



Transition to circular economy and sustainable resource use – the role of consumers?

Eva Heiskanen

Consumer Society Research Centre, University of Helsinki

Agenda

- Circularity as an organizing principle
- What about consumption patterns?
- Transitions: how do we move to a circular society?
- Top-down and bottom-up approaches to circularity
- A bottom-up but systemic approach

Circularity as an organizing principle – what about consumption?



Bio-geo-chemical cycles

Carbon neutrality

Material cycles

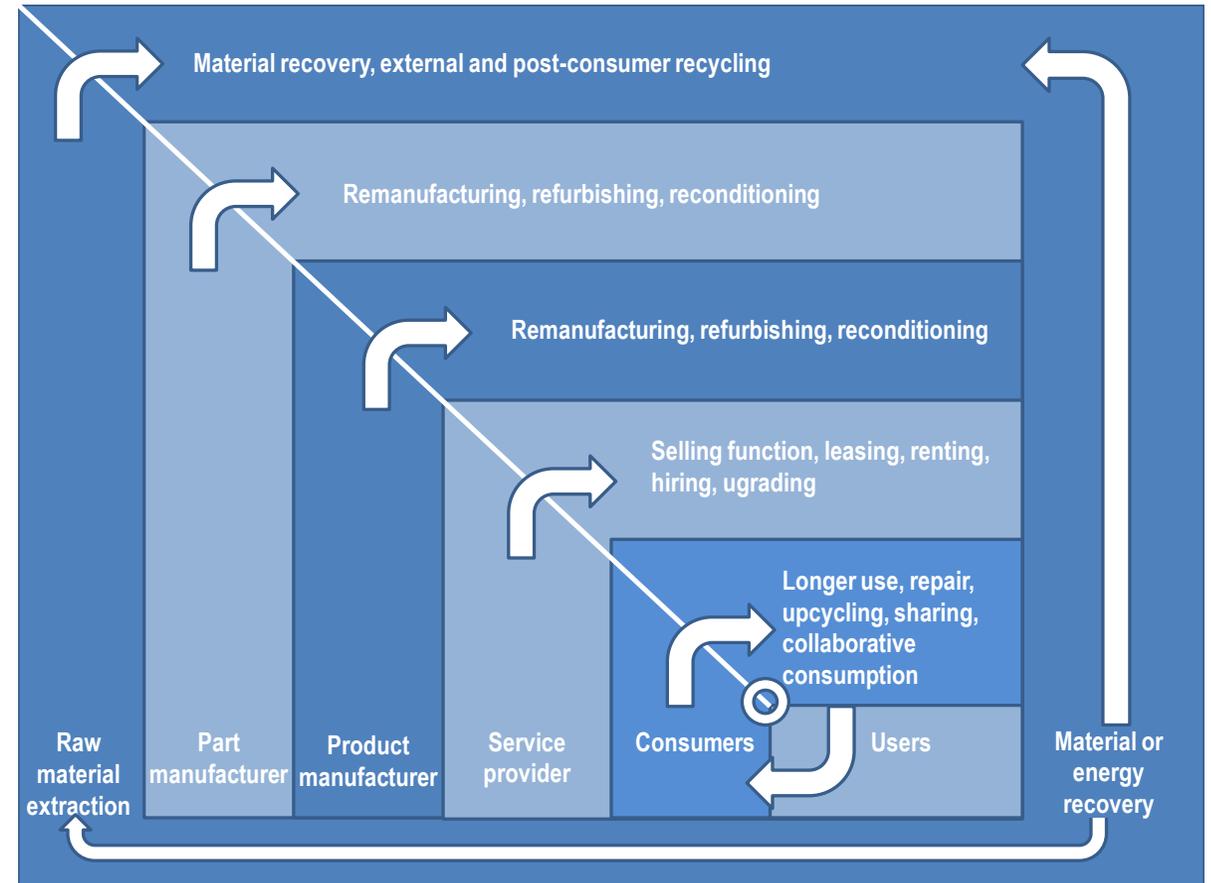
Nutrient cycles

What about
consumption – is it just
about recycling
household waste?



