, research in the field of the sharing economy has predominantly focused on the single-city approach, leaving a significant gap in the literature regarding comprehensive comparisons of cities coalitions. While studies by van der Eijnden (2017), Bernardi & Diamantini (2018), and Zvolska et al. (2018) have contributed valuable insights, they primarily examine individual cities' responses to the phenomenon, thus highlighting the need for a broader comparative approach. To address this gap, this study aims to provide a comprehensive comparison of cities coalitions, focusing on five distinct case studies selected based on their level of city government involvement, specific internal programs, and their relevance to the research questions, ensuring a diverse representation of cities networks engaged with the issue of the sharing economy.

We argue that the emerging coalitions of cities that we have observed, even when they share common values and reflections on the topic, have diverse conceptions, act differently, and promote diverse collective/collaborative actions between cities. We proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of cities networks are appearing in the international panorama over time in response to the spread of digital platforms?

RQ2: How are the different sharing cities coalitions organizing themselves? What are their main features, governance models, goals, tools and forms of collaboration?

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2 Received: 11/12/2023. Revised: 11/3/2024. Accepted: 5/11/2024. Published: 31/12/2024.

From our analysis, we identified three types of cities networks regarding the stage of evolution over time: (1) “forerunners”, (2) “dealing with”, and (3) “newcomers”. The present study focuses on the category of “dealing with”: networks currently focusing on the issue, as opposed to those just beginning to approach the phenomenon (the “newcomers”), or those pioneer networks that were the first to respond to the issue (the “forerunners”). Three reasons support the decision to focus on this group of cities networks. Firstly, this category represents a crucial stage in the evolution of cities’ responses to the sharing economy phenomenon, indicating a level of maturity and commitment to finding solutions within the urban context. Secondly, by examining networks that were actively grappling with the issues associated with the sharing economy during the period studied, the research can provide timely insights into the strategies and approaches adopted by cities, facilitating a dynamic analysis of contemporary urban governance practices. Lastly, focusing on the “dealing with” group enables a comparative analysis of cities networks that are at similar stages of development and facing common challenges, enhancing the study’s robustness and generalizability while providing practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners involved in urban governance and sharing economy initiatives.

The “dealing with” analysis is based on five case studies: Sharing Cities Alliance, Sharing Cities Action, European Cities Network on Short Term Rental, Sharing Cities Sweden, and Sharing Economy Association Japan. Analysis of these networks spans until 2020³ and allowed us to identify four different types of approach: (1) consultancy, (2) action, (3) testing, and (4) nudging. The study closes with some reflections about the potentialities of each approach type in terms of collective/collaborative actions in the transformation of contemporary society, and raises a number of questions for future research.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1 The spread of the sharing economy in the urban context

In 2009, the emerging narrative about the sharing economy was one of hope and enthusiasm for an alternative economic model that would “save the planet” (among others, Matofska & Sheinwald, 2019), reinforce community ties (Böckera & Meelen, 2017; Hamari et al., 2015; Botsman & Roger, 2010), put resources back into circulation (Harmaala, 2015; Heinrichs, 2013), promote access over ownership (Martin, 2016; Light, 2015; Grassmuck, 2012), and thus reduce consumption overall (Ala-Mantila et al., 2016; de Leeuw & Gössling, 2016). Ten years on, some of the original allure seems to have been lost, and platforms genuinely able to mitigate consumption or build community ties are rare.

The focus of consumption is convenience, price and transactional efficiency; meanwhile, community is increasingly interpreted as a commodity. In terms of a production model, the variety of platforms differs significantly in size, scope, and level of professionalization (Andreotti et al., 2017). Existing models (Fuster Morell et al., 2020) vary from more profit-oriented, “netarchical” and “extractive” practices (Bauwens & Kostakis, 2016) to more community-oriented, generative and transformative solutions (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). Several tools have emerged to help differentiate and classify sharing economy platforms. Among these is the “Procommons collaborative economy analytical star framework” proposed by Fuster Morell and Espelt (2018, 2019) which, unlike other tools, incorporates socio-economic, environmental, political, technological and even gender dimensions of sustainability. On this basis, only under particular conditions can the general phenomenon be considered sharing, collaborative and commons-oriented or platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2016). Among the successful alternative solutions and genuinely sharing models, Fuster Morell (2018) includes open commons, platform cooperativism, decen-

3 The data and information presented regarding the 5 city networks extend up to the year 2020.

tralized organizations based on social economy and open knowledge (e.g., Fairmondo), as well as sharing practices that are growing offline without relying on digital platforms (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015)⁴.

To provide a more balanced view, it is essential to acknowledge that while the sharing economy initially promised to strengthen community ties and promote sustainable consumption, its trajectory has revealed significant challenges and potential downsides within urban contexts. Some digital platforms with a capitalist ethos (Srnicsek, 2016; Kenney & Zysman, 2016) are opening up new spaces for discrimination and generating new inequalities (Slee, 2015; Srnicsek, 2016). Among these are the labour exploitation generated by food delivery (e.g., Foodora), ride-hailing (e.g., Uber), and short-term contract or freelance work platforms (e.g., TaskRabbit); or the impacts of short-term rentals platforms (e.g., Airbnb) on housing shortages and neighbourhood identity, and the gentrification, Disneyfication and hotelization (Lee 2016) that threatens historic centres with social desertification (Semi, 2015). Nonetheless, other experiences are demonstrating their capacity to act as levers for the re-building and stabilization of communities, fostering local and sustainable economic development (Stokes et al., 2014). An awareness of the nuances that run between the "corporate model" and the "community model" becomes fundamental (Sanchez Vergara et al., 2021) especially for policymakers. Cities should actively engage in addressing the challenges posed by sharing platforms either through regulatory measures, collaborative initiatives, or policy interventions. Failure to address these issues may result in further exacerbation of urban inequalities and social fragmentation.

1.2 "Within" to "between": from one to a hundred cities showing interest

Cities, densely-populated spaces with a profusion of digital and physical connections, are the ideal place for sharing practices to develop (Agyeman et al., 2013). However changes in society, such as the emergence of the platform economy, require robust urban governance structures (Andreotti, 2019), where cities have the opportunity to promote practices based on making, doing and sharing to engage residents in communities of practice that strengthen a shared identity (Benkler, 2019)⁵. They can manage the dynamic interaction between technology, ideology and institutions, acting as service providers or as a democratic community. Being a *sharing city* recalls the ability of a city to offer the lived experience of socially-embedded production and meaningful participatory democracy (Benkler, 2019).

The first two cities to officially describe themselves as sharing cities were Seoul in 2012 (Bernardi & Diamantini, 2017) and Amsterdam in 2015 (Mont et al., 2019). Both cities set out with the goal of using the opportunities offered by the sharing economy in the fields of sustainability, social cohesion and the economy. In a short time, the number of sharing cities has grown (San Francisco, Milan, New York, Vienna, etc.) despite the controversies generated by the confusion around the topic, the lack of a single common definition, and the adoption of the term by platforms that are not genuinely sharing oriented (Codagnone et al., 2016). Cities reacted to the phenomenon in different ways, according to the potentialities described by the predominant discourse, and the impending impact of digital platforms on urban contexts. Some cities tried to restrict sharing economy organizations with regulations or bans; others remained neutral, adopting a "wait and see" strategy; still others encouraged and supported the efforts of sharing economy organizations. A systematic examination of what cities are doing to "contain" the risks and endorse the benefits generated by sharing-oriented platforms allows us to map municipal governance practices and assist city governments in the management and integration of the sharing economy in their urban tissue. Interesting works in this regard include those by Voytenko Palgan (2019), who expanded previous analyses on cities' approaches to the sharing economy; Bernardi and

4 Agyeman and McLaren refer to a "sharing paradigm", in which *sharing* is intended as a tool to create a more socially just, environmentally sustainable, inclusive, fair and innovative society, and is not related solely to the generation of profit.

