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# Dilemmas of the Sharing Economy in the Age of Access

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## Abstract

In the discussions involving the sharing economy, it is possible to see a tendency to highlight its positive aspects. However, the debates seem to neglect problematizations regarding the dilemmas and consequences of what sharing can mean for the social groups interested in embracing the sharing economy concept. In the age of access, the lack of ownership of goods may indicate a transformation concerning life in society. However, the essence of collaboration inherent in the sharing economy might be questioned, as the shared system would be just an attractive instrument with a friendly discourse mostly used to transfer the responsibility of the industry to the citizen, under the banner of mutual aid. Thus, our article seeks to investigate the different perspectives on sharing by analyzing its main dilemmas. Our study presents a critical view of the barriers, vulnerabilities and illusions present in this specific issue, which most studies and approaches on the subject end up reproducing. As a theoretical contribution to the literature, we point out that only those who have access to the sharing system are able to participate effectively, and their excesses reiterate the economicist and utilitarian structure based on inequality.

**Keywords:** sharing economy; sharing; access; sustainability; inequality.

## Introduction

A quick look at the roll of initiatives that make up the sharing economy can lead to enthusiasm due to a characteristic discourse that uses politically correct terms, such as collaboration and sharing, to describe practices that recover old movements of exchange between people of a community. In these discussions it is often possible to observe a tendency to appreciate the positive aspects of the sharing economy phenomenon, e. g. to replace the concept of disruptive collaborative practices (Mesquita, Pozzebon, & Petrini, 2020), to supply or share resources – instead of purchasing new ones – between people, who act as consumers and / or suppliers (Petrini, Freitas, & Silveira, 2017), to choose the experience of temporarily using other people's goods and services (Rifkin, 2001).

It is also relevant to highlight the notion that trust, reputation, sustainability, strengthening of communities, and the empowerment of vulnerable groups – who have to cope with companies and state regulation – are the main currencies of the sharing economy; it can constitute a different way of looking at society as sharing would replace hegemonic self-interested economic and utilitarian thinking.

Despite the promotion of the theme as something promising and relevant to current social and environmental issues, there seems to be a lack of greater discussion regarding the dilemmas and developments – social, political, economic, cultural and environmental – of what sharing can mean for social groups interested in embracing this concept.

One of the points that needs to be taken into account in this discussion is related to the diverse and controversial ways of manifesting sharing practices in different contexts. Although in most cultures it is possible to see situations that involve sharing, these practices are manifested in unequal ways and carry different meanings (Gupta, Esmaeilzadeha, Uzb, & Tennantc, 2019). Global life has been affected by this movement (Parente, Geleilate, & Rong, 2018), but its impact seems to be stronger in the context of cities (Cohen & Muñoz, 2015). In the specific case of Brazil, there is a growing urban movement of activists, collective groups, social groups and individuals interested in social change and, claiming to be motivated by altruistic purposes, they try to make a transition from traditional ways of producing and purchasing goods and services to the sharing economy. These are experiments that are based on the search for a balance between work, mission, passion and personal interest. The initiatives include fair trade, sustainable consumption, networked and non-hierarchical systems, cause advocacy, knowledge exchange, new models of education or urban occupation, social inclusion and participation, urban agriculture, enhancement of local markets, among others. As examples in Brazil, we can mention the urban gardens Horta das Corujas, in São Paulo (SP) and Fábrica de Hortas, in Belo Horizonte (MG), applications/websites for sharing between users, such as Tem Açúcar? (lending of objects between neighbors), Enjoei (clothes and accessories), HappyMoment (sharing experiences between users, such as visiting a restaurant or a tourist destination) and Moobie (car lending between users). Market research indicates that the number of people willing to adopt more collaborative consumption practices in Brazil has grown from 68% in 2018 to 81% in 2019 (SPC Brasil, 2019). Projections by the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) consultancy reveal that the shared economy should generate US\$ 335 billion worldwide in 2025, and in Brazil, expert estimates indicate that the sharing economy has the potential to account for more than 30% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the services sector in Brazil in the medium and long terms (Agência O Globo, 2017).

However, the question that arises in relation to the theme refers to the dilemmas that emerge from this proposal. Many of these dilemmas lead to all sorts of questions. Is the sharing economy really “sharing” in all its senses? When involving the market, shouldn’t it be called the access economy? (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015). Could the sharing economy be a path to financial solutions, a consistent and viable alternative within the capitalist system of accumulation? Would a new scenario be possible, in which everything would be smaller and local, unrelated to the large supply chains? Is there a business movement being created from the perspective of sharing? Did this facet of the economy happen due to, or as a consequence of, the crisis that hit the global economies over the last decade?

These questions motivated us to elaborate this paper, whose purpose is to discuss the different meanings of sharing based on the analysis of delimitation, economic, sustainability, social, access, and excess dilemmas. Herein we will try to analyze in a critical way the barriers, vulnerabilities and illusions that the theme presents, which are reproduced by many studies and approaches on sharing. In other words, we seek to explore the intense debate that permeates the sharing economy from different fields of knowledge, especially from the administrative and economic perspectives. We also aim to discuss whether sharing would enable the development of a new economic and social – and possibly political – performance within the current system, or whether it would constitute a new form of expanded economic and social reproduction based on access, which would result in more exploitation and inequality – typical features of economism. Maybe the idea of sharing is nothing more than a reformulation of old concepts used to strengthen the basis of capitalism, now with the “friendly” discourse of “shall we share?”.

