



SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

SAVING THE PLANET OR SAVING MONEY?

Qualitative Study of the Foodsharing User Motives
in Borås, Sweden

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Abstract

Given the rise of ICTs and the sharing economy, grassroots initiatives emerge as a complement to food banks in order to tackle the food waste problem at the local level. Foodsharing collaborates with local food operators in order to collect edible food that would otherwise be discarded, and deliver it to sharing points where anyone can take it freely and anonymously. In contrast to a food bank, foodsharing does not assume a charitable role. Its main goal is to reduce food waste, which to a large extent corresponds with people's motivations to participate in it. With the sharing economy as a theoretical framework, in this thesis I study motivations to use foodsharing. Taking into account economic, environmental and social benefits of the sharing economy, I look for a potential mismatch between the user and participant motives that has been concluded in other schemes before. Namely, that users would be more interested in economic benefits compared to participants, and would primarily be motivated by the access to free food. Based on ten semi-structured interviews with foodsharing users in Borås, Sweden, my study reveals no such mismatch: like participants, users are strongly opposed to food waste, and generally do not see free food as an important motive to use foodsharing. The mismatch, however, seems to exist between their attitudes towards the purpose of foodsharing: while for participants it is about reducing food waste per se, users do not necessarily see foodsharing from the environmental perspective, and highlight its charitable mission instead.

Key words: food waste, foodsharing, sharing economy, motivations, glocal

1. Introduction

The global issue of food waste has been receiving much attention over the last few years. The fact that it is included in the Agenda 2030 – Target 12.3 is to “halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including postharvest losses” (UN 2015) – demonstrates a worldwide understanding of the negative consequences around it, which primarily include the waste of natural resources (Närvänen et al. 2020, 2). Economically food waste translates into losses for farmers and other stakeholders within the supply chain, and higher prices for consumers, which affect food insecurity by making food less accessible for vulnerable groups (FAO 2017, 112). It is indeed a problem of a moral kind: food produced for human consumption is wasted at the same time as a large part of the global population suffers from hunger and malnutrition (Närvänen et al. 2020, 2).

Although preventing food waste is in the interest of both governments aiming to reduce food insecurity and food companies that want to increase efficiency, a given amount of surplus food – which often ends up as a waste – is inevitable (Baglioni, De Pieri, and Tallarico 2017, 2036). A common measure being implemented in a number of countries is to donate such food to deprived people, usually through food banks and charities (Ibid.; Baglioni et al. 2017, 43). Food banks, however, are exposed to strict regulations concerning which food items they are allowed to take and redistribute (Gollnhofer and Boller 2020, 118). As a result, substantial amounts of food cannot be saved by them. Furthermore, critical opinions exist that redistributing food waste in a form of charity further contributes to the stigma around free food and subsequent marginalisation of the poor (Baglioni, De Pieri, and Tallarico 2017, 2036; Baglioni et al. 2017, 107). Given these limitations of food banks and the rise of ICTs (information and communication technologies), grassroots initiatives emerge as a complementary measure (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1492; Kölmel, Böhm and Baedeker 2019, 196; Davies et al. 2017, 137).

Foodsharing is a movement that started in Germany in 2012, with the aim to reduce food waste by enabling peer-to-peer sharing through the online platform *Foodsharing.de* as well as more institutionalised collaboration with local food

operators. In contrast to a traditional food bank, foodsharing advocates free, anonymous and unconditional access to food because it “does not want to presume which people are in need or which projects are more worthy of support than others” (Lebensmittel Retten Wiki n.d.). By now foodsharing is no longer a German-only phenomenon – over the last few years similar initiatives have started in a number of other countries, including Sweden (Foodsharing n.d.; Maträddning Sverige n.d.: Karrot n.d.). In fact, the reason I chose to study foodsharing is my own engagement in one such initiative based in a smaller Swedish city – *Foodsharing i Borås*.

Foodsharing participants visit collaborating companies regularly in order to collect food that would otherwise be disposed of. The food is then either taken home by the participant herself, or delivered to so-called sharing points – publicly accessible places with a refrigerator where anyone can come and take it for their own use, free of charge. In the context of this thesis, foodsharing participants are seen as providers, meaning that they run the scheme and enable surplus food provision by collecting food, looking for new collaborations, maintaining smooth functioning of sharing points and promoting foodsharing in their local communities. Users are seen as those who take food from sharing points but do not participate otherwise. This division is important for the formulation of my research problem further on.

As per its name and definition, foodsharing is a part of the sharing economy – an emerging economic model based on sharing underutilized assets, in the case of this research – surplus food, and enabled by ICTs (Bostman 2013; Bellotti et al. 2015, 1085). At its core, the model features economic and environmental efficiency, at the same time creating or strengthening social connections between those involved in sharing activities (Bostman 2013; Falcone and Imbert 2017, 198). According to the theory, foodsharing can lead to more efficient use of resources – both food and money, reduce the amount of waste, and facilitate community values among people involved (Falcone and Imbert 2017, 202).

As demonstrated by several authors who studied foodsharing, economic, environmental and social benefits of the sharing economy to a large extent underlie people’s motivations to participate in it. Usually the participant motivations are related to environmental thinking and social responsibility, which is perhaps not surprising

given the overall mission of foodsharing – to save natural resources and promote a more respectful culture around food waste (Ganglbauer et al. 2014; Rombach and Bitsch 2015; Schanes and Stagl 2019; Lebensmittel Retten Wiki n.d.). In addition to that, participants are motivated by the possibility to meet people with similar mindset (Rombach and Bitsch 2015). The economic factor – free access to food, although present, does not seem to play a bigger role (Ibid.; Schanes and Stagl 2019). In general, considering own economic gain is perceived rather critically in the movement (Ibid.). Namely, seeing foodsharing as a source of free food might make one dependent on it – which contradicts the ultimate goal of the movement to reduce food waste. Therefore, participants do not want that other participants or those who use foodsharing would count on it economically (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1497; Wahlen 2017, 71).

Somewhat different views on this were identified by Ganglbauer et al. who studied posts in the German foodsharing group on Facebook (2014). The group was open to all and therefore included not only active participants but also other people who want to be a part of the network, including those who use foodsharing. The authors found out that besides social and ecological values, economic need was also seen as an important incentive as it was often discussed in the group how it benefits people in need (Ganglbauer et al. 2014, 916). This indicates an assumption that people use foodsharing in order to get free food and support themselves economically.

If this assumption was correct, it would mean a mismatch between the foodsharing participant and foodsharing user motivations. While the former tend to participate in foodsharing due to idealistic reasons to act against overconsumption and reduce waste, it is possible that the latter hold a more instrumental stance and see it as a source of free food (Bellotti et al. 2015, 1092). This mismatch between the user and provider motivations, i.e. user being more economically driven than provider, has been studied and concluded in other schemes of the sharing economy such as peer-to-peer marketplaces, accommodation sharing, car and ride sharing, tool sharing and similar (Ibid.; Böcker and Meelen 2017, 36-37). In this thesis I want to investigate whether it is present in foodsharing as well. Moreover, since people taking food are key for successful functioning of foodsharing, I want to address implications that their motives can have for the movement.

1.1. Aim and Research Question

The general aim of this thesis is to learn about foodsharing users by studying their motives and challenging the assumption about the economic nature of these motives. From the researcher point of view, I seek to complement the current research on foodsharing which is mainly concerned with participants in it. But I also want to have a better knowledge of foodsharing users as someone who participates in the movement herself. Naturally, I decided to study foodsharing users in Borås because of my involvement in the foodsharing group there.

Using the potential mismatch between the foodsharing user and participant motivations as a starting point for my study, and the sharing economy as a theoretical framework for it, I formulate the research question as follows:

How do the foodsharing user motives relate to the foodsharing participant motives in terms of economic, environmental and social benefits?

To address it, I employ the sub-questions below. Realising that the three categories related to the benefits of the sharing economy can be rather limiting my research, I also include an open category for other kinds of motivations.

Sub-questions:

- What are the economic motives for using foodsharing?
- What are the environmental motives for using foodsharing?
- What are the social motives for using foodsharing?
- What are other motives for using foodsharing?

1.2. Delimitations

Despite foodsharing's existence in a number of cities across different countries (see Figure 1 in the next subsection), this research was carried out in Borås and thus focuses on foodsharing users in this particular town. A wider study examining foodsharing users in multiple places would surely provide a broader understanding of their motives and how they can be influenced by different local contexts. However, such study would require significantly more resources than the scope of a Master's thesis allows. Furthermore, due to the qualitative nature of my study with a low number of participants, I cannot draw any conclusions based on socio-demographic

characteristics such as age, education and income-level, and how they correlate with certain motives, even though previous studies on other sharing economy schemes suggest that such correlations might actually exist (Böcker and Meelen 2017, 36-37).

1.3. Relevance to Global Studies

When it comes to foodsharing's geographical spread, it is not yet a truly global movement. According to *karrot.world*, an online open source platform designed to manage foodsharing groups internally, the great majority of these groups are situated in Europe, with only one exception in Ecuador.

