

DICTIONARY

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Car sharing

By **Marie Huyghe** (Planner)

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Car sharing is the pooling of one or several vehicles for different trips at different times. Three types of car sharing exist: commercial car sharing, peer-to-peer car sharing and “informal” sharing between individuals.

The practice of car sharing is based on a new relationship with the vehicle, moving from one of possession to one of use of a service.

Car sharing allows users to save money, reduce their use of the car by using other modes of transportation and to free up parking spaces¹. The use of private cars is then regarded as one mode of transportation among others (public transportation, cycling, walking, carpooling, etc.).

Commercial car sharing

, the most well-known form of car sharing, consists of “making vehicles available to members of a service managed by a private company (the best-known are Zipcar in the United States and the Citiz network in France) for short trips and/or occasional travel at any time, and for as long as they wish.” ²

Peer-to-peer car sharing is done either via specialized websites (Buzzcar, Drivy, UneVoitureALouer, etc.) or non-specialized ones, like LeBonCoin, which connect car owners who seldom use their vehicles with people who do not own cars.

These two types of car sharing are practiced mainly in large cities, which have a requisite minimum population density³ and a public transportation network that provides access to the vehicles.

Informal car sharing between individuals, which refers to the sharing of a private car between friends, neighbors or family over an extended period, is the most common daily form of sharing. In general, a car is “shared” between three or four people, though certain groups may have up to ten members⁴. This is done in cities, towns and villages of all sizes, including low-density areas, and is seen as an alternative

lifestyle choice, sometimes coupled with intensified social life, intensive use of "local" resources and educating children about alternative mobilities.

Several conditions are necessary for the success of this type of car sharing, including trust among the car sharers (particularly on financial matters), a good understanding of "their vision of the car" ⁵ and "the operating conditions and sharing of expenses." ⁶ In 2009, B. Cordier estimated that 35-70,000 individuals practiced car sharing in France, sharing 10-20,000 vehicles.

Why do people car share?

Initially, it took a trigger factor (the breakdown of a vehicle and consideration of replacing it, as well as an acquaintance with another household that uses its car infrequently). Along with this trigger, the MOUR7 study showed that car sharers also had other characteristics in common:

firstly, all of the questioned car sharers were environmentally conscious to varying degrees and had similar lifestyles. For all of them, car sharing had gradually become a veritable "militant act" that responded to their "desire to live differently and make other lifestyle choices."

secondly, all shared the same vision of the car; they did not appreciate the car itself, but simply viewed it as a "tool for getting around." This view of the car is primordial, as car sharing cannot work if one of the car sharers is more attached to their car than another and is constantly worrying about his or her vehicle.

Action levers for developing peer-to-peer car sharing

How to encourage the practice of car sharing in low-density (rural or peri-urban) areas, where 75-80% of commuter trips are done by car and are essentially "single occupancy." Four factors facilitate car sharing⁸:

Physical proximity between the car sharers: the car must be quickly and readily retrievable (on foot or by bike).

Limited or compatible car needs. When this is not the case, and the car is needed for all trips, some households share three vehicles among four car sharers.

Compatible schedules. Car sharing involves additional organization for the car sharers, who must establish a fixed car use schedule, or try to familiarize themselves with other households' car usage in order to schedule one's own appointments and activities. Car sharers must communicate on an almost daily basis, by email, phone, written messages left in the car, etc.

Be able to find alternative solutions by: reorganizing activities to avoid having to travel; making arrangements between car sharers to find another car or to carpool; using one's social network (family, friends, colleagues, neighbors); using another mode of transportation (walking, cycling, transportation on demand or collective transportation when available) or another vehicle. The practice of car sharing requires sufficient mobility skills in order to find an alternative when a shared vehicle is unavailable. A support network is essential in sparsely-populated areas with few alternatives to the car.

Other considerations

Legal aspect of car sharing

"Commercial" and "peer-to-peer" car sharing is considered a "car rental without driver"⁹, and therefore is not in direct competition with taxi companies. A legal ambiguity nonetheless exists between car sharing and a classic car rental.

"Informal" car sharing among individuals generally takes place outside of the framework of a specific legal structure, especially when the shared vehicle belongs to one of the car sharing households. Nevertheless, Cordier (2013) recommends signing a private legal contract specifying use conditions, the roles and obligations of each member, the sharing of expenses, etc.

Some figures on commercial car sharing and peer-to-peer car sharing

Founded in 2000, the American company ZipCar was operational in 28 American and Canadian states as of January 2014, as well as in Spain and five cities in the U.K. The company also targets universities and is present on 12 campuses.

The Cityz network, created in France in 2004 under the name France-Autopartage¹⁰, consists of "16 independent car sharing services, present in more than 80 French cities, with 700 shared cars" in 2014.

Finally, in Europe, car sharing has developed mainly in Switzerland (Mobility Carsharing, the largest commercial car sharing company, has 1,380 branches in the country, with 2,600 vehicles¹¹), Austria and Germany (according to CERTU¹², the many small car sharing operators at the citywide level numbered 100,000 users in 250 cities in 2007).

According to a study by CarSonar¹³, France had more than 23,000 vehicles rented via peer-to-peer car sharing in 2013. This practice is also widespread in other countries. The first company to offer car sharing/peer-to-peer rentals was RentMyCar, created in Germany in 2001. Many others followed: Autonetzer¹⁴, the largest car sharing company in Germany, has 4,500 vehicles that are rented by 35,000 active users); WhipCar, Getaround and Go-op are three, among many others, in Great Britain, etc.

An example of peer-to-peer car sharing

Florence B lives in a rural village with a number of shops, and can get to work on foot or by bike. She has an old car that sits parked in front of her house, as she bikes to work. She only uses her car for her children's extracurricular activities and medical appointments. It is a kind of "safety net" that costs her a lot of money and is becoming damaged due to lack of use. When her friend and colleague Emmanuelle C.'s (who lives only a kilometer away) car breaks down, Florence proposes sharing her car "until Emmanuel can buy another one." Ultimately, they decide to share this car and sign a private legal contract. Their husbands are more attached to their own cars and do not participate in the car share. This example illustrates all of the aspects of an "easy" car sharing arrangement: geographical proximity between the two car sharers, limited need of a car on a daily basis, easily compatible schedules and a support network.

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More

Altermobilities

Altermobilities represent all the alternative behaviours to an exclusive use of the private car for travel. They also imply a certain right to be slower, and pre-suppose that geographical and social spaces will be organised in ways that take into account a more limited use of cars.

More

Lifestyle

A lifestyle is a composition of daily activities and experiences that give sense and meaning to the life of a person or a group in time and space.

More

Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

More



Marie Huyghe

Planner

Marie Huyghe is a Ph.D. in Urban Planning and Development and an independent consultant. Her research focuses on rural lifestyles and she uses a behavioral approach to study mobility practices and how they can evolve. She works with local governments to draft and put in place sustainable mobility policies.

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¹ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/car-sharing-2137>

² <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/altermobilities-449>

³ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/lifestyle-1756>

⁴ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobility-450>

⁵ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/directory/people/2014/01/28/marie-huyghe-planner-2123>

⁶ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/directory/people/2014/01/28/marie-huyghe-planner-2123>

⁷ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/directory/people/2014/01/28/marie-huyghe-planner-2123>

⁸ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2020/08/26/mobility-trajectories-key-notion-conceptualizing-and-shaping-changes-way-people-travel-13431>

⁹ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/video/2020/08/26/mobility-trajectories-key-notion-conceptualizing-and-shaping-changes-way-people-travel-13431>

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¹² <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/contact>