

The Sharing Economy As An Alternative Model Of Consumption And Market Sector Development*

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Abstract

The sharing economy constitutes an important complement to the mainstream economy by introducing a socially responsible segment of business activity based on access rather than ownership, cooperation, and trust. It responds not only to economic challenges during periods of crisis but also to changing consumer attitudes oriented toward sustainable development, reduced overconsumption, and improved quality of life. The growing popularity of sharing economy platforms in Poland indicates dynamic development of consumption based on access to goods and services, particularly in transport and accommodation markets, despite persistent barriers related to limited public trust.

The paper aims to analyze the development of the sharing economy as a response to market imperfections such as information asymmetry, transaction costs, and externalities, with particular emphasis on the role of digital intermediaries. Based on a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in the Web of Science and BazEkon databases between 2015 and 2024, the study demonstrates a rapid growth of scientific interest in the sharing economy, accompanied by increasing thematic specialization and conceptual diversity. The analysis identifies the key mechanisms through which sharing economy platforms reduce selected market imperfections, especially in P2P markets, while also highlighting areas where such imperfections persist, notably negative externalities.

The empirical part of the study focuses on the accommodation market in Poland, using alternative data sources to estimate market concentration and scale in the absence of reliable official statistics. The results indicate a high level of market concentration characteristic of an oligopolistic structure, strong spatial concentration in large cities, and significant differences between the sharing economy and traditional hotel markets in terms of supply structure. The findings confirm that the sharing economy is a rapidly developing yet still insufficiently measured phenomenon, offering numerous directions for further research, including contemporary nomadism and zero-waste consumption models.

Keywords: sharing economy, access-based consumption, market imperfections, digital platforms, accommodation market

Introduction

Economics is one of many economic sciences, i.e. sciences dealing with human economic activity. It is the most general science among them. Its considerations are characterised by a high degree of generalisation of specific economic reality. By formulating general laws relating to specific areas of economic activity, economics treats these areas as interrelated and interdependent elements of the economic process.

In addition to economics (political economy), economic sciences usually include economic history, which studies the development of economic processes and phenomena in the past; economic statistics, which captures the process) and economic phenomena in numerical terms; and the so-called specific economics (or economics), which examine particular areas or aspects of the economic process, such as industrial economics, agricultural economics, construction economics construction, commodity trading economics, transport economics, tourism economics, labour economics, education economics, planning science, finance science, etc. These sciences serve economics by providing it with the necessary knowledge about the facts and course of specific economic processes.

Thanks to this knowledge, the generalisations made by economics (e.g. in the form of economic laws) can be consistent with reality. Economics also plays a supporting role to other economic sciences. They benefit from the results of economic research, for example in the sense that the general concepts it creates and the theses it formulates are an essential starting point for research in specific fields or aspects of the economic process. Thus, all economic sciences complement each other.

The sharing economy, as an intensifying socio-economic phenomenon observed in many sectors, is also increasingly present in the tourism industry. One of the main reasons for the dynamic spread of the sharing economy is the growing availability of the Internet and mobile technologies. The sharing economy is based on sharing tangible and intangible assets on a non-profit, for-profit or barter basis. It is a person-to-person service, which is why it is also referred to as a peer-to-peer economy. This phenomenon creates economic opportunities for all parties involved. On the one hand, it allows those who share their resources or provide services to earn additional income. On the other hand, it offers savings to those who borrow these resources. The sharing economy also encourages consumers to make new friends and gain new experiences. An increasing number of private individuals are deciding to temporarily lend their personal property, parts of their property or other possessions, as well as services, to tourists for a fee. An increasing number of tourists are interested in taking advantage of this type of service. It could be said that in the sphere of tourist services, the possibilities for the sharing economy are limitless (Juul, 2015, p. 1). In addition to the aforementioned trends in consumer behaviour, the sharing economy phenomenon may significantly change the rules of operation for entities in the tourism industry. These management consequences are reflected in new business models and changes in the marketing strategies of tourism product and service providers.

Despite the growing interest in the sharing economy phenomenon in both academic and business circles, there is a knowledge gap in terms of precisely embedding sharing economy issues in the existing theoretical achievements of marketing. The aim of this article is therefore to fill this gap by identifying marketing concepts that are complementary to the sharing economy, such as prospection, customer engagement and the concept of system product marketing. In addition, the author attempts to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the sharing economy from the consumer's perspective and the marketing consequences of this phenomenon. The article thus contributes to the development of marketing knowledge and has utilitarian value, as the author attempts to formulate management recommendations for companies in the hotel industry.

