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The Collaborative Economy through the Lens of Sustainable Tourism. A Regional-Centric View

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Abstract: Nowadays the tourism industry faces major changes given the vast possibilities for the development of a collaborative economy in tourism that brings forth a new marketplace where consumers rely on each other -changing renting, swapping, and sharing their accommodation locations. The purpose of the present paper is to answer one of the most important challenges of the City of Brașov in Romania, which is the management of the touristic offer. The paper provides a quantitative-qualitative research approach that analyzes - based on semi-structured surveys with the users of collaborative platforms - the perception of travelers concerning the development of collaborative tourism in Brasov County. The management of touristic offer should take into account the pressure that this new type of renting may be exerting on the local economy, especially considering unfair competition on other segments of the tourist market and the change in the physiognomy of the cities of Brașov County.

Keywords: Airbnb online platform; dynamic city; sustainable collaborative tourism; urban tourism with sustainable opportunities.

Introduction

The rise of the collaborative economy in tourism in recent years is largely due to the spread of online sharing platforms of companies such as Airbnb, that enable consumers to act as a network, to support each other and to benefit from the alliance for sustainable development. Specialists (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2017; Dredge et al., 2016) point out that the collaborative economy has a significant impact on social, economic, environmental, and political sectors and brings forth major challenges that require appropriate actions. The development and wide use of technological devices, as well as the increasing use of the Internet, has provided, in the last years, vast opportunities to access the global market and expand businesses. Researchers (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2017) argue that these opportunities are available for everyone, including micro-entrepreneurs and SMEs that can access through online sharing platforms untapped services. In the past years, online platforms have facilitated the growth of small start-ups that now challenge the status quo of large traditional competitors such as hotel chains.

From a sociological point of view, and within a scenario of globalization and multiculturalism, it is argued that members of different countries around the world (and particularly Western Europe) move easily and communicate fast, as they are increasingly using new technologies and ICTs. Gianluigi (1992) points out that young people have unified taste in music, sports, and cultural activities and obviously, in tourism. For this reason, the European market is becoming homogeneous in its purchasing needs and behaviors. In this respect, some sociologists (Appadurai, 2000) have proposed that global currents are "mutating the effect of divisions" by dropping traditional national boundaries

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because of the reach of the media (Internet, cable and satellite television, TV channels as Travel Channel and National Geographic). Other reasons for a better link between people are ethnic outreach (tourism, international exchanges in higher education, such as the Erasmus+ academic program), the scope of ideas (political ideas such as ecology), technological and financial scope. From this perspective, culture would no longer be defined in isolation for a country (Craig & Douglas, 2006). Therefore, research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption appears (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

From an economic perspective, some studies in Europe have noted that, although substantial differences still exist in the context of marketing, there are tendencies that homogenize consumers. For example, the share of expenditures is increasing at the same time with the collaborative economy, along with the development of environmental and health concerns, while durable consumption decreases over time (Leeflang & van Rooij, 1995).

In the field of marketing, several investigations try to contrast the existence of convergences between young European consumers. Some writers insist on the trend towards globalization, especially in certain product categories, such as fashion, automobiles, beverages, and food products. In fact, there is talk of the birth of international products, designed to meet the needs of cross-cultural consumer segments (Hassan & Katsanis, 1991). In Asia, for example, researchers have concluded that there are some common structures in the consumption values (Tse et al., 1988). Using the Consumer Styles Inventory developed by Sproles and Kendall (1987), other authors established that young consumers' decision-making in Korea is almost like that described in the United States (Hafstrom et al., 1992). It has also been found that all Western European countries (except Germany) have very low levels of materialism, compared to other nations, such as the United States or the countries of Eastern Europe (Belk et al., 1996).

On the opposite side, another stream of literature is presented, which does not share the existence of a Pan-European consumer. This trend argues that segments can be identified according to nationality. One of the main contributions to this topic is the research conducted by Hofstede (2011) in 66 countries on work-related values. Also, Kofele-Kale (2006) develops clusters of consumers in 17 countries of Western Europe, looking for groups of homogeneous "Euro consumers" in terms of power distance, avoidance of uncertainty, individualism, and masculinity. The author identified three groups of countries with interesting implications for adapting the positioning of the product and advertising to the cultural characteristics of each block. In the same line Hofstede, et al. (1990) have carried out a segmentation in several European countries based on the most consumed products. They found that, even though one of the four segments identified was Pan-European, cultural differences between European nations prevailed. Specifically, this identified Pan-European segment comprises precisely the younger, more educated, higher-income consumers living in urban areas. Likewise, in an exploratory study, Chan and Lau (2002) examine the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior to Green Purchasing Behavior in the Chinese and American cultural settings. Although the existence of cultural differences in Europe remains the dominant theory in marketing literature, it can be argued that these cultural differences are weaker when talking about young people. This is thanks to a long period of European integration and to the construction of a "common spirit", which leads to reducing the differences between the nations of the Old Continent. Indeed, recent studies have argued that nationality does not influence the purchasing process, recommending the adoption of standardized marketing strategies, with all the advantages that this entails (Dawar & Parker, 1994; LeBlanc & Herndon, 2001).

