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Geographies of sharing and the East/West divide in Europe. The case of HomeExchange[1]

Abstract: *Sharing economy supposed to be a current global, or at least Western, phenomenon, running across geographic, nation or culture borders. In the globalized world, everybody with the access to the Internet can participate in sharing economy platforms. This article shows that this is not the case even within the West, more specifically Europe. The text argues that the participation in the hospitality platforms follow old political, geographical and culture borderlines in Europe. The authors use the example of HomeExchange.com, a hospitality platform built on the sharing economy business model, to show that contemporary hospitality networks might reproduce the old borderlines and culture divides.*

Keywords: sharing economy; Europe; Eastern Europe; Western Europe; hospitality tourism; HomeExchange.

Introduction

Globalisation with increasing connectivity and mobility was supposed to create a homogeneous world culture and de-territorialise economic, political, and culture relations (Paasi, 1998). Large-scale social changes triggered by globalisation, as well as postcolonial and postmodern sensibilities in anthropology, contributed to increasing attention to instability, fluidity and destabilisation of boundaries. The discourses of transnationalism and translocality emphasize the porous character of boundaries and cross-border movements of objects

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and people (Vertovec, 2001; Hedberg & Do Carmo, 2012; Budilová & Jakoubek 2014). The image of bounded cultures and communities has been replaced by the idea of grey zones (Frederiksen & Knudsen, 2015; Green, 2015) or ambiguity (Green, 2005). However, the space has not become irrelevant even in the globalized world of accelerated change and increased connectivity. Instead, it has been, as Gupta and Ferguson (1992, p. 9) argued, *re*territorialized in a completely different way. Recent works at the intersection of anthropology and geography focusing on the relationship of identity and place develop concepts like "edginess", referring to not so much a place, but to a way of being (Harms et al., 2014), or "pathways" denoting a flow of trade, people, or stories, embedded in a particular landscape and topography (Saxer, 2016).

However, boundaries still matter in the globalized world. In the "overheated" phase of globalisation (Eriksen, 2016), with the accompanying tensions, conflicts and frictions, there are also novel forms of boundary making, as boundaries may be also re-stabilised (Eriksen & Schober, 2016, p. 9). As Eriksen (2019) points out, while cultural meanings and values mix, group identities and boundaries persist. Renewed anthropological interest in space and place led to re-evaluation of the idea of cultural difference. Even though the local places are becoming more blurred, *ideas* of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps more salient (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 10). S. Green´s notion of cross-locations (Green, 2015) shows how any place can form part of several entities.

Home exchange, a way of travel when people swap their homes temporarily using digital platforms as a mediator, appears in the academic literature most often as a phenomenon of the sharing economy, or as an example of "alternative" tourism. Both perspectives stress the environmental and social sustainability and suggest that it implies a new economic model with the power to reshape our social, economic and political interactions. Sharing economy and participatory culture seem to be open to anyone with an access to the Internet in the contemporary globalised culture. However, the participation in the sharing economy is still not spread worldwide, and differs even within the "Western world". This paper investigates the geography of sharing economy within Europe, taking home exchange phenomenon as a case point. We will show that there are significant differences in the participation in sharing economy across Europe and these new divides often follow old culture boundaries.

Sharing economy as a subject of social science research

Research on sharing economy has focused on its economic and social impact, legal and regulatory aspects, user motivations and characteristics of the participants, or the functioning of particular platforms. Much has been written on the general characteristics of the sharing economy model (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Belk, 2014a, 2014b; Slee, 2015; Lang et al., 2020; Česnuitytė et al., 2022). Many researchers have studied hospitality networks as a unique business model, focusing on its economic, legal and regulatory aspects (Grit & Lynch, 2011; Russo & Quaglieri Domínguez, 2016; Sigala, 2017; Crommelin et al., 2018; Gupta et al., 2019; Lang et al., 2020; Casado-Diaz et al., 2020). Also, individual platforms using the sharing economy model have been studied, such as Couchsurfing (Decrop et al., 2018), AirBnb (Crommelin et al., 2018), or various home exchange sites (DeGroote & Nicasi, 1994; Grit & Lynch, 2011; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Sdrali et al., 2015; Russo & Quaglieri Domínguez, 2016).

Many researchers have examined the motivations to participate in the sharing economy. Kim et al. (2018) studied the motivation of CouchSurfing providers to help strangers, and ask why hosts help strangers even though there is no expected economic benefit. Lang et al. (2020) stress the importance of studying both types of one-sided users of sharing economy platforms: consumers and providers. They specifically focus on the motivations of both consumers and providers to adopt the other role and become "prosumers" on the example of Airbnb users. Decrop et al. (2018) focused on the motivations and shared values of the CouchSurfing community. They have emphasized the "transformative power" of CouchSurfing, i.e. the positive influence of the CouchSurfing experience on the personality of its participants (Decrop et al., 2018). Forno and Garibaldi (2015) analysed Italian home-swapping community, focusing on socio-demographic characteristics and lifestyles.

Some researchers suggest that differences between various countries in the number of sharing economy accommodation platforms might be due to cultural differences (Kim et al., 2018, p. 29), but in general an impact of cultural differences on participation in sharing economy has not been studied much so far. The cultural dimension of the home exchange phenomenon and differences in the notions of trust, reciprocity and sociality in different countries, has been suggested as one of the "research gaps" in the existing research (Casado-Diaz et al.,

2020, p. 279). Gupta et al. (2019) analyzed the influence of cultural differences on individuals' decision to participate in P2P (peer to peer) exchanges on respondents from 11 countries. They analyze the *propensity to provide* and the *propensity to rent* products from others, analyzing four "cultural dimensions" (collectivism, masculinism, uncertainty avoidance and power distance). These "cultural dimensions" like "collectivism" or "masculinism" are, however, very difficult to define at the level of nationals statistics.

