Challenging the Sharing Economy in the Post-Soviet Urban Environment

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ABSTRACT

Sharing economy is a phenomenon that has recently brought a lot of debate to the social sciences. Innovative platforms such as Airbnb and Uber claiming to reconfigure the way people consume and live through sharing of underused resources now just seem to join the line of largest international companies with growing profits. At the same time, being inherently an urban and global phenomenon, it reaches all parts of capitalist world. Post-socialist countries have joined global capitalism quite recently and the case of intersection of sharing economy and post-socialism is a peculiar one. This thesis claims that rapidly urbanized post-socialist cities might challenge the perception of sharing economy and contribute to the understanding of its complexity. Firstly, post-socialist city is contextualized in the framework of material and social infrastructures through the case study of one peripheral city. Subjective perceptions of sharing given by citizens of post-soviet cities are provided. Secondly, the operation of Western sharing economy platforms is challenged also through people's subjectivities and concept of social embeddedness of urban economic practices. The analysis, therefore, reveals internal contradiction in the sharing economy of post-socialist space – digital dimension full of strangers and opportunities is in conflict with deeply rooted institute of personal networks resulting in current disembeddedness of Western-based sharing economy in urban environment.

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It was a usual phone call home and I was about to hang up when my mom noted that she started to share rides with neighbors. There was nothing wrong with it, my mother has always been helping people out, especially when it was related to giving a ride in a direction she was going. But then she added: "Now I can at least partly cover the gas costs". This part was unusual. All this sharing thing has always been for free, even when our financial situation was unstable, I remembered that clearly even though I have not been staying in my hometown in Russia for five years. In further discussion I revealed that my mother was confused whether to accept the money or not, but something made her do it. Financialization of personal relations is quite sensitive topic in post-soviet Russia, but I was attracted by another feature of this event – it resembled to some extent the sharing economy, the phenomenon or I have been researching before. The intricacy of sharing economy application to the post-soviet urban context has been following me ever since and ended up in a form of this thesis.

I shall introduce the topic of sharing economy to the reader more explicitly. In the Western part of the world 'sharing economy' has already become a buzzword. In general, it describes the trend to employ the capacity of underused resources by peer-to-peer transactions through the online communication (for instance, rent out a spare room or give a ride for a stranger going the same direction) but so far there is no agreement on the scope and definition of sharing economy as well as on the notion itself. Moreover, it has been widely criticized for being misleading with the use of 'sharing' as a concept and also for not reflecting reality (Martin 2016; Geant 2014). The advent and development of this phenomenon to some extent reflects digital democratization aspirations and was supposed to address the strive to overcome over-rationalization of human-beings and corporations' monopoly over national economies and people's lives. According to the theorists of this emerging field the sharing economy is all about redefining – redefining the way

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we trust, consume, communicate and live (Botsman & Rogers 2010). It is also believed that sharing economy can bring sustainability as (1) it reduces waste employing resources not-in-use and reducing overconsumption as psychological and economic feature of modernity, (2) develops a new economic order based on peer-to-peer interaction and less hegemonic impact of multinational corporations, (3) creates local and global communities based on equality, tolerance and solidarity, (4) enables new connections between humans reviving the sense of belonginess in highly individualistic societies (Schor 2016; Davidson & Infranca 2016). Another important feature is that sharing economy was born in cities as a response to many inefficiencies of densely populated urban areas – traffic, high living costs, ecological concerns and also social implications of living among countless strangers.

In the outlined discourse of fuzzy meaning of sharing and ambiguity of sharing economy scope and transformative power, the case of intersection of sharing economy and post-socialism is a peculiar one. Being myself from a periphery of Russia and born already after market reforms, I find the mixture of newborn capitalism and strong social ties to socialism (which embraced a specific type of sharing) a fruitful topic for research of sharing economic practices. With 74% of urbanization rate (almost a European level) inherited from USSR, Russia has a majority of citizens living in urban conditions. At the same time, contemporary sharing economy addresses the issues arising in densely populated urban areas – expensive accommodation, traffic and inconveniency of having own car, food accessibility and irresponsible consumption, unemployment and so on. The problems, from the other perspective, become the opportunities and the demand is supposed to be rapidly satisfied by the means of peer-to-peer platforms based on online communication as it happens in the US or Europe. Apparently, in Russia which already acquired neoliberal ideas sharing economy is not booming. Moreover, it is not even associated with the ideology of

alternative economic system and fairer society. As I reveal later in this work, sharing economy[1] in Russia, in contrast, is a purely profit-driven story in a context of overall economic and social struggle.

In this paper I aim to look at the concept of sharing in post-socialist urban conditions and its influence on social and economic relations among citizens. The analytical tool of sharing economy will allow me to contextualize Russian experience of introduction of digital communication and "capitalism without capitalists" (Eyal, Szelényi, Szelenyi, & Townsley 2000) within global neoliberalism agenda. In a post-structuralist fashion, I analyze applicability of global trend to the subjective realities of post-soviet urban conditions which are constantly reminiscent of the past, past in which "sharing" had different implications and had no relation to economy in people's minds. Considering major differences in the process of urbanization in capitalist and socialist cities (Berki 2014) and, consequently, different social fabric in post-socialist cities, it might be insightful to explore sharing economy development in this new context.

When I was doing my field research, my first idea was to identify signs and specificity of sharing practices within post-soviet space and their transformation when market relations emerged and private-public configuration transformed. I traveled to my hometown in Siberia with an aim to understand deeper what sharing means for people living in a post-socialist city and to which extent they are introduced to the "sharing economy". Considering challenging nature of doing sociological and ethnographical research in Russia, I relied heavily on my personal networks to get access to the informants and that also predefined the choice of location of my field trip. This

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[1] Throughout the text I will refer to sharing economy as an abstract term denoting range of activities related to digital sharing of idle capacities in urban conditions with no normative assessment towards the social change prospects or ideological implications.

also became a main limitation of the research. Remembering my own experience of living in a post-socialist periphery and knowing how and where sharing might take place, I started to build my informants base around a multi-storey building I spent my childhood in. My research showed that even in the contexts which are typical for sharing relationships formation due to increased interpersonal trust the processes are still slow and embryonic. Therefore, in this thesis I explore the reasons of weak social cohesion and limited sharing practices with both strangers and non-strangers on the basis of my hometown, using my personal networks as a source of data. I use semi-structured and unstructured interviews with residents of the building and just citizens of my city as my main tool to identify features of a post-soviet sharing culture. My observations also contributed to the exploration of the topic of sharing as many people were refusing to talk to me as I was a stranger. I will analyze it in the context of trust to strangers and social capital in next chapters. Besides, I also use the content analysis of media to identify common perceptions of "sharing economy" and "collaborative consumption" in post-soviet context.

In the first chapter I will outline main theoretical frameworks I will use in my analysis. First of all, I will look closer at the controversial nature of sharing economy as it has features of global capitalist ideology and alternative fairer economic system at the same time. The analysis of the literature exploring the inquiry into post-socialist sharing economies and urbanity establishes the need in further research on the social implications of digital sharing in post-socialism. The second chapter will be devoted to the contextualization of my research. I will introduce my hometown and spatial conditions in which people live explaining the impact of socialist and post-socialist urban development on social interactions and sharing initiatives. I argue that social and material conditions of post-soviet cities impact the relation to sharing and sociality. Final chapter will deal with the very sharing economy phenomenon in the post-socialist context. Employing the

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analytical tools of social capital and trust I will explain different dynamics of new collaborative platforms being introduced to the city and how it is related to the aspirations towards more human economy in post-soviet people's mind. I reveal that sharing economy in form of Western-based platforms is currently disembedded from social relations in post-socialist urbanity but there are sharing practices which are based not on sharing of commodities but sharing of concern and they could be considered as a type of embedded sharing economy.

