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Government and Private Company Collaboration in the Governance of Shared Mobility Schemes: A Case Study of Dockless Bike-Sharing Schemes in Sydney, Australia

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Abstract: While a growing body of studies has investigated the collaborative governance (CG) of dockless bike-sharing schemes (DBSS) worldwide, few offer close descriptions and analyses of stakeholder interactions in specific social contexts. Our study fills this gap by examining the development of CG of DBSS in Sydney, Australia between 2017 and 2020. The methodology is guided by an Integrative Framework for CG, drawing on qualitative analysis of policy documentation and semi-structured interviews with key DBSS participants from the public and private sector. Our findings reveal context-specific drivers and dynamics that shaped the development of particular forms of CG within Sydney's DBSS.

Keywords: shared mobility schemes; dockless bike-sharing schemes; public-private collaboration; integrative framework for collaborative governance; governance



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1. Introduction

In recent years, the surge of innovations and entrepreneurship categorized under the umbrella term the “sharing economy” has made a broad range of urban public services increasingly accessible [1]. The idea of a “sharing city” is integral to many visions of urban futures, opening up new possibilities and pathways toward more sustainable cities [2]. A city organized around the value of “sharing” instead of “owning” has the potential to boost resource use efficiency.

A key component of many sharing economies in urban centers around the world is bike-sharing schemes (BSS). This type of shared-use mobility initiative was first commercialized in Amsterdam in 1965 [3]. In more recent years, GPS- and smartphone-enabled dockless bike-sharing schemes (DBSS) have spread worldwide, starting in China in 2015 [4,5]. These schemes do not require bicycles to be collected or deposited in docking stations (as they had been in the majority of bike-sharing programs) [6,7]. Instead, bicycles can be rented from a variety of urban locations at the user's convenience by scanning a Quick Response (QR) code on each bike, and the bicycle can be dropped off anywhere once the user's trip is completed [8–10]. It has been reported that DBSS are cheaper, more flexible and provide easier access to bikes than docked BSS [11]. DBSS also provide an effective way of meeting “the last mile” travel demand [12].

Nevertheless, DBSS are not perfect and their implementation presents significant challenges, particularly in terms of urban governance. Users sometimes dump or illegally park bikes in public spaces [13], disrupting traffic, creating hazards for pedestrians and affecting urban aesthetics [12]. In their initial response, some local governments in Australia impounded misplaced bikes, while the City of Melbourne went even further and announced a ban on DBSS in 2017 [14]. These fairly extreme early measures triggered fierce public criticism of government authorities for not supporting transport-sharing schemes in the public interest and for being averse to innovation. A more considered and sophisticated solution has emerged more recently in the form of collaborative governance (CG) between

government actors and private DBSS companies [9,13,15]. CG is a term used to refer generally to cross-boundary collaboration between the public and private sectors in co-managing public programs or resources [16]. Although some scholars [10,17] have noted that the collaboration between multiple actors may make the decision-making process complicated, cross-sectoral collaboration can help establish reciprocal and trust-based relations and reduce conflict [18].

Since 2017, some published research within this field has focused on the conceptual analysis of CG of DBSS [19]. However, a close inspection of this literature reveals a significant research gap. There are few empirical studies examining the dynamic engagement process among DBSS stakeholders from both the government and private companies in particular cities, and little in-depth examination of the diverse, context-specific factors influencing policy and governance decision-making. Our research addresses this identified gap by presenting case studies on the dynamic interactions of two major stakeholder groups—government and private DBSS companies within the CG framework of DBSS in different cities. We have recently published our research on local government and private company interactions in DBSS of Nanjing [20], and the present paper focuses on the city of Sydney between 2017 and 2020. The Sydney study is of particular interest because CG was actively incorporated into the policy framework guiding the development of DBSS in Sydney [9,21].

Our research methods for the Nanjing study [20] and the Sydney study are essentially the same. They include analysis of policy documents, in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives from local governments, private DBSS companies and academic institutions, and participation in multiple stakeholder symposiums. More broadly, our approach adopts the Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance of Emerson et al. [22], a comprehensive tool that can be used to delineate and understand CG models in any urban context [19]. In the Sydney study, we use this framework to explore the impact of certain factors—such as trust-building and equal engagement of government and corporate actors—on the CG of the city's DBSS. Our findings are potentially of use to industry practitioners, planners, policymakers and scholars involved in the sustainable development of DBSS in urban center worldwide.

This paper begins by describing the conceptual framework used to guide our empirical case study (Section 2). Section 3 describes the rationale for our research methods and data selection. We present our research results in Section 4, and in Section 5 (Discussion and conclusion) we compare our research outcomes with prior studies of DBSS, point to new directions for future research, and acknowledge the study's limitations.

2. Conceptual Framework for Analyzing CG of Sydney's DBSS

In recent decades, several theoretical and analytical models have emerged that seek to conceptualize emerging CG practices across the world [16,23–26] including the CG of DBSS [13,15,27]. For example, Gao and Li [27] used Ansell and Gash's [16] Collaborative Governance Model to examine governance issues related to CG in DBSS of China's cities, including conflict of interest between the government and private DBSS companies and policy-making processes of DBSS. They highlighted the lack of inclusiveness in the policy-making process of DBSS in Chinese cities. Guo, Lin, Huang, Tu, Bai, Yang and Ye [13] designed a Collaborative Governance Framework for DBSS and discussed the practical applicability of the cross-sector collaboration approach in solving DBSS governance issues in China's context. They argued that China's local governments should be transformed from 'controllers' to 'guiders' in the governance processes of DBSS. Qin and Wang [15] further discussed the responsibilities and obligations of the government, private DBSS companies and local residents in the CG of DBSS by establishing a Tripartite Collaboration Model for DBSS. Wang, Xiong, Yang, Zhu and Cheng [10] adopted the Public-Private Collaboration Framework to explore the positive impact of public and private collaboration on DBSS's policy diffusion in China's cities. While these frameworks are useful at a broad theoretical level, not all of them are easily applicable across different geographical and

institutional settings, and few pay close attention to contextual analysis or the dynamics between multiple actors within a CG, which are key focuses of our research.

