Call for Papers | American Association of Geographers (AAG) Annual Meeting | San Francisco | 29 March - 2 April 2016 |

Sharing Economies: The Struggle for Consolidation

Session Organizers: Gernot Grabher (HCU Hamburg) and Koen Frenken (University of Utrecht)

Sharing has turned from a traditional communal practice into a multi-billion dollar business within a few years. During this transformation, the sharing economy has not only attracted escalating sums of investment capital, but also mounting public and political attention. Within the increasing polyphony of voices that take a stand on the rapidly evolving sector, advocates reiterate the multiple promises the sharing economy holds: Sharing not only strengthens communities and forges new relationships by facilitating arm's length transactions, but also opens unprecedented opportunities to transform private possessions and individual skills into business assets. By challenging established notions of ownership and access, traditional business models are disrupted and real economic benefits are harnessed by improving resource allocation and reducing slack, downtime and inventory. In addition, by reducing private (car-)ownership, sharing curbs the depletion of scarce goods and the production of 'public bads' such as pollution and congestion.

With the increasing expansion and (partial) consolidation, the sharing economy however faces also a surging chorus of criticism. By avoiding the regulatory standards that incumbent industries (e.g. the taxi and hotel industry) have to comply with, pioneers of the sharing economy establish forms of business and labor practices reminiscent of unregulated capitalism. Moreover, whereas the 'great transformation' catalyzed the commercialization of private property, the evolving sharing economy increasingly involves the commercialization of personal property. By perceiving in principle any personal belonging as a trade-able commodity, the sharing economy transforms the owner, rather than into a sharer, into a trader with the mindset of a homo oeconomicus. Finally, rather than sharing idle assets, pioneering sharing platforms induce additional supply and demand (i.e. car-sharing that induces rides) or convert permanently used stock in supply for temporary use (housing stock that is withdrawn from the housing market and instead offered on sharing platforms).

Against the background of the heated public debates, regulatory conflicts and unmet promises, this session affords a forum for academic reflection on the sharing economy. We invite conceptual, empirical and methodological papers that address the following issues:

Research
+ Which established conceptual frameworks and which new concepts are needed to apprehend sharing economies?
+ What are appropriate methodologies to explore the complex online/offline-architectures of sharing economies?

Sociality
+ What particular types of relationships unfold between people who share (if any)?
+ How effective are rating-systems in substituting for trust and engendering transparency and accountability?
+ Do social selection mechanisms (i.e. homophily) influence sharing practices?
+ Who benefits from the sharing economy, and who doesn't?

Economy
+ Do the sharing economies engender new modes of networked entrepreneurship?
+ What types of business models have evolved in the sharing economies?
+ To what extent are sharing economies driven by winner-takes-all dynamics?
+ What explains the success and failure of sharing platforms?

Valuation
+ How are shared assets valued?
+ What is the value of sharing assets?
+ Are communitarian or environmental values increasingly crowded out by mere economistic considerations?

Regulation
+ How have existing forms of regulation to be adapted to govern sharing economies?
+ Which new modes of regulating sharing economies are evolving?
+ How can we explain the different regulatory responses across cities and across platforms?

Environment
+ What are the environmental impacts of sharing economy practices?
+ Are there substantial rebound effects of sharing economies?

Please email abstracts of no more than 300 words to Gernot Grabher (gernot.grabher@hcu-hamburg.de) and Koen Frenken (K.Frenken@uu.nl) by October 5th, 2015. Successful submissions will be contacted by 9th October 2015 and will be expected to submit their abstracts online at the AAG website by October 29th, 2015.