Consumption perspective on circularity

- Consumption at the centre of the circular economy
 - smaller cycles: longer use, repair, upcycle, share, collaborative consumption
 - more active engagement with products: co-production/prosumerism, maker movement, alternative modes of consumption, de-commodification?



Mont, O., & Heiskanen, E. (2015). 2. Breaking the stalemate of sustainable consumption with industrial ecology and a circular economy. pp 33-48 in Reisch, L. A., & Thøgersen, J. (Eds.). (2015). Handbook of Research on Sustainable Consumption. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Transition to a circular economy: top-down and bottom-up perspectives

- EU Circular Economy Package:
 - 70% recycling for municipal waste by 2030
 - 80% recycling for packaging, such as glass, paper, metal and plastic by 2030
 - ban on landfilling of all recyclable and biodegradable waste by 2025
 - Save € 600 billion annually
 - Shelved in Jan 2015, new package on the way
- Sitra: Experimentation for resource wisdom and circularity
 - Local experiments (Jyväskylä)
 - Sectoral pilots (textile industry)

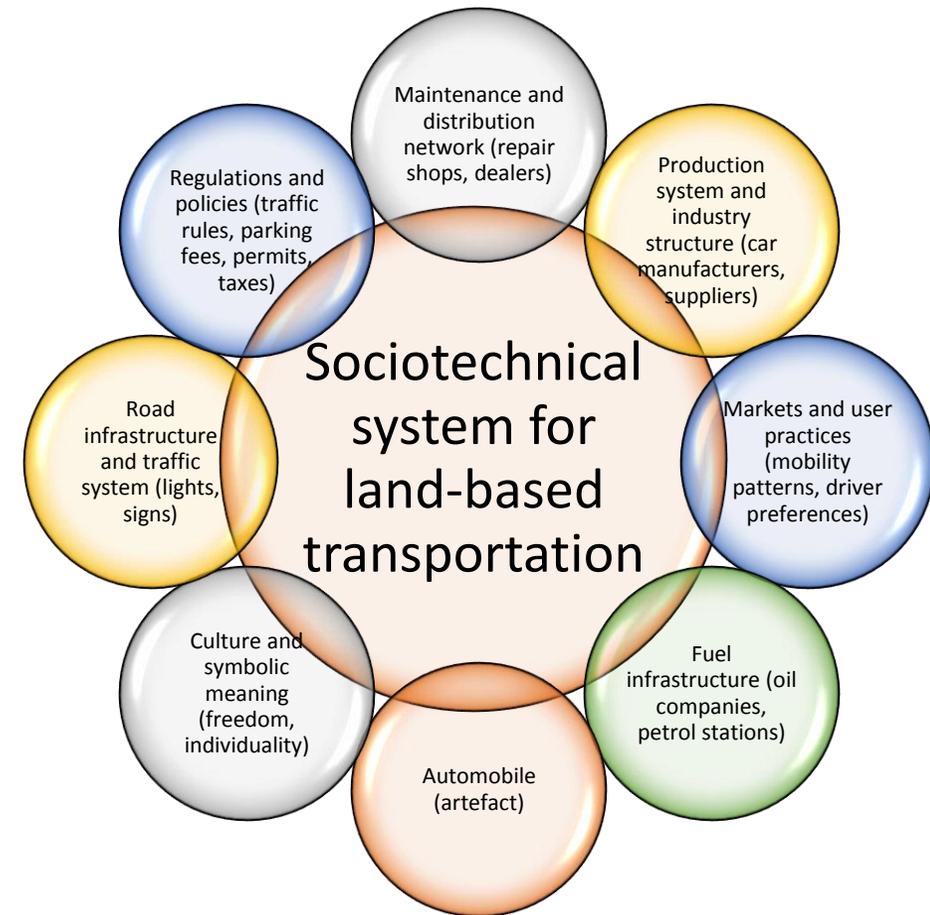


Resource-wise housing



Transition perspective on circularity

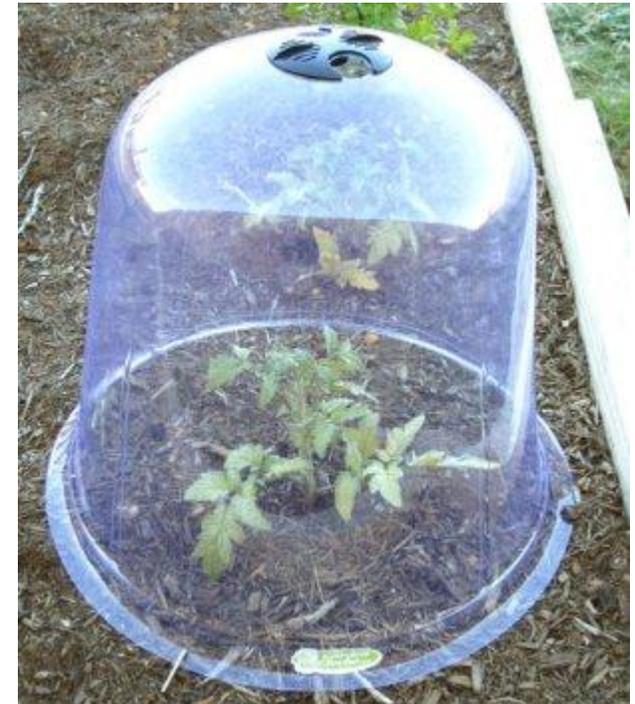
- Socio-technical transitions are extensive processes in which infrastructures and technologies, but also citizens' competencies, practices and world-views gradually change
- Change often emerges from niches, protected spaces where the new socio-technical configuration can grow and develop
- Niche technologies can challenge or change the dominant socio-technical regime in several ways, especially when windows of opportunity arise from system-level pressures



