



# Introduction

This briefing note provides a high level summary of findings from the SHARECITY100 Database, the initial phase of the SHARECITY project, which details and categorises more than 4000 initiatives from 100 cities across 44 countries and six continents. The resulting food sharing database is both productive and performative; progressing understanding of, and making visible, the multiple and hybrid ways in which food (and food-related stuff, spaces and skills) is shared across diverse urban settings.

---

## WHAT IS SHARECITY?

SHARECITY is a five-year research project funded by the European Research Council, which identifies and examines the diverse practices of urban food sharing that use **information and communication technologies** to mediate their sharing.

### SHARECITY has four objectives:

1. To advance theoretical understanding of contemporary food sharing.
2. To generate a significant body of comparative and novel international empirical knowledge about urban food sharing initiatives and their governance.
3. To design and test an assessment framework for establishing the impact of urban food sharing economies.
4. To co-design scenarios for sustainable urban food sharing futures with stakeholders.

## WHAT IS FOOD SHARING?

As there is no agreed definition of what counts as food sharing, we extend a dictionary definition of sharing:

**“having** a portion [of food] with another or others; **giving** a portion [of food] to others; **using, occupying** or **enjoying** [food and food related spaces to include the **growing, cooking** and/or **eating** of food] jointly; possessing an **interest** [in food] in common; or **telling** someone about [food]”.

(Adapted from Oxford University Press, 2014)

This definition emphasises the practices and experiences of **having things in common** and **doing things together** around food, including but moving beyond commensality; the practice of eating or drinking together. Such a definition includes attention to what is shared, from raw materials (e.g. crops) to products (e.g. processed food products or tools and cooking utensils) and services, as well as capabilities (knowledge and skills) and spaces (e.g. fields, allotments, gardens, and kitchens).

## WHY IS SHARECITY NECESSARY?



### Planetary urbanisation and unsustainable cities

The majority of the world's population now live in cities, a figure that is predicted to rise to 70 per cent by 2050. Not only does this have implications for those living in urban areas, it also has implications for those beyond these sites who are inevitably involved in providing for an urban future. Urban areas already account for 80 per cent of the world's resource consumption and most of the world's waste.



### Sustainable Development Goals

Following disappointing action on the Millennium Development Goals, the 2030 Development Agenda has been framed around 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which include ending hunger (Goal 2), creating sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11) and ensuring responsible production and consumption (Goal 12). These are not discrete goals and attention to their intersection is needed.



### Milan Urban Food Policy Pact

At the second meeting of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact in 2016, the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) José Graziano da Silva, called for cities, big and small, to help construct urban food systems that will be sustainable and resilient in the face of changing climates. By the beginning of 2017 there were 138 cities from around the world who had signed the Pact.



### Innovative cities

Cities are complex networks of political, economic and socio-spatial processes that are both intimately local and also globally connected. They provide sites where diverse human and non-human resources intersect on cultural, material and technological levels. As a result, cities are also hotbeds of innovation, including the development of innovations for urban food systems.



### ICT-mediated sharing economies

Sharing, including food sharing, is increasingly being identified as a potentially transformative mechanism for sustainable cities, by reducing consumption, conserving resources, preventing waste, and providing new forms of socio-economic relations. Research into contemporary practices of ICT-mediated food sharing is currently lacking.



**SHARECITY** will progress understanding of meta-societal issues by generating extensive and comparable data of the practices and impacts of ICT-mediated food sharing.

# The SHARECITY100 Database

Over 4000 food sharing initiatives were identified across 100 cities around the world. Initiatives were analysed according to WHAT they shared, HOW they shared it, and what TYPE of organisational structure they employed in order to share. Their ICT usage and the FLOW of shared stuff, spaces and skills were also coded.

The motivation for creating SHARECITY100 was to make the landscape of food sharing in cities visible by mapping initiatives consistently across a large number of contexts. This helps demonstrate that the creative and innovative actions of individual initiatives are not isolated experiments, but part of a burgeoning body of activities seeking to reconfigure urban food systems.

## WHY & WHEN WERE FOOD SHARING INITIATIVES FORMED?

Online mission statements and initiative descriptions were analysed in order to identify how initiatives described themselves and their goals. The frequency of key words were identified from this process and a word cloud of this data is detailed on the front cover of this Briefing Note. Excluding the word 'food' from the analysis, it is the social dimensions of food sharing that are emphasised by initiatives in their ICT profiles, with 'community', 'local', and 'people' all appearing in the top ten most frequently used words to describe the goals of initiatives.

