

Collaborative X Circular economy in European cities

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Why did we select this research?

It is the first study that explicitly explores the intersection of the collaborative (sharing) and the circular economy in cities.

Key findings

Definitions

- The Urban Circular Collaborative Economy is a concept bringing together the circular and the collaborative economy. It designates initiatives using a collaborative way to exchange goods and services with the aim to use primary resources more efficiently.
- The Urban Circular Collaborative Economy encompasses initiatives using the collaborative economy as a mean to achieve circular economy goals. The collaborative economy can be a powerful tool to reach circular economy policy objectives by allowing the exchange, re-use and repair of assets, instead of buying new ones.
- Trust is important is an important building factor of as much for the circular economy than the collaborative economy, which further links the two concepts with each other.

Impacts

- The Urban Circular Collaborative Economy has important potential impacts and positive social and environmental externalities for cities and regions.
- The Urban Circular Collaborative Economy contribute to increasing awareness of environmental matters, either directly (e.g. they conduct themselves awareness-raising campaigns or communication around environmental issues) or indirectly (e.g. they trigger a change in habits and make people more receptive to environmental concerns).
- The Urban Circular Collaborative Economy has shown to be an important tool to foster social cohesion and stimulate the economy, especially within the territories facing societal changes and poverty issues. Initiative such as community gardens, clothes libraries, energy cooperatives, are also a way to access cheaper resources and foster community links among more vulnerable people.
- The Urban Circular Collaborative Economy has an important social return on investment which is not measured, therefore, fails to be recognised for its real value.

Success factors and obstacles

- Initiatives are more numerous in “close communities” (to be understood as densely populated areas of biggest cities) which present a more favourable environment for sharing practices. The initiatives tend to gather around specific neighbourhoods, where networks of users are well developed.
- There is need of a strong network of stakeholders cooperating with each other among the actors of the Urban Circular Collaborative Economy. The presence of cultural associations or networks of social economy proven to create a more favourable uptake of the Urban Circular Collaborative Economy initiatives.
- Territories having a well-established regulatory framework, available resources, an innovative environment and entrepreneurial approach have shown a better uptake of Urban Circular Economy initiatives.
- Successful projects are based on (i) innovative business environment; (ii) entrepreneurial approach; (iii) cooperation with the municipality; (iv) involvement of public authorities, (v) participation dedicated working groups/forums/network at the international/national or local level as well as strong presence of cultural associations or social economy networks; (vi) promotion of values that are shared in the society.
- Among the major obstacles to the successful development of Urban Circular Collaborative Economy are: (i) lack of knowledge about the initiatives and their potential impacts; (ii) inadequate policy framework; (iii) vulnerable business model environment; (iv) lack of support, especially in terms of funding; (v) lack of continuity of activity.

Recommendations:

To make the collaborative economy a meaningful tool and to ensure that the initiatives contribute to circular economy objectives, recommendations under this chapter are structured around three pivotal areas:

1. Better knowledge: policymakers need to understand the existing initiatives and the environment in which they operate. This is done by a) setting out clear policy objectives in line with national and regional/local sustainability challenges, b) identifying the impacts and the mechanisms that enable Urban Circular Collaborative Economy initiatives to achieve these impacts, c) understanding how the existing landscape of initiatives maps onto those mechanisms, d) fostering learning among interested actors, e) monitoring data. By better understanding the “impact theory” behind the initiatives and grasping the good indicators to monitor them, policy makers have the necessary tools to create a favourable environment for those initiatives that answer to their territory's sustainability challenges.
 2. Better regulation: once having understood the context and tools at their disposal, policymakers need to develop framework conditions to help the initiatives they want to foster. This can be done through and most importantly a) creating an institutionalised framework to foster creation and growth of the initiatives in the longer term, b) active guidance and support, c) leaving space for experimentation and knowledge sharing.
- Better funding: policymakers need to make appropriate resources available to make sure the initiatives that are contributing to local/regional policy objectives receive sufficient funding and the right type of funding: either by providing funding themselves, or by supporting them to generate the required private income for their operations. Leverage the current initiatives landscapes and/or to reduce their current vulnerable points. The funding decision should move from financing a number

of individual projects without a clear impact chain, towards financing the one that creates momentum for a real change in the urban environment.

Description of territories:

- Flanders (policy focus: suburbanisation and climate change), given the existing regional and national climate objectives and mobility issues in Flanders, regional stakeholders aim to better understand how to foster social connections and improve the accessibility of different areas in a sustainable way (“making links between the commons”).
- Greece (policy focus: economic growth and social exclusion), given a long recession period that the country suffered from during 2008 economic crisis, which resulted in a high unemployment rate of youth; multiplied by specific geographical characteristics (insularity and mountainous areas), national stakeholders chose to study the new economic models as a mean contribution to the poverty reduction and transition towards green energy.
- Maribor (policy focus: climate change, economic growth and social inclusion) given cities high unemployment rate, change in a market industry (low economic indicators) and the lack of innovative ideas, the municipality stakeholders decided to foster employment by increasing city’s circularity by the promotion of “cooperative economy networks”. According to the municipality stakeholders, the cooperative economy network should help to strengthen the collaboration between different types of stakeholders (municipality, civil society, enterprises representing different sectors of the economy, population of all sort of ages etc.) to set the path for the new business development in the city via Urban Circular Collaborative Economy.
- For Porto (policy focus: urbanisation, economic growth and social exclusion), given the recent progression towards development of a circular economy (Porto’s roadmap towards 2030 and national Action Plan for the Circular Economy in Portugal 2017-2020), increased tourist attractiveness and strong presence of social economy in the city, municipality stakeholders decided to focus on future more consistent promotion of circular and collaborative lifestyle in the city.
- Prato (policy focus: urbanisation, economic growth and social exclusion) given city’s industrial past and existing great concentration of Chinese immigrant workers in the city, the municipality stakeholders perceive the new economic model as a springboard towards the regeneration of urban spaces left behind with deindustrialisation, and inclusion of population from cultural backgrounds.
- For the Hague (policy focus: climate change, economic growth and social exclusion), given the cities climate ambitions together with difficulties in fighting social poverty and exclusion along a high immigration rate among cities’ inhabitants, the municipality stakeholders consider Urban Circular and Collaborative Economy as a mean towards reduction of poverty and promotion of social entrepreneurship.

SHARING - Final Report.pdf 

Reference

Project website: <https://www.collaborativexcircular.com/>

Report: <https://www.espon.eu/sharing>