Some scholars focused on the geographic scale of home exchange phenomenon. Casado-Diaz et al. (2020, p. 272), for example, showed that from more than 500 000 homes offered on the HomeExchange.com site in 2019, Europe, America, and to a lesser extent Australia, were the most popular home exchange "supply" areas. Therefore, the home exchange phenomenon is largely a "Western affair" (Russo & Qualgieri Domínguez, 2016, pp. 161–162), a typically Western phenomenon, with members from predominately Europe, USA and Canada, and Australia and New Zealand (Grit & Lynch, 2011, p. 23). In this article, we focus on the participation in the sharing economy platform (HomeExchange.com), and show that even within Europe, participation in hospitality networks differ significantly between the Eastern and Western Europe.

Sharing economy and collaborative consumption

Sharing economy (Česnuitytė et al., 2022), collaborative consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010), or "collaborative commerce" (Sigala, 2017) are rapidly growing phenomena that emerged around the financial crisis of 2007–2008 and related recession period (Miguel et al., 2022, p. 4). Most of these activities imply sharing of surplus capacity in an asset or service and use new digital platforms as an intermediary (Crommelin et al., 2018, pp. 431–432). What is typical of all types of the new sharing and collaborative consumption practices is 1) the use of temporary access non-ownership models and 2) the reliance on the Internet, especially Web 2.0 technologies (Belk, 2014a, p. 1595). The former stresses access over ownership as a new form of consumption. The latter points out to the fact that sharing economy facilitates peer-to-peer (P2P) exchanges via digital platforms and mobile communication (Miguel et al., 2022, p. 3).

The growth of sharing economy testifies the increasing value of temporary access to goods over ownership as an alternative mode of consumption (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020). Many observers believe that

sharing of music, books, cars, homes, or energy will challenge the traditional business models (Belk, 2014a; Sigala, 2017). Botsman and Rogers (2010), for example, suggest that collaborative consumption could bring a similar turning point as the Industrial Revolution once did. These practices might completely change our views of how we think about ownership, and start what Belk (2014a, p. 1599) calls "post-ownership economy". Unlike traditional economy where individuals are only consumers, the sharing economy have a potential to create so called "prosumers", i.e. persons who are providers and consumers simultaneously (Lang et al., 2020, p. 2). The use of the Web 2.0. technologies results in a dramatic expansion of the pool of participants willing to engage in sharing assets and services (Crommelin et al., 2018, p. 432).

An aspiration of collaborative consumption is to replace current consumption practices with the more sustainable economic and environmental models (Miguel et al., 2022), and more equitable redistribution of wealth (Crommelin et al., 2018, p. 430). More recently, the positive narrative of the environmentally sustainable and socially conscious sharing economy business model has been criticised. Some argue that "sharing" and "economy" are inherently contradictory concepts (Slee, 2015, p. 11). Others point out that "sharing" obscures that benefitting from such "sharing" first requires ownership or effective control of assets capable of monetization (Crommelin et al., 2018, p. 432). A frequent objection to sharing practices in case of accommodation is that the properties are removed from the market for a long-term rental to be used as a tourist accommodation instead.

According to Belk (2014a, p. 1597), the concept of collaborative consumption is a broader category, including all activities when "people coordinate the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation". "Other compensation" encompasses also bartering or swapping, which involve non-monetary compensation. Many "sharing" companies (typically "car sharing") are, therefore, rather examples of collaborative consumption practices, not sharing. Belk (2014b, p. 10) calls these "pseudo-sharing", as these platforms often use the terminology of sharing, but only appropriate the sharing vocabulary. Pseudo-sharing is a business relationship, defined by the presence of profit motives, absence of feelings of community, and expectations of reciprocity (Belk, 2014b). By contrast, in true sharing the intention is not granting or gaining access but helping and making human connections (Belk 2014b, p. 17). (Belk, 2014b) also speaks about "many

shades of sharing". His concept of "true sharing" is closer to the anthropological concept of reciprocity and sharing, based on data from non-Western, "tribal", or "traditional" societies (Mauss, 1925; Sahlins, 1972).

Similarly, we should distinguish between hospitality as a feature of the "host-guest" relationship and the hospitality industry developed with the advent of modern tourism (Chambers, 2010, p. 14). In the following text, we will focus on the online sharing sites that profit from offering platforms on which people can share with others. We build on the concept of sharing that has developed in the West in recent years and that "has come to mean participating online" (Belk, 2014, p. 10).

Collaborative consumption in tourism: the case of sharing accommodation

Although tourism was promoted in the past as a strategy for the development of underdeveloped areas, due to its negative effects on local communities and environment it later started to be considered as a kind of neo-colonialism. Ideas of alternative tourism have flourished as a way out of these negative impacts. These include all forms of tourism that do not harm local communities and the environment and encompass varieties like "ecotourism", "community-based tourism" or "cultural tourism" (Stronza, 2001, pp. 268–276). Advocates of ecotourism argue that when the ecotourism works well and apply "participatory approach", its negative impacts on local hosts are reduced (Stronza, 2001, p. 275). Hospitality networks such as home exchange, endorsing the idea of sharing economy, apply this participatory approach, creating "prosumers".