To this end, we will present over the following sections the constitutive elements of the sharing economy from different approaches and authors, with emphasis on the notion of access. After this discussion, we will analyze the dilemmas that permeate the idea of sharing. In the final considerations, criticisms and debates about the sharing economy are systematized in order to advance the understanding of this phenomenon in contemporary societies.

## **Sharing economy: connection through access**

The exercise of sharing within the capitalist model of production, centered on the accumulation and ownership of commodities, is, at first sight, a controversy. It would be the triumph of cooperation over self-interest (Benkler, 2011), putting in question the practices of consumption and ownership of objects (Vasques, 2015). The system, characterized by the age of access (Rifkin, 2001) is composed of subjects that opt for shared access rather than property ownership (Belk, 2014; Vasques, 2015).

Sharing and ownership are socially constructed practices, imbued with values, cultural principles, and human relations; however, social restraints and sanctions may be imposed on both sharing or ownership (John, 2013; Price & Belk, 2016). Bauman (2008) claims that sharing is a possibility to overcome the consumerism, which is reducing solidarity in contemporary society. For consumers, ownership would not be a necessity – despite its continuous existence – because they would be more interested in sharing when it minimizes costs and maximizes benefits (Lamberton & Rose, 2012; Rifkin, 2014).

According to Sennett (2012), cooperation would work as a “grease” in the engine that implements social and economic phenomena. Cooperation would be intrinsic to the human being, but, concerning the author, it would need to be developed and rooted. In this context, sharing would appear as one of the manifestations of cooperation and solidarity in the different dimensions of life, that is, both in the context of interpersonal relationships and in the structures of social reproduction.

Sharing would be the most elementary form of economic distribution in society (Price & Belk, 2016); it would also indicate the transformation of old ways to exchange goods and services into an effective economic model (Béchaux, 2014). In this sense, multiple types of consumption based on sharing have appeared. Olson (2002) argues that groups are created to promote self-expression and the safety of members. For Botsman and Rogers (2011), in this century, individuals define themselves in terms of reputation, insertion in the community, what they intend to access, the way they share goods, services, experiences and values, and of what they donate. There is therefore a change in values; either individuals find ways to optimize the use of the product purchased or they simply choose not to purchase any product. These individuals are aware that the materialism of hyperconsumism may lead to the impoverishment of the relationship between human beings and the planet, which emphasizes the need to recreate stronger communities. In this sense, the collaborative economy reinforces the idea of a movement of social transformation towards more sustainable forms of sociability and social reproduction, being an inherent condition in the mentality of collaboration and collective action.

A new economy should connect society, nature, economy and ethics, while producing goods for individuals, their communities and territories (Abramovay, 2012). In this sense, a wide range of types of consumption has been recognized and stimulated based on sharing. Access to goods and services is driven by sharing or pooling of integrated resources through technology and community-based relationships (Bardhi & Eckhard, 2012a; Botsman & Rogers 2011; Gansky 2010). In these systems, property is no longer be the object of consumer desire (Chen, 2009; Marx, 2011), although it continues to exist. It is possible for the two systems to coexist, but sharing is less likely to replace the traditional marketing approaches related to self-interest, ownership, and accumulation (Rifkin, 2001).

The transition to more sustainable lifestyles and consumption, which includes sharing, would not be linked to ruptures with sociocultural aspects in vogue, both of which could be interdependent (Vasques, 2015). Shared use can favor consumption alternatives provided by social relationships and interactions with products and services that are environmentally and socially responsible and more sustainable than individual consumption (Bardhi & Eckhard, 2012a).

What seems to highlight the growth of the sharing model is its accelerated reinvention through network and real-time connections, which favor interaction between people, companies and interest groups (Belk, 2013; Sastre & Ikeda, 2012). It is also worth mentioning that the costs of information decreased, along with efforts to coordinate the practice of sharing.

Digital technologies attenuate the capacity of markets and deepen the analysis of the life cycle and the material and energy flow of social production (Abramovay, 2012, p. 161). This movement triggered an acceleration of online sharing activities, exceeding the limits of communities, which expand the volume and exchange of information and change the usual way to

deal with ownership (Gansky, 2010). According to Tonkinwise (2014), what boosted the development of this system was the reduction of sharing risks, as there is currently more access to information, companies and markets.

The impulse to expand productivity, in addition to the expansion of the Internet, drove the society towards an age of goods and services that flow freely, with zero marginal cost, implying the reduction of traditional marketing forms while including participation, without self-interest, profit and accumulation, and the rise of collaborative goods (Rifkin, 2014). The advantages of new technologies, such as online commerce and applications for cell phones, served as basis for the development of other forms of consumption based on sharing, which are more complex than routine market activities.

Thus, only in this new scenario (valuing experiences instead of the cost of ownership; pervasive Internet; reproduction of international economic models; economic crisis; economic potential perceived by companies; zero marginal cost)" the sharing economy showed strength and gained scale with the capacity to effectively change the direction of the global economy (Vasques, 2015, p. 93). The sharing economy seems to indicate a paradigm shift (Morlighem, 2014), which introduces a connected, interactive-minded, mobilized society that manifests itself through collaboration in a set of proposals for the development of an economic model that can meet the demands of society (Ramalho & Silva Jr., 2016).

The information network society tends to expand the non-market sphere of useful services to social life and, at the same time, promote a break between the freely cooperative activities and the ones organized in order to obtain private gains. This way, the boundaries between business and civil society become fluid (Abramovay, 2012, p. 80).

