THEORIZING THE SHARING ECONOMY

RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

THEORIZING THE SHARING ECONOMY: VARIETY AND TRAJECTORIES OF NEW FORMS OF ORGANIZING

EDITED BY

INDRE MAURER
University of Göttingen, Germany

JOHANNA MAIR
Hertie School, Germany / Stanford University, USA

ACHIM OBERG
WU Vienna University, Austria / University of Mannheim, Germany

ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.

ISOQAR
REGISTERED

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

Aurélien Acquier (Ph.D., HDR) is Professor of Management at the ESCP Europe Business School, Paris, France, and Co-director of the ESCP Europe – Deloitte Research Chair in Circular Economy. Combining institutional, organizational, and historical analysis, he explores how the sharing economy is framed both conceptually and empirically. Mapping out the heterogeneous and paradoxical roots of the notion, he explores how the sharing economy is giving birth to various societal promises and controversies, business models, and organizational forms. His research on the sharing economy has been published in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Revue Française de Gestion*, or the *Cambridge Handbook of the Law of the Sharing Economy*.

Eliane Bucher is an Assistant Professor with the Nordic Centre for Internet and Society, BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway. She received the Doctorate degree in Management from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, where she is currently a Lecturer for Digital Media and Communications Management. She was a visiting scholar at Scandinavian Consortium for Organizational Research, Stanford University as well as the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University. Her research interests include digital platforms and algorithmic labor and virtual and hyper-connective work environments. In particular, she is interested in how workers make sense of and "reverse-engineer" algorithmic decision-making mechanisms in increasingly digital work environments. Her research has been published, among others, in the *Journal of Business Ethics, Academy of Management Discoveries, Computers in Human Behavior* and the *Journal of Managerial Psychology*.

Valentina Carbone (Ph.D., HDR) is Professor of Supply Chain Management and Sustainability at the ESCP Europe Business School, Paris, France, and Co-director of the ESCP Europe – Deloitte Research Chair in Circular Economy. Her current research covers the sustainable dimension of SCM, corporate social and environmental responsibility, and sharing and circular economy business models. She explores the theoretical and ideological roots of the sharing economy and the multiple organizational configurations observed in the field, and in particular in the transportation/logistics sector. Her research on the sharing economy has been published in the *Journal of Business Logistics*, the *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management*, the *Revue Française de Gestion*, and the *Cambridge Handbook of the Law of the Sharing Economy*.

Christian Fieseler is Professor of Communication Management with the BI Norwegian Business School, Norway and Director of the Nordic Centre for Internet and Society, Norway. He received the Ph.D. degree in Management and

Economics from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, in 2008. Since then, his research is focused on the question how individuals and organizations adapt to the shift brought by new, social media, and how to design participative and inclusive spaces in this new media regime. In this field, he has over the last years, worked extensively on technology and new working modes in projects with the European Union and the Norwegian Research Council.

Koen Frenken is the Chair of Innovation Studies with the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. He previously worked at the University of Amsterdam, the University of Grenoble, and Eindhoven University of Technology. His early works focused on technological change from an evolutionary economics perspective (Frenken, 2006, *Innovation, Evolution and Complexity Theory*, Edward Elgar). He then concentrated his research on developing an integral evolutionary approach to economic geography. Since 2015, he has been developing an interest in the study of the platform economy and published a policy report on platforms in 2017 with the Rathenau Institute ("A Fair Share") and a summary piece in 2017 on the sharing economy ("Putting the Sharing Economy into Perspective", in: *Environmental Innovation an Societal Transitions*, with Juliet Schor).

Lea Fünfschilling is Associate Senior Lecturer at the Department of Design Sciences and CIRCLE, Lund University, Sweden. She received the Ph.D. degree in Sociology from the University of Basel. Her research interests are centered around understanding and conceptualizing the dynamics of sustainability transitions. Special attention is devoted to the co-evolution of institutions, actors, and technology in different industries and regions, in particular during processes of institutionalization and destabilization. She is active in the board of the Sustainability Transitions Research Network and the Project Coordinator of the Swedish Transformative Innovation Policy Platform.

