

Bicycle Tourism and Sharing Economy (C2C-Tourism): Analysis of the Reciprocity Behavior in the Case of Warmshowers

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Abstract : Sharing platforms are a widely investigated field. However, there is a research gap with a lack of focus on 'real' (non-profit-orientated) sharing platforms. The research project addresses this gap by conducting an empirical study on a private peer-to-peer (P2P) network to investigate cooperative behavior from a socio-psychological perspective. In recent years the conversion from possession to accessing is increasingly influencing different sectors, particularly the traveling industry. The number of people participating in hospitality exchange platforms like Airbnb, Couchsurfing, and Warmshowers (WS) is rapidly growing. WS is an increasingly popular online community that is linking cycling tourists and locals. It builds on the idea of the "sharing economy" as a not-for-profit hospitality network for bicycle tourists. Hosts not only provide a sleeping berth and warm shower free of charge but also offer additional services to their guests, such as cooking and washing clothes for them. According to previous studies, they are motivated by the idea of promoting cultural experience and forming new friendships. Trust and reciprocity are supposed to play major roles in the success of such platforms. The objective of this research project is to analyze the reciprocity behavior within the WS community. Reciprocity is the act of giving and taking among each other. Individuals feel obligated to return a favor and often expect to increase their own chances of receiving future benefits for themselves. Consequently, the drivers that incite giving and taking, as well as the motivation for hosts and guests, are examined. Thus, the project investigates a particular tourism offer that contributes to sustainable tourism by analyzing P2P resp. cyclist-to-cyclist, C2C) tourism. C2C tourism is characterized by special hospitality and generosity. To find out what motivations drive the hosts and which determinants drive the sharing cycling economy, an empirical study has been conducted globally through an online survey. The data was gathered through the WS community and comprised responses from more than 10,000 cyclists around the globe. Next to general information mostly comprising quantitative data on bicycle tourism (year/tour distance, duration and budget), qualitative information on traveling with WS as well as hosting was collected. The most important motivations for a traveler is to explore the local culture, to save money, and to make friends. The main reasons to host a guest are to promote the use of bicycles and to make friends, but also to give back and pay forward. WS members prefer to stay with/host cyclists. The results indicate that C2C tourists share homogenous characteristics and a similar philosophy, which is crucial for building mutual trust. Members of WS are generally extremely trustful. The study promotes an ecological form of tourism by combining sustainability, regionality, health, experience and the local communities' cultures. The empirical evidence found and analyzed, despite evident limitations, enabled us to shed light, especially on the issue of motivations and social capital, and on the functioning of 'sharing' platforms. Final research results are intended to promote C2C tourism around the globe to further replace conventional by sustainable tourism.

Keywords : bicycle tourism, homogeneity, reciprocity, sharing economy, trust

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