There has been an exponential rise in the establishment of ICT-mediated urban food sharing initiatives since the turn of the millennium, with a steep rise after 2008 due to increased accessibility of mobile, digital technologies in many countries. This date also coincides with a global recession, which has been identified as a key stimulus to the development of sharing economies.



The oldest initiatives include botanical gardens and allotments which have retrospectively adopted ICT to mediate their activities.

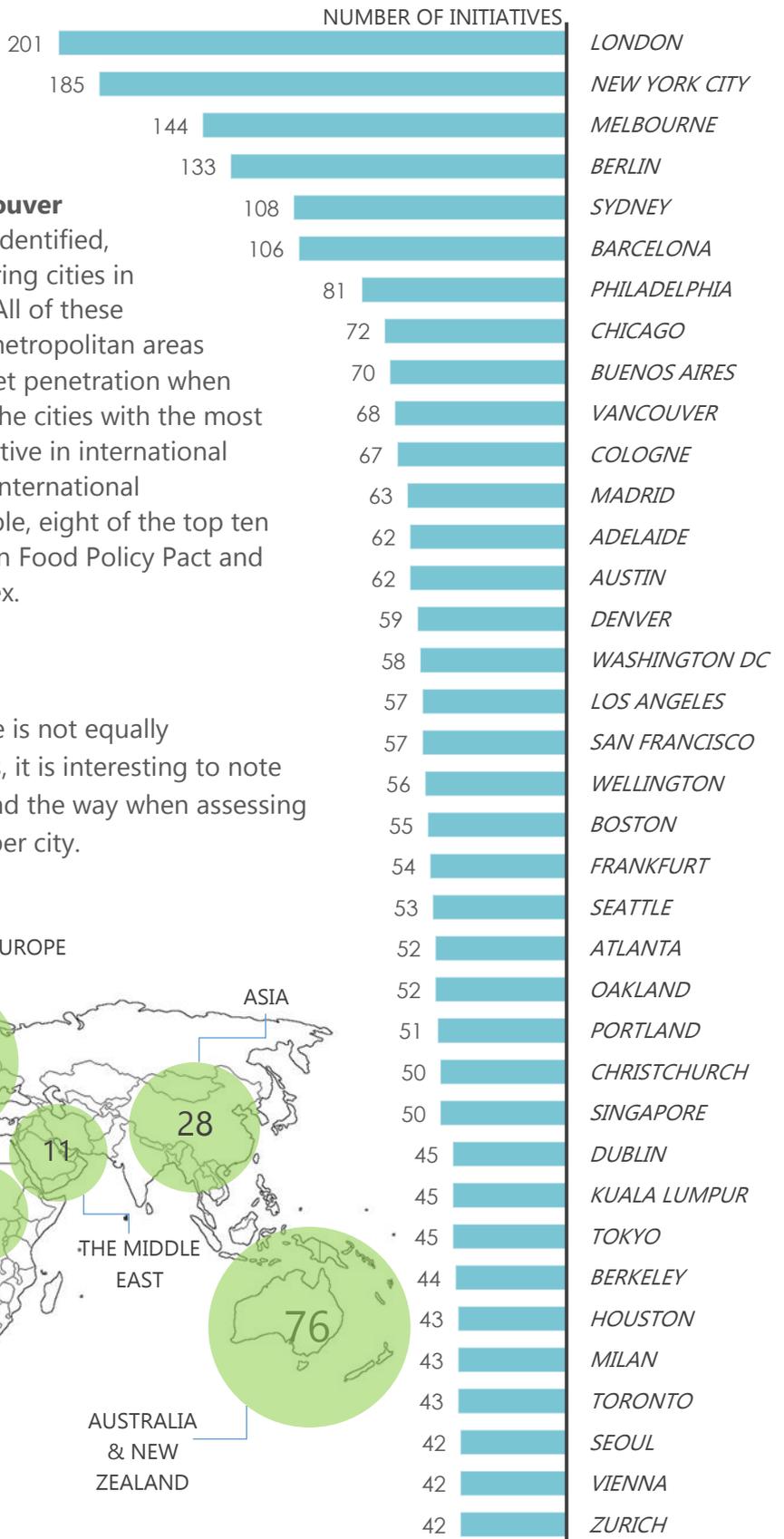
The 1970's saw the expansion of many food banks and charity food sharing organisations, as well as community gardens and food justice initiatives.