In this sense, a whole economy seems to be emerging based on sharing, especially based on the exchanges between people, and not between companies and customers (Owyang, Tran, & Silva, 2013). This paradigm redefines the relationship between sellers and buyers, expanding transaction and consumption models, which creates impacts on business models. It is possible that in the future many companies will benefit more from temporary access than from the sale of goods (Vedana & Brei, 2016). The sharing economy involves an alternative lifestyle to ownership. The sharing companies strive for generating a result that is not exclusively economic (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017).

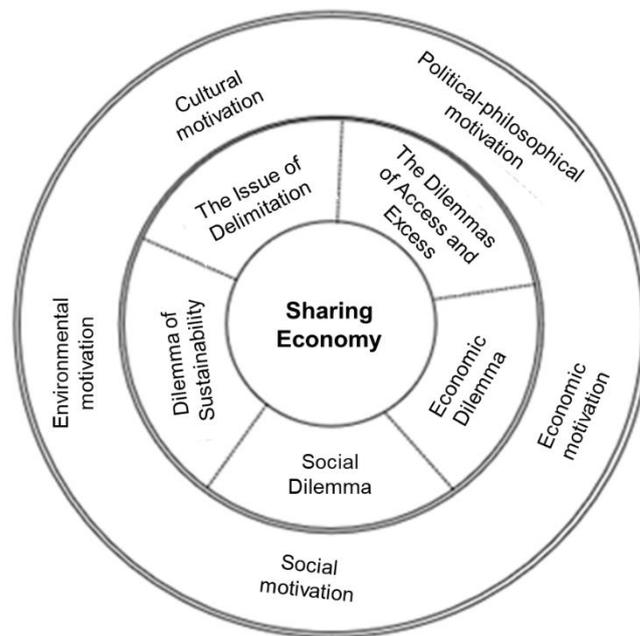
But what would be the limit of this concept? How far would it make sense? These issues that are highlighted in the discussion of the next section of the article.

## **Dilemmas of sharing: the issue of delimitation**

The ones who defend the sharing economy intend to reconstitute (or replicate) the pre-industrial society scenario, in which there were several small cities where goods were traded for services or competencies. In fact, the phenomenon of sharing is not new only in the contemporary sociability, as many superficial discussions on the subject try to confirm. Sharing also took place in ancient civilizations and it is possible, throughout history, to find different cultural and social contexts socially reproducing the practices of sharing. So, why is so much attention being given to this "recent" economic and social movement? Is it a trap made by the markets to involve companies

and consumers in a new wave of collective utopia, regulated by transparency and economic cooperation, while reinforcing individualism and ownership?

The collaborative movement has presented, more recently in some parts of the world, such as Brazil, more solid basis, configuring itself as an area that has attracted investment, which indicates that collaboration is a relevant trend for businesses in the contemporary world (Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Gansky, 2010; Schulist, 2012; Vaquero & Calle, 2013). The main dilemmas are summarized in Figure 1, and discussed throughout the text.



**Figure 1.** Dilemmas of the sharing economy

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The analysis of the traps of collaborative consumption started with the conflicting complex definitions of the term as well as its delimitations (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015; Parente et al., 2018). Sharing economics is a widely used term, especially in digital environments, however, according to Chandler (2016), there is a great lack of awareness of consumers regarding the real meaning of sharing possibly due to the variety of services involved. By encompassing different activities, with different intensities and forms of sharing, sharing can generate confusion and questioning. Belk (2013) delimits collaborative consumption as the action of individuals who acquire and distribute a resource through a small amount of money or other sort of compensation (e. g. barter or exchange), as long as they do not include permanent transfer of ownership. Thus, non-monetary sharing is excluded, where there is no financial reward involved in the transaction.

Belk (2014) states that collaborative consumption occupies a place between sharing – composed of altruistic practices – and the exchange of goods – which, in turn, are mediated by money – containing elements of both (Vasques, 2015). Companies that operate according to this perspective adopt hybrid strategies, in which self-interest and altruism would be articulated among themselves (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012). Belk (2014) proposes the term pseudo-sharing to refer to

practices in which there are motivations mediated by profit, expectations of reciprocity and little sense of community and collaboration, which would make it synonymous with collaborative consumption (Vasques, 2015). Belk (2007), therefore, postulates that sharing would only be possible in case of ownership and would involve practices related to intangible and tangible goods. In a community, ownership could happen under individual or collective modality. In this way, it would not include public goods, which are for unrestricted use (2015).

The term collaborative consumption was popularized by Botsman and Rogers (2011), who describes it as a form to accommodate needs and desires in a more sustainable and attractive way, with a low burden for the individual. This type of consumption is called P2P (peer to peer) and indicates a transaction without intermediaries, in which an interested person directly contacts the owner of a property virtually. Sharing, conforming to Tukker (2004), must be seen as a way of continuous use of the same product by different people. In other words, sharing is an active practice inherent in social relations (John, 2013).

The mesh is the definition by Gansky (2010) to refer to this mesh or network composed of shared businesses, mediated by virtual platforms, in which access replaces ownership. As it is a temporary business, such as rent or exchanges, the strategy is to sell the same product several times, maximizing the profit.

