

CLC Lecture

From Sharing Economy to Sharing Society

Leong Wen Shan



“If you want to play together, you must learn to share.”

Harmen van Sprang

This is Harmen van Sprang’s advice to his two young daughters—and also cities in the age of the sharing economy. The co-founder of Amsterdam’s shareNL and the Sharing Cities Alliance came by CLC in July to share his views on the opportunities and challenges of this rapidly growing ecosystem around the world.

Besides the more familiar sharing of cars, the Dutch are also freely sharing goods—ranging from power drills to tennis racquets—with one another via Peerby, and using Shareyourmeal.net to sell excess home cooked meals. While sharing platforms now run the gamut from pure sharing to profit-generating, as well as peer-to-peer and peer-to-business-to-peer, Mr van Sprang said this was “not a return to a socialist model.” Instead, he sees this rise as city dwellers desiring to share more, an attitude he summed up as: “I play in the city with everything that is already there.”

Sharing as citizens, businesses and the government

With the rise of a city that shares, “a citizen has many more roles today,” said Mr van Sprang. As sellers, drivers, teachers, caregivers, cooks, handymen, amongst others, citizens are now empowered to not just raise their earnings but also become more socially resilient as many sharing platforms operate on the premise of mutual trust. Businesses also benefit from the sharing economy as there are opportunities to provide support. For instance, insurance companies can ensure underwriting for services or goods providers in the sharing economy, and other complementary services.



Faced with changes in the economy and society, Mr van Sprang said governments should not treat the sharing economy as “a question of ban or authorise.” Instead of just rewarding or penalising behaviour through tax breaks and fines, he suggested the government research, map and monitor the sharing economy. Multilateral organisations such as the European Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have already started tracking figures on the sharing economy. In addition, Mr van Sprang says governments can collaborate with sharing platforms, and even provide unused government resources.

“I play in the city with everything that is already there.”

To encourage the growth of the sharing economy, Mr van Sprang has helped initiate the Amsterdam Sharing City, and is also an advisory board member of Sharing City Seoul. These organisations have come up with action plans to stimulate the sharing economy and lead by example. For instance, in the South Korean capital, Sharehub Seoul drives and monitors sharing activities, including educating citizens and organising events.

The challenges of sharing

Even while championing for sharing, Mr van Sprang is aware how it can inconvenience the city. For instance, holiday rentals have grown tremendously in a short period because “everyone is putting their house on Airbnb”. The increased access to travel means a higher carbon footprint and sometimes the lack of affordable housing. There is also the issue of how to keep a “fair playing field” between traditional hotels and Airbnb as this has an implication on social security with changes in the nature for employment.

And while sharing platforms may enable sharing, Mr van Sprang also noted that some are less open to giving access to their data, which makes monitoring and regulatory planning difficult. This is one reason why he sees the sharing ecosystem as “about society—not so much economy.” Whether it is something as sophisticated as a digital platform that maps a whole city, or as “low-tech” as putting out a shelf to share things you no longer need, the key for either to succeed is a “sharing society” that trusts one another.

About the Speakers



SPEAKER

Mr Harmen van Sprang

Co-founder, shareNL;
Co-founder, Sharing Cities Alliance

Mr Harmen van Sprang is an independent expert in the field of sharing (or collaborative) economy. He advises startups, companies, cities, and (inter) national governments and frequently brings them together to inspire them and create impact. A member of the advisory board of Sharing City Seoul, he is also one of the initiators of Amsterdam Sharing City and more recently of the global Sharing Cities Alliance. He is also the co-author of a business book called 'Share.'



MODERATOR

Dr Faizal Bin Yahya

Senior Research Fellow
Economics and Business Research Cluster Lead
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
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Prior to joining IPS, Dr Faizal was an Assistant Professor in the South Asian Studies Programme, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. He has also served in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was part of the Singapore Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly and involved in multilateral meetings dealing with environmental issues such as climate change.

About CLC

The Centre for Liveable Cities was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of National Development and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, based on a strategic blueprint developed by Singapore's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. Guided by its mission to distil, create and share knowledge on liveable and sustainable cities, the Centre's work spans four main areas - Research, Capability Development, Knowledge Platforms and Advisory. The CLC Lecture Series is a platform for urban experts to share their knowledge with other practitioners. For more information, please visit us at <http://www.clc.gov.sg>

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