Kerem Gurses is Assistant Professor at La Salle Barcelona, Ramon Llull University, Spain. He holds a Ph.D. in Management from IESE Business School and an MBA from Illinois Institute of Technology. He specializes in industry change, particularly how industry practices and technologies change through firm corporate political strategies. He is the author of many academic articles and chapters on this topic at *Academy of Management Journal, European Management Journal*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Entrepreneurship and Collaboration* among others. Kerem has also done consulting and project work for food and aerospace industries.

Markus A. Höllerer is Professor in Organization Theory at UNSW Sydney, Australia. He is also affiliated with the Research Institute for Urban Management and Governance at WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria. His scholarly work is focused on the study of institutions, meaning, and novel forms of organization and governance. His research interests include, among others, issues of collaborative governance at the interface of the private sector, public administration, and civil society. He has published in scholarly outlets such as the *Academy of Management Annals, Academy of Management Discoveries,*

Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Management Studies, Organization Science, Organization Studies, Public Administration, Strategic Organization, and *Urban Studies*. Currently, he is serving as the Chairman of the Executive Board of the *European Group for Organizational Studies*.

Stefan Kirchner is Professor of Sociology of Working Worlds' Digitalization at the Technical University Berlin, Germany. In his current research, he is especially interested in the transformative effects of digital technology for the organization of digital markets and the ensuing reorganization processes of work and value capture. He has published in journals such as *Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Socio-Economic Review, Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* and *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*.

Jennifer Klutt is a Research and Teaching Assistant at the Chair of Organization and Corporate Development, University of Göttingen, Germany. Her research deals with the governance of business models of the sharing economy, especially within new forms of working contexts such as coworking spaces as shared workspaces. Recently, she has published her empirical work in the Journal of Business Ethics. She is currently working on her doctoral thesis.

Christoph Lutz is an Associate Professor with the Nordic Centre for Internet and Society, Norway, and with the Department of Communication and Culture, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway. He received the Ph.D. degree in Management from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. His research interests cover a broad spectrum of topics and lie in the field of social media and Internet-mediated communication. More specifically, he investigates digital inequalities, privacy, the sharing economy, new forms of work, and social robots. Over the last years, he has published in leading Internet, communication, information systems and business/management journals such as *New Media & Society; Information, Communication & Society*; *Social Media + Society*; *First Monday*; the *Journal of Management Information Systems*; *New Technology, Work and Employment*; *Academy of Management Discoveries*; *Big Data & Society*; and the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*.

Johanna Mair is Professor of Organization, Strategy and Leadership at the Hertie School in Berlin. She is a Distinguished Fellow and co-directs the Global Innovation for Impact Lab at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. Her research examines how organizations tackle societal challenges and alter institutional contexts. She is particularly interested in specifying alternative forms of organizing and transformative mechanisms involved in this work. She has published articles in *Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Management Studies, Organization Studies, Journal of Management*, and other scholarly journals. She obtained her PhD in Management from INSEAD.

Indre Maurer is Professor of Organization Studies and Corporate Development at the University of Göttingen, Germany. Her research focuses on the governance

of inter-organizational relationships and social capital. Her recent empirical work in these areas examines entrepreneurial, temporary and sharing economy organizations. She has published articles in *Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Management Studies, Organization Studies, Research Policy*, and other scholarly journals. She holds graduate degrees in business administration and in socio-economics from Augsburg University, where she also received her doctoral degree in business administration.

Mareike Möhlmann is Assistant Professor in Information Systems and Management at Warwick Business School, UK. Furthermore, she is a Teaching Fellow/Visiting Assistant Professor at the London School of Economics, UK. Previously, she worked as a Postdoc at New York University. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Hamburg. Her current research focuses on digital innovation, digital platforms, the sharing economy, digital trust, and algorithmic management. Her work and comments have been featured in media outlets such as *The Times, the Financial Times*, the World Economic Forum, and the BBC.

Philipp C. Mosmann is a Research and Teaching Assistant at the Chair of Organization and Corporate Development, University of Göttingen, Germany. His research interests focus on the governance of communities in new organizational forms such as in the sharing economy. From a business history perspective, he is further interested in how both historical and modern forms of shared resource use are connected. He holds the doctoral degree from the University of Göttingen.