Connected consumption was the expression developed by Schor and Fitzmaurice (2015) to emphasize its social and digital dimensions. It refers to the range of old sharing practices, now renewed, whose central characteristics are the ability to save or earn money, provide an approachment between consumers, reduce the carbon and ecological footprint and strengthen social ties. The term hybrid economy is used to designate the mix between a capitalist and a collaborative model (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012; Rifkin, 2014; Scaraboto, 2015). According to Abramovay (2014), the hybrid economy can change the way companies operate. The internet and the collaborative economy are responsible for the disappearance of the boundaries that divide the public and the private spheres in economic life. The author states that an increasing part of the offer of goods and services is made in an open and collaborative way, without the intermediation of private organizations; it is the mixture between social collaboration and private economy that forms the basis of the current hybrid economy (Abramovay, p. 109).

Commercial sharing systems are defined by Lamberton and Rose (2012) as practices that make use of financial resources. Consumers would have the chance to enjoy the benefits without purchasing the product. Some authors distinguish the terms sharing and collaboration (Vedana & Brei, 2016). In shared consumption, the goods are used by several people; shared consumption is, therefore, an act and a process of distributing goods (Belk, 2007; 2010) and/or indicates having something in common with someone. In collaborative consumption, individuals participate at least in some phase of the production, making the good (tangible or not) a collective product, which everyone can appreciate (Botsman and Rogers, 2011).

Vasques (2015, p. 110-111) proposes a broader definition by understanding that a shared use is a choice contrary to individual and exclusive use of objects and it is based on diverse motivations, permeated by needs, ideals and values, whether economic, environmental, social, among others. Chandler (2016) explains that there are also some alternative names used for this

phenomenon, such as gig economy (freelance economy), platform economy, access economy and collaborative consumption.

Therefore, sharing (Belk, 2007, 2014; Price & Belk, 2016), collaborative consumption (Belk, 2014; Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Felson & Spaeth, 1978), access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012b; Belk, 2014), commercial sharing systems (Lamberton & Rose, 2012), the mesh (Gansky, 2010), connected consumption (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015; Schor, Fitzmaurice, Carfagna, & Will-Attwood, 2014) and access/experience (Chen, 2009) are terms used to explain concepts and practices of sharing economy. Current studies aim at clarifying the specificities of these terms (Price & Belk, 2016). Consensus on a taxonomy remains out of reach, considering the breadth of the expression and practice of sharing (Vasques, 2015).

Despite the conceptual polyphony that is found around the social practice of sharing, it is possible to detect ambiguities, contradictions and controversies that are related to the different dilemmas perceived in the context of sharing. Among them, it is possible to glimpse the economic dilemma, which is the central issue of the next section.

### *The economic dilemma*

Controversies arise regarding the way that market relations manifest over sharing transactions. Would these practices break the barriers of distribution and wealth, as opposed to the traditional economic system? In his main definition, Belk (2013) does not mention the market mediating access to goods. For Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012b), it would not be possible to speak of ownership, but of access, which could have market participation as a mediator of commercial relations. Price and Belk (2016) go so far as to say that “sharewashing” is taking place (p. 193), with market companies forcing their participation in the sharing economy, where the sale or exchange of services is promoted as sharing.

The discussion promoted by Rifkin (2014) indicates that the development of the sharing economy is responsible for shaking traditional forms of market exchanges in the capitalist system. Society would be moving towards a post-consumption economy, in which ownership would no longer spark interest among the community. The collapse of marginal costs would be leading to the emergence of a hybrid economy, composed partly by the capitalist market and partly by collaboration (collaborative commons) with far-reaching implications for the whole society (Abramovay, 2014; Haigh & Hoffman, 2012).

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2015) argue that the sharing economy is not really an economic sharing in all its spectrum. It would be an access economy, a form of social exchange that would take place between acquaintances, with no profit. Sharing is a common and cultural practice, which is present in several aspects of life in society, as occurs within the family. From the moment that the sharing is mediated by the market, with a company acting as an intermediary, the concept of sharing would fall apart. “Instead, consumers are paying to access someone else's goods or services for a set period of time. It is an economic exchange, and consumers seek utility, not social, value” (p. 2).

Studies by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012b) show that consumption based on access would be radically different from exchange relations mediated by ownership. Consumers, when accessing goods, would not feel any psychological sense of ownership. They would feel free to choose the

goods based a cost-benefit analysis and opt for the best proposal among the existing ones. Consumers would perceive the brand only as a service provider. Trust, an aspect so widespread in the sharing economy, would be translated by consumers as a positive factor, as long as it is related to surveillance. In other words, a more monitored relationship and subject to sanctions would indicate greater reliability and guarantee in the provision of the service. Such method would ensure the effectiveness of the sharing system, considering that users would not trust one another without any monitoring. Therefore, there would be no romanticism surrounding the idea of selflessly motivated trust. When everyone is looking out for their own interest, they would not effectively connect to the goods, people or companies, according to Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012b).

This argument considers that consumers would be more interested in costs and convenience than in interaction with companies and communities. Two key elements are fundamental for the functioning of the access economy (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015): (1) competition between suppliers would not depend on the ability to generate community or social interaction. Consumers want to make smart purchases and access-saving companies allow this conduct, as they offer convenience and low prices; (2) in an access context, consumers would think and act differently in relation to ownership. The temporary access enables the disposal of identities without creating bonds because customers do not need to adhere to products; unlike owning a product that becomes part of the individual's identity, creating a bond and establishing a link with their peers.

The impact of this movement reached large businesses, generating conflicts. Kumar, Lahiri, and Dogan (2018) argue that combining supplier (supply) and customer (demand) is critical to the long-term success of exchanges. Sharing activities can compete with formally organized activities, which creates instability for existing regulatory provisions. This is the case with services such as car sharing, which has shaken transportation systems in different societies, calling into question market relations previously marked by oligopolies. However, they are systems that question the well-being of consumers and workers in different ways. This factor puts pressure on platform service providers and policy makers in search of a solution to these dilemmas. The commercialization of collaborative processes concerns both researchers and activists (Abramovay, 2014; Bernholz, Cordelli, & Reich, 2013).