App-based initiatives emerge from 2012 with increases also seen in food waste and food rescue initiatives, and meal sharing platforms.

# WHERE IS FOOD SHARING MOST ACTIVE?

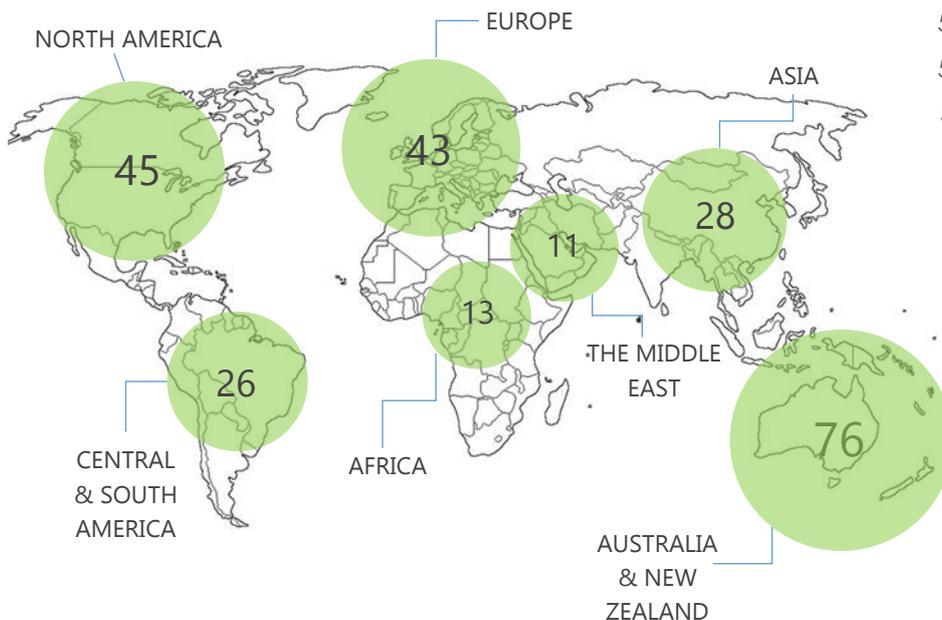
## Cities

The top 10 food sharing cities in the database – **London, New York, Melbourne, Berlin, Sydney, Barcelona, Philadelphia, Chicago, Buenos Aires** and **Vancouver** - account for 29% of all initiatives identified, while the ten least active food sharing cities in the database account for just 2%. All of these leading cities are large populous metropolitan areas with high levels of GDP and internet penetration when compared to the global average. The cities with the most initiatives also tend to be highly active in international city networks and perform well in international benchmarking rankings. For example, eight of the top ten cities participate in the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and appear in the Sustainable City Index.