This study, hopefully, will contribute to the larger topic of sharing economy global relevance by explaining challenges in concept's applicability and also to the studies of post-socialism in the context of globalization. As the topic of sharing economy creates a certain hype, it is hard to be objective about it, though I tried to remain neutral and also contribute to the understanding of its complexity. In general, the research reveals ambiguity of understanding of sharing, opens new directions for the research on the challenges in the humanization of economy and contributes to the chunk of literature on post-soviet urban practices.

CHAPTER 1 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION OF SHARING ECONOMY IN POST-SOCIALISM

It is vital to explain internal contradictions of sharing economy as I am going to use it as an analytical tool in further exploration of socioeconomic relations in post-socialist cities. In this chapter I will also review the literature establishing the ground for the research of sharing economy in post-socialist urban environment.

1.1. Sharing economy: anti-capitalist construct or reinforcement of neoliberalism?[2]

The advent of collective economies and local creativities has become especially apparent in Western cities after the 2008 crisis as sharing economy researchers claim. One of the first one to note this was Rachel Botsman. In the book *What's Mine is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* (2010) Botsman and her co-author Roo Rogers claim that it was the time to rethink our global consumerist culture. Back to 2010 the book was an attempt to systematize and theorize emerging platforms under one umbrella term with the aim to show cohesion and elaborate a new agenda. By introducing the term 'collaborative consumption' Botsman and Rogers accurately crafted a long discourse and created a way for multiple critique as the book is cited almost in every article on the sharing economy issues. Already in 2015 Botsman admits that 'the umbrella term starts to lose meaning' because the connections between ideas become looser. She gives a symbolic dictionary for the emerged terms such as 'access economy', 'gig economy' and so on in the article *The Sharing Economy: Dictionary of Commonly Used Terms* and notes that this is all about

different lenses through which we look at the same phenomenon. She finally says that it is barely possible that 'we'll arrive at precise terms'. Therefore, now we have a bunch of similar terms – collaborative consumption, collaborative economy, gig economy, access economy, peer-to-peer economy, on-demand economy, gift economy, commonalities and some others. The question is how we can decide in this variety what to use and what describes the best the emerging phenomenon. Botsman eventually comes to the conclusion that the core meaning of this new economy is human relationships (Botsman 2013).

The discourse of separation of economy from society and its real needs has quite a long history as does the struggle to improve capitalist system or, in other words, to humanize it. Concerns about modern society could be traced a century ago in already mentioned Simmel's 'Metropolis and Mental life' where he emphasizes 'the calculating mind' – the ability to mathematize all human interactions (Simmel 1903), in Weber's 'iron cage' (Weber & Parsons 2003), or Marx's four forms of alienation (Marx 1844). According to the idea of Keith Hart and his co-authors in *The Human Economy: A Citizen's Guide*, to solve the problem economics should not be only in hands of economists, it must be a study of man in which geographers, anthropologists, historians, and other social scientists work together. Hart, Laville and Cattani (2010) argue that 'the economy is made and remade by people in their everyday lives' and it is not 'an impersonal machine'. The Human Economy is, therefore, a manifesto for emancipation from poorly working ideologies and systems and for building a new understanding of what economy means and how it should work. The authors express concern with current state of affairs in the world and claim that the economy to be human should refer to our daily life economic practices. In the understanding of ideologs of sharing economy, this is what sharing economy actually does – allows to surpass established institutions and let people do peer-to-peer transactions locally and

all over the world. Pais and Provasi (2015) claim that sharing economy is able to resolve the issue of "disembeddedness" (Polanyi 1957) of economic relations from social ones. Initially, when major platforms just emerged, this was the idea indeed – Airbnb was created to facilitate the meeting of people who have free space at home and people who want to save money on accommodation. Now when Airbnb is full of flats bought specifically for short-term rentals on Airbnb, the idea of sharing has faded. However, researchers keep claiming that sharing economy does matter.

Juliet Schor, a prominent person in sharing economy research, in *Debating Sharing Economy* (2016) acknowledges the exploitative and self-interested side of the phenomenon. But she is also sure that, in general, new technologies have the potential of creating the economy based on solidarity and cooperation. NYU professor Arun Sudararajan as well believes that digitalization has a democratizing effect as many people are getting the access to the sharing services, which is a step to reducing inequality and building fairer communities. He also raises the issue of trust and relationships among strangers bringing more attention to the emergence of technological systems of feedback and reputation in the trust-building process. Basically, supporters of sharing economy are discussing some similar digitally-supported local initiatives arising in Western cities, which are built on the idea of collaborative consumption (such as time banks, clothes swapping, home exchange) alongside with the largest platforms which have already lost their "sharing identity" in most cases due to going global and increasing their operations to the extent the initial idea does not matter. As Reinhard Loske (2015) states:

> *It is important to distinguish between that part of the Sharing Economy which works primarily in the community interest and that part which is primarily oriented towards profits, in order not to lump everything together and to ensure*

that like organisations are treated alike and dissimilar ones differently. Food sharing, city gardens, carpooling
networks, repair cafés, clothes swap parties, shared cars, recycling exchanges and the temporary letting of empty properties are clearly something completely different to commercial booking platforms for accommodation or transport, free-floating car sharing offers, appliance and tool hire, agricultural machinery rings, co-working spaces and subscription clothes rental services.[3]

Though it is also true that it is difficult to separate community-oriented organizations from profit-oriented ones. Like in a global platform BlaBlaCar one driver might give a ride to a stranger with understanding that no other means of transport is available in this direction or just not wishing to travel alone, the other wants to cover the expenses and do not care about communicative part of transaction. Similarly, local timebanks or tool hires could be used exploitatively for personal needs (for instance, buying expensive tool and renting out solely for profit) without any return to community. So, the question remains: How do we classify it? As threat or as a promise?

"Nightmarish neoliberalism"[4]

The promises of sharing economy in the beginning of its existence have been loud and seemed for many as a way out of consumerist culture. However, in last ten years the revolution of sharing did not happen for a number of reasons. In this chapter I will contest that "sharing economy", which has been promoted to become an alternative to capitalist system, could be considered, in contrast, as a logical continuation of capitalist global dominance.

A good argument for this could be found in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) where they state that capitalism finds itself in a constant change under the pressure of critiques. They claim that spirits of capitalism have been different over time. And in

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[3] Translated from German by Ray Cunningham.
[4] Taken from Martin, C. J. (2016). The sharing economy: A pathway to sustainability or a nightmarish form of neoliberal capitalism? Ecological Economics, 121, 149-159.

times of "third spirit" capitalism which started in 60s, the values of flexibility, leanness, freedom and creativity proliferate. These values also underpin the sharing economy which has been recently presented as a new economic system. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) also mention that trust gains more weight in economic relations and that attitude to owning property is changing – it is more convenient to rent than to own in a new world. These two prerequisites are the pillars of sharing economy and it could be assumed that sharing economy is merely a system offering a new economic order but just a new "spirit" of capitalism.