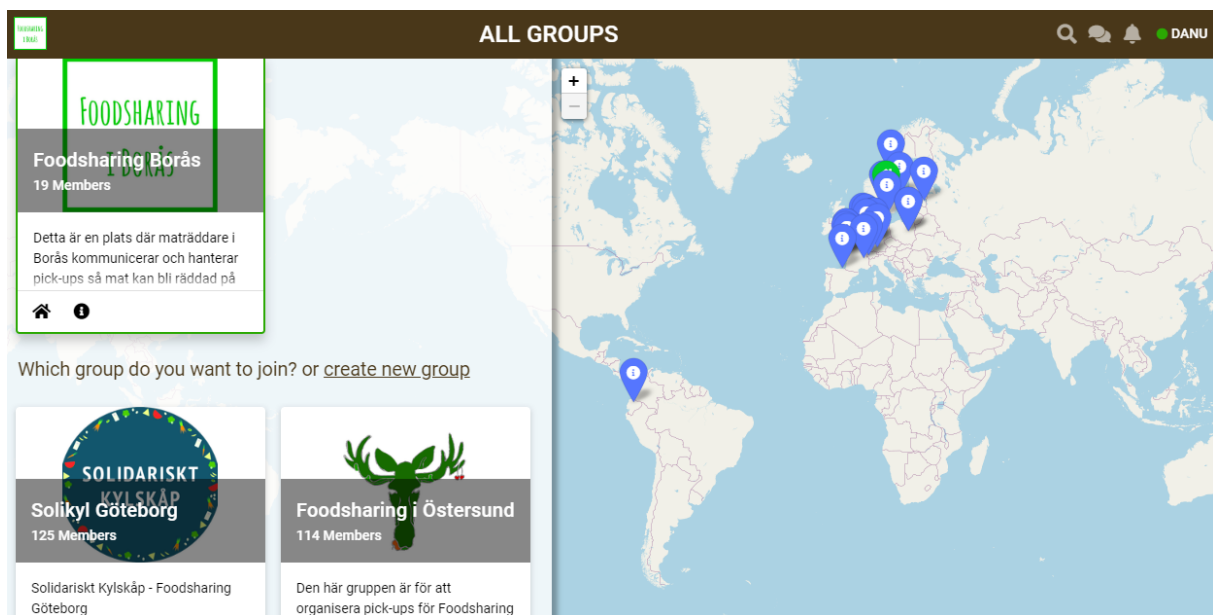


Figure 1. The map of foodsharing groups registered on *karrot.world*. Retrieved from: <https://karrot.world/#/groupPreview>. Accessed May 17, 2020.

Of course, various foodsharing groups differ from each other in size, number of cooperating partners and exact organisation of their activities, but they all follow the *Foodsharing.de* model in the attempt to reduce food waste in their respective cities, by cooperating with local businesses and reaching out to people in their communities. Such local action in order to tackle the global problem of food waste makes foodsharing into a glocal phenomenon and therefore both an interesting and relevant subject within the frames of global studies.

Motivations for foodsharing have not yet been studied in the framework of sharing economy, thereby my thesis can provide new insights on the phenomenon and its different forms, given that foodsharing differs substantially from, for example,

accommodation or ride sharing. Speaking of the foodsharing research in particular, so far it has mainly been concerned with participants in the movement, with the exception of Ganglbauer et al. study of the open Facebook group. However, by taking food distributed through foodsharing, users become an integral part of the movement, aiming for a more sustainable food system while acting locally. Learning what motivates people most can be used for adjusting organisation design or/and developing different mobilisation strategies (Bellotti et al. 2015, 1092; Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1492). Speaking very practically, it can impact how local groups like *Foodsharing i Borås* plan their work and promote foodsharing within their respective communities.

2. Background

In this section I briefly present the general context of the food waste issue and demonstrate how foodsharing became a part of it. Before moving the focus onto the research problem, I want to provide some background information about the foodsharing movement, its governance framework and risks related to it. Finally, I give a brief presentation of *Foodsharing i Borås* – a foodsharing group in Sweden which I am a co-founder and member of, and which provided me with the access to research participants of this study.

2.1. Food Loss, Food Waste, Food Banks

Globally, around one third of all food produced is lost or wasted every year (UN 2015). Negative consequences around it are multiple, and primarily include the waste of resources. Perhaps the most obvious of them are land, water and energy, but wasted food also means wasted pesticides and fertilizers, as well as human labour along the supply chain (US EPA 2015; Närvänen et al. 2020, 2) Without saying, it comes with a heavy carbon footprint from food production, transportation, storage and finally disposal in landfills – according to FAO estimations, global food loss and waste together generate about 8% of total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions annually (FAO n.d.).

Before going further, I want to clear up the possible confusion between food loss and food waste. Sometimes, for the sake of simplicity, both terms are merged together and called food waste. However, they constitute different things. Food loss is seen as accidentally occurring for reasons not under the direct control of the agents concerned while food waste is caused by intended or unintended behaviour, i.e. the removal of food fit for consumption by choice or negligence (FAO 2017, 112). The majority of food losses occurs in low-income countries at harvest and during post-harvest handling, owing to poor infrastructure, inadequate technology, limited knowledge base and lack of investment in production (Ibid., 113). In high-income countries we mainly talk about food waste occurring in the end of the supply chain, that is, at the retail level, food service and finally households. This is due to excessive food safety policies, failed marketing strategies, errors in forecasting demand or poor planning and lack of awareness by consumers (Baglioni, De Pieri, and Tallarico 2017, 2036). As the subject

of this thesis – foodsharing – deals with the latter, the term food waste will be used further on, referring to edible and safe food that does not reach the human stomach for reasons mentioned above. Examples of such food are shrivelled fruits and vegetables or unopened dairy products discarded for passing best before date (Naturvårdsverket 2020a, 8). In various reports it is often labelled avoidable food waste, to separate it from unavoidable waste such as peels, coffee grounds and bones from meat and fish (Ibid.).

To address the food waste problem, countries take formal measures in the form of policies and legislations (Baglioni et al. 2017, 37-48). France, for example, adopted a law in 2016 which bans supermarkets from destroying unsold food and obliges them to donate it to deprived people (Ibid., 43; Chrisafis 2016). Commonly, such donations are organised through food banks – national or regional organisations coordinating surplus food collection from retailers and its redistribution to charities which work directly with beneficiaries (Baglioni, De Pieri, and Tallarico 2017, 2044-2045). It should be noted that food banks do not handle surplus food at the household level, even though this is where the most food waste is generated in high-income countries (FAO 2017, 114). To illustrate it with a situation in Sweden, households account for 70 percent of the total food waste (both avoidable and unavoidable), compared to 8 percent in the retail sector, 7 percent in primary production, 6 percent in restaurants and large-scale scattering, and 3 percent in food industry (Naturvårdsverket 2020b). Furthermore, as I already mentioned in the introduction, food banks must comply with extensive food safety regulations which means that they cannot save all surplus food even if they want to (Gollnhofer and Boller 2020, 118). Finally, redistributing food waste through charities might contribute to the further marginalisation of the poor as oftentimes people have to prove they are eligible to receive food (Baglioni, De Pieri, and Tallarico 2017, 2036; Baglioni et al. 2017, 107).

2.2. Foodsharing.de

With the rise of ICTs and the sharing economy, grassroots initiatives emerge and complement longstanding practices of food banks (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1492; Kölmel, Böhm and Baedeker 2019, 196). Various web platforms and mobile applications allow people to connect with each other and with local businesses in order

to facilitate sharing and exchange of surplus food. Two separate German initiatives were merged into one and became known as *Foodsharing.de* – or simply foodsharing – in 2012: (1) an online peer-to-peer platform on which retailers and private individuals can announce free sharing of food and (2) a contractual food saving aimed at institutionalising a relationship between retailers and consumers, in order to enable people to collect surplus food directly from the store (or any other cooperating food operator) on a regular basis before its disposal (Yang, Villioth and Radtke 2019, 118-119). Since then, *Foodsharing.de* is a volunteer-run organisation as well as an online logistics platform that enables people to share food instead of throwing it away (Morrow 2019, 202). In 2014, the organisation introduced public fridges (sharing points) where saved food is deposited and can be collected freely and anonymously, thus reducing the stigma around free food. This corresponds to the mission of foodsharing to make food unconditionally accessible to everyone and thereby promote a more respectful culture around food waste (Lebensmittel Retten Wiki n.d.). In other words, the organisation presents itself as an environmental movement, and does not assume any social or charitable role (Ibid.).

At the time of writing, the *Foodsharing.de* has over 7000 co-operating businesses and almost 75 000 participants who rescue food on a regular basis across Germany (Foodsharing.de n.d.). *Foodsharing.de* differs from a traditional food bank as it has neither storage facilities nor paid staff and it is entirely dependent on volunteers who make contact with stores and do pick-ups, and of course store managers who agree to cooperate (Morrow 2019, 203). Private individuals are also involved in the scheme: on the *Foodsharing.de* online platform they can post virtual food baskets of leftover food from home and give it away to those who want it (Ibid., 202). To make all of this possible, web programmers work constantly to improve the platform, also voluntarily. Even though the whole network is completely self-managed, a hierarchical and distributed governance structure has evolved over time to manage issues such as trust and food safety (Ibid.). For example, extensive instructions concerning the latter are codified into an online wiki and everyone who wants to become a volunteer needs to complete an online quiz (Ibid, 207). This is to ensure that new persons joining the organisation would know its internal rules and regulations.