Gemma Newlands is a Ph.D. candidate with the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and a Doctoral Stipendiary Fellow with the Nordic Centre for Internet and Society, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway. Her research explores the transformation of work in the digital economy, especially focusing on issues of platform-mediated workplace recognition and obfuscation in heterogeneous management settings. She is currently working on extending Axel Honneth's critical social theory of recognition to account for the spread of nonhuman agents in the workplace. Her research to date has been published in leading Internet, communication, and business journals such as *New Technology, Work and Employment, First Monday, Internet Research*, the *Journal of Business Research*, and the *Law and Ethics of Human Rights*.

Achim Oberg is Assistant Professor at the Institute for Organization Studies at the WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria, and Senior Researcher at the Institute for SME Research at the University of Mannheim, Germany. His research focuses on digital social science and has been published in journals such as the *Journal of Business Ethics, Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Scandinavian Journal of Management, Policy & Politics*, and *Higher Education*. In his research, institutional theory and network analysis are combined to explore the structuration of new organizational fields. He holds a degree in Business Administration and Computer Science from the University of Mannheim, Germany, and completed his Ph.D. at the University of Jena, Germany.

Pinar Ozcan is Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Saïd Business School, Oxford University, UK. She specializes in strategy, entrepreneurship, and technology markets. She regularly publishes articles at academic journals such as *Academy of Management Journal* and *Strategic Management Journal* and chapters at prominent books such as *The Oxford Handbook of Entrepreneurship and Collaboration*. Pinar holds a Ph.D., a Master of Science, and dual Bachelor's degrees from Stanford University. She is the 2015 recipient of the British Academy Newton Grant for open innovation, the 2016 SWIFT award for disruption in the UK Banking sector. In 2017, Pinar was selected for the Top 40 Business School Professors under 40 by Poets and Quants. In 2018, she was selected for the Global Thinkers 50 list for emerging thinkers. Finally, in 2019, Pinar was chosen as a British Academy Mid-Career Fellow.

Laura Piscicelli is an Assistant Professor with the Innovation Studies Group, Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. Prior to this, she was a Research Fellow in Strategy, Innovation & Business Models with Cass Business School – City, University of London, UK, and a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the University of Twente, The Netherlands. Her research interests are in the area of sustainable business and innovation, including the sharing economy, the circular economy, business models, digital platforms, and consumer behavior. She received her Ph.D. degree in sustainable consumption and design from Nottingham Trent University, UK. Her work on the sharing economy has been published in journals such as the *Journal of Cleaner Production, Transportation Research Part D*, and *Sustainability*.

Tino Schöllhorn is Researcher at the Institute for SME Research at the University of Mannheim, Germany. His research focuses on digital science and he has presented his work at international conferences and workshops such as the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, the European Group of Organizational Studies Colloquium, and the New Institutionalism Workshop. His research focuses on methods and techniques of collecting data about self-representations of organizations on the Internet and their interpretation from different theoretical perspectives. He holds a degree in Business Administration and Computer Science from the University of Mannheim.

Elke Schüßler is Professor of Business Administration and Head of the Institute of Organization Science at Johannes Kepler University in Linz. Her research interests include creativity and innovation, social and institutional change, and work and employment relations. She currently examines labor standards in global supply chains and new forms of digital organizing. She holds a doctorate in Business Administration from Freie Universität Berlin, an MSc in Industrial Relations from the London School of Economics and a BSc in Psychology from the University of Sussex.

Taneli Vaskelainen is an Assistant Professor with the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, Utrecht University, The Netherlands. His research interests lie in the emergence dynamics of new industries and market categories. His studies mostly focus on empirical contexts with a promise of contributing

to a more sustainable society (e.g., the sharing economy). His work has been published in academic journals in the fields of management, sustainability, and business ethics.

Laëtitia Vasseur is a Ph.D. candidate at the ESCP Europe Business School, France. She is working on planned obsolescence. She explores the institutional emergence of the public problem of extending products' lifespan and its impact on organizations as well as its links with the concept of circular economy. She has authored a master thesis on the emergence of the sharing economy by analyzing the OuiShare organization in 2015. She is also the Director and the Co-founder of the Association HOP.

Sebastian Vith is Research Associate at the Research Institute for Urban Management and Governance at WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria. He holds degrees in Social and Political Theory as well as in Organization Studies from the University of Innsbruck. Between 2012 and 2016, he gained insights into various private and public sector organizations as a consultant, trainer for innovation management, and expert for new business development. He is currently writing his doctoral dissertation on the sharing economy from a public governance perspective.

