

# Services for Sharing: Towards a Brazilian Perspective

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## Abstract

Collaborative consumption is an alternative for reducing consumption and promoting changes in mainstream lifestyle. However, some studies have indicated barriers in adopting shared use of products and services (Yüksel & Er, 2010; Vasques & Ono, 2010; Vasques, 2011). In this context, the present paper shows initial results from an ongoing doctoral research, whose objective is to identify cultural, proxemic, psychological and social aspects related to shared use of products and services aiming to a deeper comprehension of how these aspects provide greater or lesser acceptance and even rejection of these services by qualitative research methodology and interpretive approach (Geertz, 1973). Two Brazilian cases of services for sharing (i.e. collective laundry, bike sharing) are presented and issues related to interpersonal interaction, privacy, and trust (as cultural and social aspects) are discussed aiming to promote a contribution for the product and service design field. Initial finds highlight some weak points on improving shared services in this context, as a rooted sense of ownership and individualism, unavailability of products when these services are offered and an increased credit access encouraging ownership instead opportunities for sharing.

**KEYWORDS:** service design, shared use, cultural aspects

## Introduction

The need for changes in patterns of consumption and production has been discussed by several authors, including from design field, particularly after the publication of Agenda 21 (UN, 1992) – one of the most important outcomes of the Earth Summit in 1992 – as an indicator for studies that seek solutions to social and environmental problems.

Understanding services and products for sharing as a meaning of reducing production and consumption, some authors also have been argued that sharing instead owning could stimulate changes in mainstream lifestyle besides fostering the production of more durable

goods and mitigating practices of planned obsolescence (e. g. Manzini & Vezzoli, 2002; Tukker, 2004).

In addition to reducing the demand of products, shared use can also stimulate new forms of socialization and foster social innovation actions that fall within the context of improving the quality of life, to beyond the well-being based on access. Shared use also promotes the requalification of the products use and the meanings tied to them (Manzini, 2008).

According to Gansky (2010), the growth of products and services for sharing in recent years stems from changes in technology, such as social networks, which allow a more personalized access to these systems and also by the volume of information shared on these networks, which is changing how people deal with ownership.

For Gansky, possession and desire for it will still exist although companies and designers are getting aware to the importance of the phenomenon of sharing and have begun to develop products and services whose main function is to be shared.

Besides the impact of "online" sharing on the raise of collaborative consumption, Bostman & Rogers (2010) also call attention to the influence of the economic crisis of 2008 as a phenomena that contributed to the growth of the need for sharing and more cooperative and collaborative in lifestyles. As a consequence, they argued that the meanings of these terms have been renewed and are becoming better accepted.

Nevertheless, apparently there is a contradiction between what is proposed as alternatives of consumption and what actually happens, mainly in terms of acceptance in societies where ownership is a strong symbol of status, as suggested by studies about subjective aspects regarding to shared use conducted in Brazil (Ono & Sampaio, 2007; Vasques & Ono, 2010; Vasques, 2011) and Turkey (Yüksel & Er, 2010).

Given this scenario, it is emphasized the need to deeply investigate subjective aspects regarding to sharing as well as the importance of identify inhibitors and facilitators, which could promote better strategies for designing products and services intended to shared use.

Thus, the present paper shows initial finds from an ongoing doctoral research, whose main objective is to identify cultural, proxemic, psychological and social aspects related to products and services for sharing aiming to a deeper comprehension of how these aspects provide greater or lesser acceptance and even rejection of these services by qualitative research methodology and interpretive approach (Geertz, 1973).

## Relevance of cultural aspects for sharing

In 1995 Victor Papanek had already warned about the need for investigating strategies that could cure our dependence on products, to create an ecologically benign and sustainable environment, and at the same time, enrich our inner lives.

Such strategies seem to be still a challenge for designers and researchers from design field (of products and services) since cultural, economical and social barriers related to the paradigm shift from the ownership to the use still present themselves as inhibitors concerning the design of services and specially in the shared use.

Although virtual communities have been increasing and changing the way we do many things (e.g. sharing files, music, photos, information, and others) nowadays it is still less common to share material goods with strangers than previous past.

According to Belk (2007) it is easiest to share intangible goods because we do not lose them. Actually, as some cases from internet have been showing, people are gaining popularity, social status and even money sharing virtual goods. On the other hand, sharing tangible goods is hardest because of feelings such materialism, ownership, possessiveness and self-identity developed as an extension of posses.

Belk also emphasizes sharing as an interpersonal process sanctioned and prescribed by the local culture which means that different societies understand sharing through different "lenses". Sharing, in this sense, can be seen as a value or degradation, according to their cultural norms.

Mont (2004) also call attention to cultural differences concerning how people perceive the meaning of sharing goods to their lives and explain that, in many cases, this kind of practice is associated with low income, personal sacrifices and additional problems with the organization of private life. Thus, she argues that shared-used products and services do not always have good acceptance by users, because they depend on pre-existing organizational arrangements; how they are designed; and the socio-cultural context in which they are offered.

