

figures



sharing economy
gig work
Airbnb
insights in the everyday life of a host

⇒ *The Sharing Economy, Gig Work and Airbnb*

With the emergence of the internet and increasingly shorter innovation cycles in technological development, ever more platforms and apps have emerged in the past years as (1) marketplaces for a supposedly new kind of economy that has become widespread, generally discussed as gig economy¹, on-demand economy, share economy, collaborative economy or freelance economy and (2) intermediaries for gig work. Although gig work is increasingly calling the attention of politicians, the media and scholars, it has been an academically unexplored phenomenon, above all regarding its effects on the working subjects. In the past years, any research was done on how gig economy platforms might change labour relations and which kind of demands these platforms impose on its users, namely the working subjects.

In order to close this gap, during my Master's Thesis I undertook an ethnographic study on everyday discourses and practices of Airbnb hosts in Barcelona, who share their private apartment with tourists. The work was guided by a theoretical framework that is sensitive to power relations. With my research, I want to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and demands that emanate from the gig work platform or app (for example through the feedback mechanism) on the one hand, and from the exercise of hosting as an economic activity or new form of labour itself on the other hand. Of special interest was, how Airbnb hosts deal with the challenges and demands that the hosting activity entails for them. In this sense, the research aimed at analysing ⇒ the effects of "hosting" on the subject, especially

regarding the hosts' everyday practices. Airbnb hosts work as service providers in their own home, offering their spare rooms and therefore ⇒ sharing their privately used apartment with tourists. The hosting activity comprises different online practices – creation of the profile, management of the account, communication with guests, feedback of guests- and offline practices – cleaning the home and the guest room, check-in of guests, key delivery and being a tourist guide for each guest. These online and offline activities go hand in hand, being the offline activities executed in the most intimate space, whereas the online activities are executed in the digital space, being enabled through diverse operational components of the tech-based platform and.

⇒ *The commercially shared space thanks to Airbnb*

A particular gig economy company that flourishes since August 2008 as an online marketplace for accommodations is Airbnb (short form for air mattress and bed and breakfast). The online platform provides a space where providers and demanders of spare spaces (rooms, garages, igloos, apartments, castles, etc.) can meet on a peer-to-peer basis and establish a contract over a short-term right of use of a specific spare space. Although the sharing of rooms or flats as such has already existed in former times without the help of the internet, these sharing initiatives only accounted for a small niche market as they were generally related to high transaction costs (Schwalbe 2014: 12)². Given the technological possibilities with the emergence of the internet, smartphones and the innovation of platforms like Airbnb, the market of sharing accommodation has changed dramatically, as these platforms considerably reduce the transaction costs for the mediation of room or flat sharing (ibid.: 13). This fact greatly explains why this kind of platforms (that enable a distinction between the use and the ownership of a space) have been so successful in the past years (Schwalbe 2014). The business model of Airbnb, which started originally in 2007 as a start-up company of

1 The gig economy basically refers to markets which bring together providers and consumers on a gig (or job) basis. These marketplaces are built up through internet-based technological platforms or smartphone applications, which allow clients to search for providers or a specific job. It is in this sense understood as an on-demand economy, where gig workers enter in agreement with the tech-based company to provide a service to the company's clients. The gig workers provide the demanded service and are normally compensated for the job through a payment system integrated in the app or platform.

2 Schwalbe, Ulrich (2014): Die Markteintritte von Uber und Airbnb: Wettbewerbsgefährdung oder Effizienzsteigerung? Uber und Airbnb: zur Mikroökonomik der "Sharing Economy". In ifo Schnelldienst 67 (21), pp. 13-15

three students, who wanted to earn some extra money during a congress through renting out sleeping places on air mattresses in their apartment, has grown exponentially in the past years. This has led investors to value the company at more than 20 billion U.S. dollars (Lines 2015: 1168).³