In the hospitality industry, it is so called peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation that builds on the sharing economy business model. This occurs when property owners act as hosts and let their property be used by guests. Or, "when individuals offer a room or an entire property for short-term accommodation" (Farmaki & Miguel, 2022, p. 116). The main idea of the P2P accommodation is to use unused accommodation capacity, contribute with an additional income (in case of paid platforms) to the host, or to travel in an environment-friendly way (guests). It is, however, often difficult to distinguish conceptually the sharing economy business model from the traditional short-term rentals.

Much conceptual effort has been put into distinction between various types of P2P accommodation. Farmaki and Miguel (2022, pp. 119–120), for example, offer this type of distinction: 1) P2P accommodation

offered free from hosts and guests via platforms like CouchSurfing, 2) reciprocal P2P accommodation, like the various home exchange sites, where homes are swapped between two parties (despite some swappers paying a fee to the platform), and 3) profit-based P2P accommodation such as Airbnb. The first type is sometimes said to be "prototypical sharing" (Decrop et al., 2018, p. 68), involving generalized reciprocity (Sahlins, 1972). The second type involves various home exchange sites, which is the focus of this study. The third type, online paid P2P accommodation, "represents the largest sector of the sharing economy in terms of the transaction value" (Farmaki & Miguel, 2022, pp. 115–116).

In this section, we focus on accommodation platforms using the sharing economy (or P2P) business model. All of them encompass the idea of sharing economy, although they represent "different shades of sharing" to use Belk´s (2014b) terms. These hospitality networks cover all three types of P2P accommodation suggested by Farmaki and Miguel (2022, pp. 115–116), comprising both paid and free platforms. Although the first hospitality networks are reported as early as 1949 (Servas network), the ideas of sharing economy, the Internet, and growing ecological concerns in the last 15 years have revolutionized the hospitality industry and led to an expansion of hospitality networks (Decrop et al., 2018, p. 58).

Hospitality networks are considered to contribute to a sustainable economic development (Farmaki & Miguel, 2022, p. 125; Casado-Diaz et al., 2020, p. 281), because they do not require the construction of new mass tourist accommodation infrastructure and use already existing facilities. Hence, they contribute to preserving the environment, local housing and the urban heritage (Decrop et al., 2018, pp. 68–69). They are also supposed to enhance better cultural understanding, appreciation of local culture and exchange of cultural values (Sigala, 2017, p. 353). As an alternative of traditional hospitality, they should help deconcentrate tourism flows and alleviate negative impacts of "overtourism" (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020, p. 280). CouchSurfing and home exchange, for example, are supposed to increase tourism in less favoured areas.

One of the positive effects of hospitality networks is that they help reduce the costs of travel for individual travellers, who, in turn, bring more money to local neighbourhoods. An additional source of income for hosts, it might also reduce their feelings of loneliness (Farmaki & Miguel 2022, p. 122). Hospitality networks should also contribute to the democratization of travel, because it makes possible that people of all social standings travel and enjoy authentic local experiences they

could not have afforded otherwise (Sigala, 2017). However, this democratising effect, so often emphasized by platform providers, has been challenged by researchers who argue that had not the hospitality networks been available, most travellers would have simply used a different way of travel (Farmaki & Miguel, 2022, pp. 122–123).

Hospitality networks: from Airbnb to HomeExchange

The research on accommodation sharing mainly focus on paid platforms like Airbnb, the most successful business model of P2P accommodation sharing since it was launched in 2009 (Crommelin et al., 2018; Casado-Diaz, Casado Díaz & Hoogendoorn, 2020, p. 269). Unlike other hospitality platforms, Airbnb is paid, the platform taking revenues from mediating between the parties, and is often used as an example of a network that started as a sharing economy platform, but eventually turned into a business. With regard to Airbnb, researchers mention a massive flow of tourists in cities, gentrification of certain suburbs, overcrowding of popular sites, noise-related issues, or its potential negative impact on the housing market (Slee, 2015, pp. 35–47).

Unlike Airbnb, whose status has been challenged, Couchsurfing is considered an icon of the sharing economy, a case of "pure sharing" (Belk, 2014b). Founded in 2004 by a young student, it is the most popular hospitality network offering non-commercial accommodation (Decrop et al., 2018, p. 57). CouchSurfing supports a global community of more than 12 million people worldwide, and with regard to accommodation, there is no monetary transactions between hosts and guests (Kim et al., 2018, p. 18). The site originally operated as a non-profit organization ran mainly by volunteers, but in 2010 it became a for-profit corporation (Belk, 2014b, p. 8). Participants form a network of social links and develop a feeling of connectedness and trust, and a certain sense of belonging of like-minded people who seek authentic experiences and want to mix with locals (Decrop et al., 2018, p. 58).