## **Brazilian services for sharing**

Regarding to sharing, it can be argued that Brazilian people have a cultural heritage for share goods: Among the natives, it is common to share the house (called "oca") and food with several members of the tribe. Also between rural neighbors is still a common practice to share food, agricultural tools and machinery, draft animals and others. However, this model of extended family where almost everything is shared has been fragmented over the past decades as a consequence of urbanization of cities and economic globalization.

Nowadays, the lifestyle in Brazilian's main urban centers has a huge difference from rural areas and primitive communities. Brazilian cities and towns are growing in a frightening way as well as most of cities in the world. This phenomenon is leading to increase individualism, feeling of loneliness, ownership, materialism and possessiveness. Also, the growth of crime has increased the sense of fear and mistrust already quoted by Bauman (2005) in European countries. As a consequence, these feelings are fostering the damage in the social fabric and for environmental sustainability.

To illustrate the relevance of materialism and possessiveness in Brazilian context, its population had increased 10% in the last 10 years while car selling had increased over than 100% by the same period. This number is clearly one of the results of the government's role on improving ownership instead of consumption alternatives as services for sharing. In their worlds, they are increasing the economy by reducing tax rates for cars and other goods. As practical results, Brazilian cities have more traffic, pollution and stress.

Nonetheless, the products and services for sharing offer is rising also in Brazil as a way of goods access and a result of virtual communities' impact on everyday life combined with the individualization phenomenon in large urban centers described by Tramontano (1998), which leads to more people living alone, especially among younger. Furthermore high income people are also sharing very expensive goods as luxury cars, helicopters, yachts and beach houses (Rocha, 2011).

Thus, some Brazilian cases of services for sharing that slowly can change this vector of over consumption are presented below and issues related to interpersonal interaction, privacy, gender and trust (as cultural and social aspects) are discussed.

## Method

Cases of services presented in this paper are related to bike sharing and collective laundries services. These two categories were selected for the reason that they are representative, in Brazil, for areas that correspond to new opportunities for sharing according to a worldwide research realized by Latitude 42 (2010). This study pointed out that:

*The greatest areas of opportunity for new sharing businesses are those where a lot of services do not currently exist within a specific industry category and where a large number of people are currently either a) sharing casually (not through an organized community or service) or b) not sharing at all but would be interested to share. They include transportation, infrequent-use items, and physical spaces. (Latitude 42, 2010).*

Based on an ongoing doctoral study with qualitative research methodology and interpretive approach (Geertz, 1973) methods for collecting and analyzing data include until the moment: internet mapping, interviews with providers and observations for bike sharing services; and observations and interview with users conducted by Vasques in her Master's research for collective laundry services.

## Bike sharing

The first version of a bike sharing service in Rio de Janeiro city was appropriately called SAMBA (an anachronism for Alternative Solution for Mobility by Hired Bikes, in Portuguese, referring to the musical genre that is considered a major popular Brazilian cultural expression). This service had many problems such as bicycle theft and vandalism as well other systems in different countries (e.g. Vélib, in France), and was interrupted twice since it was launched in 2008.

The same system was installed last year in João Pessoa (Brazilian Northeast Region) and Blumenau (South Region). In João Pessoa city, the service is placed at the edge of the beach (see Figure 1) with a great opportunity to be used by tourists. However, only part of the information is in English and Spanish (see Figure 2). Unfortunately the system was without communication when pictures were taken, intercepting the service use and the availability of the bikes.



Figure 1 shows bike sharing service in João Pessoa installed at the edge of the beach. Photo by Marília Riul (2011).



Figure 2 shows the panel control with most of the information only in Portuguese. Photo by Marília Riul (2011).

Moreover, in Blumenau city, the service ended less than a year after it has launched because few people used it.

Nonetheless, by the ending of 2011 the third attempt of a bike sharing service in Rio de Janeiro was launched by a partnership between the company that created SAMBA with both the city council and a national bank (Itaú Bank). As the project is called “Bike Rio” and the internet site for registration on the system is “<http://www.movesamba.com.br>”, it is motivating confusions in the service identity. Rio de Janeiro citizens named the system “Itaú’s bike” as a reference to the colours of the bank adopted in the system (see Figure 3). Also, some users of this service fell uncomfortable about the advertising on the bike (Carpes, 2012).



Figure 3 shows Rio de Janeiro new bike sharing system with the orange bikes. Photo available in <http://www.caoscarioca.com.br>.



This same system recently launched in Rio de Janeiro is now under study to be installed in the city of Sao Paulo.