5 <https://www.barcelona.cat/metropolis/en/contents/imagined-community-practice-community>

Diamantini (2017), who produced a preliminary identification of hybrid forms of governance, distinguishing them into more “centralized” and more “widespread” models; Pais and Salice (2017), who identified three roles of government, as regulator, investor and facilitator; Zvolska *et al.* (2018), who described four roles of government, as regulator, provider through funding and infrastructures, enabler through collaboration and communication, and consumer; and, finally, McCormick and Leire (2019), who defined five principal mechanisms through which the sharing economy is regulated by local government: regulating (through laws, taxes, bans and policies), self-governing, providing, enabling and collaborating.

More than 50 cities have taken part in the three Sharing City Summits (Amsterdam 2016, New York 2017, Barcelona 2018), displaying the varied current panorama of approaches, attitudes and practices. Despite their different strategies and methods, they testify to the need to promote sustainable urbanization (Ochoa *et al.*, 2018) and a novel general attitude of governing cities oriented towards the promotion of a sustainable, participative, innovative political economic model. What Benkler (2019) defines as a *public-commons partnership model* is based on four core elements: (1) participation and transparency between government and citizens; (2) trust in citizens; (3) active collaboration between public institutions and commons-based communities of practices; (4), respectful and supportive cooperation among people as proactive and collective actors. In this model, Benkler recognizes a socially-embedded production dimension based on trust, cooperation and productive achievement among the participants. The merge between these participative processes and online collaborative platforms, together with continuous learning relations within the commons-based communities of practice, allows local governments to offer a more engaged experience of citizenship. At the same time, local businesses can benefit from collaboration with public institutions and commons-based practices.

1.3 Between cities: the emergence of sharing cities coalitions

Experimenting, collaborating and sharing among cities with diverse models, political approaches, experiences and technical solutions, inside dedicated cities networks, is recognized to be a more profitable way to tackle the challenges and benefit from the opportunities of the sharing economy (Benkler, 2019). One recognized positive element is the power of the network to give cities more authority over sharing economy platforms and greater administrative control. Scaling up from a single-city approach to a network of cities can help create a framework to support common collaborative action among cities and build upon common strategies, and a valuable resource to communicate common views and ensure that platforms and other institutions take into consideration the roles played by cities’ and their perspectives on the platforms’ activities. This also means that local governments involved in the new emerging coalitions of cities perceive the more traditional cities networks as unable to respond to their needs when it comes to digital platforms, since they are providing no effective support or response in the short- and medium-term (Malè, 2019). It can also mean that the short-term actions of cities networks can “complement the medium- to long-term advocacy initiatives of major representative networks, which are aimed at the formal recognition of cities within the global governance system, but which have so far largely failed to promote actual policy or structural changes in this system” (Fernández de Losada & Abdullah, 2019, p.13).

In this framework of evolution from a single-city to a multi-city approach, the following section presents the current landscape of the sharing cities coalition. As anticipated, the literature to date has presented empirical analysis mainly focused on single cases or comparison among single cities (among others, van der Eijnden, 2017; Bernardi & Diamantini, 2018, Zvolska *et al.*, 2018; Vidal & Fuster Morell, 2018). In this study, however, we propose to scale up by analysing and comparing sharing cities coalitions for the first time.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is grounded in the principles of qualitative research and involved three main stages: identification, classification, and in-depth qualitative analysis (Yin, 2004) of existing city networks related to the sharing economy. To ensure the credibility and depth of the findings, a case comparison analysis was conducted, which adopted a qualitative approach to facilitate comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the data (Howe, 2004; Stake, 2010). Five cases were identified; they focus specifically on sharing, are based on city government involvement, and represent the five major city networks (in terms of level of activity reliability): 1. Sharing Cities Alliance (SCAlliance), launched jointly by the city of Amsterdam and ShareNL; 2. Sharing Cities Action (SCAction), promoted by the city of Barcelona in collaboration with the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya; 3. European Cities Network on Short Term Holiday Rental (ECNSTHR), led by the city of Amsterdam; 4. Sharing Cities Sweden (SCSweden), launched by the Swedish central government; 5. Sharing Economy Association Japan (SEAJ), promoted by a not-for-profit NGO.

The inclusion of diverse case studies, selected based on criteria such as city government involvement and activity reliability, contributes to the robustness and generalizability of the findings, allowing for a nuanced analysis of sharing cities networks on a global scale. In particular, the decision to include the Sharing Economy Association Japan (SEAJ) warrants clarification: other similar networks exist, such as the Sharing Economy Association Korea, Sharing Economy UK, or the European Sharing Economy Coalition; however, the Japanese association is the only one to have a specific internal programme involving city councils, while all the others are aimed at freelancers and sharing organizations.

Furthermore, the involvement of “expert voices” networks such as Shareable and Ouishare as “forerunners” adds depth to the analysis, offering historical perspectives and insights into the evolution of sharing networks and their impact on urban development. .

To address the complexity of the research subject and ensure a comprehensive understanding, a triangulation of methods was employed, as suggested by Della Porta & Keating (2008): literature review on the evolution of the phenomenon and local government perspectives; identification and classification of emerging sharing cities coalitions to identify networks for case studies; desk research and analysis of institutional and official materials related to the case studies; participant observation during the 2018 Sharing Cities Summit, the 2019 Sharing Cities Sweden Summit, and the 2019 Sharing Cities Encounter. In addition, eleven semi-structured interviews with representatives of the case studies and members of the “expert voices” networks have been conducted. One network representative and one policy maker from SCAlliance, SCAction, SCSweden and ECNSTHR, were also interviewed. Shareable, Ouishare and SEAJ were represented by a single interviewee each. The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling thanks to the authors’ existing contacts with relevant organisations. The interviews were conducted from May to November 2019 on Skype, except for the representatives of SCAction, Gothenburg city, OuiShare and the ECNSTHR, interviewed face-to-face. The analysis was performed with the assistance of NVivo software. The methodological approach also prioritized gender balance in the selection of interviewees, ensuring diverse perspectives and enhancing the validity of the research findings (gender balance was present for SCAction and SCSweden, where one of the two interviewees in each case was a woman).

3. Case Study Analysis

3.1 Towards the creation of the Sharing Cities Alliance

The Sharing Cities Summit held in Barcelona in 2018 is just one example of the need for cities to gather and discuss sharing economy issues. Since the Seoul Sharing City in 2012, the number of

cities encounters on the topic have multiplied. Some of them have more significantly marked the story of the “sharing cities coalitions”.

The first of these was the Sharing City Roundtable⁶ (at the time, the “Amsterdam Sharing Cities Summit”), organized by the Government of Amsterdam⁷ and ShareNL in May 2016 with mayors from another twelve cities including Paris, Copenhagen, Barcelona, New York City and Seoul. ShareNL⁸ is an organization established in 2013 to promote knowledge and collective awareness of the sharing economy; it advises and supports start-ups, organizations, corporations, governments and individuals, and is one of the architects of the “Amsterdam Sharing City” project. This event was an occasion for cities to jointly reflect on how cities can make themselves stronger by sharing information, best practices and knowledge. The main concerns addressed were related to the normative dimension, since digital platforms tend not to fit in the traditional legislative framework (Smorto, 2015). A draft of five principles regarding digital platforms emerged: 1. social security contributions, plus fair pay and at least the minimum wage for employees; 2. safety (fire and food safety must be addressed); 3. sustainability (the business activity should respect the environment); 4. inclusiveness (there should be no age, technological or other barriers to participation); 5. data sharing is needed to prevent and combat illegal activities.