The platform advertises on its homepage that Airbnb has more than 60.000.000 guests worldwide, over 2 million listings in more than 34.000 cities and operates in over 194 countries (Airbnb 2016).⁴ These numbers show that Airbnb has not only surpassed the mayor hotel chains in room number, growth rates and valuations of their revenues (see Cusumano 2014)⁵ but also that the specific advantage of the platform is its only dependence on the power of network effects (Cusumano 2014: 32-33). These lead to the continuous incorporation to ever more available rooms in the platforms portfolio, as ever more people decide to rent out their spare rooms through the platform. In this sense, the platform itself only must wait for the incorporation of more rooms without investing in the infrastructure. This is surely a business model that challenges and in the future possibly changes the traditional hotel industry. ⇒ An interesting point of view on the Airbnb business is the one of Dan Hill (2014)⁶, who argues that the platform enables creating fractal subdivisions of domestic space, forming hotels from our interior rooms (ibid.: 221). The author conceptualizes the business idea of Airbnb as a commodification of domestic space, referring to the maximization of resource utilization applied to an unoccupied or spare space (ibid.: 219-220). In this context, the author criticizes the idea of understanding Airbnb as part of the sharing economy as a complete misnomer,

being the business clearly more dedicated in evading taxation and regulation than in promoting the space of the city as a public good (ibid.: 220).

⇒ *Sharing practices in Barcelona - flat sharing before and after Airbnb*

The housing market in the central neighbourhoods of Barcelona is conditioned by the architecture, mainly huge 19th century buildings with spacious multi-roomed flats. ⇒ This “physical” condition characterizes the way people live in Barcelona, since high rents and maintenance costs have forced people to share their apartment since decades. For a single person or even a couple it is almost impossible to cope with the costs of an own apartment in the central neighbourhoods, unless one has an outstanding full-time income (or two double incomes as a couple). Another factor is the difficult labour market situation in Spain, which explains why not only students live together in shared flats, but also many workers. Above all low-income workers, the “milleuristas” (people who earn a salary of around a thousand euros a month) have difficulties in affording an own apartment. Besides, many immigrants start home sharing when they move to the city, based on their still no-existent or little income.

⇒ All interviewed hosts in Barcelona had experiences with home sharing before starting their Airbnb business. Home sharing, in this sense, should be understood as an activity that protects people from homelessness and secures the maintenance of a home. It is common that residents in the city of Barcelona start renting a room in a flat and not an entire flat. The housing market for rooms is very fluctuant and it is common that people change rooms frequently. Most of the interviewed hosts look back on the experience of renting rooms in shared flats during years. In this sense, home sharing did not emerge as a new practice when Airbnb arrived in Barcelona. Quite the contrary, it was an already existing practice of the city’s inhabitants, and an installed way of living in the city before the Airbnb boom. For most of my interview partners home sharing and later doing Airbnb was not only a solution to their housing but also to their labour

3 Lines, Gregory E. (2015): HEJ, NOT HEJ DÅ: REGULATING AIRBNB IN THE NEW AGE OF ARIZONA VACATION RENTALS. In Arizona Law review 57 (4), pp. 1163–1182

4 Airbnb (2016): About Us. Available online at <https://www.airbnb.com/about/about-us?locale=en>, accessed on 22.06.2016

5 Cusumano, Michael A. (2014): How traditional firms must compete in the sharing economy. In Commun. ACM 58 (1), pp. 32–34.

6 Hill, Dan (2014): The commodification of everything. Dan Hill on restaurant day and Airbnb. In: Sqm. The quantified home; [an exploration of the evolving identity of the home, from utopian experiment to the factory of data; on the occasion of the 24th Biennale Interieur, October 17-26, 2014, Kortrijk, Belgium]. Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, pp. 216–223

situation. The interviewed Airbnb hosts share similar unstable, precarious and even exploitative labour and income histories, working in temporary, part-time and/or poorly paid jobs as well as in irregular jobs with returning phases of unemployment. Some interviewees have worked simultaneously in two different part-time jobs to earn their living. Most interviewees have experiences as independent workers, as employees as well as undeclared workers. In retrospective, most couples don't have sufficient income to meet the expenses, as their labour situation is rarely characterized by a full double income but rather by under-employment or phases of (returning or alternating) unemployment. Depending economically on one main salary, it is almost impossible for couples to maintain an own apartment. Although couples generally state to share the Airbnb related tasks in equal parts, it is generally the unemployed or underemployed partner who assumes more responsibilities in comparison to the working partner.

In the case of Barcelona, there is hardly any economic alternative to the widespread practice of home sharing, as people economically depend on the income of sub-renting spare rooms in their apartments. When the Airbnb boom arrived in Barcelona, it only restructured with whom the apartment was shared, shifting the supply of rooms from long-term flatmates to a new group of roommates, namely ever-changing tourists.