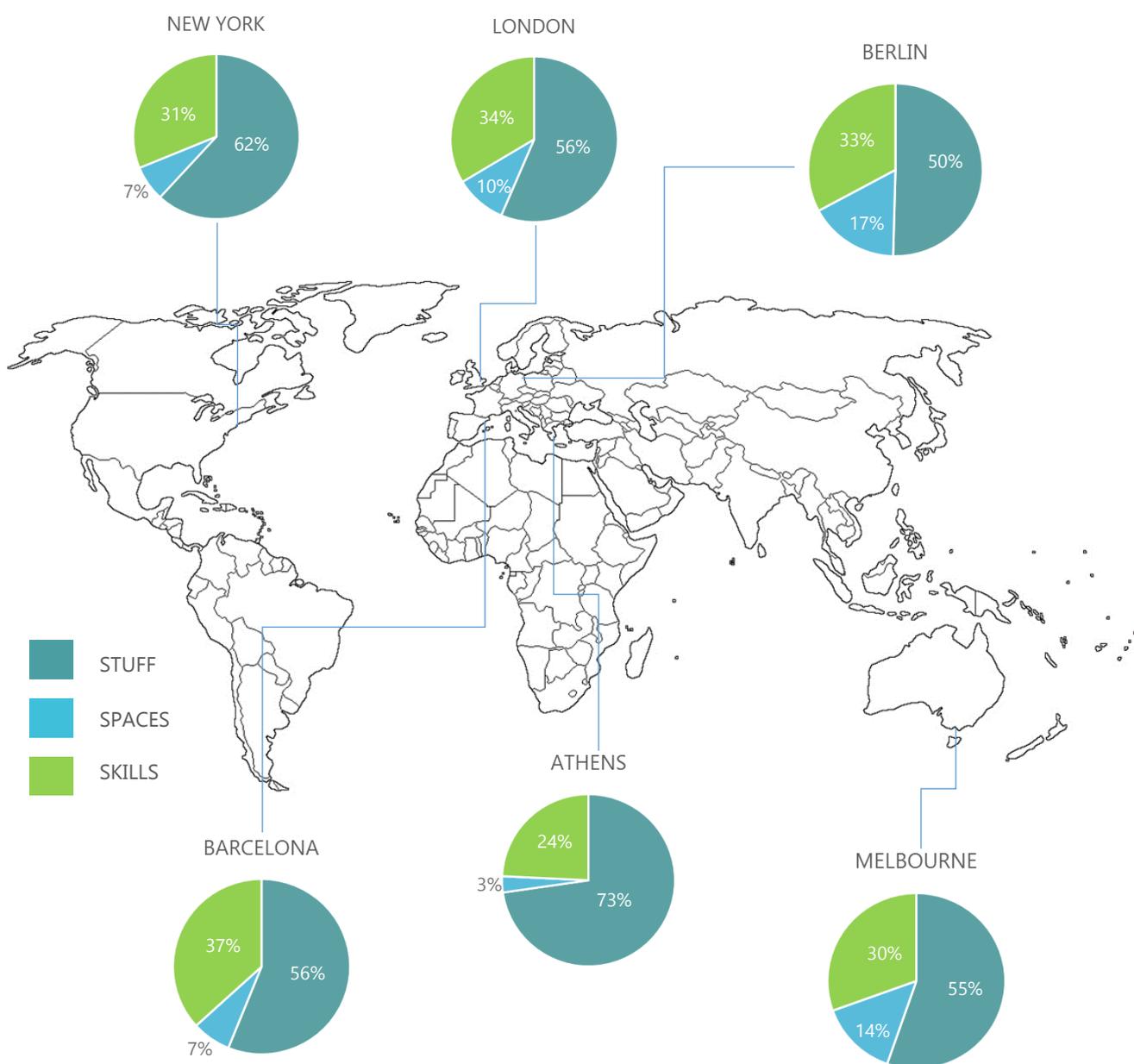
## Regions

While the SHARECITY100 Database is not equally representative of all global regions, it is interesting to note that Australia and New Zealand lead the way when assessing the average number of initiatives per city.



## FOOD SHARING CATEGORIES

Twelve categories of food sharing were identified, which can be grouped together into **'Stuff'**, **'Spaces'** (for food production, preparation or consumption), and **'Skills'** (including knowledge and experiences in growing, processing or consuming food). The combination of these categories varies across the 100 cities examined, though some overall patterns and relationships have emerged. In many cases, multiple categories are shared within a single food sharing initiative. More than two-thirds (70%) of food sharing initiatives in the database share multiple things and 35% of initiatives share three or more things. We term this phenomenon the **multifunctionality** of food sharing.