In our broader research, and in this study, we have used Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh's [22] Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance (Figure 1) to guide our research method, the reasons being twofold. Firstly, it has been widely adopted by scholars and it has been repeatedly tested in empirical CG studies [9,20,28] to conceptualize interaction among multiple actors, such as government, private organizations and users. For example, Ma, Lan, Thornton, Mangalagu and Zhu [9] partly used this framework to examine the social participation in the process of addressing governance issues of Shanghai's DBSS between 2017–2018. Secondly, the Integrative Framework provides effective tools for comparative research across various social contexts, as it emphasizes the way in which context-specific factors are important in any examination of collaborative governance in action [9].

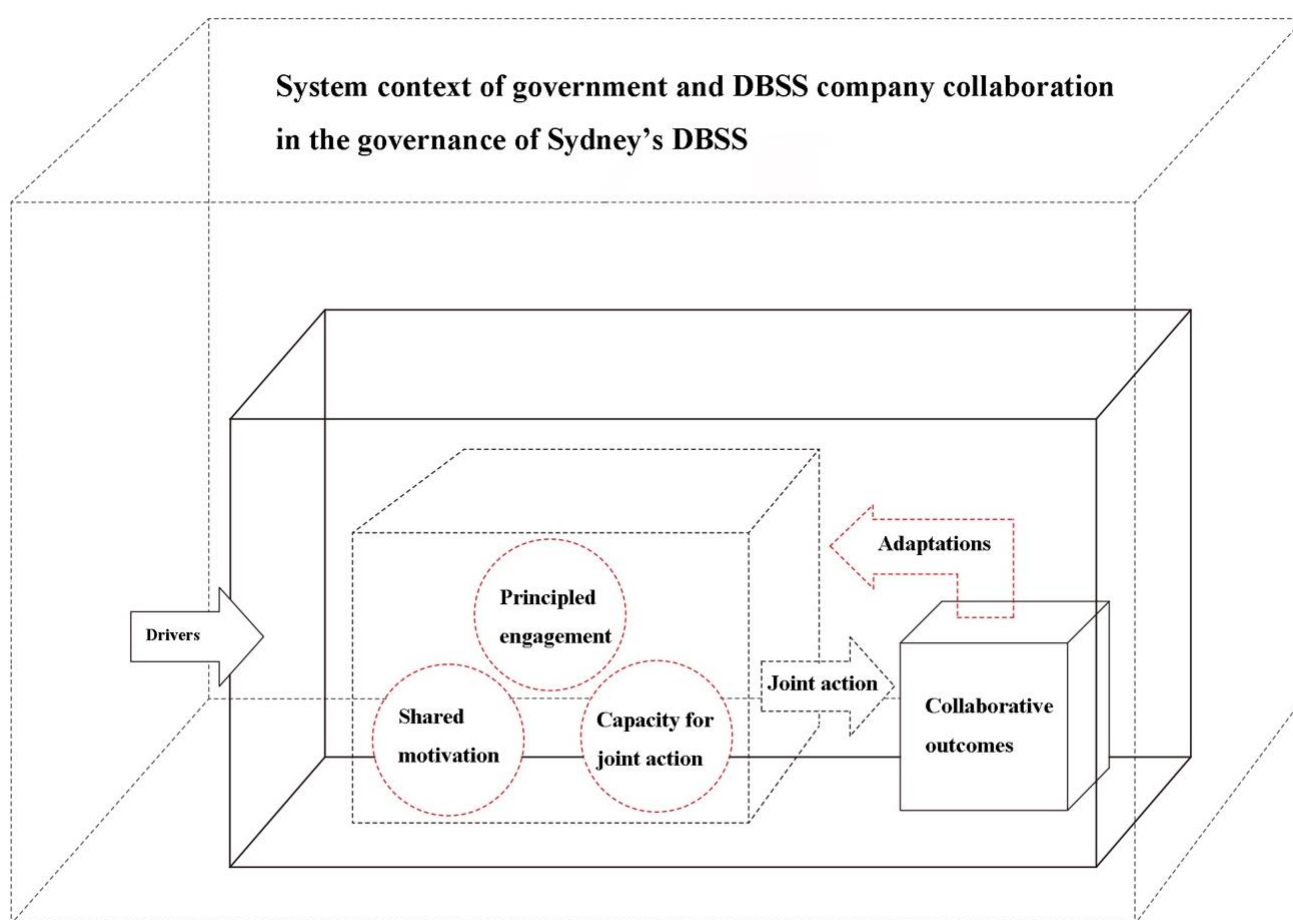


Figure 1. Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance in Sydney's DBSS (Source: re-design by authors according to Emerson and Nabatchi's [29] original diagram).

Our case study draws on the Integrative Framework to understand how local governments and companies have dynamically interacted in the governance of DBSS in Sydney since 2017 by tracking the impact of the following elements:

- *System context and drivers*, which may have improved or hindered the engagement of local governments and private DBSS companies in the CG of DBSS in Sydney (Figure 1);
- *Collaborative governance regime*, which encompasses “the particular mode of, or system for, public decision making in which CG represents the prevailing pattern of behavior

and activity” [22]. Being able to describe the collaborative dynamics that constitute and sustain it is essential to understanding the CG regime;

- *Collaborative dynamics*, which can be further divided into three cyclical and nonlinear sub-variables: principled engagement, shared motivation and capacity for joint action. These collaborative dynamics further led to joint actions aimed at making progress toward the common goal of the CG of DBSS in Sydney (Figure 1);
- *Outcomes*, which are the external effects of the joint actions taken by government and private DBSS companies alongside any necessary adaptations. These outcomes and adaptations include innovations in collaboration mechanisms and new management policies that promote or constrain the success and long-term development of any CG models.

We developed three research questions based on the theoretical elements of the Integrative Framework, as outlined below.

- RQ1 (*system context and drivers*): How did Sydney’s system context and drivers influence the CG of Sydney’s DBSS?
- RQ2 (*collaborative dynamics*): How did local governments and private DBSS companies dynamically interact in the governance of Sydney’s DBSS?
- RQ3 (*collaborative actions, outcomes, and adaptations*): What collaborative actions were carried out by local governments and private DBSS companies during the collaboration? What outcomes and adaptations have arisen from these actions?