⇒ *The boom of “doing Airbnb”*

Airbnb started slowly in Barcelona until its boom in 2013-2014, when suddenly everyone was talking about it and hosting through Airbnb finally tuned into a brand. One host puts it in a nutshell, “And nowadays, well today Airbnb is a... name... [...] It's like ‘you do Airbnb’. It's doing Airbnb”. Through its success, Airbnb has gained a monopoly position regarding short-term rental platforms in Barcelona, as it has in most tourism centres around the world. Airbnb has pushed other platforms totally out of the market. This is corroborated through the fact that all interviewed hosts rent their spare rooms exclusively through the Airbnb platform. They don't see the need to spread

their hosing probabilities through more platforms, as the Airbnb system ensures them full capacity utilization.

One host explains the boom and success of Airbnb in relation to Barcelona's position as a tourist magnet and the Spanish economic crisis. His experience in the tourism sector was a rising demand of hotel rooms despite or precisely because of the crisis. On the one hand, the crisis stimulated the internal local tourism, motivating Spanish tourists to visit Barcelona, who before could afford far off destinations. On the other hand, Barcelona became one of the top destinations of European low-cost airlines in the past 10 years. The rising influx of foreign and national tourists could not be accommodated in the city by the consistent supply of conventionally licensed accommodations (hostels, hotels, tourist apartments). In this situation of overdemand regarding touristic accommodations and the restrictive municipal legal context⁷, Airbnb presented itself as an easy solution to fill the gap. With the high demand for overnight stays, it was only a question of entrepreneurship to create the corresponding supply. Airbnb proposed a new and uncomplicated way of creating relatively cheap accommodation, satisfying and appealing to a tourist, who was interested in and open for an alternative type of accommodation. The average price of an Airbnb listing in Barcelona depends on several factors, lying between 40 and 60 euros per night for a standard double room during summer season. In winter, a room may cost half of that, whereas outstanding listings have comparable prices to expensive hotel rooms during the entire year.

The effects, that the booming market for short-term accommodation had on the housing market in Barcelona, were devastating. One host explains that apartment owners started raising the monthly rent of their apartments in the city centre, assuming that the future tenant was going to run a profitable Airbnb business in that flat. According to the hosts, basic rents quickly raised from 1000 to 3000 euros per month. Not only the average value and rent for entire apartments grew with Airbnb. According to the interviewed hosts, rooms in a shared flat were available for around 300 euros per month before the Airbnb boom. Nowadays they cost at least 500 euros. The interviewed hosts attribute the

7 City hall stopped allocating tourism licenses.

increase of net rents and the rents of average rooms, that were available for residents who live, study and work in Barcelona, to the booming Airbnb business. Some hosts nowadays feel guilty for being involved in the Airbnb business because of the increased housing prices. But nonetheless, when starting their Airbnb business, they were carried away by the -promoted and real life-simplicity and speed of making easy money through the Airbnb platform.

In comparison to the average price of 300 euros that a room in Barcelona has cost, the financial profit from turning a room into an Airbnb listing is undeniable when analysing the hosts' prices more thoroughly. Based on the data from the online listings, the interviewed hosts can earn on average between 630 and 1200 euros per month with a single room, and between 900 and 1850 euros with a double room.⁸ That means that switching from sub-renting to locals towards tourists can double or even sextuple the host's income.

⇒ *“Easy money” and “amateur investments”*

According to my findings, all hosts saw very low barriers for starting their Airbnb business because they knew that the demand for rooms on a short-term basis was very high in Barcelona. “Doing Airbnb” is generally understood as a business that generates “easy money”, which means that it only takes a minimum, amateur investment for starting the business and only few follow-up investments, as well as little work for running it. ⇒ It is seen as a way of maximizing the economic advantage regarding a spare room.

Above all during the years of the Airbnb boom the word gets around that Airbnb is “the” business to get into, the safest and easiest way of earning an extra income in Barcelona. Motivated by this “hearsay” and the advertising of friends who were already hosting, the interviewed hosts tried their luck with their own Airbnb business.

⁸ Maximum possible income according to the published prices on the profiles at full occupancy during the month. Not taking into consideration weekly or monthly discounts for long-term stays.

