

Abridged TITL

Couchsurfing: Exploring the World

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~~(Learning report)~~

Abstract—Travelling is a fundamental step to growth as a human being. Many characteristics and virtues are developed through the exchange of new experiences and travelling is the perfect scenario to stimulate this aspects. This activity changed my perception about the world and people.

This is not an abstract of the document

Index Terms—Travel, communication, change, initiative.

1 INTRODUCTION

HUMAN beings are innately social and are shaped by their experiences with others [2]. These experiences are fundamental for a person to grow as a human being. This activity was made on the holidays and the primary goal was to take some rest from the classes, it soon became a more complex and interesting experience. This report pretends to analyse the communication and interactions with different people from different cultures and how those interactions can change the mindset and attitudes of an individual.

2 TRAVEL

Since the beginning of human life, man has the urge to travel. Initially, there was a basic need; we had to travel to find food or a better place to settle, we were nomads. Later, we developed the ability to stay and to settle down in one fixed place, but the desire to expand our village or to meet new villages was always present. This wish made the man discover the world, either by land or ocean, by horse or boat. Human history was always based on travelling. Man wanted to find the best spices at the lower prices, the best natural resources or even conquer another country. Nowadays, thanks to the

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available technology, travelling become simpler and easier. Our goals, nowadays, are different than in the past. We travel to see new places, to go to work meetings, to visit our family and friends or to grow as human being.

3 A BETTER PERSON

In this section, I will describe how travel changed me and what I learned.

3.1 Who are you?

When someone asks, "Who are you?" It would be simple enough to respond with our name. However if the person wanted to know the entire story about who we are, the question would be more difficult to answer. We had to give details about our age, height and weight. We may also include all our preferences and the secrets that we have never told. We also had to express our feelings towards situations like our impatience when an issue get complex, our anger when we lost a game or our fear of speaking in public. To give all of this information would be a real challenge. But if the questioner was still curious and asked, "How did you get the way you are?", we could say that we choose to be, because we did our selections based on our feelings and attitudes. This answer is a natural one and in most cases is true, however in a large scale it is not. The impact of the world on all of us is greater than we realize and everything was its influence bib1. Everybody has an unique story and to

[illegible]

truly know someone, including ourselves, we have to know that story and to understand it. Through this concept, I learn that everybody has its own life story, and this is what truly make us. I learn to truly understand and listen other people stories and experiences, this also gave me a strong ability to observe the small details that can reveal powerful informations about each person.

3.2 Mine is better

When we were first-graders all of us turned to our classmates and said, "My dad is bigger than yours" or "My crayons color is better", when this happen we are not just speaking about our father or our crayons. We are saying something about ourselves, "I'm special, I'm more important than you". Not only in the first years of school but also in the high school or university, a high percentage of people believe that they are above average in leadership ability or that they are above average in ability to get along with others.

For many people the "mine is better" tendency is balanced by the awareness that other people feel the same way about their things, that it's an unavoidable part of being human to do so. The problem is when people believe that they are on a higher truth about their situation [1]. When we travel and interact with people who have more life experience than we do, we realize that our believes or our preceptions, sometimes, are not better, and may even do not be good at all. Travelling showed me that even if we believe that we know a lot about something, it is always necessary to listen other people opinion and to respect them. This is easier said than done, however for more than one time, I totally disagreed about someone's opinion and after some time, when I got more life experience, when I started to see the world in a different way, I discovered that not only he was right but my initial idea made no sense.

We do not know everything. It is not human possible to do that, but an amazing skill that we do have, is the ability to learn. I started to control the "mine is better" attitude when I found out that it completely can distort perception and

corrupt judgment. This showed me that even if I do not agree with something, it is necessary to be tolerant and to respect it. Showed my that the opinion of the others, even if they are the opposite of mine, they are not againsts me. I feel that I am more tolerant and I started to put myself in a third person perspective whenever there is a debate.

