

LeihBar

“Only 20% of the items that people own are actually in use.”

Swiss Consumer Protection Agency



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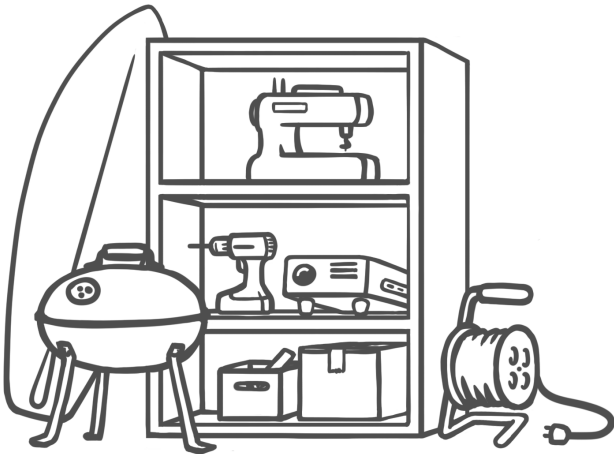
Background

The LeihBar – a library of things of all sorts and forms supports the concept of owning less and using more. As many items found in human household are only rarely in use, renting them for the few occasions they are actually needed rather than buying them can simplify human life, save money, space and especially resources.

Imagine opening a closet or storage space in your home and discovering a collection of forgotten items – perhaps a tile cutter from your last renovation, a sewing machine from an abandoned craft project, maybe a gumball-machine purchased for a memorable college-party, or a child seat used only once for a family visit. Each of these objects holds its own story and fun memories yet many sit unused for long periods of time. In fact, only 20% of the items we own are regularly in use. This raises an important question: what if we could rethink our relationship with ownership? This is where LeihBar comes into play.

LeihBar is a volunteer-run and community-driven initiative located in Bern, Switzerland, that operates as a “library of things”. It encourages individuals to own less and use more by providing access to a wide range of items. The catalogue includes 800 items from common tools like drills and kitchen appliances to leisure equipment such as an inflatable boat, and is available online. Here, members can browse and reserve items in advance in order to borrow them.

This system not only helps reduce clutter in peoples’ homes but also fosters a sense of community by allowing people to share resources. Nearly all items have been donated by the local community and, in many cases, are surprisingly expensive and of high quality while few were purchased on the secondhand market. A wish list for items is available on the website.



LeihBar also emphasises sustainability by repairing broken items in collaboration with the local repair-café and giving them new life reinforcing the value of reusing rather than discarding.

Members pay an annual membership fee of 60 Swiss francs and can then borrow as many items as they please at no additional cost. A one-month trial membership is available for 15 Swiss francs. To make borrowing from the LeihBar affordable for everyone, people with lower income, such as students and apprentices, can choose to pay only 48 Swiss francs a year. People with the cultural discount card “Kulturlegi” may pay only 30 Swiss francs. These membership-fees cover the costs for rent, electricity, website and the acquisition of new items.

Since its foundation, the 700 members have made nearly 16,700 rentals with nearly 4000 rentals per year.

The Spark

The LeihBar concept was initiated by the Swiss consumer protection organisation. Raffael Wüthrich, then head of sustainability, spearheaded the project through a successful crowdfunding campaign. The project's visual identity, including the logo, posters, storage space and lending counter designs was developed in collaboration with a student from the Basel School of Design. A dedicated group of volunteers then worked together to set up the initial space in the building of Bern's communal space “Viktoria”.

LeihBar officially opened its doors in December 2018 marking the beginning of this innovative sharing initiative. The concept quickly gained traction and two years later, in September 2020, LeihBar Bern expanded its reach by opening a second location in Bern's neighbourhood Wabern.

Governance Model

In the spring of 2019, the LeihBar Bern Association was established allowing the Consumer Protection organisation to transfer most responsibilities to it and making it a nearly independent entity. Since then, a cooperative partnership with the Consumer Protection Organisation has been maintained in the form of consulting when it comes to data protection or IT support. To spread the message, Bern's city council for waste disposal and recycling supports Leihbar with an annual budget of 1000 Swiss francs for publicity measures.

The operation and ongoing development of LeihBar are managed by a team of 38 non-paid volunteers. This diverse group spans a wide range of ages, professional backgrounds and social experiences. Collectively, they contribute close to 3,000 work hours, expertise and experience.

The volunteer team's diversity and dedication have been instrumental to LeihBar's growth and success. This collaborative effort ensures that LeihBar continues to serve the community effectively promoting sustainable consumption and resource sharing, but also the priority of ‘thinking local’. Available support from the Consumer Protection Organisation combined with the volunteers' enthusiasm has created a robust foundation for LeihBar's mission of encouraging people to borrow rather than buy, thereby reducing waste and fostering community connections.

Social and Environmental Benefits

LeihBar not only promotes sustainable consumption but also offers a range of social and environmental benefits. Through encouraging people to donate and share items with their local community the association strengthens communal spirit and the feeling of connection. By facilitating the borrowing of items instead of purchasing them LeihBar also significantly reduces the demand for new products, conserving valuable resources such as raw materials, energy and water that are typically consumed during manufacturing. This model helps decrease waste and lowers the carbon footprint associated with producing goods.





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Members also benefit financially and can save money by accessing items they may only need occasionally rather than investing in seldom-used possessions. Additionally, LeihBar helps reclaim space in homes as fewer items lead to less clutter and a more organised environment.

A key aspect of LeihBar's success is its diverse group of volunteers who come from various age groups and professional backgrounds. This diversity enriches the community experience fostering connections among members as they engage in sharing resources. By participating in this initiative, volunteers also help building a network of trust and mutual support within their own community.

Additionally, the initiative promotes social equity by making fashion accessible to all. Participants can refresh their wardrobes without spending money, making it easier for individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to access quality clothing. This inclusive approach not only reduces financial barriers but also encourages a mindset shift towards valuing quality over quantity in clothing choices.

Replicability Potential

The LeihBar concept shows strong potential for replicability in various communities. Its model of a “library of things”, can and has been adapted through several autonomous local initiatives to different cities and regions allowing communities to share resources efficiently and sustainably. As of now, there are 23 library-of-things actions in Switzerland, which arose from local initiatives, act independently and are all equally successful. These expansions highlight the growing interest in resource-sharing initiatives across Switzerland as well as other countries such as Germany. Interested parties can find a “make your own LeihBar” manual at the website of the consumer protection agency. The concept proved to be specifically suitable and effective in urban areas with limited and expensive living space, limiting peoples’ options to accumulate things, as well as a large demographic age range between 20 and 50 years.

The flexibility of the LeihBar model makes it suitable for various urban and rural settings as it can be tailored to the specific needs and interests of different local communities. By fostering local engagement and collaboration, the LeihBar concept can effectively promote sustainable consumption practices while building social connections among residents.

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