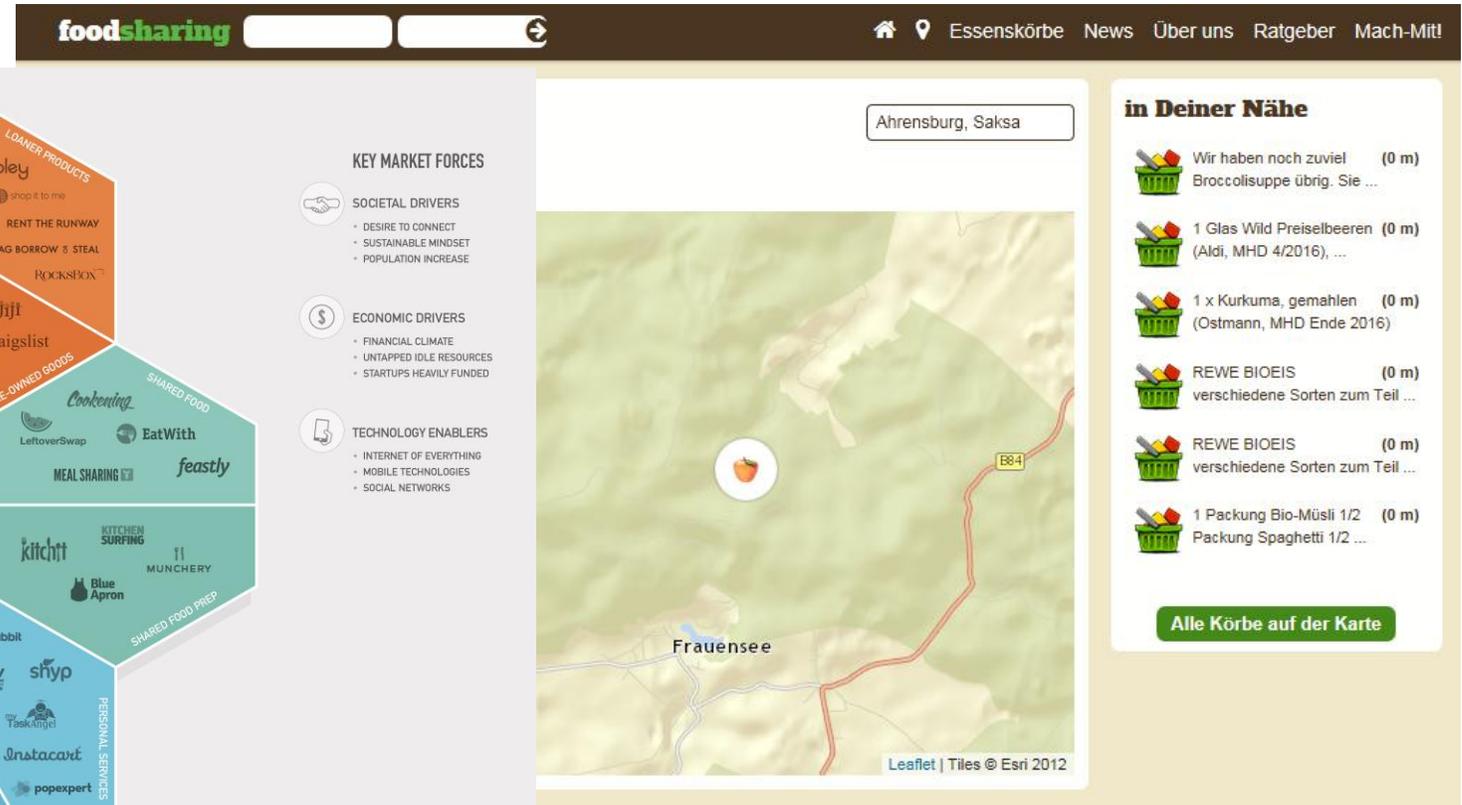
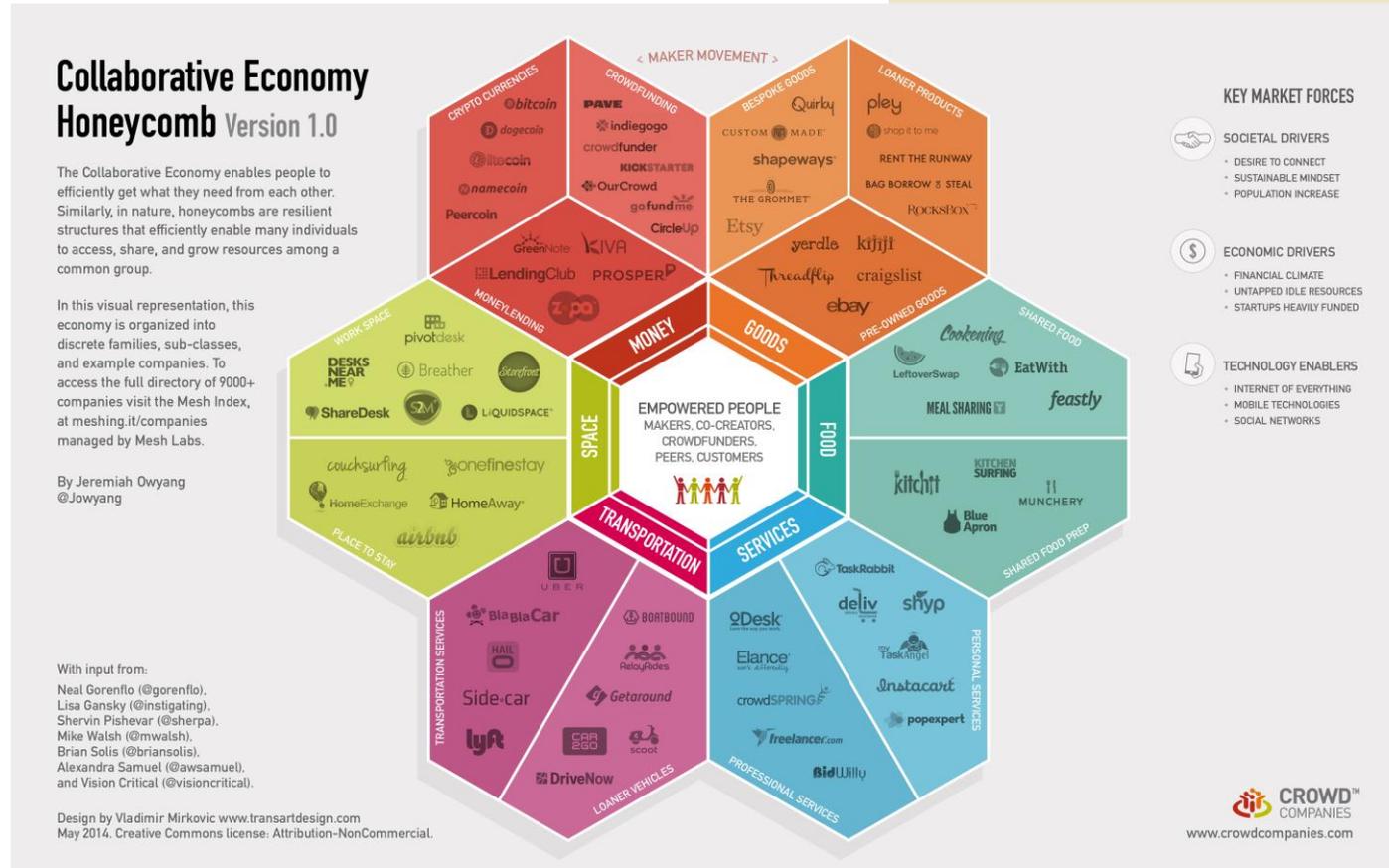
Based on Geels, F. W. (2005). The dynamics of transitions in socio-technical systems: a multi-level analysis of the transition pathway from horse-drawn carriages to automobiles (1860–1930). *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, 17(4), 445-476.