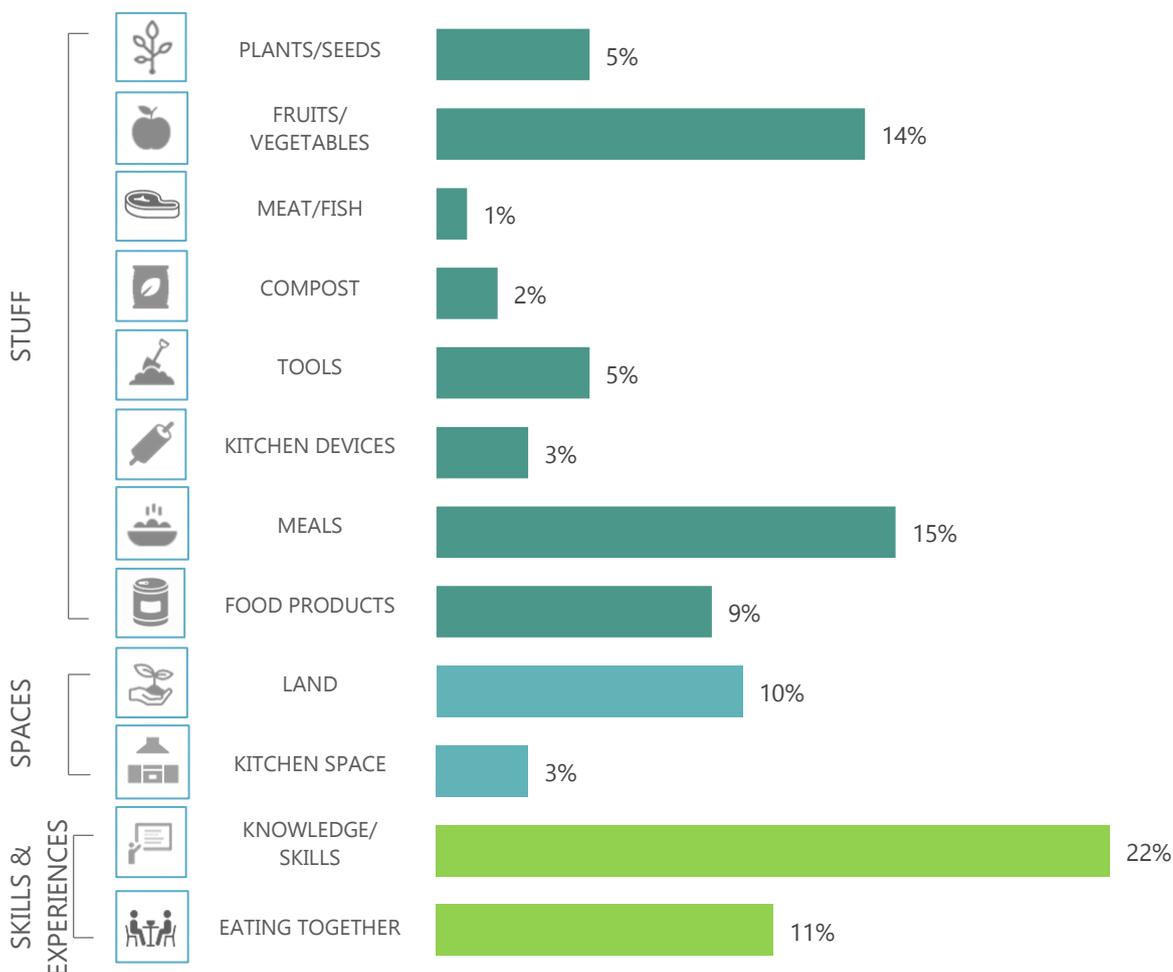
## WHAT IS SHARED

The most common shared entity is that of **Knowledge/Skills**, with more than half of initiatives (54%) engaging in sharing information about food. This is perhaps unsurprising as information-provision is easily disseminated via ICT infrastructure and can provide a one-way dissemination function without necessarily requiring interaction between donor and recipient. Information, unlike fruit and vegetables, or meals, is not degradable, although the relevance and accuracy of such data may have a limited lifespan.

**Meals** are the second most commonly shared entity (35%) in the database. This is a broad category that includes for-profit pop-up supper clubs where meals are cooked in temporary

settings for paying customers wishing to eat with others, and where people provide meals for travellers or neighbours in their own homes. It also includes initiatives providing the infrastructures for emergency food relief such as soup kitchens. Raw and unprocessed **Fruits/Vegetables** make up the third most commonly shared category across the database.

While individual cities can vary widely, the patterning amongst the categories of WHAT is shared is remarkably consistent across the database. The categories of **Knowledge/Skills, Meals, and Fruits/Vegetables** appear as the top three things being shared in both the ten most and ten least active cities in the database.



## HOW IT IS SHARED

Four modes of sharing and six organisational models were also delineated and coded in the database:

### MODES OF SHARING



**GIFTING** - Stuff, spaces or skills given for free



**BARTERING** - Stuff, spaces or skills swapped without money



**COLLECTING** - Includes gleaning, foraging, food rescue, dumpster diving/skip surfing



**SELLING** - Exchanging or renting food or food related stuff, spaces, and skills for money

Gifts are the dominant mode of sharing across the database with nearly half (49%) of initiatives using this means of exchange, followed by selling (35%), which takes place in both mainstream commercial for-profit companies and alternative markets such as Community Supported Agriculture and Cooperatives. Non-profit and charity models are employed by over one third of the initiatives (35%) followed by associations, a category which also includes clubs and networks (27%).

