IPS STUDY ON SHARING INITIATIVES AND THE SHARING LANDSCAPE IN SINGAPORE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Researchers:

Dr Carol Soon, Senior Research Fellow

Nadzirah Samsudin, Research Assistant

Besides industrialisation and urbanisation, the Internet has been touted as the next major threat to community life in contemporary times. While some researchers have raised concerns over digital alienation and fragmentation of communities, others have found that technology helps build social capital, provides opportunities for civic engagement, and contributes to innovation. One of the outcomes of technology deployment is that sharing initiatives are gaining traction worldwide.

This report, commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), is a culmination of a two-phased study — the first to examine the entire sharing landscape in Singapore and was conducted from October 2018 to April 2019.

Phase 1 of the study reviewed different global initiatives for sharing, identified the factors and conditions that facilitate sharing, and examined policies in countries with notable sharing initiatives. The scope of our review and analysis for Phase 1 include policy briefs, white papers, research briefs and academic journal articles that were published on the topic of sharing initiatives. Researchers also mapped the sharing landscape in Singapore.

Key Findings of Phase 1:

➢ There is no uniform concept on sharing and what should be considered as a "sharing initiative". Sharing took on different meanings for different people. The common definitions are: Sharing is about the pooling of resources, resource distribution, and sharing means caring.

➢ There are diverse needs and wants that motivate sharing, the transaction type, the transaction process and the outcomes or benefits. It is thus more beneficial to focus on the dimensions, characteristics and features of sharing. Several common determinants across sharing initiatives include a reliance on online platforms and/or mobile devices to connect people; transient and temporary transactions; and presence and emergence of meaningful interactions and trust.

➢ The outcomes of sharing can be both positive and negative, and can affect cities, societies and individuals. At the city level, sharing can reduce cost or transform how services are delivered to residents. It can also help to develop local economies. At the societal level, sharing initiatives promote shared experiences, build communities and strengthen solidarity. On the downside, commercial or for-profit sharing initiatives have created unlevelled competition in traditionally protected industry, such as the case of ride-hailing companies such as Grab and the taxi industry. Existing inequalities, such as the digital divide (because sharing is predicated on access to technology) and income divide (where the benefits of the sharing economy do not trickle down to the needy), could be exacerbated.

- Participants of sharing initiatives tend to be young, well educated, have high income and live in urban areas. The motivations for sharing can be broadly classified into three types — instrumental motives (e.g., to save costs and for convenience), social-hedonic motives (e.g., enjoyment and wanting to part of a community), and normative motives (e.g., altruism and sustainability).

- The factors that influence sharing include: low awareness among citizens about sharing initiatives; cultural barriers that hinder residents' openness and willingness to share; the value and significance they place on objects; how developed a country is in terms of innovation and its IT infrastructure; and the roles governments play to facilitate sharing (i.e., as enabler and facilitator, as innovator and creator, and as regulator). The report showcases four case studies — Amsterdam, China, Medellin and Seoul — and illustrates how governments facilitate and promote sharing in different ways.

A mapping of existing sharing initiatives in Singapore (see pages 93 and 98 of the report) shows that the majority of the initiatives in Singapore meet extrinsic needs (e.g., cost savings and convenience) and take place at the collective level.

Phase 2 comprised findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that were conducted with six groups of individuals (55 in total). They included users and innovators of different types of sharing initiatives in Singapore — non-revenue-generating (NRG), revenue-generating (RG) initiatives and community-based initiatives. We also included lapsed users and non-users in the study. Through the FGDs, we examined the motivations, enabling factors and barriers that influenced people's participation (and non-participation) in sharing, as well as the conditions for success and failure of sharing initiatives in Singapore.

Key Findings of Phase 2:

- Sharing took on different meanings for different people in Singapore. The common definitions were: Sharing was about the pooling of resources, resource distribution, and sharing means caring.

- Users of NRG and community-based initiatives, and innovators of NRG initiatives felt that sharing had an environmental dimension as it reduced waste. Users of RG initiatives on the other hand associated sharing with the attainment of personal and extrinsic benefits, such as cost savings and convenience. Innovators of RG initiatives emphasised the "collaborative consumption" aspect of sharing.

- The FGD participants shared different types of resources, ranging from physical spaces, clothes, services, to immaterial things such as ideas and information. Sharing took place through formal initiatives that were mediated and facilitated by organisations, informal sharing networks, and in residential communities.

- Some FGD participants felt that volunteering was a form of sharing, as it involved the sharing of one's time. Participants also saw sharing as a way of helping those in need or who are less well-off. Similarly, innovators of NRG initiatives emphasised the pro-social and non-transactional dimensions of sharing.

- Participants had different opinions regarding the involvement of money in sharing. While most users and innovators of NRG initiatives felt that sharing should be driven by altruism, care and concern, and hence should not involve monetary transactions, some felt that the intent behind charging a fee was important (e.g., charging a nominal fee as a security deposit versus making a profit). Users of RG initiatives, particularly those who provided resources and services, looked forward to making a profit or

earning some income. Innovators of RG initiatives said that they should be able to "break even".

➢ Users were mainly motivated by three Cs — costs, convenience and sometimes community — to participate in sharing initiatives. Their interest and needs also influenced their participation. The barriers to participation were lack of time and convenience, and inconsiderate behaviour of users.

➢ Sharing initiatives fulfilled users' personal needs and provided both extrinsic (e.g., saving money and bringing convenience) and intrinsic benefits (e.g., they felt good as they are helping someone in need). NRG initiatives also contributed to users' emotional wellbeing.

➢ Innovators of NRG and RG initiatives faced different types of challenges. Innovators of NRG initiatives were constrained by the lack of funds and manpower to sustain their initiatives, and had to manage partners (e.g., venue sponsors) who had different expectations. Innovators of RG initiatives were confronted with high costs to entry in a small market, a nascent sharing landscape and constraints posed by regulation. Both groups of innovators faced common cultural challenges — people's lack of understanding of sharing and their attitudes towards sharing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations for research and policy on developing the sharing landscape in Singapore include:

➢ Singapore is ripe for sharing. It has a well-established IT infrastructure, an educated and technology savvy population, a vibrant tourism industry and a government that is open to collaborations with the private and people sector.

➢ Given that sharing also takes place through informal networks, further studies are needed to determine the extent of informal sharing in Singapore. As RG initiatives have unintended social benefits, future research should not discount the social dimensions of these initiatives and examine their impact on cultivating social ties and building communities.

➢ To shift public consciousness and discourse away from the revenue-oriented paradigm of sharing, greater recognition and support should be given to NRG initiatives and informal sharing.

➢ The government plays an important role in growing the sharing landscape — it has a strong signalling effect and it can provide infrastructural support. Thus, policymakers should consider endorsing certain sharing behaviours and initiatives to cultivate positive sharing norms. Innovators also suggested the establishment of a Trustmark to help build public trust in sharing initiatives.

➢ Regulation is a double–edged sword. It may pose constraints to an initiative, but it can also help assuage users' fears relating to quality and safety. Thus, consultations between government agencies and innovators are necessary and should start at an early stage.

➢ A consistent and concerted effort across public agencies is required to build a sharing city. This can be done through identifying and articulating a common vision or goal, or by getting the different agencies to work together on a specific sharing project.