RESEARCH ARTICLE

HOSTING AS A LIFESTYLE: THE CASE OF AIRBNB DIGITAL PLATFORM AND LISBON HOSTS

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ABSTRACT: The article investigates how the Sharing Economy enables a digital platform to impact the way of life of Airbnb hosts, thus contributing to how one can benefit from some important aspects of social life based on the ideas of hosting, trust and intimacy. The aim herein is to reflect on how such digital platforms use social idealizations about sharing as a moral value to encourage the modes of production of digital capitalism, providing new forms of social dramatization and transforming an Airbnb host into a self-entrepreneur. We argue that the "game" of sharing induces some behavioural changes to ensure a positive reputation which transforms the idea of hosting into a lifestyle aimed at earning money. This means that hosts are induced to manage their feelings and redefine their identities as they acquire new insights about what it means to "be at home" or to "be alone" and then use this as social capital to increase their home-based business. To describe the reconfiguration of identities and social values, we analyse 15 comprehensive interviews with Lisbon hosts that rent rooms in flats where they cohabit with guests. In order to complement this, the Airbnb platform will also be analysed.

KEYWORDS: digital platforms; digital reputation; hosting; lifestyle; sharing economy.

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1. Introduction

The article explores how the digital platform Airbnb uses the idealization of sharing to improve its business and impact the lifestyle of Lisbon hosts contributing to the commodification of some important aspects of the social meanings of hosting, trust and intimacy turning them into a self-entrepreneur determined to be superheroes of accommodation.

The main objective of this article is to examine how Lisbon hosts deals with rules established by Airbnb and the ways in which they materializes news forms of social dramatization in order to deal with the transformation of their private life in a hosting service aimed at earning money.

To elaborate on this, we begin the first section with a qualitative approach that demonstrates how Airbnb systematizes user profiles providing hosts with a space that allows them to create an idealized self-image marked by social imaginaries about collaborative work, mutual trust and community life. The Airbnb platform encourages the creation of a safe place for its users establishing a complex system of identity validation procedures expressed in an environment regulated by behavioural assessment, digital reputation and reciprocal surveillance (Möhlmann, 2016).

The following section distinguishes how the "game" of sharing induces some behavioural changes in the everyday life of hosts to ensure a positive reputation through management feelings (Hochschild, 2012) and social performance (Richardson, 2015) that helps to transform the idea of hosting into a lifestyle. The penultimate section explores how hosts are induced to redefine their identities and acquire new insights about what it means to "be at home" (Roelofsen, 2018) or "to be alone". These identities in turn are used as social capital (Fleming, 2017) in order to increase their home-based businesses. The central argument is that Airbnb promotes not only the reorganization of the idea of hosting from a financial perspective, but it also provides a scenario to maintain the monetization of everyday life (Martin, 2002). This is achieved through a transmutation of private affections on the concepts of "home", "trust" and "privacy" into main sources of revenue. Some of the implications entailed in this argument are further discussed in the brief conclusion.

To describe the reconfiguration of host identities and social values, we analysed 15 in-depth and semi-structured interviews conducted in Lisbon between November 2017 and November 2018 with hosts that rent out rooms in flats they live in and cohabit with guests. The interviews were conducted following the recommendations of authors who spent some time explaining this methodology, such as Dubar (1998) and

Kaufmann (2013) which made it possible to have a broader understanding of the respondents' life trajectories and subjective positions.

Data from Inside Airbnb (2019) show that accommodation in Lisbon during 2019 has about 22,000 active listings. Of this number, 74% represent listings of an entire house to rent. The rest are listings that offer private rooms. This does not imply that these are hosts living in the houses in which they rent. A private room can be, for example, inside a hotel or a hostel.

To find our respondents we logged onto the Platform using the real profile of one of the authors. We pre-selected listings through the use of a filter for the rental of a private room in homes co-habited by hosts. Then we simulated a reservation in Lisbon to access an area called "talk to the host" and we sent a direct message to the host explaining the goals of our research and inviting him/her to an interview.

The biggest issue while elaborating the data was to establish a trusting zone regarding the hosts' recruitment. The first author at times had to use his own experience as a host in Lisbon to point out the fact that he knew how it felt to be in their shoes. A presentation of the project was sent by message to the recruited people soliciting their participation. Most people who were contacted through the Platform did not reply at all. A few showed some interest in participating but gave up after a short period of time.

The ones who answered positively were interviewed. After the interviews some of the hosts recommended that other people participate in the study, i.e. the "snowball" strategy was also used. The interviews were made according to the hosts' preferences regarding time and place. On most occasions this meant at home, while several other interviews were conducted in bars and restaurants in Lisbon. The interviews were taken individually and lasted between 1 hour to approximately 3 hours. We used some excerpts that were considered appropriate for our goals. The interviews were recorded with the hosts' consent, and later transcribed and analysed through MAXQDA, qualitative data analysis software.

Although the article did not focus on studying gender on Airbnb, we ended up having a total of 15 interviewees, 12 of which were women. They are mostly Portuguese (11), although we also have Brazilian (2) and French (2) participants, with overall ages varying between 35 and 60.