At the same time Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) also pay attention to the importance and transformational role of networks in a new capitalist paradigm. Referring to Castells' *The Rise of Network Society* (1996) we can define networks as a theoretical concept describing social relationships in the Information Age. Castells provided the scholarship with theoretical tool to analyze structure of the contemporary society and emphasized new forms of communication between people who become more and more individualized. "Who are the owners, who the producers, who the managers and who the servants becomes increasingly blurred in a production system of … networking, outsourcing and subcontracting" (Castells 1996). Networks in Castells' understanding can be connected to what is created through sharing economy platforms and communities. Interestingly, in Castells' analysis network society is intrinsically capitalistic. Therefore, network theory as well could prove belonginess of sharing economy to capitalist ideological framework (of a different type or spirit).

Chris J. Martin in the article *The sharing economy: A pathway to sustainability or a nightmarish form of neoliberal capitalism?* (2016) questions whether this emerging field is a real way to sustainability and not just 'a purely economic opportunity' and concludes that the sharing economy has a paradoxical potential both to reinforce current imperfect economic system and to

'promote more sustainable consumption and production practices'. Evgeny Morozov, a prominent critic of cyber-utopianism, has less optimistic view and promotes these ideas in his ongoing critique of sharing economy and other promises of Silicon Valley. In The Guardian's column *Don't believe the hype, the 'sharing economy' masks a failing economy* he is also hinting on a controversial nature of sharing economy saying that "… [utopian sharing economy tales] rationalize the pathologies of the current political and economic system, presenting them as our conscious lifestyle choices" (Morozov 2014). His main idea is that sharing economy does not only give us desired emancipation from capitalist system, it is "cementing our connection to the global market" as our possessions – tangible and intangible – can be shared everywhere through the Internet (Morozov 2014).

"Real utopia" of sharing economy

Apart of fierce criticism there is still a hope in the academia that a structural change might have place with improvements in social cohesion, responsible consumption, sustainability awareness and community building. It might sound too good to be truth and that is why I prefer to use here the term 'real utopia' coined by Erik Olin Wright to describe aspirations towards a better world order through participatory changing of institutions. The ideal 'sharing economy' pictured in many articles, news columns, blogpost and podcasts reminds me of this term. Though now it seems that pioneers such as Uber, Lift and Airbnb are struggling with complying with their suggested ideology, there are plenty of other initiatives mentioned as "good sharing" by Reinhard Loske (2015) which we can count as real sharing economy. The question is what brings them together.

There is nothing new about sharing – it was a driver for social and economic development since the start of civilization. Here it is important to acknowledge that the notion of sharing is

quite fuzzy. It could be difficult to distinguish between 'gift giving, sharing, and commodity exchange' (Belk 2009). The distinction is supposed to be in the mind of participants of sharing activities and it could vary from case to case. What is new in the topic of sharing nowadays is the digital dimension expanding the scope of practices and their efficiency. What have been tried to convey by many supporters of sharing economy who operate in the field of economic anthropology is that in Polanyi's terms sharing economy is something which can help in overcoming society's disembeddedness from economy (Pais and Provasi 2015). Juliet Schor, a prominent researcher in this emerging field, believes that sharing economy provides "powerful tools for building a social movement centered on genuine practices of sharing and cooperation in the production and consumption of goods and services" although big platform indeed could have negative effects (Schor 2016). She distinguishes between what we are used to call sharing economy – giants as Uber, Lift and Airbnb and less visible local initiatives built on collaborative consumption through digitalization. Schor (2016) leaves the open question whether sharing economy practices are able to nurture a movement towards more inclusive and sustainable economy.

One of the factors which allows us to believe so is the transformation of values from materialist to post-materialist. Sharing economy in many cases promotes the ideology of access against ownership. Internet-enabled transactions and virtual storage contributes to the change in the value of ownership. Belk (2014) in *You are what you can access: Sharing and collaborative consumption online* analyses the impact of new digital sharing and predicts that saying 'You are what you own' might have been losing its relevance and converting to a new wisdom 'You are what you share'. In general, he thinks that this can indicate a transformation to post-ownership

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economy. To me, this can open the discussion whether this transformation is global and comprehensive, which I will partly embrace in this thesis.

Another important contribution to the ideologization of sharing economy has been made NYU professor Arun Sudararajan in the book *THE SHARING ECONOMY: The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism* (2016). The analysis lies in the intersection of computer technologies, psychology and social sciences. The author believes that digitalization has a democratizing effect as many people are getting the access to the sharing services, which is a step to reducing inequality and building communities based on solidarity. He believes in the potential of trust relations improvement through digital means.

The issue of trust is considered to be of major importance in sharing economy. Considering mass amount of operations with strangers, trust in this context is perceived as more rational and more pragmatic in contrast to trust of personal networks. In *How digital trust powers the sharing economy* of Mazella et al. (2016) authors believe that James Coleman's understanding of trust as readiness to collaborate accepting the risk of uncertainty in other party's action is the most relevant for sharing economy case. Currently we are talking about digitization of trust and with new technologies we can assess the risk more efficiently. As trust opens for us new opportunities besides traditional personal networks, we can start talking about trust as a currency or a social capital if we turn it into market logic.

Social capital is a very broad, interdisciplinary and ambiguous topic in social sciences. It relates to trust, reciprocity, civil society, voluntary actions, democracy etc. And it has a key role in sharing economy ideology of social transformation. While Bourdieu's classical concept is only slightly relevant for this particular research, another prominent social capital understanding developed by Robert Putnam has more implications. His definition refers more to social networks

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and reciprocal relationships. He also grounds his theory around communities and growing need of social connectedness in the society where isolation prevails. His concern in *Bowling alone* (2000) is that the tendency of doing something with someone else is declining in the US context, so does the social capital. In regard to sharing economy and sharing activities in digital age in general, social capital is both prerequisite and product of such transactions as a particular level of social capital is required for entering the domain of sharing relations with strangers and successful participation in such transactions might foster the sense of belonginess and trust to other people. Sharing economy in a sense is a producer of weak ties (Granovetter 1977) which are important in social capital building if we assume that our social networks (overall sum of acquaintances) matter in regard to our life chances. There is also a large discussion over the relation of social capital to civic society and democratization, which are though extremely interesting in relation to sharing economy potential but too broad for the purpose of this paper.

The isolation and estrangement topic in modern communities has something to do with spatial dimension – urban environment, in particular. Cities and metropolises are often imagined as places of opportunities, hopes and freedom. The continuing process of urbanization proves people's aspiration to live a content, convenient and promising life. However, such life of eternal possibilities is inevitably accompanied by the feelings of separation, individualism and stress of increased competition. One of the first to notice and describe that phenomenon was Georg Simmel in his famous *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1909). His theory claims that a modern person living in a metropolis creates 'a protective organ' and acts more rationally than emotionally. From this statement Simmel explains two fundamental features of a modern metropolitan man – calculating mind and blasé attitude. First is coming directly from a money economy and exemplifies the phenomenon of mathematizing every part of person's life. Simmel

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just depicts the situation not giving his personal assessment – we cannot say whether the process is positive or detrimental. Simmel sees in modernity (in metropolises) the way for a person to free themselves from the ties of a small traditional community.

