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## **“LIBRARY OF STUFF”: A CASE OF PRODUCT SHARING SYSTEM PRACTICE IN TURKEY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sharing behaviour patterns have inspired and have been formalized into different service systems and these sharing systems have gained attention recently. With the rise of (Information and communications technologies) ICTs and peer to peer (P2P) services enabling collaborative consumption have been supported with more developed web sites and easy to use mobile applications.

Since Turkey has uniquely rich and multifaceted cultural heritage flourishing from many different traditions, “sharing” in different cases is one of these oldest rituals embedded in Turkish cultural DNA. This habitude has been turned into product sharing systems where members share their underused belongings with other members. This paper specifically focuses on a product sharing initiative in Turkey (Library of Stuff) as a single case to examine its infrastructure, its design, strengths and weaknesses.

Key Words: use-sharing, service design, sharing systems, sharing services.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the pursuit of alternative and more sustainable forms of consumption; collaborative consumption has been chosen instead of individualistic overconsumption as a subject of inquiry. As Botsman & Rogers (2010) put it, collaborative consumption is constructed by proposing "access to usership" instead of "permanent ownership". These alternative consumption models include sharing, swapping, renting or trading products and services. Economic benefit of collaborative consumption systems is be another reason for preferring sharing product and service systems instead of owning them.

Economist Juliet Schor (2011), highlighted the increase in many types of alternative consumption types in society as a "wave of social innovation" supported by the sustainability movement, brought into the mainstream by the economic downturn and enabled by digital technologies. After Weitzman (1984) has coined the term sharing economy, many sharing schemes have being presented in different fields (car-sharing, bicycle sharing systems, local tool renting-lending facilities, local toy libraries, house-room sharing sites, etc.)

When "collaborative consumption" is discussed, it should be remembered that the behaviour of participants of the system rely on relations with the community, and the relational dynamics within the community. According to Belk (2007), "sharing" could be identified as "the action of giving our possessions to others for their use and taking other's possessions for our use volitionally". Schor (2015) has highlighted that today's sharing concept is quite different than what has been used to. It is open to total strangers, not limited to family members and close kin. Belk (2007) believes that relations of community would be developed with the synergy that sharing actions create while less resources are deployed. There are examples showing some hints of evolving of communities out of the emotional bonds rooted within sharing systems. In this paper, we try to provide a sharing system example from the Turkish context that which can have positive social and environmental impacts on the society when they are supported and proliferated.

## 2. "LIBRARY OF THINGS": SHARING PRODUCT SERVICE SYSTEMS EXAMPLE

Sharing different kinds of "products" at libraries in the US have been a normal event as they were the centers for "sharing" information open to public before digital times. As libraries lose their popularity with the digitalization of information, these occasional sharing events were forgotten also. Sacramento Public Library started a sharing scheme of tools that people don't want to own but they need once in a while. The community decided the tool is to be purchased within a certain budget (Hasan, 2015). Mainly UK based "Library of things" (LoT) – with the most popular name used for "borrowing centers", "borrowing shops" or "item libraries" – are hubs where household items and tools are set mostly as non-profit volunteer cooperatives or initiative groups. According to Dymont (2017) more than 80 tool libraries around North America, Europe and Oceania and almost a dozen LoT stores are working all over the world. The general working scheme of LoTs all over the world is renting the tool or product from the library for a short period of time with very low renting rates. Also in some LoT hubs there are DIY corners where you can use the tool or learn how to use the tool you rent if you need.

Motivation of formation of LoT initiatives in general could be summed up in three pillars of sustainability; economic, environmental and social. People can use the so many kinds of hand tools such as lawn mower or a drill that are only needed for a couple of hours or days in a whole year or month. There are many studies proving that (Wrap 2010) the energy and virgin material for making most of the equipment and household items we have at our homes are mostly impair investments from an economical and environmental perspectives because they are not used as they are supposed to be in their their life span. Shared use of underutilized stuff via enabling platforms is a way of increasing resource productivity and a path to shift to circular economy. In addition to the economic and environmental benefits, almost half of the LoT centres are also centres for small DIY projects where DIY enthusiasts can meet, gather, use the tools, learn and teach how to use several equipment. Hence, the places become a social centre.

Still, "library of things" is not a well adopted movement. With all the positive dimensions of LoT stated above, there should be something holding people back from lending and borrowing stuff from these libraries. The study of ING-DiBa (2015) revealed that there is a considerable gap between what people want to share their belongings and people who actually participate a sharing system in the context of LoT. Literature about the reasons of "not participating a collaborative consumption platform" and "not using LoT platforms or centres" are being built up recently as new LoT centres are founded each day.