### SHARING ORGANISATION



**NONPROFIT & CHARITY** - Registered charities and non-profit organisations



**ASSOCIATION** - Formal clubs, associations and networks that require membership



**FORPROFIT** - Commercial ventures with the goal of generating a financial profit



**INFORMAL** - No formal structure, organisation or membership requirements



**COOPERATIVE** - Enterprises that are jointly owned and democratically controlled by their members



**SOCIAL ENTERPRISE** - Organizations registered as a Social Enterprise or similar form which aims to produce a social or environmental good through trade

## ICT – ENABLING, ENHANCING & SUPPORTING

Websites are the most common form of ICT mediation used by the urban food sharing initiatives in the database. Across the 100 cities websites are used to mediate the sharing of every category of WHAT is shared and every MODE of sharing from gifting and bartering to collecting and selling. Unsurprisingly, given the level of technical knowledge, skills and investment required for construction and to build the network effects necessary to generate value to the user, only 9% of the initiatives had an app. While apps form a small cohort (361 or just 9%) of the overall food sharing database, they have garnered significant attention more broadly because of the impacts of high-profile app-based sharing companies in other sectors such as transport and accommodation sharing.

# SUMMARY

The SHARECITY100 database enables, for the first time, **consistent analysis** and **identification of patterns** and trends in ICT-mediated urban food sharing across cities, countries and continents. It is highly productive; creating a picture of the **why, where, what and how contemporary food sharing** takes place. Certainly, the diverse collection of food sharing initiatives documented provides a counter-balance to much of the sharing economies research which has tended to focus on a small number of high profile, for-profit enterprises which are using ICT to link up those with idling resources and capacity and those who wish to avail of it.

The SHARECITY100 not only provides the foundation for more in-depth explanatory and comparative scholarly analysis, it also provides the **bedrock** on which connections and networks amongst and between sharing initiatives can be forged, and both nascent and active food sharers and those who seek to regulate the sharing of food can come together.

As a further means to create visibility and open up the area of food sharing for conversations between stakeholders, key data from the 100 cities in the database relating to the where, what and how of ICT-mediated food sharing have been converted into an **open-access, interactive online database** available at <http://sharecity.ie/research/sharecity100-database/>.

Publicised through the project website as well as through sharing and city networks, this online database has already been viewed over 2000 times by users from 20 countries around the world – including South Korea and Mexico as well as Brazil and Canada – in just the first five months since its launch.

## FURTHER RESOURCES:

### SHARECITY100 VIDEO

SHARECITY100 DATABASE Davies, A.R., Edwards, F., Marovelli, B., Morrow, O., Rut, M., Weymes, M. (2016) SHARECITY100 Database, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.

Davies, A.R., Edwards, F., Marovelli, B., Morrow, O., Rut, M., Weymes, M. (2017) Creative construction: Crafting, negotiating and performing urban food sharing landscapes. *Area*.

Davies, A.R., Legg, R. (2018) Fare Sharing: Interrogating the nexus of ICT, urban food sharing and sustainability. *Food Culture and Society*, 21(2): Forthcoming.

[www.sharecity.ie](http://www.sharecity.ie)



This publication was authored by the SHARECITY research team in 2017. All or part of this publication may be reproduced without further permission, provided the source is acknowledged.

**Please Cite as: Davies, A., and Weymes, M. (2017) SHARECITY Briefing Note 1: The SHARECITY100 Database, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.**

Prof. Anna R. Davies  
[daviesa@tcd.ie](mailto:daviesa@tcd.ie)

Marion Weymes  
[weymesma@tcd.ie](mailto:weymesma@tcd.ie)

Dr. Ferne Edwards  
[edwardsf@tcd.ie](mailto:edwardsf@tcd.ie)

Dr. Oona Morrow  
[morrowo@tcd.ie](mailto:morrowo@tcd.ie)

Dr. Brigida Marovelli  
[marovelb@tcd.ie](mailto:marovelb@tcd.ie)

Monika Rut  
[rutm@tcd.ie](mailto:rutm@tcd.ie)



**Trinity College Dublin**  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin



Horizon 2020  
European Union funding  
for Research & Innovation



**European Research Council**  
Established by the European Commission