The transformations that have occurred in tourism due to Airbnb implementation

The tourist who uses Airbnb platform seeks two objectives: firstly, the accommodation offered is cheap and the tourist does not have to spend an exorbitant amount to enjoy a vacation, secondly by choosing an accommodation through Airbnb platform the tourist has the opportunity to integrate into the fabric of the neighborhood and live experiences as if they were locals. Models exported from the Anglo-Saxon world, like Bed & Breakfast, that use specialized internet platforms have not achieved the impact that other online platforms such as Airbnb, Alterkeys, or Only Apartments have in a short timeframe of 4 years. Airbnb is an online service that connects homeowners with people who look for vacation rentals. Today it has more than 7 million listings worldwide in 191 countries and regions. „The influx of tourism spending by Airbnb guests at restaurants and cafes is being felt around the world. In Europe, Airbnb guests spent at least an estimated US\$11 billion at restaurants and cafes in 2018, including over US\$2.7 billion in France, US\$1.7 billion in Spain, and US\$1.3 billion in Great Britain.” (Airbnb, 2019).

The CEO of Airbnb explained that 25% of the customers of his platform is more than 50 years old, something that, according to him, denies that the collaborative economy and new forms of consumption are unique to young people. In a conference on digital density at the XXI Meeting of ICT and Digital Media held at Iese Business School, Airbnb CEO said that the platform is successful because it allows selling a different tourism experience. He admitted that the increase in digital density - the number of users in the network - has facilitated the growth of Airbnb, but stressed that without a "good user experience" would not have been possible. He has also remarked that the level of knowledge of this brand is "very low", even though certain places are the most visited cities in the world with Airbnb (Barcelona, for example).

In the context of the trend known as "collaborative economy" or "sharing economy", a wide variety of business models have been developed in different sectors and activities (Tunguz, 2011) demonstrated that when it comes to business models, Airbnb may be more the exception, since the platform's viability depends on the value of listed items, the profit an owner can make, and the cut for the intermediary. In the collaborative economy sector, Airbnb (www.airbnb.com) is a reference case (Pizam, 2014) that has followed the scheme of disruptive innovation (Christensen et al. 2015). Airbnb would initially have significant disadvantages when it comes to competing with other more traditional alternatives available to tourists when selecting accommodation, such as quality of service, friendliness, and availability of staff, brand reputation and security (Chu & Choi, 2000; Guttentag, 2015).

The customer strength position is directed by the page itself, applying different search algorithms to consensus the demand and the visibility between the different establishments, be they apartments or rooms. Other competitors may also be pages with services like those of Airbnb, so it would be necessary to think of diversification and opening of sales channels to have a greater degree of penetration in the different markets. The client chooses the option that he/she wants of accommodation according to his needs and requirements, the strength that he has is the choice depending on the demand to which he has access. In this type of sales channel in which we have focused, the strength of the client lies in the trust that the host contributes through the information collected by the portal, in terms of offline identification and the evaluations received by other users. This will be a key factor for the future client to feel secure at the time of booking and to know that they are not going to cause any setback, that may harm him in his stay or that he cannot recover the money of the reserve. Different policies in the management and reservation will favor the recovery of amounts paid according to the cancellation policy that the host has established. Cancellation policies go from strict with a penalty of one week before accommodation, until flexible being able to cancel the day before the entrance without receiving compensation or penalty to the guest.

The customer has little bargaining power, this is because the volume of purchase of each guest is small in relation to the total of reservations. It should also be noted that it is possible, although not usual, that the host makes an offer on the original price for the guest to decide before booking, and therefore we might consider haggling prices on the part of the client, although it is not usual.

