Sharing cars among neighbours as a precursor to professional Car-Sharing

What is meant by Car-Sharing is simply the sharing of vehicles, professionally organised and managed. This is the subject of the momo Car-Sharing Project. In this paper, however, we will address a form of shared car use which, in some cases, serves as a precursor to professional Car-Sharing. It’s about sharing cars privately among friends and neighbours.

What do we mean by sharing cars among neighbours?
In contrast to professional Car-Sharing, sharing cars among neighbours is usually a matter of a single car being used by a restricted group – often friends, family or neighbours. The car belongs to one of the users and she or he makes it available to the others. Insurance and other questions in case of damage are usually dealt with through a contract negotiated by the users. The community of users is not set up for economic profit; user fees are set so as to only cover costs (including depreciation of the vehicle). In contrast to professional Car-Sharing, groups sharing vehicles among neighbours are not necessarily out to increase membership; rather, knowing the other users personally is generally a defining characteristic of these “communities of trust”.

What is the advantage of sharing cars among neighbours from the perspective of professional Car-Sharing?
The biggest barrier to the growth in Car-Sharing participation – apart from the lack of clear and accurate information about how it operates – is that many people see car ownership as a symbol of status rather than simply as a mode of transport, and enormous sums are paid out for that symbol. In many cases, vehicles are selected to convey to the world their owners’ position in society, and cars are often seen by underprivileged groups as proof that one is an accepted member of society. The auto industry supports this perception in many ways through target-group oriented car advertisements.

If someone decides not to need a car of his own because s/he can use the car of someone from their circle of acquaintances, that is already significant progress. The principle of “using rather than owning” that Car-Sharing is based on begins with an attitude change to the rational use of cars. Sharing cars among neighbours can be the first step.

Autopia – the Belgian intermediary for private Car-Sharing
Sharing cars among neighbours is practised in many European countries, but there are neither state-run nor private facilities that collect and publish information on the numerous widespread groups that share cars.
There is one exception in Belgium. There, the organisation Autopia vzw has offered practical...
support to neighbourhood car sharers in the Flemish region of Belgium since 2004. Autopia’s support for private car sharers consists, for example, of the following services:

- Autopia puts out a handbook with practical tips for those who share cars privately.
- They connect car owners with those who are looking for a car to use.
- Every private Car-Sharing group is able to use a personnel online reservation calendar via Autopia. Distinctions can be made at the time of reservation between urgent trips and more flexible reservation requests.
- Autopia negotiates framework agreements with manufacturers and service providers and also offers, for example, reasonably priced car insurance for private car sharers.
- They organise gatherings and offer presentations providing information about car sharing and support to car sharers. They also provide such information at events of all sorts.
- Autopia initiates collaboration with local authorities and runs joint promotional campaigns to spread the idea of sharing cars among neighbours. For these purposes, Autopia provides the information materials.

650 participants were registered with Autopia vzw at the beginning of 2009. On average a private Car-Sharing group in Belgium consists of five to eight households sharing one car. They usually live in the same neighbourhood.

An individual membership costs €5 per year. These users share 110 private cars in 12 Belgian cities – approximately one tenth the number who use Belgium’s professional Car-Sharing operator Optimobil (Cambio Belgium).

One exceptional phenomenon is situated in Ghent. Ten years ago six households shared one car in private. In 2009 the same private group shares 20 cars and 300 members use them. This group doesn’t make any profit but shares all costs between the users.

Although there is a geographical overlap in Belgian cities between those who share cars among neighbours and professional Car-Sharing, they are not seen as being in competition. Indeed several of the founding members of Autopia – for example Taxistop Belgium and the Bond Beter Leefmilieu Foundation – also provided significant service in the development of professional Car-Sharing in Belgium.

In some cities, such as Antwerp, Leuven and Mechelen, the local authorities have awarded Autopia groups priority parking in parking spots designated for private car sharing vehicles.
Sharing cars privately

Tab. 1: History of Autopia vzw membership (Source: Autopia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Number of car sharing groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>653</td>
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</tr>
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Tonndorf – the smallest community in Germany offering Car-Sharing

The smallest community in Germany in which Car-Sharing exists is Tonndorf in the state of Thuringia. There, four Car-Sharing vehicles are shared by 38 participants, with a fifth car soon to be bought. With its mere 664 inhabitants (as of 30 June 2008), the community of Tonndorf holds two German car sharing records: it is the smallest community with a functioning Car-Sharing organisation and, with 5.7 Car-Sharing users per 100 inhabitants, it has the highest density of Car-Sharing in Germany, if not worldwide.

This astonishing record is the result of an organic evolution from private car sharing among friends to organised Car-Sharing. The present users are part of a project group who have organised and teamed up to create the “Living and Working Association of Tonndorf Castle”.

Along with other community activities, shared car use is part of their agenda.

In mid-2008, the users decided to organise themselves into an association and to open up their car sharing offer to anyone who was interested, including those outside the Castle Association. Now they operate the vehicles in the “Schlosskarschering e. V.” (in German a nice play on words) as a growth-oriented Car-Sharing organisation, and have opened up membership to residents of the neighbouring village.

Through their membership in the Bundesverband CarSharing e. V. (the German federal Car-Sharing umbrella organisation), participants in Tonndorf are able to cross-participate with other German Car-Sharing operators to reserve and use their vehicles (and vice versa).

This example shows concretely how private car sharing can evolve into a public Car-Sharing service.

Fig. 4: Vehicle fleet Schlosskarschering e.V., Tonndorf (Source: Schlosskarschering e.V.)

Fig. 5: Tonndorf, castle (Source: Genossenschaft auf Schloss Tonndorf e.G.)
Further information on the above showcases:
http://www.autodelen.net (in Flemish)
http://www.schloss-tonndorf.de/carsharing.htm (in German)