It must be said that this kind of collective governance described above is not exactly compatible with the existing requirements of food authorities. Indeed, public fridges in Berlin were declared a health hazard for their lack of hygiene a couple of years ago (Davies 2019, 43-44; Marshall 2016). Following EU and German regulations, redistributing food as it does makes *Foodsharing.de* into a food business operator, and therefore all food donations that goes through it must be logged; additionally, an individual responsible for upholding food safety needs to be appointed (Regulation (EC) No 178/2002; Davies 2019, 44). In response to this ruling, *Foodsharing.de* argued that its public fridges constitute private exchange sites and therefore should not be considered as a food business operator (Davies 2019, 44). This contestation is first of all practical: as a volunteer-run organisation, it has no paid staff and therefore very limited capacity to resource, monitor and check the numerous sites that the public fridges occupy (Ibid.). But it is also ideological in relation to the movement's views on food commoning: foodsharing and its fridges are supposed to be open to everyone, and the food inside is owned by no one (Morrow 2018, 202). However, if no one owns the food, no one is responsible for it, and there is no one to hold liable for sharing food that is unsafe – which is the problem for food authorities (Ibid., 203). As a consequence of the conflict, the remaining fridges in Berlin are much less accessible, besides, the organisation must display warnings on the fridges declaring that the food inside is not regulated and that anyone who uses the fridge is “eating at their own risk.” (Ibid., 210). *Foodsharing i Borås* (or to my knowledge any other group in Sweden) has not been targeted by food authorities so far, but it also has this type of warning at its sharing points – to minimize the risk the volunteers would be held liable if something happens.

2.3. Foodsharing i Borås

According to *karrot.world*, there are now five groups in Sweden, namely in Gothenburg, Lund, Stockholm, Östersund and Borås, the latter serving as the research setting for this thesis (Karrot n.d.). It was established in the summer of 2018, and since then there are two sharing points in different districts of the city, both located in community centers/libraries that are operated by the municipality. The municipality, though, does not operate the sharing points and the staff working there is not responsible for foodsharing in any way. One could even say that the sharing points operate unstaffed

because foodsharing participants are only there when they deliver food and clean the fridges.

At the time of writing, *Foodsharing i Borås* cooperates with one bigger grocery store, and one charity organisation that does not have the capacity to distribute all the food it gets donated. This amounts to three regular food pick-ups per week. In addition, there are irregular pick-ups from a cooperating conference centre, an online shop selling locally produced food and other organisations that, for example, have leftover food after their events. To a lesser extent there is also food that private individuals leave at the fridges now and then. All of this allows to keep a regular flow of both food and people at the sharing points, but the ambition is to increase the number of co-operations over time. The main communication channel for promoting foodsharing locally is the Facebook page with over 1000 followers. Besides posting general information such as changes in the community centres' opening times, the page is also used to inform people when there is food at the sharing points. However, this kind of updates have become increasingly rare recently – food usually disappears from the fridges quickly without an extra prompting.

Foodsharing i Borås is the smallest group in Sweden: Gothenburg's *Solidariskt Kylskåp (Solikyl)* currently has 125 members registered on *karrot.world*, *Foodsharing i Östersund* – 114, *Food Saving Lund* – 94, *Foodsharing Stockholm* – 50, while *Foodsharing i Borås* only 19 (Karrot n.d.), although the number of *karrot.world* users do not necessarily indicate how well the groups are established and what kind of infrastructure they have developed in terms of sharing points and regular co-operations. Regardless, all of them are built according to the *Foodsharing.de* model with the goal to reduce food waste by cooperating with local businesses and redistributing food surplus within their communities.

3. Previous Research and Theoretical Framework

There have been a few studies about motivations related to foodsharing so far, and all of them look into what motivates people to participate in the movement. In this section I go through these studies which, although do not directly examine foodsharing users, provide some indications about their motives as well, which leads to my research problem. In the second part of the section, I move the focus onto the sharing economy which constitutes the theoretical framework of this study.

3.1. Motivations in Foodsharing

Rombach and Bitsch (2015) were among the first ones to study foodsharing. Namely, they interviewed participants of *Foodsharing.de*, *Slow Food* and dumpster divers in Germany in order to compare their motivations and knowledge about food waste. Speaking of *Foodsharing.de* participants' motivations, the following were identified as the most important: to reduce waste, act against overconsumption, and promote the value of food and food commensality by facilitating sharing among strangers (Ibid., 10). Similar but more detailed findings were made by Schanes and Stagl (2019) who looked explicitly at foodsharing in their study, interviewing 16 participants in Vienna and Graz. The authors found a diverse combination of motives ranging from moral principles to more individualistic reasons to benefit personally and financially as receivers of free food (Ibid., 1491). The majority of participants hold strong opposition against the fact that so much edible food is discarded and not used for human consumption (Ibid., 1495). Not surprisingly, almost all interviewees stated they engage in foodsharing to limit the amount of food waste (Ibid., 1497). Participation is thus motivated by the ability to directly, practically and noticeably contribute to changes in the food system (Ibid.). However, the goals of participation are not necessarily uniform: some are satisfied with collecting and distributing food and therefore wish to upscale the initiative, while others intent to disestablish it in the long-term, aiming at more radical policy changes that in the ideally would allow to eradicate the food-waste problem as such (Ibid., 1491).

Neither of these two studies revealed that economic gain in the form of free food would be a defining factor in people's engagement. Taking some food for one's own consumption is mainly seen as a reward, given that participation in foodsharing requires a fair amount of commitment. Namely, collecting and delivering food items is

very time-consuming and labour-intensive (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1497). Otherwise, seeking economic gain from one's participation in the movement goes against foodsharing views on food commensality and is therefore undesirable (Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 10-11). Furthermore, seeing foodsharing instrumentally, i.e. as a place to get food, entails a risk to become dependent on it, which is problematic in terms of the foodsharing goal to reduce food waste (and thus the amount of free food at sharing points) (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1497). Related to this, foodsharing participants generally prioritize rescuing food over giving it to the poor, and do not want that other participants or those who use foodsharing would count on it economically (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1497-1498; Wahlen 2017, 71).

Different views in relation to this were identified by Ganglbauer et al. (2014) who studied the German foodsharing group on Facebook that was open to all and included not only people who actually participate in foodsharing but also others who want to stay in the network, including users. Based on the qualitative analysis of the group posts, the authors identified two underlying and interdependent incentives behind foodsharing, namely social and ecological values, and economic need (Ibid., 915). Some of the group members argued that there seems to be something inherently right in not throwing food away, thus bringing up the aspect of social responsibility (Ibid.). Another aspect was the possibility to build new relationships through foodsharing activities (Ibid.). Ecological motivations oriented towards macro-effects and systemic changes along the food chain were noticeable as well (Ibid.). But contrary to the studies discussed above, the economic factor stood out very clearly, given how often the group members commented about those in need who support themselves through foodsharing, thus assuming the economic usage of it (Ibid., 916). Though, in contrast to the findings from the other studies that identified critical opinions about this, here it was discussed in the positive light. The difference might be explained by the fact that Rombach and Bitsch, and Schanes and Stagl interviewed active participants who collect food items from retailers and are expected to follow the official line of foodsharing since they have a representing role (Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 11). Ganglbauer et al., on the other hand, analysed posts by a broader circle of people in the open Facebook group. It is likely that people who are not participants in the

foodsharing do not have a full understanding of it, and might see its purpose differently (Ibid.).

Regardless, if the assumption about economic usage of foodsharing was correct, it would constitute a mismatch between the motivations of foodsharing participants and foodsharing users, the latter being driven by the possibility to get free food. Of course, it should be kept in mind that to avoid the feeling of shame people might choose not to bring up the necessity as a motivating factor, especially when they are interviewed as representatives of foodsharing (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1496). Not to ignore the 'shame factor', such mismatch would be in line with the previous findings on motivations in the sharing economy. As demonstrated by Bellotti et al. who conducted an interview-based study with the aim to compare the motivations that users and providers have for participation in various peer-to-peer services, providers seek to give people an opportunity to behave in a more sustainable fashion, by sharing resources and helping one another (2015, 1092). User's motivation, on the other hand, will often hinge upon the service's ability to satisfy basic needs (Ibid., 1090). Thereby, while providers tend to place an emphasis on idealistic motivations such as increasing sustainability and creating a better community, users are usually looking for services that offer what they need at the most competitive price, with maximum convenience (Ibid., 1092). These findings were confirmed by Böcker and Meelen who looked into motives for intended participation in different forms of the sharing economy, i.e. car sharing, ride sharing, accommodation sharing, tool sharing and meal sharing (cooking extra portions and sharing it with neighbours) (2017). As none of these studies looked into foodsharing, in my work I seek to find out if the mismatch between user and provider (participant) is also present there. In order to situate foodsharing in the framework of sharing economy and prepare the theoretical ground for this study, in the following I present the concept in more detail.

3.2. Sharing Economy and Sharing Food

The emergence of foodsharing in order to counteract the existing waste culture in the food sector can be seen as an example of shifting attitudes towards consumption in general (Hamari, Sjöklint, and Ukkonen 2016, 2048). The convergence of social networks, a renewed belief in the importance of community, pressing environmental

concerns and cost consciousness are moving consumers away from centralized and controlled forms of consumerism towards one of sharing, openness and cooperation (Bostman and Rogers 2010, xx). It is coined sharing economy, alongside with other related terms such as peer economy, collaborative economy or collaborative consumption (Bostman 2013; Falcone and Imbert 2017, 199). In fact, these terms are oftentimes used synonymously, and a single harmonized definition of sharing economy is still lacking in the literature, given that the phenomenon is still in its development phase (Ibid.). It is more or less agreed, though, that sharing economy is the most inclusive term; Rachel Bostman, the pioneer author in the field, defines it as follows: “an economic model based on sharing underutilized assets from spaces to skills to stuff for monetary or non-monetary benefits” (2013).