Young individuals, aged between 20 -35, belonging to the Generation Y, prefer collaborative platforms because of their familiarity with digital technologies. Mortara (2018, p.101) states that “the rise of collaborative consumption as a possible new paradigm of relations between individuals, trading, and society often revolves around the issue of trust”. In this respect, Ranzini, et al. (2020) report that for young individuals, belonging to the Millennial generation, consider feedback systems on sharing platforms as a way of establishing trust. Godelnik (2017) points out that Millennials have a positive attitude towards sharing economy and collaborative business models. An -EU H2020 research project (Ranzini et al., 2020) provides an additional perspective of Millennials within the sharing economy. The report findings show that Millennials are interested in sharing platforms because they offer a more cost-effective alternative to traditional services, they are convenient and offer different social interactions. Millennials are driving the digital economy. This is also highlighted by Budziewicz-Guźlecka (2017) who points out that Millennials, a generation born in the digital culture era, proficient users of technologies and social media, become the main prosumers in the sharing economy. For this reason, we want to examine the practices and motivations behind sharing economy activities and understand the importance of ICT in relation with collaborative tourism.

Although an increasing number of people are jumping on the bandwagon of shared economy, the propensity of those using/providing this type of service is still low across Europe. A report on “European Perspective on Participation in the Sharing Economy” shows that almost 19% of the respondents participating in a survey have turned to sharing services, while only 9% of them have offered goods/services as providers (e.g. the largest part of the sharing participants can be found in France and the UK). However, the bulk of the surveyed (63%) are aware of sharing services but have never used any. Around 9% of the people surveyed are unaware of such type of services (Italy and Netherlands as well as Denmark and Norway are countries where the awareness of shared services is pretty low).

Car and home sharing rank the highest within the Europeans’ preference for shared services which in general appeal to younger people. Interestingly, home sharing is far more often used by higher-income individuals, who are not easily found within young age bracket (millennials). This is largely in agreement with some statistics provided by Airbnb showing that clients aged 30-40 are also highly visible when it comes to home sharing at rates still lower than those offered by well-established hotels/resorts.

So when speaking about the young generation (20-25 years) making the “perfect client” for home sharing (e.g. through Airbnb), one should not look past the lower income class they are, while displaying higher digital skills. This does not necessarily mean that the participation structure in home sharing will not change over time once the present young generation grows older and access to internet and digital platforms become even more widespread than today.

What is more, the recent theory proclaiming that the young generation (millennials) are more attached to “using” rather than “owning” is a bit of stretching a point, as the reverse also holds true: would anyone be able to temporarily make use of a good if no one is having it in possession? It is a fact that digitalization has turned the world of services on its ear complementing classic way of doing business. Some say that sharing economy emerged from austerity in the aftermath of the big financial crisis when purchasing power was weakened.

According to Eurostat (2019, May 25), in 2019, only 9% of all Romanian individuals used any website or application to arrange for an accommodation from another individual, while 64% of them did not use any website or application to arrange for an accommodation from another individual (the EU average figures stand at 21% and 66% for the above-mentioned indicators). Romanians aged 25-34 are the most frequent website/application users to get an accommodation from another person (17% of all individuals), while the cohort 25-54 years with high formal education reach 30% of all individuals using website/application for home sharing. Interestingly, the age group 35-44 years is not too far behind the 25-34 age bracket scoring 12% of total individuals looking for home sharing by means of internet or an application.

Methodology and research hypotheses

Official figures and reports on sharing economy are not easily available especially when dealing with a research that has its main focus on local level. Alternative sources are also scarce and not very reliable from a statistical standpoint, while various platforms (intermediaries) do not issued reports on Romania.

In the context of „collaborative economy" or "sharing economy", a wide variety of business models have been developed in different sectors and activities (Tunguz, 2011). Demonstrating that, when it comes to business models, Airbnb may be more than an exception, since the platform's viability depends on the value of listed items, the profit an owner can make, and the cut of the intermediates. In the collaborative economy sector, Airbnb (www.airbnb.com) is a reference case (Pizam, 2014) that followed the scheme of disruptive innovation (Christensen et al., 2015). Airbnb would initially have significant disadvantages when it comes to competing with other more traditional alternatives available to tourists when selecting accommodation, such as quality of service, friendliness, and availability of staff, brand reputation, and security (Chu & Choi, 2000; Guttentag, 2015).

The general objective of this study is to inquire about the incidence and possible development of the collaborative tourism in Braşov County while its specific objectives are as follows:

- (1) Understanding the purpose of collaborative tourism and its main characteristics.
- (2) Understanding the importance of ICT in relation to collaborative tourism.
- (3) Knowing the stage of development of collaborative tourism in Braşov County.
- (4) Depicting the offer and the demand profile of the users of this modality, at the local level.

The assumptions established by the work hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Accommodation is a service that offers the greatest possibilities for the development of collaborative tourism.

H2: ICTs are the basis for the practice of this new trend.

H3: The demand segment targeted by this trend consists of young people seeking to generate a closer bond between residents and visitors.