3. Research Methods

This study developed a qualitative case study strategy to respond to our three research questions. Case studies have been widely used in urban studies [30], facilitating research in which the “holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-live events” are retained [31]. This approach also allows researchers to focus on particular individuals, groups or institutions, and to provide a picture of complex interactions between different actors with non-aligned interests and ideas about acceptable solutions [32].

3.1. Case Selection and Case Study Context

Based on the requirements of our case study strategy, we chose to focus in this paper on only one urban DBSS program. In selecting the Sydney DBSS program, we were guided by three key criteria:

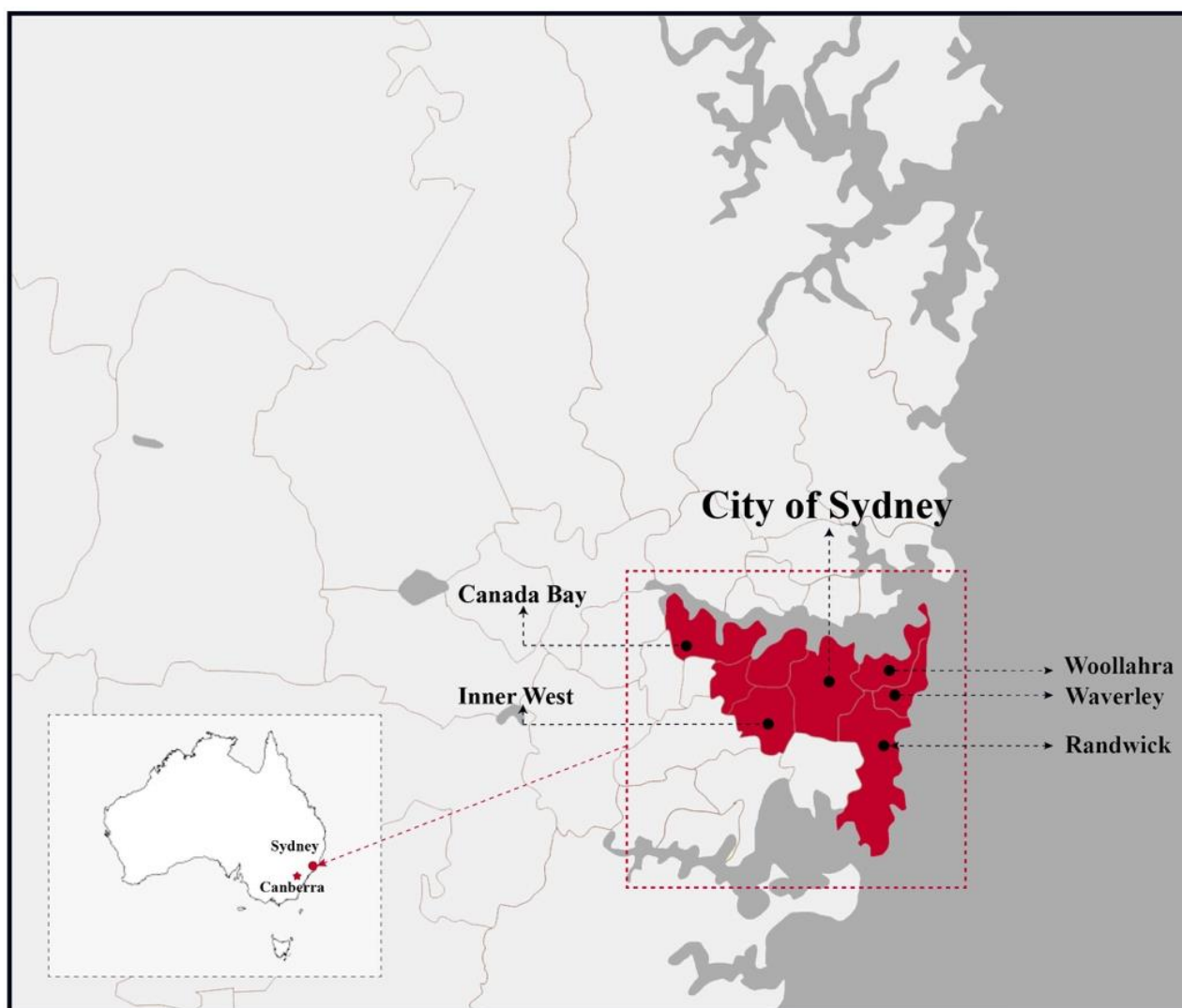
- The DBSS had been operating for at least one year.
- The city had begun to regulate the DBSS and had some features of cross-sector collaboration.
- The research team had strong local contacts, allowing for access to targeted interviewees.

The data we gathered to develop these criteria was mainly sourced from prior academic literature. Although many Australian cities did fit these selection criteria, Sydney was the most suitable city for our study for several reasons. Firstly, Sydney was one of the first cities in Australia to launch DBSS. Secondly, Sydney’s DBSS had incorporated CG elements from the start of its governance and policy design. Thirdly, the research team could tap into their local social network in Sydney, especially among local governments, private DBSS companies, and universities and think-tanks.

Sydney is the capital city of New South Wales (NSW) and the largest city in Australia [33] (See Table 1). Sydney launched its first DBSS fleet in 2017 [34]. By the end of 2017, five private DBSS companies were in operation, with more than 10,000 shared bikes across the metropolitan area. These DBSS quickly became a popular transport alternative in a relatively car-dominated city. In response, six local governments—Waverley, the Inner West, City of Sydney, Randwick, Woollahra and Canada Bay—formed a Sydney Local Government Alliance (Figure 2) and began collaborating actively with industry to devise a governance framework in December 2017.

Table 1. Background information about Sydney's various DBSS (based on 2020 statistics).

Population (Million)	4.4
Area (km ²)	12,367.7
Number of local councils	31
Number of shared bikes	15,000
Number of private DBSS companies	Lime, Jump, Onyahbike

**Figure 2.** Location of Sydney within Australia (local government areas marked in red are the focus of this case study). Source: By author.

3.2. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

In the first stage, we collected archival data and contextual materials in relation to the operation and management of DBSS in Sydney, including any relevant laws or policies, collaboration memoranda, and websites of local governments and DBSS companies.