Unlike the problem stated above, "LoS" was well appreciated and functioned in Turkey because it has reached a remarkable amount of users that was not expected at the beginning. Within this framework, it is aimed to examine the Turkish case of LoS, its similarities and differences of working schemes to reveal how the platform enlarged the scope of environmental consciousness, grew social bonds via p2p sharing actions and related collaborative events.

## 3. METHODS OF THE STUDY

Firstly, the literature about "library of things" and borrowing centres" all over the world was scanned thoroughly via digital technologies. The case research is done on a single case study because it was a unique example in Turkey.

With a semi-structured face-to face interview with one of the LoS initiative Turkey co-founders - Ayşe Gokce Bor, the platform was analysed thoroughly from service design perspective. Cofounder- Aysu Erdoğan Miskbay

joined the discussions about the design and the phases of the platform via emails reciprocally.

The website of the LoS initiative was analysed from the screenshots saved to <https://web.archive.org>". At each change of the platform, UI changes were screened and differences were investigated comparatively to understand the reasons and design decisions taken to achieve the related problems.

The Facebook and Twitter accounts were also investigated with – netnography method – which is defined by Kozinets (1998) briefly as an adaptation of ethnography to the cyber world. The content and the frequency of collaborative consumption events and community gatherings were analysed specifically to evaluate impact for the sharing system.

#### 4. THE CASE OF "LIBRARY OF STUFF" IN TURKEY

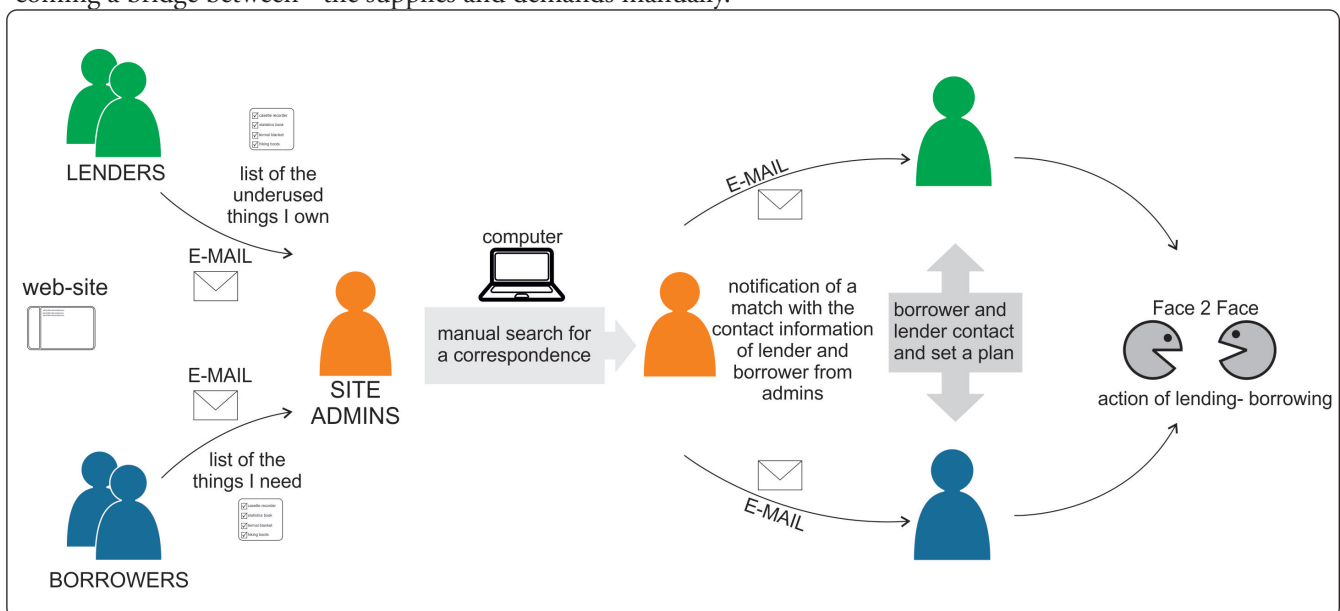
The main idea of LoS (Library of Stuff) is rooted from a lesson in master classes of one the cofounders, Ayse Gokce Bor (at that time, living in Sweden). After a call of her friend Aysu Erdogan Miskbay from Istanbul, she had an opportunity to present her idea at a start-up weekend event of Ozyegin University in 2012. At the end of the workshop sessions, their idea came in first within all proposals in Startup Weekend Istanbul; then they decided to continue with the project. At that time, they both were not aware of the already existing similar systems abroad. But as they focused and researched more about the project background, they saw similarities as well as differences between the platform they wanted to create and existing examples. And they decided to continue because none of the existing platforms at that time were what they have thought of to build up. The social media channels were also built with the name: "EsysaKutuphanesi" (meaning Library of Stuff in Turkish) almost at the same time.

The basic motivations behind the "Library of Stuff" initiative in Istanbul were mostly about reducing the amount of products we use in our daily lives and the carbon footprint by reducing excess consumption. It supported the maximum use of products until the end of their life cycle and created awareness to the environmental crisis.