The exchange of goods and services is nothing new. Since ancient times, people have helped each other and tried to make each other's lives easier by kindly lending or exchanging their property with each other in their immediate neighbourhood. Specialists in a given field performed tasks in exchange for the services of other specialists, with mutual benefit. Today, this process continues, but on a much larger scale and using distribution channels that were unknown at the time. Barriers of distance and accessibility have disappeared, and thanks to the Internet, all exchanges have become extremely simple. This trend has come to be known as the sharing economy. Its origins can be traced back to the United States in 1995 with the emergence of goods exchange portals such as eBay and Craigslist, which dealt with the cheap import and distribution of goods (Schor, 2014). This phenomenon was reinforced by the introduction of good software, which reduced transaction costs and minimised the risk of cooperation between unknown contractors. By 2010, many similar websites had appeared on the market, facilitating the free exchange of clothing, books, toys, sports equipment and even furniture. The collaborative

economy, which seems to be constantly gaining momentum, is a manifestation of a broader phenomenon known as prosumption.

Toffler, the creator of the term 'prosumer', pointed out that this is a specific market entity engaged in production for its own use (prosumption). Prosumer activity manifests itself in two areas. Firstly, as part of a self-help movement, i.e. the creation of non-profit organisations and consumer communities whose aim is to 'help themselves', mutual counselling and support for participants in the movement. Secondly, in relations with companies that involve consumers in performing part of the work previously carried out by companies, including involving consumers in product design (Rupik. 2010). The essence of prosumption is therefore to combine the sphere of production with the sphere of consumption, and the processes characteristic of these spheres interpenetrate each other until the boundaries between them are completely blurred (Jung. 1997).

New technologies are causing the modern economy to change rapidly. Along with the mobile internet market and growing confidence in bold start-ups, a modern branch of the economy is developing – the sharing economy. We are becoming participants in an economic revolution that is changing our understanding of consumption and property rights. This is a time when access to services and goods is creating a new form and expanding the classic attributes of ownership rights.

Since 2008 in the West (and since around 2010 in Poland), we have been observing the development of a cultural and social phenomenon known as the sharing of goods. Many consumers have come to believe that access to something is more important to them today than owning a specific item. This is, in a sense, a response to the financial crisis. People have recognised sharing as an opportunity to save money. Communities have begun to work together to facilitate full access to resources. This has been accelerated by the dynamic development of the Internet, social media, and constant access to the Internet via mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, wearable devices). People have learned to communicate with each other simply, quickly and effectively via the Internet. Thanks to digital technology, the idea of borrowing, bartering and sharing one's resources with others (goods, financial resources, skills, time) has been revived. The meaning of owning goods has been undermined, and more and more attention is being paid to their function. Access to services and things is beginning to be treated as a new form of ownership (a new form of property) (Ziobrowska. 2017).

The sharing economy and shared consumption are issues that are increasingly discussed in contemporary discourse, not only in the media but also in academia.

Scientific studies predominantly take the view that the sharing economy is an alternative model of consumption, focusing on access to a given good without the need to own it. Temporary access is the basis for sharing, which enables more efficient use of resources. Profound social change in this area and the accompanying digital revolution have meant that possessions are no longer treated as a reflection of an individual's identity, which may indicate the dawn of a post-ownership era. Trust between users, reputation built online, and a new social quality created between complete strangers are also significant. The role of new technologies is also emphasised, as they significantly reduce transaction costs, make it possible to share previously unavailable resources, and create a network of connections between individual market participants. Issues related to legal regulations that are not keeping pace with emerging new technologies and their possibilities are also being raised more and more often. Researchers also point to the great potential of the sharing economy in terms of more efficient use of resources and sustainable development.

The global economic crisis has increased the importance of the social economy. It has become a subject of interest not only for economists, but also for representatives of other disciplines and central and local authorities. The social economy relates to many areas of social life, and its key principle is to reinvest profits for the benefit of the community. Based on the values of participation, solidarity and self-government, it can play a very important role in the development of cities and in supporting the processes of building civil society. The sharing economy fits into the area of social economy and represents a new economic and social trend built around the sharing of human and material resources. The sharing economy involves shared consumption, crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. The sharing economy allows suppliers and consumers to share resources and services: from homes to cars and other initiatives (time banks, food sharing – kitchen social, open access to education). The sharing economy includes selfless sharing, exchange and paid rental of resources.

