

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by  
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## Development of the Sharing Economy

While teaching sustainability strategies, one of my favorites is called servicizing or dematerialization. The word “servicizing” may not be found in any dictionary because it was created to describe a specific type of business. A company that manufactures a product to sell for a particular application will retain ownership of that product and just sell the application or service. It is also called dematerialization as the company does not sell any physical material. A simple example is selling illumination rather than incandescent light bulbs. When a light bulb goes out, it is because of a small broken filament but we throw out the entire bulb including the glass, metal and ceramic. If the company made a light bulb where the glass bulb can be removed and the broken filament replaced, there would be no need to throw out the entire light bulb. The only waste is the small broken filament, but even that is not a waste. The company can melt down all the filaments and make new ones. So in effect, there is no waste and no new bulbs would have to be manufactured. Of course, this is now hypothetical as incandescent light bulbs will no longer be manufactured.

The concept of servicizing advanced further when one considers underutilized assets. An example is automobile ownership and usage. The average car owner probably uses his/her car about five percent of the time that it is available for use. So 95% of time it sits idle but the owner still pays 100% of the insurance and depreciation. Volvo recognized this disparity many years ago and became a transportation company instead of an automobile company. It placed cars in strategic locations in certain cities in Sweden, and allowed subscribers to enter the car, drive it to their desired location, and leave it there for the next driver. Each driver paid for only their small portion of the usage, insurance and depreciation. This business model came to the U.S. with companies like Zip Car and I-Go that allowed drivers to use the company's cars. However, even individual owners of cars started to loan theirs to desired drivers. An example of this is Buzz Car in France which was started by the founder of Zip Car. Also, RelayRides will rent out your car that you leave in an airport parking lot for days or weeks at a time or anywhere else you make your car available.

More recently, the idea of underutilized assets took hold with people's homes. The company “airbnb” started when two young men bought some air mattresses and rented a room in their apartment to visitors of San Francisco that could not find a hotel room. People can now offer a room in their house or apartment/condo or even an entire home. Airbnb is now the largest “hotel” in the world with 1,500,000 listings in 34,000 cities in 190 countries.

Another form of this underutilized strategy is a modified car sharing concept where you not only use a car for a specific trip but you also get a driver. This led to companies like Uber and Lyft. Car owners that have some available time will pick up passengers and drive them to a desired location. In effect, this is not much different than a private but unlicensed taxi service.

While it has the advantage of making use of an underutilized asset, it cannot really be considered a “green” system as it replaces the already existing taxi services and placing more vehicles on the road. What makes more sense is for a passenger to find a ride with someone who is already going to the desired location. In other words, hitch a ride with someone going where you also wish to go. A car occupied only by the driver can now add one or more passengers that share in the costs and thus reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions.

There are many other sharing businesses like couch-surfing where you can meet people all over the world by staying at their home for free. Just last year, 400,000 hosts greeted 4,000,000 surfers. If you have a boat to share, just contact “we are on a boat”, or contact the app to use a boat. Or if you need a lawn mower once per week, there is an app to borrow one – no need to buy one or maintain one. Again, these are all based on underutilized assets.

Stop and think of other underutilized assets and you may be able to start a new business. As an example, churches that are occupied primarily on Sunday mornings are definitely underutilized. Most of the time they are not used yet need to be maintained 100% of the time. Many of them have meeting spaces and/or large rooms for gatherings that are also underutilized. We need to take advantage of these opportunities in order to consume less resources and less energy in this deteriorating environment.