In the second stage, we carried out fieldwork to collect primary data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with important participants involved in the CG of Sydney's DBSS. In total, 10 interviews with key participants in Sydney's DBSS were conducted between September 2020 and January 2021. The interviewees include:

- One senior transport planner in the transport sector of the NSW State Government;

- Three managers of cycling strategy teams within participating local councils;
- One founder of a DBSS company;
- One regional head of government relations within a DBSS company;
- Two general managers of DBSS companies;
- Two researchers from think tanks specializing in transportation planning.

Interviewees were selected based on their experience of participating directly in governing DBSS in Sydney. Interview questions were designed to address our study's three core research questions. Before each interview, the lead researcher gathered information about the key DBSS activities carried out by each interviewee's department or organization, allowing the interview questions to be customized to the interviewee's particular involvement in the DBSS. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not allowed, so we used telephone and online (ZOOM) interviews.

To provide further data on Sydney's DBSS, we visited offices of Sydney's DBSS companies including Mobike (the prior name of Meituan Bike) and Lime in early 2020, and also attended two online symposiums in the second half of 2020 through VooV Meeting. The first symposium, organized by Southeast University in August 2020, was attended by scholars from universities in the United States, Australia and China. The focus was on innovations in government regulatory mechanisms in managing and supporting DBSS across the world, including Australia. The second symposium was organized by Meituan Bike in October 2020, and the participants included scholars and overseas team leaders. The focus was on the development of Meituan Bikes in China's cities and overseas markets including the Sydney market, and how their overseas management teams collaborated with local governments.

All relevant data collection was carried out by one lead researcher guided by an expert research team. Documents, interview transcripts and notes from the symposiums were subsequently analyzed and summarized through a thematic coding method introduced by Yin [31]. The coding process included five steps:

- Firstly, the data was prepared and organized using Excel;
- Secondly, we chose "prefigured" codes according to the theoretical variables of the Integrative Framework (e.g., collaborative dynamics and drivers, principal engagement, institutional arrangements);
- Thirdly, axial coding was used to construct linkages between the concepts and the data and adequately explore the relationships between the concepts and categories [10];
- Fourthly, the key concepts were linked through selective coding;
- Finally, the data was interpreted in relation to our research goals and questions [35].

To maintain the anonymity of those interviewed for the Sydney case study, each interviewee has a code identity in the format of 'organizational type—numbering' (such as 'G-01', 'C-01' and 'A-01') as outlined in Table 2 below. In this coding system, 'G' stands for government departments, 'C' for DBSS companies, and 'A' for academia.

Table 2. List of Interviewees.

Code	Organization	Position
G-01; G-02; G-03; G-04	NSW State Government and local governments	Senior managers
C-01; C-02; C-03; C-04	Private DBSS companies	Senior managers (government relations/general managers/founder)
A-02	Research institution and university think tank	Researchers

4. Results

Based on the empirical data collected, the results in response to our research questions are presented in the following sections.

4.1. Initiating and Developing the CG of DBSS in Sydney (System Contexts Including Drivers)

In response to RQ1, this section discusses Sydney's system context and how it defined the style of CG of Sydney's DBSS that emerged between local governments and private companies between 2017 and 2020.

In July 2017, an Australian DBSS company called Reddy Go launched its first DBSS fleet in the City of Sydney. Within a short time, this DBSS expanded operations to include all of Sydney's major urban areas. Most local governments initially supported the DBSS, believing this model of bike-sharing could fill existing gaps in short-distance travel options offered to citizens and thus could be a good option for the "last mile" of public transport, with associated benefits of reducing pollution, congestion and travel costs (G-01).

While local governments were cautiously supportive of Sydney's DBSS, there was still considerable uncertainty about DBSS governance and regulation within government and industry circles. Unlike Melbourne or other Australian cities, Sydney was unusual in that it did not have any existing (docked) bike-sharing programs before the arrival of the dockless versions that rapidly became popular. Local governments thus lacked governance experience in all forms of bike-sharing schemes, let alone in the new DBSS. As one government official noted, "We really want to control the DBSS market, but we don't know how to do it . . . we don't [even] know which department should be responsible for DBSS" (G-02).

A second complicating factor was that most of the DBSS start-ups that set up operations in Sydney (following the lead of Reddy Go) had headquarters overseas, for instance in China or the U.S., and as a result, had limited knowledge of operating a DBSS under local conditions in Sydney. As one DBSS company manager explained, "Sydney is unfamiliar to us. It is a vast and sparsely populated city, the operation cost of DBSS in Sydney was beyond our imagination, and we even didn't know how many maintenance staff we needed and how fast we needed to redistribute bikes for citizens" (C-01).

During this early period of uncertainty, some local governments and DBSS companies in Sydney began to take up adversarial positions in response to the vandalism, dumping, and inefficient maintenance of bikes. For example, some government leaders started accusing DBSS companies of failing to do enough to "lift their game" (G-03), and some local governments (such as the Inner West Council) began to implement more drastic measures, such as deploying staff to impound damaged and abandoned bikes, and charging DBSS companies expensive fines for their return.

In protest against these fines, which the companies considered to be prohibitively high, DBSS companies refused to pay the fines or to redeem their bikes. Waverley Council (which is the local government authority for the famous Bondi Beach, among other eastern suburbs of Sydney) said it impounded 107 bikes abandoned in their jurisdiction, but only two companies paid fines to retrieve 60 of these bikes, leaving 47 unclaimed [35]. This fairly extreme management approach increased costs both for Sydney's local governments and for DBSS companies. One government official explained that "to impound dump[ed] bikes, our frontline staff are having to run around and look at illegal bikes, [and] that is costly for us" (G-02). Furthermore, as one DBSS company manager noted, "Paying an expensive fine can make operating costs prohibitive" (C-02).

Over time, however, local governments and DBSS companies in Sydney began to develop a pragmatic understanding that, to be effective, the governance of DBSS needed to be more collaborative, and they sought to develop jointly a more sustainable approach to supporting DBSS across the city. As one DBSS company manager explained, "When we work[ed] closely with each other, the opportunity for DBSS to work [well] was far greater" (C-01). This emerging evidence of the value of government and organizational collaboration led to the continued use of dialogue in developing a CG model.

