

URBAN SHARING IN LONDON

Country: United Kingdom
Population (city): 8,787,892
Population (metro): 14,040,163

City area: 1,572 km²
Government: 32 boroughs + the City of London



SHARING & THE CITY
Cities – Sharing – Sustainability

Urban Sharing at a Glance

Urban sharing in London spans across a wide array of sectors, from mobility to tool and accommodation sharing. There is a variety of for-profit and non-profit sharing organisations operating in London, and the city supports or hinders them based on their merits.

Some sharing organisations are helping alleviate London's sustainability challenges associated with air pollution and housing shortage, or are otherwise contributing to the lives of London citizens. Such organisations have the potential to receive support from the local government in the form of funding or marketing.

City Strategies, Agenda and Position on Sharing

London published a Smart London Plan in 2013 as a response to its population growth, which is expected to exacerbate congestion and the resulting air pollution. The plan stresses the importance of collaboration between citizens, businesses, researchers, investors and other stakeholders.

Urban sharing organisations are included in the Greater London Authority's efforts to support innovative start-ups, but the city currently does not have a sharing agenda. The majority of USOs have developed independently of the local government, although mobility organisations have received much attention from the Transport for London - the authority responsible for operating public transport in London, which is heavily involved in smart mobility plan for London.

We found London to support those sharing organisations, which comply with the city's sustainability agenda. Organisations, which the local government finds to have negative effects on the city and its citizens are regulated.

Sustainability Challenges Faced By the City

London's sustainability plan developed by the Mayor and the Greater London Authority echoes the sustainability challenges faced by the city. There is a strong focus on fostering the development of a strong, stable and sustainable economy and support is offered to London-based start-up companies, including sharing start-ups. London also has a strategy for air quality, water, waste and climate change. Air pollution is a pressing issue, and the Greater London Authority has passed a number of pollution-minimising policies, especially of relevance for the transportation sector. This has implications for shared mobility organisations in the city. London also struggles with providing housing to its rapidly growing population, which affects short-term accommodation sharing platforms.



Design of Sharing Organisations

There is a diverse array of urban sharing organisations present in London, comprising both peer-to-peer (P2P) and business-to-consumer (B2C) business models. Sharing thrives especially in the mobility sector with abundant station-based (e.g. Zipcar, Easycar, Carplus) and free-floating (e.g. Drive Now) car sharing organisations. London's shared mobility mix is complemented by P2P parking (JustPark) and B2C bike sharing (e.g. Santander cycles, oBike, Ofo). Several local sharing platforms which allow users to share consumer goods were also established in London (e.g. Freegle, Storemates, Library of Things). On the other hand, short-term accommodation sharing available in the city is dominated by foreign-based organisations (e.g. Airbnb, 9keys, HomeExchange, Couchsurfing, BeWelcome).

Collective Action for Sharing

Over thirty sharing organisations from various sectors operating in London are members of the trade association "Sharing Economy UK," established in 2015. The association lobbies on behalf of its members and requests its members to sign a Code of Conduct which asks them to act fairly and sustainably. Sharing Economy UK is a unique association acting on behalf of non-profit and for-profit sharing organisations and has no equivalent elsewhere in the world that we know of.



Sustainability Practices of Sharing Organisations

The Mayor of London's Office, Transport for London and a number of councils support car clubs because the authorities consider shared mobility a promising innovation to curb air pollution. An annual Carplus survey showed that 1 shared car could remove 17 privately owned cars. Similarly, a platform that connects drivers with parking spaces called JustPark is supported by the Mayor of London because it decreases emissions caused by cars circling around. On the other hand, London regulates the two large sharing vanguards, Uber and Airbnb. Uber lost its licence to operate in London in September 2017 due to public safety and security implications, and entire home listings on Airbnb and Airbnb-like platforms are limited to 90 days a year. A room in a house can be rented year round. This regulation was passed in order to avoid exacerbating London's housing crisis.

Many locally based sharing organisations have social sustainability in mind. For example, the P2P storage sharing organisation Storemates caters to the needs of Londoners who, struck by the housing crisis, live in tight spaces unable to store all their possessions. Storemates helps them find storage space in other people's homes for affordable prices.

Sharing as a Social Norm

London has embraced urban sharing platforms and is moving away from private car ownership, which is being replaced by car clubs. An interviewee from the Greater London Authority stated:

"Londoners are happy to share a car with each other because we are happy to sit on the public transport with each other as well."