The platform's official data states that about 55% of the hosts in 2018 were women. Although figures on women's representation are roughly equal to men, this slight

variation in gender has been the focus of Airbnb since it has invested in measures and partnerships that foster women's entrepreneurship.[1]

We cannot claim that the readiness of women to respond to our invitation is related to a majority presence on the Platform. However, this participation could indicate an attempt by women to increase their income as they defend themselves against the effects of the financial crisis considering that in Portugal the female unemployment rate has been tendentiously higher when compared to male rates (according to Pordata, 2019). We could also consider that this happened after the crisis where the number of visitors to Lisbon began to increase as a consequence of the renovations in the historical centre housing complex and the demand for services in the local tourism sector also started rising (Lestegás; Seixas & Lois-González, 2019).

It is important to mention that the "sample" of interviewees in our research does not prioritize a statistical representation model but rather an exploratory presentation of different cases (ages, qualifications, nationalities and working conditions) in order to understand how the hosting activity crosses its identities in order to become a cohesive group. Regarding the results, it reveals the strategies these individuals use to negotiate sharing private spaces with strangers, along with performances to keep a family-like environment that builds up trust and upholds reputation within the platform.

2. Feelings Towards Sharing: Collaborative work and precariousness

The popularization of "Sharing Economy" has resulted in several appropriations of the term which includes the identification of the practices that occur between consumers and service providers through digital platforms (Belk, 2014). However, the vulgarisation of sharing as a social exchange between acquainted people has allowed for the growth of big companies that manage new ways of online capitalist production. Meanwhile, the notion that supports sharing collaborative practices according to which both parties would equitably benefit without having profit as a goal has been fiercely replaced by the intervention of businesses dominated by a reduced number of participants. In this sense, when we talk about Sharing Economy in a digital context we should consider the fact that it is no longer a new phenomenon but rather a semantic appropriation used to describe a new way of production and consumption that results

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[1]   Available at: https://blog.atairbnb.com/celebrating-and-empowering-women-around-the-world, Retrieved: July 15, 2019.

from a digital-based discourse of cyberculture and technological innovations which, in most cases, has nothing to do with sharing (Arcidiacono; Gandini & Pais, 2018).

That is why we should ask ourselves how this kind of economy, said to be the basis of the original idea of sharing, does in fact provide social exchanges in which both parties get equal benefits. In this sense, probably one of the most quoted and contested examples of Sharing Economy platforms is Airbnb, one of the world's largest companies known not only for its success in local housing business, but also for claiming the status of a "community" of sharers.

The transposition of sharing to the digital world has resulted in a widespread debate about social exchanges online. Because of this it would be quite pretentious of us to state that companies such as Airbnb promote sharing in a social sense. On the other hand, it would be disproportionate to dismiss its role as a catalyst of new social scenarios, namely between platform users. This leads to the following questions: How should we answer qualitative questions that attempt to understand the real nature of the exchanges it provides? And, is there real sharing, and if so, between whom and who is it for?

In order to establish our study's goal we chose to consider Sharing Economy as an expression used to refer to various forms of exchanges facilitated by digital platforms involving a great diversity of profit aimed activities and others with a non-profit purpose (Richardson, 2015), generally using the idea of giving access to unused resources. Schor (2014) considers that Sharing Economy activities fall into four broad categories: 1) recirculation of goods; 2) increase in the utilization of durable resources; 3) exchange of services, and 4) sharing of productive resources. Even if companies like Airbnb are perceived as being responsible for new occupational precariousness scenarios, there is still a massive presence of users who are considered as "independent workers" by these kinds of companies.

The positions about the role of these companies in developing a Sharing Economy are ambiguous. Some argue that they have inaugurated a new way of providing access to specialized services in the field of tourism and urban mobility by creating a friendly ambience made by new forms of consumption and a new income for ordinary people, improving local economies and even contributing to the preservation of the environment (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015), such as reducing carbon dioxide emissions (Mazzella & Sundararajan, 2016). Others argue that such companies have only applied old models to current trends in order to take advantage of crisis contexts to outsource services and thus preserve the precariousness of labour, as well as promote, as in the case of tourism, the concentration of properties in the hands of companies and the gentrification of historical cities (Gil, 2019). There is no doubt that Sharing Economy

has renewed the commitment to an economically sustainable society. However, the fast absorption of such practices by the capitalist market has changed the alternative into a business of capitalist industries, by debating the boundaries of corporate colonization in a collaborative mode of production.

In this sense, the particularity of the Sharing Economy stands out as it has been able to maintain itself in this ambiguous space of controversies and polysemic characterization, often protected by the label of "sharing" as an economic novelty not only bringing a breath of fresh air to the digital market but also establishing new occupations, new market niches and new social and legal challenges (Murillo, Buckland, & Val, 2017).

The idea of collaboration goes hand in hand with Sharing Economy. The key feature of collaborative activities is reciprocity between all the people involved, which presupposes common benefits among peers. The result is the P2P culture.[2] From that universe emerged a multitude of initiatives that use digital technologies as a starting point for the development of collaborative projects.

By following these practices, big companies, like Airbnb, have built up their dominance in the creation of new forms of labour. By building on the digital dimension which the sharing rhetoric got from the cybernetic production and consumption imaginaries attributed to the emergence of the Internet (free access to information through communitarian/collaborative experiences on a global scale) and on social values such as hospitality and trust, it has stood out globally as the main example of the transformation of the concept of collaborative work into a capitalist form of production. These kinds of companies, according to Srnicek (2016), can be considered "lean" platforms because they are centred on outsourcing what they offer. This means that those companies have reduced property value, as well as simplified labour, in order to profit without spending many resources.