In July 2017, the Reddy Go company and the City of Sydney Council initiated the first CG model for DBSS in Sydney. Soon afterwards, an alliance of six Sydney councils—Waverley, the Inner West, City of Sydney, Randwick, Woollahra and Canada Bay—was established to collaborate with DBSS companies in devising a municipal-level governance

framework called the Inner Sydney Bike Share Guidelines (the Guide) [36], which took effect from December 2017. By the end of 2018, the last private partner—Lime company—had also joined this alliance.

The CG regime of Sydney's DBSS was directly influenced by the city's cultural, political and socio-economic context. The private ownership and management of various DBSS was seen as welcome and legitimate in an open and "free market" as long as these companies' operations did not impinge on public amenities (G-02). As one government official affirmed, "We do not make lots of red tape, nor make it difficult for DBSS companies to operate" (G-01). This philosophy of governance provided an enabling environment for DBSS companies.

Moreover, public-private collaborations have been encouraged by the NSW State Government as a method of addressing the needs of Sydney's rapidly growing urban population (G-03). Local governments and DBSS companies were thus encouraged to maintain a healthy partnership that sought to "truly share" responsibility for delivering DBSS in Sydney (C-01). One interviewee suggested that this was possible in part because Sydney is recognized worldwide as an early adopter and leading innovator in developing public-private partnerships, and as a result there are fewer political constraints on this kind of collaboration between local government and private DBSS companies (G-01).

The development of the CG of Sydney's DBSS has also aligned with the city's planning and regulatory system. Since 2017, the NSW State Government and Sydney's local governments have sought to promote the development of DBSS within Sydney through local development plans, such as NSW Future Transport 2056 [37], Sustainable Sydney 2030–2050 [38], and Planning for Sydney 2050 [39]. Several influential political leaders in Sydney, such as Clover Moore, also strongly encouraged DBSS companies to establish operations in Sydney (C-02), and proposed various measures to support the establishment of DBSS, such as policy incentives to establish DBSS infrastructure (including adding bicycle lanes) (G-02). While DBSS were in theory supported in local government planning policy, it should be noted that some of our interviewees stated that the NSW State Government had provided limited regulatory frameworks for the management of DBSS. This in turn limited the extent to which local governments, as a third-tier authority, could govern DBSS through policy and law-making (G-01; C-01; C-04).

A final system context factor influencing how CG evolved in Sydney relates to the public policy focus on developing Sydney as a global center for innovation. Both government authorities and DBSS company representatives noted that the city's local governments and private organizations are strongly encouraged to innovate, to be open-minded about the positive role DBSS could play in the city, and to be receptive to progressive governance approaches to DBSS in Sydney (G-01; C-04).

4.2. Dynamic Interaction between Local Governments and Private DBSS Companies to Address Governance Issues of DBSS in Sydney (Collaborative Dynamics)

This section addresses RQ2 by highlighting the interactions between local governments and private companies in resolving DBSS-related issues in Sydney.

4.2.1. Principled Engagement

In Sydney, local governments began communicating with DBSS companies in June 2017, one month before the first DBSS fleet launched on Sydney's streets (G-01). This early dialogue explored their shared interests. While local governments were focused on supporting public amenities for their communities, and DBSS companies were focused on business profits, over time they recognized their interests were interdependent (G-01; C-01). As one government official remarked, "If we [local governments] get more people using bikes, we get safer streets, less traffic and a healthier urban environment; if they [DBSS companies] get more people using their bikes, it means they get more users and more profits" (G-04). Local government authorities and DBSS company representatives noted in interviews we conducted that, during these early months, they successfully identified

a mutual interest in delivering better, safer and more numerous cycling options to local communities (G-02; C-01).

Stakeholders from government and industry were also able to define and articulate a shared vision for CG of DBSS, mainly through establishing collaborative partnerships, alliances and governing mechanisms (G-01; G-03; C-01; C-02). In December 2017, local governments and DBSS companies clarified their respective responsibilities for Sydney's DBSS through in-depth dialogue and negotiations, which resulted in the development of the Guide for DBSS (G-01; C-01). In this Guide, DBSS companies (such as Reddy Go) were tasked with responsible operation and following key established rules (C-01). Local governments were tasked with monitoring the impacts of DBSS operations on public amenities and maintaining effective communication with DBSS companies about these impacts.

Central to the implementation of the Guide was communication through face-to-face meetings and workshops, as well as electronic approaches to sharing and gathering feedback (via telephone, ZOOM meetings and email), which created a communication platform for CG between local governments and DBSS companies (G-03; C-01). A key element of this successful communication process was a sense of fairness and inclusivity. A government official noted, "We [local governments] . . . discuss everything with DBSS companies, rather than just coming up with arbitrary decisions that then others would say—it's not reasonable" (G-02). A wide array of issues was discussed through these various communication mechanisms, including how many bikes would be operational; how the impact of these bikes on the city's streets might be managed; how users could be motivated to wear helmets for their safety; and whether DBSS companies should be responsible for providing insurance to users.

However, these communication processes did not always result in agreement. A key reason given for this by both local government and DBSS company interviewees was a large number of local governments (and their subordinate departments, such as transport, parking ranger teams, and legal divisions) and private DBSS companies involved in every decision, which made it difficult to reach consensus. With so many stakeholders, there was always one representative who would say, "We don't want to do that" (C-02), forcing everyone back to the drawing board.

This situation was further complicated by the limited regulatory framework developed for DBSS in Sydney by the NSW State Government (G-01; C-01). When there were differences of opinion between local governments and DBSS companies, or within different government departments, no one was given regulatory power by the NSW State Government to mediate or determine a clear pathway to resolve disputes or disagreements. As a result, the CG alliances developed between local governments and DBSS companies in Sydney were sometimes unable to come to a joint determination that could satisfy all parties.

In 2017, for instance, the Transport Department of the City of Sydney asked DBSS companies to deploy more maintenance staff so that illegally parked bikes could be removed more efficiently from the city's streets. DBSS companies complained that it would be difficult to enact this proposal because of the high labor costs of employing the required number of maintenance staff to address this requirement. Instead, they suggested collaborating with the city's parking rangers, but this proposal was initially rejected because the parking rangers (within those local governments) felt it would unfairly increase their workload.