##### 4.1. Design of the Service

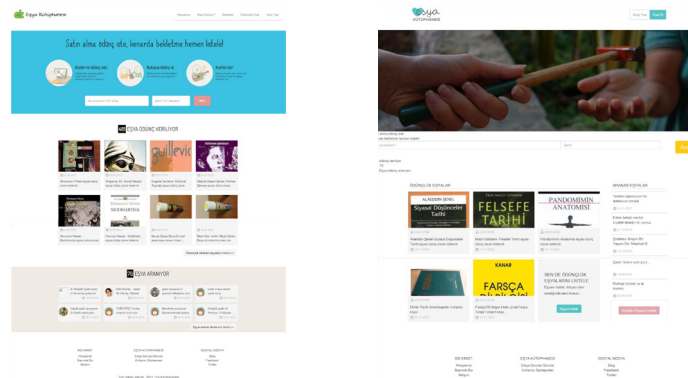
The system proposes sharing the products we own but not frequently use instead of buying new stuff each time we need them. The connection platform between prospective lenders and borrowers was designed to be a closed web site. A person who wanted to be a member of the system had to fill out a short application form and email it to the website administrators. If the applicant wouldn't give reliable answers, a second inquiry was sent. Administrators had the authority to approve the membership depending on the answers of the applicants.

When the membership was approved, one would list down the things that s/he could share and list the things s/he required then sent it to the website. The owners of the web site received all these mails coming from the members, put all these shared things and required items into separate lists in their own servers. They were continuously cross-searching both the shared stuff list and requirements list. When they found a match they were sent e-mails to both members – the one who shared the stuff and the one who needed it. Basically, they were trying to match - becoming a bridge between - the supplies and demands manually.



[Figure 5.1] How the Library of Stuff works

But in order to reduce the effort and time to answer the same questions from members on a regular basis, a FAQ page has been prepared and the system was explained thoroughly. The explanation was enhanced with the user experience (UX) improvements. It was firstly lists of questions and answers: simple text without any additional graphic elements. Differentiation was done by differentiating text format. At further revisions the narrative of the first pages were supported with graphical elements while FAQ has reached a more modern look with the change of format of text and kerning details. All the web page was revised with simpler "flat design" concept.



[Figure 5.2] Web page revisions

#### 4.2 Building up on a Sharing Community.

The systematization of sharing activity via web site in the community was new for Turkey when the system was introduced. The administrators were cautious about keeping the platform safe while trying to expand it as much as possible. According to the answers they got in the membership forms, the most frequent reasons of application they have encountered were mostly about environmental concerns such as “reducing waste”, “reducing consumption” and “reducing carbon footprint”. Also answers like “being a part of the system that I believe in” and “this is what it has to be, so logical, I want to support” were also very common. There were even some participants who had participated just to support because they sympathized with the main idea and wanted it to sustain as long as possible.

At the first months after the web site was launched; besides the technical infancy phase, the founders faced mostly questions about the “sharing process” which related the social motives of “sharing” in deed. These questions rooted from prejudgments of the participants would be listed as follows:

- 1). “People would like to have so much but wouldn’t give anything to share”,
- 2). “What happens if any of my stuff is damaged during the use? Do you have guarantee?”

All these questions were answered by administrators (who were always the cofounders) of the website and mostly answered with the examples from daily routine sharing activities.

Time has proved the judgments were wrong; more people were listing their stuff to lend than the ones listing their requirements, 617 items were listed to be shared by 235 members in first year period.

Bor stated (personal communication, 2017) that while working on the technical improvements and solutions for the problems about “trust” issues at the core, it is proved that complexity of sharing is more about people’s relations than the action itself. As people get connected, the sharing action was built easier and connection of the products was just built automatically. The lending-borrowing encounters and how the action would take place were left to the participants to be planned. After the first months FAQ questions were dropped down dramatically (with the support of frequently updated posts on Facebook and Twitter accounts).

In 2014, the initiative was honored with the support of Tecno-Entrepreneurship Award from Ministry of Industry and Technology with the project of “CO2 calculation platform website for the household items” and Didem Yeni has joined the founder and administrator team when the initiative legally became a start-up company.

The administrators were always keeping the social media accounts alive with the infographics and explanation of sharing rituals rooted back our Turkish cultures via photographic explanations.



[Figure 5.3] Post examples from twitter account of Library of Stuff

From the user feedback and comments to LoS, the ideas of an insertion platform emerged. In the first quarter of 2016, with the support granted from of Ministry of Industry for entrepreneurs; another version of Library of Stuff was put into action on web with the name “Ferris Wheel” (Dönme Dolap). It was constructed on donation of an item from one member to other who needs it. Instead of a payback scheme, the new owner would make a donation to a third party (proposed by the platform) who needs support. The members who were donating to own

the items listed on the platform were free to choose the channels that they like to donate to. So they were actually crowdfunding people while having the item from a second hand. The donators at the first phase were freeing their homes from piled up products and letting the underused items into the material flow again. The donation from the members was mostly from generosity. But some of them wanted to give away the unused products from their houses for good to have more space.