With the emergence of digital platforms based on the idea of sharing services and goods, companies like Airbnb "live off" of the mediation they promote between peers and, for that to happen, they charge the hosts a percentage of what they earn as there are commission fees for the rendered services. By acting as a mediator, Airbnb assumes no labour-related responsibility. As intermediary, it argues that the hosts use

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[2]   According to Bauwens (2006), the P2P (peer-to-peer) process is based on the production of "use-value through the free cooperation of producers who have access to distributed capital. Its product is not exchange value for market, but use-value for a community of users (...) freely accessible through new common property regimes." The process is "governed by the community of producers and not by market allocation or corporate hierarchy".

the platform as independent workers. Therefore, it avoids any legal commitments. It is interesting to observe that according to Portuguese law (Decree-Law No. 128/2014)[3], which addresses Local Lodging, it states that any Airbnb host (and all the others who work in this line of business) must register properly, declare any profits, and pay social security contributions as a self-employed worker, which means that currently the Portuguese State acknowledges hosts and, consequently, Airbnb. We cannot deny the positive effect of these platforms in these people's lives. Nevertheless, we cannot forget the negative impact on their lives either. After all, do hosts use the platform as a means to increase their income or do they provide the company with a service? In other words, can hosts be seen as Airbnb employees?

In the Portuguese case, this situation is clear from the moment that legislation organizes the activity of local housing at a national level. It is impossible to use Airbnb as a host without carrying out the requisites required by law. This implies that the law provides the professionalization of the hosting activity at its various levels, especially those performed at a domestic one. In this sense, we consider that this has created a comfortable gap for Airbnb to deny that hosts be considered as co-participants of their empire. Hosts could be considers as "prosumers" (Glucksmann (2016), meaning that they act as producers and consumers. They are crucial to Airbnb's economy considering that they promote the creation of surplus-value to the company while self-customizing their identities, and self-adjusting the domestic labor according to the Airbnb hosting rules. However, they receive no specific payment from it.

During the interviews with Lisbon hosts, this idea of working for Airbnb was ambiguously interpreted by the people involved. Although they recognise the positive aspects of the service they provide as a way to increase their income and improve their lifestyle, they seem to be aware of the absence of an employment relationship between the platform and its users. We are left, however, with the impression that they believe there is some kind of relationship that could be defined as "a partnership", or "a place where you get to know new people".

> In fact, I feel like I am self-employed and Airbnb is a partner of sorts. It is a showcase of part of my work. We work together. I guess I could do it alone, but it probably would not have the same impact. I know that, being a business, they need to make money. On the

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[3]   Available at: https://data.dre.pt/eli/dec-lei/128/2014/08/29/p/dre/pt/html, Retrieved: January 20, 2019.

other hand, I think they should be more present in the community, come a little closer. [4] (Host 1, Brazilian, male)

I think this kind of hosting makes it more 'family-like'. Hosting strangers just to make money… I am not a saint; I need the money to pay my rent. But that is not the only reason. I like sharing. I like hanging out. For instance, I always had a fascination with Australia. I have hosted lots of Australians. It is awesome to talk to them about their home country. For someone who loves to travel but cannot do it often, this is definitely another way of doing it. (Host 2, Portuguese, female)

It takes a lot of work. You have to report who sleeps at your place to the Town Council. And how many people. Then you have to report it to SEF (Immigration and Borders Service). And with the money people are asking for, it does not pay off. You host someone for two days. You have to change the bed linens, have the bedroom and bathroom cleaned up, wash the clothes, do the ironing, all for 20 euros a day. You don't get to do anything else all day long. You have to assess the person and reply in 24 hours. (Host 3, Portuguese, female)

The social imaginaries of Airbnb hosts allow the company to assert itself as a capitalist giant. Instead of establishing a work system in which the host works for the company, it behaves according to social values which are the basis of community, mainly the idea of sharing. This means Airbnb morally exempts itself from any work-related liabilities by transforming the hosts' sharing discourse into its own.

The inclusion of hosts in the "self-employed" category prevents these people from receiving specific training to assure a symmetrical provision of services according to corporate goals. Faced with this shortcoming, one of the strategies these Sharing Economy platforms use to manage their "staff's" behaviour is the overvaluation of digital reputation (Mikołajewska-Zając, 2018) through their own system based on the concept of a two-side review. This method helps to create reliability and atmospheres of trust between peers, as well as some kind of surveillance regulated by the participants themselves, by establishing a social feedback system based on the interactions during the process of renting a room/home.

One can read the following on the Airbnb site: "On any given night, 2 million people stay in homes on Airbnb in 81,000 cities all over the world. There are nearly 5 million

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[4] The interviews were conducted in Portuguese and all English translations were made by the authors.

listings in 191 countries to choose from – that's more than the top five hotel chains combined. What makes all of that possible? Trust".[5]

Trust is the reason why sharing should happen in safe places for peers. Sociology thinks very highly of this concept and trust has been interpreted in many different ways. Luhmann, (1979) believed it is an indispensable resource for contemporary societies, which are characterised by a permanent risk and uncertainty. Likewise, Fukuyama (1995) argued that Japan's and China's economic growth was linked to the trust systems established by those societies.