As it is a relatively new phenomenon, of which there is neither an extensive knowledge nor specific studies in Braşov County, this is an exploratory investigation. Also, it is intended to determine the existing trends in a little-explored environment. Exploratory studies are usually done when the objective is to examine a research topic or problem that has not been studied or has not been addressed before.

The methodological tools used for obtaining the data and information that guided the scientific approach are the following:

- (1) Collection of conventional (bibliography) and non-conventional (Internet) documentation.

- (2) Semi-structured surveys with users of collaborative platforms.
- (3) Semi-structured surveys with a targeted population of Brasov County.
- (4) Content analysis and evaluation of the tourism-recreational offer performed online.

For the development of this research paper, the authors set out to meet the objectives related to collaborative tourism within the city. For this, an extensive bibliographic analysis was carried out, to understand the scope of the collaborative tourism and its main characteristics.

The online quantitative research is based on a series of questionnaires conducted in April – May 2018. The questionnaires were carried out through Google Forms and were disseminated via Internet and Facebook. We had a total of 225 responses; however, we could only validate 208 responses to our survey. The convenience sample of 208 respondents (N=208) were aged between 17 and 50 years old, with a majority of individuals between 20 and 30 years (more than 50%). The respondents had diverse occupations such as students, independent professionals, public and state employees. We developed two questionnaires, one for tourists who stayed in Brașov County through Airbnb aimed at identifying their experience in Brașov, their use of the platform, their purpose of visiting the city; the second questionnaire was focused on measuring the degree of knowledge of Romanian respondents on the subject of collaborative in Brașov County.

Different collaborative platforms were also consulted to identify their development status in Brașov County. At the same time, semi-structured surveys were conducted to discover the residents' knowledge of the subject. The surveys targeted people who use these services as a way to travel within the city, thus allowing a proper characterization of demand for online sharing platforms. In this way, the general objective of the paper was achieved, i.e., to investigate the incidence and the possible development of collaborative tourism in Brașov County.

To investigate the extent to which tourists use collaborative platforms in Brașov County, the authors of this paper conducted a content analysis investigating, on the one hand, the activity of one of the most popular and representative online platforms: Airbnb. On the other hand, the content analysis followed the activity of other platforms like Uber, Couchsurfing, Facebook groups, and real estate advertising pages. The investigation aimed to compare the development of the collaborative platforms used in tourism within a determined period.

Results and discussion

Content analysis: Airbnb in Brasov County

In the case of Airbnb, at the time of the first analysis (from the 1st to 30th of April 2018), 45 space rental advertisements were found. By applying filters on the web page, information was retrieved about the services offered by each host. The second part of the analysis was performed in May, the same year, yielding 52 advertisements.

The services that most accommodation locations provide are Wi-Fi, kitchen, and TV (see Table 1). From these data, it could also be observed that the number of accommodation locations offered was higher in May than in April, however, in some cases the services decreased, which indicated that, in some accommodation locations they were no longer offered, or that the accommodation locations are not the same.

The data shows that the number of listings offered is higher in May than in April, however, in some cases there is a decrease in provided services, which may indicate that some accommodation was no longer offered, or that the accommodations are not the same.

Table 1 Services offered via Airbnb advertisements, in Braşov County

Services offered	Number of ads that serve the service	Number of ads that serve the service
	April 2018	May 2018
Wi-Fi	42	47
Swimming pool	8	4
Kitchen	42	46
Accessibility for disabled	7	8
Breakfast	13	10
TV	40	47
Satellite TV	12	9

Also, the Airbnb page allows the user to apply a filter that specifies the type of property listed for rent. This option allowed us to analyze the types of accommodations offered by the online platform, which are highlighted below in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of accommodations offered by Airbnb in Braşov County

	Apartment	House	B&B
April	34	10	1
May	39	9	4

The large number of apartments listed for rent on the Airbnb platform compared to the listed number of houses and the B&B, unequivocally, shows the inclination of tourists in the city of Braşov towards the simplicity and independence offered by Airbnb apartment listings. While the listed houses offer more luxury and comfort, and the B&B system requires the observance of a schedule and rules imposed by the owners, the apartments offer guests fewer rules, comfort and greater freedom, without any additional complications. Furthermore, the Airbnb platform offers the facility of renting an entire apartment or house, a private room or a shared room, an apartment in the house, a whole floor in a house, so on. By applying filters, the following data could be analyzed (Table 3).

Table 3. Room type offered by Airbnb service

Room type offered	Number of advertisements that offer this type of room	Number of advertisements that offer this type of room
	April	May
Apartment or an entire house	38	46
Private room and other individual spaces	6	5
Shared room	1	1

Most listings offer a whole apartment or house to rent, which means that there is not necessarily a daily contact with the host. Nevertheless, most hosts make an effort to satisfy the guests and communicate easily with them. In this respect, we can observe that the hosts speak, besides the local language, English (16% in May 2018), followed by German (3%, May 2018), and Italian (3% May 2018).

