Sharing Inspired:

An exploration of "gemachs" as mechanisms of the sharing economy in ultra-Orthodox Israeli society

Abstract

Israeli *chareidi* society boasts a developed system of medical equipment *gemachs*, which offer community members the opportunity to loan various equipment at no cost. While *gemachs* have existed for centuries as charity organizations in Jewish communities, they also share many characteristics with modern mechanisms of the sharing economy. This research explores *gemachs* as mechanisms of the sharing economy, as well as the potential of *gemachs* to enhance community resilience. Specifically, this study seeks to understand the success of *gemachs* through the eyes of *gemach* managers and pinpoint characteristics and definitions of successful *gemachs*.

I conclude that successful *gemachs* exhibit many of the characteristics of successful sharing mechanisms, as described by Botsmans and Rogers (2010), including critical mass, idling capacity, and trust in others. However, Botsman and Rogers offer a fourth characteristic of successful sharing mechanisms: belief in the commons. This was irrelevant to *gemach* managers. Instead, religious belief was an important driving force behind *gemachs*. Therefore, I recommend broadening Botsman and Rogers' fourth characteristic of successful sharing mechanisms to include any ideology that perpetuates sharing. Additionally, measures of success for *gemachs* varied significantly from measures of other successful sharing systems. While other systems are often measured by outcomes, *gemach* managers often defined success in terms of output. Furthermore, the conditions that cultivated the creation of many *gemachs,* including community and ideology, are often outcomes sought by other sharing mechanisms. Based on this, I suggest that sharing economy mechanisms may generate a positive feedback cycle.

This study also lends insight into the importance of culture and informal institutions when cultivating the sharing economy, particularly in more traditional societies. Finally, I show that *gemachs* are likely to increase community resilience by adding a layer of social interconnectedness and increasing access to resources.