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MONITORING AND INFORMATION SYSTEM

D I G E S T

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Shared mobility

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(2018) Commercial car sharing,  
complaints and coping: does sharing  
need willingness? Urban Policy and  
Research, 36:4, 464-475  
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## The role of 'willingness' in car sharing



Photo credit: Adobe

**Car sharing can contribute to reducing car ownership, car use and the number of kilometres vehicles travel. This study highlights the role of users in maintaining a positive attitude towards alternative transport practices. It demonstrates that willingness is central to mobility transitions.**

Commercial car sharing is a positive shared transport innovation of the past decade, with evidence suggesting that car sharing reduces rates of car ownership, frequency of car use and the number of kilometres vehicles travelled.

A range of business models underpin car sharing, including cooperatives (such as car clubs), commercialised peer-to-peer lending of vehicles or for-profit businesses (such as ZipCar and Car2Go). People who are members of car-sharing organisations are less likely to own a private car and more likely to use public and active (walking and cycling) transport modes.

Car sharing can reduce carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions per capita and decrease household vehicle ownership. It can also be seen as an important factor necessary for the transition to sustainable mobility. One key question for urban policy, is how to encourage new ways of being mobile such as car sharing.

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## TRIMIS

The Transport and Research and Innovation Monitoring and Information System (TRIMIS) supports the implementation and monitoring of the Strategic Transport Research and Innovation Agenda (STRIA) and its seven roadmaps.

TRIMIS is an open-access information system to map and analyse technology trends, research and innovation capacities, as well as monitor progress in all transport sectors.

TRIMIS is developed and managed by the Joint Research Centre on behalf of the European Commission.

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## The role of 'willingness' in car sharing

This study explores the role of willingness in the transition to more sustainable mobility with the use of car sharing. Willingness is necessary in any transition to a new system based on concepts of collaborative consumption because it supports the early establishment of the new system. The study analysed data from a group of car sharers in Sydney (Australia) – a city in which car sharing is emergent and is a relatively successful challenger to private car ownership.

This study focused on car sharers' complaints associated with transport modes. It undertook in-depth interviews of car share users, which covered length and type of car-share membership, the way car sharing is practised and perceived, original and existing motivations for car sharing, and complaints about car sharing. It aimed to reveal a depth of understanding that cannot be accessed through survey data collection and analysis techniques as a way to analyse the circumstances and attitudes supporting car sharing as a practice. The complaints from car-share users were grouped into three key concerns:

1. elements of rigidity in a city structured for the flexibility of the private car;
2. technological and infrastructural glitches related to car parking;
3. cultural distrust and/or ignorance of a new system.

By working through various complaints, the study participants expressed their willingness to embrace new ways of being mobile, but had an undeniable desire to make car sharing successful. Participants were eager to highlight faults with car sharing – particularly cars left dirty or not returned to the right space on time. However, they also described coping strategies to deal with faults inherent in a new operation.

Car sharers were willing to start and continue car sharing because they could see tangible benefits from the practice. Car sharer's willingness to overcome particular problems are fed by positive elements of car sharing. The analysis of complaints reveals ways where car sharing differs from car ownership. While the aim should not be for car sharing to replicate car ownership, its pitfalls and broken promises will have implications on its ability as a system to contribute to a less car-centric city as the system expands.

The study highlights the need for mobility systems to challenge the dominance of private cars, especially in low density cities. Policies will have to support new systems through periods of establishment and support practitioners willing to try something new. For example, providing car parking for car-sharing cars. In championing new mobility systems, urban policy makers may need to accept a system that is imperfect and in development. A willing cohort of car sharer users ready to endure faults to make a new system work, implies support for alternatives to the private car.

A voluntary shift away from private-car ownership is proving difficult to achieve. Developing an understanding of potential barriers to transition and practising ways to resolve them is key to researchers and policy makers interested in moving from private-car use to more shared mobility.