As a result of this process, some sharing-based companies and others that are migrating their operations towards sharing may be becoming large corporations, evading regulations and taxes, in addition to maintaining characteristics of ownership and organization similar to those of corporations that operate in traditional markets (Baker & Baker, 2016), a scenario that seems to be changing before social pressures. The sharing system can be controversial in terms of the effective promotion of well-being, hiding other interests behind the flags of sustainability, cooperation and solidarity. Theoretical models that separate social, political, and environmental factors from economic dimensions cannot explain experiences of community-based business development, especially among poor populations.

### *The dilemma of sustainability*

Shared use gained strength through sustainability, as it promotes the intensified use of the product. The environmental impact is reduced when avoiding the purchase and consumption of a new product. Thus, the lifespan of the product is optimized (Abramovay, 2014; Costa, 2014; Tukker,

2004; Vasques, 2015). In this sense, collaboration and sharing have the power to change lifestyles, with sustainability being one of its consequences (Ornellas, 2012).

One of the main contributions of the sharing economy to the sustainability agenda is related to the reuse of several products. In other words, the sharing economy can alleviate some environmental problems by maximizing product usage (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017); the incorporation of innovative solutions in business models can also reduce the demand for new products and new facilities, reducing resource consumption by costumers (Rong et. al., 2018).

In addition, cities are natural incubators of new business models for sharing due to the high population density and reliable infrastructure of communication technologies. In this scenario, sharing could bring social benefits such as increased social ties and social cohesion. The shared economy also influences production through the creation of capacities through the shared access to manufacturing. There is, however, no clear empirical evidence on these benefits (Rong et. al., 2018).

According to this logic, there are benefits if the product is discarded due to excessive use, that is, when the product becomes worn and outdated. This idea clashes with the consumerist logic of accumulation, which aims at consumption and the increasing ownership of goods. If, on the one hand, the substitution of these products may increase energy efficiency (Roy, 2000), on the other, there are more products circulating. Without the need for substitution, the traditional reproduction of capital would not take place. However, instigating the exchange of products is a stimulus of the system itself, which can encourage the expanded use of the product in order to speed up its substitution. The background of this issue is related to the increase or maintenance of high levels of consumption, even in the context of sharing, putting sustainability in check.

Tonkinwise (2014) highlights the problem of scale in product sharing, questioning the sustainability of the system. In order to become viable, this service depends on the geographical proximity between those who offer something and those who demand something. There would also be an increase in consumption by the ones who create sharing businesses because they would purchase more products in order to share them and profit from the transactions. With the market growth, the environmental impact would increase because there would be a higher demand for inputs.

### *The social dilemma*

In a subtle way, collaborative consumption can be a way to distribute work along the chain. An activity that should be the responsibility of the industry starts being "shared" with other members of the product chain, especially with the costumer. The justification for such change is related to participation and collective construction or customization; this way, the product can be customized due to the costumer's involvement in the productive process. However, what really happens is a transfer of work and responsibility to the consumer.

New technologies allow almost all work to be split into unitary tasks, which can be distributed to several workers in several places, whose payment is tied to the existing demand for that task, at that moment (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015). Customers and professionals stay in touch through virtual platforms and such relation is based on quality, reputation, and reliability. These

data are often handled by the system itself, leaving only positive comments visible, omitting or hiding criticisms and negative scores from services or professionals. In this system, the highest profits stay with the companies that own the software. The employer neither needs to understand the task nor know how to hire good professionals. The maintenance of the platform in operation is enough for its success.

The new contract work transfers the risks to the workers, which eliminates the minimum labor rights. Would sharing be equity or a form of labor exploitation? Is it a practice that can make legal work precarious and generate unfair competition? Does this flexibility lead to overwork, at any time, in exchange for a minimum payment? There would be a monetization of idle time (Molesworth, Watkins, & Denegri-Knott, 2016; Sundararajan, 2013), in which the obstacle is to find ways to make workers more efficient. Would materiality, typical of capitalist relations since its creation and establishment, be transformed into simple temporality? (Abramovay, 2014; Fontenelle, 2014).

The biggest challenge would be the search for a fairer income distribution. From this point of view, the sharing economy could represent a setback, as it would favor those who use it to concentrate profits, accelerate consumption (even without ownership), undermine work relations, and deconstruct processes that could lead to sustainability. The other side reflects the erosion of employment rights (Schor, 2014), the suppression of benefits and the transformation of individuals into independent entrepreneurs who have to create strong brands, even if they have no basis to support them. The system would just broaden the excesses of the hegemonic economic model.

### *The dilemmas of access and excess*

From another angle, it is important to pay attention to the debate between the dichotomy free and limited access. The access to tangible and non-tangible goods (Bardhi & Eckhard, 2012a; Belk, 2007), and rivals and non-rivals goods (Abramovay, 2012), could be questioned. According to Belk (2007), intangible goods involve services, knowledge, skills and experiences, among others, while tangible goods include objects and goods. The difference in perception and/or engagement of individuals in the idea of sharing may be in sharing something that is available to everyone (such as streaming music) and in sharing a product or service that, while in use by someone, is not available for another individual (such as a car or a phone). To what extent could the culture of ownership be overcome if it is accepted to share something for everyone to use unlimitedly? What to do when the access becomes limited and sharing can bring some kind of burden to whomever owns the good?