Later, Luis Wirth, American sociologist, elaborates on the sense of estrangement in a bit more negative way in the *Urbanism as a Way of Life*: 'Whereas the individual gains, on the one hand, a certain degree of emancipation or freedom from the personal and emotional controls of intimate groups he loses, on the other hand, the spontaneous self-expression, the morale and the sense of participation...' (Wirth 1938). He defines contacts in the cities as superficial, impersonal and transitory. In such conditions the question of disconnectedness and social capital become quite topical. In the ideology of sharing economy, it helps to resolve urban issues and also contributes to social connectivity. Davidson and Infranca in their research *Sharing Economy as an Urban Phenomenon* also identify urban conditions as the hidden architecture of sharing economy and state that 'the sharing economy has found effective tools to replicate a version of the kind of trust economy associated with pre-urban community' (2016: 237). Urban environment is full of anonymous strangers, which implies a certain risk understood by all urban actors. Sharing economy helps to 'deanonymize' strangers by introducing rating and feedback systems and 'providing a new mechanism to generate social capital' (Davidson & Infranca 2016). In a way, they assert that it is a replacement for the reputation a person usually has in a small community.

With the discussed internal controversy of sharing economy, there is definitely a need to rethink what do we understand as a phenomenon and whether it has the impact attributed to it. It seems that right now there is a discrepancy between what do we put into the notion of sharing economy and how it is represented as a popular image. At the end of the day, it is still just a theoretical construct. In this line, Ann Light and Clodagh Miskelly (2015) suggest calling the

emergence of new movement 'sharing cultures' believing that it might be healthier because the phenomenon covers not only the economy but also environmental and social sustainability and democracy issues. I have described aspirations towards sharing economy potential with an aim to show how multifaceted can be the promise of the digitally-enabled sharing. It should be taken into consideration that aforementioned claims have been made based on the research in Western urban communities. And considering fast penetration of such market innovations to other parts of the world, it is important to assess how these promises work in different contexts.

1.2 Post-socialist urbanity: neoliberalism and weakened social capital

The research of sharing economy hardly could be separated from its spatial dimension as it requires critical mass of mobile users and solves a particular set of problems of urban space. In this section I will give a general picture of post-soviet urban social fabric in order to lay a ground for further case-based discussion.

The title of the article *Neo-liberalism and Post-socialist Urban Transformations: Poverty, Inequality and the City* (Smith and Rochovska 2006) already says a lot about state of affairs in post-socialist cities after transformation. Authors explain that neo-liberal agenda was crucial in transition policies creation in CEE (Central and Eastern Europe). The rapid transition happened to be "a profoundly uneven process" (Smith and Rochovska 2006: 45) and was followed with increased rates of inequality and poverty as market forces were not balances with welfare state efforts. Berki (2014) distinguishes multi-layered nature of post-socialist urban change. He notes that a hybridization of local and global transitions took place because post-soviet countries underwent both changes of economic system on local level and also global political, economic and cultural shifts (Berki 2014:324). As the result post-soviet societies obtained such features as

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"individualism, hedonism, the need of self-expression, and hybrid consumption" (Berki 2014:324).

We can suppose that individualism, for instance, is not only a product of neoliberal forces coming in form of increased competition and self-oriented values but also a feature of transitional period. Cook, Rice and Gerbasi (2004) argue that "uncertainty and risk (such as that created by corruption and dishonesty) lead to formation of trust networks which are narrow and close". I will argue in this thesis that this feature of post-socialism has a considerable impact on sharing practices and sharing economy form and functioning in Russia.

When talking about trust in post-soviet space, it is essential to refer to the important analysis of trust-cultures of Piotr Sztompka. The term he coined – "syndrome of distrust" – illustrates the state of trust decay in post-soviet social order. On the example of Poland, he suggests that transitional chaos or anomie producing lack of moral guidance affects all spheres of social life. "Trust is based on the anticipations of the future", he reminds (Sztompka 1999:176). Within post-communist space exposed to numerous challenges and opportunities coming with market and globalization the sense of predictability has considerably lowered. And even after decades the situation with uncertainty and trust has remained. In Russia, for instance, the discourse of external threat is sustained through media channels controlled by the government and corruption with informality still proliferate under "closed eyes" of the government and benefiting parties and weak civil society.

In the case of urban life, the "defensive strategies" (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina 2000) were the response of household to the time of uncertainty. Such strategies were rooted into the material, social, skills and citizenship assets inherited from Soviet past (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina 2000:47). Smith (2017) notices that such strategies were not a resistance but a deeply

rooted practices of living during state socialism. The inherited asset of networks of friends and relatives is of particular interest for me due to the focus of my research. I could argue through my findings that the situation still persists and such coping strategies in many cases predefine the nature of sharing in urban life and social relations in post-soviet Russia. I will touch upon material urban conditions of a post-socialist city as this dimension of urban life has not been widely considered in literature.

1.3. Academic inquiry into sharing economy in post-socialist context

While books are written for broader public, documentaries are created, and urban strategies related to sharing economy are employed on the level of Western megapolises, it is hardly possible to find information about this 'global revolution' in other parts of the world. At the same time, the roots of sharing activities can be traced from the very beginning of human history (Belk 2009) and usually they are the core of social relations in any culture. situation with sharing economy could be even more interesting in post-soviet conditions as socialist economy was to some extent a sharing economy. But does it spur in any way contemporary sharing economy development? Does it imply that sharing economy in this part of the world has a specific path of development? In this section I will give an overview of the literature trying to deal with the question of general sharing economy development in post-communist space abstracting from urban dimension.

In close academic circles interested in post-soviet application of sharing economy, it is often associated with the informal economy or grey economy which is indeed a special topic in the post-socialist discourse. Kovács et al. (2017) in the paper *Looking at the 'sharing' economies concept through the prism of informality* research the social embeddedness of sharing practices with a focus on post-communist conditions. They believe that 'the spectrum of economic transactions' is remarkable in the former territory of USSR and due to the high similarity of

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informal practices and sharing economy practices in the age of digitalization there is a strong connection of one to another. However, the specificity of post-soviet sharing economy lies in its 'low-fi informality' as they call it, meaning that the basis of it is not technology-driven. In most cases, the relationships of reciprocity and trust are established through personal networks, however, since soviet times they have become more commercialized and, consequently, undergoes the process of disembedding as the authors argue. I will use this understanding of (dis)embeddedness in my argument later considering sharing economy platforms operation in a post-soviet city and importance of personal networks in the process of re-embeddedness of new sharing practices.

Embeddedness is a quite important concept when it comes to the sharing economy perception in the post-soviet states. Introduced by Karl Polanyi, it articulates the complexity of relationships between economy and society. Though later the concept has been understood differently by various researchers, Polanyian view on it tends to be interpreted through his stand on the contemporary market economy when the economy plays the dominant role over society and 'social relations are embedded in the economic system' (Polanyi 1957).