If Couchsurfing is considered a case of "pure sharing" (Belk, 2014b), encompassing generalized reciprocity, home exchange platforms would be very close to Couchsurfing on the scale of "various shades of sharing". Home-exchange is a non-monetised P2P sharing accommodation where individuals exchange their homes for a limited time via online platforms (Casado-Diaz, Casado Díaz & Hoogendoorn, 2020). People who join usually pay a modest fee (mostly an annual or monthly subscription). Most home exchange sites offer both a possibility of a simultaneous exchange (both parties travel at the same time),

and a non-simultaneous exchange, when the two exchanges need not be at the same time. People who own a second home often use the latter option. Most companies also offer a system of "points" or "balloons" (earned by letting somebody stay in your home) to allow for more flexibility and non-reciprocal exchanges. Interactions between participants of home exchange platforms is based on trust and reciprocity. The key role in building of trust is played by online platforms and their reputation systems that help promote trust among community members (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, pp. 208–209). Home exchange platforms usually have a system of guest ratings and the parties often communicate via emails or skype prior to their exchange. The mutual trust is also warranted by the double role of the host and the guest in reciprocal exchanges.

The phenomenon of home swapping originated in 1950s in the United Kingdom and the United States (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 209). Since the advent of the Web 2.0 technologies, home sharing platforms proliferated (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 208). Today, there are many of home swapping platforms, such as Love Home Swap[2], Intervac[3], Homelink[4], or HomeExchange[5], although only a few give access to a reasonably large number of homes with a world-wide reach (Casado-Diaz, Casado Díaz & Hoogendoorn, 2020, p. 271). Most of them (e.g. Love Home Swap, Homelink, HomeExchange, or Seniors Home Exchange[6]) are based in North America or Europe. Other non-profit hospitality networks are, for example, Hospitality Club[7], founded in 2000 in Germany (not active today, in partnership with AirBnB since 2012). In 2007 a group of dissatisfied members of the original Hospitality Club created another platform, BeWelcome[8], registered in France. In 2014, Trustroots[9], a non-profit hospitality exchange network was founded in Germany to support hitchhikers, cyclist, buskers, or climbers.

Russo and Quaglieri (2016, p.150) suggest that home exchange disturb traditional core-periphery tourist patterns, when the powerful and rich from the northern and western world travel into southern and

[2] https://www.lovehomeswap.com
[3] https://www.intervac-homeexchange.com
[4] https://www.homelink.ca/
[5] https://www.homeexchange.com/dashboard
[6] https://www.seniorshomeexchange.com
[7] https://www.facebook.com/hospitalityclub.org/about
[8] https://www.bewelcome.org
[9] https://www.trustroots.org

eastern "pleasure peripheries". Home exchange brings a different pattern by implying symmetry and making both suppliers and demanders a part of a peer community ("prosumers"). The concentration of places for home exchange does not necessarily match the tourist attractions places, which might attract guests to less "touristy" areas. Casado-Diaz et al. (2020, p. 276) also mention an element of randomness, when sometimes the chance of being offered an exchange from an unexpected place results in an exchange that you would not have imagined otherwise. This "out of the beaten path" character, together with environmental responsibility lead some researchers to believe that "… the practice of home exchange has the potential to realise many of the aspirations and social and economic outcomes associated with the sharing economy" (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020, p. 269).

Home exchange is based on the sharing economy philosophy and emphasizes the values of responsibility and trust. The participants, like-minded people all over the world, are called a "community". Home swappers are often people with a high level of trust towards strangers, and high environmental sensitivity (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, pp. 214–215). Motivations to participate in home exchange platforms usually comprise economic reasons (saving money), a wish to travel in an alternative way, to meet new people, or sustainability (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Sdrali et al., 2015; Decrop et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018). People choose home exchange because they want to flee from the mass tourism experiences and desire unique, authentic, individual experiences (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020, p. 275). The focus is on the local way of living and a more localised tourist experience (Farmaki and Miguel, 2022, p. 125).

Home-swappers are frequently different from conventional low-cost travellers. They are often teachers[10] or people working in related fields, because they are flexible regarding the period for travel and open minded towards different cultures; they also often comprise families (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, pp. 212–213). Grit and Lynch (2011) conclude that people who participate in home exchange are mostly middle-class educated professionals, self-employed or retired, with a higher-than-average income, often people in their mid-30s to 40s with dependent children or in their 50s and 60s without dependent children. They also confirm that home exchangers are independent travellers who are

[10] Intervac, one of the first homeexchange organisations that started before the advent of the Internet, was founded by teaching unions in Europe in 1950s, to improve understanding between people from different cultures (Grit – Lynch 2011: 22).

open to exploring new cultures, open-minded and trusting, such as teachers, journalists, architects or doctors (Grit & Lynch, 2011, pp. 23–24).

However, research shows that home exchanges are more likely to occur "between like-minded and privileged members of the creative middle class, rather than low-income people" (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015, p. 297), i.e., people with high educational, cultural and networking capital benefit most. Besides, you need to own a home in order to participate (Grit & Lynch, 2011, p. 21). In this perspective, home exchanging does not fight social inequality, because people with properties in attractive localities, and people with second homes, benefit more. As suggested by Casado-Diaz et al. (2020), in some parts of the world home exchange phenomenon might result from a cultural institution of second homes ownership. It might then be seen as an opportunity of accessing a temporary second home in a global geographical reach, without a necessity to own one (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020, p. 277).

The case of HomeExchange.com: data analysis

Our analysis focuses on the geography of participation in the HomeExchange.com[11] network. HomeExchange.com, supposedly the first organized home swap service online[12], was established in 1992 by an American Ed Kushins. At present, HomeExchange.com boasts to be the world´s largest home exchange company, with the widest offering of homes: more than 450 000 homes in 187 countries, and covering 70% of market share.[13] According to their own presentation, the platform aims to promote more egalitarian and circular tourism, thinks about the environmental impact, defies standardized tourism, avoids creating ghost towns, and promises a return of authenticity and the immersion in the local culture.[14] The platform therefore explicitly embraces the ideas of sharing economy.

