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Kirklees, Comoodle and the Collaborative Economy: The Politics of Sharing

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CSRC

October 13 | 2015

A definition from Nesta (2014)

'Making sense of the UK collaborative economy'

- Do you use an app to find free stuff – a spare hand drill you can borrow for some DIY?
- Do you live in co-housing, work in a co-working space, or use a local alternative currency?
- Do you ever resell, swap or give away your old stuff in an online marketplace?

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Across the UK, a growing community of individuals and organisations is exploring and embracing these kinds of activities. At the heart of this new movement is the idea of collaborating to consume, learn, finance and produce in new ways!

So what is Collaborative Consumption?

- Proponents of ‘sharing’ and ‘collaborative consumption’ often provide critiques of consumer capitalism – new economics!
- *‘An economic model in which consumers use online tools to collaborate on owning, renting, sharing, and trading goods and services’ –*
- *What’s Mine is Yours* – (Botsman and Rogers 2010)
- Assumption about the use of new technologies!

The broad territory of sharing

Sharing cities briefing

Friends of the Earth 2013

	Things	Services	Experiences
Individual	Swapping, bartering	Ride sharing, AirBnB	Skill sharing
Collective	Car clubs, Tool Banks	Child care, Credit Unions, Time Banks	Sports clubs, Social media
Public	Libraries, Free Cycling	Health Services, Public Transport	Politics, Public space

The politics of sharing...

October 11, 2015 5:48 pm

Uber stuck in city traffic

Share

Author alerts

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Comments

The ride-hailing service needs to win its political battles



The use of technology
vs.
Established interests

Everybody loves disruption, except the people who are being disrupted. As Uber, the app-based ride-hailing service, has spread rapidly from its San Francisco home to cities around the world, it has repeatedly faced resistance from incumbent taxi operators, who are often politically influential. Regulators and legislators from Brussels to Beijing have moved to restrict Uber's operations.

Some of the fiercest opposition has come in Europe, where the culture clash between the remorseless competition of the US tech industry and the locals' respect for tradition and deference to established interests is especially stark. While Uber's operations give rise to legitimate questions about safety and congestion, the public interest issues used as pretexts for cracking down on the company are often spurious. The proposed new restrictions in London, which would put Uber at a competitive disadvantage against the city's black cabs, are a case in point.

Five Cities Selected As Winners in Bloomberg Philanthropies 2014 Mayors Challenge

BLOOMBERG PHILANTHROPIES | SEPTEMBER 17, 2014

- Barcelona, Spain: Collaborative Care Networks for Better Aging
- Athens, Greece: synAthina, a Public Platform for Engaged Citizens
- Kirklees, United Kingdom: Comoodle, managing resources
- Stockholm, Sweden: Biochar - for a Better City Ecosystem
- Warsaw, Poland: Virtual Warsaw - Urban Information System for Visually Impaired

Mayors Challenge Online Community

Creating a network of city innovators



Welcome to the **Mayors Challenge Online Community!**

Whether you are one of the 16 finalists or 5 winners of the Bloomberg Mayors Challenge, you are part of a small but increasingly influential band of city innovators that are blazing a trail for city administrations the world over. With this in mind, Bloomberg Philanthropies are seeking to convene a global community of city innovators facilitated online.

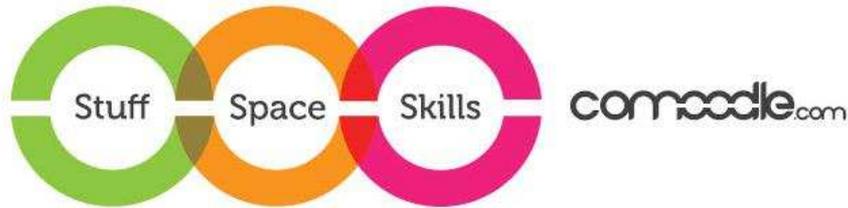
This digital platform will function as an active forum for learning and collaboration within the sphere of city innovation.

Why did Kirklees win?

- Kirklees Council's big idea is to rethink how public resources are managed...
- 'We know that communities have the potential to pull together and make a real difference in their neighbourhoods. Yet masses of stuff, space and skills are unused or not used to capacity. Often we don't know what's available, or how to access it'.
- 'Comoodle' is our idea for connecting people who have a passion to make their area better, giving everyone access to the resources we need and building trust through sharing.'

Kirklees Council and the sharing revolution

- Stuff – furniture, machinery...
- Space – office, warehouse...
- Skills – training, health...



- **Context is everything...** *'They'll be nothing left to share soon'!*
- It's important to recognize that comoodle is being developed in a policy context dominated by austerity measures and funding cuts
- As we will discuss, the fact that Kirklees is selling off assets (stuff and space) and making people (skills) redundant is a big hindrance to Comoodle!