Simmel (2004) has also presented some arguments that describe the way trust is intimately connected to transitional periods from a monetary economy, that is to say, based on the material aspect of the thing itself, to a credit based economy, i.e., based on immaterial aspects which can only be carried out because there is a pre-existing system of trust. In this new level of trust based on credit, beyond rational and cognitive evidence, Simmel (2004) believes that trust is asserted by an almost religious element connected to the notion of faith, where in order to achieve an agreement between peers it is necessary to believe that it will, in fact, work out. Likewise, he also argues that trust has an institutional basis, which is the same as when you socialize with people who believe in corporate reputation, where those entities are credited for their nature as organized institutions.

In the case of the Sharing Economy based on digital platforms which presupposes providing services to strangers, trust becomes the basis of the entire process (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). The introduction of technology in such a context is based on the stability of these concepts which are part of the social complexity. We should consider that technology, in general terms, has gone through a process of social recognition where it is seen as something positive for society. As far as the Internet is concerned, this process has occurred gradually. There is no need to say how much of it was used and what for. The question is that it has built such a reputation that the "sharers" do not hesitate to host people they have never seen before (Costa, Fernandes, & Gonçalves, 2017).

> I prefer to believe in the good of humankind. The idea of trusting others is quite lovely. And I know that, nowadays, that is hard, but it is an almost philosophical thing. It is lovely to think I can open my house doors to travellers, to people who want to get to know our country. This is my own romantic view of life and I am hoping not to have my dreams crushed. I enjoy fighting for this idea. (Host 4, Portuguese, female)

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[5]   Available at: https://www.airbnb.pt/trust, Retrieved: January 20, 2019.

> I have this story that happened with a friend of mine and someone who was trying to make a reservation and kept asking for more photos. And there were plenty of photos in the profile. I started to think it was kind of weird. Meanwhile, someone else joined the conversation, but on a guest profile saying she was his wife and that she was in Barcelona. She said she was not able to do the verification asked by Airbnb. And I thought: this person is trying to bypass the system. Usually it is like that, people do not want others to bypass the system because it is a matter of security. One thing is when someone who is staying in your house asks you if they can stay another week, and you say: Oh, let us keep it between ourselves, as to avoid taxes and fees. That is one thing. But by then you can tell you can trust the other person, you know what their thing is. Online, I mean… and I am talking about someone who has no reviews, no photos. Of course, there could be nothing wrong with them, but when people come to your home they show their faces, they identify themselves, knock on the door, we open, we talk. (Host 5, Portuguese, female)

If we are to consider mistrust as a mechanism which aims to decrease the complexity of relationships, even though its impact produces simplifications which carry negative effects over something or someone (Mota, 2016), what you see in the sharing between strangers through digital platforms are attempts and efforts to assure mutual trust environments. In this sense, the only reason building *digital trust* is possible is because it has been developed by processes we bring from outside the Internet. According to Simmel, all social relationships involve, in a way, some sort of expectation. However, since relationships are not always identical, participants cannot help but to admit they cannot control them and, consequently, will have to apply what Möllering, (2001) called "suspension". In other words, it is a leap of faith in which people, momentarily, let go of their assumptions about others in order to maintain an interaction. Otherwise, social interaction would be almost impossible.

3. Building a digital reputation

The idea of digital trust is complemented by the concept of reputation. Reputation plays a prominent role in the relationships established during the consumption of goods and services within the Sharing Economy, as an immaterial manifestation of social capital in a digital society (Gandini, 2016:28; Ert, Fleischer & Magen, 2015). With the expansion of the Internet, a company's prestige, the quality of a service and the notability of a profile (or just the opposite) can be empirically measured in order to produce performance metrics which can help both with self-assessment and as a way

to produce a set of images and symbolic values that will guide and shape the rules of the qualitative validation of a service.

Rankings become fundamental when it comes to Sharing Economy concepts. Scores are obtained through algorithms that calculate performances from the evaluations of service providers, and are turned into numerical or symbolic scales, as stars and badges. In this sense, we agree that online reputation systems converge into a kind of economy in which trust becomes the expected consequence that is esteemed by hosts while creating value for the offered service.

The need to keep a positive reputation results in the standardization of the participants' behaviour, as shall be described next. This means that, for the hosts, the search for an image that suits social expectations on hospitality and friendliness, contributes to formatting an oriented performance. Nonetheless, this dramatized behaviour implies that you must build yourself up as a reputable person, which is one of the coercive means of capitalist sharing (Hearn, 2010). Within this framework of thought, we should discuss, for instance, the essential role played by the historical construction of social values considered to be a paradigm for building up trust and the consequences of social media in this process. Hosts must worry about both establishing a good reputation on the platform and extend their "self-branding" to other digital spaces by acknowledging that their digital identity will somehow be investigated by potential guests.

We would risk saying that the Sharing Economy favours its own politics based on promoting hosts as some sort of added-value for its ecosystem. Since they are essential to keeping the accommodation business going, and considering, as previously mentioned, that Airbnb is not interested in training these people, the most useful resource is to evoke reputation as a key element to ensure a double optimum performance: it benefits both hosts and Airbnb. Hosts keep their reputation intact, and so does Airbnb. This can, nevertheless, be seen as somewhat perverse or cynical given that people who do not fit into certain patterns or that are left out for structural reasons are at risk of being included in an excluded minority.

According to Airbnb's bilateral review system users can assess each other. The assessment becomes public on each other's profile in order to avoid possible retaliations and negative reviews, but also to testify their trust in other participants (Möhlmann, 2016). The following excerpt verifies how important this system is to the host:

> I think it is important because it validates my hosting. I believe it can determine where the guest will stay. As far as I am concerned, I always try to be honest about my guests.