A cities coalition based on shared values and goals, the Sharing Cities Alliance (our first case study), was also created during this summit. The second summit was held in New York in 2017⁹ and hosted 22 cities across thirteen countries and four continents. During this summit, the birth of the Sharing Cities Alliance was made official and the five principles were implemented. The main mission of the Alliance is to be a good practices exchange and collaboration platform to address the challenges of the digital decade. In the words of the founders, “we provide all partners with a collective memory and access to each other’s materials and experiences”. The Alliance co-organizes summits, facilitates online seminars, shares highlights in a monthly online magazine, works one-on-one with leading urban professionals, and collects materials, research and policies in a comprehensive digital database (Alex).

Both summit editions (2016 and 2017) represented an important space for collaboration between city representatives, experts, entrepreneurs and researchers, and the opportunity to share best practices, public policies, legislation, and research.

3.2 The emergence of a Sharing Cities Task Force

The third edition, a four days summit held in Barcelona in 2018¹⁰ simultaneously to the Smart City Expo World Congress, was organized by Barcelona City Council, with the Dimmons research group of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and the support of the city of Amsterdam, New York City, BarCola¹¹, Sharing Cities Alliance and Shareable. It constituted the largest cities encounter to date on the sharing economy, attended by 50 cities from all continents. The main focus was on boosting tangible commons outcomes and collaboration measures, including the co-creation of a set of common principles to reach a joint declaration; the collaboration between cities on regulation and negotiation with large platforms that generate disruptive impacts in the city; the definition of criteria to distinguish between platforms; the promotion of policies for in-

6 More information is available here:

http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SC_Adam_2016.pdf.

7 Represented by Vice Mayor Kajsa Ollongren.

8 For more information, see <https://www.sharenl.nl/>.

9 By Alicia Glen, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development of New York City.

10 More information on the Barcelona Summit is available here:

<http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/sharing-cities-summit/2018-barcelona/>

11 BarCola is a node on collaborative economy and peer production based on the commons in Barcelona. It analyses and evaluates the situation of the model oriented to common goods within the collaborative economy in the context of Barcelona, maps cases of collaborative economy and common goods models, develops recommendations for public policy planning in that field, improves dialogue between social and solidarity economy and production oriented to common goods.

clusive platform models, beneficial to the general common interest; the knowledge policies and a common data-sharing platform between cities.

The summit was thus the occasion to co-finalize, present and sign a *Declaration of Common Principles and Commitments for Sharing Cities*¹², resulting from the principles defined during the two previous summits. The Declaration is composed of ten principles¹³ and aims to be a framework to support collaborative actions between cities, build upon common strategies and provide a valuable resource for communicating cities' common views. The principles are inspirational (Bernardi, 2018) and not legally binding; they represent a symbolic message delivered globally about cities' general approach towards platforms and the sharing economy. They propose an action plan and a coordination strategy among cities in order to gain negotiation power with digital platforms and engage in joint actions regarding national and supranational decisions and regulations.

The Declaration was signed by A Coruña, Amsterdam, Athens, Atlanta, Barcelona, Bethlehem, Bologna, Bordeaux, Buenos Aires, Gothenburg, Grenoble, Kobe, Lisbon, Madrid, Milan, Montreal, Montreuil, Muscat, New York, Paris, Reykjavik, San Francisco, Santiago de Compostela, São Paulo, Seoul, Taipei, Terrassa, Torino, Toronto, Umea, Valencia, Vienna and Vitoria-Gasteiz. Other cities are currently in the process of validating the Declaration: Bristol, Eindhoven, The Hague, Malmö, Melbourne, Prague, Rijswijk, Singapore and Stockholm.

The Declaration embodies the starting point of the Sharing Cities Action Task Force, or Sharing Cities Action (our second case study). It is the result of the Barcelona City Council and the Dimmons research group's combined endeavour to establish a task force office to support the Declaration, foster collaboration between cities and develop concrete actions to address the challenges and opportunities posed by the platform economy.

In November 2019, Sharing Cities Action organized a Sharing Cities Encounter during the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona to maintain communication between the sharing cities, provide updates about the activities, research and initiatives implemented, restore the willingness of cities to collaborate, and together define the 2020 Action Plan (Bernardi, 2019). The encounter brought together 30 city representatives and 150 actors from the international sharing ecosystem of business platforms, civic society, networks, experts, activists and research centres. The participants also included representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Committee of Regions and Cities. The Sharing Cities Alliance and Sharing Cities Sweden (see below) also attended. Among the outcomes of the 2018 - 2019 period there are the expansion of the network from 50 to 85 cities from 36 countries; the cooperation on the European Cities Network Short Term Holiday Rental; the contributions from cities to the Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) on the platform economy; the publication of the report¹⁴ "An Overview of Public Policies of the Sharing Economy by Cities" (an analysis of cities' conceptions and approaches regarding the definition of the sharing economy, its challenges and opportunities, criteria used to differentiate platforms, and cities' main goals and policy interventions). In addition, the Corporate European Observatory (CEO) collaborated in the launch of a report on platform lobbying in Europe ("Über-influential? How the Gig Economy's Lobbyists Undermine Social and Workers' Rights"¹⁵); Murray Cox, founder of InsideAirbnb, collaborated on the study *Data Strategies for Cities to Facilitate Negotiation with Platforms*,

12 The Declaration can be read here: <http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sharing-Cities-Declaration-1.pdf>.

13 Three additional principles were added to the seven to come out of the NY Summit: (1) differentiation between platform models; (2) defence of the sovereignty of cities; and (3) public support policies for collaborative platforms that have a positive impact.

14 The report is available here: <http://www.sharingcitiesaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/REPORT-SHARING-CITIES-SUMMIT-2018.pdf>.

15 The report is available here: <https://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/%C3%9Cber-influential%20web.pdf>.

During the meeting, the city of Seoul announced its intention to build on the previous summits' experience to organize the Sharing Cities Summit 2020. The Summit was held online in November 2020, and attended by representatives of the main sharing networks to discuss how cities are reacting to COVID-19 from a sharing perspective. During the online summit, participants stressed the importance of operating as a network, since the current challenges are too difficult for any city to face alone.

3.3 The European Cities Network on Short Term Holiday Rentals (ECNSTHR)

In Europe, another distinct type of city network has surfaced, encompassing cities grappling with the surge of short-term holiday rentals, which services pose significant challenges, notably by driving up housing costs and impeding access to affordable housing options. Cities are reacting differently: some with hostility, others with a laxer response. Either way, negotiations and agreements have failed to resolve major problems, and platforms are seeking centralized top-down positions in the EU to bypass local governments. According to Haar (2018) and Tansey and Haar (2019), platforms have entered the lobbying ecosystem in Brussels mainly through the European Holiday Home Association (EHHA) founded in 2013, whose website boasts a short-term rental industry with a capacity of 20 million beds and a yearly turnover of 80 billion euros. These numbers pushed the EU parliament to promote the 2017 resolution "European Agenda for the collaborative economy", stating that "tourism sector home-sharing represents an excellent use of resources", and affirming that the EU "is concerned about the risk of fragmentation of the single market" and "condemns, in this regard, the regulations being imposed by some public authorities, which seek to restrict the supply of tourist accommodation via the collaborative economy." In 2016 and 2017, the EHHA has presented formal complaints against EU cities, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels and Paris, for violating EU laws.