From a socio-technical transitions perspective...

- New systems like the circular economy are rarely viable as such when they are invented
- Local niches or experiments can be protective spaces for new solutions to evolve:
 - for the developers to find sensible and user-friendly ways of providing services
 - for users to learn to use them, develop meanings and competences, and adapt them to their everyday life
 - and for regulators to learn about how to govern them



Potential niches: Collaborative economy/ Online



Foodsharing.de

Potential niches: Collaborative economy IRL



From niche to mainstream: sometimes it starts with "lead users"/social movements

- Some practices have spread from "lead users" to the mainstream
- Examples
 - Wind power, organic farming (DK)
 - Ecological housing (several countries)
 - Recycling (CA)
 - Household food waste composting (FI)



www.ytv.fi



Can niches be scaled up?

- Do niche modes of circular consumption manage to change consumers' expectations?
- Do niche modes of circular consumption manage to attach to some established practices or institutions?
- Do the niches accumulate, e.g. spread over several different populations for different reasons?
- Is there niche/mainstream adaptation?
- Is there de-institutionalization and unlearning of established practices?

<http://www.syke.fi/hankkeet/kesti>



www.saasyoda.fi



Helsinki school's veggie day



Experiments are important – but we need to learn from them

- Experimentation does not mean that we do not need policies, but rather that the transition needs to be developed from bottom-up and top-down at the same time
- Careful analysis of practical experiments offers a good basis to design and adapt policy frameworks on the basis of barriers and opportunities recognized
 - What are the barriers to change (economic, regulatory, normative, cognitive)?
 - What new infrastructures and services are missing?
 - What competencies are missing?
 - How to develop new meanings and cultures around new practices?
- We also need to make a careful analysis of whether (and in what form) the experiments have the potential to transform mainstream practices

Thanks!

eva.heiskanen@helsinki.fi

