

21 Sharing in the context of nature-based tourism

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Introduction

The tourism sector is impacted by megatrends such as increased availability of high-tech equipment, information and communication technology (ICT) and the sharing economy (SE) (Elmahdy et al. 2017). High-tech equipment and clothing provide tourists with increased comfort and safety. The ICT enables online booking and digital communication and in recent years, digital platforms have enabled sharing of underutilized assets with strangers. These global trends expect to affect 'the demand for nature-based tourism experiences, and the way people engage with nature' (Fredman & Margaryan 2020, p. 6).

A part of the nature-based tourism (NBT) sector is equipment-intensive, with activity-adapted development of specialized equipment and clothing (e.g., Randonnée, kiting, kayaking). The equipment is often expensive and underutilized. One of the key themes in the NBT literature is to understand the role of NBT in the context of global transformations as (among others) the SE (Elmahdy et al. 2017; Fredman & Margaryan 2020). The SE includes a broad set of activities and concepts, from Airbnb and Uber to companies enabling temporary transactions of assets, often labelled 'access-based consumption' (Eckhardt & Bardhi 2015) or 'on-demand renters' (Trabucchi et al. 2019). The focus in 'access-based consumption', is to gain access to goods or services for a limited period without acquiring ownership (Eckhardt & Bardhi 2015). Moreover, 'on-demand renters' are characterized by 'companies which enable a temporary transaction of new assets' (Trabucchi et al. 2019, p. 1007). These approaches present an innovative version of the traditional renting business model where the companies provide a platform that offers direct access to shared assets (B2C, C2C), without any human intermediaries (Trabucchi et al. 2019). The literature on SE is growing but has a strong bias towards cities and metropolitan regions. More

knowledge is needed about the development of the SE in peripheral areas (Agarwal & Steinmetz 2019).

With this backdrop there is a need for more knowledge about what people are willing to share and with whom, and how the use of technology can affect the NBT experiences. Findings from Iversen and Hem (2018) and Fredman & Margaryan (2020) underpin these knowledge gaps. To fill these gaps, the purpose of this article is to investigate attitudes towards sharing of gear (including clothes) among tourists doing NBT in Norway, aiming to increase our knowledge about NBT in the context of sharing economy and to contribute to the knowledge gap about sharing economy in general and in peripheral areas in particular.

Method and data collection

'The sharing economy, digital service innovation and restructuring of Innlandet: an analysis of the potential in the visitor industry and creative services' (CreaTur) is a R&D-project funded by the Regional Research Fund Inland. The project examines the development of the SE in the county of Innlandet in Norway, with a focus on factors preventing and promoting such development in a peripheral context. The project is limited to the tourism industry and aims to identify the potential the SE represents for this industry.

A survey has been conducted as an exploratory study within the R&D-project CreaTur. One aim of the survey was to identify attitudes towards sharing gear. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The survey covered a range of questions including background characteristics, attitudes toward borrowing and sharing gear, types of gear shared, and from whom or where the gear was shared/borrowed, and optimal timing for access to such gear. In addition, the respondents were asked about their last nature-based experience, the travel companion(s), means of transportation, and the use of sharing apps.

To trigger self-recruitment, the project partners spread the survey using different digital platforms, like homepages and social media (Facebook and Instagram). An obvious disadvantage of this method is the lack of control with population and respondents, and one must assume that only the most committed chose to respond. On the other hand, one may also assume that committed persons have extended experience with nature-based activities and knowledge of gear requirements. 523 respondents answered the survey, which will be supplemented with in-depth-interviews (in progress).

Preliminary findings

Preliminary findings suggest that about 80 % of the respondents would like to share gear if possible, and (a bit surprising) about 70 % states that the Covid-19-pandemic do not affect their attitude toward sharing. The findings also suggest that older respondents are more reluctant to share gear (figure 1). Important arguments for sharing gear are related to environmental and economic benefits. The findings indicate no difference in whether the respondents live in an urban or in a rural environment when it comes to attitude towards sharing. Looking into how the respondents get access to the equipment, common access is through commercial renting services, like hiring skies at a ski resort. The data indicates little sharing between strangers. More common is accessing gear through family.

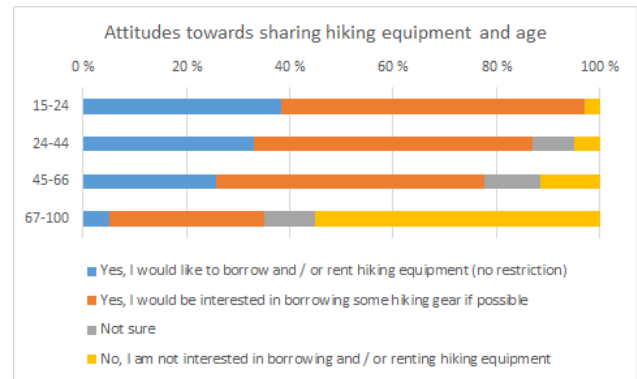


Figure 1. Attitudes towards sharing gear. Age groups. n=523.

Source: Survey, CreaTur. 2020.

Preliminary results indicate that there is an underutilized potential in the market. About 80 % of the respondents are positive towards sharing gear. Identified barriers are (among others) easy access to the gear and safety precautions like assurance that the equipment is available as planned and personalized. Confidence that the gear is maintained and in good condition is important among users. These preliminary findings favor actors who have (or have the opportunity to have) access to a large supply of gear, indicating B2C-sharing as a model to meet the demand for gear with C2C-sharing as a supplement in the market.

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