Talking about possible alternatives for generating an income, the Airbnb hosts explained that the easiness of the Airbnb business was already common knowledge in Barcelona. Most hosts did not see any (profitable) alternative to Airbnb, as ⇒ the platform helped capitalizing a resource that was already given, namely the own residence.

The accuracy of their initial assumption of being an “easy business” was quickly confirmed and hosts did not need to search or wait for clients: after putting the listing on the platform it was immediately booked. By the time of the interviews, hosts were completely booked in advance between 2 to 4 months ahead. Based on this demand, hosts are neither concerned about finding new clients nor about their competition. Regarding their initial investments to start the business, hosts followed the principle of minimal investment (minimal allocation of resources). They renovated their homes with very tight budgets, took advantage of already existing furniture, received furniture as a gift from family or friends, built furniture from recycled materials, and one host even collected several pieces from the bulky waste on the street. Most started hosting with the minimal necessary items (bed, bed linen) and furnished the room(s) little by little. One guiding principle for starting the Airbnb business is making money out of something that is already there, exploiting and capitalizing spare rooms in their apartments at the lowest possible cost.

⇒ *Working in your own home?*

Blurring boundaries in the life of a host

Airbnb is associated with work, by the hosts, in the sense of being a periodic activity that generates an income for the daily subsistence. But, hosting is distinguished from a “normal” Monday to Friday job, in which employees must follow rules and a function established by someone else. In comparison to formal jobs related to a legal relation of dependence, Airbnb is understood as an independent business without a legal framework. It is framed as an autonomous work, a self-generated workplace, in which hosts must create their own regulations and guiding concepts. The discourse of most hosts is centred on “being their own boss” and

having the choice regarding how they run their Airbnb business and how they coordinate hosting with other labour or free time activities. Airbnb related tasks are related to the following “off-line” and “online” activities: (1) clean, tidy up and decorate the room and apartment, wait for the guests to arrive, receive the guest and do the check-in, show the apartment and “play concierge” (giving information on Barcelona and possible touristic activities, events and locations, hand over a map, make guests feel comfortable, guide them through the city), buy ingredients for the breakfast, help in emergencies, manage employees and (2) communicate with guests through the platform, manage the Airbnb profile and give feedback to guests. These tasks are often perceived as spread or multiple tasks that can and sometimes must be exercised without any fixed schedules. ⇔ The fact that most Airbnb related tasks are housework tasks, makes it difficult for some hosts to perceive hosting as a job. The boundary between work and free time becomes blurred by the space where hosting is exercised, namely the own home, and by the type of activities that Airbnb is related with (household activities). Some hosts associate most hosting activities with normal everyday household tasks, which must be done being a host or not. This makes it particularly difficult to draw a strict line between Airbnb-related working and free time activities.

Nevertheless, other hosts distinguish between specific hosting activities and common everyday household tasks, which they would complete anyways. Whereas the cleaning and preparation of the guest room (sweep, clean the dust, take off, washing and drying bed sheets, putting clean sheets on the bed, remove the waste, air the room) and cleaning the bathroom is normally associated with “work”, other cleaning responsibilities in the home are not. One host, for example, likes to think of her Airbnb related tasks as a part-time job at a hotel. She perceives hosting as if she had the order to only prepare one hotel room per day. For her it is a job as any other, with the only difference that it is exercised at her home. After preparing and leaving the guest room, she feels that she has completed her working responsibilities. This thinking enables her to distinguish between working and free time activities, as the doorstep of the guest’s room is also a physical demarcation between her “working space” and her “home”.