In today's world, with the dynamic development of the Internet, humanity has gained innovative forms of communication that were previously unavailable. The development of new technologies and social media has contributed to the emergence of new relationships between people and brands. Innovative communication and constant access to the Internet have become a catalyst that has contributed to the acceleration of the sharing

economy. (Rifkin. 2016). In many places around the world, policies have begun to be adapted to the needs of local businesses and communities. Processes of creating and merging organisations in the field of social economy have emerged, which has also contributed to the emergence of a new, more sustainable economy. The sharing economy is becoming one of the most important global trends, offering an alternative way of thinking about the future of cities, which face numerous challenges related to improving the quality of life and strengthening competitiveness at the regional, national and, in some cases, even international level. Until now, the development of the market economy has been largely linked to the development of the market itself. The increasing wealth of available goods and growing labour productivity led to the growing role of intermediaries who, for money, supplied increasingly affluent consumers with goods that were not available in their immediate vicinity. Wholesale and retail trade, transport and intermediary sectors of the economy developed. Increasingly wealthy consumers demanded a wider range of goods and services. Today, all this is changing thanks to new, groundbreaking technologies. The internet and digital technologies have made the cost of reaching the consumer very low for the producer. Intermediaries are not needed, since anyone who has resources or production capacity in relation to their needs can easily reach those who need them at a given moment with information (Cieślak. 2015).

Research objective and methodology

The subject of the research was the theoretical and practical aspects related to the economic situation and directions of development of the sharing economy as an alternative consumption model in Poland. Achieving the research objective required the appropriate selection of research material sources.

The main objective of the research was to understand the sharing economy as an alternative model of consumption. The main goal is to systematise the concepts related to the sharing economy, as well as to identify the characteristics that determine whether specific solutions can be classified as part of this form of economy. The sharing economy as we know it today is a very broad and vague concept. In order to resolve the ongoing disputes between its supporters and critics, it is necessary to categorise it. According to the accepted thesis, explaining the essence of the sharing economy requires distinguishing between the actual sharing economy, whose main premise is a lack of profit orientation, and solutions that only use its elements (Sztokfisz. 2017).

The main goal of the sharing economy is to move from ownership to access. Ownership, which was a characteristic feature of the capitalist system, is replaced by the availability of goods and services. In the era of capitalism, freedom was defined in a negative sense as the right to exclude, an example of which is the car, which has become a symbol of the conventional approach to freedom. Today, the younger generation is beginning to think about freedom in a positive sense as the right to join others. For the Internet generation, freedom means the ability to optimise one's life, which means a life in which one participates in a variety of experiences and in a wide range of relationships in different communities that one forms over the course of one's life. Freedom is measured more by access to others within a network than by possession. The more inclusive and deeper one's connections are, the greater one's freedom. Freedom means the ability to collaborate with others without restrictions in a world where there are many equal participants (Rifkin. 2016). The current development of the sharing economy can be observed for several reasons:

- the global collapse of the economy of the second industrial revolution;
- growing problems related to environmental degradation;
- problems related to urban overpopulation;
- deteriorating quality of life in cities;
- transportation issues, traffic jams, noise in cities.

The sharing economy is based on trust and cooperation. It is thanks to these two values that we can begin to change the capitalist views of many people. In the past, cooperation was limited to immediate family, friends and neighbours. Today, these functions are being taken over by companies, institutions and organisations. The desire to compete and look after one's own interests is human nature, developed by capitalism, and in a market economy it has led to many distortions, such as fraud, exploitation, etc. Thanks to innovative technologies, the sharing economy is gaining popularity and economic rationality. Thanks to trust, cities can develop and prosper. Life in a metropolis largely depends on whether humanity will be able to cooperate with each other. People must start thinking more broadly than just in terms of family or nation and must believe that people who behave and look completely different from themselves will treat them fairly by honouring agreements and commitments. They will consider not only their own good, but that of others, and above all, they will show a willingness to make sacrifices for the common good. The problems of modern civilisation, such as pollution and climate change, require a collective response from humanity (Montgomery. 2015).

The development of the sharing economy is also linked to the development of community. According to Ostrom, for a long time, community was an impressive management system that should be considered in the context of the environmental, economic and social challenges and opportunities facing communities in an increasingly connected global world (Ostrom. 2002).

The sharing economy as exemplified by urban development

People have always exchanged goods and experiences and passed things on to family and friends. The sharing economy is based on the same mechanism, only it operates on a larger scale and among strangers. In 2010, Time magazine listed the sharing economy as one of ten ideas that will change the world, and it can indeed be said that this is happening. The popularity of the idea of sharing has led to the creation of websites that support and promote the sharing economy. Examples of such websites include OuiShare, which facilitates community building and knowledge exchange, and Shareable, which allows users to find information about the most interesting sharing activities, including clothing and book exchange initiatives. Thanks to these two services, in October 2010, a network of cooperating cities was established, called the Sharing Cities Network, within which organisations from 50 centres around the world exchange ideas and experiences on shared consumption (Dorda. 2015).