3.3 Communication

Communication is the fundamental key for human interactions. Not only is important to communicate, but also to communicate in a correct way.

Either to ask directions, to order some food at the restaurant or to meet new people, travel forces, in the good way, to talk with new people. Couchsurf highly promotes the communication among people. Not only we talk to our hosts, we also talk to their family and friends or sometimes we can go to a Couchsurf meeting and a considerable amount of people is present. After a couple of days talking to many different people, an interesting phenomenon happens: Conversations start to become boring. Not in a bad way. We all have a pre-script in our head that we tell when we meet new people. We have a set of questions that we always ask and a couple of stories that we tell. However after some conversations, telling the same stories and asking the same question becomes boring. One think that I noticed, is that I simply did not wanted to talked about me. First, because most stories were already told a lots of times and second because when there is a trully desire to listen to the other person and to make original questions that we think in the moment, conversation becomes a lot more interesting and unforgettable.

This way, I feel that my conversation skills improved a lot. I opened my conversations options and now I know that I have much more to talk than only a few funny stories about me. Also, when meeting new people, I feel that it is an opportunity to ask complete innovative questions rather than the traditional and boring script conversation.

3.4 Team Work

Team work can be defined as the combined action of a group of people, especially when effective and efficient [3].

The difference between travelling with parents and travelling without them is noticeable. With parents, everything is simple. It is holidays, it is supposed to be a time without any kind problems. However, travelling without them, specially with a different travel concept, it is quite different. From sharing some space on the bag because we were only allowed to take one bag on the plane, to make sleep shifts to one person sleep while the other keeps track of the train stops, I realized how important is to have a friend supporting you. This is something that I only understood at the end of the trip. There were multiple situations where I was wrong or had a not very efficient solution to a problem, but reflecting on the situation with my friend, most times, we managed to solve any kind of issues.

Big companies usually have an odd number of participants in a voting. This allows them to have no tie. Or one side wins or the other wins. In our trip, we were only two. For more than one time, we wanted opposite and incompatible things. This showed me that team work is not only good moments. There will be complex situation that need to be handled, however team work is also understanding that sometimes we win, sometimes we do not. I learned that we have to be flexible. There will be times where things will not go the way we want, where we have to respect our friends or to blindly truth them. There will situations that alone, I will not make it, so I need to work in a team, as a team. And since we are a team, we fail as a whole and we succeeded as a whole. I believe this is a strong concept that can be applied to work group, friends and love relationships.

3.5 Initiative

A lot of times we dream about having something that we really want, but most times on our daily life we do nothing to achieve it. We want to know how to do it, we want to be good at it and we don't want to spend time

and energy learning it. In the end, we comfort ourselves saying that we do not really need, that it is not that import or simply by ignoring it. This is the first step to achieve nothing. I was like this: I did not want to send requests to people I have never seen, I did not have the will to plan a trip or even to search and book flights. And I was doing pretty fine in my live by achieving nothing. I realized I was not the only one. I hearded people talking about their dreams and wishes and how comfortable they were convinced that their dreams is not for them, that they will never reached them. Not only I felt pitty for them, I realized I was one of them and I hated myself because of that. This have to change... I fought againts myself and I told my mother, "I will travel this holidays!". I did it! I realized that going to bed thinking about what you did (even if you did it wrong) is much better than going to bed wishing you had the initiative to do something. This trip made me more initiative, it showed me that is good to dream and even better to fight everyday to achieve our dreams. Showed me that life starts out of our confort zone and only there we can have amazing stories, memories and the will to dream higher. And if in the past I dreamed about spending a weekend out with friends, now I dream about travelling around the world by hitchhiking.

4 CONCLUSION

Travelling is a fundamental step to grow as a human being.

This activity made me a better person not only because I learned a lot but because I am able to see the other in a different way. I understood that we cannot limit our mind to only one prespective and we should always listen and understand what other people have to say. I started to take all the opportunities I can find. Opportunities are open doors to a new world and we cannot imagine what is on the other side unless we go out of our confort zone and explore the world.