Accordingly, two quite interesting cases from the Albania and Romania suggested by Kovács et al. highlight social embeddedness of certain practices (when the importance of the practice exceeded only the economic benefit) coming from soviet informality. Currently, under the capitalism values pressure the practices happened to become commercialized and, therefore, resemble the phenomenon we call 'sharing economy'. Romanian case of childcare and the relationship between parents and a nanny could be considered as a case of sharing economy since the mediating services connecting strangers appeared. Before the same pattern of collaboration worked in a slightly different form – a nanny could work not for money but for certain favors done by the family and at the same time she was available for complementary tasks in exchange for

other favors, which, by the end of the day, turned out into the never-ending reciprocal system creating more stable bonds between people than in current version of sharing. Nevertheless, conceptually the turn to 'cash-to-care' exchange makes such informal economic activity very close to the idea of sharing economy (Kovács et al. 2017).

In Albania, at the same time, sharing has been present in the financial sector too. Due to obvious constraints of socialist system (limited market of goods, low wages, long queues for basic commodities) people time to time felt the possibility to buy something immediately (TV or washing machine) but could not do it. The informal system of a lottery loan-financing emerged: a group of people was saving a small part of money every month and the collected sum was given to one participant determined by the lottery. Using this scheme people could buy needed appliances or finance a wedding not waiting too long. Interestingly, even now, with the proliferation of banks and credit products, such schemes are still in use. Again, authors say that social embeddedness might be the reason because connections and sense of community are still important for workers. Alongside with this reason the economic ones – reducing transaction costs and risks of getting rejected in a bank – are prevailing. This case of local sharing initiatives could be as well associated with sharing economy. The perspective the authors suggest reveals sharing economy dependence on soviet context in some cases and reveals its clear distinction from the forms of sharing economy we are used to see in Western countries – technologically-oriented; in the form of intermediary between strangers; following to some extent the sustainability agenda.

Another very recent research by Laurențiu-Mihai Treapăt, Anda Gheorghiu and Marina Ochkovskaya on sharing economy in Russia and Romania aims at presenting successful cases of conventional sharing economy (platform-based such as Airbnb and Uber). Explaining basics, principles and examples of sharing economy as it perceived in Western context they proceed with

describing and analyzing consumerist culture in Romania and in Russia with historical insights (low life quality level in socialist closed system, perestroika hyperinflation impact and even referring to the formed mentality, which could be too ambitious). In case studies they consider Airbnb rather superficially and using evaluative judgements such as 'wonderful experience … to exchange opinions with people from different countries' while Russian market on Airbnb is barely represented by hosts offering to share their flat, usually it is used to market free apartments and with only lucrative purpose. Although their note that another service, YouDo.ru (a platform for outsourcing tasks and finding on-demand employment) works complementary with Airbnb as it supplies Airbnb renters with cleaners and electricians is quite interesting and revealing as it shows sharing economy as an interdependent system where audiences intersect. The authors also try to explain the popularity of YouDo claiming that the generation of Millennials is resistant to standard working hours in Russia. This statement needs some justification, from my point of view, as well as general generational hypothesis. I will touch upon this topic in chapter three, looking at the nature of some behavioral patterns in post-soviet Russian urbanity.

More historically and socially embedded example of sharing economy is suggested by Jehlička and Daněk (2017) in their article *Rendering the Actually Existing Sharing Economy Visible: Home-Grown Food and the Pleasure of Sharing* where they attempt to cover a blind spot – 'the non-market and non-monetized sharing of home-grown food' as an intersection of sharing economy and sustainable gardening. Most interestingly, in their analysis they use the division Global North/Global South claiming that in the context of Global South the informal/sharing economy takes the form of coping strategies while in the context of North under the influence of capitalistic values the initiatives of non-monetized foodsharing become marginal and, therefore, perceived as 'inappropriate'. They find such approach to the foodsharing problematic and seek to

prove that foodsharing not fully based on the Internet platform and existing locally also might be a part of sharing economy with its claimed prospect to transform the society into a post-capitalist one. The fact that in the Czech Republic 'non-profit and non-market sharing transactions can be conceived of as ethical choices and alternative spaces' is revealing and expand further research on the topic.

Non-monetary sharing in extreme conditions is a separate sub-topic in the broader issue as it is motivated by different factors. People not only share commodities or services but also, they share concerns and the situation of hardship. Zikera and Fulk (n.d.) wrote an article *Indigenous Siberian Food Sharing Networks: Social Innovation in a Transforming Economy* where they explained anthropological perspective of such sharing existence and this could be related to the economy of sharing. They dig into the theories of 'kin selection, reciprocal altruism, indirect reciprocity, signaling, and demand sharing' to understand deeper the system and motivations of the indigenous people. Even though the groups are remote and live in hard economic conditions not being really included into the world economy, such studies allow to get some insights on reciprocity and sharing in local communities as if there was no substantial connection with outer world. Moreover, it puts in question extreme conditions and catastrophe-related sharing as a part of sharing economy as well as introduces into the analysis the term "sharing of concern".

To sum up, with the small amount of literature available it is hard to give assessment to the phenomenon developing on the post-soviet space in its relation to sharing economy. Some literature gives only superficial or one-sided understanding of the situation. Nevertheless, as the literature on informality and grey economy in the region abound and we can clearly establish the connection (to some extent, as a predecessor of sharing economy), more elaborated research on this connection could be done to trace the uniqueness of local collaborative consumption and its

relation to global capitalist ideology and emancipatory activism. The social embeddedness of traditional and disembeddedness of modern (digital) sharing practices in the context of urban post-communist environment is something I am specifically paying attention in my research.

CHAPTER 2 - POST-SOCIALIST CITIES: TENSE RELATIONS WITH SHARING

Field trips are never easy, neither homecomings. The situation of being intertwined between my research interests and past belongingness to the place has put me in an interesting position: I felt that I can derive as much from my past and present subjectivities as I did from interviews with residents. Here I present my findings which are quite personal and critical as I tried to put myself into the position of "the other" and, in fact, a product of that space. This chapter explores the context and reveals the connection of sharing/economic practices in post-soviet conditions with people's experiences and subjective realities of life in Russian cities.

2.1. Corrosion inside and outside: trust and public spaces in post-soviet cities

My hometown is a post-soviet city which you can hardly call atypical: the main street has the name of Lenin, the main square is called Gorky square, street where I spent a considerable part of my life is named after Karl Marx. The remnants of soviet past constitute a big part of a modern city image. Grey five-storey *hruschevki* (standard housing units), *dom kultury* (house of culture) and a public space in form of city park alongside with some shopping malls and modern residencies are the common parts of majority of small and middle-sized cities in post-soviet Russian periphery. Berdsk is a middle-sized city with around 100,000 inhabitants the majority of whom commute every day to work to a regional center and 3rd city in Russia, Novosibirsk. Having industrial heritage in form of big closed factory and no current activities to sustain future economic development, it is a typical example of a peripheral post-socialist city. The usual feeling I have when I return to Siberia to visit my family is apathy and almost everything you see contributes to it – modern buildings vacantly neighboring with barracks, big retailers occupying same space with merchants selling clothes from China, inaccuracy, boredom and few aesthetics in infrastructural objects, and, most importantly, people looking indifferent and apprehensive at the same time in

case you somehow invaded their privacy, even by looking. The apathy was gone on my end when I returned with enthusiasm to conduct my research, however, nothing changed on the other side.