The main impediment that kept the LoS back from growing and becoming what it was planned by the co-founders was the real distance between them. They were living in different cities, one of the cofounders were living abroad. So, the management and development processes of the system and web site became very difficult and time consuming while working in different time zones. Because development of the new concepts needed frequent gathering and brainstorming sessions, wire framing studies, user researches and research result analysis phases were very difficult and slow. They also needed technical support for website maintenance and automatization of most of their manual actions. It was not only hard to make real-time connection but also have the synergy and motivation at both ends all the time. As a result of these "technical" barriers and lack of emotional vigour to sustain the platform, on 8.11.2016 they have closed the activation of LoS web site, informing beforehand via social media channels they had in addition to the website.

#### **4.3 Experiences for New Beginnings – Insights from the Case**

The biggest motivation behind the system was to increase the period of active use-phase of the underutilized products. From a 4 year of process, the initiative gave us a large source of information. It was believed that if the system was well-integrated within daily life through a mobile application and location services for unplanned even accidental needs, the use rates would increase radically. Such as; you would find the nearest computer mouse that would be used for a couple of hours wherever you were when you forgot yours through the mobile application of LoS. Thus, the sharing would get easier and the flow of the products would be at higher rates, more than just seasonal use and planned uses.

LoS Istanbul was introduced to the public in such conditions that were fairly immature for "sharing" related activities in Turkey when compared to European examples. Nowadays these ride sharing systems have been an element of popular culture, the number of users of the web sites have reached a hundred thousand. So, it is believed that a considerably larger community has been constituted at many different fields with different motivations for sharing recently which LoS would have grown easier, bigger, wider if it was still active.

After the web-site closed, the cofounders have found traces of unexpected. The analysis of the personal messages between members proved that there had been much more item sharing than it is seen publicly. Not because of secrecy, but being more convenient and faster than the emailing the system and waiting for reply the personal messaging area has been turned into another sub-platform of sharing web site. The members have even improved certain accustomed behaviours at the phases of delivery such as members having a cup of coffee or tea at the moment of interaction and the one who requested the item was paying the bill. However, nothing has been dictated from the administrators to the members. Also, the personal private messaging area between members has cut off the administrative control over the community. The lack of control of the messaging reduced the awareness of the actions which has been taking place via platform. Yet, the interactive relations with the members and the relations between the administrators (co-founders in this case) have direct effects on the sustainability of the platform itself.

The platform has been sparked from a synergy between the co-founders and was kept alive mostly with the motivation of the member-admin relations and was refreshed each time a new branch website developed and a new platform added to the main Library of Stuff idea but it had ended mostly because of the lack of physical interaction and economic support to technically develop and sustain the platform.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

From the first findings of the interview and in depth research of web site material, it was proved inevitable that an interaction was created between the members who were giving and borrowing the items from the sharing platform and the interaction increased with the frequency of the use of the web site accordingly. Findings of McArthur's research (2015) on user- motivations for using land-sharing systems shows similarities with general motivations of participants in sharing schemes in LoT initiatives as well; establishing and belonging to a community, politics of production and consumption collaboratively, adventure and financial benefits. As reported by Bor (personal communication, October 20, 2017), the members who applied for LoS have given similar motivations for their application such as; to be a member of sharing community and reduce the unnecessary consumption. The motivations have been in the same track with the research result of Hamari et al. (2015) as well. These are sustainability and joy of the activity as well as its economic benefit.

Service design is co-creative by the terminology and practice. This case proved that definition also. (A. G. Bor & A. E. Miskbay (November 12, 2017) have emphasized the importance of reaching directly to the source of information -feedbacks and comments- from the users of the platform. The more face to face interactions occurred between development team of the platform, the more realistic and deeper information was gathered. These direct interactions with the users of the platforms were a source of inspiration and motivation. The lack of these relations with the community gathered around the platform was a drawback effect on both administrators. To be close to

each other and to be able to work together was another source of synergy and motivation which was strongly required for having brainstorming, developmental and organizational work. Also, codification of routine sharing actions of neighbours, relatives and people who know each other into a structured platform where people share their products with people they do not know needed other kind of synergy. In this regard, besides having an inevitable effect on decreasing excess consumption with its different characteristics from other LoT initiatives around the world, the LoS experience taught a substantial body of knowledge. Although LoS is not active now, it has created a core community ready to emerge in new alternative sustainable life practices and sharing experiences to alter the unsustainable ways we live in.

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