Dominika Wruk is Senior Researcher at the Institute for SME Research at the University of Mannheim, Germany. She has published articles in journals such as the *Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Business Economics*, and the *Zeitschrift für KMU und Entrepreneurship*. Her research focuses on the emergence and diffusion of new organizational forms and concepts and on how such processes shape and are shaped by institutional environments. She holds a doctoral degree from the University of Mannheim.

VARIETY AND TRAJECTORIES OF NEW FORMS OF ORGANIZING IN THE SHARING ECONOMY: A RESEARCH AGENDA

Indre Maurer, Johanna Mair and Achim Oberg

The idea of "sharing instead of owning" – though it is not new – is currently experiencing a revival and becoming a major trend in modern (business) life (Belk, 2010; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Schor, 2014). It constitutes the defining principle of the so-called sharing economy, characterized by peer-to-peer-based sharing of access to goods and services, coordinated through information- and communication-technology platforms (Cohen & Kietzmann, 2014; Heinrichs, 2013). Starting as grassroots movements, initiatives associated with the sharing economy have gained increasing importance and diffused in different sectors and markets. A variety of new (and old) forms of organizing based on the basic idea of sharing, bartering, or lending have emerged and spread, changing or even disrupting existing ways of organizing in a number of markets, such as mobility, service delivery, and hospitality (Owyang, 2016; Stokes, Clarence, Anderson, & Rinne, 2014).

For scholars of organizations, such developments and implications provide a welcome opportunity for taking stock of and theorizing the sharing economy. Not surprisingly, the amount of sharing-economy research in organization and management studies has increased significantly in recent years – as it has in many other disciplines. This increase is reflected in the number of special issues in leading organization and management journals devoted to the topic (e.g., *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 2017; *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 2018; *Journal of Management Studies* (in preparation); *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* (in preparation); and *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2019) and in the abundance of literature on the sharing economy, with around 400 peer-reviewed articles published annually during the last years.

The studies featured in these academic journals have contributed to our knowledge base on managing and organizing in the sharing economy in important ways. They have drawn attention to highly debated issues (Martin, 2016), strengthened our understanding of sharing-economy organizations' business models (Munoz & Cohen, 2017), and provided valuable insights on potential societal, economic, and ecologic consequences of this phenomenon (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016; Parguel, Lunardo, & Benoit-Moreau, 2017; Plewnia & Guenther, 2018; Voytenko Palgan, Zvolska, & Mont, 2017). This body of literature has also placed exploration of the variety and trajectories of new forms of organizing in the sharing economy at the center of current research efforts (see Fig. 1). It has emphasized the unsettled nature of the sharing economy (Kornberger, Leixnering, Meyer, & Höllerer, 2018), described its complexity and paradoxical character (Acquier, Daudigeos, & Pinkse, 2017), and pointed to the different levels of analysis on which sharing-economy organizations can be studied (Mair & Reischauer, 2017).

While the multiple facets and inherent complexity of the sharing economy open up new ways for practice and theory to stimulate one another, at the moment these two perspectives seem out of sync (Belk, 2014; Cohen & Kietzmann, 2014). On the one hand, scholars complain that theoretical insights lag behind public discourse and practice (Acquier et al., 2017; Etter, Fieseler, & Whelan, 2019); on the other hand, much research remains rather descriptive and phenomenally driven instead of building on existing theoretical work (Vaskelainen & Münzel, 2017).

Therefore, the core of this special issue is empirical and conceptual work that explores the variety and trajectories of new forms of organizing in the sharing economy by harnessing, extending and recasting existing organization theories.

In the following, we first provide evidence that corroborates why understanding the variety and trajectories of new forms of organizing is at the top of the agenda for current organizational research on the sharing economy. Based on the most influential scholarly articles published in the last five years, we constructed a semantic network. This semantic network visualizes that terms such as "heterogeneous," "diverse," and "complex" are commonly linked to descriptions of the sharing economy. Patterns derived from this analysis illustrate that scholars have a shared understanding of the variety and dynamics of the sharing economy and that this understanding presents an important starting point for current research.