Like many other similar platforms, however, HomeExchange.com has been increasingly incorporating commercial aspects and has lost a part of its original sharing economy ethos. The GuesttoGuest platform, operating since 2011, acquired the competing

[11] https://www.homeexchange.com/dashboard
[12] https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/gtg-prod/images/cms/presse/press_kit/press_kit_homeexchange_US.pdf
[13] https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/gtg-prod/images/cms/presse/press_kit/press_kit_homeexchange_US.pdf (6. 7. 2022)
[14] https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/gtg-prod/images/cms/presse/press_kit/press_kit_homeexchange_US.pdf

HomeExchange in 2017, after having acquired European competitors like Itamos, Trampolinn and Home for Home[15] (Casado-Diaz, Casado Díaz & Hoogendoorn, 2020, p. 271). In December 2018, the two websites created a unified platform keeping the HomeExchange brand (Casado-Diaz, Casado Díaz & Hoogendoorn, 2020, p. 271). The fusion with the GuesttoGuest platform caused a backlash among many members. The introduction of the commercial worldview disturbed the original "community" and "sharing" ethos of the platform and many members withdrew. To some extent, expectations of reciprocity and the sense of sharing were replaced by profit seeking motives.

Our analysis is based on two sources. First of them is a long-term participation in the community of home swappers at the HomeExchange.com website. We have participated in this community (with a typical profile of middle class teachers in their 30s – 40s with dependent children) since 2012, having accomplished more than 20 exchanges to various European countries. We have discussed the phenomenon with many of our friends from different countries, and attracted some of them to become participants. In the course of the years of our participation, we have noticed a certain East/West divide in the use of the website. This was the motivation to do a research on the participation in HomeExchange.com platform. The second source of our analysis is the data of HomeEchange.com website participants in terms of their country of origin.

Unlike other researchers (e.g. Gupta et al., 2019), we do not distinguish *propensity to rent* and *propensity to provide*, assuming that having a profile on the website means willingness to do both. Having a profile means that you are accepting offers from others and that you act as a host at the same time. In this regard, HomeExchange.com has indeed created "prosumers", i.e. persons who are providers and consumers simultaneously (Lang et al., 2020). In our analysis we do not distinguish "active" and "non-active" users of the site, like Kim et al. (2018) did, for example, in case of their research of Couchsurfing users. We suppose that creating a profile implies a willingness to share your home with strangers and at the same time some degree of activity (because the members pay an annual fee for keeping the active profile).

[15] https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/gtg-prod/images/cms/presse/press_kit/press_kit_homeexchange_US.pdf

We have analysed the number of profiles on the HomeExchange.com site (July 2022)[16], as a representative of the largest home exchange platform. The aim of the analysis is to show the willingness of people in respective countries to participate in a sharing economy platform. The data presented below in the tables 1 and 2 and map 1 suggest that the Western European countries are definitely overrepresented, compared to Eastern Europe, the dividing line copying more or less the former Iron Curtain. The most represented countries (see Table 1) are France and Spain (with more than 10.000 profiles), followed by Italy (3146), Germany (2785), Netherlands (2529), Belgium (1469), United Kingdom (1365), Switzerland (1040), Denmark (1039), and Ireland (839). These countries are followed by Sweden (650), Portugal (526), Iceland (403), Norway (391), Austria (369), Hungary (341), Croatia (247), Czechia (237), Poland (181) and Greece (160).

Spain	more than 10.000
France	more than 10.000
Italy	3146
Germany	2785
Netherlands	2529
Belgium	1469
United Kingdom	1365
Switzerland	1040
Denmark	1039
Ireland	839

Table 1. The most represented countries in terms of the number of profiles (HomeExchange.com), July 2022.

On the other side of the scale, among the least represented countries in Europe (see Table 2), we see Kosovo (2), Liechtenstein (7), North Macedonia (10), Albania (21), Lithuania (23), Bosnia and Herzegovina (25), Serbia (25), Luxembourg (28), Slovakia (29), and Andorra (29). Other least represented countries are the following: Latvia (31), Russia (34), Bulgaria (36), Montenegro (44), Estonia (67), Slovenia (75), Romania (87), Ukraine (90), Belarus (92), Finland (97) and Turkey (157).

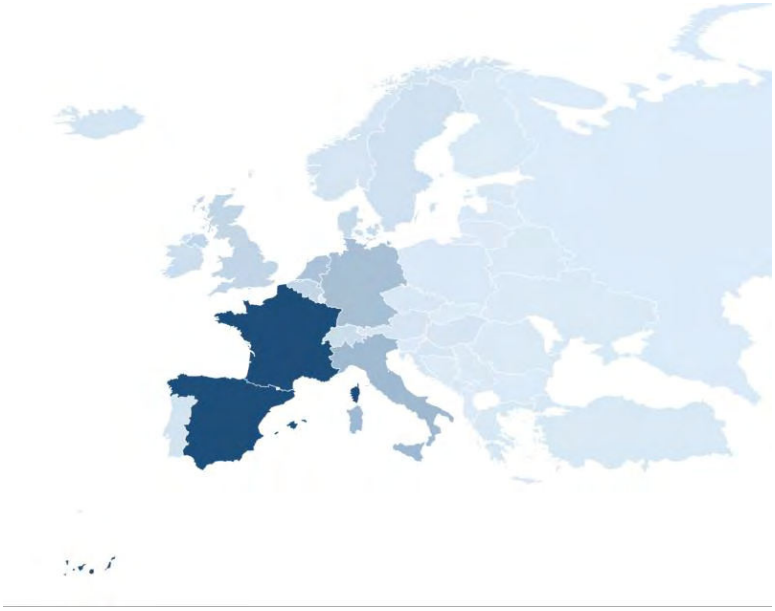
Kosovo	2
Liechtenstein	7
North Macedonia	10

[16] Data were retrieved from the website on July 9, 2022.

