



CO-OPERATIVES UK

NEW INSIGHT 8

The great sharing economy

A report into sharing across the UK

Rachel Griffiths

“80% of us say sharing makes us happy, but sharing our toothbrush doesn't.”

Executive summary

We hear a lot about shares in the financial press, but with business ownership more unequal than ever before, somewhat less about sharing. The 4,992 co-operative enterprises in the UK are something of an exception. They share profits with around thirteen million people and allow people to come together to do things that they can't do alone.

Over half of the UK would love to find ways of being able to share their time and resources within their local community.

To understand more about how the UK shares and its attitudes to sharing, Co-operatives UK, the trade association for co-operative enterprises, commissioned this research into attitudes towards sharing in the UK on behalf of its members.

The key findings are as follows:

- We have more stuff in our lives than ever before. The average child, according to our survey, has over 75 different toys, gadgets and items that they own at home.
- We share less compared with a generation ago, with more homes occupied by single people and more cars on the road with single drivers.
- We want to share more. Over half of the UK would love to find ways of being able to share their time and resources within their local community.
- One in three people would be willing to share their garden with someone else locally, if they looked after it to grow vegetables or flowers.
- We are a nation that knows how good sharing feels. 7 out of 10 people in the UK say that sharing makes us feel better about ourselves, 8 out of 10 say that sharing makes them happy.
- 75% of us believe that sharing is good for the environment and 6 out of 10 of us would share his or her car journey with someone if it were possible.

- We think the UK is not good at sharing. The poorer you are the less likely you are to think people share.
- One in four of the UK spends over 20 hours or more alone each week.
- Those in the North West, traditionally the co-operative heartland, share most.
- 47% of us feel uncomfortable about sharing things outside the family.
- We're most likely to share a bottle of wine, a pot of tea and pizza and least likely to share our toothbrushes, bank accounts and our bath.

Introduction

The gap between rich and poor in the UK is at the highest since records began. Inequality is rife with 50% of the nation's population owning just 1% of its wealth.¹ We are bracing ourselves to face consequences of huge public spending cuts, becoming concerned about levels of 'happiness' across the nation, and all the while desperately seeking solutions for serious long-term issues such as global warming and global poverty.

How would this change if we shared more?

Why are there 38 million empty car seats on the road every day² when the majority of us would prefer to travel with others? The fact that we share less means an increase of around 2% in the number of commuter cars on the road every day.

Sharing makes 8 in 10 of us feel happier, so why aren't we doing more?

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This paper explores attitudes to sharing in the UK, the extent to which we share and hints at the barriers that may prevent us from doing so.

The research shows that there is a very strong will to share more in the UK, but not necessarily a clear way.

The research was commissioned by Co-operatives UK and carried out by George Street Research between 1 and 7 June 2011 using a nationally representative sample of UK residents from Research Now's online panel. In total 1,018 surveys were completed.

The rise of sharing

There is a growing body of evidence that wider sharing can have not just social and environmental benefits, but can be of benefit in terms of economic efficiency.

Sharing assets under the right conditions promotes more efficient and more sustainable outcomes.

Looking at happiness, sharing time and company emerges as the number one predictor of well-being. Looking at resource use, from fisheries to the global atmosphere, sharing assets under the right conditions promotes more efficient and more sustainable outcomes.

Alongside this work is the emergence of new tools from games theory and experimental economics, and an understanding of the 'commons' and not just the 'market' as a framework for the allocation and management of resources. As Elinor Ostrom argues, the central question in social sciences now is around sharing - "why co-operation levels vary so much and why specific configurations of situational conditions increase or decrease co-operation."³

The UK's attitude to sharing

81% of us say sharing makes us happy, 75% say it is good for our self-esteem.

When it comes to personal views on sharing, 81% of those in the UK say it makes us feel happy and 75% say that we feel better about ourselves when we share our time and possessions.

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Those in the South East get the greatest pleasure from sharing out of all the regions in the UK - 86% believe sharing makes them happy and a huge 88% state that sharing makes them feel good about themselves.

79% of women feel better about themselves when they share compared with a lower 71% of men.

It's the 25-34 year olds who feel the best about sharing.

UK residents understand the value of sharing but remain a little uncomfortable with sharing personal things with people outside the family.

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There is some hesitation around giving things away, with 33% of us thinking it may be foolish to do so in these uncertain times, although they are still in the minority. Even if we feel we don't have much, we're highly unlikely not to want to share. Enjoying spending time on our own is no barrier to sharing. Slightly more of us (49%) are likely to share with those they see as 'needy' than with people they see as 'like me' (42%).

Table 1: Attitudes to sharing

	Agree Strongly %	Agree Slightly %	Disagree Slightly %	Disagree Strongly %	DK / NA %	Mean Score
I feel I have no one to share things with	6	12	21	55	5	1.7
I don't like to share because I don't feel I have much	3	11	29	50	6	1.7
I feel uncomfortable sharing personal things with people outside my family	15	32	28	20	4	2.4
In these uncertain times, it would be foolish to give things away	9	24	36	25	5	2.2
I would rather not share too much of my time because I enjoy time on my own	5	23	38	29	5	2.1
I give out of duty rather than desire	3	12	34	42	8	1.8

Our potential to share is significant.