The European Cities Network on Short Term Holiday Rental (ECNSTHR) emerged in that context. The need for cities to form themselves into a collective actor arises from the fact that, in the EU framework, cities can only aspire to be "agenda setters" with little impact on the policy-making processes (Vidal, 2019). The promoters of the initiative have been the cities of Barcelona and Amsterdam, with their Brussels offices playing a leading role. The network incorporates ten EU national capitals and London, and a further eleven major cities in EU Member States, adding up to a total of 22 European cities working together on the short-term rental issue with a special focus on regulation. These cities are Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Bologna, Bordeaux, Brussels, Cologne, Florence, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Krakow, London, Milan, Munich, Paris, Porto, Prague, Utrecht, Valencia, Vienna and Warsaw. They all signed a position paper¹⁶ appealing for improved EU legislation of short-term holiday rentals platforms, since the current legislation makes it difficult for city administrations to take effective measures against globally operating short-term rental companies. European cities are teaming up to improve the regulation of short-term holiday rental platforms with a joint position from which they are calling for a new Digital Single Market legislative framework that will oblige holiday rental platforms to share relevant data with city administrations. Three main demands have been issued: (1) platforms must share relevant data with local government administrations to enforce the law; (2) ads for national/local holiday properties must include a valid registration number, and platforms must remove any ads that fail to comply with this condition; (3) platforms must comply with and enforce national and local legislation, meaning they would be responsible for non-compliance with the local and national legislation of the Member State in which they operate as well as the state in which they are legally based (Dimitrova, 2020). In the opinion of the ECNSTHR representative interviewed for this study, platforms should cooperate with registration schemes, not obstruct enforcement, cooperate with social housing companies, and make their hosts pay taxes.

¹⁶ The position paper is available here: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROPEAN_CITIES_ALLIANCE_ON_SHORT_TERM_RENTALS_final.pdf.

3.4 Sharing Cities Sweden: a national programme to connect cities

In parallel, the Sharing Cities Sweden programme¹⁷ emerged, a national initiative developed under the large umbrella of the Swedish programme Viable Cities, a strategic innovation programme for smart and sustainable cities, led by KTH Royal Institute of Technology, to achieve climate-neutral cities by 2030¹⁸.

Sharing Cities Sweden is dedicated to exploring the potential of the sharing economy as a means to tackle environmental concerns, mitigate energy consumption, and enhance social innovation and sustainability within urban contexts. The initiative focuses on establishing pioneering test beds across Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Umeå, fostering collaboration on a national and global scale while facilitating the exchange of insights derived from shared experiences in urban settings. The network comprises a diverse array of stakeholders from both the private and public sectors, academia, and civil society. Lund University assumes a pivotal role as the primary facilitator and coordinator of the network, overseeing its evaluation processes.

Sharing Cities Sweden's test beds are designed according to the key factors of urban living labs: well-defined context; experimentation with new solutions, technologies and policies; collaboration among different stakeholders; clear leadership and ownership; systematic evaluation. The sharing services developed in the test beds relate to (1) utilization of spaces (premises, housing, green infrastructure, shared public space, etc.), and (2) utilization of goods and services (tools, clothing, toys, handicrafts, etc.). Transport and mobility are included to a certain extent.

Within the programme, the network is also developing a toolkit with the twofold aim of helping city governments to evaluate sharing policies and improve their understanding of the role of cities; and helping sharing organizations to evaluate their level of sustainability and shareability in economic/social/environmental terms. The toolkit will define sharing sustainability indicators for measuring the impact and added value of sharing services and scoring the sharing organizations.

Lastly, the network has developed a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), available free of charge, offering a collection of diverse short films and key short readings on sharing cities, in addition to interactive forums and a practical assignment to create an online learning community. It provides a diversity of key examples of the emerging sharing economy in cities.

In October 2019, the Sweden coalition organized the Sharing Cities Sweden Summit, inviting all the actors in the Swedish ecosystem to reflect on the first results of the test beds and explore the role of sharing cities in advancing sustainable development goals.

Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the network started organizing online events to report on the test beds' progress. Worthy of particular note among the various initiatives is the collaboration with the Sharing Cities Alliance to co-organize a virtual roundtable, "Sharing Cities: Shaping Tomorrow", for the purpose of sharing insights and ideas on the future of sharing in cities and communities. The initiative gathered over 40 people from Sweden, the Netherlands, and across Europe and the world.

3.5 The Sharing Economy Association Japan: connecting cities while creating an ecosystem

Moving to the other side of the world, we find the Sharing Economy Association Japan (SEAJ). In Asia, concern about the sharing economy is also growing and, given the position of Seoul as a clear forerunner in this field (Fedorenko, 2017), other Asian cities have begun to reflect on the subject. Seoul itself has tried to build a network with other Korean cities, launching the "Joint Declaration on Sharing Urban Policy for Sustainable Urban Development" in 2016. The goal was to expand the sharing of human and material resources and information; provide joint support for shared businesses and organizations; seek city-level measures to improve related laws and

¹⁷ More detailed information is available here: <https://www.sharingcities.se/>.

¹⁸ For more information, see <https://viablecities.com/en/home/>.

systems; and strengthen cooperation with overseas city governments¹⁹ (Bernardi, 2016). However, to date the network has not taken off and there is no news of possible initiatives and activities, despite the fact that the city of Seoul is involved in both Sharing Cities Action and the Sharing Cities Alliance, of which it was one of the first signatories. In Japan, on the other hand, a network of cities is being created with the will to build and strengthen the national sharing ecosystem. The SEAJ adopts mainly a business approach, and its 280 members include a number of so-called “unicorns” such as Airbnb.

The extremely valuable contribution of the SEAJ, and the reason for its inclusion in our analysis, is that it envisages a special programme which connects cities and relies on the support of city councils to strengthen the ecosystem. The associations’ partners include the Economic Promotion Centre for the Japanese Government and 26 city councils, in addition to sharing organizations and businesses.

The Sharing City Approval Mark is one of the cities-related activities through which sharing cities in Japan are established. To obtain the mark, the city is required to host a sharing business: cities that utilize sharing economy services to tackle regional issues are considered sharing cities. Another valuable initiative is the Sharing City Lab, a school for learning about the sharing economy and the role cities can play in it. To date, the lab offers thirteen online learning videos.

3.6 “Forerunners” and “newcomers” among the sharing cities coalitions

Finally, we reflect on the roles played by the so-called “forerunners” (e.g., Shareable and Ouishare), considered the “expert voices”, and “newcomers”, traditional networks of cities just beginning to address the phenomenon.

Shareable is a non-profit news, action and connection hub for the sharing transformation, interpreted as an emerging bottom-up movement for the solution of the greatest challenges facing contemporary society. It can be considered the first association to genuinely initiate reflection on “sharing”. Currently, it provides a range of services including consultations, presentations, workshops, editorial projects, online promotions, event support, and research. In 2013, it launched the first “Sharing Cities Network”: fifty cities around the world began mapping their shared resources in the first Shareable annual #MapJam²⁰, with the goal of connecting local sharing activists in cities around the world for mutual support and movement building²¹. However, in contrast to the coalitions examined in our case studies, Shareable is a cities network arising out of civil society, as opposed to city councils.