An example of a city that has fully embraced the sharing economy is Seoul. The city has an impressive IT infrastructure – it has the fastest Internet in the world (available for free throughout the city, including the underground). Dozens of programmes based on the sharing economy and large-scale car-sharing schemes for residents have been set up in the city. The tools of the sharing economy have contributed to positive changes: new jobs have been created, wages have increased, and the administration has begun to manage available resources responsibly (Dorda. 2015). An example of the application of the sharing economy in Europe is Amsterdam, which on 2 February 2015 was named the first sharing city in Europe. The city is based, among other things, on systems such as Peerby and Snappcar. In addition, it has a developed digital infrastructure, and its residents are able to exploit its potential. Amsterdam began introducing changes with the shareNL platform, which brings together enthusiasts of the idea of sharing, and conducted research within its framework, which showed that over 84% of residents surveyed declare their willingness to use at least one type of activity that fits into the concept of the sharing economy.

Another city in Europe that uses sharing economy tools is Berlin. Residents of this city can use the world's most developed public car network. Paris is another city that is developing thanks to the sharing economy. The city has the most developed bicycle rental and car sharing systems. The sharing economy is also present in Poland, but so far it has mainly influenced the popularity of commercial solutions in this area. Services such as Blablacar – an online platform for carpooling, Vinted – a service for selling used clothes and accessories, and Couchsurfing – a service based on the sharing economy that allows users to find free accommodation around the world – are very popular. The increasing number of city bike rental services in various cities is also part of the sharing economy (Dorda. 2015).

Soon, Poland will see the emergence of sharing economy tools that will contribute to environmental protection. Krakow, Warsaw and Wrocław are three cities that are introducing a car-sharing system – a network of self-service car rental stations where cars can be rented for a few minutes, hours or even days. The main goal of introducing this system is to convince residents to give up owning their own cars, which would significantly contribute to reducing air pollution and improving the quality of life of residents. It is also worth noting that one city car replaces ten private cars. The introduction of car-sharing also significantly reduces the need for parking spaces, which is of great importance considering the time spent looking for a parking space and the cars parked everywhere that destroy public space (Shaheen. 2012). Additionally, it is encouraging that young people are changing their attitude towards cars, preferring access over ownership. Car sharing is becoming increasingly popular among the younger generation around the world. Car sharing clubs are being set up, where members pay a small fee and in return have access to cars when they need them. Each member of such a club receives smart cards, which give them access to vehicles parked in car parks throughout the city. Cars are booked in advance via the Internet or a smartphone app (Martin, Shahenn. 2011). Once people start using shared cars, they will also begin to change their other mobility-related behaviours – they will start using public transport more often, cycling or walking (Obarska. 2016). In recent years, city bike rentals have gained popularity in selected Polish cities. Modern technical advances have been used, which have contributed significantly to the popularity of city rental schemes, including touch screens that allow easy login and bike rental, and GPS tracking, which allows bike and car sharing to be combined with public transport.

In North America, the latest innovation – solar-powered electric bikes – has been enthusiastically received by the younger generation. Initially, there were 19 programmes allowing the use of shared bikes, with over 215,000 users (Shaheen. 2012). In the United States and Canada, 58% of new IT-based public bicycle sharing operations are run by non-profit organisations, while 21% are privately owned and 16% are publicly owned and run by contractors. The non-profit ones work best – they account for 82% of members and 66% of bicycles in use (Shaheen. 2012). The shift in focus from ownership to use also brings economic benefits. Most bike-sharing schemes are located in congested urban areas where traffic simply comes to a standstill during rush hour. According to research conducted by Velib in Paris and Capital Bikeshare in Washington, most users say that travelling by shared bikes is faster and more convenient, and at the same time less expensive – you can save money on car maintenance. The same is true for cars; in the United States, owning and using a car costs an average of hundreds of dollars per month (up to 20% of household income). When sharing cars, users are free from maintenance, usage, insurance, tax and other costs (Rifkin. 2016). Currently, the main attribute of the capitalist market – car ownership – is falling victim to car-sharing systems within a growing community of cooperation.

It is worth noting that it is not the market that tames the community, but the community that tames the market. The transition from ownership to access and from markets to communities in personal mobility may greatly accelerate the introduction of driverless vehicles in the coming years.