There are some events that change the life of on person. The process from start to end of this activity certainly was one of those event.

In This type of document (Technical) The conclusion should start with a Summary of the subject addressed in the document and then highlight the results!

Table 1
Principle competences developed

Competences	Developed competences
Group learning	x
Self learning	x
Citizenship	x
Social skills	x
Verbal communication	x
Written communication	x
Creativity	x
Company experience	-
International experience	x
Sports	-
Leadership	x
Languages	x
Organization/Management	x
Team work	x
Languages	x
Reflection over the practice	x

7) Bart Vanraes (<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/bart.vanraes/>)

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REFERENCES

- [1] V. Ruggiero *Beyond feelings: A guide to critical thinking*, 9rd ed.
- [2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interpersonal_relationship
- [3] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teamwork>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Aliaksandra Sankova for making this activity possible. She had a very important role by stimulating and inviting me to enter the Couchsurf community, aswell as helping me to organize and to prepare every trip and being my travel parter.

I would like to thank all Couchsurfer members who contribute for my amazing experience, including:

- 1) Nandana Mihindukulasooriya (https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/nandana_mihindu)
- 2) Daniël van Leeuwen (<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/dandoen/>)
- 3) Hendrik Hendrik (<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/straffehendrik/>)
- 4) Joline ten Haken (<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/joline1984/>)
- 5) Oliver Meskawi (<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/oliver55/>)
- 6) Lindsey Nic (<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/lindseynic/>)