Second, we introduce a framework that helps to clarify different dimensions to advance theoretical work on the sharing economy in organization studies. This framework is informed by the studies in this volume and covers dimensions such as methodological approach, level of analysis, exploratory goal, explanatory mechanisms, and trajectory. Our hope is that it will facilitate and guide future theoretical inquiry into the variety and trajectories of sharing organizations. When introducing this framework, we describe how the contributions in this volume fit into it.

Third, we acknowledge the exploratory nature of this volume and summarize the individual contributions by grouping them according to theoretical themes that they touch upon. This concluding summary highlights how the chapters

relate to the overall objective of this volume – theorizing the sharing economy – and provides a more granular thematic overview that connects the contributions to contemporary debates in organizational studies.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SHARING ECONOMY AS A PHENOMENON OF VARIETY AND DYNAMICS

We found it helpful to first take stock of how scholars have described and started to theorize the sharing economy. To carry out this aim, we conducted a semantic-network analysis based on the most influential scholarly papers on the sharing economy[1] and the depictions the authors of these papers used to define and
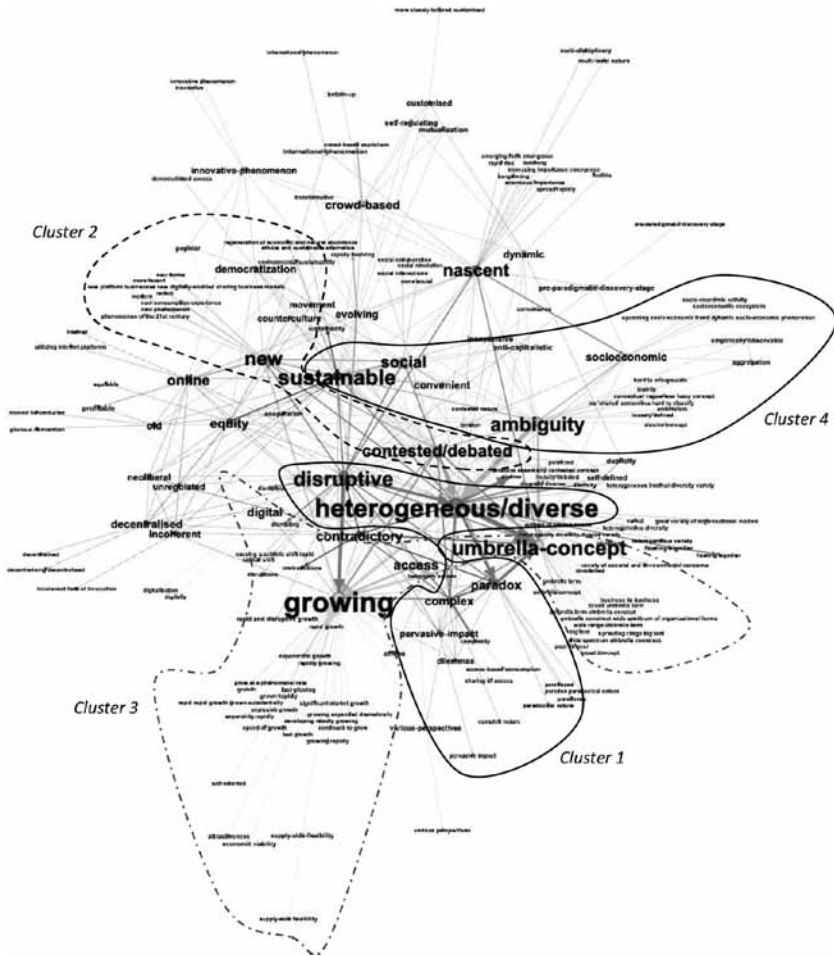

Fig. 1.   Semantic Network of Depictions of the Sharing Economy.

characterize the phenomenon.[2] From the co-occurrence of descriptions, we were able to construct a semantic network with clusters of high density (Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte, & Lefebvre, 2008) that shows those characteristics that are commonly mentioned together in depictions of the sharing economy. The analysis revealed that scholars perceive the sharing economy as a phenomenon of inherent variety and dynamics. This perception underscores the need for and potential fruitfulness of studying the variety and trajectories of new forms of organizing in the sharing economy. Fig. 1 illustrates these findings by visualizing the following four clusters of terms commonly used to describe the sharing economy and the organizations operating within it: "diverse and paradox," "new and contested," "growing and broad," and "ambiguous."