In 2012, California, Nevada and Florida signed a bill allowing driverless vehicles on the roads. When signing the bill, California Governor Jerry Brown said, ‘Today we are looking at how science fiction is becoming tomorrow's reality.’ *rzeczywistością*” (Muller. 2012). There are some concerns about the safety of driverless vehicles, but engineers are reassuring and emphasise that the majority of traffic accidents are caused by human error. Automated vehicles do not get distracted, fall asleep or get drunk, which gives them the potential to save human lives. Traditionalists believe that the older generation of drivers enjoy driving their own vehicles and that most drivers will not be interested in automated cars. With regard to the Internet generation, these arguments may prove questionable, as it is already apparent that young people have difficulty concentrating behind the wheel because their attention is distracted by smartphones. Driving a car is unlikely to be more interesting than simply being driven by a vehicle. In a sharing and collaborative economy, when time becomes a scarce commodity, being freed from driving for several hours a day means extra time for much more interesting activities (Rifkin. 2012). On inter-city business trips, instead of being constantly focused on driving, we gain time that can be used for additional work. Sergey Brin, one of the co-founders of Google, predicts that soon millions of people using shared cars will be booking vehicles electronically. After delivering them to their destination, driverless cars will automatically be sent to pick up the next passenger or return to the nearest car park to recharge their batteries and wait for the next call. Technological progress is already so enormous that it is difficult to even estimate, as it affects many areas of life and the economy in general. Every day, new inventions and innovative solutions are created. So why would people not want to take advantage of the available innovations or want to own and maintain their own car when they can have access to a driverless vehicle, book it at any time via their mobile phone and travel effortlessly and time-efficiently to their destination using GPS navigation, paying only for the time they use the service? The era of capitalism combined with the exchange of property on the markets is giving way to access to services in a collaborative community, and evidence of this transformation is precisely the changing attitude towards cars (Rifkin. 2016). Nowadays, people not only share cars or bicycles, but also their flats, houses, clothes, toys, tools, gardens and skills within a networked community. A large number of items that people own are not used by them for some time. Humanity must begin to live closer to each other and share space, vehicles, buildings, etc. Society must finally begin to collect experiences instead of objects (Montgomery, 2015). The sharing economy will continue to grow and, in the long term, may contribute to the decentralisation of capital and power in the world, which may disrupt the current economic order and introduce greater autonomy for individuals at the expense of large corporations. Undoubtedly, legislative processes relating to the sharing economy will have a major impact on its further development.

Considering the examples of sharing economy tools presented above, it is important to remember that solutions from other cities cannot be automatically replicated. Each city must discover its own potential in terms of the sharing economy and use it effectively. The sharing economy offers a range of solutions that can be included in the development strategy of Polish cities to improve the quality of life of their residents. It is important for humanity to understand that a change in lifestyle is necessary to reduce the consumption of energy and raw materials. Humanity should abandon the concept of consumerism in favour of sharing.

In the face of the aforementioned threats, responsibility for cities lies not only with their authorities, but also with their residents. Thinking about the future of cities should be focused on creating new community strategies, which can be implemented with the help of the sharing economy.

The hotel services market

The tourism services market has contributed to the growth of the sharing economy (Cheng. 2016). Its rapid development was due, among other things, to the high ratio of the purchase cost of a good to its rental cost (e.g. for this reason, sharing economy platforms mediating in the tool rental market have not been successful) (Täuscher, Kietzmann. 2017), the internationalisation of the market (high transaction costs), the problem of information asymmetry endemic to the tourism market, and the low repeatability of transactions. Some authors supplement the above factors with environmental factors (sustainable consumption), the importance of community and authenticity (Skalska, Markiewicz, Pędziński. 2016), and the large share of the human factor in the product (Dredge, Gyimóthy. 2018). or even a response to mass tourism (travel motives do not change, but tourists need new experiences) (Forno, Garibaldi. 2015). The development of the sharing economy is particularly intense in the following markets (Majchrzak. 2016):

- accommodation,
- transport,
- catering,
- guiding and piloting.

In the context of the hotel services market, entities participating in the sharing economy are referred to by various names. In English, the following terms are used to describe entities representing supply: suppliers or hosts, and even microentrepreneurs (or low-risk microentrepreneurs). To describe the demand side, terms such as consumer, tourist or traveller (in relation to the sharing economy in tourism) are most commonly used. The term 'supplier' will be used for entities representing supply, and 'consumer' for entities representing demand. Hotel services offered on P2P markets, like hotel services offered by companies, vary greatly in terms of standard, type and location. Although sharing economy platforms mediate the rental of both shared rooms and huge residences, it is possible to identify specific features of the hotel product offered in the sharing economy. The main difference, already apparent when searching for accommodation through sharing economy platforms and OTAs (online travel agencies – an online intermediary in the tourism market) is the possibility of choosing a product version depending on the presence of the host in the rented accommodation in the sharing economy, while in the case of OTAs, the main selection criterion is the type of accommodation (hotel, motel, etc.).