> They will learn that when there is something I dislike I'll just say it, and this way other hosts may also get to know all about my guests' behaviour. But that hasn't happened to me yet. This is what I do: if the guest writes a comment, I will write back. I will send a customised comment. I do not use standardized comments because people are not all the same. I end up using some detail about something that happened during the stay, something that identifies a singular moment of the person while staying with me. (Host 6, Brazilian, female)

Airbnb's host reputation is built by combining four areas on the platform: *self-description*; *performance*; *peer reviews* and *recognition*. In Airbnb's case, after checking out, guests are asked to assess the hosting (the assessment is not mandatory) in two ways: 1) a star rating in six different categories: accuracy, communication, cleanliness, location, arrival and value; 2) written reviews submitted by guests. The platform provides a reviews page which will be published online, and they can also send a private review that will only be accessible to hosts. The hosts' reputation is also quantified by the number of reservations they accept, the time they take to answer enquiries (response rate) and the cancellations. Their response rate is also a factor that will contribute to increase the hosts' reputation, as a testament of the amount of time they spend addressing the guests' requests. Anyone can check those in the hosts' profile.

Any host who meets the requirements pre-established by Airbnb reaches the "SuperHost" (SH) condition. The system uses star ratings and reviews to grant SH status through quarterly assessments. Hosts are notified about the assessments, statistics on their reputation and warned about the next evaluation so that they can try to improve their performance.

Hosts who reach SH status receive a badge that will appear on their profile, and that will help identify them, increase their reputation and give them a chance to get more reservations. SuperHost requirements are the following: host a minimum of 10 stays in a year; maintain a 90% response rate or higher; have at least 80% 5-star reviews; zero cancellations, with exceptions made for those that fall under the Extenuating Circumstances.

The benefits of becoming an Airbnb SH are the following: the profile badge is easily identifiable by guests; $100 travel coupons for hosts that retain their status for a full calendar year; they have priority support when they call Airbnb; Airbnb will invite them to trial and preview new upcoming releases and attend exclusive events. Their reputation is also guaranteed by the way they present themselves, room/home description, photos they post, flexibility regarding the cancellation of reservations and the verification of identity through proper documents.

The only way to reach an Airbnb host is by using the platform's reservations system. Our sample was randomly created through the attempt to contact hosts. Messages were sent through the Contact Host on the listing page, the only way to establish direct contact with the hosts. Although it is not about a real reservation request, the platform also uses it to assess the hosts' performance. By default, the system assumes that the request will become a reservation. Therefore, it forces hosts to either accept it or refuse it, blocking their calendar for the corresponding periods of time. The hosts' interaction on the platform is taken into account in order to establish their status and becomes an asset for these people. To reach SH status is quite important for some hosts. One of the interviewees told us that our approach through the platform could have jeopardized her status.

> Luckily there was a reservation for that same date. This way I didn't have to refuse it. If I did, I would have lost my superhost status. I wouldn't want that to happen because I worked so hard to get it. (Host 2, Portuguese, female)

> I am a superhost. When I got the little badge I got a little surprised because I didn't know what it was. You need I don't know how many positive reviews… just stuff you need to become a superhost. And they keep reassessing you, just to check if you keep the standard. I try to keep a perfect room, to be a good host so nobody feels the need to complain. And I try to put myself in the guest's shoes, as if I were the one staying there. I always leave them a small gift. I always check the guest's profile. In case it is an older couple, I leave them some wine and fruit. If it is a student, I leave some water and a snack. (Host 6, Brazilian, female)

> The only thing that worries me about my reputation is that Lisbon is starting to offer too many homes. If I do something to upset Airbnb's algorithm, my profile will be pushed back and won't even be visible to people. That's all. (Host 5, Portuguese, female)

 If we are to consider this process as a positive factor, the verification of identities in the Sharing Economy has served as a great resource to keep the reputation of businesses based on sharing private services with strangers. Nevertheless, considering all the existing loopholes both parties can use, there are several studies that show a shift from an idealized attitude that has been transformed into discriminatory behaviours and an increase in social inequalities (Edelman, Luca, & Svirsky, 2017; Farajallah, Hammond, & Pénard, 2016).

As service providers or consumers can pre-judge others through shared information on digital platforms, they can both, by privately exercising their freedom, decide to

accept or refuse a request, or buy or not a service after analysing the pre-requisites they establish to ensure the so-called security. In the case of a conventional economy this sense of security is usually validated only through an identity document, whereas in a Sharing Economy it requires both a document and a subjective assessment process from both parties. In this sense, the hosts that participate in the process can imagine who the guests are and how they will behave during their stay, and vice-versa, through some sort of moral judgement of each other's profiles.

