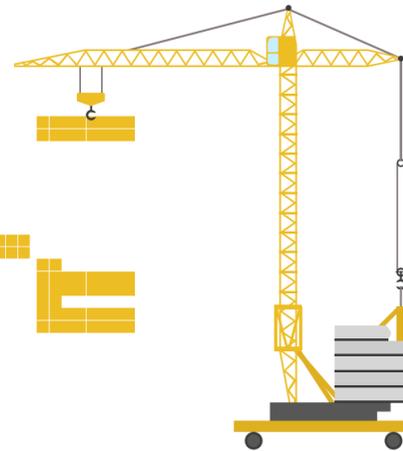


USING IS SWEET, OWNING OBSOLETE



Germany's sharing economy is catching on

BY MANFRED RONZHEIMER

If you want to build a building, you need construction machinery and industrial cranes. When the work of those excavators and wheel loaders is done and the building is standing erect, the machines are taken back to the depot. In fact, a large portion of building equipment is active on construction sites for only 50 percent of its "lifetime." In the case of cranes, that number sinks to only 25 percent.

These figures were ascertained by Manuel Kimanov and Rezi Chikviladze, two business students at Jacobs University, a private educational institution in Bremen. Their original assignment had been to develop new business models for the "sharing economy." After looking at the numbers, they were able to put their findings to almost immediate practical use in the form of Sharemac (www.sharemac.de), their online platform for construction equipment rental, which premiered in January 2019 at the hanseBau tradeshow. The database contains more than 32,000 pieces of construction equipment of different brand names, including their performance data. Booking online is easy, and there is a 4 to 8 percent per-transaction rental fee, which is shared equally by the renter and lender.

For Sven Voelpel, an economics professor at Jacobs University and the academic mentor to the Sharemac founders, it's a win-win situation for both sides: "Construction equipment lenders gain an additional source of income; renters are given cost-effective opportunities to rent; and it's easier to overcome bottlenecks, for example, in the case of short-term orders."

"Don't buy it, use it" is the motto of the "share economy," a new, solidarity-driven way of doing business that is now catching on in Germany. Sharing, renting, swapping, leasing and joint use are common today in many areas of application: cars, apartments, clothing and music are shared, as are a number of key technical devices, such as drills, which some users need only once a year.

Perhaps the most important aspect of "shared use" is the cost savings, but the environmental impact of such sharing is also growing in importance, for example via the reduced use of resources for product manufacturing. A third aspect is the social nature of sharing, which encourages the capacity of a product to bring people together, not separate them.

Still, not everything about the sharing economy is positive. There

are some unwanted side effects, as Gerd Scholl from the Berlin Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW) noticed. He was involved in a research project examining the environmental impact of peer-to-peer sharing in the realms of private car sharing, private carpooling, private apartment sharing and the online trading of used clothing between private individuals. As Scholl notes: "The focus was on the sharing done between private individuals, because this area had emerged only a few years prior and created entirely new markets that did not exist before."



Bob and his software builders: The Sharemac student entrepreneurs and alumni of Jacobs University in Bremen alongside their professor.

Scholl's team ascertained that the greenhouse gas potential – the generation of climate-damaging gases – was reduced by 40 percent when individuals purchased secondhand T-shirts as opposed to new ones. "In addition, if the T-shirt was purchased via an online platform such as Kleiderkreisel, the reduction in green-

house gases would be further enhanced to 47 percent, as calculated in terms of an average female user," reports Scholl, rating the additional ecological gain achieved as "rather moderate." The is due to what is called a boomerang effect: while the sharing platform did indeed reduce the consumption of new products, it nevertheless also increased the purchasing of clothes as a result of "low prices and clearer market transparency."

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Manfred Ronzheimer is a freelance journalist based in Berlin.

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