Hotel companies often generate a significant portion of their revenue from the sale of additional services, such as restaurant services, spas, conference room rentals, etc. The rationale for offering additional services stems from:

- 1) scope effects (synergies) – customers can purchase multiple products from a single seller, thereby reducing the transaction costs associated with searching for offers from other sellers;
- 2) the possibility of increasing revenue by offering additional services to guests who do not use accommodation services;
- 3) the possibility of achieving a competitive advantage. The sharing economy product in the hotel industry does not generally include additional services (except for wireless internet), and therefore the customer must purchase them outside the place of accommodation.

One of the main services that distinguish traditional hotel products from P2P services is reception services, the absence of which can also be viewed ambivalently, because on the one hand, there is no possibility of quick contact in case of any problems, but on the other hand, it ensures greater anonymity, which is also valuable to some consumers. The lack of additional services means that the customer has to perform them on their own, which is not necessarily synonymous with lower quality, considering the current trends towards self-service in service companies (ATMs, automatic check-in at airports, self-service checkouts, etc.) (Meuter, Olstrom, Roundtree, Bitner. 2000). If we disregard cost issues, limiting personal contact with the salesperson means that the employee no longer has a direct impact (both positive and negative) on the quality of service (it is therefore easier for the entrepreneur to control the quality of the product). The lack of contact with the salesperson can also be an advantage for customers who choose the self-service option even without additional cost incentives, as shown by research conducted in the 1980s (Bateson, 1985). As Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom and Brown point out, other incentives for customers to use self-service may include 'time savings, prestige, personal development or simply pleasure'. The lack of self-service can also cause customers to switch to competitors (Griffy-Brown, Chun, Machen, 2008), while the use of new information technologies in self-service is considered crucial to achieving high guest satisfaction in the hotel industry (Beatson, Coote, Rudd, 2006). The trend towards self-service has also been widely observed in the hotel industry since the beginning of the 21st century (Fisher, Beatson, 2009), and this phenomenon also applies to high-standard hotels, where interpersonal relationships between guests and staff have

always been an added value. Research also indicates that a positive evaluation of self-service options increases service satisfaction and repeat purchases (Beatson, Coote, Rudd. 2006). Despite the lack of additional services offered, contact with the local community is an element used in the marketing of almost all sharing economy platforms in the hotel industry. This is particularly important in the case of services consisting solely of renting a bed or room in the flat where the owner lives. The progressive professionalisation and specialisation of sharing economy services, which involves the purchase of cleaning and key transfer services, among others, means that tourists have no more contact with the local community than they would if they purchased services at a hotel. This is particularly important in the case of purchasing services from management entities – another link in the distribution chain between flat owners and the platform – specialised entities that rent flats on a long-term basis and sublet them on a short-term basis, or developers who build flats for short-term rental. An important element that differentiates traditional hotel services from those offered within the sharing economy is the possibility of using a kitchen in the latter. The area of rented flats is also generally larger than that of rooms in traditional hotels. This may be important for guests travelling in groups (families) and on a limited budget.

The hotel product offered within the sharing economy has, in a sense, the characteristics of several traditional hotel products. The emphasis on learning about the local culture and the possibility of renting only beds or rooms, as well as the lack of additional services, is undoubtedly a feature of hostels and youth hostels. The inclusion of a kitchen in the accommodation unit and the relatively large floor space make the hotel services of the sharing economy similar to those of guesthouses, while the standard and location are similar to hotels located in large urban areas. For this reason, in the first studies of hoteliers, the sharing economy phenomenon was treated as a product that is not a substitute for traditional hotel services and was therefore often ignored by economic practitioners. However, it quickly became apparent that the services offered by sharing economy platforms had become direct competition not only for hoteliers, but also for traditional intermediaries in the hotel services market.