> (…) I realised how other hosts give reviews. There are a couple of key sentences I am starting to use like "I definitely recommend", or "I want you to come back, you are always welcome and I'll even recommend you to other hosts". If you say something like "oh, it was lovely, it was nice", you can actually be trying to say something else. But she didn't have any of this. She had already caused some trouble. Next time I see someone with a similar profile, I'll know. In this case I did call Airbnb to know if I could ask her to leave. I ended up not talking to her because I don't usually get upset with people. Airbnb recommended me not to do it and since my boyfriend lives downtown I went to his home and left her by herself. I think she was the only person I said I would not recommend. She gave me three stars. Three stars means that she cannot book another place any time soon. Airbnb's way of doing things forces hosts to be nicer. When they replied "Oh you better not cancel because that is going to affect your reputation". I don't think that's fair. I was keeping it cool, we weren't being loud or anything but she wanted me to go to bed at 11. I wouldn't mind getting her another place to stay. I would have given the money back… (Host 5, Portuguese, female)

Their organization of the profiles provides us with interesting sociological considerations if we take the example of the classical concept of "role", used by Goffman (1993, 49) as "one of the ways through which our performance is shaped and changed as to adjust to the interpretation and expectations of the society you are part of" and the idea of "emotional labor" from Hochschild (2012). The catalogue shape that the digital platforms provide to users is a common practice in varying sites that gather data in order to standardize them. On the other hand, this makes service providers more assertive regarding the way they manage the information they provide, thus favouring a greater integration, almost mimetically, of standards of behaviour and values, as noted by Goffman (1993), which are officially recognised by society, even more than their global performance.

To become a SuperHost means they need to learn how to manage their feelings in the context of hosting strangers. As highlighted by Hochschild (2012), it's possible to point that an Airbnb Host express hosting by doing a labour that requires inducing or

suppressing feelings in order to sustain an expected image about hospitality. That image, as we demonstrate below, is an empirical effort from a host made by conjugating a set of demonstrations expressed by rules of behaviour established by the Airbnb manual that includes managing feelings, and requires an incessant production of the idealized home, which takes into account a specific aesthetics about cleanness, comfort and safety. This, based on Hochschild's affirmation, represents a full package of a publicly observable display to create value in host labour.

This is why we may consider the existence of a performance of the Sharing Economy*,* as reported by Richardson (2015), like an adjustment to an imaginary pattern which characterizes the behaviour of people who share.These patterns are confirmed through this sort of game between service providers and users. The former try to come up with a social profile validated by reviews they receive after the stay or trip. On the other hand, users are also assessed by the service provider. This is how we establish organic proof of a reputation system which is the platform's foundation. According to Airbnb's site: "Reviews and verifying profiles help develop trust in our community".[6]

During the *performance of sharing* it is possible to recognise that selling a service in a Sharing Economy results from the suppression of anonymity. Unlike the service provided by a traditional economy, like hotels and transportation companies where the user usually does not know anything about the employees' personal lives, in a Sharing Economy the processes of purchase and sale of services are oriented by an idea of *total transparency*. It is necessary to transform commercial procedures into personal practices in order to develop peer-to-peer relationships divided according to convictions (Gil, 2019). The personalization of commerce is the basis of this kind of economy. To perform a social identity and the true *self* of participants reduces uncertainties and allows for interactions to be established in order to confirm the social relationships within these platforms.

This entire process of production of self is the host's responsibility. This means that they must make a permanent effort to create their own professional image, starting with the one they produce on the platform. All the fields must be completed. All the photos must be presentable (Ert, Fleischer, & Magen, 2016). Cleanliness and place organization must be visible to all potential guests. Those Airbnb pre-requisites for success create significant attempts to standardize hosting. By forcing hosts to act as entrepreneurs that meet requirements of discipline which inspire trust, organization and professionalism, the platform is able to create a pattern. As previously mentioned, Airbnb's reputation is

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[6] Available at: https://www.airbnb-toolkits.com/outline/e5felkdf/activities/pr6pymuv, Retrieved: April 05, 2018.

built on the hosts' own reputation. So, it is possible to conclude that the company's prestige, its social value, depends solely on the individual success of each host. Therefore, in order to build this pattern, Airbnb has been developing ways of reaching its hosts. One of them is the distribution of algorithmic rewards based on the good performance of each host. People with solid reputations are granted privileges in its search engine. Surely a SuperHost's advertisement will be on display on the platform. This reward system gives Airbnb the ability to attract hosts and allow them to maximize their profits through the production of value resulting from their permanence in this pattern. This game between promised benefits and real gains creates neoliberal expectations regarding these people's lifestyles. It is not just about socializing, and even less about sharing your life in a community. It is much more than this. It is the acquisition of ideals about financial freedom, flexibility of work hours, autonomy and individuality. As described by Gil (2019), it is the image of someone who is worthy on their own right, capable of overcoming crisis situations without having to resort to the State or social policies.

4. Adjusting the "home sweet home"

The organization of the platform's interface equals "preparing the ground", the perfect space to implement an adequate performance that fits a pattern of behaviour expected from a hospitable and sociable person, as well as the ones individuals expect from themselves through values which precede those of companies (a good character, honesty, transparency, friendliness, etc.). This performance is an attempt to reaffirm a community's moral values, according to goals such as those of Airbnb, which is considered to be a global community. As Derian Chesky, one of the platform's co-founders states, "the idea that people are fundamentally good and every community is a place where you can belong".[7]

The main attraction promoted by Airbnb is the promise that tourists will live unique experiences by staying at the homes of people who actually live in the city they are visiting. A welcoming experience; something unique, original and not superficial like staying at a hotel. You will find this general comment throughout the interviewees' statements, while they highlight positive aspects about their homes as fully prepared spaces to provide a good hospitality. This conversion to an organized space leads us to an analytical perception of the change or redirection in the concept of "home", i.e., the

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[7]   Available at: http://www.airbnb.pt/diversity, Retrieved: March 23, 2018.

place where you are supposed to find refuge, and moments of rest and fraternization with the people you love the most. You can tell from the interviews that this reorganization comes from the creation of the guests' own space, which results in a new way of understanding the idea of home. Most hosts highlight the positive aspects of this productive process, for instance, making money and the need to keep the house organized and clean, which contrasts with new everyday life restrictions. The home stops being the hosts' space of freedom, forcing them to adopt new social behaviours in the presence of strangers, and also forces them to acquire a new lifestyle. We are facing a new way of inhabiting:

> I do this thing every 6 weeks. I lock the calendar for my two bedrooms. In case there are no requests, I close for one night. That day I have the house all to myself. I can walk barefoot and have messy hair. I take the time to organize stuff. But I cannot afford to do that all the time because I need the money. (Host 2, Portuguese, female).