Another issue is the lack of access to information from global sharing companies. They disclose data about efficiency, reputation or happiness of its "associates", but there is no way to confirm the data. Because they are not publicly traded companies, they can use the data in their favor. In addition, they hire some institutions to carry out studies and disseminate the results in the media, spreading the promising discourse of sharing; however, there is no access to the databases, and the reports are often lean or reduced to a press release.

Another dilemma is the relationship between image and identity. Temporary access enables the individual to reaffirm its identity before their social groups through the possibility of displaying a more expensive, modern or sophisticated status product. The second-hand shop, especially those

of famous brands, can be a way of displaying a luxury that the person would not be able to afford otherwise, opening a crack in luxury consumption (Sastre & Ikeda, 2012). Instead of rethinking consumption and questioning the often-abusive value that brands charge for their products, second-hand shops indicate a way to acquire an item with brand store tags, reinforcing the symbolic aspect.

The new economy of sharing presents different features when compared to the old practices of collaboration. The current sharing involves excess, sharing by the ones that have things to be shared, sharing by the ones who opt for it and choose what to share. The merit of participation is perceived at this point, for there is an engagement among people, in which leads to the construction of a gregarious feeling. In this specific point, the current sharing system seems to differ from old sharing practices, which, in turn, was more solidary, with less expectation of recognition, and which often occurred by necessity, as an instinct for survival.

Mont (2004) argues that shared use would not be accepted by some people, as it would depend on previous organizational systems and the social and cultural context in which they occur. In some countries, the motivation may be communal, in others, financial or environmental. The cultural difference also reflects the meaning of sharing in the lives of individuals, which may be associated with low purchasing power or financial problems.

According to Roose (2014), the incentive that stands out among the people who share is financial. They want to share because through this initiative they can save some money (Sastre & Ikeda, 2012) and be more practical. Sharing is functional (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015). Instead of paying for hotel rooms, for instance, the customer can have access to the same service – hosting – in a simpler way. Sharing can be more practical, simple, and direct (Bardhi & Eckhardt). Sacks (2011) states that users tend to engage in collaboration by enabling access for lower costs.

Botsman and Rogers (2011) argue that collaboration is not only motivated by cost savings, as these consumption habits began before the financial crisis of 2008. But the authors acknowledge that the economic necessity made people more prone to embrace new forms of access. The growth in the costs of acquisition and maintenance of goods, instability in social relations and uncertainties in the labor market have turned ownership into a more difficult mode of consumption. Consumers start re-evaluating consumer habits and rethinking values (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Vedana & Brei, 2016).

Giving up ownership may lead to a more sustainable access or a way of anti-consumerism. Access systems based on community initiatives may originate for ideological reasons to reappropriate community or public spaces, as in the case of the collective construction of community gardens (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2012). Such policies motivated by access models are seen by their creators and participants as ways of practicing their citizenship outside the market and contesting their domination under common public spaces (Visconti, Sherry Jr., Borghini, & Anderson, 2010). Even within the same context, motivations for access may vary. The political aspect of access can determine consumer identification, as well as consumer-to-consumer relationships (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012a).

At this point, the sharing economy presents yet another ethical issue. As no one can gather the information necessary to know social aspirations, as there is no computational capacity to gather this information and, above all, to respond to the demands, the price system can play that

role (Abramovay, 2012, p. 169-170). Such statement indicates the challenge presented by/in the sharing economy. Could sharing economy replace the current economic system and offer an alternative from the controlling hands of the market? Or does it seek not to maintain this control, since it encourages the generation of independent enterprises in the local community? Abramovay (p. 170) emphasizes that the domain of free and voluntary collaboration in economic life is minimal. The efficiency in the allocation of material resources on which social life depends on individuals to consecrate their best energies, in a rational and self-interested way, to do that with which they expect to receive the best remuneration possible. He adds that the emergence of the networked information society corresponds to a real refutation of these premises.

Moving from the pursuit of more (in terms of production and consumption) to the paradigm of the best, improving quality of life without increasing consumption, represents a radical change. It means to trade economic growth, as a major objective, for sustainability (Bursztyn & Bursztyn, 2012, p. 64). The authors argue that before this scenario, society should seek to solve urgent dilemmas, such as the contradiction between productivism and sustainability; the reconciliation between social needs and environmental conservation; world-wide vs. local conflict resolution; and solidarity, which should stand out from the self-interested logic (Bursztyn & Bursztyn). Is the sharing economy the answer to these challenges? In the view of its advocates, shared-use services are disruptive and alter the way social, work and consumer relations occur, and can lead to changes in hegemonic systems (Vasques, 2015).

There is no structure that connects different fronts of the sharing economy with the contemporary market (Bardhi & Eckhard, 2015; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010). Collaboration is designed with different purposes, as showed in Table 1, and although these phenomena are undoubtedly reshaping the market, to this point we lack a way to balance these diverse systems, as well as connect them to previous studies (Lamberton, 2016) in order to turn them into more solid and perennial structures.

Table 1

**Vision on motivations for sharing**

<b>Social</b>	<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Political-Philosophical</b>	<b>Cultural</b>
Sharing is a way of socializing, an opportunity to meet or interact with people, it promotes social well-being.	Sharing reduces the impact of production and consumption, reducing the generation of waste.	Sharing provides financial gains with the subject, who faces the hegemonic model of that can be more accepted or not, depending on the cultural relationships of the society in question.	Sharing empowers the subject, who faces the alternative lifestyle of that can be more accepted or not, depending on the cultural relationships of the society in question.	Sharing is an alternative lifestyle of that can be more accepted or not, depending on the cultural relationships of the society in question.

