

## **From Individual Ideation to Collective Incubation: Time for Cities to Get Quirky!**

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Cities are a hotbed of innovation of all sorts, including sharing-based startups. AirBnB (San Francisco), RelayRides (Cambridge), TaskRabbit (Boston), Skillshare (New York), Lyft (San Francisco), Carpooling.com (Munich), Rent the Runway (New York) and Uber (San Francisco) are just some of the more known examples of sharing-based platforms that originated in cities.

The above is by no means a representative, let alone an exhaustive list. Yet, even an extensive compilation may not do justice to the potential for startups with a shareable character that could or do occur in urban environments.

Successfully developing and growing cities are traditionally faced with the curse of meeting the expanding needs and wants of their populations. As they are growing in numbers, urban populations are also expanding their sophistication, education, income, and wealth. Growing sustainably for cities thus means the needs 'to do more with less' in the light of increased budget constraints derived by insatiable wants and needs. Hence, shareable innovation optimizing the use of underutilized resources is vital for the future of cities. As the Young Global Leaders Sharing Economy Dialogue Position Paper 2013 notes: "Cities that can take advantage of platforms available for collaborative consumption will tap into vast new opportunities to create jobs, attract talent, promote local investment and community-building, and offer a healthier place to live."

If cities want to behave more "strategically" by designing and defining their own destiny they need to learn how to proactively unleash their shareable innovation potential. The currently popular initiatives like "the Sharing City Seoul" project or even the more specific initiatives focused on transportation (Washington DC, San Francisco), food (Seattle, Philadelphia), and housing (Portland), are merely a drizzle. All the while, a flood is needed.

We propose a new model, the Quirky model.

In fact, the true obstacle for many cities may not be as much a lack of ideas, as it is a lack of access. To successfully empower sharable solutions in quantity and of quality cities first need to create the proper context in which knowledge, skills, access to capital, network, passion and patience required to develop ideas into ventures are nurtured and cultivated. Such an outside-in models may seem a bit far-fetched. But it's also a proven model, as Kickstarter and Indiegogo demonstrate in the traditional for-profit business world of consumer product development: Create the supportive environment and they will come. And the model has been around for quite a while in the traditional world of entrepreneurship: incubation.

When it comes to idea incubating, one company seems to stand out in particular. Built with a mission "to make invention accessible," Quirky is a crowd-sourced consumer product-development company. Every week the company receives about 3,000 ideas from all over the world that are vetted by its online community of more than 600,000 people, and the best ideas move on forward to be evaluated in a weekly meeting by Quirky's professional team and community (these meetings are open to the public and are broadcast live on the Internet). The most promising ideas are then developed and refined by Quirky's designers and engineers, and are eventually offered for sale. Quirky then shares 10 percent of the revenues with the inventor and other community members who took part in the product development.

We propose cities adopt and adapt this process of democratizing innovation and commercialization of shareable ventures by combining a simple, equitable and incentivized process, where innovation becomes accessible to all the city residents with the support of local shareable innovation incubation labs that provide the required tools, just as the Quirky team does. Cities would potentially be able to significantly increase the number and attractiveness of shareable startups and rip the benefits of becoming true "shareable cities".

It seems ironic that the most underutilized resource in cities is the collective creative intelligence of its very residents. Utilizing the adapted Quirky model of incubation may be a formidable way for cities to scale and scope shareable innovation in step with their economic and demographic progression.