Apprehension could be the word of my field trip. Being a researcher, you often pay too much attention to people, but in the society of indifference this creates a tension. Russian people are not used to be interviewed and due to certain reasons (which I will discuss in this chapter) they are also not keen of sharing personal information with strangers. The only party interested in public opinions is political surveyors. Thus, due to lack of trust in political institutions (Shlapentokh 2006), any research activities are met with indifference at best or disgust at worst. Having known this from personal experience, I was mostly relying on personal networks to obtain necessary data, but my interaction with strangers have also given me a considerable understanding of the situation in a post-soviet urban environment.

Based on what I explored, I could still prove that post-soviet eclectic urban environment and specificity of private-public material relationships impact the patterns of social communication in post-soviet cities as I explained in Chapter 1. First of all, the configuration of life of a typical post-soviet urban dweller limits all possible interactions with people you are not supposed to meet outside of work/study conditions. Streets in most cases are simply functional as way from one point to another, public spaces are highly limited and often abandoned as an unprofitable burden of USSR past, open air sport places are functional several months per year due to harsh climate. In contrast with usual representation of urban space as dense and rich for interactions, Bigbov (2002) in his almost literature-like research on Paris/Moscow organization of urban public spaces explores that in Moscow as in a post-soviet city any café terrace would be separated from the street by fences, while in Paris seats are allocated on the street mixing the street crowd and café visitors and enabling subtle social interaction – you could hear people talking over the table, examine

people's food, catch somebody's eye, accidentally touch people and even exchange few words. In post-soviet city, therefore, almost the only and usually the main place for socialization is a yard or territory near multi-storey building, where children and their parents, pet owners or car owners may form some kind of spontaneous social ties. This situation creates a specific attitude towards interaction with strangers – distrust and suspicion. Boris (male, 22, junior researcher in physics, recently moved to the capital) reveals in a talk:

> *I do not feel comfortable about public places in city, like, you know, I would not go and sit on the grass with other people in a park. Maybe if I was born somewhere in Europe, not in Berdsk, it would be different, but I never had such experience in my life and I do not really feel the need even now when I have access to considerably more comfortable urban conditions in Moscow.*

Secondly, detachment and isolation are also symptomatic due to economic paradigm change. In post-communist literature the topics about changes in values and market reforms impact on social life abound. For instance, Ledeneva (1998) in *Russia's Economy of Favours* notices that after shift to the market economy we could reveal "tendencies towards a decrease in mutual help, the narrowing of circles and the break-up of personal networks". Though, she admits that it did not mean that personal networks were not functional, they just became more pragmatic, rationalized, profit-oriented. This is a very obvious conclusion from many ethnographies devoted to post-socialist transformation. During my communication with informants who had an experience of living in USSR, I often heard notes that people now are different, more egoistic and self-oriented.

Paradoxically, urban space which was created with the ideology of collectivity nowadays contributes to the opposite. Low level of effective communication culture and distrust are important feature of post-soviet urban life. As I discussed previously, cities have always been characterized as places with people who are led by calculating mind and blasé attitude (Simmel

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1903). Impossibility of knowing a person next to you creates already a certain level of anxiety which has been successfully suppressed by generations of city dwellers. Though for Russia which inherited socialist cities built from scratch just some decades ago and inhabited by people who never experienced urban life before the situation is different. Besides weak culture of urban co-living, the post-socialist transformational hardships have contributed to the crystallization of behavioral patterns related to personal safety and communication with strangers. Ivleva (2010) in *Urban Neighborhoods in Transformation Process* suggests that in the 90s the ties existing among people living in one building started to weaken and people became more worried about security issues. This was related both to the economic disaster and criminalization in "wild 90s".

The anomie (Durkheim 1897) of post-socialist period has resulted in "the syndrome of distrust" as Ivleva (2010) states. Maxim Trudolubov in his book *People Behind the Fence: Private Space, Power and Property in Russia (2015)* elaborates on the topic of security by giving a historical insight into the inner strive for isolationism. He states that ideas of collectivism lost their popularity long before the collapse of Soviet Union. People were longing for some private life in their communal lifestyle and "passion for consuming things (owning things) is still here with us" (Trudolubov 2015). At the same time, this has led to narrower understanding of responsibility. If before people considered their yard as common responsibility, now their home is limited by a flat. As Russian urban sociologist Alexander Bikbov says "public spaces and collaboration emerge only in cases of threat, not because of joy of sharing"[5]. When talking to the residents of my housing unit in Berdsk with around 100 flats I was trying to identify any traces of sharing culture and collaboration within this post-communist community. My hypothesis was that with absence of

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[5] From his public lecture in June 2017 in Moscow.

quality public spaces and general distrust people will tend to collaborate around places where they spend lots of time. But my informants proved the opposite:

> *Once I had a feeling that I actually wanted to create a nice common space in our section, so I put flowers on a window sill near my flat. But they were there only a week or less, I can hardly imagine who might have stolen them but since then I have never done and will never do it again for sure…* – Elena (female, 52, teacher).

Very similar story I heard from a resident of other section of the building: they installed new lamp bulbs by pooling money from the whole floor flats residents. When new bulbs were stolen, it firstly impacted overall trust to people and also decreased the desire to pool or collaborate for common good – risks are too high.

Level of trust and readiness for collaboration are very often associated with the notion of social capital in sociological theory (elaborated in Chapter 1). Though the connection between social capital and local development are blurry because there is still "some magic" in the understanding of collective action and the assumption of synergy (Giaccaria 2016), all considerations above bring me to assuming a pessimistic interdependency between decaying urban space and social capital in post-soviet space. It seems that collapsing post-soviet city finds itself in a vicious circle: disorganized individualized citizens are not taking actions to prevent corrosion of public spaces, while continuing corrosion of public spaces reproduce apathy and isolationism.

2.2. *"Sharing is never about money, it is the impulse of the soul"*[6]

In the context I have just outlined, reader may have difficulties imagining proliferation of sharing practices. And though aforementioned issues indeed have something to do with the willingness to share and collaborate, I also argue about a specific cultural understanding of sharing closely linked to inherited asset of personal networks (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina 2000) which impacts considerably the perception of sharing economy and social relations in post-soviet society.

Being myself from this cultural context I had difficulties with translating and understanding "sharing economy" at first times. Sharing cannot be related to money, the process itself is usually quite intimate because we usually share what we own and we share with people who will appreciate our effort. Here comes the apprehension to strangers I have already discussed – you hardly can have intimate relations with stranger. They call it sharing for money? We call it selling here.

There is a quite important finding I got which has been repeated in multiple interviews and even found reflection in myself. People regardless of their sex or age or social status tended to agree that sharing is usually an act of kindness and people should not rationalize it by expecting money in return. Therefore, if somebody has some unused resources the first thing he or she would do is to go through personal network to identify whether somebody is in need:

> *"I usually ask close friends or ask them to ask their friends. I would not ask people I do not know, they might think that I am undermining their economic status, offering help… No, they won't understand"* – Natalia (female, 48, warehouse worker).

The attitude to sharing as to something sacred, defining close relationships contradicts significantly with financial difficulties many people experience. However, when I was asking

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[6] From the interview with Elena (24th of April 2018)

about selling/renting idle capacities, people were confused – not many people still trust the Internet but the only other way is personal networks. And friends do not sell, they share.