As per its name and definition, foodsharing is a part of the sharing economy. The movement deals with collecting and sharing surplus food (underutilized assets), free of charge. What is probably unique about foodsharing, it involves both peer-to-peer and business-to-consumer sharing; cooperating food businesses is actually key to the successful functioning of the whole scheme. Alternatively, one can define foodsharing as a form of collaborative consumption, “an economic model based on sharing, swapping, trading, or renting products and services, enabling access over ownership” (Ibid.). One of the common expressions of collaborative consumption is redistribution markets, where unwanted or underused goods are redistributed (Bostman and Rogers 2010, 72). Due to similarity of these concepts, I refer to the studies on both sharing economy and collaborative consumption further on.

The sharing economy can provide a new way of thinking based on economic efficiency and environmental effectiveness, which can potentially accelerate the transition toward sustainable development (Falcone and Imbert 2017, 198; Bostman 2013). Additionally, there exist social effects that should not be ignored. Historically, humans have always shared, but sharing was mostly confined to trusted individuals such as family, friends and neighbours (Frenken and Schor 2017, 4). Today’s online sharing economy platforms enable sharing among complete strangers which arguably can bring people together and stimulate social cohesion in communities, thus fostering neighbourly values (Ibid; Bostman 2013). Since these three sides of the sharing economy – economic, environmental and social – are key to my study of motivations in

foodsharing, below I present them separately, demonstrating how they feature foodsharing each.

3.2.1. Economic Benefits

Economic benefits resulting from efficient use of resources is perhaps the defining feature of the sharing economy. Indeed, as Bostman and Rogers put it, sustainability and community are often unintended or even unexpected consequences of collaborative consumption, but they are the inherent part of the deal due to efficient use of existing assets (2010, 74). Namely, the rise of ICTs enables to unlock the idling capacity of resources – the untapped economic, environmental and social value of underutilized assets (Bostman 2013). This idling capacity can range from empty seats in cars to spare bedrooms, from underutilized Wi-Fi to latent skills and qualifications, from underused consumer goods to surplus food items (Ibid.). With the help of web platforms, mobile applications and social media, those who have such idling capacity can be easily connected to those who want it (Ibid.). One of the most common forms of it is already mentioned redistribution markets, encouraging reusing or reselling unwanted or underused goods rather than throwing them out (Bostman and Rogers 2010, 72). Thereby, foodsharing is actually a food redistribution market where food surplus is redistributed through sharing points to those who want it. From the economic point of view, this redistribution means lower expenses for everyone involved: through regular cooperation with foodsharing food businesses can reduce their waste management costs, while others get access to free food and thus save money. It was already mentioned that taking food for own use is often seen as a reward by foodsharing participants and can actually be one of the motives to participate, even though not a defining one. Here I want to note that participants are required to put their time and labour before they take something for themselves. Given that for users taking food is completely unconditional, it is interesting if and to what extent economic motives are important for them.

3.2.2. Environmental Benefits

Efficient use of resources comes with inherent environmental benefits. Namely, redistribution markets keep stuff circulating, maximising use and extending the life span of individual items (Ibid., 129). For the environment it means less waste as well as less carbon emissions and resources that go along with new production (Ibid.). This might not necessarily be relevant for every company or organisation in the sharing economy but it is very much so in the case of foodsharing. The movement labels itself as environmental: by collecting and redistributing edible food that would otherwise be discarded it seeks to save natural resources and promote more respectful culture around food waste (Lebensmittel Retten Wiki n.d.). Accordingly, participation in foodsharing is often motivated by the willingness to reduce food waste and contribute to changes in the existing food system, making it more sustainable. Since foodsharing users have an important role in the scheme – they are the ones to actually save food by taking and consuming it – I am interested to see if there are any environmental motives on their side.

3.2.3. Social Benefits

The sharing economy offers a marketplace for direct peer-to-peer exchanges, eliminating the need for middlemen to control transactions. Instead it is self-managed using online tools such as rating and reference systems (Bostman and Rogers 2010, 92). Because of these tools sharing among strangers feels more secure and acceptable. Furthermore, as people are often supposed to meet face-to-face for conducting an exchange, it can establish new social ties and strengthen neighbourly values (Frenken and Schor 2017, 6). Since providers and users of the sharing economy might be expected to differ in socio-demographic backgrounds – the former possibly being richer and thus owning assets that the latter wants to get access to, sharing practices increase social mixing (Ibid.). Of course, this is to the extent that people involved create meaningful contacts during the exchange (Ibid.). Even though it is hard to evaluate the meaningfulness or durability of social interaction in the sharing economy, it is still an important part of it (Ibid.; Böcker and Meelen 2017, 30). This stands out particularly clearly in accommodation sharing platforms like Couchsurfing or Airbnb where it is common that hosts socialize with their guests and introduce them to local communities (Frenken and Schor 2017, 6). When it comes to foodsharing, it

must be said that social interaction between participants and users is not an integral part of the scheme. Nevertheless, social cohesion is coded in the name foodsharing – people are encouraged to share their leftover food with others at the sharing points at the same time as everyone is welcome to take food, which requires a certain degree of trust between individuals. Promoting this kind of food commensality can be a motive to participate in foodsharing, alongside with other things like meeting people with similar mindset and building new relationships. As socialising is not really obvious on the user side of foodsharing, I am curious if I can identify any social motives in my study.

3.3. Motivations in Sharing Economy

So in theory, foodsharing can lead to more efficient use of resources – both food and money, reduce the amount of waste, and create or consolidate social relations between those involved in the scheme. Admittedly, the real impact in these three areas would be very hard to measure. Also, as a reaction to several foodsharing-like initiatives and start-ups being developed in the US and Europe, some criticism emerged that the correlation between foodsharing and reduced waste should not be taken for granted (Falcone and Imbert 2017, 202, 210). Namely, the habits of consumerism or lack of environmental awareness among foodsharing users might cause rebound effects and facilitate further consumption (Ibid., 210; Frenken and Schor 2017, 7). Also, urged by the fact that foodsharing is free and uncontrolled, people might take with them more food than they actually need or are able to eat. Therefore, to achieve the full potential of foodsharing in terms of the sharing economy, it is important that all involved in the scheme – both users and providers – would have the notion of sustainability in their motives (Böcker and Meelen 2017, 37; Kölmel and Böhm 2019, 196; Bostman and Rogers 2010, 74).

Of course, motives can change over time: people that start using foodsharing for economic reasons might later come to appreciate social and environmental aspects of it, or vice versa (Böcker and Meelen 2017, 37). Also, as pointed out by Bostman and Rogers, the fact that collaborative consumption might attract new consumers based on traditional self-interested motivation, i.e. saving money, value and time, should not detract from its overall impact on consumer behaviour (2010, 216). That is, after trying

foodsharing, they might become more receptive to other kinds of collective solutions, and in the longer term these experiences can contribute to an overall shift in consumer mind-set (Ibid.).

So far, the research was basically concerned with either the sharing economy as a whole or the most common forms of it such as accommodation sharing or car and ride sharing (Hamari, Sjöklint, and Ukkonen 2016; Böcker and Meelen 2017; Guttentag et al. 2018; Lee et al. 2018). It was already mentioned that users and providers of the sharing economy tend to have different motives, the former being more economically motivated than the latter (Böcker and Meelen 2017, 37; Bellotti et al. 2015, 1092). However, as demonstrated by Böcker and Meelen, different motivations underlie different forms of sharing, and motivations often differ between participants themselves (2017, 30, 36-37). This can be explained by difference of the shared goods economic value, the (assumed) environmental impacts of sharing them, as well as the degree of social interaction involved in the process of sharing (Ibid., 36). For example, economic motivations are relatively important for accommodation sharing due to high price and considerable financial benefits to users (Ibid., 30, 36). Car-sharing, on the other hand, can offer obvious environmental benefits because of negative impacts of car production and car ownership (Ibid., 30). Finally, social motivations stand out in sharing economy forms like ride-sharing and meal-sharing where socialising is integral to the scheme (Ibid., 36). In the case of foodsharing, I expect social motivations to be least relevant for users, but as it allows to save both money and environment, even if not very considerably, it is particularly interesting to see how economic and environmental motivations interplay here.

Different combinations of motives are possible as well: even if economic gain is involved in the process of sharing, environmental and social factors can still be important (Ibid., 37). Also, there might be discrepancies between how people *think* about collaborative consumption and why they actually *engage* in it. Namely, perceived sustainability might be an important factor in the formation of positive attitudes towards foodsharing, but economic benefits are a stronger motivator for intentions to use it (Hamari, Sjöklint, and Ukkonen 2016, 2055).

These theoretical considerations, alongside sharing economy as the main concept, serve as the theoretical framework of my study. In my attempt to identify the foodsharing user motives and relate them to those of participants, I employ the analytical framework featuring economic, environmental and social benefits of the sharing economy. Before proceeding to the findings, in the following section I present the methodology of my research, as well as ethical considerations that I had to take into account.