> We have decided to do it to help pay the rent. In order to have some things you have to give up others. Suddenly, the thing we gave up, as a couple, as a person, was having to share a bathroom, something we had never done before. I had never done that. It was a big sacrifice, I mean, having to share our space with someone else, with different people all the time. (Host 1, Brazilian, male)

> I feel that the notion of home, of an unblemished place, so to speak, changed completely for the first time. It is about a whole different dynamic. Now I have to stick to a certain code of conduct. For instance, control the noise I make. But regarding cost-benefit, I would say they are almost even. There are more highs than lows. Generally speaking, the people I host are very respectful (Host 7, Portuguese, female)

The home becomes a workplace that does not follow the traditional work logic; it becomes an extra income source instead. This way, it establishes a specific kind of conflict which does not usually happen between work and money, but rather between money and life, if you are to consider that those activities directly affect the hosts' daily life (Gil, 2019; Orozco, 2014). This premise contradicts the concept of home as a place for resting after work; a space to recover from physical exhaustion before having to return to the factory, and thus keep capitalism up and running. This notion would be refuted now that Airbnb homes have become small companies open 24/7 improving financial gains to women that were confined to working continuously unpaid jobs within a place that was sacralised by social traditions based on a man-ruled imaginary. Meanwhile, we cannot deny that it carries the representative weight of being the first

social context where relationships of power arise (Glucksmann, 2013; Roelofsen, 2018). It is interesting to notice that the constraints of converting the home into local housing result in the acquisition of new professional skills (hosting) for women, and that some men become aware of genre issues related to managing the home. Even if it is not widespread, one of the interviewees pointed this out:

> In Portugal, people over 35 cannot get fixed-term jobs. And if we're talking about women with children, it is ten times worse. Unless you have got high qualifications that make the companies really want you… But with women it is different because they would rather hire a man for that same position. I think that is why there are many women using Airbnb and local housing. Usually, these women have higher-education studies, but cannot get another job, or never will, and they know it. In case they have inherited a house or received some severance payment, they will think of buying a place, for instance, a house, and set their own business to raise some income. This is something I see a lot of women doing and I guess it is good for those in Airbnb. (Host 5, Portuguese, female)

> I started doing things I didn't usually do. Hosting is a lot calmer. My previous job was very tiring. I used to work with insurance. When I talk about my current occupation some people think I'm crazy. Are you cleaning the floors? That's because I do it all at home. I clean the floor, the bathroom, I do the ironing. Things I didn't use to do very often. Sometimes I even feel it is therapeutic. I didn't use to do house chores. Either my wife did it or we would pay someone to do it. (Host 1, Brazilian, male)

This *ontological* home is not only a place you wish to go to rest and live, but also a place where you can make money. It re-asserts itself as a place to produce labour value. It is material and abstract work which transforms prosaic behaviours into commercial products. Hosts create varying types of work through the production of standardized behaviours, so called by Gil (2019) "externalities", and the exploitation of sociability. After the abstract work of producing a digital *self*, i.e., their profile, hosts must continue their hard task of hosting. They must not only legally and financially manage their earnings, but also clean and decorate the rooms, buy welcoming gifts, organize tours and, apart from all that, even have time to entertain the guests, and that is why they must master at least the English language. As stated by one of the interviews, they use and improve their skills in order to "sell themselves":

> Something I found to be very interesting, I love History and they (guests) ask many questions. That makes me do research and find out things I didn't know about my country. And this is fantastic. (Host 8, Portuguese, female)

> I have something other people don't. The title of my profile is *a real Lisbon girl*. Born and raised in Lisbon, Graça. Most of the time that is why people choose my room. I am actually selling myself. I am from downtown Lisbon and there aren't many people like me anymore. (Host 5, Portuguese, female)

Being a host becomes a routine. From the routine comes a pattern which, along with Airbnb, contributes to ensure the best possible service. On the other hand, and somewhat insidiously, the routine ends up validating the activity as a job, which makes hosts accept the pattern as a positive factor in their performance. In this sense, socialization becomes a way to create economic value by guiding the idea of privacy towards a different place in the space where one assumed to already have it. Hosts develop physical and discursive strategies to create new private spaces in their own homes.