Public disapproval is a great demotivator for post-soviet urban citizens. "What will people say?" is popular reason to comply with often obsolete beliefs. Offering something being in use or something not usually perceived as profit source (offering a seat in a car, or host people in someone's house) in exchange for money, for instance, is one of such things. Being profit-oriented, putting your business first and thrifty behavior are still perceived negatively. This is what Szelenyi, Eyal and Townsley (2000) named as "capitalism without capitalists". People are living in the free market system for quite some time but their values and understanding of capitalism are quite distinct from the Western one.

One could argue that the situation might be different depending on generations and this could partly be true. My respondents which fall into the category of so-called "millennials" tended to be more ambiguous about selling/sharing binary. They are more digitally educated and have no problem with using peer-to-peer platforms to rent/buy/sell/borrow, however, I also noticed that they hesitate to do it:

> *It really depends on how much the thing/service costs, till a certain limit I will just give it away for free. But I would not say I do it really often. The flat and the car I would not share, for instance, I value my privacy. Regarding other things… my consumption is limited and minimalistic, so…* - Alexey (male, 27, web designer).

But still all of them agreed that sharing is for closer circle of people or for people in need and it requires no money in return. "I would donate a lot of clothes right now and even food if only I knew who can accept and benefit from that" says Alina (female, 23, young mother). The common perception of meaning of sharing is still seemed to be inherited from parents born and grew up in Soviet Union.

The contradiction between meaning of sharing and market practices attached to it has made sharing economy platforms in Russia just an alternative to existing "traditional" business. People see new carsharing companies as an alternative to car rentals, Airbnb stays are just cheaper than hotels, but they would opt for hotel to maintain privacy; Uber is, of course, a taxi company for all respondents. There is nothing anti-capitalist in existing sharing economy in Russia, apparently, it is a sign of global capitalism ideology proliferation for post-soviet people because they see it as monetization of everything and this goes against moral principles of many.

CHAPTER 3 – DISEMBEDDEDNESS OF SHARING ECONOMY IN POST-SOVIET URBANITY

Right a month before I came to conduct my field research my hometown had been introduced to carsharing. Carsharing is a way of sharing mobility provided by an organization which rents a car by minutes or hours. In Western economies it was a response to the post-ownership aspirations, urban traffic problems, and burden of having a car in a big city. Partly it is also a step to sustainability as urban planners and sharing economy ideologs insist – it must be reducing the car ownership rate in big urban areas. As the introduction of the new model to Berdsk was right before my fieldtrip, I found it quite symbolic. Indeed, global "sharing economy" has reached even my peripheral post-soviet city…But I was particularly interested in people's reaction. Would they use it? What is their attitude to the commodity shared with strangers? In this chapter I will consider how the understanding of sharing and public & private binary changes overall attitude to sharing economy. I will analyze the attitude to digitally-enabled sharing practices and what makes them unattractive for people having a specific understanding of sharing and economy in mind.

Existence of 'traditional' platform-based sharing economy in Berdsk is commonsensically limited by its not-touristy image, trust issues described in previous chapter and misfunctioning sense of community. At first, I was thinking that maybe weak acquaintance with Internet among people could be the reason of passive interaction with innovations but according to regional statistics in 2017 78% of citizens of age above 18 use Internet regularly and 62% of adults have accounts in social networks. The study also showed that popularity of TV as a mean of mass

communication has reduced in 2017[7]. So, unfamiliarity with digital dimension is definitely not the case, and I could notice that also from communication with my informants of all ages – everybody had a page in Russian most popular social network, VK.com, even pensioners. My intention was to understand what is restricting people from using online communications for various sharing practices if they are familiar of what the Internet has to offer. Already knowing that contacts with strangers are socially unacceptable, I also look at personal networks and how they develop.

3.1. "Sharing? In Russian language it would be called 'making some money' economy"[8]

I would like firstly to return to the topic of carsharing introduction in my city. Carsharing is not really obvious sharing economy – the transaction which is usually made is between a company and a person (you download the app, connect to the Internet and select car on the interactive map to activate it). Though the fact that one car is used by many people numerously during the day increasing efficiency of a product (it doesn't stay as an idle capacity) allows us to categorize it as sharing economy. Social implications, so important for ideologs but not visible from the first sight, are there as well. The research on car sharing by Dowling et al. (2018) contains some interesting insights about community sense building and social impact of car sharing in the US context. Using an interesting perspective and assessing how car sharing is related to the intimate relationship of the owner with his/her car the authors conducted several interviews with active car sharers. The hybrid form of ownership arising in the car sharing practice brings out questions and challenges for the car sharing users as well as the researchers. For instance,

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[7] From sociological study in 2017 "Auditoria y reiting sredstv massovoi informatsii v Novosibirskoi Oblasti" ["Audience and ratings of mass media sources in Novosibirsk region"].
[8] From the interview with Dmitriy (28th of May 2018).

Stephanie, a mother of two children, noticed that her kids often leave their toys in the car and it was a problem when she couldn't get them back. At the same time, other kids also leave their possessing's in the car and it even takes a form of a ritual as noted Stephanie. Seeing the things left by other people users cannot fully identify the car as their own and it creates a certain sharing culture. Davis, a father of two, adds that he already has established a special routine – adjusting mirrors, seats, radio channel – and it feels like a normal practice.

During the interviews held by the authors of the paper respondents also highlighted the fact that they feel the sense of community. For instance, through such conversations 'oh, do you goget? I goget too' (GoGet is the name of the platform) they identify each other through shared language. Participants admit that they like the sense of connection and recognition even if they do not wave at strangers in GoGet cars to greet them. One person said that people sometimes were leaving their business cards and it gave the 'sense of people' as well as listening their preferences on radio. Therefore, there is a specific sharing culture which was nurtured through the regular using of the service.

As the service of carsharing in Berdsk was just introduced and it was practically impossible to find a person who used it and was ready to talk, I referred to the Internet forums and local online portals to identify people's reaction and experiences. I was also asking my respondents about their opinion explaining in advance what carsharing is. In the Internet, of course, people were more expressive and explicitly showed their skepticism and distrust in the idea. "This would never work because people in our country will treat carefully only what belongs to them…", "Taxi is better", "We just stepped out of communism and again sharing one car with anyone?..", "I believe that in some months these cars will be dismantled and sold by parts", "I do not want to sit in a car used by so many people and who knows what they did there!" – comments of such critical nature were

more common than from people expressing interest and support for the idea. In personal conversations my informants were more inclined to show interest in the innovative idea, but common response was that it sounds interesting but too complicated and suspicious – for instance, you never know in which condition the person who used the car before left it. This again shows lack of generalized trust (to other members of community) or weak social capital in post-soviet conditions.

Carsharing, of course, not the only sharing economy model available in my hometown. Airbnb and Uber are, of course, present but the perception of them has nothing to do with sharing. There are only two listings of hundreds on Airbnb offering a place in somebody's flat. Others are just advertisements of hostels and private apartments bought for renting business. Uber is actively hiring taxi drivers and currently people have several applications in their smartphones to compare prices to which they firmly refer as to taxi services. Another big player is BlaBlaCar which has recently announced that Russia might become its primary market. Indeed, BlaBlaCar has a strong potential but it could be explained by one simple reason – Russia is a vast country and transport infrastructure is often poor. When I was talking to Sergey (25, male, event manager) he admitted that for his job he often uses BlaBlaCar but the reason is pragmatic – other means of transport are uncomfortable or unavailable. Social implication of sharing a ride with strangers does not bother him too much due to his open and extraverted personality but sometimes he felt worried with particular people in a car. "I like to talk and yes, you can meet some interesting people in such rides, but if there was a train or public transport I would opt for them", he says. He adds that money he pays in the end of any ride strongly distinguish this practice from what he could denote is sharing: "This is a service and from service I have specific expectations. My attitude to a person

is completely different when money is on the table". This image resembles the critique of sharing economy provided in chapter 1.