4. Methodology and Ethical Considerations

4.1. Choice of Method

The research question of my thesis implies the qualitative nature of this research. That is, I am interested in individual views and meanings of foodsharing rather than broad generalizations and quantifications of the phenomenon. Instead of looking at the distribution or prevalence of certain motives in the population, I want to get unique insights and deeper understanding of why people go to sharing points and take food from there (Britten and Fisher 1993, 271). My goal is to understand interviewees' rather than my own concepts about foodsharing, therefore using a quantitative tool like a survey questionnaire where participants must choose from a pool of answers that I prepared for them would be a drawback in this context (Ibid., 270; Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 7).

Instead I employed the interview method. Being a specific form of conversation, interviews can provide me with the access to my interviewees' unique narratives about foodsharing, which get unfolded through interaction and interpretation (Kvale 2007, 20-21). According to a postmodern epistemology, knowledge is interrelational and dependent on the local context as well as on the social and linguistic construction of a reality (Ibid., 21). Thereby, I saw interviewing as a rich and nuanced exploration of foodsharing and not as an extraction of objective facts or meanings (Ibid., 19).

As my working questions are quite focused – I am interested in people's motives and not necessarily their overall perception of foodsharing – I decided that semi-structured interviews would serve me better than unstructured ones: I could steer my interviewees through specific topics using an interview guide but still provide them with relative leeway in their answers, follow up on them and allow new topics to emerge in some cases (Bryman 2016, 468). The questions asked were indeed adjusted to the individual case during each interview (Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 8).

Another qualitative method that I considered to employ was focus group interviewing. Besides pragmatic benefits such as time and cost savings compared to individual interviews, a group interview could create an opportunity for several foodsharing users to discuss collectively various motivations that are relevant for them (George 2013, 257). The interaction between them, for example, querying each other and explaining

themselves to each other, could have the potential to create a dynamic synergy that is absent in individual interviews (Ibid.). In the end, however, I decided that individual interviewing was a safer option. One reason for this is that the topic of discussion – motives for using foodsharing – might be sensitive and even embarrassing to some participants, and not all people would feel comfortable discussing it in a group of strangers. It could potentially distort their answers if not deter them from participating (Ibid., 258). Another reason is myself feeling rather insecure in the moderator's role. Even though I speak fairly good Swedish, I am far from a native speaker. Moderating a focus group discussion for research purposes seemed to be a little too challenging for me at this point so I opted for individual interviews instead.

4.2. Being the Insider

I have already mentioned that I am engaged in foodsharing myself, and that I used my own group – *Foodsharing i Borås* – for sampling research participants. For this purpose, being the insider was really helpful, though, not unproblematic. In this section I want to explain and discuss my status more in depth.

I have been with *Foodsharing i Borås* since its start in the summer of 2018 up until now so I took part in the development of the initiative from a group of two to a small but relatively established organisation with well-functioning sharing points and a base of followers. I am not the official leader of *Foodsharing i Borås* but I am one of the most active members who initiates and has her say in various decisions. To disclose my motives of participating in foodsharing, they to a large extent correspond to those that have been identified in the previous studies. I am convinced that wasting food is irresponsible against other people and the environment, and I see foodsharing as my two cents in order to change that. Time to time I follow other participants on a food pick-up, and in case there is something of interest to me, I take some food with me.

Given my strong involvement and insider's knowledge, I am by no means a neutral researcher in the context of this thesis. I have my personal views and experiences regarding foodsharing, and it was quite challenging to distance myself from them while doing the research. Such distancing, though, is very important to avoid having ready-made categories and schemes of interpretations and instead be open to new and unexpected phenomena (Kvale 2007, 16). I had to stay critical of my own

presuppositions and hypotheses during the interviews and also while analysing the material (Ibid.). In order to do so, I often reminded myself that other people do not have my knowledge of foodsharing, and that I am interested in all kinds of answers, not only 'the right ones' from the movement point of view.

Another issue related to my insider's position is its potential effect on the power distribution between me and my interviewees. A research interview, as opposed to an open everyday conversation between equal partners, already holds a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject (Ibid., 18). I am the one initiating the interview and determining the topic, posing questions and deciding which answers to follow-up. My role is to ask while the interviewee is expected to answer by providing me with relevant narratives according to my research interest (Ibid., 18-19). These structural positions already imply that interviewees may tell what they believe I want to hear (Ibid., 18). My concern here is that when the interviewees learned that I was not only a student writing her Master's thesis about foodsharing but also one of the volunteers, it might have added another dimension to the power asymmetry between us, not to mention influencing the interview data (as cited in Rose 1997, 308). Keeping this in mind, I tried to be extra careful not to indicate my agreement or disagreement with the interviewees, e.g. when some of them were elaborating on foodsharing goals (Bryman 2016, 472). Failing to do that could have made my interviewees feel obliged to follow the same line as me or even get uncomfortable about their points of view.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Realizing that my insider's position can cause certain problems, I nevertheless assumed an overt role as a student in University of Gothenburg and a volunteer in *Foodsharing i Borås* during my fieldwork. In other words, I presented myself and my interests to my interviewees openly. I believe such an overt role was important for my research to be as ethical as possible (Ibid., 425-427; Vetenskapsrådet 2017, 10).

As ethical issues go through the entire process of an interview investigation, another thing that I had to take into consideration is the consequences of the interview for the subjects, such as stress caused by my questions (Kvale 2017, 29). Some of them were economically deprived and interviewing them about their motivations to use foodsharing felt intrusive. To minimise the impact on the interviewees' integrity, I took

necessary precautions to protect their privacy as well as confidentiality of their answers (Vetenskapsrådet 2017, 41). Every interviewee was informed that their participation was anonymous, and that they could skip certain questions if they felt like it. One concern to bring up here is that Borås is a relatively small town, and even though I can guarantee confidentiality within academia, it is harder to do so within the local community, where my research was a known fact to some people. Nevertheless, I made my best effort to anonymize research data – both transcriptions containing full interviews and aggregated data that ended up in the thesis – so it would be very difficult or even impossible to link a certain answer to a specific individual (Ibid., 40). Besides changing the names of interviewees, I also coded or removed those parts of interviews which disclosed details that could potentially be recognizable to other people (Kvale 2007, 33). Informed consent was obtained before the start of each interview, informing interviewees about the purpose and the procedure of the interview, including confidentiality issues and how I would handle them (Ibid., 32).

4.4. Interviews

During a period of exactly one month, between March 20 and April 20, 2020, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with unique foodsharing users in Borås. I also happened to conduct one interview with a person who I thought was a foodsharing user but then he told me he was not. Apparently, he goes to the sharing points to leave his own surplus food, not to take something for himself. Interestingly, I saw that person taking food from the sharing points on a few occasions after we had an interview, but I nevertheless excluded it from my research material.

In addition to that, one pilot interview was conducted in the middle of October 2019, as an exercise and assignment for the preparatory *Research Design and Methods* course. Even though I changed my research question formulation since then and adjusted the initial interview guide quite significantly for my actual fieldwork, this pilot interview still provided me with some interesting and valuable material about the user motives. I decided it would be a pity not to use it so I included it in the analysis as well. These nine plus one interviews provided me with enough material and allowed me to reach theoretical saturation, that is, motives of different interviewees started to be repetitive to a large extent (Bryman 2016, 412).

As already mentioned, the insider's status in *Foodsharing i Borås* provides me with fairly easy access to foodsharing users. I have admin rights to our Facebook page and thus can see when someone sends us a private message asking, for instance, if there is any food at the sharing points. Five interviewees were thus recruited through Facebook, reaching out to people who I assumed were using foodsharing due to their messages or comments under various status updates. Realizing that it can feel intrusive, I presented myself as a student and a foodsharing volunteer, explaining why I decided to contact that specific person. In addition to this, I also used my own personal network to recruit four interviewees. When I did no longer succeed to recruit people like this and snowball sampling did not really work in my case, I made a couple of attempts to meet potential interviewees at the sharing points. This resulted in one interview. Unfortunately, one more person recruited this way changed her mind later.

Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes, the majority taking around half an hour. All of them were audio-recorded after having obtained the permission from the interviewees. Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face, two were held over the phone and one on Skype, depending on the interviewees' preferences. The face-to-face interviews took place in a few different locations in Borås, i.e. office, library or café, aiming for a quiet corner or a separate room. One interview was held in a bit hectic environment of a community centre – even though I asked the person to interview her in a separate room privately, she insisted we would have it in the common space so she would not miss the food delivery to the sharing point.

A semi-structured interview guide, outlining the specific topics of discussion, was used in each interview (Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 8). The following key areas were explored through open-ended questions, following the conversational flow of the interviews: motives for joining foodsharing, importance of foodsharing – personally and in general, importance of being able to use foodsharing anonymously, hypothetical charging of foodsharing, social situations related to foodsharing, pros and cons of foodsharing. using foodsharing in the future.

Two interviews were held in English because the interviewees were not native Swedish speakers – just like me – and thus English felt like a natural choice. The rest of interviewees preferred speaking Swedish. No conversational difficulties or

understanding problems arose, however, I do believe that interviews carried out with a full language proficiency would potentially be richer in valuable material. Therefore, it can be considered a limitation of my methodology.