Albania	21
Lithuania	23
Bosnia and Herzegovina	25
Serbia	25
Luxembourg	28
Slovakia	29
Andorra	29

Table 2. The least represented countries in terms of the number of profiles (HomeExchange.com), July 2022.

As suggested, the data show a difference on a Western-Eastern axis dividing Europe (see Map 1). The divergence in representation starts already on the borders between France and Germany. We might hypothesize that the difference would take place between the former Western and Eastern Germany. Unfortunately, we do not have more detailed data on the number of profiles in Germany related to their geographic distribution. So any possible difference between the Western and Eastern Germany cannot be proved. On the other end of the scale, we find the countries of Eastern Europe, with some small Western European countries like the Luxembourg or Liechtenstein.



Map 1. The number of profiles on Home.Exchange.com platform in different European countries (July 2022). Map by: Natalia Jandl Trušina.

If we take into account the number of inhabitants of the respective countries, the picture changes slightly. The number of profile counted per 100.000 people for respective countries (see Table 3) shows as the countries with the highest numbers of HomeExchange.com profiles: 1. Iceland, 2. Andorra, 3. Spain, 4. Liechtenstein, 5. Denmark, 6. Ireland, 7. France, 8. Netherlands, 9. Belgium, and 10. Switzerland.

Iceland	107,1
Andorra	37,1
Spain	21
Liechtenstein	18
Denmark	17,7
Ireland	16,6
France	14,7
Netherlands	14,4
Belgium	12,6
Switzerland	12

Table 3. The most represented countries in terms of the number of profiles (HomeExchange.com), July 2022, counted per 100.000 people.

Among the least represented countries, counted per 100.000 people (see Table 4), we find: Russia, Kosovo, Ukraine, Turkey, Serbia, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland.

Russia	0,02
Kosovo	0,1
Ukraine	0,2
Turkey	0,2
Serbia	0,4
North Macedonia	0,5
Slovakia	0,5
Bulgaria	0,5
Romania	0,5
Poland	0,5

Table 4. The least represented countries in terms of the number of profiles (HomeExchange.com), July 2022, counted per 100.000 people.

We can see that small Western countries like Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Andorra count as the countries with a high number of HomeExchnage.com profiles, when counted per 100.000 inhabitants (see Map2). Counted per 100.000 people, the data show even more

compelling picture of a Western/Eastern divide, with the most represented countries (Table 3) being the countries of north-western Europe, and the least represented (Table 4) Eastern European and Balkan countries. There are, however, also some exceptions in this perspective, such as the United Kingdom (a north-western country), taking quite a low share counted per 100.000 people (2), which is less than Hungary (3,5) and Czechia (2,3). Similarly, some Mediterranean (south-east European) countries show quite a high proportion of HomeExchnage.com profiles per 100.000 people, such as Montenegro (7,1), or Croatia (6,3), which makes them more enthusiastic home exchangers than, for example, Swedes (6,2), Italians (5,3), or Austrians (4,1).

Map 2. The number of profiles on Home.Exchange.com platform per 100.000 people in different European countries (July 2022). Map by: Natalia Jandl Trušina.

Geographies of sharing: sharing economy in the European East and West

As suggested in the scholarly literature, home exchange is largely a "Western affair" (Grit & Lynch, 2011, p. 23; Russo & Qualgieri Domínguez, 2016, pp. 161–162), especially popular in Europe, North

America and Australia (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 209). Europe and the United States, followed by Canada and Australia, are regions with most active home exchange communities, unlike for example, China, that is marginal in this respect (Russo & Quaglieri, 2016). Most home exchange sites are based in Europe and North America. Hence, most researchers of hospitality platforms focus their research on these geographical areas. For example, Forno and Garibaldi (2015, p. 211) analysed the Italian home exchange community on the HomeExchange.com platform, which was fifth in terms of the number of members after the United States, France, Spain, and Canada. Kim et al. (2018) focused on European cities in their research of CouchSurfing hosts and their motivations, because European cities accounted for more than 50% of the total registered users, and "a relatively higher proportion of active hosts (against registered users) are located in European cities than in those of other continents." (Kim et al., 2018, p. 22).