4.2.2. Shared Motivations

Our case study has revealed that the shared motivation for local governments and DBSS companies to engage in the CG of Sydney's DBSS was driven mainly by trust and mutual understanding, and less by internal legitimacy and commitment. A key reason for this was the absence of a regulatory framework for DBSS created by the NSW State Government to legitimize CG negotiations and agreements between local governments and DBSS companies (G-01). This led to a greater dependence on the formation of a set

of “gentlemen’s promises” (G-02) based on trust between local governments and DBSS companies to support the efficient operation of DBSS in the city.

While trust-building was a slow process, the level of trust between local governments and DBSS companies gradually increased over the course of their collaboration between 2017 and 2020, mainly as a result of the previously mentioned commitment to fair and inclusive engagement. This enabled clear communication and information-sharing between local governments and DBSS companies, which in turn improved inter-organizational responses to DBSS management in Sydney (G-01; C-01; C-03). One company manager explained, “We always have over-communicated with each other to share interests, strategies, plans, and everything that we think the other may be even remotely interested in” (C-04).

DBSS companies also made positive contributions to promoting mutual trust with local governments by recruiting local people as members of their business and operation teams. These staff were already familiar with the local culture, norms and policies and knew how to communicate well with the local government. One company manager noted that “to build trust, we employed local people in our team from the start. We let the local people guide us in terms of how to manage the business locally with the government. This enabled us to adjust to the local culture and work within the local system” (C-02).

As they built mutual trust, local governments and DBSS companies also developed more respect for one another. As a local government official pointed out, “[We became] very open and respectful of DBSS companies’ advice on what they see as some of those key principles to operate, because we recognized their expertise in DBSS operation” (G-04). A company manager responded, “When we operate in Sydney, we respect and understand the transport strategy and management requirements of governments and how to better serve communities” (C-04).

While DBSS companies occasionally complained that local governments floated “crazy requirements” (C-04) which they considered unreasonable, for the most part, these companies felt that they could usually find an alternative way to address any issues through open negotiation (C-01). In late 2017, for instance, the City of Sydney introduced requirements for DBSS companies to maintain a 24/7 hotline to remove bikes from public areas within 20 min of receiving a report from a member of the public of damaged, faulty, abandoned or inappropriately parked bikes. This short time frame for removing bikes was seen as unreasonable by DBSS companies due to their limited maintenance capacity to address this requirement (C-01). The issue was finally resolved through a series of respectful negotiations, and the City of Sydney Council agreed to extend this time frame to seven days.

4.2.3. Capacity for Joint Actions

At the end of 2017, as previously noted, a city-level regulatory document (the Guide) was jointly created by public and private stakeholders to set out minimum standards and expectations for DBSS operations, including safety, bike redistribution and footpath accessibility [36]. The Guide required DBSS companies to monitor the location of bikes at least daily, and to collaborate with local governments and public landholders to share relevant data for transport and urban planning purposes.

Other knowledge-building activities involving both local governments and DBSS companies developed capacity for further joint actions. For example, local governments worked with professional researchers to investigate a range of governance approaches to DBSS in other cities around the world (G-01). Dr Elliot Fishman, an experienced researcher in the bike-sharing field and team leader at the Institute of Sensible Transport, was engaged to give advice to local governments and DBSS companies. In 2017, he ran a three-hour workshop in Sydney for managers from government organizations and DBSS companies, sharing his knowledge of successful management of other DBSS worldwide and presenting ideas that were adopted by participants (A-01).

Both local governments and companies took seriously their responsibility to provide leadership in the CG of DBSS, and demonstrated positive attitudes toward establishing co-leadership structures. Representatives from public and private organizations played

a role in guiding the process, facilitating collaboration, bringing people together, taking the lead on different decisions, keeping participants informed, organizing meetings, and inspiring others to take relevant steps. One government official said that “we are all the leaders for the CG, all of us keep track” (G-01), and another made the point that “both of us [local governments and private DBSS companies] were very active leaders regarding this collaboration” (G-02).

However, stakeholders from local government and industry noted that the NSW State Government did not at first play a role in supporting this leadership structure. As a company manager stated, “I think that there needs to be a bold leader who can help us to promote the evolution of DBSS CG, and I think we have seen it at city level, but I don’t think we’ve seen that bold leadership yet at the state level” (C-02). Another manager suggested that the reason for this lack of leadership from the NSW State Government might be political, given that the widespread operation of various DBSS in Sydney is still somewhat controversial. A significant portion of the public remains opposed to DBSS because of safety issues for pedestrians and disruption to urban amenities caused by the disorderly parking of bikes (C-01).

While there was political will among local governments and DBSS companies to support the CG of Sydney’s DBSS, it was widely acknowledged by both public and private actors that the capacity to mobilize resources (particularly financial resources) remained limited (G-01, C-01). Interviewees highlighted the fact that little political or financial support was provided by the NSW State Government (G-02, C-01). They also noted that local governments, due to competing demands on their funding, had limited capacity to fund DBSS operations, and, as such, the private DBSS companies were the primary funding source for any initiatives (G-02, C-03). These constraints somewhat curbed the capacity of local governments to facilitate collaboration and joint actions (G-01).

4.3. The Degree of Improvements to DBSS in Sydney under Public-Private Sector Collaboration (Collaborative Actions, Outcomes and Adaptations)

This section, which addresses RQ3, explains how the collaborative dynamics previously delineated helped to propel collaborative actions and outcomes within the CG of Sydney’s DBSS between 2017 and 2020.

4.3.1. Collaborative Actions and Outcomes

The ability of local governments and DBSS companies to realize their common goal of ensuring better, safer and more numerous cycling options across Sydney was enabled by their collaborative actions, which were aimed at fostering dialogue and effective joint management mechanisms.

