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Contributing to sustainable lifestyles through agency and sociability in a sharing economy

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Abstract

A challenge in striving towards a more sustainable city is to make people act in a responsible way. Despite the numerous promising movements, there are still many examples of unsustainable behavior by citizens. Belgium has one of the highest ecological footprints on earth (WWF, 2016), making SDG12 a main challenge. Research shows that a single focus on knowledge sharing and creating awareness is insufficient to realize action (e.g. Bain et al., 2012). Another approach urges itself to realize responsible citizenship behavior.

Uitto's research (2015) points out that within the context of education, pro-social experiences and even more, agency experiences are the highest precedents of responsible environmental behavior. A more in-depth view on the concept agency, leads to the research of Bandura (2006). He makes the distinction between three modes of agency: individual agency, proxy agency and collective agency. The difference can be found in the type of resources used to realize the desired outcomes.

Together, agency and sociability could form a strong duo in the challenge to stimulate today's consumer behavior towards more sustainable lifestyles. Educational institutions succeed in translating these strategies into practice (e.g. participatory class governance). However also in the economic field, innovative business models are increasingly trying to adopt these strategies (Kolbjørnsrud, 2017). This reflects the growing importance of consumer engagement in nowadays decentralized socially-embedded economic models, such as the sharing economy. Although the strategies mentioned above are well documented in the context of sustainable education, more information on similar practices in economic contexts could contribute to their value for innovative business models.

Following research question will be addressed in this paper: In which way do pro-social and agency experiences relate with the performance of sustainable behavior in an out-of-school context, more specifically in the context of the sharing economy? Several hypotheses will test the correlations between the use of sharing economy, intrinsic motivations and the involvement of users in internal sociability and agency. Also the three different modes of agency will be included in the analysis.

Quantitative data is collected through a survey, completed by users of sharing initiatives in Belgium. The survey investigates the sustainability profiles of the users, their motivation to use sharing initiatives and their involvement in pro-social and agency activities of those initiatives. We collect the data through different channels: direct communication from sharing initiatives to their users, face to face completion of the survey on relevant events and distribution of the survey towards our personal network.

Positive correlations are expected between sustainable profiles, type of motivation of users and their involvement in pro-social and agency experiences.

Suggestions for further research are firstly exploring the interconnection between sociability, agency and transformative learning (Jickling & Wals, 2008). Secondly, expanding the research to external agency, referring to general agency not related to the organizations. Thirdly, performing an analysis of the effectiveness of different mechanisms to activate sociability and agency.

Keywords

sustainable behavior – sociability – agency – sharing economy

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