Furthermore, according to the data obtained through the Airbnb portal, it was possible to determine the location of the apartments offered in 2018. The apartments were mostly located in the downtown area and the central part of the city of Braşov near the Black Church. Expanding our analysis to the whole Braşov County required a more comprehensive search through collaborative platforms since the Airbnb listings were mostly limited to the city of Braşov. Taking into account the same filters, we have identified 1969 listings in the County of Braşov in April 2018 (the period immediately following the Orthodox Easter Holiday) and 2055 listings in May 2018.

Airbnb has a tool that allows the authors to see when the user last accessed the platform (Table 4). In April and in May, the data obtained were as follows.

Table 4. The Number of Last access of Airbnb users from Braşov County

	6M	1M	1W	1D
April	627	166	43	10
May	613	201	93	26

Of the 1969 existing users in the portal in April, only 627 used the platform in the last 6 months. For May, out of 2055 users, only 613 accessed Airbnb. In turn, it can be observed that only a few users use the portal daily or weekly.

There are also web pages that offer apartments for rent per day in Braşov city, and there are also Facebook pages that offer this type of service. In turn, there are different web pages that group real estate, where houses, apartments, and premises are listed, rented and sold. As for the spaces that are rented, a difference is made between those who do it for extended periods of 1 year or more, and those who rent temporarily, that is, per day.

Analysis of Collaborative Tourism Demand in Braşov County

Taking into account that the lodging mainly develops the offer of collaborative tourism in the city, only this type of service is the one that we will analyze next. To determine, Airbnb's demand, we took into account the evaluations obtained from the advertisements of the apartments and houses offered through the platform. From all the listings, we analyzed 281 users' reviews who have used the service. The majority of guests had positive evaluations, however, negative comments were also found, but to a lesser extent. Some examples are given below (Table 5):

Table 5. Travelers rating who stayed in Braşov County via Airbnb platform

Negative evaluations	Positive evaluations
"Apartment is very hot. In one of the rooms, the ceiling fan did not work "	"The apartment is comfortable and the location is good for exploring the city. Communication with Andrei was very good. We waited for his mother who was very attentive. There was fresh mineral water, coffee, tea, and caramel cookies that comfort after a long trip. Thank you"
"Unfortunately, we could not know the apartment we had booked, since Mircea welcomed us in another different and smaller than the one booked by Airbnb. He promised us that the next day we would go to the place reserved, but finally, he did not. Of the 3 days, we spent in Braşov, we spent more than half looking for another place to stay because of this irresponsibility. "	"Our stay was very brief, but we felt extremely comfortable in the apartment of Andrei. Andrei received us and was very kind in her directions. The apartment is very well located and has everything you need to have a stay as if you were at home. You can even keep the car in the house. "
"The apartment is not very spacious and not well equipped. Unfortunately, not close to the center and shops, we don't like it. "	"Loved my stay in Braşov. The apartment is exactly as described: well located, nice view of the city, quiet, safe, clean, very well equipped. My hosts contributed greatly to the success of my trip by their kindness, generosity and all the information they shared with me about the city, its surroundings, transportation, activities, etc. I highly recommend this accommodation. "

To analyze the demand for Airbnb in Braşov County, the authors obtained data through the website and conducted surveys among users who stayed in the city through the platform. The Airbnb web page allowed us to obtain data about the age of the tourists who arrived and their place of origin. The age range was comprised of persons between 19 and 43 years old, who came from different parts of Europe, as shown in the below figure.

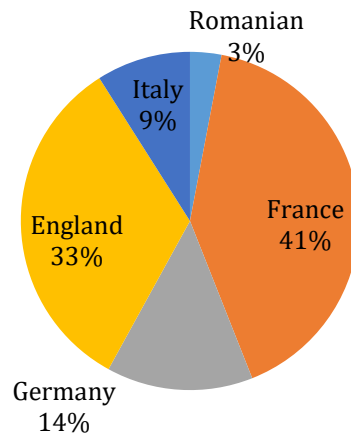


Figure1. Place of origin of the tourists who stayed in Braşov County through Airbnb

The idea of sharing with others and generating a different bond with the locals motivates users in choosing their accommodation through collaborative platforms such as Airbnb. In most cases, travelers visited the city because it was a mid-point for their final destination, and on a few occasions, they wanted to know the city and visited it specifically. The strategic position of Braşov enables many tourists traveling from north to south or vice versa, to make a stop in the city for business and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, and Exhibitions), using accommodation services. This could constitute a potential demand for collaborative tourism. Certainly, the existence of a wider range of tourism methods, including the one we are discussing in this study, helps the city develop sustainably by increasing the income earned by residents and businesses in the area, and by increasing tax revenue earned on the local budget.