4.5. Interviewees

Before moving further, I would like to give a brief profile of my interviewees. Of the ten foodsharing users interviewed, eight of them identified themselves as women and two as men. The interviewees were between 27 and 55 years old and came from varying socio-economic backgrounds: five of them were permanent full- or part-time employees in various fields such as communication, HR and municipal services; two were on sick leave; one was an hourly worker without any permanent employment at the time of interview; one was unemployed since recently due to losing her job; one was permanently unemployed due to sickness.

The interviewees' relationship with foodsharing was not uniform. While seven of them have been using foodsharing for half a year and longer (two of them since the opening of the first sharing point in Borås, that is, November 2018), two interviewees were very fresh users (1-2 weeks at the time of interview), and one stated she has been using foodsharing for a few months. Half of the interviewees use both sharing points in Borås while the other half have only been to one of them. Four interviewees identified themselves as regular users of foodsharing, meaning they take food from the sharing points 1-2 times every week, the rest does it less often, maybe 1-2 times every month, or they would not be able to answer because they had only discovered foodsharing very recently.

Despite not being able to interview more male users, I think that such sample of participants was enough to represent the variety of foodsharing users otherwise. Thanks to this variety, I was able to collect a range of different motives and experiences related to foodsharing.

4.6. Data Analysis

Even though the scope of this thesis did not allow me to go through the full and lengthy process of grounded theory, I followed some of its main principles while analysing my research material. Therefore, as grounded theory suggests, I started with the transcription and analysis of the material soon after the first interviews were conducted (Bryman 2016, 581-583). In this way I got acquainted with the data from the very beginning which was useful in conducting further interviews (Ibid.).

The analysis was based on carefully reading the transcripts word by word several times and comparing them in order to identify motivations and action patterns for individual interviewees, derive concepts from them and finally assign them to the three categories related to the sharing economy theoretical framework or establish brand new ones (Ibid.; Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 8). Here I would like to note that it was essential for me to be open-minded and willing to be surprised by the material, and not to expect predetermined results suggested by the theory section or my own presumptions (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1494; Kvale 2007, 16).

I started with the initial coding where I went throughout the transcripts attempting to note down as many codes as possible to get the early impression of the data (Bryman 2016, 575). After this, a more focused coding followed where I looked which of the codes can be grouped together due to their similar underlying meaning and thus combined them into broader concepts, e.g. foodsharing as a help to the poor, immorality of wasting food, convenience, etc. (Ibid.; Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 8). In the last stage I looked for connections between these concepts, interpreted them in the light of my sub-questions and finally put them under the following categories (Bryman 2016, 575; 582): economic motives, environmental motives, social motives, other motives and demotivating factors. These categories define the structure of the following section where I present the results of my research.

5. Results

The ten interviews I conducted provided me with plenty of valuable material. My sub-questions were of great help in guiding me through that material and also keeping myself within the limits of my research. This is why I focused only on the motives to use foodsharing, leaving out some interesting points on, for example, perceived lack of solidarity among foodsharing users. In this section I present these motives, divided into four different categories – economic, environmental, social and other motives. The fifth one is a deviation from the sub-questions where I present demotivating factors.

5.1. Economic Motives

In my quest of the potential mismatch between the user and participant motivations, I was probably most intrigued by what my interviewees had to say about their economic motives to use foodsharing. Three of them stated such motives very clearly - they use foodsharing primarily because of economic hardship they experience, and one interviewee let me understand that she is actually dependent on foodsharing. When I asked if closing the sharing points down would affect her somehow, the answer I got was: *I would be hungrier.*

No other interviewee expressed the motive of free food this straightforward. A few others mentioned the fact that foodsharing allows to save some money but at the same time they claimed that it is of secondary or none importance to them. For example:

William, 27

It can be one of my motivations, since right now I'm not like in a super good economic situation, to just have one or two things for free. But it's not that... I'm not in a bad situation so it's not like I really need to because I have problems. I mean I can buy food for myself. So just like sometimes to take one or two things I think it could save a little bit of money but it's not like the main reason.

In general, even though my questions were about the interviewees' personal motives to use foodsharing, many answers I got were related to other people's usage of it. Just as in the quotation above, several interviewees brought up that their financial situation allowed them to buy food for themselves, that's why it is better that those who actually need it would use foodsharing instead. Perhaps not surprisingly, those interviewees with difficult financial situations where the ones to mention that foodsharing should

primarily be used by the needy, but the similar sentiment was felt during some other interviews as well. For example:

Mimmi, 49

Maybe it's because I'm not that poor, I have a job so I'll be fine. That's why I think I'm not that kind of person who goes there and takes food.

Jens, 44

I have a good enough economy to buy new food so to speak (laughing) but there are many people who don't. I know a few people in Borås who... they must count every penny, so Kristineberg [one of the sharing points], for example, is fantastic for them.

As I demonstrate further on, the majority seems to appreciate different aspects of foodsharing, but one of the things appreciated the most is the support to the poor that foodsharing can offer.

5.2. Environmental Motives

Most of the interviewees showed their support for the foodsharing's idea to save edible food from being discarded, or even identified with it in some cases. *Good idea, fantastic idea* – these were reoccurring adjectives when I discussed foodsharing with my interviewees. Many expressed their dissatisfaction that food is being thrown away and praised foodsharing for creating the possibility to save it. One interviewee mentioned that one of the motives she started using foodsharing was to express her support for the idea she stands behind and help the newly built organisation to get going, so the fridges wouldn't just stand there.

I would like to note that even though this positive attitude towards foodsharing and its goal to reduce food waste was common among the interviewees, the underlying reasons were not uniform. It ranged from the general views that it is necessary to save resources – whether it is food or dishwasher space, to strong feelings that it is morally wrong to waste food. It appeared that family background and personal experiences related to poverty were contributors to such feelings.

William, 27

My parents, especially my father, had a really bad childhood, he comes from a poor background so he always had like a kind of stressed relation with food. So my father, you know, if you go to a restaurant, even if he is full, he will finish his plate and he will finish the plates of the others. Because for him, I think, it's psychological, like you cannot waste food because you never know what will happen tomorrow. So I grew up like seeing this model.

Mimmi, 49

I come from a land where we don't have any food. We were very poor when we came [to Sweden]. We as a family had to split three small plates of food. 15 people. Then you won't get a job, you have a hard time finding a job and getting full. But now we come to Sweden, when I went to school you get free food, why should you take it and throw it away?

For this particular interviewee, her fundamental objection against food waste was a defining factor for using foodsharing. Apparently, she goes to a sharing point only when she sees a status update on Facebook, and realises the food would spoil if she did not take it. In other words, she would not take food that can last for a longer time without going bad. She even expressed concern that participants in foodsharing do not handle food properly, e.g. do not wrap sandwiches in plastic, which leads to food being wasted in the end.

Another motive to use foodsharing that stood out was the general dissatisfaction with consumerism in the society. According to the interviewee who brought it up, this kind of mentality – to *buy buy buy, new new new all the time* – is not compatible with the ongoing discussion about the environment. Therefore, it made him glad when he learned about foodsharing and its way to counteract consumerism. Furthermore, (only) one interviewee expressed the overall need for changes in the existing food system as a reaction to the amounts of waste in it. Interestingly, this is the same person who uses foodsharing primarily as a source of living.

Anna, 50

So many people throw away food, it is a huge problem! Instead you could just produce less food. What you can do is that you only produce organic food, it won't be as much food but with more nutrition in it, so you don't need that much either. There would also be less emissions if you produced less food.

In addition to using foodsharing, a few examples were brought up to me about reducing waste in other ways, e.g. trying not to waste any food when cooking or consciously

picking items with a *short date* when buying groceries. Though, the interviewees made it clear that such practices have twofold motivation, and are actually related not only with wasting less but also paying less, as products approaching their best before date or pre-packed boxes with mashed fruits and vegetables are often sold with heavily reduced price.

To sum up, the idea of saving edible food instead of throwing it away was appreciated by most of the interviewees. Several underlying reasons for that stood up: general views that resources should not be wasted, anti-consumerist sentiment, personal background and immorality of wasting food. In most cases, though, these were not sole motives to use foodsharing, and were complemented by several other factors.

5.3. Social Motives

Social benefits were not really considered a relevant motive for using foodsharing. Neither of the ten interviewees seemed to have some explicit social motivations that would strongly influence their usage of foodsharing. In fact, one interviewee expressed his wish for foodsharing to be more social, for example, organise various activities at the sharing points and in this way create opportunities for meeting people. The interviewee claimed that such activities would make him use foodsharing more often.

Despite the fact that there are no such social activities directly related to foodsharing (not in Borås at least), I identified several social aspects that appeared to have some relevance for foodsharing users. For example, while Facebook was the main channel to discover *Foodsharing i Borås*, a few interviewees said they learned about foodsharing when they colleagues or friends told them about it. Furthermore, one interviewee said she had not started using foodsharing herself until she saw other people doing it:

Rita, 28

I saw that there was more maybe accepted that people would actually go there and take the food, and I thought, yeah, it's not that strange. (...) The food looks good, it still looks edible, and so I thought maybe I could just take one the first time, 'cause I didn't want to take like too much.