Cluster 1 "diverse and paradox." Many authors point to the diversity, heterogeneity, and paradoxical nature of the sharing economy (see Cluster 1 in Fig. 1). For instance, authors highlight the "great diversity" (Schor, 2014, p. 3) and "wide range of activities and business models" (Plewnia & Guenther, 2018, p. 3) of sharing-economy organizations. In addition, they emphasize that the sharing economy is "replete with paradoxes and tensions" (Acquier et al., 2017, p. 1) and point to its complex, disruptive, and paradoxical nature (Laamanen, Pfeffer, Rong, & Van de Ven, 2018; Martin, 2016; Schor, 2017), which imposes "paradoxes and dilemmas" (Munoz & Cohen, 2017, p. 2) on organizations operating within it.

Cluster 2 "new and contested." Other authors emphasize the newness and contested character of the sharing economy (see Cluster 2 in Fig. 1). They refer to its "new digitally-enabled sharing business models" (Junglas, Koch, Sundararajan, & Wang, 2017, p. iv), mention "new forms of organizations" (Etter et al., 2019, p. 3), or emphasize that the sharing economy as a whole represents a "new phenomenon" (Li, Tallmann, Qian, & Keil, 2018). While the democratization of the economy is mentioned as one of the expected contributions of these new forms of organizing, its realization is being increasingly questioned. This questioning results in heated debates that bolster the claim of the contested nature of the sharing economy (Etter et al., 2019).

Cluster 3 "growing and broad." A third group of authors points to the growth and breadth of the phenomenon (see Cluster 3 in Fig. 1). These authors view the sharing economy as an "umbrella term" (Codagnone, Biagi, & Abadie, 2016, p. 5) or "umbrella concept" (Heinrichs, 2013, p. 229) that subsumes current developments and models. At the same time, they commonly emphasize the rapid growth of the phenomenon (Cohen & Kietzmann, 2014; Fraiberger & Sundararajan, 2015), which is enabled by the spread of digital technologies as well as the increased digitalization of economy and society (Matzler, Veider, & Kathan, 2015; Schor, 2014).

Cluster 4 "ambiguous." A fourth group of authors highlights the ambiguous goals of sharing-economy organizations (see Cluster 4 in Fig. 1). The broad definition of the sharing economy as a "socio-economic phenomenon" (Plewnia & Guenther, 2018, p. 571) or "socioeconomic ecosystem" (Laamanen et al., 2018, p. 213) commonly applied by these authors indicates the lack of a shared definition and clear boundaries for the sharing economy and underscore its "ambiguous" nature (Erickson & Sørensen, 2016, p. 3; Plewnia & Guenther, 2018, p. 571).

Often, authors who emphasize the ambiguous character of the sharing economy also elaborate on whether and how sharing organizations contribute to social and ecologic goals. While non-economic goals were among the early promises of the sharing economy, researchers and practitioners increasingly question whether such promises can be kept and instead acknowledge that the sharing economy and the goals it represents are ambiguous (Etter et al., 2019; Hawlitschek, Teubner, & Gimpel, 2016; Martin, 2016).

Taken together, scholars seem to agree that the sharing economy and the organizations operating within it present a phenomenon that features diversity and paradoxes, newness and contestation, rapid growth and breadth as well as ambiguous goals. In combination, these features make theorizing the sharing economy a challenging and at the same time promising endeavor. These features also make clear that an important starting point for theorizing the sharing economy is understanding the variety and dynamics of organization forms within it. We argue that organization studies as a discipline is well suited for studying sharing-economy organizations because one of its strengths is dealing with a new and growing phenomenon of high levels of heterogenity and ambiguity.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THEORIZING THE SHARING ECONOMY

The objective of this volume is to instigate and facilitate theoretical work on the sharing economy grounded in a deep understanding of the phenomenon. Inspired by the contributions in this volume, we lay out an organizing framework based on various dimensions: the methodological approach, level of analysis, exploratory goal, explanatory mechanism, and trajectory. These dimensions are particularly useful for future theorizing of the variety and trajectories of new forms of organizing in general, and they may also guide organization scholars in further theorizing the sharing economy specifically.