Online platforms: insights from the citizens of Braşov County

The respondents recognized some of the platforms mentioned in the survey but said they did not know about Collaborative Economy, Collaborative Consumption, or Collaborative Tourism terms. That is, only 29% know any of these terms, but more than 50% recognize some collaborative platform. The one that was the most identified by the respondents was Airbnb, followed by Uber and other platforms, as can be seen in Figure 2.

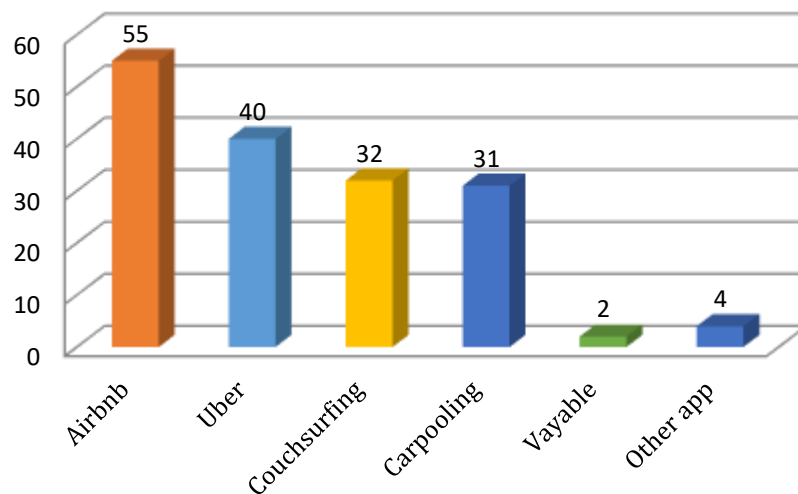


Figure 2. Use of different ICT platforms

Furthermore, we assessed if those people who knew about the collaborative ICT platforms also used them. Specifically, we were interested to identify the user frequency and to determine the role of collaborative platforms in users' life, with emphasis on whether they are simply users, providers, or both.

Regarding the role of users, of the 109 respondents who used a collaborative platform, 90 said they had demanded the service, while only 4 users had offered a service. The rest of the 15 respondents who used collaborative platforms, stated they played both roles, meaning they offered and demanded service using this tool, as shown in Figure 3.

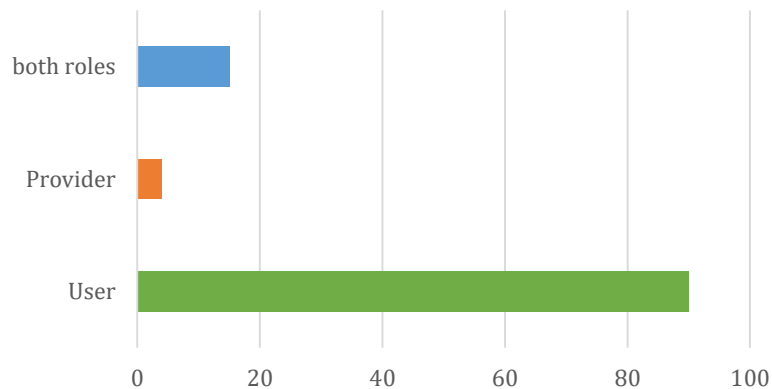


Figure 3. Respondents' answers regarding their role in delivering or using the service

From the 109 respondents who reported using one or more platforms, 80 did so between 1 and 2 times only, 30 between 2 and 10 times and only 5 frequently used it, more than 10 times (see Fig. 4) This analysis encourages us to go further because it is obvious that the number of applications for living space is much higher than the number of spaces offered, and the number of those who act as both users and providers is 14%. It is clear that there is a market for this business model, but we need to identify the reasons that are still unbalancing a higher demand against a lower offer. For this reason, we will continue to explore other attributes of the researched area.