Ouishare²² is an international organization launched in 2012 to connect people, accelerate projects for systemic change, and transform the world through sharing, technology and open, collaborative and horizontal businesses. With more than 60 connectors in 20 cities throughout Europe, Latin and North America, and the Middle East, it has organized more than 300 events, including ten international conferences, and published nine research studies. Ouishare mainly experiments with social models based on collaboration, openness and fairness. The network is not cities-based, but made up of freelancers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. Nevertheless, the organization has been one of the first to question the sharing economy and how communities can take advantage of it, connecting both practitioners and local governments.

Both Shareable and Ouishare are non-governmental networks, though some city councils may participate alongside civic society, freelancers and economic actors.

19 The cities involved were SiHeung-Shi and JeonJu-Shi, as well as the Elementary Local Self Governments - *gu* - of Gwangsan-Gu, Seodaemun-Gu, Seongdong-Gu, Seongbuk-Gu, EunPyung-Gu.

20 The #MapJam is a decentralized event, in collaboration with Ouishare and other partners, to simultaneously map shared resources in cities around the world: <https://www.shareable.net/we-gathered-we-mapped-we-shared-a-mapjam-follow-up/>

21 For more information, see <http://commonstransition.org/portfolio/sharing-cities-network/>.

22 See opensource.ouishare.net.

With respect to “newcomers” such as Eurocities, Metropolis, and UCLG, these are characterized by authority, strong internal relations among the members, and a recently-acquired interest in the sharing economy. According to Vidal (2019), these networks struggle to arrive at a unified position and strategy due to the variety and heterogeneity of their members, as well as the lack of continuity in the political cycles of cities. The emergence of new sharing cities coalitions confirms and suggests the inability of the traditional cities’ networks to effectively support local governments in the sharing field. Nonetheless, they are trying to initiate reflection, as in the case of Eurocities, which has recently incorporated sharing into its agenda.

4. Discussion: collective/collaborative (re)action of cities to the sharing economy

Although the five sharing cities coalitions share common values, the analysis of institutional material, and the information obtained through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, highlights a number of peculiarities. The information is organized in three categories: (I) *Basic features*, (II) *Governance model*, and (III) *Goals, tools and collaboration*.

4.1 Basic features

The following table summarizes the main basic features, showing the different nature of the five case studies and how they differ from one another in terms of level of operation, number of cities involved, coalition promoter, and internal sustainability:

Table 1. Level of operation, number of cities and promoter of the four networks

	SCAlliance	SCAction	ECNSTHR	SCSweden	SEAJ
Level	International	International	International	National	National
Cities	16	85	22	4	26 (of 280 total members)
Promoter	Foundation	City council + University	City council	Central government	Not-for-profit NGO
Sustainability	Fee	No fee - UOC and city council support	No fee - city council involvement	Central government and city council involvement	Fee (not for cities)

In terms of sustainability, some networks are self-sufficient and others, such as SCAlliance and the SEAJ, rely on a membership fee. SCAlliance proposes three different types of memberships that enable access to different services. Fee-based membership/partnership highlights the more consultative nature of this network. The SEAJ also proposes a fee-based membership/partnership with different levels of access, but it is interesting to note that the local governments involved are not required to pay a fee. SCAction receives funding from Barcelona City Council and the UOC. Members of the ECNSTHR are not required to pay a fee. SCSweden receives funding from the Swedish central government, though each of the cities invests its own resources in developing the project locally (city councils allocate funds to sharing activities).

4.2 Governance model

From the main nodes and the actors involved, we can detect a different organization for networks with a national base and those with an international base.

Table 2. Crucial nodes and actors involved in the four networks

	Crucial nodes	Actors involved
SCAlliance	Foundation (ShareNL) as promoter and coordinator Amsterdam City Council as main partner and reference city	Cities and policymakers Local stakeholders from the member city
SCAction	University (Dimmons research group) as coordinator Barcelona City Council as promoter and reference city	Cities Sharing organizations and local stakeholders from the member cities
ECNSTHR	Amsterdam City Council and its Brussels office in a leading role	Cities
SCSweden	National government as promoter (Lund) University as facilitator and coordinator of the network, as well as evaluator. 4 city councils: Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Umeå	Businesses Public sector Academia Civil society All local stakeholders are invited to participate
SEAJ	Not-for-profit NGO (Sharing Economy Association Japan) as promoter and facilitator	Sharing organizations and businesses (mayor players included) Economic Promotion Centre of the Japanese Government City councils (every city has a Sharing Economy Committee)

While SCAlliance is promoted as a foundation that receives funding from Amsterdam City Council, SCAction is promoted by Barcelona City Council, and supported and coordinated by a cognitive actor, the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, through the Dimmons research group of the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute. In the case of SCAlliance, the actors involved are mainly cities with, occasionally, local stakeholders from these cities. In the case of SCAction, the main actors involved are cities together with local stakeholders from those cities, since this network perceives the whole ecosystem linked to a city as important. The ECNSTHR is promoted by and composed of city councils or metropolitan areas.

With respect to national networks, the Swedish network is promoted by the central government as part of the Viable Cities national programme, but the facilitator/coordinator, also responsible for evaluation, is a cognitive actor, Lund University; the four municipalities involved in the project are also active and crucial nodes. All stakeholders within the ecosystem are invited to participate, meaning that businesses, the public sector, academia and civil society are involved. In the Japanese experience, the promoter and coordinator is a not-for-profit NGO; the main actors involved are sharing organizations and businesses (including major players such as Airbnb), the Economic Promotion Centre of the Japanese Government and selected city councils (every city has a Sharing Economy Committee).

4.3 Goals, tools and collaborations

Having examined the goals declared by the five networks during the interviews (Table 3), we can highlight some first considerations. First, SCAlliance aims to enable all partner cities to continuously unlock the opportunities and address the challenges of the sharing and platform economy, providing a collective memory as well as access to each other's materials and experiences.

Connection and exchange are key aspects. In the founder’s words, “By working together, each city administration is better able to work with and for its citizens”.

SCAction aims to promote common action between cities in order to defend the sovereignty of cities against the power of large platforms. In view of the asymmetric power/information relation between big platforms and single cities, the coalition aims to inform and empower cities to engage in critical collective actions and joint lobbying. In addition, the coalition works to promote collaborative actions in support of responsible platform models. The main goals are to assert and ensure city sovereignty; promote socio-economic development; collaborate on regulation and negotiation with platforms; defend and adapt labour and digital rights and public innovation; and define platform differentiation criteria and promote platforms with a positive impact. The ECNSTHR is oriented towards the normative dimension of the sharing economy and is focused on the short-term holiday rental market. Cities in this network seek to jointly address the challenges posed by this kind of platform and have a stronger voice at EU level, and they want data and greater cooperation from platforms.

SCSweden is more oriented towards sustainability and its main goal is to develop world-leading test beds for the sharing economy in the four cities involved in the initiative for the purpose of developing sharing services and digital solutions as an alternative to unicorn companies, and putting Sweden on the map as a country that actively and critically engages with the sharing economy in cities.

The Japanese coalition is more focused on the creation of the country’s sharing economy ecosystem. It aims to overcome the generalized lack of trust and encourage people to use shared services and resources, activating new economic behaviour, as well as to create the ecosystem, intensify the platform environment for business operators, and consolidate the protection system for platform users.

