

Report on the IPS-MCCY Sharing City Workshop

By Tay Mei Ling and Nadzirah Samsudin

The wonderful thing about building social capital and initiating social capital as a government, is that it can surprise you in very good ways.

— Mr Pieter van de Glind
Co-founder of shareNL and Sharing Cities Alliance

ON 25 JUNE 2019, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) jointly held the [IPS-MCCY Sharing City Workshop](#) at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. The workshop was the outcome of an IPS study commissioned by MCCY to understand the sharing landscape in Singapore. It was attended by nearly 70 participants comprising policymakers, businesses, innovators, academics and representatives from the people sector. It was held under the Chatham House Rule.



Participants at the IPS-MCCY Sharing City Workshop.

Introduction

In his opening remarks, Mr Philip Ong, Deputy Secretary (Community, Youth & Sports) at MCCY, said that the idea of a sharing city was attractive because it recognised three things: that the economy was not just about transactions but about relationships and trust; humans were interdependent; and everyone had something worthwhile to offer and share. He acknowledged that the nature of a sharing city was very “amorphous and broad”, though this is both a strength and a weakness — while a broad coalition of stakeholders with varying interests can come together and potentially collaborate, an “easy consensus” on sharing would be difficult to reach.

Key Trends and Developments in the International Sharing Economy Landscape

Mr Pieter van de Glind, co-founder of shareNL & Sharing Cities Alliance spoke about how shareNL has contributed to the creation of online sharing platforms, which encourage citizens to participate in the sharing economy and use it for social good. An example is the promotion of shared mobility in Amsterdam by utilising garages for car-sharing. Some sharing platforms have turned commercial, he said, citing accommodation-sharing platform Airbnb, which has started launching their own branded apartments.

Sharing initiatives could foster relationships among individuals, he said, citing the example of Refugees Welcome in Europe, a platform that connects refugees to homes in local communities; and WeHelpen in the Netherlands, where users request for help and support from one another in times of need. Building and initiating social capital could “surprise the government in good ways,” he said, raising the example of residents who met and bonded over a community garden provided by city officials in The Hague, Netherlands, and who subsequently started their own community in sustainable energy.

He envisioned Singapore as a front-runner in Asia that could create spaces for sharing communities to thrive. As a member of the Sharing City Alliance, Singapore could even host the next sharing cities summit.

Sharing Initiatives and the Sharing Landscape in Singapore

Given the numerous definitions of and nomenclatures for sharing initiatives, it would be more useful to focus on the characteristics of sharing, said Dr Soon, relaying key findings from the IPS study commissioned by MCCY. This included looking at access and meaningful interactions among users instead of the ownership of goods. Based on existing research, people who participate in sharing initiatives tend to be younger, more educated, higher-income and urban-dwelling.

Dr Soon then presented a map of Singapore’s sharing landscape, based on the level at which sharing takes place (individual, collective or public) and motivation type (intrinsic or extrinsic). Most sharing initiatives met extrinsic needs such as cost savings and convenience, and took place at the collective level. Examples include co-working spaces and ride sharing platforms.

Dr Soon also presented findings from a series of focus group discussions (FGD) with users and innovators of sharing initiatives. FGD participants tended to associate volunteering with sharing as “sharing is caring.” Diverse needs and wants that motivate sharing were also

unearthed, such as to save costs and to help others. She then drew a parallel between how innovators of revenue-generating initiatives (e.g., Sharent) were driven to solve everyday problems creatively, while innovators of non-revenue generating initiatives (e.g., HoodChampion) were driven to promote social mixing. Despite low public awareness of initiatives in the latter category, there was latent interest among FGD participants to participate in them, said Dr Soon.

Sharing Economy 2.0 — Security, Trust and Service

Mr Patrick Wong, President of the Sharing Economy Association (Singapore) provided a brief overview of the association and how it represents members on matters relating to the sharing economy. He noted that current legislation seemed unable to cope with the rapid pace of digital innovation. For example, the government faces challenges in regulating online sharing platforms such as Speedoc, an on-demand medical service, due to uncertainty over whether it should be regulated as a technology company or a medical clinic. He added that the lack of “social and community sharing” in Singapore could be a result of Singaporeans’ preference to rely on the government to problem-solve.



(From left to right) Mr Patrick Wong, Ms Lucinda Seah, Dr Carol Soon and Mr Pieter van de Glind.

Dialogue Session

Ms Lucinda Seah, Deputy Director (Strategic Planning) at MCCY chaired the discussion session. Among various questions asked, a key concern raised was whether the concept of “sharing” could be stretched too far, given the wide diversity of sharing practices. To this, Ms Seah said that sharing should not be seen from a “hard-nosed, purist perspective” as it might

neglect any informal sharing that occurs. From MCCY's perspective, sharing should create a sense of community. This point was echoed by Dr Soon, who added that taking a "purist stance" might omit the positive externalities that different types of sharing engender.

Participants were also concerned about the issue of trust. Mr Wong and Mr van de Glind both agreed that to engender trust among users, rules and expectations of norms and behaviours had to be clearly communicated. Dr Soon added that social regulation, particularly a rewards system, could be implemented to promote positive behaviour.

A participant who runs a goodwill exchange store asked if a sharing platform such as GoGoVan could incorporate a feature for users to donate and deliver goods to stores. Mr Wong replied that there were complexities in doing so. However, Mr van de Glind suggested for this to be a starting point for a people-private partnership. Dr Soon added that in Chicago, a public-private partnership between Lyft and residents saw people giving up their cars for Lyft rides, to gain redeemable credit.

Mr van de Glind added that there had to be a group of early adopters who were willing to experiment in order to drive more bottom-up sharing initiatives. Small acts of sharing should also be celebrated. Dr Soon said that as sharing initiatives emerge organically, the city would have to embrace some form of "messiness".

In closing, Mr van de Glind recommended that the Singapore government articulate a "sharp definition" for sharing initiatives, one that could be expanded upon and allow for exceptions.

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