APPENDIX

STATEMENTS OF EXECUTION

Figure 1. E-ticket to Amsterdam and train ticket from Amsterdam Airport

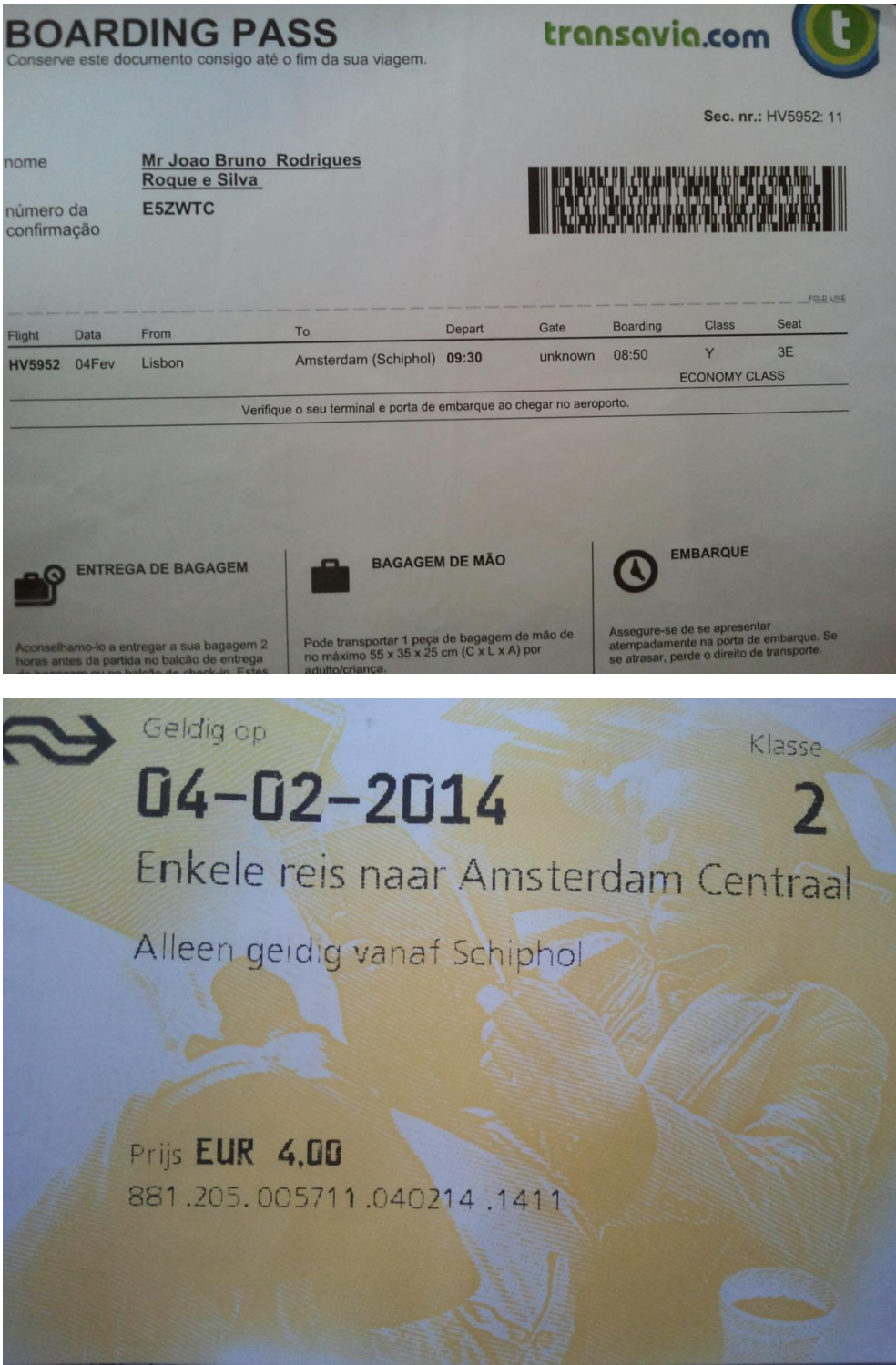


Figure 2. Train tickets from Belgium Cities (Antwerp, Gent Brussels, Brugge)

GO PASS 1
GELDIG VOOR EEN REIS
ENKEL
2e klas

12/02/2014 14:03
001
800702574112
ANTWERPEN-CENTRAAL

Van : ZONE ANTWERPEN
Naar : ZONE BRUGGE

Op : 12/02/2014

Reisonderbreking, via en alternatieve terugreis zijn niet toegestaan;
Enkel geldig voor een persoon jonger dan 26 jaar;
Biljet geldig tussen 2 Belgische stations (grenspunten uitgezonderd)
Terugbetaalbaar aan loket.

6.00 EUR

De Vervoersvoorwaarden van NMBS Mobility zijn van toepassing. Info op www.nmbs.be
Iets verdacht's gezien? Bel het noodnummer 0800/30230

GO PASS 1
GELDIG VOOR EEN REIS
ENKEL
2e klas

14/02/2014 15:1
00
84130148124
GENT-SINT-PIETER

Van : ZONE GENT
Naar : ZONE BRUXELLES

Op : 14/02/2014

Reisonderbreking, via en alternatieve terugreis zijn niet toegestaan;
Enkel geldig voor een persoon jonger dan 26 jaar;
Biljet geldig tussen 2 Belgische stations (grenspunten uitgezonderd)
Terugbetaalbaar aan loket.

6.00 EUR

De Vervoersvoorwaarden van NMBS Mobility zijn van toepassing. Info op www.nmbs.be
Iets verdacht's gezien? Bel het noodnummer 0800/30230

Figure 3. Train tickets from Belgium Cities (Brugge, Gent)