Table 3. Goals of each sharing cities network

	SCAlliance	SCAction	SCSweden	ECNSTHR	SEAJ
Goal	To be an intermediary for city-to-city collaboration and mutual exchange of information	To foster collaboration among cities to develop concrete actions to deal with challenges and opportunities of the platform economy	To develop world-leading test beds for the sharing economy in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Umeå to promote city sustainability	To have a joint voice at EU with regard to legislation to regulate short-term holiday rental platforms	To build the Japanese SE environment and match organizations to it; promote the use of sharing economy services; consolidate legal protection measures

With respect to the *tools* that mark each coalition, we detected a rich adoption of what can be considered technical supports. SCAlliance, for instance, created ALEX, the alliance’s lexicon: a searchable, continuously evolving database featuring a comprehensive collection of the most up-to-date research, reports, case studies, policies, regulations, and market developments in the sharing economy. ALEX gathers all the information on SCAlliance core activities in one place and is curated by the Alliance team. The available resources are crowdsourced from its members, and are available exclusively for paying members/partners of SCAlliance.

SCAction relies on the “analytical star framework” (see section 3) developed by the Dimmons research group; on the Declaration approved during the 2018 Sharing Cities Summit in Barcelona by all the 50 cities that attended; and on a number of studies conducted by Dimmons. SCAction has also developed co-creation materials free to download under a Creative Commons 4.0 licence. These include Dotmocracy canvases for feedback on policy proposals and short-, mid- and long-term action points; canvases and cards for mapping platform economy initiatives worldwide, from a quadruple helix ecosystem perspective (public administration, business, research, and civil society); and canvases and cards for imagining a day in the future of platform

economy (2028), focusing on mobility, housing, leisure, communication, knowledge, education, food, energy, health, gender, shopping, finance, relationships and care. SCAction is also developing an open data commons and visualization resource on sharing cities and the collaborative economy. The database is currently still in a beta version but nevertheless is a valuable tool for public administrators, researchers and entrepreneurs, as well as other stakeholders such as journalists, citizens and civic entities seeking to understand new collaborative economy activities in relation to cities.

The final aspect taken into consideration in this category is cities' belonging to more than one network (*collaborations*). This aspect can be detected for all the networks except the Sharing Economy Association Japan, which involves only Japanese cities not affiliated with the other four networks.

Table 4 Cities' belonging to the four networks (excluded SEJapan) + sign of the Declaration

	SCAlliance	SCAction	ECNSTHR	SCSweden	Declaration signed
Almere		X			
Amsterdam	X	X	X		X
Åstorp		X			
Athens		X	X		X
Atlanta		X			X
Barcelona	X	X	X		X
Berlin		X	X		
Bethlehem		X			X
Bilbao		X			
Bologna		X	X		X
Bordeaux		X	X		X
Brno		X			
Brussels		X	X		
Brussels-Capital Region		X			
Buenos Aires		X			X
Cape Town	X				
Catania Metropolitan City		X			
Cologne		X	X		
Copenhagen	X	X			
A Coruña		X			
Dallas	X				
Debrecen		X			X
El Prat de Llobregat		X			
Fez		X			
Florence		X			
Frankfurt		X			
Ghent	X	X			
Gothenburg	X	X		X	X
Granada		X			
Grenoble		X			X
Helsinki		X			
Izmir		X			
Karlskrona		X			
Karlstad		X			
Kobe		X			X
Krakow		X	X		
Linköping		X			

Lisbon		X			X
London		X	X		
Los Angeles		X			
Madrid		X			X
Malaga		X			
Malmö	X	X		X	
Maribor		X			
Milan		X	X		X
Montelibano		X			
Montreal		X			X
Montreuil		X			
Moscow		X			X
Munich		X	X		
Municipality of Neapoli-Sykies (Thessaloniki Urban area)		X			
Muscat		X			X
Naples		X			
Nice		X			
New York City	X	X			X
Norwich	X				
Palma		X			
Paris		X	X		X
Porto		X	X		
Reykjavík		X			X
Rotterdam		X			
Samsun		X			
San Francisco		X			X
Santiago de Compostela		X			X
São Paulo		X			X
Seoul	X	X			X
Seville		X			
Singapore	X				
Stockholm		X		X	
Sydney		X			
Taipei		X			X
Tallinn		X			
Tartu		X			
Tel Aviv					
Terrassa		X			X
The Hague	X	X			X
Thessaloniki		X			
Toronto	X	X			X
Turin		X			X
Umeå		X		X	
Utrecht		X	X		
Valencia		X	X		X
Vienna		X	X		X
Vilnius		X			
Vitoria		X			X
Warsaw		X	X		
Washington	X	X			
Wroclaw		X			
Zagreb		X			

SCAction counts 85 cities; SCAlliance 16 cities; ECNSTHR 22 cities; SCSweden 4 cities. Amsterdam and Barcelona (in yellow) are part both of SCAction, SCAlliance and the ECNSTHR, demonstrating a strong participatory approach and a clear leading role. In Table 4, cities highlighted in orange are members both of SCAction and the ECNSTHR; cities with no highlighting are members of SCAction exclusively; cities in green highlighting (Copenhagen, Ghent, NYC, Seoul, The Hague, Toronto, Washington) are members both of SCAction and SCAlliance, as are Gothenburg and Malmö, which are also part of SCSweden; while Stockholm and Umeå are members of SCAction and SCSweden, but not of SCAlliance. Note that agreeing to or signing specific documents is not a requirement for involvement in SCAction. Each city's involvement is related to their will to be mutually connected and have a space of common reflection that may become common action. As anticipated, SCAction has developed several activities during the 2018-2019 period, relying on the availability of cities to be involved in research and other studies. The SCAction members are not obliged to sign the Declaration; signing cities are indicated in table 4. The four cities highlighted in blue (Cape Town, Norwich, Dallas and Tel Aviv) are members of SCAlliance exclusively, and joined the alliance in 2019. About ECNSTHR, Florence, Frankfurt, Helsinki and Prague are members of this network exclusively. Note that none of the Swedish cities is a member of the ECNSTHR. The following Venn diagram offers a visual summary which attempts to clarify the identity, affiliations and intersections between four of the five coalitions (the Japanese coalition is not included). Note that the choice to be part of one coalition or another, or to more than one, is related to the goals and approaches adopted by each network.

