

## Title of assignment: “Sharing material goods for reduced consumption”

The aim of this summer project is to review how sharing of material goods is addressed and understood in the academic literature, and map the status of sharing in the Oslo region.

### BACKGROUND

There is a pressing need to address consumption patterns as part of a larger societal transition to meet climate targets.<sup>1</sup> However, due to the deep embeddedness of consumption in social relations and economic systems, and contemporary aspirations and expectations towards what constitutes a decent life, research and policy alike have so far failed to formulate the necessary measures to tackle overconsumption.<sup>2</sup> Reorganising *how* products circulate has been proposed as a viable strategy for reducing consumption<sup>3</sup>, within which sharing stands out as a feasible and effective solution. To date, however, research on the sharing economy has largely focused on accommodation and mobility<sup>4</sup>, marginalizing the potential to reduce consumption by utilizing the idle capacity of material goods (e.g. household appliances, sports equipment, tools, electronics, toys). Moreover, holistic analyses of potentials for and implications of increased sharing for reduced consumption are lacking.<sup>5</sup>

This summer project will dig deeper into the sharing economy and available/proposed solutions in the Norwegian capital Oslo. We focus on modes of exchange where *the ownership* and *the usership* of material goods are separated, for instance through renting, borrowing or collective ownership. While sharing practices and collaborative forms of consumption have always existed<sup>6</sup>, digitalization and innovative platforms have re-established sharing on a larger scale<sup>7</sup>, enabling the rapid scaling of operations, efficient matching of supply and demand, and bringing networks of strangers into social interaction, supported by transaction and trust-building schemes.<sup>8</sup> Sharing now covers a diversity of practices, business models, and actors, operating across scales, including non-profit, business-to-consumer, and peer-to-peer arrangements, but we know less about which business models are relevant and effective in reducing consumption, and the collaborative efforts of users, businesses, and governments in developing, implementing, and institutionalising sharing practices.

---

<sup>1</sup> Welch, D., et al. (2019) After Paris: Transitions for Sustainable Consumption. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 15(1), 31-44.; Wiedmann, T., et al. (2020) Scientists’ Warning on Affluence. *Nature Communications*, 11(1), 3107

<sup>2</sup> Wiedmann, T., et al. (2020) Scientists’ Warning on Affluence. *Nature communications*, 11(1), 3107

<sup>3</sup> Southerton, D., et al. (2023) Towards Sustainable Consumption: Reflections on the Concepts of Social Loading, Excess and Idle Capacity. In *Consumption, Sustainability and Everyday Life* (pp. 339-61). Springer.

<sup>4</sup> Tham, W.K., et al. (2022) Foundations of Consumption and Production in the Sharing Economy. *Electron. Commer. Res.*, 1-24.

<sup>5</sup> Zhu, X., et al. (2021) A Systematic Review and Future Directions of the Sharing Economy: Business Models, Operational Insights and Environment-Based Utilities. *J. Clean. Prod.*, 290, 125209.

<sup>6</sup> Belk, R. (2014) You Are What You Can Access: Sharing and Collaborative Consumption Online. *J. Bus. Res.*, 67(8), 1595-600.

<sup>7</sup> Netter, S., et al. (2019) Sharing Economy Revisited: Towards a New Framework for Understanding Sharing Models. *J. Clean. Prod.*, 221, 224-33.; Sutherland, W., et al. (2018) The Sharing Economy and Digital Platforms: A Review and Research Agenda. *Int J Inf Manage* 43, 328-41

<sup>8</sup> Bardhi, F., et al. (2012) Access-Based Consumption: The Case of Car Sharing. *J. Consum. Res.*, 39(4), 881-98.; Hamari, J., et al. (2016) The Sharing Economy: Why People Participate in Collaborative Consumption. *J. Assoc. Inf. Sci. Technol.*, 67(9), 2047-59.

## **AIMS**

A first step in addressing the knowledge gaps outlined above is to map how sharing is currently understood and practiced. The concrete research tasks of the summer project is to:

- 1) Identify important knowledge gaps in the academic literature on sharing of material household goods related to potentials for and barriers against reduced consumption.
- 2) Map how sharing of material goods is addressed, promoted and inhibited in relevant municipal (Oslo), national (Norway) and regional (EU) plans, strategies and legal frameworks.
- 3) Create an overview of available modes of sharing in Oslo, within the realm of consumer goods (i.e. accommodation and mobility not included) across different organizational models (size, services, commercial/-non-commercial).

The result will be relevant to research activities within the FME Include and ongoing research activities with the research group on Sustainable consumption and energy equity at Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM, UiO). The results can also be useful for researchers elsewhere working with sustainable consumption, and it is expected that the assignment will provide a learning experience to the student (corresponding to Master level criteria for performance) guided by supervision from researchers.

## **SCOPE OF WORK**

The student will work under supervision of Arve Hansen and Ulrikke Wethal, both at SUM. The student will be offered a desk (shared student office) at SUM and can benefit from contact with other researchers at SUM. The work is to take place principally in the summer 2023 and the report is to be submitted by 15<sup>th</sup> August to Hansen/Wethal. The scope corresponds to six weeks' full time work, but the work can also be spread over a longer period according to the applicant's suited timeframe.

Number of available projects: 1

## **OUTCOME**

The outcome is to be a report, with annexed background information, sources etc. We also encourage the candidate to publish a popular article (e.g. newspaper article) based on the work. This latter is seen as important both for the student's own development, and to bring the role of consumption out to public awareness. Such dissemination from research to a broader public is an important objective in Include and at SUM.

## **APPLICATION**

Preferred applicants are students enrolled in Master Programme's at departments at University of Oslo that are members of Include. These are Centre for Development and the Environment, the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, the Department of Education, and the Department of Political Science. However, the assignment is open to all candidates with at least one year of studies at the Masters level. Interested candidates must submit a statement of purpose/motivation and an overview of academic records and background.