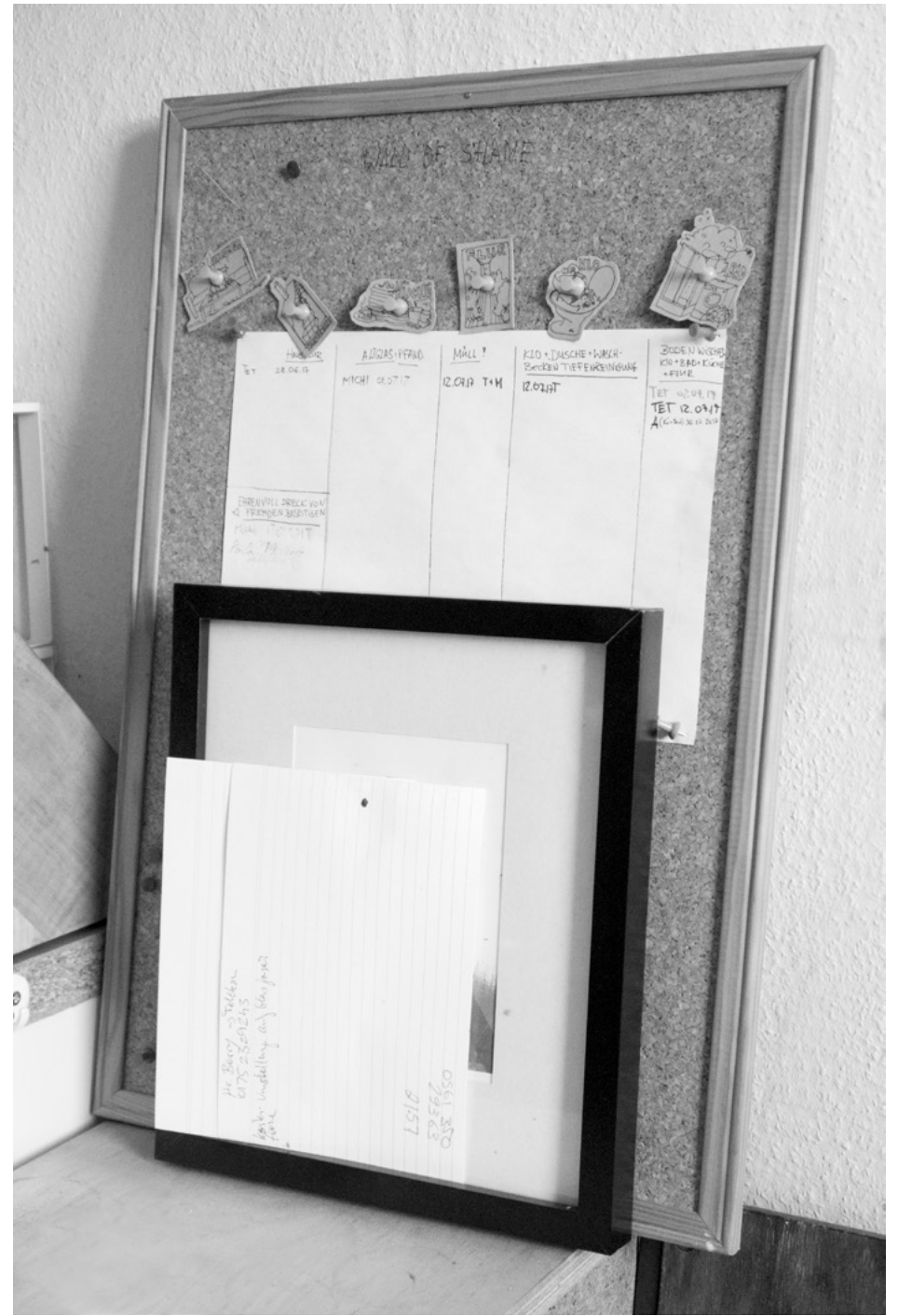


















⇒ *The hosting activity as a structure-lending factor in the everyday life*

The hosting activity must be understood as a structure-lending factor in the everyday lives of the interviewed hosts. Their daily routines are strongly shaped by the arrival times of their guest, being their everyday life and hosting practice generally characterized by the duality of (1) waiting for the guest and (2) interrupting free time activities. One couple explains two feasible options: “Running, or losing hours staying at home waiting for a person to arrive”. Although the couple tries to avoid sacrificing any of their activities, they report on being forced to “run”, which means to hurry up with or interrupt an activity in order to be home at the arrival time of new guests. The obligation to be physically at home is a key demand of the hosting activity, being related to several aspects. On the one hand, it is important to be at home in order to meet the expectation of a good host. There is the predominant feeling that the host should be the one that welcomes the guest, delivers the keys and makes space for clearing any doubts. Hosts are generally guided by the need to establish a personal contact to their guests. Especially the first encounter between host and guest appears repetitively in the discourses of the hosts as a main factor of success of their business. With making the guest feel comfortable and safe from the first moment on, they aim at obtaining positive feedback and rating on the platform, returning guests as well as word-of-mouth recommendations.

