

Searching for Gender Equality

By Corinna Wu

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SHARING ECONOMY

Tragedy of the Common Car

► In many cities, cars carrying a Zipcar logo have become a familiar sight. The company, based in Cambridge, Mass., maintains a fleet of more than 11,000 vehicles in 19 cities and on 250 college campuses that members can rent by the hour for short, local trips. For many of Zipcar's 730,000 members, the service's low cost and convenience have made it an attractive alternative to owning a car.

The popularity of Zipcar caught the attention of Boston-based marketing professors Fleura Bardhi of Northeastern University and Giana Eckhardt of Suffolk University, who would discuss the company over coffee. "Finally we said, 'There really has not been that much research on how consumer behavior differs when people are accessing things compared to owning them,'" Eckhardt says. The pair realized that their casual observations could spark an interesting project.

Bardhi and Eckhardt recruit-

ed a group of 40 Zipcar customers in the Boston area who represented the company's customer base, primarily students and young professionals. The researchers interviewed them and even rode around with the study participants to see how they behaved when using the service.

"When we first started, we thought people would act the way that they do when they share things with other people—in other words, that there was going to be a large sense of community surrounding using Zipcar," Eckhardt says. "We found almost the opposite of that."

In fact, the Zipcar customers felt indifferent toward the cars and their fellow Zipcar members. They didn't care whether they left trash in the car or parked it in places where it might get damaged. They didn't feel any sense of ownership or any connection to other Zipcar users. Nevertheless, they did appreciate the rules

Zipcar may have 730,000 members, but most don't feel part of a community, reports a new study.

and oversight from the company that ensures that cars are returned on time, full of gas, and in acceptable condition.

The results surprised them, but Eckhardt says the results illustrated an economic principle known as the "tragedy of the commons," the idea that people act in their self-interest, even if their actions might harm property that is communally owned.

Although Zipcar is known as a car-sharing service, it's not a true sharing situation because the company owns the cars. "It's not sharing that occurs among consumers," Bardhi says. "We would argue that maybe this sense of community would not emerge because of this market mediation."

Many such access-based services have popped up in recent years. Companies like Netflix, Bag Borrow or Steal, and Hubway rent out DVDs, designer handbags, and bicycles, respectively. Russell Belk, professor of marketing at York University in Toronto, compares the Zipcar case to a smaller, cooperative car-sharing service in Sweden, where the members do feel responsibility for the cars and toward the other users. "How big can we get with that sense of community before it begins to break down?" he says. "This is a good start, and we hope it will provoke more research." ■

Fleura Bardhi & Giana M. Eckhardt, "Access-Based Consumption: The Case of Car Sharing," *Journal of Consumer Research*, December 2012.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Spreading Protest Tactics

► Protesting can take many forms—from waving signs, lighting candles, and making speeches to holding sit-ins, writing letters, and filing lawsuits. Some unusual tactics—such as paying for a purchase in pennies to slow down business—aren't used often, but once successful, they can spread like wildfire.

Sarah Soule, a professor of organizational behavior at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, wanted to see just how such protest tactics have spread among social-movement organizations. To do that, she and Stanford sociology graduate student Dan Wang used network analysis to examine collaborations among groups.

For the study, Soule and Wang started with a publicly available database containing more than 24,000 protest events documented by *The New York Times* between 1960 and 1995. Soule and her collaborators developed the database over a decade with funding from the National Science Foundation, and it now is a useful staple for the study of protest in the United States for that period, she says.

The newspaper accounts often reported who organized and sponsored the protests. If two or more groups were listed, the researchers considered those groups as having collaborated. They then tracked each organization's unique repertoire of tactics and asked, "Do they ever use those again in an event where

they are protesting alone?” Soule says. The researchers found that groups being at a protest together did indeed influence diffusion of those tactics from one group to the next.

This idea has been discussed before, Soule says, but no one had rigorously applied a method to control for the known biases in doing this kind of network analysis. “Is it really that these organizations learned from each other, and the tactic diffused? Or is it just that these organizations are sort of similar, and so they do the same sorts of things?” Soule says. The method they developed was able to disentangle those effects.

From their analysis, Soule and Wang found that organizations with a broader repertoire of protest tactics tended to adopt new tactics more readily. More collaboration also facilitated the transfer of tactics. Groups that had more initial overlap in their tactical repertoires also experienced more diffusion.

Soule says organizational learning theory is often applied to the for-profit sector but not to the nonprofit sector, into which social movement organizations tend to fall. “One thing those types of organizations can think about is how collaboration does lead to learning and therefore to innovation,” she says.

The researchers “really put these network methods to extraordinarily good use in coming up with original findings about tactical diffusion,” says David Meyer, a professor of sociology and political science at the University of California, Irvine. “I think it’s going to inspire lots of other people to follow on what they’re doing.” ■

Dan J. Wang and Sarah A. Soule, “Social Movement Organizational Collaboration: Networks of Learning and the Diffusion of Protest Tactics, 1960–1995,” *American Journal of Sociology* 117, 2012.