In the context of the development of the sharing economy, the question always arises about the key factors for the growth of peer-to-peer (P2P) service markets. Many researchers point to the use of ICT as the main factor in the development of the sharing economy, but e-intermediaries appeared in many P2P markets as early as the late 1990s (services such as Allegro, eBay, etc.). The earlier lack of e-intermediaries in the sharing economy is difficult to explain by the specific nature of e-intermediation in the hotel industry, as the first OTAs, intermediating in the sale of hotel services (including Expedia), also appeared in the second half of the last decade of the 20th century. The main problem that hampered the development of P2P markets in the hotel industry was therefore related to market imperfections specific to these services. The development of the sharing economy cannot therefore be attributed solely to innovations in sharing economy platforms related to the reduction of transaction costs in P2P hotel service markets (which naturally occurred), as similar innovations (involving the aggregation of supply and demand) using ICT in other P2P markets had already occurred earlier. The main barrier to trade was therefore the existence of information asymmetry in P2P accommodation service markets, linked on the one hand to moral hazard involving the use of high-value goods by strangers, and on the other hand to landlords' concerns about product quality. This solution to the problem of information asymmetry by sharing economy platforms has enabled the development of the sharing economy in the hotel services market. With the development of the sharing economy in the hotel services market, distribution channels are lengthening and companies are becoming increasingly specialised. This is a phenomenon typical of the development of many other goods and services markets. The most important intermediaries in this market are online sharing economy platforms, which attract most of the attention of both the media and academic literature. In addition to platforms, metasearch companies, which group offers from several platforms, are also intermediaries in the sharing economy market. The second group of intermediaries operates between platforms and service providers. These are companies that manage the process of renting flats on behalf of owners.

The imperfections of the sharing economy in the hotel services market can be divided into two groups. The first includes imperfections related to information asymmetry and transaction costs, and the second includes externalities and the unreliability of competition. Only the first group of market imperfections is limited by the parties to the transaction. The success of the first platforms mediating the exchange of goods on P2P markets was related to the reduction of transaction costs and information asymmetry between the parties. Transaction costs were reduced by the construction of a platform that facilitated the search for specific goods and standardised the payment process. However, since transaction costs within the platform are reduced in a very similar way to OTAs or other platforms operating in P2P markets, the paper focuses on analysing the reduction of information asymmetry. Reducing this form of market imperfection was the main reason for the success of sharing economy platforms. Information asymmetry was linked to the feedback system and insurance offered by the platform. However, since consumers usually paid for goods before receiving them, reducing information asymmetry mainly concerned consumer protection. In the case of services, especially hotel services, the provider transfers significant

assets to the guest for use, and therefore reducing information asymmetry concerns both parties. This is the main difference between the system of reducing information asymmetry on P2P platforms mediating in the exchange of goods and platforms mediating in the exchange of services (Pawlicz. 2019).

Summary and conclusions

In summary, the sharing economy phenomenon complements the mainstream economy with a socially responsible business segment that is characterised by a focus on values and changes the traditional concept of ownership, enriching it with aspects of social interaction. Economic development is not possible without trust and a willingness to cooperate. The sharing economy phenomenon is not only a response to the needs of the economy in times of crisis, but also a solution for people who understand that you don't have to own something to consume it. Despite emerging doubts regarding, to a large extent, the rights and obligations of people providing services in this area, the sharing economy undoubtedly offers many benefits, such as: reduced resource consumption, the emergence of new business models, low costs and the resulting savings, building social bonds and trust between people (the creation of local communities) and counteracting the exclusion that is an attribute of property rights. Consumption based on access to goods reflects the mindset of a growing number of consumers who strive for sustainable development, the elimination of overconsumption, and often the exclusion of consumption as the very act of acquiring new items. Observation and analysis of consumption based on access to goods leads to the conclusion that this is a rapidly developing area, but one that has been poorly researched so far.

The multitude of platforms, applications and systems representing the sharing economy in Poland proves that excessive consumption is slowly being replaced by its sustainable counterpart, and that consumers are increasingly interested in improving their quality of life, which is not necessarily linked to the purchase of new goods or services. The main problem facing shared consumption in Poland is public trust. However, it can be observed that despite their resistance to sharing goods and services, consumers are engaging in shared consumption practices such as exchanging and donating unused goods and travelling together in the form of carpooling.

The high popularity of platforms, applications and systems available in Poland that promote consumption based on access to goods and services suggests that shared consumption will continue to grow, especially in the areas of carpooling and the sharing and exchange of items. In Poland, the sharing economy is a relatively new area, but one with high growth dynamics. Observing the growth of shared consumption raises many interesting directions for further scientific research. One of them is the phenomenon of contemporary nomadism, a society of wanderers who abandon their stationary lives, homes and full-time jobs and move from place to place without putting down roots anywhere. Contemporary nomads are also people who work remotely and can be said to live in many places at once. They improve their quality of life by owning fewer possessions, which makes it easier to move frequently. In this context, it is interesting to find out at what point we, as a society, begin to be bothered by the excess of possessions we have. The second direction for further research is the increasingly promoted ideology of 'zero waste', i.e. a way of living without waste, which is spreading mainly in Western Europe and North America. Growing problems with environmental degradation and urban overpopulation are forcing not only local authorities but also residents themselves to take increasingly far-reaching measures to recover energy from waste and professionally segregate rubbish. Sustainable urban planning and reducing the carbon footprint is possible, among other things, by finding answers to the questions of whether zero waste is already a necessity and how Polish society approaches waste sorting.