On the other hand, hosts are convinced that one should not leave the business for too long, e.g. for vacations. Many hosts look back on problems with or negative critiques from guests while being personally absent, which motivates them to be present without delegating their hosting responsibilities to third persons. In this sense, hosts structure their personal activities according to the guests’ schedules.

⇒ *The shared home – some notes on Airbnb apartments*

Whereas in the digital space, the pictures of the listed apartments on the Airbnb platform look exaggeratedly bright, when entering

the real space, the visitor is confronted with and surprised by darkness and dullness. This can be traced back to the fact that Airbnb hosts take advantage of the free photographer service offered by Airbnb. This service provides them with professionally taken and edited photos that give a warm and familiar impression of their homes.

In Barcelona, most Airbnb apartments are located in typical 19th century buildings, with the characteristic highly decorated stone tiles on the floor, long hallways, huge living and dining areas, front rooms with French doors, inner dormitories and tiny storage rooms. ⇨ In some apartments, the hosting activity and the presence of tourists in the apartments is more visible than in others. In one apartment, you are welcomed by hundreds of thank-you notes from former guests, maps of Barcelona and the world as well as a bookshelf with a free book exchange. Another host put signs in English on the different trash-bins in his kitchen in order to make the recycling system clear to his guests. In many apartments, you find a handwritten or printed sign with the information on the Wi-Fi connection in the living room, on the dining table or under the TV. Other hosts ban this kind of information to the guest room itself, putting a sign behind the door or a note on the bedside table. They resist themselves against any kind of visibility of the hosting activity in their home, arguing that they don't want it to feel like living in a hotel.

Except the private rooms or dormitories, all communal areas are shared by the host and the guests, such as the kitchen, the living and dining room, the bathroom and the balcony. All hosts have designated spaces for storing personal items or groceries for every resident of the apartment, including the short-term guests. In all apartments spaces have been taken over by the guests: in the bathroom cabinet, you can find the guests' toilet bags; in the fridge and the cupboard in the kitchen you can see where guests store their groceries. In some apartments guests even leave their personal mark. An example is an artist that stayed for an artist's workshop in Barcelona and left the final painting on the guest room wall. ⇨ The guest rooms themselves look very similar, offering the Airbnb standard: two single beds or one double bed, a cupboard, a bedside table and a lamp; sometimes even a

table with a chair and/or a couch. Most furniture is second hand, was found on the street or self-made by repairing, recycling or up-cycling an already existing piece of furniture. Whereas the guest rooms resemble one another regarding the furniture, the appearance of the apartments differs according to the number of rooms listed on the platform. The more rooms of an apartment are shared through Airbnb, the more depersonalized are the shared areas as well as the offered guest rooms. Whereas apartments with only one listed room still present the style and personal character of the host (for example through personal and family pictures, decorative items brought from vocational trips around the world, self-made lamps, etc.), it was notable that the more commercial apartments (with two or more listings) are characterized by the criteria of availability, functionality and easiness to clean.

In all cases, the intimate private rooms of the hosts show more personality than the rest of their apartments. Their dormitories are decorated with holiday snaps or photos of shared moments with friends and family. You can find paintings on the walls, handicrafts, plants, childhood memories, books. This individuality is generally less visible in the shared areas of the apartment and vanishes almost completely in the listed Airbnb guest rooms.

⇨ *Hosting an "invisible guest"*

A very striking discourse among the interviewed Airbnb hosts is the advantage of hosting tourists in comparison with long-term flatmates. As already explained above, most hosts have a broad experience with home sharing. Their decision on starting hosting tourists through Airbnb is mainly based on the economic benefit and the problematic cohabitation with long-term flatmates. ⇨ Most hosts simply felt tired of sharing their flat and daily life with permanent flatmates. What is striking in the hosts' descriptions of their guests, is that these are shaped by the guests' absence in the hosts' homes. Guests can be better characterized as "invisible guests" as they spend most of their time outside the host's home (pursuing touristic activities in the city), or locking themselves into their rooms when arriving late

at night. Guests rarely use the shared areas, like the kitchen and the living room. According to one host “they [the guests] are out all day” and another one remembers several reservations, during which neither he nor his girlfriend ever met the guests. In this sense, guests are not perceived as invasive but rather as generally absent. Some hosts even forget that they have guests at home. It is precisely this absence of guests that makes one host continue with Airbnb. He explains that if guests would start using “his” space more intensely and compromise the intimacy and calmness of his home, he would consider giving up the activity.