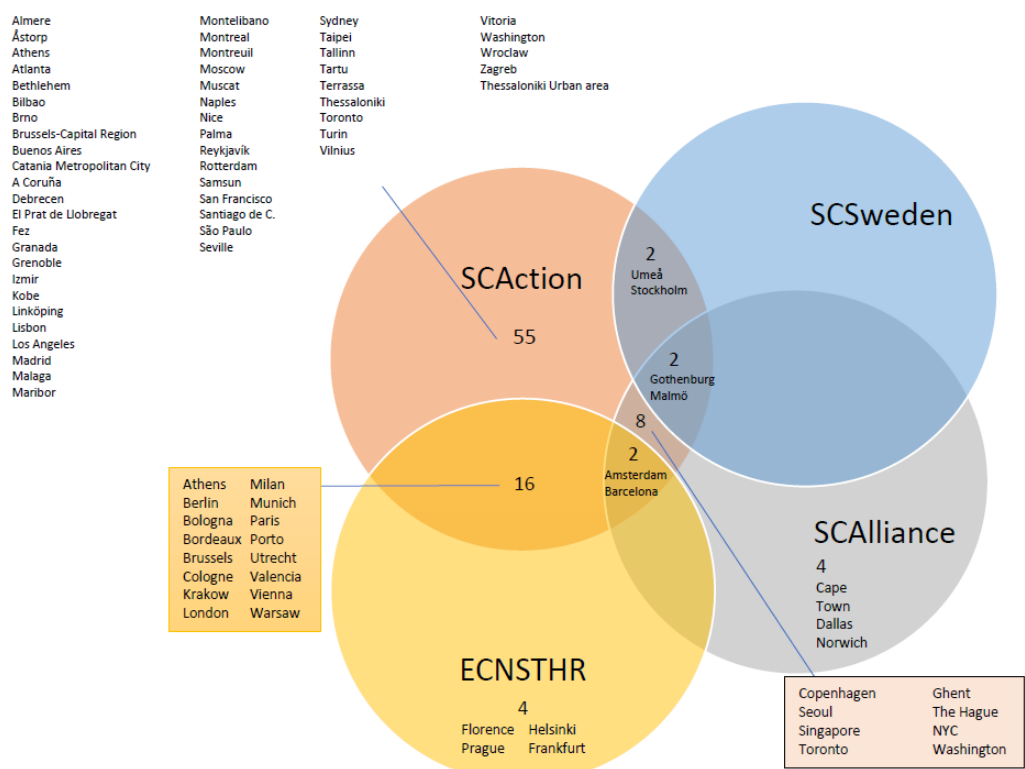


Figure 1. Cities' distribution between SCAlliance, SCAction, the ECNSTHR and SCSweden. Source: Authors' own.

4.4 Different approaches: four modes

From the analysis we can see that different city network approaches/(re)actions emerge: as shown in Table 5, in all the coalitions the “cities connection” is obviously a key element, but then every coalition defines a diverse mode of organization, based on its own background, goals and tools.

Table 5. Approaches of the five cities coalitions

Mode	Key features	Coalition	Description
Consultancy	Knowledge exchange Consultancy services Cities connection	SCAlliance	SCAlliance serves as a consultancy hub facilitating knowledge exchange and connection among cities. It offers consultancy services and acts as a proactive connector since its inception in 2016. Through ShareNL, it provides a platform for mutual knowledge exchange, organizing encounters like the Sharing Cities Summit, and offering specific advice and consultancy services.
Action	Collective and collaborative actions Lobbying power EU-legislation improvement Cities connection	SCAction	SCAction and ECNSTHR are action-oriented coalitions focusing on supporting collective and collaborative actions implemented by cities collectively. SCAction works to address challenges and implement concrete actions, such as advocating for platform regulation.
Action	Collective action towards EU-legislation improvement Lobbying power Cities connection	ECNSTHR	ECNSTHR collectively seeks improved EU legislation on short-term holiday rental platforms, leveraging the lobbying power of a group of cities, notably influencing legislative initiatives at the EU level.
Testing	Development of fair sharing services Sustainability-oriented ecosystem Experimentation Cities connection	SCSweden	SCSweden is focused on creating a local ecosystem promoting fair sharing services oriented towards sustainability. It utilizes urban living labs and test beds to experiment with schemes and solutions. Lund University facilitates and coordinates the network, responsible for evaluation.
Nudging	Creation of national sharing economy ecosystem Commercial focus Collaboration with corporate players Cities connection	SEAJ	SEAJ aims to create a national sharing economy ecosystem, primarily focusing on commercial aspects and forming alliances with corporate players. While cities are involved, the primary focus is on fostering the commercial aspect of the sharing economy rather than collaboration among cities.

At this point we can advance a number of observations. The first relates to the national or international dimension of the network, in that networks with a national dimension express *the need to allow the sharing economy ecosystem to emerge, as a lever for improving citizens' quality of life*. However, some contradictions emerged: while SCSweden is indeed working towards the development of fair sharing services oriented towards sustainability and promoting alternatives to the big platform models, SEAJ includes unicorn companies alongside social sharing enterprises and not-for-profit and community-based services; while SCSweden aims to promote collaboration among cities, for SEAJ the sharing cities project is just a part of a mainly trade-oriented programme.

The networks with an international dimension are not seeking to strengthen the ecosystem, rather, they are *working on the exchange of knowledge and the creation of connection and collaboration among cities*: SCAlliance mainly connects cities by offering a space for mutual knowledge and exchange, creating encounter opportunities, such as the Sharing Cities Summit, and offers specific advice and consultancy services; SCAction is more oriented towards co-creating an action plan and pushing for concrete collective collaborative actions among the cities; The ECNSTHR aims to connect cities to have a joint impact at EU level on legislation that regulates the short-term holiday rental platforms.

In addition it should be underlined that SCAlliance was an outcome of the 2nd Sharing Cities Summit; since then, it has established specific tools such as the magazine and the ALEX lexicon, and still offers consultancy through ShareNL.

On the contrary, SCAction was an outcome of the 3rd Sharing Cities Summit; its aim was to connect cities and implement the Declaration, offering tools designed before its creation. The initiative has also worked to new researches on the latest hot topics for cities. For example it has contributed to the Opinion of the European Committee of the Region (CoR) on platform economy, and to the publication of the report on public policies adopted in seventeen member cities; it has contributed to the launch of the report on platform lobbying in Europe and to the study conducted with Murray Cox on data strategies for cities to facilitate negotiation with platforms. It has also given its support to the European Cities Network with respect to short-term holiday rentals. The main focus for the 2018-2019 period has been on challenges and cities reactions (i.e. negotiate or regulate).

Lastly, the ECNSTHR has pushed the EU, via the mayors in its network, to define a new legislative framework for platforms offering short-term holiday rentals.

According to our case studies, we observe that each city coalition is built over a diverse sharing cities framework. Each one has different views in terms of diagnosis of the state of the sharing economy and its challenges and opportunities, and their criticism or support of the diverse SE models (e.g., "corporate" versus "socially- and community-based"). Their positions on gender equality and sharing economy gender performance are also diverse, and in terms of gender organizational performance, only one of the five coalitions (SCAction) has a woman in a leadership position.

Our coalitions of cities are very close to what Malè (2019) calls a "proactive cities front": emerging forms of city networking that are effective in bringing local issues to global governance. These have specific features observable in our case studies, such as a flexible and light structure, a shared political willingness to upscale local problems, and engaging in short-term actions that can complement the medium- and long-term advocacy initiatives of major representative networks.

In the literature related to cities networks, Cardama (2019) affirms that city networks should include, not only local and regional governments and their networks, but also urban stakeholders from the private sector, as it is the case with SCAlliance and SEAJ, and from the knowledge/cognitive sector, as is the case with SCSweden and SCAction. Indeed, more synergistic and complementary ways of operating can be formulated only by involving the full diversity of actors engaged in city networking (quadruple helix). The sharing cities networks in our study seem to be aware of the importance of multi-stakeholder governance and the involvement of all the relevant local actors. In the case of the ECNSTHR, only city councils are involved, given the network's goal of lobbying the EU for a new legislative framework for short-term holiday rental platforms, but clearly their joint action adds value to their strategy.

Roca (2019) believes that networks also need to move beyond the advocacy narrative of traditional municipalism towards more technical discourse capable of demonstrating the actual capacity of local governments to tackle global challenges by defining better indicators and other instruments of public policy. In this regard, SCAction makes available a number of useful tools (the analytical framework star, the toolkit, the Declaration) and demonstrates the ability to shape and conduct specific research. SCSweden also has a toolkit and is working on sharing sustainable indicators.