Imperfections occur in every market where goods are exchanged between buyers and sellers, including information asymmetry, public goods, transaction costs and externalities. However, the existence of imperfections per se does not necessarily mean that public entities need to intervene, as the market environment also provides incentives to develop solutions that increase the efficiency of exchange. Such activities include the actions of transaction parties, non-profit organisations and the functioning of intermediaries in the market. When private regulation does not significantly reduce market imperfections, public entities take regulatory action (top-down). Reducing market imperfections has become the foundation for the development of the sharing economy, which is crucial for the modern service market. The sharing economy in its current form did not really exist ten years ago, which is why in recent years it has grown dynamically both as an area of the economy and as an interesting field of scientific research. Based on a bibliometric analysis, it was found that between 2015 and 2024, the number of publications on the sharing economy in the Web of Science and BazEkon databases increased geometrically (the fit coefficient of the number of publications in individual years was significantly higher for the geometric function than for the linear function). Based on a review of the literature, changes were observed in the selected research areas in published scientific articles; while in the initial phase, researchers were interested in the sharing economy en bloc, the works from 2016–2023 are characterised by a narrowing and refinement of the topics of scientific interest.

The analysed works show a huge diversity of conceptual apparatus – among the numerous definitions of the sharing economy, as many as 11 groups differing in the subject of the definition were identified, which clearly indicates the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon as an area of scientific research. The dynamic development of the sharing economy would not have been possible without private initiatives to reduce endemic market imperfections in the services sector. The most significant forms of market imperfections hindering the development of the sharing economy in the hotel services market included information asymmetry and transaction costs. However, these imperfections have been reduced thanks to the emergence of e-intermediaries who, using new technologies, innovatively connect demand with supply. Measures related to the development of a system of mutual evaluations, preliminary verification and guarantees (provided by intermediaries and paid to owners in the event of damage to the rented premises) have enabled the effective conversion of individual transactions into repeat transactions, which in turn has increased the costs of opportunistic behaviour by the parties to the transaction and deepened the trust between the parties, which is crucial for P2P markets. However, intermediaries do not eliminate all market imperfections. An analysis of the tools used by sharing economy platforms has positively verified the research hypothesis that sharing economy intermediaries do not reduce market imperfections related to negative externalities. Sharing economy markets have developed only for products that are relatively high in value compared to the cost of renting them, but this applies to markets characterised by low transaction repeatability. For this reason, the transport and hotel services markets have developed strongly, in contrast to, for example, the tool rental market. Due to enormous economies of scale and network effects, the sharing economy platform market in areas of growth mediating between transaction parties has taken the form of an oligopoly. However, the reduction of market imperfections has meant an increase in its efficiency without the need for intervention by public entities. Although the sharing economy accounts for an increasingly large part of the economy, there is still a lack of tools to measure it. Supply, represented on the market within the sharing economy, is virtually non-existent in public statistics, and the data provided by platforms (intermediaries) is fragmentary, does not include research methodology and is therefore unreliable. For this reason, other research tools must be used to determine the scale of the phenomenon. In order to estimate the market concentration of sharing economy platforms, a method based on the amount of internet traffic generated by intermediary websites (so-called organic search) was proposed. To assess the size of the market represented by the largest platform, Airbnb, data from consulting companies whose business model is based on scanning the content of the platform's website was used. The calculated market concentration indicators corresponded to the reference values for an oligopoly. The sharing economy market is developing primarily in large cities. Based on data on the size of the sharing economy base (available on the Airbnb platform) for the hotel services market in Poland (provincial cities were surveyed), it was found that by far the largest supply of such services is in Warsaw and Krakow. A comparison of three supply concentration indicators (HHI, share of the four largest cities, Gini index) for hotel services by city in the sharing economy and the traditional hotel services market showed that market concentration is significantly higher in the former.

In the largest cities, the number of beds available on the Airbnb platform also accounts for a significant percentage of the supply of hotel beds (in Gdańsk and Kraków even over 100%, and in Wrocław and Warsaw over 80%), but part of this supply is only available for a few months of the year. The available data on demand and prices in the sharing economy are much more limited than the data on supply. Based on the research conducted, it was found that the data on average capacity utilisation by city in both markets are not correlated, while the data on average price levels by city in the sharing economy and in the traditional hotel services market show a strong positive Pearson correlation coefficient.

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