According to the study conducted by Eurostat (2020) on the participation in P2P accommodation in the EU countries (quoted in Farmaki & Miguel, 2022, pp. 121–122), Luxembourg is the country with the most individual hosts (46%), followed by Ireland (34%) and Malta (30%). Conversely, there were some countries with less than 10% of the population being hosts, such as Cyprus and the Czech Republic (both 5%), Latvia (8%), and Bulgaria (9%). Sometimes destination countries are analysed. According to the HomeExchange.com platform, for example, the most popular countries in terms of numbers of nights in 2018 were 1. France, 2. Spain, 3. USA, 4. Italy, 5. Canada.[17]

In our analysis, we have focused on Europe and analysed data from the HomeExchange.com platform with regard to the number of profiles in respective countries. Unlike the above-mentioned statistics of P2P accommodation (which might include also various paid sites such as AirBnb), we focused on a website (HomeExchange.com) based on the sharing economy model and implying reciprocity. We believe that our data reveal the (un)willingness of people in respective countries to participate in the sharing economy. As expected, our data show a definite overrepresentation of home exchange participants in the countries of Western Europe, compared to the European East. In this section we try to find an answer to the question: Why people in Eastern European

[17] https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/gtg-prod/images/cms/presse/press_kit/press_kit_homeexchange_US.pdf (6. 7. 2022).

countries do not participate in sharing economy (represented by HomeExchange.com) as much as people from the European West?

1. External constraints hypothesis

First, we suggest a hypothesis we call "external constraints", according to which people in Eastern Europe do not travel so often, because of their limited economic capacities. Worse economic conditions of Eastern Europe (compared to the European West) might be seen as an obstacle to travel.

This hypothesis, however, may be easily refuted. Home exchange sites are an economic way of travel, accessible to large segments of population. Even if we take into consideration an annual fee paid to the website (annual membership in 2022 being 175 USD)[18], it is still insignificant amount compared to "traditional" vacation.

We might also remind the objection of some researchers that participants need home in order to participate (Grit & Lynch, 2011, p. 21), and so only the well-established middle class benefit from it (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015). Is the absence of home ownership and obstacle to participation in home exchange? According to Eurostat data for 2021, countries of Central and Eastern Europe are among the countries with the highest degree of inhabitants living in their own house or flat. The highest shares of home ownerships were reported in Romania (95%), Slovakia (92%), Hungary (92%), Croatia (91%), Lithuania (89%), Poland (87%), and Bulgaria (85%). In other words, owning a home is more general in Central and Eastern Europe than in the European West. Among the countries with the highest share of tenant living we find Germany (51% tenants), Austria (46% tenants), Denmark (41% tenants), France (35% tenants), and Sweden (35% tenants).[19] The best established home-owners in Europe, therefore, are the least enthusiastic home exchangers.

In addition, language barriers might be hypothesized to be a barrier to home exchange travel (the websites using predominantly English). However, the advent of online translators easily help overcome the language barrier in the home exchange travels. People use translators to describe their home and their family in their "profiles" on the website, translators are automatically used to translate people´s messages to one another in their internal communication, and translators

[18] https://homeexchangehelp.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360000610118-What-are-the-advantages-of-the-Membership (15. 12. 2022).
[19] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-1a.html

help people understand each other even on the ground. Translators, widely used by many participants, make the travels easier and the cultural contact smoother. Besides, the predominance of English on the website does not explain a big share of profiles in countries such as France and Spain, and a low proportion of homes in the UK.

2. Culture sediments hypothesis

Another hypothesis, which we call "culture sediments", associates differences in the contemporary (non-)acceptance of sharing economy in various parts of Europe with cultural patterns of the past. Historians, sociologists, demographers and anthropologists have drawn many dividing lines between the European East and European West (Wolff, 1994; Todorova, 1997; Davies, 1999; for the critique see Szołtysek, 2015, pp. 41–109). One of the oldest is the dividing line between the Catholic (and Protestants) West and the Orthodox East. Another one is a line between Europe that has been a part of the Roman Empire, and the part of Europe that lied outside. Later, this division transformed into the difference between the (Western) Roman Empire and the Byzantium. Eastern Europe has been conceived as a category since the Enlightenment, when western travellers started to construct it in opposition to the West (Wolff, 1994). Iron Curtain was the latest embodiment of this political and cultural geography of European continent, reinforcing the idea of the East-West cultural, political and economic differences.

As our main topic is concerned with exchanging of homes, we might recall another dividing line, suggested by a statistician John Hajnal (1965, 1982) and concerning the geographical variation across Europe of family and marriage patterns. Hajnal (1965) argued that Western Europe (or, more precisely, north-western Europe) has been characterised since the 16th century by late marriage and large proportion of population remaining unmarried. Later, he added more criteria to show that the family in the European West was based predominantly on the model of simple household system, preference for neolocality, and the predominance of nuclear or stem families. The rest of Europe, lying south-west of the St. Petersburg – Trieste line (so called Hajnal line), was, on the contrary characterised by complex family households, early marriage, and an emphasis on patrilineal ties (Hajnal, 1982). Hajnal´s thesis received serious criticism for oversimplification and overemphasis of differences between "East" and "West", viewed by

many as an act of Western ethnocentrism (Goody, 1996; Todorova, 2001; Szołtysek, 2015).

One of the differences Hajnal emphasized, however, was an omnipresence of so called "life-cycle service" in north-western Europe. In the past, it was common for young people to become temporarily a part of another household before marriage. This service in the households of strangers, unknown in the European East, led, according to Hajnal (1982) to the growth of the independence of women (who married later and economically secured, so they had a bigger say in their choice), more flexibility in the workforce of young adults, and a smoother acceptance of capitalism in the West.

This family model, however, also meant that the definition of the family in the West was not based on strictly "consanguine" ties, like in South-Eastern Europe with its emphasis on patrilinearity. In the European East it was very unusual to accept strangers in one´s household and to consider them a part of the family. It seems that unlike the European East, the European West has been used to accept strangers in the family. The term "family" often meant the household, including all dependents, servants or apprentices, i.e. all who lived in the same house (Laslett, 1971; Mitterauer & Sieder, 1982, pp. 5–10; Tadmor, 1996). Is it possible to associate these "culture sediments" with a lack of trust towards strangers in contemporary Eastern Europe?