The interviews highlighted the advantages of city network membership, such as the engagement for open common reflections and the exchange of expertise, the access to consultancy and to information on the state of the art of the sharing economy and platform features, the ability to reach the critical mass needed to acquire international legitimacy, visibility and strength, the empowerment for collective action, as well as a sufficient influence for lobbying the EU or other actors and joint connection with platforms and definition of negotiation actions.

At the same time, our interviewees indicated a number of stumbling blocks typical of cities networks, such as the dispersion of energy / diffusion of effort; the lack of complementary collaboration and coordination between networks (de la Varga, 2019); some problems of communication; the lack of effective answers to challenges posed by the sharing economy (inability to provide solutions, strategies and effective actions that prompt transformations); or the reproduction of imbalances between north and south; the adoption of solutions that are more symbolic than effective and the promotion of a marketing product.

Summarizing, the analysis allows us to categorize our networks according to their type of action/ reaction to the sharing economy, identifying four different modes: *consultancy*, *action*, *testing*, *nudging*.

Consultancy is exemplified by SCAlliance, which offers a consultancy service to cities, with the undeniable value of having driven connection among cities since its first meeting in Amsterdam in 2016, working through ShareNL in a proactive way and as a connector.

Action is exemplified by SCAction, which is oriented towards supporting collective and collaborative actions designed and implemented by cities collectively. Suitable also for the ECNSTRH, which is collectively seeking improved EU-legislation of short-term holiday rental platforms. The lobbying power of a group of cities in relation to platforms or supra-institutions is greater than that of a single city.

Testing is exemplified by SCSweden, which is creating a local ecosystem based on a sharing economy oriented towards sustainability, adopting schemes tested in urban living labs using the test bed tool. The programme is funded and validated by the support of a cognitive actor, such as a university.

Nudging is exemplified by the SEAJ, which is trying to create a national sharing economy ecosystem, in alliance with corporate players. The involvement of cities is noteworthy even if the focus is mainly on the commercial aspect rather than the collaboration among cities. This mode also applies to SCAction, which is acting as a nudging actor in promoting the collective and collaborative action of cities working together.

As a final observation, if we consider SCAlliance and SCAction alone, we can detect a contraposition between one approach based on paid consultancy and another based on an attempt to be a connector of cities that fosters the development of concrete collective actions.

Conclusion and further steps

The paper begins with a presentation of the sharing economy in the urban context and the main reactions among cities, but offers the advantage of switching from a single-city ("within-city") approach to a multi-city ("between-cities") approach. The study has the added value of not being limited to the comparison of a set of single cities, as is usually found in the literature (van der Eijnden, 2017; Bernardi & Diamantini, 2018; Zvolška et al., 2018; Vidal & Fuster Morell, 2018). To the best of the authors' knowledge, for the first time in the literature, the paper focuses on the wider framework of the sharing cities coalitions attempting to create links between cities and compares some of the main coalitions. It illustrates the international relations and action and collaboration between cities by identifying the current sharing cities coalitions, presenting their genesis, features, governance models, goals, tools and type of collaboration, and demonstrating that they can be very diverse in their policy decisions, strategies and approaches.

Shifting from a single-city to a multi-city approach, the study provides valuable insights into the diverse nature of these networks and their collaborative collective (re)action to the sharing economy. In particular, in replying to the research questions, the study has identified in the international panorama four categories of coalitions: consultative, collaborative collective ac-

tion-oriented, testing sustainable solutions and nudging. It has emerged that each sharing cities coalition 1. exhibits distinct features (such as level of operation, number of cities involved, promoter and sustainability model), 2. has different governance models, with some coordinated by foundations or NGOs (e.g., SCAlliance, SEAJ) and others led by city councils or governments (e.g., SCAction, SCSweden), and 3. also goals, tools and collaboration vary.



Figure 2 Summarizing table of the four modes emerged

SCAlliance aims to operate as an intermediary for city-to-city collaboration and the mutual exchange of information; it is consultative in nature, charges a fee, and relies on connection and exchange, exemplifying what we call a *consultative* mode of (re)action. SCAction aims to foster collaboration among cities to develop concrete actions to address the challenges and opportunities of the sharing economy, and seeks responsible platform models, and collaboration in regulation and negotiation with platforms; it charges no fee, and embodies an *action* mode of (re)action. The ECNSTHR falls into the same *action* category, since it is a coalition oriented towards the normative dimension of the sharing economy that seeks a better legal framework for the regulation of short-term holiday rental platforms. SCSweden is more sustainability oriented and its main goal is to develop world-leading test beds for the sharing economy in four cities; it exemplifies the so-called *testing* mode. Finally, the Japanese coalition is more focused on the creation of the country's sharing economy ecosystem, intensifying the platform environment for business operators while simultaneously involving cities; it embodies what we call the *nudging* mode.

From the study also emerge the attempts made by coalitions to involve other types of stakeholders, and create adequate tools to address the challenges posed by the phenomenon. In addition, the national networks seem better able to conduct ecosystem work than the international ones. The cities currently involved in these coalitions are growing in number, and in many cases they are also affiliating with more than one coalition. In particular, Amsterdam and Barcelona, in the European context at least, are playing a strong leading role and pushing for the creation of trade unions to empower cities.

The COVID-19 crisis and the associated increase in the use of platforms is exacerbating the importance of this type of collective action among cities, as demonstrated by the online Seoul Summit of November 2020, which called for even greater connection and collaborative action between cities.

Nevertheless, after the pandemic these coalitions have slow down their activities or reoriented them. SCAlliance is now working with the goal to empowers city governments and urban professionals to better govern in the digital age. SCAction has not seen further developments since the virtual meeting in 2020 hosted by the city of Seoul. The ECNSTHR has continued to operate actively to advocate for legislative action on tackling illegal short-term rentals. Mayors, deputy mayors, and other city officials from EU cities (such as Barcelona, Bologna, Brussels, Arezzo, Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Lyon, Porto, Florence), as well as dozens of Members of the European

Parliament (MEPs) and Eurocities, signed a letter in 2022 demanding action to a European Commission perceived as abandoning the project of a legislative initiative to regulate short-term rentals; recently (2024), the European Parliament passed the long-awaited regulation requiring platforms to share data. The SCSweden was linked to a national project lasting four years, initiated in 2017 and concluded in 2021. Over the course of four years, it developed and published various reports and outputs that summarized the activities and findings from different initiatives within the overall program, including the test-beds and strategic projects. Finally, the SEAJapan remained active until 2019, hosting an annual summit, but currently there appear to be no recent activities.

Concluding the study contributes to the growing body of literature on cities networks and the sharing economy, providing valuable insights for policymakers, city officials, and practitioners seeking to enhance their engagement with digital platforms and promote sustainable urban development through collaborative actions and knowledge sharing.

Moving forward, future research should delve deeper into the traditional cities networks and their efforts to address the sharing economy, how they perceive it, their power to address critical issues in this field, and the types of relationship they could have with the emerging sharing cities networks. It would also be interesting exploring the reconfiguration created in the general ecosystem of cities networks by the new emerging sharing cities coalitions, by the multiplication and diversification of the actors involved in international city networking (Losada & Abdullah, 2019), and by the large-scale investment of private capital and interests that are creating competitive dynamics. Further analysis on the overlapping and multiple affiliations among networks and participants is required too. Lastly, it should be considered the evolving dynamics of these coalitions post-COVID-19, particularly regarding their response to digitalization and the shifting landscape of urban challenges.

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