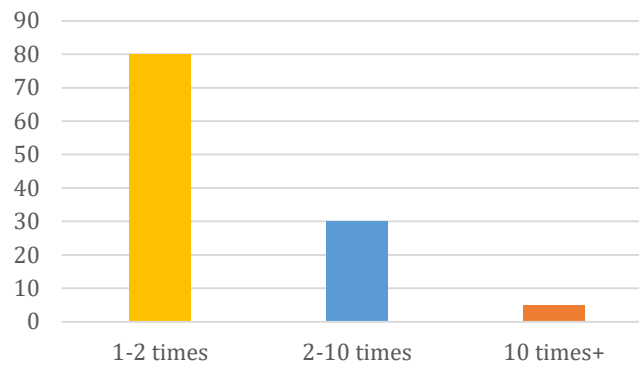


Figure 4. The respondents' opinion regarding the frequency of the use of the service

An interesting fact is that 80% of respondents consider that Braşov County should further incorporate collaborative tourism platforms (see fig. 5). Respondents who stated that more such ICT platforms should be incorporated (N=208), 111 considered that Uber should be adopted in the city. Some respondents said that Airbnb could be more developed in Braşov County. Finally, one person suggested that a specific platform for carpooling should be used instead of the Facebook groups where travel is offered and demanded.

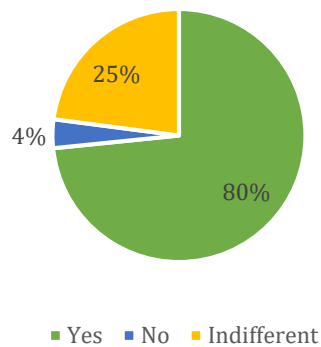


Figure 5. The respondents' opinion regarding the incorporation of collaborative tourism platforms

We took into account and analyzed the comments of the respondents to offer a deeper understanding of collaborative platform usage. Respondents expressed the importance of these platforms, especially Airbnb for those people who visit the city with the intention of volunteering since they are mostly people who do not travel with much money and need a space where to sleep and to eat. Another comment referred to the importance of these platforms due to their simplicity and ability to streamline processes, as long as this does not affect the work of people.

Starting from the specific research objectives, we illustrate that very few citizens effectively understand the meaning and business model of the collaborative economy in tourism. They are, at best using ICT through Internet platforms, especially young people, but they do not comprehend the effect of collaborative economy transformations has on the tourism industry.

We verified the established hypotheses through the different tasks carried out in the investigation. Firstly, we verified whether the lodging service presents greater possibilities for the development of collaborative tourism within the city. The lodging service was the sector that offered most listings and accommodation within the Brașov County. In addition, this sector has highly varied demand coming from international tourists from different places in the world.

Secondly, it was possible to highlight the crucial role of ICTs in the development of a collaborative tourism phenomenon. The online platforms act as tools that reach a greater audience since individuals have worldwide access to list, share, and swap their accommodation. Another important benefit that comes from using online platforms is the emphasis on delivering an incredible experience of the local cultures, different from the traditional hotel lodging.

Thirdly, we observe certain deficiencies that should be taken into account when it comes to collaborative platforms. Uber-style platforms would complement the work of taxi drivers, considering the predisposition of the Brașov County population to incorporate them in every-day use. However, this activity should be regulated so that there is a balance between the interests of the actors involved.

The increased competition that the new platforms bring to the traditional markets and the rising consumer choice from the sharing economy could represent a great opportunity for local government in terms of increasing the city's touristic appeal. In addition, the sharing economy also creates opportunities for new jobs, economic growth, as well as competitiveness.

The study made possible to identify elements that make Brașov a dynamic city with sustainable opportunities that continue developing, not only from the tourist point of view, but in all aspects. Brașov is a city with a great diversity of activities, it is a university center, which partly contributes to tourism, mainly by the arrival of people who come to work, study or visit the city. In this sense, the local government could seize the opportunity and contribute to the sharing economy by supporting investors to repurpose the number of uninhabited dwellings, since they could be part of the tourist accommodation offer through the collaborative platforms. In addition, the local authorities could act on subjects related to the tourism and the ICTs and implement applications (to use on smartphones and tablets) linked to the tourist sharing platforms that promote tourist activity and this way increase the city's development. By appealing to ITC and by taking into consideration the strategic position of Brașov, the local authorities could also attract different tourist segments, such as tourists who travel for business and businesses using accommodation services (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing and Exhibitions). Certainly, the existence of a wider range of tourism methods, including the one we are discussing in this study, helps the city develop sustainably by increasing the income earned by residents and businesses in the area, and by increasing tax revenue earned on the local budget.

While the County Council of Brașov continues to promote tourism in the traditional way, it has recently invested in an informative GIS-designed platform (android/iOS compatible) in cooperation with other local administrations in the same county, travelling associations and tour operators. The initiative is aimed chiefly at better promoting the county's must-see nature, cultural attractions, and provides pretty detailed information on traditional accommodation as well as restaurants & food.

Data analytics from the web platform so far show that most of the click rates come from Romanian visitors followed by those from Germany and United Kingdom, while the application is mostly used by users from Germany, Ireland, Italy and Cyprus. The website

platform and application are not yet interactive and do not offer direct services to customers such as buying tickets for museums, room reservations etc.