AGRICULTURE

Trading on Climate Change

► The specter of global climate change has many farmers in sub-Saharan Africa worried. They rely on rainfall to water



Maize farmers like this man in rural Tanzania may benefit from global warming's effects on agriculture.

their crops, irrigation not being a common practice. With climate change threatening to increase average temperatures and alter rainfall patterns, maize production in the region is expected to drop 22 percent by mid-century.

But climate change won’t affect countries in the same way. According to a new analysis, Tanzania might benefit from unexpected trade opportunities resulting from climate change—if the country enacts policies to take advantage of them.

The study, conducted by researchers at the World Bank, Stanford University, and Purdue University, shows that Tanzania moves out of step with other countries when it comes to climate change’s effects. Climate modeling predicts that in years

when its trading partners are experiencing severe droughts and reduced agricultural yields, Tanzania will be only mildly affected. That difference means that Tanzania could increase its grain exports and take advantage of higher prices on the world market. The extra income

from those exports could alleviate rural poverty in the country, the study’s authors say.

In the past, however, Tanzania has not taken advantage of the price spikes brought about when maize supplies shrink around the world. “Just at the time when the world market needs more trade, Tanzania—like many other countries—has a history of putting on export bans,” says co-author Thomas Hertel, an agricultural economist at Purdue University. “It’s a strategy that doesn’t serve the rural population well, but [the government] hopes it serves to keep down prices in the urban areas.”

To reap the benefits from its unique position, Tanzania will have to participate more actively in the global trading system, Hertel says. Export bans keep grain prices low domestically, which is a popular stance with people in the more politically influential urban areas. But in

the long run, fetching higher prices for farmers and boosting their income would benefit the rural areas, where most of the poverty is located.

“There’s good reason to believe that a reasonably efficient and fair trading system is the best way to accommodate

the shocks from climate change,” says Channing Arndt, an agricultural economist at the University of Copenhagen. One challenge, though, is that Tanzania needs to improve its estimates of national maize production and surpluses. Without that information, world markets

won’t know how to react—and Tanzania won’t be able to reap the benefits of that reaction. ■

Syud Amer Ahmed, Noah S. Diffenbaugh, Thomas W. Hertel, & William J. Martin, “Agriculture and Trade Opportunities for Tanzania: Past Volatility and Future Climate Change,” *Review of Development Economics* 16, 2012.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Searching for Gender Equality

► Policies combating violence against women vary widely from one country to the next. Studies trying to account for these differences have pointed to a variety of cultural, economic, and political factors. But relatively little is known about how the activities of civil society drive progress on this human rights issue.

A new analysis by political scientists Mala Htun of the University of New Mexico and S. Laurel Weldon of Purdue

University shows just how great an impact civil society has in this area. In a comprehensive study of policies in 70 countries, they found that mobilization by autonomous feminist movements has the most enduring impact on policies to eliminate violence against women.

The study is part of a larger project supported by the National Science Foundation to examine laws and policies related to gender equality around the world. In addition to the issue of violence against women, Htun and Weldon have looked at areas such as reproductive rights, family law, maternity and parental leave, child care, and mechanisms to promote political representation.

Htun and Weldon assembled a research team to fill out a giant survey, tracking policy development over a 30-year period for

each of the 70 countries. Using information from government documents, reports from international organizations, and secondary literature, the team put together a global picture of policies combating violence against women.

Progressive policy change regarding this issue comes about not just from any social movement of women, Htun says, but by “movements explicitly trying to elevate women’s status and expand women’s opportunities”—and that are independent from political parties and government.

One finding from the study that bucks conventional wisdom, Htun says, is that getting more women elected to political office did not correlate with more gender-equitable outcomes.

“I think the findings are

enormously important,” says Anne-Marie Goetz, chief advisor for peace and security for UN Women. “Policymakers around the world are constantly looking for the magic bullet, the technocratic solution that’s going to make all the difference. But what [Htun and Weldon] are saying is ... that the only places where you see a change in policymaking—and in results—is where you have a significant political constituency for change.”

The current study, along with the others in the project, illustrates that gender equity is not a single issue but many different unique issues, Htun says. For example, the politics of family law are determined more by the relationship between the state and organized religion than by feminist movements. “Our main argu-

ment in the project is that the politics driving change differs across issues,” Htun says. “These issues are completely different in regard to the actors at stake, the interests at stake, and therefore what it takes to get policies changed.”

Goetz says that data-driven analyses such as this one are “absolutely crucial” for policymakers, so that they can know the conditions under which they can achieve progressive policy outcomes. Htun and Weldon’s study “strengthens the argument for building the capacity of women’s organizations and ensuring that they have an operating environment that enables them to advance their work,” Goetz says. ■

Mala Htun & S. Laurel Weldon, “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005,” *American Political Science Review* 106, 2012.

CAREER OR CONSCIENCE CRAPPY CHOICE

iOnPoverty.tv