In further talk with Sergey I revealed that in his professional life he often uses renting services and also has some equipment which he rents. Though he strongly distinguishes between renting and sharing – the latter is only for personal networks and reciprocal relations are involved. In general, my informants tended to think that there is no demand for such services and this created a feeling that all the platforms coming from abroad are inherently out of place. Common question addressed to me when I was trying to explain principles of sharing economy was "Why should I refer to strangers instead of my personal closer networks of whom I trust and who can give me a service/goods for free or on a barter basis?" Post-socialist urban conditions, at the same time, as discussed in previous chapter, do no create incentives for further networks development – no leisure activities or public places are organized, people who work rarely leave their homes except for visiting friends at their private property.

Online transactions, for instance, is another factor of suspicion. Older generations who have little trust in virtual banking and financial opportunities of the Internet agreed that they to limit their transactions to cash ones or sometimes with bank cards. This is another kind of distrust in action – institutional, which could be explained as a result of unstable economic system during *perestroika* and also distrust towards something you cannot fully understand such as the virtual space for older generations. Having only one primary media source, the TV, they might be predisposed by officially translated governmental discourse that online content in the web is usually unreliable or misleading (Ognyanova 2010).

3.2. Sharing economy with human face: prospects for digital social change in post-socialist urbanity

One of my intentions was also to identify what post-soviet person (not living in Moscow or global capital city) would consider as a sharing economy. In general, the understanding of "sharing" contradicts with understanding of "economy" in the minds of my informants. The examples of global platform sharing economy were always regarded as profit-oriented and, consequently having nothing to do with sharing. But when I was mentioning features of sharing economy, my informants usually recalled some online-communication activism which happened around. For instance, I found out that residents of a neighboring building have created a group in a social network to solve common problems and organize economics of the building more effectively. At the same time, when I asked residents of my building whether they wanted to have the same communication tools, they were not enthusiastic about it – most people believed that the system of paper notifications works better now, and some were uneasy about knowing people from the building as well as giving them personal contacts in the Internet.

Nevertheless, in further discussion I could reveal that, in general, people believe that knowing your neighbors and having friendly, not apprehensive atmosphere in the building is important. At least for safety reasons. But nowadays people do not see this safety coming from digital collaboration. Serious trust issues and existence of established personal networks as well contributes to the unwillingness of participation in some kind of sharing local economy.

I am particularly distinguishing local and global sharing economy here because the attitude to global services is also predetermined by trust issues in post-socialist society. Global players coming from the West usually creates an image of greedy capitalists wanting to take away last money and their orientation on digitalization and online transactions plays a crucial role in people's

refusal to use the services. Relative complicatedness of the technological processes of digital sharing creates a feeling for an average post-soviet urban citizen with inherent "syndrome of distrust" that it is all fraud, especially if it is related to the provision of bank card details. The cases of locally-operated sharing economies might have more chances to succeed as I could derive from the conversations. For now, such advances could be seen in the creation of chats and exchange boards in social networks. The transactions are usually common – rent/borrow/buy/sell/give away and happen not systematically with no social meaning attached. I could not notice a wish to share personal belongings with strangers and this might still be related with private-public contradictions inherited from socialist past. As Trudolubov (2015) note the wish to own is natural for the society experienced socialism and total sharing.

However, I could notice an important sign of readiness to the sharing of concern. "Sharing of concern" in the framework of sharing economy has been theorized by Kornberger et al. (2017) on the example of digitally organized sharing during the 2015 refugee crisis in Vienna. He believes that "it is this sharing of sympathy […] that creates bonds between people and constitutes society – and not the exchange of commodities". But sharing of concern is tightly linked with sharing of commodities if we look into the essence of sharing (Kornberger et al. 2017:32). In the cases of digital sharing in post-soviet space I encountered exactly this type of sharing: people usually started to use new (online) ways of collaboration and commodity exchange if they had a concern. Now these concerns are local (for instance, one relates to children safety – a chat of moms in messengers where they eventually end up exchanging goods and services) but from my respondents I learned that they would be happy to collaborate on other levels if they knew now.

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Just today, when I am writing this chapter (08.06.2018), a leading Russian online magazine on urban practices published an article about Telegram[9] channels and chats used in one city in Sakhalin (Far East) for communication between administration and ordinary citizens[10]. The story of emergence is simple – everything started with problems citizens had and then activists approached house managements companies and city administration to create digital way of communication. It worked, for minor changes but with snow ball effect people started to engage with total strangers for common good. Of course, personal recommendations were vital in the process. But this is a novel example of coordination and collaboration for economic purposes through digital channels. To achieve that local administration also had to introduce special Telegram literacy courses for people of older generations. Considering post-socialist urban configuration of social relations, it was important to enhance trust – trust in institutions, trust in other people. The role of the authorities is crucial due to rooted dependence on the state. The role of personal networks is also huge in this process, and while sharing economy platforms could enter non-Western markets with the idea that commodity sharing with strangers will work solely because of economic struggles, they will remain disembedded and will be used as coping strategies of households reinforcing "nightmarish neoliberalism" (Martin 2016). Nevertheless, gradual re-embeddedness seems real for digital sharing as people start to employ digital services at least through the help of socially embedded personal networks.

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[9] "Telegram is a cloud-based mobile and desktop messaging app with a focus on security and speed" (from Telegram.org).
[10]

CONCLUSION

When I asked my mom whether she would use ridesharing service BlaBlaCar to share rides with other people and save money on that, she quickly refused. Not to say that I expected something different, but this was a spur to understand what was actually stopping her and many others. She told me that she might be motivated by the strive to help out, to know new people or just to not feel alone in the car, but there is something which has more weight in her decision-making.

In trying to understand what it is, this thesis aimed to show peculiarities of application of global popular notion to the post-soviet urban realities. I did not set a goal to rethink the notion of sharing economy because it is still evolving and transforming but wanted to challenge its ambiguous reality in the light of the context which is very sensitive to the concept of sharing. I show how post-soviet urban material and social configurations influence people's perception of what is sharing and what is economy. Using "sharing economy" as an analytical tool I dig deeper into the questions of trust, social capital and personal networks to show reasons for disembeddedness of Western sharing economy practices.

On the case of a post-soviet peripheral city I could see that citizens are still inside the cage of distrust and conscious isolation, which is reproduced by the stagnating infrastructural heritage of socialist past. Sharing practices in many ways resemble informal economy, and, most importantly, are limited to the personal networks of trust. Distrust also invades digital dimension, which impacts the level of development of new digital sharing economy practices. My research showed that due to social disembeddedness of Western sharing economy, many services are used by citizens as coping strategies. At the same time, there is a hope that digital trust can reinforce social capital as personal networks start to employ virtual reality in their daily needs.

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