3. Iron Curtain and postsocialism legacy hypothesis

Another line of interpretation does not go so far in the past, but looks into a recent development in Europe, mainly the divide of the continent by the geopolitical circumstances of the Cold War. It could be also called "culture sediments" hypothesis and asks if the contemporary differences in the acceptance of sharing economy in various parts of Europe could be associated with the differences between the postsocialist East and the rest of the continent.

After the end of the Cold War, Eastern Europe became a "laboratory of social change", where social scientists would study what happens when boundaries disappear and large parts of Europe become interconnected with the rest of the continent. The discourse of "postsocialism" was born (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999; Hann, 1994, 2002; Verdery, 1996). It was assumed that postsocialist countries would smoothly accept the western cultural values, market economy and political pluralism. Quick incorporation into the European political structures and acceptance of the globalized Western culture were supposed.

Still, this did not happen as expected, as some examples show, such as the continual support for the communist parties in postsocialist countries (Creed, 2010), problems with the creation of "civil society" (Sampson, 2002; Jung, 2019), problems with privatization and dissolution of agricultural cooperatives (Verdery, 1994), or the widespread "postcommunist nostalgia" (Todorova & Gille, 2010; Todorova, Dimou & Troebst, 2014).

One of the often cited consequence of socialism in Eastern Europe is the widespread distrust of people to one another, connected to the developed dependence of the isolated nuclear families on the state (Rev, 1987). As David Kideckel (1993) put it: "the socialist system, though ostensibly designed to create new persons motivated by the needs of groups and of society as a whole, in fact created people who were of necessity self-centred, distrustful, and apathetic to the very core of their beings". Similarly, Czech sociologist Ivo Možný (2003) argued that socialism created isolated and distrustful individuals and nuclear families. One of the consequence of the shared socialist legacy of European East, then, might be the widespread distrust.

As we have shown above, sharing economy is based on trust. Most scholars agree that "trust is critical in sharing economy business models" (Lang et al., 2020, p. 3), and that one is expected to trust in a "generalized other" in order to agree to swapping one´s home (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 215). And that "a lack of trust has been identified as one of the main barriers to not participating in the sharing economy (Lang et al., 2020, p. 3). Only people who share a belief that people are to be trusted, might easily participate in sharing with others, and especially in home exchange. The other "cultural sediments" hypothesis thus might be: Is it the engraved distrust to others, shared by the European East due to their socialist legacy, that prevent people from this part of Europe to engage in sharing economy?

4. Litmus paper of the acceptance of the affiliation to the West

The last hypothesis claims that the low share of participation in the sharing economy in the European East is a kind of a litmus paper indicating how much the given country has accepted its own affiliation to the West. We assume that home exchange platforms, with their origin in the Western Europe and the U.S., with the predominance of English as a communication language, represent a "Western affair" in the eyes of the people from Eastern Europe.

The non-acceptance of platforms such as HomeExchange.com by the majority of people of the European East might suggest that they do not feel to be "a part of the game". They do not share values this game is based on, and by not taking a part in it, they declare they do not feel to belong to the same community. Could this hypothesis explain why Eastern European countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, or the Balkan countries with the least pro-Western identities such as Serbia or Bulgaria, are amongst the least represented countries in these sharing economy platforms?

Conclusion

In this text, we focused on the phenomenon of sharing economy, mainly on the home exchange phenomenon. We suggested that although the sharing economy is supposed to spread worldwide in the contemporary globalized, seamless world, it does not work in this way in practice. Even though admitted by most scholars as a "Western affair", concerning mainly Europe, North America and Australia, there are big differences even within the "Western world".

We investigated the geographies of sharing economy within Europe, using the example of participation in the HomeExchange.com platform. Using the data from July 2022 we have shown that there are major differences in the participation in the HomeExchange.com platform between the underrepresented European East and overrepresented European West.

We have discussed four hypothesis possibly explaining this difference. The first one, called "external constraints hypothesis" suggests that external obstacles (wealth, capital, or language) might cause the difference in the participation in sharing economy. We have refuted it by pointing out the high shares of home ownerships in Eastern Europe compared to European West, and the widespread use of translators that enable communication without knowing the others´ language.

The second hypothesis, called "cultural sediments" hypothesis, discusses the possibility of a certain cultural legacy of the traditional Western and Eastern European family models. Following Hajnal (1965, 1982) we argue that the difference might be explained by the Western tradition of incorporation of strangers (apprentices, maids, servants) into the family, which was incomprehensible in the European East.

The third hypothesis is a variation of the "cultural sediments" thesis and suggests that the reluctance of East Europeans to share their homes with strangers might be explained with the socialist legacy. As

socialist regimes in Eastern Europe created people who were distrustful and suspicious, it might explain why most of them until today do not consider it a good idea to let someone strange into one´ house.

The fourth hypothesis suggests that Eastern European countries do not participate in the sharing economy because they have not accepted their Western affiliation. Hence, they do not trust sharing economy platforms, seen as representatives of the Western ideas and values.

We have refuted the first hypothesis, and we leave open the latter three. It is a matter of further research to falsify them. Certainly there might be other possible explanations and we leave it for the further research to raise and discuss them.

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