

Read the following text. For statements 1-6, choose the answer (a, b, or c) which fits best according to the text. Number 0 has been completed as an example.

WHO WOULDN'T LIKE A SHARING ECONOMY? WELL, ME FOR ONE

The "sharing economy" has been around in various incarnations for a while – perhaps even, in its broadest sense, since our ancestors dwelt in caves. Go back 20 years or more, and scarcely a season would go by without someone, somewhere, introducing a hyper-local currency to encourage people to buy local services, or a new scheme encouraging people to barter their skills – you cook me a casserole, I teach you Russian, that sort of idea.

But the spread of digital everything has propelled sharing to a whole new level. From eBay to Uber to Airbnb and hundreds of other sites – that offer car-sharing, peer-to-peer lending, and back again, via music-sharing, to skill-sharing – people now have the means to capitalise on assets that hitherto lay idle. Sharing is such a warm and fuzzy concept, isn't it? Just perfect for the post-plutocratic age of austerity.

From the political left, where sharing seems akin to good old-fashioned co-operative socialism (even the little guy should be able to afford a taxi), to the free-market right, which holds that everyone has the makings of a millionaire, the sharing economy is seen as a thoroughly wholesome development. It commands a remarkably broad consensus as a jolly good thing – or, in the business jargon, a "win-win".

Which, in many respects, it is. Car clubs in urban areas should reduce congestion, pressure on parking and pollution. Something similar applies to car-pooling, which could be encouraged if the owner/driver is allowed to make a small profit. There is much to be said for tool-sharing, as there is for plying a trade on your own terms, as part of skill-bartering or for real money. So it is perhaps no wonder, in the spirit of the times (and in recognition, perhaps, of both actual and potential lost tax revenue), that the Government wants to get in on the act.

To that end, it commissioned a review, which was published earlier this week, entitled "Unlocking the sharing economy". Conducted by Debbie Wosskow – herself a sharing economy star as chief executive of the home exchange start-up Love Home Swap – it quoted the accountants, PwC, as calculating that this sector is worth around £500m a year and could be worth £9bn by 2025. It also found that 70 per cent of the UK population would share their idle assets if it were easy or convenient. Wosskow's vision is of the UK as a nation not of shopkeepers, but of "micro-entrepreneurs", co-operating dynamically for their own and the collective good. As I say, who could possibly be against such a prospect? Well, there are some. There are the city cabbies, from London to Berlin, who fear being undercut by amateurs from Uber (and on the rather crucial matter of insurance, rather than expertise, they may have a point). There are some trade unions who worry that low-paid workers could be done out of jobs by others agreeing to work for less than the statutory minimum wage. Then there are anti-enterprise curmudgeons like me.

It so happened that the release of "Unlocking the sharing economy" coincided with the appearance of an extensive blogpost on the website of the (Conservative) Centre for Policy Studies. Anticipating a recommendation by Wosskow, to the effect that tenants should be allowed to sublet all or part of their space, Adam Memon called for everyone, in whatever sort of accommodation, to be allowed to sublet as a matter of course.

In his post, he condemned the arguments advanced by a Democratic New York senator against her constituents subletting on Airbnb as "both chilling and revealing". Essentially what she had said was that "if you live in an apartment with people living to the right and the left, below and above, your right to let strangers stay in your home for money affects all your

neighbours". She went on to spell that out in an American way, about conditions of tenancy and lawsuits. I would spell it out in a British way.

Whether you live in a house or a flat, but especially a flat, and whether you are a tenant or an owner-occupier, you are part of a community and have a stake in it. You learn where and when to put out the rubbish; you try not to disturb the neighbours; there are time and volume restrictions on noise. There is a delicate balance that is easily upset. Anyone who sublets "to earn a little extra money", as Memon sympathetically puts it, risks destroying that balance.

Westminster Council has already indicated that it may lift restrictions on subletting, and not just – apparently – for council tenants. That could prompt some lucrative business for lawyers, as long-term residents in private flats with restricted covenants on subletting try to stop their blocks becoming, at best, glorified hotels and at worst dosshouses for an itinerant population.

Memon calls attitudes like that of the New York Senator (and me) as "patronising paternalism verging on outright authoritarianism" that hinders the blossoming of the entrepreneurial sharing economy. Obviously, I would prefer to call it understandable concern for a certain quality of life.

Source: Mary Dejevsky, *The Independent*

0 **The author thinks that the "sharing economy" may have existed in some form...**

- a. for the last 20 years or more.
- b. only for a very short time.
- c. since prehistoric times.

1 **The author thinks that thanks to the digital revolution, people can now...**

- a. make money more easily than before.
- b. make profits from things they didn't use before.
- c. sell things more easily and thus enjoy more free time.

2 **Both the political right and left consider the sharing economy to be...**

- a. entirely beneficial.
- b. rather promising.
- c. totally unpredictable.

3 **The government approves of sharing and has decided to take measures to...**

- a. increase taxes on this type of activity.
- b. make some profit from it.
- c. start to promote it immediately.

4 **The writer thinks that Wosskov's vision of the UK is...**

- a. based on misleading statistics.
- b. naïve and impossible to implement.
- c. not quite as popular as she assumes.

5 **The writer thinks that subletting a flat...**

- a inevitably upsets a balance in community life.
- b may alter the status quo.
- c may be suitable in the USA but not in Britain.

6 Memon thinks that points of view like that of the writer may...

- a give a false impression of what the sharing economy is.
- b make the sharing economy less attractive to the general public.
- c prevent the sharing economy from spreading.