**Sharing can occur for different motivations, it can be temporarily defined by one of them and it can migrate from one to the other motivation, and the motivations can live together.**

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

## **Final considerations**

All the dilemmas discussed herein about sharing indicate some issues related to broadening discussions on the theme and contributing to literature. It is important to notice that the access economy is changing the structure of markets and industries, requiring a new understanding of the individual. A successful model in the access economy is unlikely to be community-based, however studies in the field of sharing do not accurately describe the benefits people expect to receive, as well as their motivations. As analyzed in the dilemmas of the sharing economy, the theme raises discussions from various areas of knowledge, portrayed in the article with the science that hybridity is part of the study of sharing. Authors from sociology, organizational studies, consumption, economics, marketing and other fields of knowledge are mobilized in this work. Ambivalences and contradictions are interrelated with the challenges and opportunities of sharing for the economic and social transformation of cities. The sharing of goods or collaboration between people is only part of a larger system with other possibilities. The combination between community-based initiatives and the growth of social participation and technological advances represents a breakthrough. These factors indicate a sharing movement that works as a vector for the generation of wealth as it is combined with the strengthening of a political movement, coming from citizens, restructuring the current bases of economic and social reproduction.

The Table 2 summarizes the dilemmas discussed and questions for future research, in order to contribute to the expansion of the discussion on sharing.

Table 2  
Dilemmas of sharing

Dilemmas of Sharing	Main Arguments	Based on the Authors	New research topics
<b>The Issue of Delimitation</b>	There are conflicting and complex definitions of the term as well as its delimitations. By encompassing different activities, with different intensities and forms of sharing, can generate confusion and questioning.	Bardhi & Eckhardt (2015); Vasques (2015); Chandler (2016); Price & Belk (2016); Parente et al. (2018).	Are the existing boundaries capable of explaining the phenomenon of the sharing economy? How to align concepts and proposals in favor of studies in the research field?
<b>Economic Dilemma</b>	Controversies arise regarding the way that market relations manifest over sharing transactions. Would these practices break the barriers of distribution and wealth, as opposed to the traditional economic system?	Haigh & Hoffman (2012); Bernholz et al. (2013); Belk (2013); Rifkin (2014); Abramovay (2014); Bardhi and Eckhardt (2015); Baker & Baker (2016).	How can the sharing economy contribute to reducing inequalities? To what extent does it act in this direction today?
<b>Dilemma of Sustainability</b>	The problem of scale in product sharing: expanding the use of the product can speed up its replacement. The growth of the sharing market instigates the purchase of new products with a growth of generating profit with its sharing.	Tonkinwise (2014); Abramovay (2014); Costa (2014); Vasques (2015); Zervas et al. (2017); Rong et al. (2018).	What are the environmental impacts caused by the actions of the sharing economy? How could it advance more sustainable models, structures and types of business?
<b>Social Dilemma</b>	The new contract work transfers the risks to the workers, which eliminates the minimum labor rights. Would sharing be equity or a form of labor exploitation? Is it a practice that can make legal work precarious and generate unfair competition? Does this flexibility lead to overwork, at any time, in exchange for a minimum payment? The system would just broaden the excesses of the hegemonic economic model.	Sundararajan (2013); Abramovay (2014); Fontenelle (2014); Schor (2014); Bardhi & Eckhardt, (2015); Molesworth et al. (2016).	How could the sharing economy advance the inclusion of people in the world of work? How would the sharing economy surpass exploitative ways of working to expand possibilities for a more just society?
<b>The Dilemmas of Access and Excess</b>	What to do when the access becomes limited and sharing can bring some kind of burden to whomever owns the good? Instead of questioning consumption practice, the shared economy can reinforce it. The current sharing involves excess, sharing by the ones that have things to be shared, sharing by the ones who opt for it and choose what to share. Another issue is the lack of access to information from global sharing companies.	Sastre & Ikeda (2012); Bardhi & Eckhard (2012a); Roose (2014); Bardhi & Eckhardt (2015); Sacks (2015).	How to escape the logic of excess in favor of a new way of producing, consuming and living? How could the sharing economy contribute to expanding people's access to ensure a better quality of life?

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

It seems to make sense to think that the world needs a new economy (Abramovay, 2012), or the creation of new possibilities within the current system. Would the sharing economy be a path? Against the idea that the sharing economy would contribute to the sense of community, there are evidences that it could accelerate the commodification of time and space, deepening alienation

within communities, which share common goods, but exclude non-participants (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016; Lentz, 2006). In most cities, the center-south regions concentrate bicycle sharing points, coworking spaces, opportunities to access high quality goods, excluding peripheral populations due to the difficulty of access and increasing inequality. In this sense, access encompasses at least three dimensions: (a) geographical issues: distance to move around and access goods and merchandises; (b) economic issues: price of commuting to access goods; (c) social and cultural issues: access to sharing networks, groups and circulation in different locations in the city, considering that many consumers are marginalized in privileged spaces in cities.

It is also worth considering that, historically, socioeconomic models deal with variations of the factors that influence it, e. g. social relations, technologies and production factors, in addition to undergoing changes due to the socioeconomic models of regulation. Capitalism has changed to incorporate social achievements, as well as certain political, social and environmental battles (Bottomore, 2012).