A key example of this was the establishment of regular communication channels between local governments and DBSS companies. Since mid-2017, local governments and DBSS companies have institutionalized their communication methods by committing to scheduled regular meetings (G-1; C-2). According to the notes of the symposium organized by Meituan Bike, the regular meetings included both weekly and monthly meetings. In the early stage of the collaboration, meetings were more frequent and sometimes government officials met general managers of DBSS companies every day. This frequent contact allowed collaborators to develop familiarity with each other and revealed “pain points” and shared areas in which to collaborate (C-03). One company manager described the positive impact of this continuing dialogue as follows: “Partnership has become better than it was in 2017: we have regular dialogue, sharing [of] ideas, working together on problems, and are operating in a mutually supportive and constructive relationship” (C-01).

Another example of a successful collaborative action was the development of joint management policies. During the second half of 2017, local governments—in collaboration with DBSS companies—developed a series of management policies through four important round-table meetings. Each of the proposed rules was repeatedly confirmed through emails between local governments and DBSS companies, with consensus-based management

norms formally established in the Guide (G-01; C-01). Interviewees highlighted how the Guide provided an essential resource in making important improvements to DBSS operations in different local government areas. One scholar from Sydney indicated that the Guide established formal rules for DBSS management in Sydney, which helps companies better regulate and punish users' illegal behaviors (note from symposium organized by Southeast University). A company manager also commented, "Currently, issues of bike congestion and disorderly parking . . . rarely happen, which is the most direct manifestation of the success of [the collaboration]" (C-04).

The benefits of the CG to the governance of Sydney's DBSS can be summarized as follows:

- First, Sydney's local government and DBSS companies established a stable communication mechanism through collaboration, which provided a fair and open platform for them to negotiate and solve problems. Based on this platform, they improved partnership, exchanged information, shared resources and planned joint actions;
- Second, through collaboration, Sydney's local government and DBSS companies have made many innovations in institutional arrangements and management policies, which have become fundamental rules for the management of DBSS in Sydney. These newly established rules have effectively improved the governance level of DBSS in Sydney.

While most local governments and DBSS companies engaged over time in these collaborative actions, not all DBSS companies regularly participated in communication or maintained an active level of engagement with local governments (C-01). For example, some DBSS companies were only prepared to communicate with local governments through informal channels, such as email or phone, and avoided the round-table meetings (G-03; C-01; C-02).

Local governments, for their part, did not always have the budget to recruit enough staff to participate directly in front-line management actions, and instead had to play the role of messenger in the daily management of DBSS. When government officials received reports about illegal bike dumping from citizens or rangers, for instance, they would, by necessity, delegate the clean-up to the relevant DBSS company. This could take a fairly long time, making it difficult for the local government to fulfil its duties to the community. Without the ability to detect these kinds of problems in real time, DBSS companies had a lot of "wiggle room" to evade their management responsibilities and duties. While these problems of bike congestion and disorderly bike parking in Sydney have gradually been reduced, the situation is still far from the ideal expectations laid out in the Guide (G-02).

4.3.2. Adaptations

Interviewees of Sydney's local governments, private DBSS companies and scholars described the participatory process of collaborative actions as "governance innovation" (G-03). It was an adaptive process that resulted in learning, and trust among participants. An example of the potential to adapt is the recent attempt by the NSW State Government to begin to engage in the CG frameworks that had already been established by local governments and DBSS companies between 2017 and 2020. From the end of 2018, when the NSW State Government realized the benefits of CG of DBSS, they began to provide more political and technical support to these established collaborations. For example, the NSW State Government has started collaborating with technical experts to develop a management app that integrates the operational information of all DBSS companies to enable convenient monitoring by local governments and companies (G-03).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This case study identifies a range of social, cultural and political contextual factors that determined the particular evolution of the CG of DBSS in Sydney, Australia. Despite limited support from the NSW State Government, there was significant collaboration,

power-sharing and joint decision-making between local governments and DBSS companies from early in the establishment of these dockless bike-sharing schemes.

Our findings confirm the argument of Berends, Ritter and Chalmers [28], who state that contemporary Australian governance structures provide a favorable environment for developing CG, as well as research by O'Flynn and Wanna [36], who argue that Australia's democratic culture and political traditions allow government and industry to collaborate on an equal footing. Yet, it is also important to note that the mostly successful CG of Sydney's DBSS only came about in the wake of crisis and discord, as local governments and DBSS companies responded to negative impacts on the city's amenities and public order posed by the newly established DBSS before proper oversight was established. This finding corresponds with some earlier research on Sydney's DBSS [9,14,37].

Our case study of CG of DBSS in Sydney reveals the significance of cultural and political contexts in any understanding of collaborative governance. Our findings in this paper show that the Sydney context stands in stark contrast to the Nanjing context explored in Cao, Prior, Gu and Giurco [20]. That companion case study, on the CG of DBSS in Nanjing, China, showed that the government-led CG model for DBSS was shaped by a hierarchical culture and political tradition, with significant power imbalances between government authorities and private DBSS companies.

This paper is the first to recognize that the principles of fairness and inclusivity in negotiating and decision-making are crucial to successful CG between local governments and private companies. This finding is quite different to some prior studies [10,20,38] that have focused on the CG of DBSS in China. Those researchers argued that CG is predominantly politically motivated, and that a free and fair public-private engagement is only possible when the overall goals align with government ideology.

Our findings in this case study support those of Holbrook [39], who has shown that an open and democratic CG process allows participants to overcome any rivalries or suspicions that might impede genuine collaboration, and encourages trust-building. The alliance of local governments and DBSS companies in Sydney led to regular and clear communication, institutional innovation, knowledge-building, higher levels of trust and mutual respect. This supports Janine [40]'s insight that trust can help to "unlock" the distinctive capacities of actors in any collaboration.

This case study also shows that a lack of active engagement and leadership by the NSW State Government within the CG of Sydney's DBSS had a somewhat negative impact. This left an identified gap in terms of a strong external initiator, arbitrator and decision-maker—a gap that hindered local governments and DBSS companies in establishing stable collaborative leadership mechanisms. This confirms the findings of Wang, Xiong, Yang, Zhu and Cheng [10], who highlight how essential and irreplaceable a strong and highly capable public sector is in terms of mobilizing key resources to support collaborative governance processes.

We have shown that opportunities for equal engagement and building high levels of trust between local governments and DBSS companies can lead to positive collaborative actions, outcomes and adaptations in the short and long term, including healthy communication mechanisms and sustainable management policies. These findings support the argument of Schlæger [41], who highlights the way in which mutual trust and constructive relationships are effective instruments to drive any collaborative governance process.