63% of us would share our journeys to work with someone if it was possible, 53% of us would love to find ways to share their time and resources within our local communities.

Half of us intend to share more when we have more.

We have more stuff in our lives than ever before. The average child, according to our survey, has over 75 different toys, gadgets and items that they own at home.

While traditional ways of sharing, such as libraries and 'toy libraries', are being cut back, new types of sharing are also emerging – from advertisements for 'dog sharing' through to 'land share' schemes promoted by Transition Towns, in which people with unused gardens allow local people to tend and grow food. Over 1 in 3 people in our survey report that they would be willing to have their garden shared in this way.

Half of us intend to share more when we have more.

Having less does not necessarily mean that we intend to share less - one in four of those with the lowest household incomes intend to share compared with one in six of those with the highest incomes.

18-24 year olds in the UK are the age group most willing to share. It may just be that the rise of file sharing, which is of such concern to record companies, is not just a result of technological innovation but a reflection of a culture among young people more open to sharing.

More widely, people who are members of co-operatives - perhaps not surprisingly - emerge as more likely to share than people who are not members.

But we think the UK is poor at sharing.

More people in the UK think we are poor at sharing (36%) than the number who think we're good at it (32%).

More people in the UK think we are poor at sharing (36%) than the number who think we're good at it (32%). When it comes to our perceptions of just how able the country is to share, it is those in the North East who have the most positive view of sharing in the UK (44%) and those in the Midlands (26%) who have the least positive view.

The richer you are the more likely you are to think that people share. Those with a lower household income of £19k or below are less likely to think people share than those on a higher household income of £40k or above.

Your age is likely to affect who you think is best at sharing: the nation believes that the best age to share is the retirement age, although the young (under 30s) think they are the best age group at actually sharing.

Sharing our journeys

There are 38 million empty seats in commuter cars every day but more people prefer to travel with others than alone (62%).

The average number of people who car share has fallen from 1.64 in 1985 to 1.58 in 2009 – a fall of 3.6% despite the fact that 63% of us would share a car journey with someone if it was possible.⁴

Those in Wales (63%) and the UK's 18-35 year olds (67%) are those who most prefer to travel with others than alone.

75% of us recognise that it is good for the environment to share – which must be an opportunity to explore, given that current environmental policies tend to encourage more efficient use of products sold to us as individual consumers rather than encouraging less need for products, through sharing, in the first place.

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Indeed, it could be argued that, ultimately, all the major environmental challenges today, from biodiversity and habitat loss through to climate change could be interpreted as relating, one way or another, to our capacity as societies and as a species to share resources.

Sharing our meals

Eating is our nation's favourite sharing experience; just 3% always prefer to eat alone.

The UK is a nation of sociable eaters, preferring to share meals (75%) above anything else: homes (72%); car journeys (63%); or our time (62%). A majority of us (75%) – and women more than men - would prefer to eat with others than alone.

While those in London are more likely to prefer to eat alone (68%), it's people in the North West of England who are most likely to be found sharing a meal (75%).

It appears that wealth does not affect your preference for eating with others - students (77%) are the most likely to prefer sharing meals, more than those earning £60k plus. However, living with your friends doesn't necessarily mean that we like to eat with them.

Among families, despite concerns expressed from time to time about the decline of the family mealtime and the rise of staggered eating - where family members eat separately - sharing in fact remains strong. 80% of parents say that their children eat their evening meal along with one or both parents. This level is the same as for the previous generation, although they were slightly more likely to eat with their whole family, as opposed to one parent. 67% of UK adults eat a meal with their families at least three times a week. Almost half do so every day.⁵

Sharing our homes

29% of all households are single occupancy – 64% of us would prefer to live with someone.

The number of single occupancy households has increased from 4.4 million in 1981 to 7.3 million today – 29% of all households compared with 22% in 1981⁶ - but this isn't what the nation wants.

We're a nation that prefers to co-habit, with 7 out of 10 (72%) of us much preferring to live with others rather than alone.

Men are happier to live alone than women, while 18-34 year olds most prefer to live alone, and 35-44 year olds most prefer to live with others.

29% of all households are single occupancy – 64% of us would prefer to live with someone.

When it comes to the regions, living in London (63%) suggests you may least prefer to live with others while those in the North West of England (77%) most prefer to live with others.

Sharing our time

1 in 4 (26%) of the UK spends more than 20 hours alone each week. 41% of men spend 16 hours or more alone each week compared to just over a third (36%) of women. Those in the South West spend the most time alone (34% over 20 hours a week), and those in Wales spend the least time alone (23% of the Welsh are on their own for less than 2 hours a week). Almost half (45%) of those with a household income of less than £10k spend more than 20 hours a week alone.

Perhaps as a result, only 22% of the UK spends more than 16 hours a week with friends. Our other findings in terms of sharing time are that:

- 64% of the UK has 6 or fewer close friends.
- Londoners spend most time with friends and have the most close friends (40% have 7 or more, and 29% spend 16 hours or more with them), but it's those in the North West who share their time visiting or entertaining friends the most (one in three spending over 20 hours).
- 18-24 year olds share the most time with friends (39% 16 hours or more) and 55-64 year olds the least (24% under 2 hours).