Most interviewees said they recommended or talked about foodsharing to their family members, colleagues, friends or neighbours. In a few cases it resulted in social situations, for example, going to a sharing point to take food together and then eating

a joint dinner with their families. One interviewee said that she actually gives away all the food she takes to other people as she does not need it herself. She feels that it makes those people glad which in turn makes her glad.

Since both of the sharing points are located in community centres/libraries, I was interested if and how this can be significant for foodsharing users. I learned that the majority of my interviewees would not go to the community centres or would do that less often if the sharing points were not there. And while some of them only go there to take food, others actually spend time there, chat with the staff or other visitors, or take a chance to use available services, e.g. library or open day care. As one interviewee put it, there is a package that comes with foodsharing:

Marie, 55: *It happens that at Norrbyhuset [the community centre in which one of the sharing points is located] I talk to people, maybe buy a fika, borrow a book, return a book, so it's kind of a package. And I think it's nice.*

Me: *Would you continue going there if the sharing point closed down?*

Marie, 55: *No, I wouldn't. Because it is the fridge that attracts me the most. Because I still like the idea that you shouldn't throw away stuff and the rest comes as an extra, it is a bonus.*

As per above, foodsharing seems to fit well in the community centres, attracting new visitors and facilitating various social interactions. However, when I asked my interviewees if they ever talked to other foodsharing users, only two of them said they did and it was basically limited to saying "hi". This is not really weird because people come to pick food at different times so chances to meet someone are not necessarily very high. Indeed, most of the interactions directly related to foodsharing were held with the staff, e.g. asking where to find the fridge or if there is any food left.

It can be concluded that socialization is not something that currently motivates foodsharing users, however, developing the social side could potentially attract more people to the sharing points in the future. I also learned that even though using foodsharing is not necessarily social as such, it facilitates 'bonus' social interactions that people appreciate.

5.4. Other Motives

5.4.1. Convenience

Some of the motives brought up by my interviewees were hard to relate to the tree categories based on the sharing economy, and this is where the open category came to use. One such motive was convenience. Indeed, it appeared to be one of the defining factors whether a person in my sample used foodsharing or not. For instance, a few interviewees said they take a chance to check the fridge once they happen to be at the community centre – but not the other way around. Furthermore, I got the impression that several interviewees would never use foodsharing if it was not on their way home or near their workplace.

Rita, 28

I never got myself to actually go there and take the food at the beginning and, yeah, it was mainly because I couldn't physically, I couldn't make an effort to go to that place because it was too far away from my way home. But then, when they opened it near my workplace, and I thought, well, it's close to me, it would be stupid to just leave the food lying in the fridge...

Even though such attitude was not shared by all the interviewees – some of them would go to a sharing point regardless where it is located in the city – it is quite telling nevertheless: one might be aware and fond of foodsharing, but this might not be enough to actually use it if it requires a lot of efforts.

5.4.2. Breaking the Routine

Another aspect of foodsharing that was important to several interviewees was related to discovering new things. One interviewee said she discovered a great deal of fruits and vegetables that she was not aware of and would never buy herself otherwise, and that it can be a lot of fun to learn how to prepare them properly. Similarly, another interviewee took a coconut with her once, which resulted in her googling how one is supposed to consume it. Foodsharing thus allows to break the routine which felt like a motive in itself for some interviewees.

William, 27

Most of the things that are in the fridge are things I don't buy in a shop, so I'm like, oh yeah, it's good, I can try it if I like it. And maybe then I can buy it myself at the shop. So I think it's a good way to discover new things. Because when you are in a shop you don't necessarily think of buying this thing, or maybe you pass by and you don't see it, or maybe it's too expensive.

In addition to discovering new things, one interviewee brought up the joyful moment of being surprised by the fridge content which in turn determines what she will be cooking for dinner that day.

Lena, 35

It's really fun not to get to decide myself what I get. It's fun to come there and see 'oh, there's isterband', which was there last time. I only took one package, don't know what to do with isterband, so I found some recipe for sausage stroganoff with isterband. I think it is fun to have to think and kind of... 'oh, now it's eggs and milk so maybe pancakes then...'

The possibility of breaking the shopping or cooking routine as well the joy of discovery were the last motives I identified in my research material, but before proceeding to the analysis section, I want to present the opposite of what I was aiming to find out but which I feel is of great importance for the conclusions of this work. That is, what demotivates people to use foodsharing.

5.5. Demotivating Factors

As I already mentioned in the beginning of this section, one of the recurring thoughts during the interviews was that foodsharing can be a great help to the poor. Since it was not only a neutral thought but also something that affected one's usage of foodsharing, here I would like to discuss it more thoroughly. The reason I interpreted it as demotivating was the *guilty feeling* several interviewees expressed:

Kristina, 50

At the same time, you can get a guilty feeling that you maybe shouldn't get something because... (...) you shouldn't because it is for certain groups but not for others.

Even though this interviewee uses foodsharing regularly, she did not sound very sure about using it in the future. She said that using foodsharing once per week feels too often and that she probably should use it less. Furthermore, a few other interviewees explained how their usage of foodsharing is at least partly affected by the fact that there are others who need it more. For example, one interviewee said he never takes

more than *one or two things* from the fridge; another one said she wants the needy people to take food first, that's why she would wait before going to the sharing point after seeing a status update on Facebook.

When I asked the interviewees what they thought about foodsharing being for all and not targeting any specific groups in the society, they all demonstrated their understanding that the main goal of foodsharing is to reduce food waste. However, they believed this goal could be fulfilled best if the food would go to those who need it most. One interviewee made a distinction between the official and unofficial goals of foodsharing:

William, 27

I think the point of the association is not to waste food, but this other point is like your own moral responsibility. Like there is some food for free, so of course it is better to give it to people who need it a lot than take everything for yourself. So my perspective is that the official rule and point is not to waste food but then you have this unofficial idea of your own responsibility that it's good to share it with people who need it.

At the same time, it was brought up by some that this kind of solidarity is not unproblematic in foodsharing. Namely, if you do not take food, there is a risk that it will remain laying in the fridge, eventually going bad, because there is no guarantee that it will be taken by someone else.

Related to the above, the other demotivator to use foodsharing was the fact that is free – which perhaps constitutes the most unexpected finding of this research. Several interviewees explained that taking food for free makes them feel uncomfortable. Seemingly, it was not only about taking advantage of something that supposedly belongs to those in need, but also the very idea of taking without giving something in return. This felt strange or even unacceptable to some. For this reason, one interviewee donates some money to charity every time she takes something from foodsharing.

Mimmi, 49

I'm not poor... I can say that much... There are others that have more to gain from that food anyways... For example, if I take food I give money to the cancer foundation instead. I want to buy.

Consequently, this interviewee replied enthusiastically when I asked a hypothetical question about paying a membership fee to be able to use foodsharing. In general, the

idea of such fee was welcomed by all except two interviewees who said they probably could not afford to pay anything extra. Apart from this, people said they would like to contribute in order to help develop the organisation or express their support for the very idea of foodsharing. Two interviewees even suggested that a voluntary fee would be introduced so users could donate a chosen amount of money once they are at the sharing point.

So while free food can be a motive to use foodsharing, it can also demotivate people or prompt some mixed feelings whether one is actually entitled to take food from the sharing points. Paying for foodsharing therefore seems like a good alternative for most of the users. Together with the rest of the findings, I take this to the analysis section further on.

6. Analysis and Discussion

Having learned what motivates and also demotivates people to use foodsharing, in this section I want to go back to my theoretical framework and discuss how the user motives relate to those of participant in terms of economic, environmental and social benefits of the sharing economy. I conclude the section with a few critical points on my work.

6.1. Economic Motives

Given that users have completely free access to food (in contrast to participants who need to put their time and labour in order to be able to take something), one could assume that free food and the possibility to save money could be a motive for them to use foodsharing. I learned that such assumption is neither right, nor wrong. People going through financial difficulties indeed use foodsharing in order to get free food, and even though they understand and support the general idea of reducing food waste, saving money seems to be more important for them. The majority of people I interviewed, though, do not seem to care about the economic gain they can get, or at least do not think of it as the main reason to use foodsharing. This might be related to Böcker and Meelen's insights about motivations to share depending on the shared good value (2017, 36). That is, most people can afford to buy food in a high-income country like Sweden, and economic gain from using foodsharing is probably not considered to be very significant. Moreover, some people said they actually felt uncomfortable to take food for free, and would therefore agree to pay a fee as foodsharing users. Some also expressed doubts whether they are entitled to use foodsharing when they can afford to buy food at a store, implying that economic benefits of foodsharing are not important for them but can be important for those who do not have money. Therefore, it can be concluded that besides clearly stated need for free food by a few interviewees, another important finding is the perception of economic significance of foodsharing when talking about other users, which is similar to what Ganglbauer et al. (2014) found out when studying posts in the open foodsharing group on Facebook. Just like in Ganglbauer et al. study, my interviewees talked about in the positive light, sometimes even implying that this should be the goal of foodsharing. Following the official line not to presume which people are in need and

advocate free access to food for all, participants would not agree with it, mainly because it contradicts the actual goal of the movement – to reduce food waste and ideally redistribute less and less food (Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1497).