> I have always been an extrovert. I have always liked tourism. I don't see it as an intrusion, I think it's nice. Now, I always tell guests that my bedroom door is the limit, because that is the small space that I've got left. I have the right to some privacy. (Host 9, Portuguese, female)

> I am happy when, for instance, I don't have any reservations for two days because I get the house all to myself. You end up losing your privacy. You need to be quite altruistic in order to share a space with strangers. That's what I feel I've lost. (Host 6, Brazilian, female)

The dimension of domestic space has a transforming effect on these people's lives. The idea that hosting on Airbnb is original because you presuppose it means being hosted by locals and living a unique experience, not as artificial as staying in a hotel, is also a social currency for hosts. Considering the social changes which resulted from austerity contexts, the effort to produce their homes as a symbol of a distinct type of tourism is present in these people's activity as hosts. It becomes a postcard whose goal is to attract more clients. From its symbolic creation through detailed descriptions and staged photos intended for the platform, to the organization, cleaning and decoration, the home embodies an archetype. In this model, the traditional concept of home as a family comfort place is recurrent. The guest needs to feel at home. The interviewees' discourse about the fundamental role played by the transformation of the home into a welcoming space and a symbol of a social reality that matches the tourist's expectations about a local experience is a constant.

> My home is a regular house, a funny house. It's got antiques, things from my grandmother, my great-grandmother, old photographs. So when people see the photos, they say that the house belongs to someone who actually lives there. I see photos of really cool houses all the time. I wouldn't like to sleep in one of those houses, the ones with swallows and quotes by Fernando Pessoa. Sure, in my house I also have a few IKEA items, but other people overdo it and it may attract guests for the wrong reasons. I am not going to compete against people who live in 120 square metre houses, even if it is a two-bedroom apartment like mine. I need to show what makes mine a different house. (Host 5, Portuguese, female)

5. Concluding remarks

The success of companies such as Airbnb shows that platform economies has been strengthening traditional capitalism in a new way. By combining financial crisis with new technologies, new organization systems, new models of exploitation and new forms of work, the companies whose goal is profit have based their businesses on the commercialization of social values which is at the foundation of societies. There is no doubt that these businesses have also become a source of income to many people.

Nowadays, the concept of Sharing Economy has become an institution. It has its own language and a specific grammar. Just as the Internet, which was celebrated in the early 2000's as an archetype for the redemption of contemporary social behaviours, this type of economy, which uses digital technology, has been celebrated as an alternative for financial crisis scenarios. However, its expansion in the digital market has brought about legal and social challenges. As a system based on non-commercial relationships, the Sharing Economy models which precede the inclusion of technology, subsisted as a social compound organized by specific dimensions, which usually consisted of small social circles. The enthronement of network technology has radically changed this dimension and promoted its commercialization.

After our analysis on the Airbnb interface we see that such platforms, even though they present themselves as spaces for the promotion of open social interaction, in fact, embody their own politics (Srnicek, 2016). The participation in these platforms requires that the participants perform certain behaviours to ensure trust spaces among the people that use them. Sharing with strangers becomes a grammatical principle of this new economy. Being nice and having a good reputation are the basic premises of its composition. It is in this sense that we can talk about "commercialization of sharing" and "economy of affection", a process developed through the overvaluation of moral

values about community ideology which is being built up through the self-regulation of peer-to-peer standardized behaviours.

By analysing the subjective trajectory of hosts that took part in this study it was possible to understand the mainstream character of those premises in the discourse and experiences that characterize this group of actors, which results in an imaginary web that connects people and interests. We noticed how much hosting on Airbnb altered the understanding of apparently stable social definitions such as the idea of home, trust, privacy, sharing and labour. Changes which not only affect the redefinition of such concepts, but also lead hosts towards an emotional professionalization, transforming, as Airbnb calls them, into some kind of "hostrepreneurs". Distant from the idea of domestic hosting as a hobby, i.e. welcoming a guest according to traditional models, even if it involves eventual systems of reward (a gift you get for hosting someone, or an allowance to pay for hosting a traveller, for example), Airbnb's hosting system has led this kind of activity entirely towards monetization. In this sense, hosting is no longer a casual activity, but rather a financial activity, an income source for the interviewed hosts.

The data gathered during the course of the interviews and the analysis of Airbnb's interface helped to observe how the hosts attempt to include this new reality into their everyday life. With money coming in, that is to say, by transforming the home into a commercial space, these discursive strategies personified the hosts' speech by using ambiguous justifications; on the one hand, they alluded to an improvement in their lifestyle because they were making more money and, on the other hand, the limitations they had to deal with for sharing their living space with strangers.

The ambiguities of idealized *feelings of sharing* were also present in the relationship they established with Airbnb. To improve your income you need to make a remarkable investment, which can include acquiring technological skills, handling the platform, managing reservations, achieving goals, organising the space and even creating your own *self* which represents the embodiment of friendliness and sociability. Since the hosts acquire commercial market skills they try to become entrepreneurs on their own right through marketing dynamics, and are led to re-orient themselves as a subject. Even though these activities reflect precariousness, which is not generally acknowledged, these hosts cling to their positive aspects and benefits. This brings us to admit that precariousness is also a lifestyle. This is mainly due to the fact that Airbnb was partly a result of an employment crisis and has built its reputation on that same crisis. However, we have also seen how much hosts see it as fundamentally important to decrease their own precariousness. Still, we nearly all agree that the subjective backgrounds of the interviewees have showed us how this change permeates directly

into everyone's lifestyle. This shift in the Sharing Economy due to financial imperatives shows how much this field has been promoting the creation of new digital monopolies and the permanence of labour precariousness scenarios in which people, by trusting Airbnb's promise of redemption, subject themselves to new forms of production that capitalize on their own intimacy. It means that the contribution of hosting in the Sharing Economy is to challenge traditional social values and to question to what extend its need must be resignified to offer protection from the monopolies of digital life.

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