

Abridged TITLE

Couchsurfing: Exploring the World

Aliaksandra Sankova

(Learning report)

Abstract—Couchsurfing is a hospitality exchange and social networking website, which provides a platform for members to "surf" on couches by staying as a guest at a host's home, host travelers, or join an event. I am an active members of this service and on the holidays before current semester has started, gratefully to the service me and my colleague João Silva have been to France, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, Spain and France. This report serves as description of what I learn while exploring beauty and variety of cultures, creating plans of trip and meeting new people. I received big amount of references and vouches - indicators of trust establishment, what can be considered as a great success and recognition.

Index Terms—Couchsurfing, travel, communication, time management, people, skills.

1 INTRODUCTION

COUCHSURFING can be a wonderful way to meet new people and to travel on a modest budget, but it takes a little extra coordination to work well. Being a good Couchsurfer means perfectly fit the community and develop some skills, necessary for that.

2 ACTIVITY EXPERIENCE

2.1 Learned basics

Couchsurfing can be a wonderful way to meet new people and to travel on a modest budget, but it takes a little extra coordination to work well. Being a good Couchsurfer means perfectly fit the community and develop some skills, necessary for that. While travelling I learned to:

- **Work in team.** As we were two of us travelling, it was very important to split the responsibilities. We were trying to make it even - both were sending requests, both were monitoring Skyscanner. Once we had situation where we left without place to

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sleep in Rotterdam. I learned how to work in team in critical situations.

- **Write a clear Couchsurfing request.** Process of asking unknown person to accept you in his or her house is very sophisticated and I consider the Couchsurfing request is a face of myself. It is very important to adjust the relationship with the person from the first message. I learned how to write nice personalized letters. I always give concrete information about when I will arrive, why I would like to meet particularly them, how long I am willing to stay. I explain goals of my visit and plans while I am there.
- **Represent myself.** In addition, it is also very important to provide well-structured and complete information in your profile, so people will know about you. It should be more than little but less than too much. I learned how to represent myself in written form in such a way that people would feel that I am trustworthy.
- **Find common ground with people.** It is based on thorough reading of his/her/their profile, paying attention and constantly ask myself: "Why would I like to meet this person? Do we both listen to the same music? Are we the same age? Have we been to the same places?". This information can be very useful and work

(1.0) Excelent (0.8) Very Good (0.6) Good (0.4) Fair (0.2) Weak	LEARNING					DOCUMENT						
	CONTEXT x2	SKILLS x1	REFLECT x4	S+C x1	SCORE	Structure x0.25	Ortogr. x0.25	Gramm. x0.25	Format x0.25	Title x0.5	Filename x0.5	SCORE
	16	0.8	3.2	0.6	6.2	0.25	0.2	0.2	0.23	0.5	0.5	1.88

towards ice-breaker. Even though a person who is accepting me is a volunteer and is most likely open to meet new people, it is still very important to be not just silent neither too much talkative. I learned how to find common

- **Manage my time.** It is important to start coordinating the visit as soon as someone accepted the request. Check all the dates if they are firm, or might we stay another few days at the previous stop, check how to get to the place, do we need directions or advice about transportation. I learned to be efficient in terms of time management as it can be considered impolite to be late even though you are first time in the city. As we may not be given a key to the host's home, we have to make sure we coordinate our comings and goings during our stay, as well. I improved a lot my logistics skills as now I can plan any kind of route fastly and efficiently.
- **Communicate with people** Couchsurfers may be able to offer helpful advice how to act in their city, where to go and which areas to avoid. It is very important to respect house rules. I learned to be very attentive. I also learned to be attentive with things people may not think to tell me, like where to put my shoes - inside or outside etc. I learned to ask questions if I am not sure about something as well as to be very responsible: show up when you said I will, or communicate if something is going wrong.
- **Trust the instincts.** If a person, situation or profile seems unsafe - it is very important to communicate clearly and be able to take care about myself. I learned do not worry about seeming rude in suspicious situations and say "no".
- **To be informed about the culture.** It is very important to be aware of cultural sensitivities, mores and general safety recommendation for each place we go. I learned to do a "homework" before every trip.
- **Be careful while communicating.** I pay a lot of attention to profiles, read what other members say about a person we are going to visit.
- **Have a backup plan** While travelling on low budget, it is almost impossible to guarantee that everything will happen as planned. I learned to be open to changes, do not stress and know my options. If something doesn't work out, I make sure in advance I have an alternate place to stay.
- **Be grateful.** Even though the accommodation we get through Couchsurfer is absolutely for free, I time to time offer something in exchange. I learned to be friendly, and keep a positive attitude even if I am not in mood. It is easy to be appreciative of people's hospitality, and it can make a big difference in how they treat us.
- **Share skills.** Couchsurfing is beautiful as can be a tool for teaching each other some things: a recipe, a song, a custom. Perhaps it's something about the place or the culture there. I learned plenty of recipes and improved a lot foreign languages while travelling.
- **Make friends** Not all surfers and hosts will make friends every time, but sometimes we do find a friend. I learned to develop international friendship.

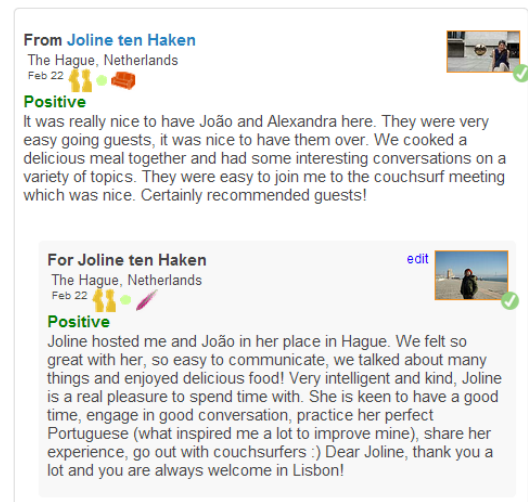


Figure 1. Reference from our host in Den Haag, the Netherlands.

2.2 Recognition

As was said in Activity Report, there are various mechanisms claimed to increase security and trust. **Personal references** are comments

which members may leave to comment their experience of hosting or staying with person. Reference can be positive, neutral or negative and it is taken very seriously. **Personal vouching system** whereby a member that had been vouched for three times — originally starting with the founders of the site — might in turn vouch for any number of other members. [1] After these trips I gained 3 vouches and 8 references. One of the references is represented on Figure 1. Some more may be found in Annex part of the document.

3 CONCLUSION

Experience with Couchsurfing definitely changed my life. “What goes around comes around” - this saying took on a completely new meaning for me. I opened my door to the world, and many travellers from all over the world were able to experience the same hospitality I was given on my trips. It changed my view on life. Table 1 represent a digest of competences I developed while doing this activity.

I was able to improve my skills and discover new cultrues from the inside, from the house of strangers cooking food together and walking in hidden from tourists places. So much was waiting out there for me. And so much is waiting for now. So many nice people and colleagues I met: some of them were from computer science area as me. I heard there were people getting married and starting business after meeting on Couchsurfing. I will definitely continue travel like that.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the people who have hosted us during winter holidays, namely:

- **Mathieu Bobet** from Paris who hosted us from 26 to 29 of December, 2013
Link to profile:
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/auriz/>
- **Nandana Mihindukulasooriya** from Sri Lanka who hosted us in Madrid in New Years Eve (30, December 2013 - 1, January

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	x
Leadership	x
Languages	x
Organization/Management	x
Team work	x
Reflection over the practice	x

2014).

Link to profile:

https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/nandana_mihindu/



Figure 2. Meeting 2014 Year with 12 grapes and CouchSurfers at Puerta del Sol, Madrid

- **Joline ten Haken** who hosted us in Den Haag from 6 to 7 February, 2014
Links to profiles:
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/joline1984/>
- **Daniël van Leeuwen** and **Oliver Meskawi** who hosted us in Rotterdam from 7 to 9 February, 2014
Links to profiles:

<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/dandoen/>
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/oliver55/>

- **Pieta Kluytenaar** who hosted us in Rotterdam from 9 to 10 February, 2014
 Link to profile:
https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/pieta_kluytenaar/
- **Bart Vanraes** who hosted us in Antwerpen from 10 to 12 February, 2014
 Link to profile:
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/bart.vanraes/>
- **Hendrick Straffe** who hosted us in Brugge from 12 to 14 February, 2014
 Link to profile:
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/straffehendrik/>
- **Lindsey Nic** from United States of America who hosted us in Brussels from 14 to 16 February, 2014
 Link to profile:
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/lindseynic/>

REFERENCES

- [1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CouchSurfing>
 [2] <https://www.couchsurfing.org/n/about>





Aliaksandra Sankova, student n°79487

Dear Sir or Madam, if you are interested to have a look at my Couchsurfing profile, please follow the link <https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/sankova>.


APPENDIX

STATEMENTS OF EXECUTION

Figure 3. E-ticket to Amsterdam

transavia.com e-ticket



importante!

- Imprima este bilhete electrónico e leve-o consigo durante a sua viagem.
- A transavia.com considera da sua responsabilidade assegurar que tenha em seu poder os passaporte(s)/documentos de viagem exigidos para o(s) seu(s) destino(s).

dados da reserva

número da confirmação da reserva: **E5ZWTC**

data da reserva: domingo 26 Janeiro, 2014

VOOS € 100.00

voo de ida ➔

terça-feira 04 Fevereiro, 2014

número do voo: HV 5952

de: Lisboa (LIS), partida às 09:30 hs (hora local)

para: Amesterdão (Schiphol) (AMS), chegada às 13:35 hs (hora local)

- No Lisbon poderá efectuar o check-in a partir de 2 horas até 40 minutos antes da partida.

passageiros

adultos e crianças a partir dos 12 anos

MRS. Aliaksandra Sankova (18-09-1990)

MR. Joao Bruno Rodrigues Roque e Silva (30-09-1992)

outros custos € 10.00

taxas de reserva € 5.00

sobretaxa de cartão de crédito ou Paypal € 5.00

preço total € 110.00

incl. taxas e suplementos: € 25.20

pagamento através de Visa em 26-01-2014 € 110.00

dados para contacto

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
Figure 4. Tickets from Netherlands



Figure 5. Tickets from Belgium




Figure 6. Experience with CouchSurfer in Antwerpen: request and reference


Alexandra Sankova
 February 8th, 2014 - 10:42 pm



About Me
 Hello, Bart!
 We are Alexandra and João, young software engineers from Lisbon. We are looking for place to stay in Antwerp from 10 to 12 Feb. We hope you have some free time and opportunity to host us. We are neat, polite, independent so hosting us won't bother you that much, also we love to cook and exchange recipes so we could make some interesting dinner, we believe is the best way of intercultural dialog :)

Quick access to both profiles
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/sankova/>
<https://www.couchsurfing.org/people/joao%20brunosilva/>



Why I'd Like to Meet You
 You seems to us very nice person, you have nice profile, lots of positive references and I also noticed that not so far you hosted my friend Yuliya Liuliak. Hopefully see you soon :)


Bart Vanraes
 February 8th, 2014 - 10:58 pm

Hey Alexandra and João,
 You are welcome to stay at my apartment.
 Yes, I've hosted Yuliya right before NYE and showed her the city together with a friend of her :)
 What time do you think that you'd arrive in Antwerp on monday?

From Bart Vanraes
 Antwerp, Belgium
 Feb 21 


Positive
 Alexandra and João are really nice and easygoing people.
 On the second evening of their stay, they spent a lot of effort cooking a Belarusian soup for us and some friends of mine.
 We had some nice conversations about the things we both studied while having a drink.
 They even washed all the dishes even if I told them not to :-))

For Bart Vanraes
 Antwerp, Belgium
 Feb 21  

Positive
 I'm very grateful that we stayed with Bart. He is kind and interesting young man, very welcoming and really easy to talk to. Responsible and hospitable, he provided us with everything we may need and made us feel so comfortable!
 We spent nice time at his place cooking and chatting, drinking belgian beers, meeting his friends :) Thank you very much for everything and keep in touch!

Figure 7. Experience with CouchSurfer in Brugge: photos and reference



Figure 8. Experience with CouchSurfer in Lisbon: me as host



Couch Information

Can you host?



Maybe

[edit](#)

Couch Available: Maybe

Preferred Gender: Any

No smoking allowed

Has children: No

Can host children: No

Has pets: No

Can host pets: No

Max Surfers Per Night: 1



Shared Sleeping Surface: Depends

Shared Room: Depends

We have a couch in common area so you won't have much privacy while staying here unless someone of us went to travel and room appeared to be free.

Here is a small challenge: prove that you read my profile by writing in your request word "wanderlust".

I live in T2 apartment near metro Alameda.

Mostly like you won't have your keys but there is someone at home all the time.

We are fine when people ask to host them up to 3 days. Further is really depends.

We are both vegetarian and students. It's better if you have your own food and wash your dishes. But we do love to cook together :) Anyway, please, no fish, no meat, no poultry in the house.

Every hosting decision is going to be discussed with my flatmate. In fact, this is his profile <http://www.couchsurfing.org/people/anandnarisipuram>