How sustainable is the sharing economy? On the sustainability connotations of sharing economy platforms

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Why did we conduct this research?

This paper describes and classifies the sustainability connotation of sharing economy platforms. The platforms here refer to the intermediary functioning to create the accessing or exchanges, payments, and evaluations among the peers or companies. Based on how the sharing economy has spread into different sectors of the economy, and also as a result of the different development paths of the sharing economy, it is relevant to address similarities and differences among different platforms.

Key Findings

- The development of the sharing economy on the meta-level does not reflect a homogeneous development from sustainability towards non-sustainability, although research has indicated a shift from sharing and accessing to acquire and consuming.

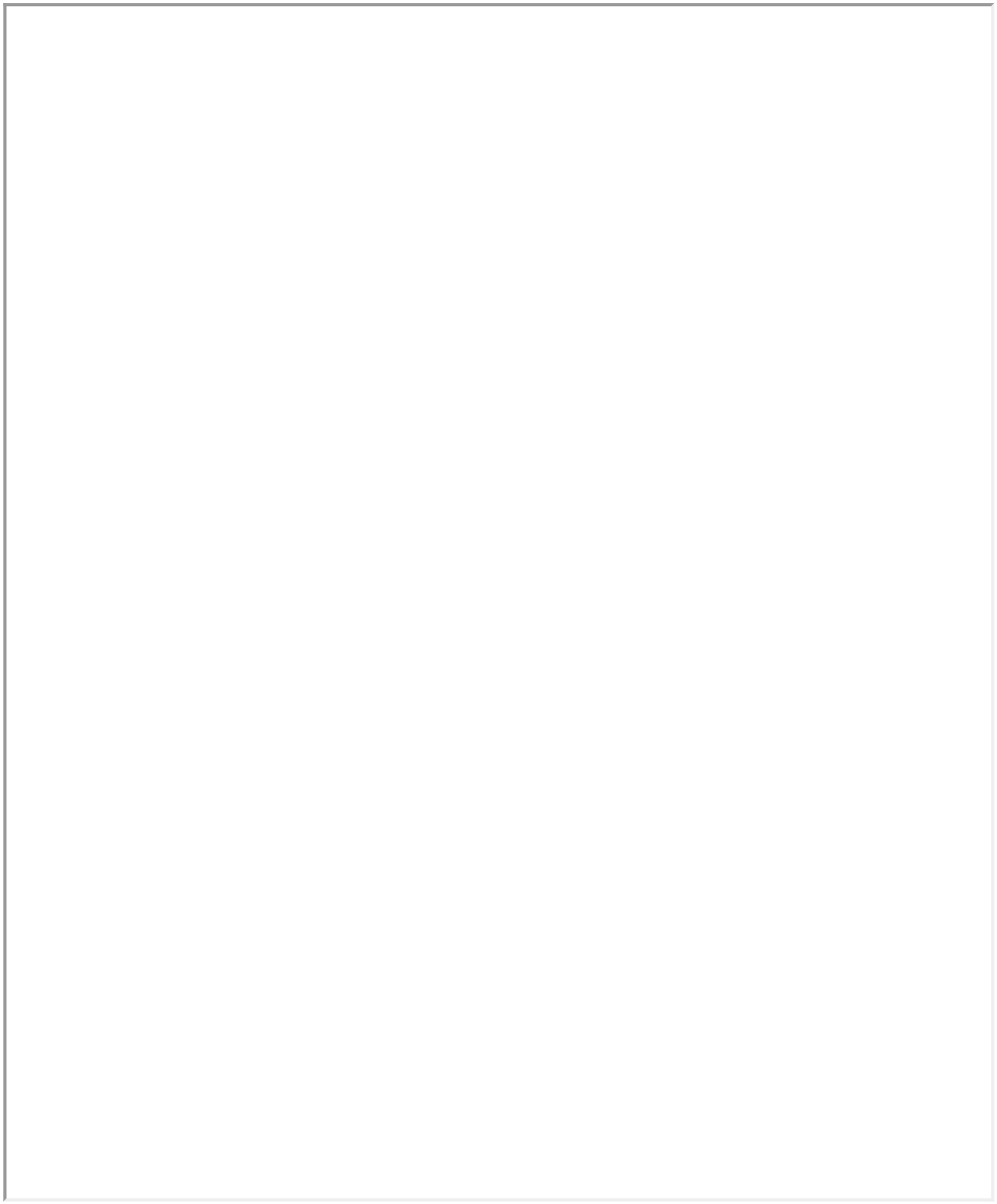
- Sustainability-oriented platforms are still emerging in the sharing economy. These are strongly connected to specific sectors, while the findings also point at how dominating role model sharing economy platforms put less emphasis on sustainability orientations.

- The development from accessing and sharing to acquiring and consuming

may rather be the consequence of the development of individual platforms than an overall development in the sharing economy.

- The sustainability orientation of sharing economy platforms as new platforms emerge, suggests following the legal requirements of those traditional sectors of the economy that they establish themselves in.

- The sharing economy does not drive a sustainability movement, but rather adjusts to those circumstances it aims to become a part of. Expectations for the future would be that sustainability orientations of sharing economy platforms would continue as the sharing economy spreads into new sectors, but then be based on legal requirements connected to these specific sectors, while further developments of individual platforms may put sustainability orientations beyond (and even as part of) such legal requirements at risk.



Reference

Geissinger, A., Laurell, C., Oberg, C. & Sandstrom, C. (2018) How sustainable is the sharing economy? On the sustainability connotations of sharing economy platforms. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 206: 419-429.