Figure 4. Tickets for bus and tramp in Brussels

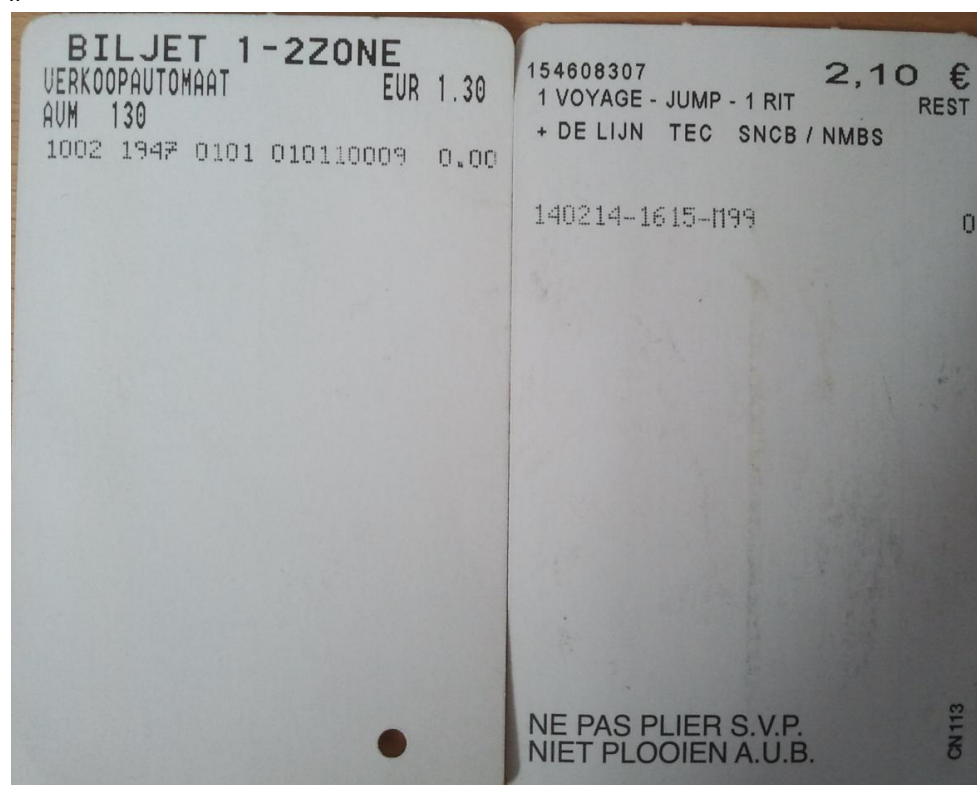






Figure 5. Tickets for bus from Brussels city center to airport






Figure 6. Reference sent and received from Joline ten Haken, host from The Hague

From Joline ten Haken
The Hague, Netherlands
Feb 22  

Positive
It was really nice to have João and Alexandra here. They were very easy going guests, it was nice to have them over. We cooked a delicious meal together and had some interesting conversations on a variety of topics. They were easy to join me to the couchsurf meeting which was nice. Certainly recommended guests!

For Joline ten Haken
The Hague, Netherlands
Feb 21  




Positive
Joline hosted me one night in The Hague and it a really great experience! She is very friendly, has amazing stories to share and is always with a good smile! We cooked amazing dinner together and went out to a CouchSurfing meeting. Unfortunately, we did not spend much time together. But that is a good reason to meet again! Obrigado, Joline! :D


Figure 7. Reference sent and received from Hendrik Hendrik , host from Brugge



From **Hendrik Hendrik**

Brugge, Belgium

Feb 15 





Positive

Joao and Alexandra are the best surfers U can wish. We only had time together in the evenings and these evenings where great. Considered, friendly with my little black cat, great conversations talking of trains, ... So, what can a host wish more? Joao (still not able to speak your name, sorry) and Alexandra I hope to meet U two again in the future!

For **Hendrik Hendrik**

Brugge, Belgium

Feb 18 



Positive

Hendrik hosted me and my girlfriend and everything was perfect! We had an amazing dinner, we shared tons of stories and even went out for some beers with other CouchSurfers. He is the best guy if you want to visit Brugge! He has a magnificent knowledge about the city! He knows so many historical events and funny curiosities that going out with him is amazing! And, of course, he has a really nice little black cat :D Thank you, Hendrik (: