Monetizing Network Hospitality:
Hospitality and Sociability in the Context of Airbnb

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ABSTRACT

We present a qualitative study of hospitality exchange processes that take place via the online peer-to-peer platform Airbnb. We explore 1) what motivates individuals to monetize network hospitality and 2) how the presence of money ties in with the social interaction related to network hospitality. We approach the topic from the perspective of hosts – that is, Airbnb users who participate by offering accommodation for other members in exchange for monetary compensation. We found that participants were motivated to monetize network hospitality for both financial and social reasons. Our analysis indicates that the presence of money can provide a helpful frame for network hospitality, supporting hosts in their efforts to accomplish desired sociability, select guests consistent with their preferences, and control the volume and type of demand. We conclude the paper with a critical discussion of the implications of our findings for network hospitality and, more broadly, for the so-called sharing economy.

Author Keywords

Network hospitality; sociability; hospitality exchange; money; sharing economy; collaborative consumption; Airbnb

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

General Terms

Human Factors

INTRODUCTION

Peer-to-peer online platforms afford novel collaborative practices related to the sharing and exchange of both tangible and non-tangible goods and services such as space, skills, time, and money. Well-known examples of these platforms include the hospitality exchange services Couchsurfing and

Airbnb. The two share several key characteristics: Firstly, users of the Couchsurfing and Airbnb sites are required to create a *profile*, through which they can make a listing, offering a free place to stay or space for rent, respectively. The profile is also needed when a user wants to request hospitality from others. Secondly, in addition to profiles trust between users is fostered, in both services, with the help of a public recommendation system wherein users are encouraged to rate and review each other after each hospitality exchange. Regardless of the similarities, there is also a crucial difference between the two: Airbnb is focused on short-term peer-to-peer rentals with a well-defined "price tag" attached to them, whereas Couchsurfing fosters hospitality that is offered with the expectation of no direct compensation, on the basis of generalized reciprocity within the community.

The social interaction and the exchange of accommodation that occur via hospitality-exchange services have been referred to as *network hospitality*. When coining the term, in the context of Couchsurfing, Germann Molz [10, p. 216] defined network hospitality as the way people "*connect to one another using online networking systems, as well as to the kinds of relationships they perform when they meet each other offline and face to face.*"

Previous studies [see e.g. 10 for an overview] have examined practices of network hospitality in the Couchsurfing community, where the hospitality exchange is, as a rule, devoid of monetary transactions. We add to the emergent body of research on network hospitality by examining hospitality-exchange processes that take place via Airbnb, a service that promotes monetizing network hospitality. We present a qualitative study that explores 1) what motivates individuals to monetize network hospitality and 2) how the presence of money ties in with the social interaction related to network hospitality in the context of Airbnb. Our study approaches the topic from the perspective of *hosts* – Airbnb users who participate in the network by offering accommodation for other members in exchange for monetary compensation.

Prior research on network hospitality [3,9,10,11] highlights that the pleasant and meaningful social encounters that hospitality exchange facilitates are an important motivation

for participation. From an ethnographic study of Couch-surfing, Bialski [3, pp. 44–5] argues that host–guest interaction in network hospitality can be conceived of as a form of *sociability*: a form of association into which people enter for the sake of "*the sheer pleasure of the company of others.*" This conceptualization originated with sociologist Georg Simmel [22, p. 255], who depicted sociability as an intrinsically rewarding "*play-form of association*" that "*has no ulterior end [...] but the satisfaction of the impulse to sociability.*"

We found that, while the possibility of earning money is an important factor in igniting participation, the social aspects of network hospitality play a central role in sustaining hosts' motivation to keep participating. Moreover, our analysis shows that the presence of money provides hospitality exchange with a structure and formality that contributes to the hosts' sense of control and ease of participation. This is manifested in various phases of the hospitality-exchange process, from decisions about who to host to the resulting social interaction with guests.

Hosts often try to select guests who are in some way similar to them. The inclusion of money in the exchange alters the social roles of guests and hosts participating in network hospitality by moving them towards those of customer and service provider. This shift makes host–guest interaction less of an obligation, even for the host. It does not, however, exclude the possibility of sociable interaction between host and guest. Our analysis suggests that the inclusion of money in exchange relations may contribute to favorable conditions for sociable interaction since it removes a sense of obligation of intense social interaction between hosts and guests, allowing host–guest relations to develop on a more voluntary basis. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for further research, design, and policy efforts in the domain of network hospitality and the "sharing economy" more broadly.

RELATED WORK

Our theoretical framework draws on 1) literature on the nature and functions of hospitality, 2) Simmel's notion of sociability and his theorization on the role of money in structuring social relationships, as well as, 3) previous research regarding network hospitality.

Hospitality and Sociability

Brotheron [4] has defined hospitality in terms of exchange, emphasizing the relationship between the host and the guest, the two fundamental parties in hospitality. Hospitality is framed here as an exchange that incorporates both material and symbolic transactions, including offering accommodation, food, drink, and expressions of gratitude.

Arguing from an anthropological point of view, Selwyn [20] states that hospitality can be seen as a fundamental form of social interaction that establishes solidarity and feelings of togetherness between people. Acts of hospitality establish and consolidate links between individuals and groups; thereby, hospitality is an important social form holding societies together [20].

Importantly with respect to the topic of this paper, Morrison et al. [18] point out that hospitality can be either conditional or unconditional; that is, it can be acted out for purposes of making a profit or be offered without any expectation of compensation from the receiving party. In other words, the exchange relationship between the guest and the host may be either negotiated, in which case two individuals bargain and discuss the terms of the exchange beforehand, or generalized, in which case there is no expectation of direct reciprocity between the parties to the exchange [6].

Lashley [13] identifies three partly overlapping domains of hospitality: social, private, and commercial. The social domain of hospitality refers to the social setting in which hospitality takes place, along with the social functions of hospitality. The private domain incorporates the ways in which hospitality is acted out in domestic settings. Finally, the commercial domain has to do with the provision of hospitality as an economic activity (for example, at guest-houses and hotels). We situate the network hospitality that takes place via Airbnb at the intersection of these three domains: it is a private form of hospitality, for the hosts accommodate the guests in their homes (or at other properties that they own), in line with their own preferences and customs. Yet, because the hospitality is offered in return for financial compensation, a commercial element is present too. Finally, the hospitality exchange that Airbnb promotes is part of the emerging culture of network hospitality, a form of hospitality that takes place between individuals from around the globe and leverages online social networking tools to enable and coordinate peer-to-peer exchange.

It is notable that hospitality is often understood to go beyond its material aspects: the social interaction between the host(s) and the guest(s) is an important aspect of how hospitality plays out. It is when we view hospitality from this point of view, that Simmel's [22] idea of sociability becomes relevant. This is because we argue that ideally the host-guest interaction evolves in the frame of sociability, a stylized form of being together where sociality, often in the form of casual conversation, becomes an end in itself [22]. Sociability gains its value from interaction in its own right, rather than some ulterior motive or a practical purpose [22].

Sociability is an essentially reciprocal mode of interaction in which tact is of great importance. Participants should avoid both excessive bragging about status and excessively overt expressions of personal troubles and faults. That is, in Simmel's [22] terminology, one should not cross either the upper or the lower threshold of what is appropriate. Moreover, sociability is "homogenic interaction" in which participants are expected to act as if all interacting parties were equal and genuinely equally respected. Moreover, it is indispensable for the contents of the sociable "chat" to be

interesting for all participants, in order to allow for a lively exchange of talk. As we will discuss later in the paper, these requirements explain, in part, why it can be easiest to accomplish sociable interaction with people who are similar to oneself in social standing, interests, and favored codes of interaction. This tendency to homophily is especially interesting in the context of hospitality exchange, since one could argue that the social value hospitality brings to the hosts often feeds upon the effort to cope with the uncertainty of hosting a "stranger" [5], an interesting but unfamiliar person.

Network Hospitality

As noted above, network hospitality refers to how those engaging with hospitality-exchange services connect to one another via online social networking systems, as well as, to the kinds of relationships they perform when they meet face to face [9,10]. Members of these networks can engage in hospitality exchange by hosting visitors or by staying with others as guests. The idea that hospitality exchange is not just about accommodation but also a matter of meeting people and engaging in mutually meaningful social interaction is well documented in previous research on network hospitality [3,9,10].

The concept of network hospitality has its roots in Wittel's [24] notion of network sociality. Network sociality refers to contemporary forms of association and social interaction, which, according to Wittel, increasingly consist of and are composed around flexible networks of various kinds rather than stable communities. Building on this idea, the concept of network hospitality draws attention to the interplay between hospitality and technology and to the ways in which strangers encounter one another in a mobile and networked society [10].

Network hospitality is a relatively new phenomenon [9,10], although the practice is rooted in ancient traditions of hospitality and welcoming strangers. Its more recent historical precursors include various formal and informal hospitality networks of people who would provide meals, transportation, accommodation, or other aid for traveling strangers. For example, Adler [1], in her historical analysis of "tramping," describes how trade societies established networks of homes and inns to accommodate traveling craftsmen in early nineteenth-century England.

An example of early, more institutionalized, networks of hospitality exchange is Servas International [9,10]. It was founded after the Second World War as a non-profit cooperative to promote tolerance and world peace through cultural exchange. The members' contact details were published and distributed on paper, and participants relied on telephone contact and hand-written letters to coordinate hospitality exchanges. By the late 1990s, the Internet had made pegging through printed lists obsolete as several hospitality-exchange organizations, among them Hospitality Club, Global Freeloaders, and Hospitality Exchange,

appeared online [9]. As was Servas International, these networks were primarily non-profit projects guided by the belief that travel, interpersonal exchanges between people from different countries, and the generous offering of free hospitality could spread tolerance, friendship, and even world peace.

Beyond accommodation, examples of network hospitality include ride-sharing, meal-sharing, and travel-sharing wherein locals show travelers around their town [9]. All of these practices leverage online platforms to facilitate offline social interaction and the exchange of material and sociable resources [9]. In sum, networked technologies are creating new hybrid spaces of social interaction, incorporating "*complex interplay of mobility and immobility, online and offline interaction, brief but intense encounters, and local articulations of a global project*" [9, pp. 216–7].

Money and Hospitality

As said, sometimes hosts may (and are expected to) ask for compensation for their efforts. Dernoi's [7] article from the 1980s suggests that hospitality exchange wherein private individuals and families accommodate travelers in their homes for a fee was widespread, although much more scattered, already before the appearance of enterprises such as Airbnb. Moreover, in between private households and commercial hospitality businesses there are what Lynch *et al*. [15] label *commercial homes*, including small hotels, bed and breakfasts, and family accommodations. While accommodating guests often provides an essential stream of income for those running commercial homes, the practice also allows for social engagement with the guests, such as receiving gifts and hearing interesting stories of guests' home country [15]. While Airbnb does afford such professionalized hosting, none of our participants were taking advantage of this opportunity. Rather, all of them carried out hosting in (what used to be) their leisure time.

According to Simmel [21], the use of money as a means of exchange frees people from various kinds of traditional and moral constraints, thereby contributing to their personal autonomy. Simultaneously, the indifference of money has a rationalizing and homogenizing effect on the life and interactions of individuals. Simmel [21] argues that, while money affords precision and calculability in social relations, it creates indifference and increases the social distance between actors. Accordingly, it seems unlikely that monetized hospitality exchange could lead to the non-instrumental, voluntary, and enjoyable social interactions that previous research has associated with practices of non-monetary network hospitality.

However, we argue that the potential distance that money creates between actors does not exclude the possibility of meaningful, sociable interaction between individuals. On the contrary, we claim that the presence of money and the existence of a clear price for the network hospitality that is being offered may provide conditions in which sociable

interaction can flourish – even more easily than it might in non-monetary network hospitality, wherein concerns over indebtedness and reciprocity may complicate interpersonal connections. Bialski [3, p. 75] has expressed a similar idea in relation to hitchhiking Web sites via which passengers pay for the ride. She reflects on how the presence of money can change the social dynamics of the situation: "*Perhaps the sociality that emerges despite the explicit nature of the reciprocity deems the conversation less instrumental, more voluntary, than the conversation and interaction in some cases during the implicit reciprocity between Couchsurfers.*"

To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have examined network hospitality from the perspective of individuals who offer hosting via hospitality-exchange platforms that promote monetizing network hospitality. We address this gap with our analysis of what motivates people to monetize network hospitality and how money is woven into the resulting social interaction.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

We present findings from a qualitative case study comprising 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews with, all in all, 12 participants from 11 households who had listed space for short-term rental via Airbnb in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, Finland. We will now describe in more detail our participants, as well as, present the interview and analysis procedures we applied.

Participants

We recruited the participants through the Airbnb platform. The first author created a profile on the site in order to contact potential participants. The only prerequisite for participation in the study was that the person had hosted at least one guest prior to the interview and was managing an active listing for an Airbnb rental in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area at the time of recruitment.

Participants' age varied from 22 to 58. Seven subjects were male and five female. Four of them were living alone, one shared a flat with two housemates, and seven lived with a partner (four of the latter had children, too, in their household). In one household, both adults were present for the interview. Other interviews were conducted one-on-one with the person managing the Airbnb profile. One of the households was in the city center, nine were in urban areas relatively close to the city center, and one was in a suburban area. Seven participants lived in an owner-occupied flat while the other five had a lease.

The number of guests our participants had hosted ranged from just one to over 30. Four of the participating households had hosted fewer than 10 guests, seven more than 20. The participant with the most hosting experience had listed her apartment on Airbnb in March 2012, while the most inexperienced had joined the service just a month before the interview. Eight subjects had experienced Airbnb

also as guests, while the remaining four had participated solely by hosting. Two of the interviewees had experience of other hospitality-exchange networks (i.e. Couchsurfing) – one as a host and the other as a guest.

For a final characterization, we identified two primary modes of hosting through Airbnb. We use the label *remote hospitality* for hosting situations wherein the host is not physically sharing the home (or other property he or she manages) with the guest and instead lodges somewhere else during the guest's stay. Here, the interaction with the guest is typically limited to messages exchanged through the Airbnb service, e-mail, SMS contact, phone calls, and the occasional quick encounters in which the keys to the apartment are handed over and final details of the stay are discussed. Another way to perform hosting through Airbnb is by being physically present and sharing the apartment with the guest. An example of this is renting out a spare bedroom or one's living room. We refer to this mode of hosting as *on-site hospitality*. In our study, five participating households practiced remote hospitality, while the other six engaged in on-site hospitality.

Interview Procedure

The interviews were conducted the Helsinki Metropolitan Area in June–August 2013. At the time, there were, in total, around 400 Airbnb hosts in and around Helsinki; monetizing network hospitality via Airbnb was still a relatively novel phenomenon in this locale. The interviews were conducted by the first author at a location of the participant's choosing, either in their home or at a public venue such as a café. No compensation was offered for participation.

The interviews were semi-structured. The first author conducted two pilot interviews in order to test and refine the interview procedure. The pilot interviewees were acquaintances of the second author. They were active Airbnb hosts in the area at the time. On the basis of our observations from these interviews, the interview procedure was modified slightly for smooth flow, and some questions were added to make the interviews more comprehensive. The pilot interviews were used solely to improve the interview procedure. They are not included in the set of 11 interviews that forms our research material.

The interview outline was designed to elicit a holistic account of the participant's hosting experiences. The interviews started with questions addressing matters such as how the participant had first heard of Airbnb, whether he or she had used Airbnb also as a guest, whether the interviewee had experience of other hospitality-exchange networks, and how any such experiences differed from those related to Airbnb. These questions were followed by a set of questions related to the participant's motivations for Airbnb hosting. The interview then proceeded to cover the respondent's presence on the Airbnb Web site, including how he or she determined the price for the listing.

Participants were then invited to describe how they decided which inquiries to accept and how they communicated with guests before their stay. In addition, we asked questions about the hospitality exchange itself, including how stays were arranged; what kinds of things the participants felt they needed to take into consideration when hosting someone; and whether there had been any problematic, troubling, or otherwise unsuccessful exchanges. Finally, each participant was given an opportunity to bring up any topics that he or she felt had been left out or been given too little attention. Background information, such as the participant's age, level of education, and profession, along with the estimated number of guests hosted so far, was collected with a paper form at the end of the interview. The forms were left to the end of the interview since our prior interview experiences from Finland indicated that beginning with demographic inquiries does not aid in building a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere and might even be interpreted as meddlesome.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All interviews were conducted in Finnish; with the exception of those of two participants who did not speak Finnish and so were interviewed in English, instead. Because the interviews were conducted primarily in Finnish, most interview excerpts are translations from the original Finnish transcripts. In the following, we refer to the participants pseudonymously to protect their anonymity.

Analysis

We chose a qualitative interpretative approach for the study in order to balance leveraging prior work with approaching our research material in an explorative manner. While Germann Molz's conceptualization of network hospitality and Simmel's theorizing on sociability served as the main theoretical frames for our study, the empirical analysis was grounded in the research material [23], since we wanted to foreground the participants' perspectives and approach their experiences of monetizing network hospitality in a material-driven fashion.

We began the analysis by reading through the transcripts, paying attention to any recurrent themes that could elucidate our research problem. Through this initial analysis, we identified four categories for use to frame our further analysis. The first author coded all sections of the interview transcripts that were interpreted as illustrating 1) motivations underlying the practice of monetizing network hospitality, 2) the role of money in the exchange process, 3) the resulting host–guest interaction, and 4) the ways in which hosts choose their guests. The excerpts containing descriptions of the motives for participating in Airbnb as a host were then open-coded, with a focus on the various ways in which the participants described their hosting motivations. The findings from this part of the analysis are presented in the first part of the next section of the paper. The other three categories were analyzed in detail and compared to one another. This was done to uncover themes

characterizing the practice of Airbnb hosting, the resulting sociality, and the role money plays in the two. We labeled the resulting themes "sociability," "selectivity," and "control." They are presented in the latter subsection of the next section.

FINDINGS

The presentation of our findings has two parts. Firstly, we describe the intertwining of social and financial motives underlying participants' decision to monetize network hospitality. Secondly, we discuss how the presence of money plays into the emerging sociability and depict how monetary transactions and the possibility of using pricing as a tactic can help hosts to achieve desirable experiences.

Social and Financial Hosting Motivations

Our analysis shows that the financial gains Airbnb hosting can provide are an important factor driving hosts' participation. However, for most of our participants the money made through Airbnb was not an indispensable part of total income. Often, the money that was made by hosting was not used for unavoidable living expenses; rather, it was seen as a "nice extra" that could be used, for example, for travel. For example, Pia, a 25-year-old woman who practiced remote hospitality by renting out her two-room apartment via Airbnb (while she was out of town), shared the following account of how monetizing network hospitality had allowed her to fund travel with her significant other:

"*Well, yeah, the money has been nice. I have already funded a few of our trips with the money I've made this way.*" (Pia, 25)

Only one out of our 11 participants, 22-year-old Kaisa, described the financial gains made by hosting visitors via Airbnb as of significant financial importance personally. She was a host who practiced remote hospitality by renting out her room in a flat she shared with two roommates. She recounted making efforts to rent her room out for at least a few nights each month so that she could use the money she made this way to cover some of her rent.

While a commonly cited reason for engaging in the practice of monetizing network hospitality, the possibility of making a profit was typically described as supplementary to the social motives for engaging in network hospitality. These included the opportunity to meet new people from around the world and incorporating more social interaction or a new kind of interaction into one's life. For example, Ida and Sami, a couple living a busy life with three children and two full-time jobs, highly valued the novel sociality that Airbnb hosting had brought to their lives. They practiced on-site hospitality by renting out a private room in their city-center flat. For them, receiving guests through Airbnb functioned as a departure from the mundane rhythm of everyday life. Hosting visitors provided a welcome opportunity to engage in meaningful social interaction in a

manageable way, meaning that they could freely limit who they would host, how frequently, and for how long:

"[…] *if we would not do this, it could be even a bit dull sometimes, you know, since our everyday life pretty much consists of just working and taking kids to their hobbies and so on. It can be quite hectic. [...] Since we have a family, we can't just decide with Ida to, for example, go to a salsa class to meet new people.*" (Sami, 31)

In another example case, Alfonso, a 53-year-old foreigner living and working in Helsinki, stressed the importance of the social nature of network hospitality as a reason for engaging in Airbnb hosting. For him, renting out a private room in his two-room apartment was, in essence, a way to meet new people, since his social circle in Helsinki was relatively small and at times felt insufficient to him:

"*For me, it's not that easy to meet people here in Helsinki. Of course, I could go to a bar or something, but it's not that easy for people of my age to meet people like that. But sometimes I have really nice conversations and moments with my guests, people who are total strangers to me. I think it's similar to what happens when you are traveling. You meet people on trains and airplanes, and it's just easy to connect with them.*" (Alfonso, 53)

Moreover, two participants were initially prompted to engage in Airbnb hosting by the monetary compensation for hosting but then grew to appreciate the hosting as a social practice, too, once they had accumulated more experience of network hospitality. Tomi, 33, was a remote host who rented out his investment apartment through Airbnb. Therefore, he initially had a more straightforwardly businesslike attitude to hosting than our other participants. However, Tomi too noted that one reason he had been pleased with his hosting arrangement was, indeed, the possibility for pleasant sociable interaction with the guests. Although Tomi practiced remote hospitality and did not stay with the guests, he reported that at times he might invite guests to take a little tour around the city with him:

"[...] *there is always a potential of meeting people, interesting people.* […] [*T*]*here have already been quite a few guests whom I've really connected with and who have been quite similar to me or have a mindset similar to mine.*" (Tomi, 33)

Importantly, Tomi could freely choose when to initiate such interaction, and he described doing so only when he felt that he was likely to get along well with the guests and that he might enjoy their company. Thus, although Tomi was predominantly hosting for reasons other than the sociable interaction that network hospitality can entail, he was able to move away from the business-oriented mindset when he so desired and engage in social interaction with guests. Of course, whether the guests chose to take up his invitations was always up to them, but at the time of the interview Tomi's experience had been satisfying.

Mikael, a 41-year-old professor, was prompted to engage in Airbnb hosting by his wish to put the extra space he and his family had in the basement of their apartment to better use and to earn some money by doing so. His views on interaction with the guests were similar to those of Tomi. He explained how, at the start of his time as a host, he had been rather unsure of how it would feel to let a stranger into their house, what would be an appropriate amount of interaction with the guest, and what his guests would think of the hosting arrangement. However, in the course of receiving guests, it had turned out that he actually enjoyed hosting:

"*It has been nice to meet these people. I haven't talked to all of them an awful lot, but it has still been nice. This has brought, like, this new sort of sociality to my life.*" (Mikael, 41)

It is noteworthy that even some of the participants who practiced remote hospitality appreciated the social nature of the hosting. They found hosting socially enjoyable even though they did not usually spend time with their guests face to face, instead just preparing the apartment for the guest's arrival and then lodging somewhere else during the guest's stay. Despite the minimal in-person interaction embedded in their hosting arrangements, some of these hosts wanted to establish a host–guest relationship with their guests. Often, this was accomplished through small acts of hospitality such as making sure that the guests are offered a little to eat when they arrive, or giving them advice and recommendations on what to do during their stay in the city. Pia was among those with this kind of orientation towards remote hospitality:

"*I'll always try to think about how to make the guest's stay an unforgettable experience – you know, make them feel like, "Wow!"* [...]. *I'll make sure that there's some fruit or maybe some Finnish candy for the guests as they arrive, and if I have time maybe I'll leave some nice flowers on the table.*" (Pia, 25)

The hosts engaging in these acts of hospitality found it very rewarding and pleasing if the acts were recognized and acknowledged by the guests, either through the reviews posted on the host's Airbnb profile page or, considered even better, by unofficial and more personal means such as the leaving of a postcard or hand-written note for the host. Pia described this:

"*These letters and notes that people leave here are the best. Almost everyone has left a personal note or at least sent an e-mail message in addition to the official review done through the Web site.*"

In a similar vein, Pertti described the personal hand-written messages he had received from guests as one of the most rewarding aspects of hosting, creating a sense of warmth:

"*One of the most gratifying things has been the personal hand-written messages I have received from my guests. Airbnb automatically reminds people to write the reviews,*

but no one asks the guest to leave you a personal note. Also, the occasions when I have received, for example, a text message where the guests say that they [have] followed my hint and gone to some restaurant or event I had suggested for them are very nice. They give you a warm feeling." (Pertti, 33)

Interestingly, these descriptions reveal that although the terms of the exchange relation are negotiated beforehand, the hosts very much appreciate informal acknowledgment of their hospitality efforts. It thus seems that in monetized network hospitality there still exists a residue of traditional forms of hospitality exchange, as described for example in ethnographic accounts of Mauss [16] and Malinowski [17], in which exchange of material and symbolic gifts play an important role in establishing and consolidating social ties between groups and individuals.

In summary, even though the opportunity to monetize network hospitality – that is, to make a financial profit by offering hosting – was an important reason for the participants' engagement with Airbnb, the sociable interaction that has been recognized as an important driver of network hospitality in prior research was very visibly present also in the accounts of our participants. These findings complicate the narrative of how the inclusion of monetary transactions in the hospitality-exchange process affects the resulting social interactions, because they point out that, at least some Airbnb hosts are driven to monetize network hospitality not just because of the money they can make but also because they find the sociality of the practice pleasurable. In brief, the financial and social motivations that drive individuals to monetize network hospitality need not be contradictory with one another.

The Presence of Money in Network Hospitality
Our analysis indicates that the presence of money can provide a helpful frame for network hospitality. It can support hosts in their efforts to accomplish desired sociable interaction, to choose guests selectively in line with their preferences, and to control the volume and type of demand from potential visitors.

Sociability
The social interaction that practicing network hospitality spurs is an important reason for Airbnb hosting. Yet, among our participants, none of the hosts who sought social interaction with their guests talked about the sociality of network hospitality within the framework of "making new friends" or creating lasting or long-term social relationships. Instead, participants described the sociality of network hospitality more commonly in terms of enjoyable and/or inspiring moments in which one can spend time with interesting, previously unfamiliar people from around the world and engage in intriguing conversations with them. Participants reported enjoying these moments of social interaction as such, but they did not expect that the relationships with their guests would extend beyond the

guests' visit. Alfonso used the following wording to describe his feelings on the topic:

"*We might have breakfast and dinner together and have interesting conversations. It's often really nice, but I haven't kept in touch with any of them. […] I just haven't felt like it.*" (Alfonso, 53)

This sociality that participants sought can be understood in terms of sociability – a form of sociality that gains its value from the interaction itself. Many of the participants reported that they found the possibility of meeting interesting people with diverse cultural backgrounds intriguing and rewarding:

"*You can actually meet some nice and interesting people through hosting. […] For example, I got to meet this Italian fashion designer as he stayed at my place. These kinds of things are nice, because when you think about it, how on earth could I've met this guy if he wouldn't have been my guest? You can't just go and stop people on the street and be like, 'You look interesting. Would you like to hang out?'*" (Kaisa, 22)

The hosts we interviewed often deemed the social encounters with their guests enjoyable but still stated that they had no inclination to extend those social relations beyond the one-time, short-term hospitality exchange at hand. The sociality of monetized network hospitality can, therefore, be interpreted as a form of social "play" in which participants engage for the sheer pleasure it brings, without any expectation of it leading to more serious or lasting social relationships. This echoes Simmel's notion of sociability, along with findings from prior research on non-monetary network hospitality. The difference, though, is that, alongside the value seen in sociability, there are financial profits at stake for the hosts (and presumably for the guests, too, for whom peer-to-peer accommodation is often a cheaper alternative than staying in a hotel).

Selectivity
Our participants mentioned the opportunity to engage in sociable interaction with people from around the world as a key reason for practicing Airbnb hosting. However, accomplishing the sociable interaction the hosts were hoping for was not always a foregone conclusion. Time constraints, differences in interests, or a sense of not really seeing eye to eye with one's visitors could get in the way of shared moments of sociability.

For example, Kaisa, a host who reported subletting her room via Airbnb a few times a month, expressed enthusiasm for meeting new people through her practice of monetizing network hospitality. Occasionally, she would host Couchsurfers, too. However, she felt that hosting could get tiresome if there was a mismatch in expectations between the guest and the host. She explained that this seemed to be more common in the case of non-monetary network hospitality than when the practice was monetized and hospitality came with a clear price tag:

"The attitude is often that since you are charging these people, they think that you should somehow be in the background, whereas through Couchsurfing, [the guests] *ask you to be their guide or boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever. It can sometimes be a bit annoying if you are not really in the mood for that or you are just busy. Usually people who come through Airbnb are a bit more independent, and they don't expect that much from you."* (Kaisa, 22)

We can see that, while the money Kaisa could make by hosting Airbnb guests was important for her, she also felt that, at times, monetizing network hospitality was preferable because it made the hosting socially easier. Kaisa was eager to socialize with her guests, but she wanted to do it in accordance with her own preferences – that is, selectively, when she felt like it and with those guests she found interesting. This example indicates that monetary transactions can contribute to the host's sense of control, and her/his comfort with, the hospitality exchange. This may be because when hospitality exchange takes place in a *quid pro quo* fashion, it is easier for the host to withdraw if she/he feels that the social interaction with the guest is becoming burdensome. It seems that when network hospitality is monetized, the normal perceived obligation of host–guest interaction is reduced somewhat. This relaxation of a felt obligation to be sociable is echoed in the following account from Tomi, who, in addition to Airbnb hosting, had experience of being a guest through Couchsurfing:

"I think that in Couchsurfing both the host and the guest are expected to show interest towards each other and to spend some time together. In Airbnb, the guest is paying for the accommodation, so (s)he is not expected or obliged to socialize that much with the host. So this also means that if the host wants to be more in the background, he can do that." (Tomi, 33)

Many respondents received various inquiries from potential guests, which often left them the opportunity to choose which guests to accept from a pool of potential candidates. In our participants' accounts, the evaluation of potential guests was based on the guests' profiles, the reviews they had received from prior exchanges, and the communication that took place prior to accepting of the accommodation request. Our participants emphasized how much they valued the fact that they knew in advance who they were going to be hosting. They felt that viewing a guest's profile gave them insight into what kind of person the guest would be, and this allowed them to be intentional in choosing which people to host:

"The fact that you can choose who comes there is nice. I just pretty much use my intuition in choosing the guests and try to choose guests who seem nice, you know, so that I might even spend some time with them if I feel like it." (Tomi, 33)

Our participants made efforts to increase the likelihood of an enjoyable hospitality exchange by deliberately selecting guests they expected to be easy to host. Often this meant selecting individuals who were in some respect similar to the host him- or herself:

"Mostly I choose to host young people, often students or people who have quite recently graduated from a university. […] *They are easy to get along with, and often we have something in common or are in a similar phase in our lives."* (Sophia, 22)

"For the most part, our guests have been highly educated and they are in interesting jobs. They are the kind of people with whom it is easy for us to find some common ground, and, therefore, the conversations have often been very interesting." (Sami, 31)

While these considerations are beyond the scope of this study, it is necessary to point out that the guests can, of course, make similar evaluations regarding potential hosts as they look for a place to stay. Some participants acknowledged this possibility and described how, to attract guests with interests similar to theirs, they had included a lot of information about themselves and their interests in their profiles:

"I try to give a good picture of who I am in the profile because then the guest who is interested in staying at my place will likely be a kind of person whom I am interested in hosting. For example, I state here that I am not into drinking or smoking and that I really like to talk to people. And mostly the guests who end up at my place are quite similar to me." (Sophia, 22)

This tendency to look for and choose guests who are similar to the host or who share his or her interests is in line with Simmel's reflections on the circumstances in which sociable interaction is likely to occur. The similarity and equal social standing of the interacting parties is a central condition for sociable interaction. However, it is interesting to find this tendency to homophily in a practice like network hospitality, in which meeting people with different cultural backgrounds plays a central role in igniting participation in the first place.

Among our participants there were a few who openly stated that they did not wish to host people from specific countries, people of certain ethnicity, or people of a particular age. Sophia explicitly stated that, because of previous bad experiences of subletting, she chose not to host people from India or "black people". She went on to explain that she knew that this kind of selectivity is "*not a good thing*" but that she knowingly did it anyway, on account of the negative experiences of subletting her room in previous apartments:

"[These experiences] *have related to subletting my room in my previous apartments. 'Cause I am a student and I've been abroad quite a lot, I've had to sublet my room and it's*

annoying when you want to rent out a room and someone just causes trouble all the time." (Sophia, 22)

Similarly, Ida and Sami, Markku, and Pertti stated that they were "*maybe a bit more selective*" when it came to accepting Russian guests. However, they often expressed awareness that this kind of discriminatory behavior is not necessarily a good thing and that hey have tried to avoid practicing it:

"*Well, if I think about who we have declined most, they're probably Russian people. We've hosted Russian guests, but still I notice that I think twice before I accept. It's a big and diverse country, and I know I shouldn't think this way, but still...*" (Ida, 35)

These expressions of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors illustrate how, upon closer examination, the discourse of taking part in network hospitality because of the wish to engage in cosmopolitan cultural exchange by hosting people from around the world may not be the whole story. While the participants seemed to be truly motivated to meet new people, they often preferred to host people who were similar to them in some, or many, ways. As a result, the networks of social encounters that network hospitality fosters may not be as inclusive and boundary-spanning as the hype around Airbnb and other similar services might lead one to believe.

Control
Our analysis reveals that hosts do not determine the price for their hospitality solely via profit-maximizing economic thinking. Instead of always trying to find the optimal "market price," participants explained that they factor in social considerations. These consisted of the type of guests they wish to host, together with their expectations regarding whom they can attract or avoid. Also, they depended on how cheap or expensive an offering they wanted to make.

For example, Pia had priced her listing somewhat above what she believed to be the average price for the type of accommodation she was offering. She explained that she chose to do this in order to keep out "troublemakers":

"*I could sure get more guests if I would lower the price. [...] But I've wanted to keep the price a bit high 'cause I want to— How should I put it? Well, sort of reach a slightly higher standard. So I want especially those guests to contact me who are looking for an above-average place to stay. Because I think this flat is quite nice and then I can also go to a little extra effort of making sure that they have, for example, some food waiting here as they arrive and so forth. And maybe the higher price keeps the worst troublemakers and exploiters away.*" (Pia, 25)

Similarly, Ida and Sami noted that one reason for their guests having usually not been "regular backpackers" is that the price they had set for their room was not from the lower end of the spectrum:

"*Well, I have to admit that our place does not seem to draw the usual backpacker-type travelers who are just trying to manage with as small a budget as possible. On the contrary, actually. Our guests have, for the most part, been very educated people, bankers, architects, professors, and so forth. [...] This is, of course, at least partly due to the fact that the price we have set is not particularly cheap.*" (Ida, 35)

In a contrasting example of pricing with social factors in mind, some participants explained that they price their properties below "the market price" in order to achieve a situation wherein they have more options to choose from in selecting those to host. This arrangement relies on the logic that a lower price leads to larger numbers of inquiries from potential guests. Pertti, 33, described the benefits of asking for a price lower than what he could get as follows:

"*[T]he good thing in keeping the price a bit low [...] is that you get to choose* [the guests] *[...]. For the host, it is easier that way.*" (Pertti, 33)

These examples show how monetizing network hospitality is not a straightforward matter of maximizing profits. Our participants were using their ability to determine the price of hospitality to assert control over hosting situations. For some, this meant asking a higher price to tempt certain types of guests and discourage others, while other participants expected that offering accommodation for a lower price than they expected to be able to demand would result in a generally more enjoyable hosting experience.

Finally, the degree to which hosts could use pricing as a tactic for selecting guests and controlling demand was dependent on how established their own reputation was on the Airbnb platform. Many participants explained that they had started with a lower price in order to attract visitors early on and then hiked the price once they had accumulated a good reputation through positive reviews from their guests.

DISCUSSION
Overall, our participants were motivated to monetize network hospitality by acting as Airbnb hosts, both because of the financial gains they could make and for the social gratification they expected. Money was often the initial driver of getting started with hosting, but over time the social factors tended to gain in importance, even for some hosts who earlier had not been interested in the sociability that network hospitality can entail.

Money as a Frame for Network Hospitality
Our analysis indicates that the presence of money can provide a helpful frame for network hospitality, supporting hosts in their efforts to accomplish the desired sociability, to select guests in line with their preferences, and to control the volume and type of demand from potential visitors. The presence of clear-cut monetary transactions may contribute to hosts' sense of control by making it easier for the exchange partners to adopt a shared definition of the

exchange situation. This, in turn, is helpful in the coordination of the entire exchange process.

Our findings indicate that the monetization of network hospitality is not a simple story wherein the introduction of monetary transactions leads to instrumental and calculative social interaction between hosts and guests, as Simmel's [21] theorizing would suggest. Sociability, similar to that observed in the context of non-monetary hospitality exchange, can persist. The presence of money may even contribute to the flourishing of voluntary, enjoyable interaction that entails no sense of obligation and that, in this, approaches Simmel's ideal of pure sociability as a valuable social form.

The presence of money has emerged as a central point of contention in ongoing debates over the nature and potential of the so-called sharing economy. On a higher structural level, there certainly seems to exist much to reconcile between the logics on which venture-backed peer-to-peer platforms operate and the ethos of cosmopolitan sharing. It is not the point of this paper to take a stance in that discussion beyond articulating the experiences of individuals who monetize network hospitality on a relatively small financial scale and for whom the sociability between hosts and guests is by no means a misplaced fantasy.

It is worthy of note that, in our study, even the hosts who practiced remote hospitality and, accordingly, had little in-person interaction with their guests still valued the social aspects of hosting. This indicates that the act of trusting strangers to stay in one's home, making efforts to ensure that they enjoy the stay, and receiving the occasional hand-written note that acknowledges these efforts can meaningfully contribute to a sense of connectedness and cosmopolitanism. Our interviewees' accounts point to a similar imagination being at play for guests, as well, who for their part strive for "authentic" experiences and value the opportunity to stay in a "local" home, even if they meet the hosts only in the passing. Yet, while our findings indicate that the presence of money can be not only harmless but even outright helpful for the sociable interaction and sense of connection many seek in engaging with network hospitality, this should not be taken as alleviating the need for researchers, designers, and policymakers to think critically about the implications money may have for network hospitality and about the effects that monetizing network hospitality may have on neighborhoods, cities, and societies at large.

Homophily and Discrimination in Network Hospitality

In the context of network hospitality, there is an interesting – and somewhat troubling – tension to the tendency to homophily. People participate in network hospitality in order to meet people from other cultures; they want to experience certain "strangeness". However, at the same time, they are selective of which "strangers" to engage with, often opting to host those who are in some way similar to them. From

Ciborra's [5] point of view, this does not count as genuine hospitality, as for him hospitality is behavior that reveals a human effort to cope with the uncertainty and mystery of hosting a stranger.

If network hospitality continues to gain ground as a form of accommodation, homophily may become an increasingly serious and problematic source of discrimination. In some cases, our participants openly described discriminating against potential guests who were members of particular racial, ethnic, or age groups. Similarly, prior studies suggest that people tend to favor those who are in some way similar to them when making decisions on hospitality based on viewing the profiles of potential guests or hosts [3].

Some have expressed concern that social network sites in general increase this tendency to homophily. This may create an "echo chamber effect" wherein the diversity of one's social interaction decreases as he or she interacts only with similar others [2]. This has worrisome consequences for those who, for one reason or another, are seen as less desirable exchange partners. In a recent study, Edelman and Luca [8] compared the prices that black and non-black hosts charge for similar accommodations on Airbnb and concluded that non-black hosts charge approximately 12% more than black hosts. The authors suggest that this highlights the prevalence of discrimination in online marketplaces, revealing an important unintended consequence in the process of selecting exchange partners.

An open question remains as to whether the monetary transactions and the consequently lessened obligations for intense socializing that characterize Airbnb hosting can create room for increased openness to diversity in comparison to non-monetary forms of hospitality exchange that rely on indirect and implicit forms of reciprocity. It seems plausible that those practicing remote hospitality might be more willing to host strangers with whom they do not have a lot in common as long as they feel sufficiently assured of the guests' trustworthiness, while those who host on-site may be more likely to select guests with whom they expect to achieve the desired amount of sociability as comfortably as possible. Since both hosts and guests can gain meaningful social experiences from remote hospitality even when personal interaction remains minimal, monetizing network hospitality may, somewhat unexpectedly, promote experiences of connectedness that would be less likely to occur in the realm of non-monetary network hospitality that tends to entail an expectation of intense social interaction.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. Firstly, we make no claims of generalizability to Airbnb hosts, whether at large or within the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, where the interviews were conducted. It is important to bear in mind that Airbnb hosting can take on different social roles in different geographical and cultural settings, varying with, for

instance, the population density of the area and the price of housing, both of which affect the type of space hosts are likely to have available in a given region and the type of hosting they can practice. Comparisons across such settings are beyond the scope of this paper, but we will reflect on their importance when outlining topics for future research. Secondly, we cannot control for the self-selection bias that may exist in our study: For instance, it is possible that those with especially positive experiences of Airbnb hosting were more likely to take part. However, the aim of the study was to explore hosts' motivations for monetizing network hospitality and to gain insight into how they conceive of the resulting sociality and the ways in which the presence of money ties in with it. We regard this study as an important first step in understanding aspects of network hospitality – and "the sharing economy" more broadly – in which monetary transactions are an integral and visible part of the practice.

Avenues for Future Research

We call for further research to map out the diversity of experiences related to monetizing network hospitality. These are likely to range from occasional hosting in one's primary home, as was seen with most of our participants, to more or even fully professionalized forms of making a profit by leveraging the opportunities that Airbnb and other, similar platforms provide. The volume of hosting, the importance of the income or savings involved for those engaging in the practice, and the degree of professionalism on the part of the hosts are but some of the factors that indicate the circumstances in which network hospitality is practiced. Future research should consider variations in the social role of hosting and the ways in which it is reflected in the resulting social interactions between hosts and guests, taking into account the life situations of the participants, the nature of the hosting location (urban/suburban/rural), the type of hospitality offered (remote/on-site), and cultural differences. The meanings and implications of monetizing network hospitality are likely to be diverse. This should be considered as the debate surrounding network hospitality and the "sharing economy" moves forward.

Furthermore, to complement our findings, it would be important to examine the perspective of Airbnb guests in depth to understand how they perceive the significance of monetary transactions in network hospitality and, for instance, the issues around selecting potential hosts and negotiating hospitality with them. One fruitful pathway for this would be to explore experiences of individuals who cross over between roles, acting as both guests and hosts. Moreover, some of our participants had experience of both Airbnb and Couchsurfing so that they were able to weigh the impact of monetization on network hospitality. Yet targeted, systematic comparison of exchange processes between systems of monetary and non-monetary exchange could benefit the field greatly, as could historically grounded analysis of earlier, even paper-based, forms of

hospitality exchange and homestays. Also, as a part of the comparative endeavor, it would be helpful to examine the complex dynamics of how different types of reciprocation intertwine and play out in the course of hospitality-exchange processes. Finally, in drawing conclusions on the nature of network hospitality, when monetized or otherwise, we must critically and openly examine the diversity of experiences and granularity involved.

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