Rifkin (2014) considers that the era of capitalism is going away, and that society could be experiencing a moment of hybrid economy, partly capitalist and partly collaborative. These systems would work together, despite imbuing profound inconsistencies. For a new economy to emerge, the biggest challenge is not in the hands of the government on market decisions, nor on the elimination of markets, but in the proposal of the decentralized economy, in which markets play a decisive and non-exclusive role (Abramovay, 2012).

It is important to emphasize that the meaning of sharing changes according to the involvement of people in the distribution of resources. Among the advantages that sharing provides are convenient and economical access to valuable resources, flexibility and freedom from the financial, social and emotional obligations embedded in ownership. Even with these benefits, will the sharing economy have the transformative capacity to change the way of trading and to change the purpose of the global economy? Is the future of society collaborative or does this movement represent only a front contrary to the idea of ownership, typical of capitalism?

It should be noted that if there is an increase in entrepreneurship when offering arrangement for lodging, for example, there is a decrease in formal jobs in hotel chains, restaurants and travel-related transportation. It is necessary to consider the risks of sharing, the responsibility for damages, thefts or crimes regarding shared assets. Regulation and the payment of taxes need to be reconfigured, as well as facing the culture of unrestrained accumulation, a characteristic of the capitalist economy, which exceeds environmental limits.

Consumption, as a practice, is not problematized in the idea of sharing. Consumption can even be boosted through expanded access. The sharing economy is therefore understood as a reformation, and not as revolution. As it is presented in different configurations, especially in more market-centered ones, sharing itself is not able to change the system towards a more democratic and sustainable society because even though products and goods are shared, the profits remain individual. The sharing economy is a way of pursuing a less unequal administration over the urban process, but it unveils challenges to overcome economicism and provide a revolution in social participation that create human emancipation, (re)building forms of life under the perspective of social justice.

Comparing the roles played by customers and suppliers in the sharing and conventional economies, it is possible to perceive the lack of alignment of regulatory authorities (Cheng, 2016). The way in which the government deals with startups allows them to exploit loopholes instead of developing a legitimate business model (Bond, 2015) that does not lead to the exploitation of those involved in the business chain. Despite presenting incipient ways of reframing economic practices in cities, many barriers need to be overcome for the effective change of the urban society. The link among players requires a holistic approach to sharing economics in order to face it as a fair economic opportunity and a sustainable form of consumption (Martin, 2016). An alignment between subjects, companies, government and the community would contribute to sustainable sharing (Cohen & Muñoz, 2015).

When everyone is looking out for their own interest, they do not connect effectively to the goods, people or companies they have access to. This argument implies that individuals would be more interested in costs and convenience than in the interaction with companies and communities. The temporary access enables temporary access enables the disposal of identities without creating bonds because customers do not need to adhere to products; unlike owning a product that becomes part of the individual's identity, creating a bond and establishing a link with their peers. Consumers do not seem to seek social value in exchanges with strangers. This scenario relates to the views of cities as centers of individualism. Among the dilemmas addressed herein, the essential point is the realization that the current sharing is that of excess, the sharing of those who have it, what to offer to the access of other individuals. The current model of sharing seems to reinforce the persuasive rhetoric of the utilitarian and segregatory agenda of the economic system of exploitation. The motivations, forms and practices of sharing are constantly changing and reframing, being different, moreover in the universe of dilemmas attached to this economic movement. Overcoming economism involves "overcoming by and in practice: it is a change in social practice" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 127).

The mere existence of this economic activity enabled an interpretative flexibility. The sharing economy has already had a significant impact on society to help generate debate on the role of economy in society, peer to peer business models and alternatives to traditional capitalism. The rapid growth of the sharing economy is related to socioeconomic conditions, in which there is a continuous search of a better distribution of urban supply chain values (Cheng, 2016; Gansky, 2010).

Even though there are overly functional and market-driven motivations, at the center of this new economy is social cooperation organized in a network, whose potential for social participation is superior, giving rise to forms of collective action that exert force on public and private organizational hierarchies (Abramovay, 2012). It is up to us to find out, and this is of obvious importance, whether these models based on sharing economy are sufficient to answer work-related questions and the expression of social responsibility within society (Ramalho & Silva Jr., 2016).

There is no glaring economic growth, but strategies by which economic life makes an increasingly better use of resources. At this point, the sharing economy is expressed and can contribute to sustainability and overcoming inequalities. The meaning of production needs to focus on the expansion of human freedom, respecting the capacities of nature (Abramovay, 2012). Collectively rethinking living standards, in order to overcome inequality and create a balance in life in society, are challenges that confront the patterns of social and economic reproduction and their forms of management.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that we seek to insist on debating the social and economic relations that involve sharing and access, so that new investigations can provide knowledge not only in the search for social and environmental equity, but also due to theoretical implications, considering that sharing and access involve vital debates in the field of applied social sciences, especially considering the relationships between economics, society, emancipation and social reproduction.

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## Conflict of interests

The authors have stated that there is no conflict of interest.

## Authors' contributions

**First author:** conceptualization (lead), data curation (equal), formal analysis (lead), investigation (lead), methodology (lead), project administration (lead), resources (supporting), supervision (supporting), validation (equal), visualization (lead), writing-original draft (lead), writing-review & editing (lead).

**Second author:** conceptualization (supporting), data curation (equal), formal analysis (supporting), investigation (supporting), methodology (supporting), project administration (supporting), resources (supporting), supervision (lead), validation (equal), visualization (supporting), writing-original draft (supporting), writing-review & editing (supporting).

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