In São Paulo, the major Brazilian city, a bike sharing service is already under tests at the University of São Paulo campus in the capital. The project named “PedalUSP” was created by two engineering students, as a final project at Polytechnic School (Poli). In an interview with Mauricio Villar, one of the Compartibike's owners, he pointed up the role of social media (Facebook and Twitter) as means of getting insights and feedback from the users: the possibility of having a basket for carrying objects was discussed among users in these medias and was declined because the vast majority of users associated the presence of a basket with bikes for women. This shows an important cultural aspect regarding to bike sharing between different genders. He also explained that the yellow and blue colors (see Figure 4) was chosen to identify the bicycles with the colors of both the Polytechnic School and the University logo, while creating feelings of attachment and belonging for users. Acts of vandalism against the service are rarely found.



Figure 4 shows PedalUSP - the University of São Paulo bike sharing service. Photos by Marcos Santos / USP Images.

It is noteworthy that all these services had started to operate few months ago. Thus, interviews and deeply observations with their users have not been carried out yet.

### Collective Laundries

Sharing washing machines is a very common practice among Brazilians low income neighbors and relatives as a way to have access to these goods (Chelles, 2008). Such services for sharing can be framed as “relational services” (Cipolla & Manzini, 2009) because they request intensive interpersonal interactions, trust and favors encounters among multiple users in opposition to standard services such McDonald's. However, as ownership is strongly related to social status, the desire of purchasing a washer machine is also common into this population.

On the other hand, users of residential collective laundries investigated by Vasques (2011) in her Master' thesis had also affirmed that they want to buy a washing machine as soon as possible, for reasons of product availability (it is almost impossible to wash their clothes when they want) and privacy (everybody can see they underwear clothes, still understood as a “taboo” in Brazil). While the first reason is essentially connect with the user and service schedule, the second is a rooted cultural aspect not covered in the service.

In an exploratory research carried out in Curitiba city by Ono & Sampaio (2007) was identified reduced possibility of sharing washing machines by women between 40 and 70 years, based mainly on attachment in relation to these artifacts and the importance concerned to ownership and individualism in use, whose justifications for this position refer to the care with the washing machine and issues relating to hygiene and health. Participants also reported they have fear on spreading diseases when sharing with people they do not know.

These issues are directly linked to cultural aspects related to the clothing care described by Barbosa (2006) as a classificatory system about what is cleaned and polluted when washing clothes and it is heavily rooted in Brazilian culture, especially among housewives.

However, this classificatory system of pollution was also identified by Vasques as present in collective laundries in cases of standard and even in relational services showing that people keep cultural habits related to owning a product when they are sharing them.

Thus, sharing washing machines seems to be more difficult not only because we live in a society that values ownership and posesses as a social status, but also because it is more difficult to share products with which we have emotional connections. Cultural and practical reasons lead to feelings such as disgust, lack of privacy and fear of both contamination and damage to shared goods are also very important and inhibit services for sharing in collective laundries.

## Summary and Concluding Discussion

In this paper, we argued that a better understanding of aspects that influence the acceptance or rejection in shared use can reflect in a valuable contribution to the design field of services and services. In this sense, tools and methods for service design could be improved with insights that concerns to avoiding barriers related to cultural, social, psychological and proxemic aspects of sharing goods (material or tangible and immaterial or intangible).

Initial finds of the ongoing research call attention to some weak points on improving services for sharing in the Brazilian context: The unavailability of products or gaps in service provision; a rooted sense of ownership and individualism; socio-cultural aspects such as privacy, lack of hygiene and mistrust.

This research next step will be carry out interviews with bike sharing users and compare both bike and collective laundries services in order to get insights from one service that could be applied on the other and highlight differences that work in a context and do not in another as well to identify inhibitors and facilitators associated with sharing aiming to outline strategies for designing services for sharing.

Based on Fry (2009), who emphasized that sustainability lies mainly in human relations instead a product of science or technology, we understand that to reach sustainable patterns of consumption and production, substantially, cultural and behavioral changes are needed, which could be mediated mainly through human relationships and the interaction with services and products that encourage these interpersonal encounters as services for sharing. However, they should not just be reproduced in different contexts and will not be easily accepted when imposed as a mandatory change that goes against local habits and behaviors.

As has been pointed out, design for shared use directly involves how people relate to products and services, their lifestyles, habits and everyday lives, being necessary to

understand them to create feasible alternatives which may lead to changes in current consumption patterns.

Brazil is a country with huge differences in income, education, geography and culture. Thus, this research is a great opportunity to understand differences on sharing between Brazilian large urban centers. Although they are not the mainstream, services (and products) for sharing in Brazil are increasing in a significant way and could represent promising solutions aimed not only at the welfare of the population, but also in the provision of services for two big events that is going to happen in the next years: the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016.

Furthermore, is worth to highlight the role of public authorities as one inhibitor for sharing evidenced by Brazilian's policies of credit incentive and taxes reduction viewed by government as a way to boost the economy, despite the opportunity to spread an economy based on sharing services that could increase the possibility of a "leap-frogging" for a more sustainable society.

## Acknowledgment

Authors would like to thank University of São Paulo for financial fund to attend Cumulus Conference. Financial support from CNPq (National Counsel of Technological and Scientific Development) is also highlighted.

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