Our work for Kirklees...



We're running some very small scale Comoodle pilots to help us learn about the practicalities of sharing stuff, space and skills. This will help us to identify any barriers to getting things done, learn about getting people interested in local projects and build a better Comoodle.

- **We were commissioned to evaluate these pilots to challenge some initial assumptions and develop insight to aid the roll out of Comoodle.**
- **An ethnographic case study evaluation approach was used to develop the level of rapport necessary to establish an insider perspective (Robson 2000 - Small-Scale Evaluation)**

Findings

3 Case studies: Stuff, Space, Skills:

Main objective is to capture insights to feed into the development and implementation of on-line platform to stimulate and operate collaborative economy

- Assumptions being tested
- Back story to each of the pilots
- Issues and challenges participants have confronted in collaborating and sharing
- Define benefit of the activity (in Comoodles)



Case 1: Stuff

Comoodle Assumption being tested:

Volunteers will come forward to deliver community projects, council services will release tools and skills and a Comoodle value can be used to define benefit of the activity

- **Community project** – maintenance of open-green space
'So what I said was 'if we can keep this nice for you because it's your land but it's our interest, can you help us with some machinery?''
- **Challenges in sharing:** coordinating sharing of work; volunteers taking over council jobs; health and safety; financial costs
'the cost of the equipment for that one site to use it for very few hours to what we'd use it for... we've got three pieces of equipment sat at ..., cutting a relatively small site that we would have on a team's route cutting goodness knows how much land and that's a really big issue looking into the future.'

Case 1: Stuff

- **Benefit of the activity**

Community spirit and positive attitude of residents

'The feel good factor that we've had from doing what we've done...it's not just about cutting grass, it's been about community spirit, about people speaking to people, who normally maybe's not have spoken to because your getting to know each other through what you're doing.'

'...that's the key to it and so the more people that get interested, the more empowering it is and so it's a work in progress.'

Case 2: Space

Comoodle Assumption being tested:

Council services will release council space for community groups to use, that community groups will use space in an appropriate manner and that a Comoodle value can be used to define benefit of the activity



- **Lack of space** – increase in demand and supply

'It wasn't only growth in demand; it was growth in donations from members of the public, the churches, schools and all sorts of other organisations - they recognised the advent of the food bank age as it were and people were giving a lot...'

- **Challenges in sharing:** lack of clarity regarding Comoodle offer; uncertainty regarding timescales; lack of networking/sharing at grass roots level

'[We would] prefer to go with Comoodle because I think it's a good thing for Kirklees to try and get something like this off the ground'



Case 2: Space

- **Benefit of the activity**

Sharing and trading

'They [Kirklees] provide us with space and possibly other things; we in return, at no cost to them really, provide a crisis support service for the people of Kirklees'

Future trades: Foodbank Plus

'...we've got to build links with the other emergency food providers; soup kitchens, cafes...because we're very well established, so we've probably got links that maybe other smaller food banks don't have...'



Case 3: Skills

Comoodle Assumption being tested:

Council services will release staff to share skills with community groups to make better use of this underused community space, that a trading value can be found to justify the support and that a Comoodle value can be used to define benefit of this activity

- **Share skills** – skills need tailoring, skills not enough

'the job thing with computers is good...and then we've got to put the activities on for older people...we need the skills gearing towards what our estate is, not what people think that they can do [elsewhere], which is a family orientated centre...'

- **Challenges in sharing:** formal ways of working; requires long-term commitment; letting go of responsibility

'There's no kind of easy route for those officers to back out of this huge industry that's been created [around community empowerment/engagement]'

Case 3: Skills

- **Trading value**

Identifying alternative trading models

Asset transfer the centre to the community *versus* continued Council ownership; impacts upon nature of trade

'We [KC] can provide skills for this type of event, but the overall aim is to find people with the skills in the community to make the events sustainable in the long-term'

- **Benefit of the activity**

Building healthier community

'...that seems to be the biggest thing - actually preventing people getting poorly, depression – mental health's a big one, mental health and community...'

Conclusion: the Politics of Sharing

- Lack of clarity about what is possible - exacerbated by pressures faced
 - Funding cuts mean pressure on Kirklees Council to save money; community groups keen to protect individuals, groups and community services (e.g. Case 3)
- Who is sharing what, with whom and for what purpose?
 - Issues of responsibility; where to draw the line between voluntary action and council work (explicit in Case 1 and implicit in Cases 2 and 3)
- Lack of understanding about partners needs and expectations
 - Key challenge here was the tension between short-term fix and long-term solution (explicit in all Cases)
- Differences in timescale and priorities
 - Community groups and organisation have **direct** and sometimes moral and legal **obligation to target groups**
 - Kirklees Council faces challenge of **filling the gaps in service provision** whilst losing key employees