6.2. Environmental Motives

Speaking of environmental motives, my findings show that just like participants, users of foodsharing are strongly opposed to the fact that edible food is being wasted. But while the willingness to reduce food waste can be seen as the driving motive for foodsharing participants (Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 10; Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1497), on the user side this link is not so straightforward. For example, while for someone preventing food from being thrown away because it will not last another day can be a sole motive to go to a sharing point, others will not make the same effort if it is out of their way. At the same time, these users might be claiming that it is morally wrong to waste food or that there is too much consumerism in the society, which largely corresponds to the claims of foodsharing participants (Ibid.; Ganglbauer et al. 2014 915). Alternatively, one can use foodsharing primarily because of economic reasons and even be dependent on it, but still think that changes towards sustainability in the food system are necessary in order to reduce the current amounts of waste. Here I find it relevant to refer to Hamari, Sjöklint, and Ukkonen's study on participation in collaborative consumption, in which they found out that there tend to be discrepancies between the way people think about collaborative consumption and the reasons why they engage in it. Namely, one can have positive attitudes towards a certain scheme due to its perceived sustainability, but economic benefits will be a stronger motive to engage in it (Hamari, Sjöklint, and Ukkonen 2016, 2055). This finding can be applied to foodsharing users too. While they seem to appreciate foodsharing's goal to reduce food waste, it does not necessarily determine their actions. And while economic benefits can indeed be the decisive motive for some, for others it is more about convenience or trying something new.

6.3. Social Motives

The social benefits of foodsharing are probably the least obvious, even though the idea of sharing one's leftover food with others as well as making food accessible to everyone through sharing points is inherently social. Promoting this kind of food commensality can be a motive for foodsharing participants, among other, more tangible things like meeting new people with similar mindset (Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 10; Ganglbauer et al. 2014, 915). For the users, though, taking food from the fridge is not really a social act, and following Böcker and Meelen's findings that the strength of social motivations depends on the degree of social interaction involved in the process (2017, 36), it is not surprising to not find any motives related to, for example, building relationships (Böcker and Meelen 2017, 36). I did find, though, that there are some indirect social benefits of foodsharing that users appreciate. Because of sharing points, the community centres receive more visitors, and some of them actually take a chance to hang out there or/and use available services. Furthermore, foodsharing facilitates social situations outside the sharing points. So even though it is impossible to measure the extent of it, social benefits can indeed be considered an inherent consequence of foodsharing (Bostman and Rogers 2010, 74), or as one of my interviewees put it, a *bonus*. Potentially, it can be an even bigger bonus if participants would not only deliver food but also organise various social activities at the sharing points, e.g. workshops on zero-waste cooking. Such activities could create opportunities to attract new users (and potentially participants), mainstream the food waste issue and promote foodsharing by making it more established and accepted which in turn could lead to more users due to social proofing (Ibid., 82). That is, some people might need to see others using foodsharing before they start doing it themselves, as we often decide what to do or not to do based on what those around us are doing (Ibid.).

6.4. Critical Reflections

I would like to end this section with a few critical reflections on my work. The possible mismatch between the user and participant motivations that I was looking for with my research was based on the premise that foodsharing participants are mainly driven by the willingness to reduce waste and act against overconsumption. This premise,

though, is not unshakable. Namely, so far there has only been a few qualitative studies that looked into what motivates people to engage in foodsharing. It is not impossible that a quantitative study with a big sample of foodsharing participants would disclose different results, where economic motives would appear to be more relevant. The same can be said about studying the user side: my findings did not show that economic benefits would be the driving factor by default, but my small sample cannot be seen as representative in any way. I did interview a few people who use foodsharing instrumentally but I cannot know how common it actually is without employing quantitative methods. Also, it is impossible to check the authenticity of my interviewee's responses. Some of them were very open about their economic incentives, some said they should not be the ones to use foodsharing because they have money, and some did not seem to care about the economic aspect at all. But it is important to remember that people might not always feel comfortable or willing to speak about their real motives, which can in turn affect the findings. At the same time, the interviewees might have told me what they thought I wanted to hear, for example, that foodsharing is a great idea. Finally, I carried my research in a small town of Borås, with foodsharing being a relatively new phenomenon there. It is not clear to what extent my findings could be applied to bigger communities where foodsharing is more established and has been in place for a longer time, for example Gothenburg. Bearing these weaknesses in mind, in the next final section I present main conclusions of this work.

7. Conclusion

In this work I studied foodsharing – a grassroots initiative that aims to reduce food waste by cooperating with local food operators and redistributing their food surplus through sharing points. This kind of food provision is enabled by foodsharing participants that put their voluntary time and labour to collect food and deliver it to sharing points. On the other end there are foodsharing users who come to sharing points and take food for their own use.

The starting point of my research was the potential mismatch between the foodsharing user and participant motivations, which has been previously concluded in other schemes of the sharing economy. Namely, while providers in the sharing economy tend to have idealistic motives such as increasing sustainability and creating a better community, users are usually looking for services that offer what they need at the most competitive price, with maximum convenience (Bellotti et al. 2015, 1092; Böcker and Meelen 2017, 36-37). The previous research on foodsharing participants have indeed shown that they are motivated by the direct possibility to reduce waste, act against overconsumption, and promote the value of food and food commensality, while the access to free food is perceived as less relevant motive and more like a reward (Rombach and Bitsch 2015, 10; Schanes and Stagl 2019, 1497). In order to see if there is a mismatch, with this thesis I decided to examine what motivates foodsharing users and how their motives relate to those of participants. For this, I employed the theoretical framework of sharing economy, featuring its economic, environmental and social benefits. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with unique foodsharing users in Borås, Sweden, meaning that the conclusions should be seen as concerning this particular city.

The interviews revealed a wide array of motives that interplay among and within people. I found out that for people going through financial difficulties the access to free food is a defining motive to use foodsharing, but many others do not consider the economic benefits when they take food. This implies that free food is not a by default motive neither for using foodsharing, nor participating in it. Furthermore, users, just like participants, hold a strong opposition against food waste and support the foodsharing idea to save edible food from being discarded. But while the action against food waste

is principal for participants in their engagement, my findings show that for users it is often the combination of several things, where convenience or curiosity to try something new can be what fuels the action to go to a sharing point and take food. Speaking of social benefits, meeting new people and promoting food commensality is something that can motivate foodsharing participants, but is not really relevant for users. Nevertheless, foodsharing generates some positive social outcomes at the community centres where sharing points are located, or even outside of them, which users tend to appreciate.

So my findings do not reveal that users would be clearly more economically driven than participants. Indeed, both users and participants share their opposition against food waste. This might indicate the sustainable nature of foodsharing, where both sides advocate efficient use of resources and responsible consumption. What about the mismatch then?

I did find the mismatch but not where I was looking for it. Even though I did interview a few people who have economic motives and use foodsharing to get free food, I also learned that foodsharing being free can actually discourage people from using it. Some users feel uncomfortable about taking food without paying for it, and thus would welcome a decision to introduce a monthly membership fee or, alternatively, a voluntary donation. It can be said that foodsharing users are to some extent influenced by the stigma around free food, which foodsharing participants seek to reduce. This is closely related to the attitude that foodsharing should primarily be used by those who need it most, which deviates from the foodsharing's official stance not to label itself as a charity and thus not to target any specific groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is indeed a mismatch, but not as much between the user and participant motivations as between their attitudes towards the purpose of foodsharing. While for participants it is about reducing food waste per se, users do not necessarily see foodsharing from the environmental perspective, and highlight its charitable mission instead. I would like to share a few reflections on that.

Those seeing foodsharing as a way to help deprived people demonstrate great solidarity, however, food surplus redistribution targeting specific groups is hard to implement practically having in mind that foodsharing is entirely dependent on

voluntary work. That is, the way foodsharing is designed cannot guarantee that certain people take a certain amount of food at a certain time. The essential thing is that food would be taken from a sharing point, otherwise there is a risk that it would go bad. On a more ideological level, this has to do with the foodsharing mission to change the existing culture around food waste and promote the value of food regardless of one's financial situation. However, my findings demonstrate that such mission is by no means easy to accomplish. Namely, it is problematic to promote foodsharing as something for all, when objectively there are people who need free food more than others. This fact can make an existing or a potential user with sufficient income feel uncomfortable or even guilty about taking food and thus discourage it from using foodsharing. Which implicates that in practice it might become just another kind of charity. A possible way to avoid that could be to enhance the environmental profile of foodsharing, highlighting how using it can help save resources and reduce waste. At the same time, finding new co-operations and creating more sharing points in different parts of Borås could make foodsharing more reachable and attract more users (as well as participants) which in turn would make it more established in the community.

To conclude, this thesis and its attempt to map out the user motives can be seen as a modest contribution to the existing foodsharing research which so far has not studied the user side of the movement. Furthermore, by placing foodsharing into the sharing economy theoretical framework, I demonstrated that the user and provider mismatch previously concluded in other sharing economy schemes (Böcker and Meelen 2017, 37; Bellotti et al. 2015, 1092) cannot be directly concluded in foodsharing. To continue in the same direction of studying motives, further research – though, larger in scope than a Master's thesis – could focus on the change in motivations to use foodsharing over time. Similar to this, a longitudinal study could show if people, after using foodsharing for a certain amount of time, develop new consumer habits related to food. Finally, the existence of foodsharing depends not only on participants delivering food and users taking it, but also on food businesses that agree to give away its food surplus. Therefore, studying their motives to cooperate – or, alternatively, not to cooperate – would provide an even more comprehensive picture of this sharing economy scheme.

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