The “invisible” Airbnb guests present two main advantages for Airbnb hosts: (1) they only stay a brief period of time, which reduces the risk of personal incompatibilities or conflicts and (2) they use the home almost exclusively for sleeping. This general absence in the homes and the minimal use of shared areas are perceived as a huge advantage for the intimacy of the hosts. Hosting Airbnb guests is seen as easier and less conflictive: it offers the maximum economic output and fewer conflicts based on a minimum emotional investment of the host. ⇨ Shared moments of daily life, e.g. shared meals or free time activities, are the exception rather than the rule. Hardly ever you can find an intended togetherness in Airbnb homes.

⇨ *Self-control: Changed everyday practices through hosting*

Although most guests are generally absent in the Airbnb homes, the hosting activity motivates hosts to change their everyday practices. In their majority, changing practices are related to a self-imposed self-management and control.

Several hosts restrict their use of the common spaces or even change their daily habits because they are worried about disturbing their guests. ⇨ Hosts mention that they strongly avoid making noises at home and therefore moderate their passion for listening to loud music. One host has reduced his social activities at home (e.g. reunions and parties with friends) and constantly controls that it’s not too noisy. He tries to limit social activities in his flat to the weekends and to keep his home calm, because making noises and disturbing his guests at night might appear

in the feedback comments afterwards. He explains that during meetings with his friends he is very restless and admonishes his friends to speak softly. As a result, he can hardly enjoy social gatherings at his home.

Another host feels that she cannot move freely in her home anymore. The architecture of her home, above all the direct connection between the guest room and the kitchen/dining room, is conditioning and limiting her eating and cooking practices. This goes so far that she rarely uses the kitchen and dining area because she feels uncomfortable. Asking her about how she feels in the presence of a guest, she responds that she cannot move freely anymore. She feels like she cannot use her kitchen, as long as her guests are still around. This goes so far that for having breakfast, she waits until her guests leave her apartment, or she leaves her apartment for having breakfast at a bakery. She also has problems with cooking, as she thinks that the smell and the noise could bother her guests. That is why she tries to avoid cooking late in the evening. With that, she is also avoiding sharing the dining space with her guests. She says that she only feels free in her flat when she has no guests, being forced to restrict her routines while having them. ⇨ Regarding her personal barriers for sharing the kitchen and the dining space, some hosts also imposed spatial barriers in their apartments. On the one hand, these barriers help hosts to deal with their distrust regarding a stranger, and on the other, they help with gaining more intimacy. One couple for example installed safety locks on the doors of their and their daughter’s bedroom. Every time they leave the apartment, they close the doors to their private space in order to impede that guests enter their private space. Another host locks the door to her studio and connected bedroom when she leaves. Besides, she locks herself in at night when she has male Airbnb guests or she expects guest to come home drunk.

Another host comments that during his initial time as a host, he interacted a lot with his guests and organized dinners or parties for his guests. Since three years he feels the need to have more privacy. Nowadays he limits his interaction with the guests to the necessary minimum and dedicates more time to himself, withdrawn in the living room. He even put a curtain on the glass

door of the living room and often closes the door for not being disturbed while reading a book, watching a movie or talking to a friend. Similarly, another host explains that he closes the door of his living room in order to have more intimacy or peace while working on the computer. These examples show that Airbnb hosts actively impose special barriers because they feel the need to be left alone.

⇒ *Airbnb home sharing – a real sharing experience?*

What can be finally said about the flat sharing experience of the interviewed Airbnb hosts in Barcelona? How can their discourses and practices be understood in a broader sense of “sharing”? As shown above, ⇒ home sharing was an already installed practice in Barcelona before the Airbnb platform appeared. The interviewed Airbnb hosts look back on a broad experience in sharing their flats with roommates. In several occasions, it is just this flat sharing experience that motivated hosts to start sharing their home through Airbnb: their negative experiences with long-term flatmates and related conflicts in the daily life pushed several hosts towards short-term rental platform. Many host took a conscious decision on shifting from cohabiting with students or workers towards sharing their flat with ever changing tourists: beside the huge economic benefits, it was also an option for gaining more intimacy and living in more peaceful cohabitation. The discourses on the advantages of living with “invisible guests”, who rarely use the common spaces, show that the hosts are less interested in sharing their homes and daily lives with their guests. They rather took the decision to do Airbnb in order to live more independently from their flatmates, compared to former experiences with long-term roommates. In this sense, the idea of sharing behind the platform should be put into question. The platform surely proposes a different type of home sharing. It is a marketplace for a commercially shared place, where the guest pays for the temporal use of a specific space. It does not have much to do much with neighbourhood or cohabitation sharing experiences. In this context calling Airbnb a sharing economy really seems to be a misnomer.