Methodological Approach

To cope with the newness of the sharing phenomenon and a lack of understanding, one can rely on Weber's (1978) epistemological concept for the social sciences. In his view, one important aim of sociology is developing a meaningful understanding of social phenomena. Weber distinguishes between the complementary processes of "understanding" ("Verstehen") and "explaining" ("Erklären") to accomplish this aim. New phenomena typically have an ambiguous meaning and are therefore contested. A contested phenomenon demands an interpretative and theoretically driven description of actors, actions, and situations (Weber, 2013). In this view, "understanding" represents a systematic interpretative process in which researchers as outside observers relate to phenomena under study, make observations, and interpret them against a theoretical background – which is eventually further developed from insights gained about the new phenomena (Ringer, 1997).

Following Weber's ideas, "understanding" thus goes beyond purely descriptive approaches and rather relates to existing bodies of theory and knowledge. As methodological approaches, conceptual research and theoretically driven qualitative research can be particularly suitable for achieving this goal. Once a phenomenon is understood and explored, processes of "explaining" aim at testing alternative assumptions about the underlying mechanisms driving a phenomenon and the effects associated with it. Expectations derived from different theories can be operationalized and tested against each other using quantitative research as a methodological approach. Processes of "explaining" eventually lead to the creation of grounded or established knowledge of a phenomenon.

The history of science has shown that processes of "understanding" or "explaining," to some extent, take place in succession (Ruse, 2009). New phenomena are typically explored in conceptual and qualitative research to achieve a thorough "understanding" of the phenomenon against the background of existing theories, before hypotheses on relationships between drivers, new phenomena, and effects are developed; before concepts are operationalized; and before hypotheses are tested. In Weber's ideas of bureaucracy, for example, we observe such a sequence. Weber developed ideas on the relationships between elements of an idealized bureaucratic organization in the early twentieth century, but those ideas, in the sense of "explaining," were not tested until situational and contingency approaches emerged (Kieser, 1999) and large empirical research projects (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, & Turner, 1968) were carried out in the 1960s.

Keeping these considerations of process in mind is helpful when reflecting on meaningful methodological pathways for studying organizations in the sharing economy. Conceptual and qualitative research approaches typically seek to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon as the basis for explanation, whereas quantitative research for the most part examines large-scale patterns in the search for explanations. Since, as already mentioned, the sharing economy is a new phenomenon, most of the current research on it is conceptual (e.g., Mair & Reischauer, 2017) as well as qualitative (e.g., Kornberger et al., 2018; Kyprianou, 2018; Reischauer & Mair, 2018a; Uzunca, Rigtering, & Ozcan, 2018). Similarly, the contributions in this volume predominantly cover conceptual research (Frenken, Vaskelainen, Fünfschilling, & Piscicelli, in this volume; Kirchner & Schüßler, in this volume) and qualitative research (Acquier, Carbone, & Vasseur, in this volume; Mosmann & Klutt, in this volume; Vith & Höllerer, in this volume; Wruk, Schöllhorn, & Oberg, in this volume) along with some contributions applying mixed methods (Bucher, Fieseler, Lutz, & Newlands, in this volume; Ozcan, Gurses, & Möhlmann, in this volume). These applied approaches help to further unpack and explore the variety of organization forms and provide an in-depth understanding of the trajectory of the sharing economy. In line with existing studies, the contributions in this volume rely on a range of empirical data sources: interviews or written surveys with founders and users, organizational documents or websites, media articles and other types of texts. They also employ a range of data-analysis methods – from inductive content analysis to (semantic) network approaches to statistical analysis (see Table 1 for an overview

of the methodological approaches applied in the individual contributions in this volume). We believe that applying the diverse methodological repertoire we as organizational scholars have available – including ethnographic methods, topic modeling, or simulation – will be important for advancing our knowledge base on the sharing economy, and that this repertoire will allow us to mainstream the study of sharing-economy organizations in the larger field of organization research.