County Council of Braşov should do more in terms of improving and developing tourism infrastructure/amenities especially in terms of attracting more investments to expand the still limited accommodation network, improving on the transportation system, ramping up artificial snow production in view of warmer winters (more snow cannons), enhance events promotion and better advertising and last but not least in taking firm steps to support durable tourism in the area.

Conclusions

Finally, a conclusion linked to the tourist activity of Braşov County is to consider the collaborative tourist who visits the city, approaches it as a mid-point within his or her journey. It also highlights the features of the city that, make the development of the collaborative tourism possible, considering its strategic location, the diversity of activities one can attend, the culture and history and also, its municipality work teams that are responsible for cultural activities and generate technological applications that contribute to the development of the city. Not least, we have to consider its young population with good management of the ICTs.

It is concluded that, for sustainable development and management of this new trend, an informative campaign must be conducted, aiming to present the population the benefits and disadvantages that can be generated by approaching the collaborative tourism. It is also essential, as new needs arise within the society, agreements to be signed between the private and the public sector, for joint, effective cooperation, taking into account that the collaborative economy can be a key tool for development and advertising our country worldwide.

Given the very rich offer of collaborative tourism, the authors of the present paper consider that the collection and analysis of the specialized literature and specific documentation is an excellent starting point, but not sufficient. Therefore, we have also developed a quantitative-qualitative research approach, to investigate the development of collaborative platforms and their use in Braşov County. The results of semi-structured surveys show that Airbnb users are young people, between 20 and 40 years old, with diverse professions. They come from different countries and their main characteristic is that they frequently use this medium to travel. Taking into consideration that most users are satisfied with services (as seen in the analyzed comments, the received reviews were excellent in most cases) along with their motivation to connect with the local population we can determine that tourist are likely to use the service in the future or recommend it to others. However, most of the replies stated that the visit to the city was not the main point of interest, but a secondary stop towards their final destination. Therefore, Braşov County should attract that segment of visitors who are interested in discovering the city and the county as a main tourist destination.

Our research shows that most respondents have a balanced view of collaborative platforms and they are in favor of this phenomenon, only if it does not compromise the work of other people. We can conclude that knowledge of the subject is dispersed, in other words, that some citizens have a high degree of knowledge while others know only some aspects.

Given the very rich offer of collaborative tourism, the authors of the present paper consider that, what has been done so far, namely the collection and analysis of the

specialized literature and specific documentation, is a good starting point, but not sufficient. The results of semi-structured surveys on topics such as the main collaborative platforms, main services offered or the role played in delivering or using the service, have also been analyzed. Nevertheless, the research presents several shortcomings determined by the sample size and profile, as well as the measure used to collect the data, as for a better understanding of the phenomenon data on the opinions and characteristics of foreign tourist could be better outlined. The intention of the authors is to continue and deepen this research through the continuation of semi-structured surveys that clarify the following areas of interest: customer strength position, the power of customer negotiation, types and numbers of accommodation locations offered by Airbnb in Brașov County. Other relevant aspects to investigate could be the language of the hosts, the types of rooms, the number of guests, the place of origin of the tourists, the hosts' preferences.

Further research could deepen the research and to go beyond the current limitations and publish a much more comprehensive research in the field of the cooperative economy in tourism. We also want to introduce a new direction of research, namely how this collaborative economy can turn into a future direction of interest for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Local government should take into account that the collaborative economy in tourism can be a key tool for the development of the local economy. Although Romanians use on-line platforms when planning their excursions abroad, our research has shown that in their country they prefer to use a new on-line platforms, such as Airbnb.

Sustainable development and management of this new trend are necessary. The first step for achieving sustainable development is having an informed population. The citizens of Brașov county need to understand both the benefits and the threats of collaborative tourism. It is also essential that as new needs arise within society; the private sector and the public act cooperatively, taking into account that the collaborative economy can be a key tool for developing sustainable tourism and growth in Brașov County.

Home sharing in tourism is not regulated at this time Romania. Having a level playing field is crucial competition-wise (Uber's lesson speaks volumes about that). A draft bill on tourism is still pending in the Parliament, after it was greenlighted by the Senate. Among other things, the draft stipulates that all private individuals renting out their flats/houses for travelling purposes have to register with the Ministry and the Fiscal Agency and get their property licensed or they will be fined up to RON 20,800-31,200. Moreover, they will have to have an active email address and a phone number registered with local and central tourism authorities. The move is aimed at customer protection (e.g. management of potential complaints filed by the client) especially when accommodation is booked through an intermediary that is incorporated abroad and last but not least at increasing income transparency

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