



## The sharing economy

Although 'sharing economy' is a modern expression, the idea of sharing resources and services is by no means new. Basic bartering or simple donations, flea markets and second-hand shops are just a few examples of how individuals have used their initiative to both provide and obtain resources, either for free or at a small cost.

Some types of shared economy have nothing to do with money transactions at all. Different kinds of libraries, for example, have been set up, loaning products that range from books to toys. Some small free libraries encourage a reader to borrow a book and then bring it back with another one they have read, thus feeding an educational and cultural need. In Great Britain, charity shops are very popular. You donate everything you no longer need, from a wooden spoon to a four-poster bed, and these items are sold for the charity that the shop represents. The staff are all voluntary.

Because of the rising cost of maintaining cars, coupled with ever-growing pollution issues, car sharing has become popular. If two or more people are travelling to work from more or less the same starting point, it makes sense to share the cost and use one car instead of three or four. How many cars do we see at rush hour with only one person inside them?

It is becoming more difficult for young people in particular to afford their own homes; one solution to the problem is house sharing. It helps a great deal, of course, if the people involved get on well! However, the advantages are clear. Costs are kept down when shared between several people and living with like-minded individuals provides company and intellectual stimulus. Food is also often cheaper when bought in bulk.

Online platforms that connect, for example, teachers and students, can be very useful for learning all kinds of subjects and much less expensive than travelling to evening classes the other side of town. Skype and other similar apps are often free and keep people in touch with each other, sharing experiences almost face to face.

The bike sharing system has grown tremendously in recent years and in many cities the use of bicycles is free. You only pay if you lose the bicycle.

It can only really be useful, though, if the city has multiple places where you can collect or leave the bicycle, but where it does work, it works very well.

In this ever more expensive, complex and overcrowded world, sharing could be seen as a valid method for overcoming many social and economic problems.