Levels of Analysis

Research on new organizational forms in the sharing economy has started to explore the phenomenon at different levels of analysis. Fig. 2 provides an overview of possible levels that future research can consider. At the individual level, research has already begun to analyze why people participate in sharing models as providers or consumers and what drives their satisfaction (e.g., Hamari et al., 2016; Möhlmann, 2015). Another interest in current research at this level is in revealing the motivations and traits of sharing-organization founders (e.g., Cohen & Muñoz, 2016; Li et al., 2018). The diversity of models and application areas in the sharing economy has given rise to a number of studies at the organizational level, which to a large extent have focused on understanding the organizational and business models of sharing organizations (e.g., Cohen & Muñoz, 2016; Voytenko Palgan et al., 2017; Wruk, Oberg, Klutt, & Maurer, 2019) and their historical predecessors (e.g., Mosmann, 2019). Many of these new models rely on developing communities of suppliers and consumers who participate in value creation. The question of how to effectively establish and coordinate such communities is one of the research interests on the level of platforms and communities (e.g., Bucher et al., in this volume; Mosmann & Klutt, in this volume; Reischauer & Mair, 2018b). The rapid growth of the sharing economy in many industries has drawn attention to studies at the market level in specific subfields of the sharing economy – such as in the mobility, carsharing, and accommodation industries – focusing on how sharing organizations interact with each other and with industry incumbents (e.g., Shaheen & Cohen, 2007; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017). A related set of studies has integrated industry associations, regulators, media organizations, and other social actors into its analyses, positioning
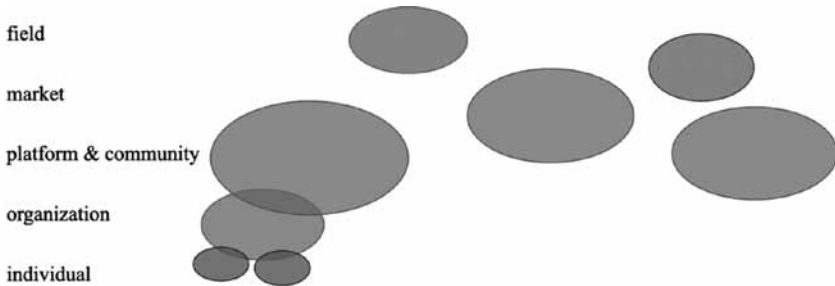

Fig. 2. Sharing Phenomena on Different Levels of Analysis.

these studies at the field level (Acquier et al., in this volume; Frenken et al., in this volume; Kirchner & Schüßler, in this volume; e.g., Laamanen et al., 2018; Wruk et al., in this volume).

As the contributions in this volume show, the variety within and trajectories of the sharing economy allow researchers to develop study designs that span multiple levels of analysis and also bridge literatures in adjacent fields such as political economy, legal studies, business history, or information systems (Mair & Rathert, 2019; Wruk, Oberg, & Maurer, 2019). (See Table 1 for an overview of the individual contributions in this volume and the level of analysis they present).

Understanding the Variety of New Forms of Organizing

We now turn to developing a typology for systematizing different theoretical inquiries for understanding the variety of new forms of organizing. We discuss two common dimensions – exploratory goal and explanatory mechanism – that have proved particularly useful for mapping a heterogeneous yet connected body of research (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). From these dimensions, we construct a four-field matrix and use it to organize and briefly summarize both the general approaches for studying the variety of new organizational forms as well as the individual chapters in this volume.

Exploratory Goal: Emergent Structuring of Variety Versus Governing Variety

In line with the above-mentioned newness of our research object – the sharing economy – we introduce the "exploratory" goal (not explanatory goal) as one important dimension for organizing research on the variety of sharing organizations. This dimension captures the general approach a theory takes to understand the variety of new forms of organizing: Is its focus on the emergent structuring of variety or is it on the mechanisms for governing variety instead? The first approach aims at understanding the heterogeneity in the sharing economy as an emerging process. It is thus primarily interested in examining the process and implications of the emergent structuring of a field. The second approach emphasizes agency rather than structure: It focuses on governance and governing variety in the sharing economy and explores effective modes, strategies, or practices for coordinating actors to achieve desired outcomes. Neither approach is mutually exclusive, yet to demonstrate types of inquiry we differentiate between approaches that are primarily interested in either the emergent structuring of variety or in governing variety.

Explanatory Mechanism: Cognition Versus Practice

Independent of the exploratory goal, the explanatory mechanism presents another dimension, which helps to understand the variety of new forms of organizing in the sharing economy and explain the mechanisms at work. One fundamental difference within this dimension is between theories emphasizing cognition and logics and theories focusing on practices. Although cognition and practices are interrelated (as behavior and meaning, or talk and action) (e.g., Meyer &