Overall, our case study shows that, compared to the early stage of DBSS in 2017 (not implementing CG), the public-private partnership between local governments and DBSS companies has produced several significant positive effects on Sydney's DBSS governance over the last three years (implementing CG). These positive effects are mainly reflected in the refinement and sophistication of the collaboration mechanism, communication mechanism and management mechanism. As a result of these mechanisms, the network between local governments and DBSS companies has become closer and denser, the level of trust between them has been improved, and the conflicts between them have been gradually resolved. This finding confirms the arguments of some scholars [36,42], who noted that

cross-sector collaboration allows actors to negotiate and make decisions more like friends rather than enemies. In addition, Sydney's local governments and DBSS companies can use consensus-based rules (the Guide) to manage DBSS. Since the collaboration began, no actor has carried out unilateral actions like they did in the early stage of DBSS in 2017, such as the local governments impounding bikes without notifying DBSS companies. This finding also supports the point of O'Flynn and Wanna [36], who pointed out that cross-sector collaboration can help actors establish rules and find a transformational way to address dilemmas. The above positive effects improved the impact of Sydney's DBSS on the city's streets.

However, we have also noted the negative impacts of the initial inaction by the NSW State Government in terms of supporting the CG of Sydney's DBSS. This sent the wrong message to DBSS companies that they could selectively participate in the CG, which meant that some companies only half-heartedly implemented and enacted newly established collaborative rules. Our findings in this regard are consistent with those of Liu et al. [43], who note that a lack of strong leadership in a public-private collaboration means that accountability cannot be ensured. Similarly, O'Flynn and Wanna [36] highlight the fact that private actors will not make a concerted effort to pursue mutually beneficial outcomes without a binding force from higher authorities. Wang, Xiong, Yang, Zhu and Cheng [10] also argue that if a CG scheme has no strong or authoritative leader, more effort will be required from all parties to achieve successful outcomes.

Finally, this paper tracks significant adaptations in the CG of Sydney's DBSS. The NSW State Government, as noted, has already made a series of gradual changes to demonstrate their commitment to CG. Once they had recognized the benefits of the CG of DBSS, they began to provide much-needed legislative and technical support. This finding corresponds with the argument of Ansell and Gash [16], who indicate that the "small wins" from collaborative actions are achieved in an iterative cycle, propelling the participants forward, and encouraging a virtuous cycle of collaboration.

Beyond these practical insights, our case study also has theoretical implications for the conceptualization of CG in the growing sharing economy, thanks to our application of the Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance as defined by Emerson and Nabatchi [29]. We used this Integrative Framework to guide our focus on the contextual aspects that promoted or hindered the establishment and forward momentum of the CG of Sydney's DBSS. Our findings highlight the advantages of Australia's democratic culture and political traditions, and the key role this political context plays in supporting collaborative processes of urban governance. These favorable conditions encourage equal public-private engagement, establish trust in partnerships, and support the sustainability of any CG framework.

This further supports the findings of Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh [22], who suggest that any Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) depends on principled engagement because it fosters the development of shared motivation and, in turn, the capacity for joint actions. We have also documented the observed negative impacts of the absence of stable and strong leadership on CG actors' capacity to build and sustain governance structures, mobilize resources and motivate long-lasting joint actions.

Our research findings have clear implications for urban governance policy and practice in the growing sharing economy. Sydney's DBSS provides a unique opportunity to track both public and private interests as they have played out in urban governance over time. This is important because it has been suggested that the success of DBSS and other transport-sharing ecosystems (such as car-sharing) not only increases profits for businesses, but also benefits entire local communities [33,38]. We have shown that any successful CG collaboration depends in part on establishing regular communication channels, knowledge-sharing and trust-building between participants. However, as our study highlights, this bottom-up approach to CG governance does not always lead to agreement, and higher-level government authorities need to play an active leadership role in any CG framework. In Sydney, as we have discussed, local governments and DBSS companies would have

benefited from NSW State Government-led policy, legislation, financial and technical resources, and clear mediation and conflict resolution pathways.

While we provide insights into the specific context that has shaped the CG of DBSS in Sydney, there are some limitations to our study that suggest avenues for future research. We have adopted only qualitative methods to explore the CG framework of Sydney's DBSS. Future research could explore the complex causal factors behind the interactive process and outcomes by using a mixed or triangular method. We also note that we had limited access to internal or classified documents from local governments or DBSS companies in Sydney; future researchers could negotiate gaining access to this kind of material.

In our case study of the CG of the DBSS in Nanjing, China (Cao, Prior, Gu and Giurco [20]), we explore a more authoritarian, top-down CG model for DBSS within a Chinese political and cultural context. Our research outcomes in that case study highlight the advantages of Nanjing's local governments in being able to direct the CG processes of DBSS, due to their capacity to rapidly mobilize a series of key political and fiscal resources [20]. The CG of Nanjing's DBSS is driven by cultural and political factors that have obvious differences from Sydney's bottom-up, consensus-based CG model. To be more specific, Sydney's culture emphasizes liberalism and democracy, while Nanjing's culture emphasizes centralism and government authoritarianism. The power relations between local governments and DBSS companies in Sydney emphasize equality, while in Nanjing, DBSS companies are in a weak position relative to local governments.

The two CG models have also generated different outcomes for their DBSS governance. For example, Nanjing's CG model can improve the governance effect of DBSS in a shorter time with the support of the strong administrative power of local government. However, if such collaboration continues to develop in an unequal partnership, the CG model is hard to maintain for a long period as the power of the CG is diminished. By contrast, the CG of Sydney's DBSS as a bottom-up CG model is likely to do better in terms of the sustainability of the CG model, although it needs ongoing efforts in addressing governance issues of DBSS. This can be seen in the increasingly active involvement of the NSW State Government, Sydney's local governments and DBSS companies in the partnership. Future research could focus on synthesizing insights from both top-down and bottom-up case studies of CG, comparing the contextual factors and dynamic interactions of stakeholders in these two models, and weighing up the advantages and drawbacks to both approaches.

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