- Men share more time with friends than women (25% of men spend 16 hours or more compared with 19% of women).
- The poorer you are the more time you are likely to spend entertaining or visiting friends (those on a household income of under £10k spend on average 5.73 hours per week).

The UK's sharing index

North West is best

The table below shows which regions prefer to share their meals, homes, journeys or time.

Table 2: The sharing index

What is shared / Region	Prefer eating with others	Prefer living with others	Prefer travelling with others	Spends 16+ hours a week with friends	Index
North West	67%	64%	38%	31%	50%
Northern Ireland	73%	69%	41%	17%	50%
North East	56%	60%	38%	26%	45%
Midlands	58%	58%	34%	18%	45%
South East	60%	55%	36%	23%	44%
South West	55%	45%	37%	21%	42%
Scotland	55%	52%	31%	27%	41%
Wales	57%	56%	40%	14%	42%
London	46%	38%	28%	24%	34%

Things we like to share

53% of us would like to find ways of being able to share time and resources with our local community.

The three things the UK likes to share most are wine (31%) a cup of tea (23%) and pizza (13%).

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Those in the North East most enjoy sharing socks while sharing a cake appeals most strongly to those in Wales. Those in the South West like to share books.

Students, Londoners, those in the Midlands and 24-44 year olds are most likely to enjoy sharing a bath.

Things the UK least likes to share

Eight things we least like to share:

- Toothbrushes
- Bank accounts
- Baths
- Socks
- Mobile phones
- Chips
- Duvets
- Keys

Those in the North East are least likely to share their toothbrush and Londoners are most likely not to mind.

Sharing – then and now

While the FTSE Share Index has risen five-fold over the past generation, our index of sharing behaviour, in some contrast, has fallen by 5%.

We can compare levels of sharing today with earlier years, by comparing relevant data today with a selection of three key indicators of sharing from a generation ago, where data exists. This suggests that sharing is in some decline. While the FTSE Share Index has risen five-fold over the past generation, our index of sharing behaviour, in some contrast, has fallen by 5%.

Table 3: Trends in sharing

Form of Sharing	Trend compared to a generation ago
Sharing our journeys	-4%
Sharing our meals	No change
Sharing our homes	-11%
Total	-5%

Conclusions

What could be achieved if the government approached our national economic challenges from the perspective of increasing the levels of sharing? Dare we begin to imagine that if we shared more, how much less strain would be put on our over-stretched public services, on the environment, on our well-being?

Irrespective of how much money we have, where we live or what our age group is, the UK has indicated that we want to share more, we're prepared to share more and we intend to share more because it makes us happy and increases our self-esteem. We already understand the benefits.

Co-operative organisations are proficient at releasing the asset of sharing. Placing sharing at the heart of their every-day business activity, they naturally take time to engage members and staff to ensure every view has the chance to be heard and that everyone shares in shaping the direction of the organization. They narrow the gap between rich and poor by sharing profits because they realize the wider benefit that more equality brings to all. They engage communities in renewable energy schemes, providing not just affordable energy for local people, but also benefiting the environment.

Irrespective of how much money we have, where we live or what our age group is, the UK has indicated that we want to share more.

Sharing is a significant yet largely over-looked national asset which our country could use to tackle economic, environmental and social issues.

Our nation has the 'will', it just needs more of the 'way'.

Method

Findings on associations and demographics are taken from an online survey, commissioned by Co-operatives UK and conducted by George Street Research, amongst a nationally representative sample of 1,018 adults across the UK.

The research was carried out online between 1st June and 7th June 2011 using Research Now's panel of UK residents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Griffiths has 20 years experience in helping sectors, industries and organisations to enhance their reputations. Formerly deputy chief executive of the Association of Mutual Insurers, an accredited member of the Institute of Public Relations and a credentialed business coach, she is passionate about the national and international co-operative sector.

1. Data from the Equality Trust, www.equalitytrust.org.uk/, accessed 17 June 2011.
2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bloom/actions/carshare.shtml>, accessed 17 April 2011.
3. Ostrom, E & Walker, J, eds, *Trust and Reciprocity*, 2005, Rusell Sage Foundation.
4. Data from Department of Transport/Office of National Statistics, National Transport Survey.
5. Research by the Department of Sociology at Oxford University and YouGov, and commissioned by Birds Eye. http://www.birdseye.co.uk/assets/downloads/Changing_Plates.pdf, accessed 20 April 2011. Data is for UK adults over 18.
6. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>, accessed 17 June 2011.

Co-operatives UK

Co-operatives UK works to promote, develop and unite co-operative enterprises. It has a unique role as a trade association for co-operatives and its campaigns for co-operation, such as Co-operatives Fortnight, bring together all those with a passion and interest in co-operative action.

Any organisation supportive of co-operation and mutuality can join and there are many opportunities online for individuals to connect to the latest co-operative news, innovations and campaigns. All members benefit from specialist services and the chance to network with other co-operatives.

www.uk.coop

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