And one should also give a thought to something that might have been underestimated by the Airbnb hosts. ⇒ Whereas sharing a home with flatmates, who split the expenses for the rent and ancillary costs, might create a feeling of shared responsibility and equality in rights of use, sharing the own home with the paying customer or Airbnb guest evokes feelings of being a service provider in the own home. By renting out your spare space through Airbnb, hosts are no longer only flatmates, but find themselves in the role of being service providers, cleaning staff and touristic guides, working from inside their own homes. With the help of certain operational elements of the platform, as for example the feedback mechanism, relations of power are established between the Airbnb guest and the host, who constantly struggles for making the guest happy, even at the cost of limiting the daily routines and personal uses of the supposedly shared space. It seems that the economic remuneration makes these cutbacks in the personal daily life bearable. If this has much to do with sharing is an open question. ↵

☞ Charlotte Sandoval, born in 1987 in Bielefeld, Germany, currently works as a research associate at a private state-approved university of applied sciences. From 2008-2013 she studied International Relations at the Universidad Católica de Córdoba in Argentina and finished her studies with the academic degree Licenciatura en Relaciones Internacionales. During her studies, she spent one year at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Münster. In 2016, she graduated from the interdisciplinary English-speaking Master Program Global Political Economy of Kassel University. In her thesis, she elaborated an ethnographic study of everyday discourses and practices of Airbnb hosts in Barcelona, who rent spare rooms in their private homes to tourists through the online platform Airbnb. From a sociological and labour perspective, she put a focus on the working subject, namely the Airbnb host. In the context of changing labour relations and ongoing technological developments (as e.g. the emergence of gig economy platforms as intermediaries and marketplaces for gig work), she scrutinized which principles guide “doing Airbnb” and which effects offline and online activities related to the hosting activity have on the everyday lives of the working subjects. She made use of a poststructuralist theoretical framework, mainly based on the Foucauldian concept of power¹ and neoliberalism as governmentality². Her study shows that the hosting activity and certain operational tools of the Airbnb platform and app impose new demands on hosts that can be embedded in neoliberal thinking, namely an increased demand of self-management, self-responsibility, risk-management as well as constant availability and accessibility. Several functions of the platform can be identified as meeting point between the coercive work control (by the platform/app) and a self-imposed work control (by the hosts). These illustrate social relations of power, based on Foucault’s concepts technologies of dominance and technologies of the self³. A summary of her thesis will soon be available in the Working Papers Series “New Research in Global Political Economy”⁴.

- 1 Regarding Foucault's concept of power, have a look at:
Foucault, Michel (1980): About the beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self. Two Lectures at Dartmouth. In *Political Theory* 21 (2 May 1993), pp. 198–227
Foucault, Michel (1980): Truth and Power. In Michel Foucault, Colin Gordon (Eds.): *Power/knowledge. Selected interviews and other writings 1972 - 1977*. New York: Vintage Books.
Foucault, Michel (1980): Two Lectures. In Michel Foucault, Colin Gordon (Eds.): *Power/knowledge. Selected interviews and other writings 1972 - 1977*. New York: Vintage Books, pp. 78–108.
Lemke, Thomas (2012): *Foucault, governmentality, and critique*. Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publ (Cultural politics & the promise of democracy).
Rose, Nikolas (1998): *Inventing our selves. Psychology, power and personhood*. 1. paperback ed. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press (Cambridge studies in the history of psychology).
- 2 Regarding the concept of governmentality, have a look at:
Foucault, Michel (1991): *Governmentality*. In Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter Miller (Eds.): *The Foucault effect. Studies in governmentality; with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault*. Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, pp. 87–104.
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sharing figures



#2 beds and breakfasts

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