

Call for papers

SHORT-TERM TOURISM RENTALS: OBSERVATION, REGULATIONS and LABOR RECONFIGURATIONS

EIREST, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University

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Paris



EIREST - Equipe interdisciplinaire de recherches sur le tourisme

The « digitalization » of a growing part of human activities is a major cause of change in the contemporary world. In particular, the power of digital technologies has radically changed the sector of intermediation activities, allowing international digital companies to match a demand and a supply scattered all over the world. The tourism sector, and particularly tourist accommodation industry, is at the forefront of this powerful movement of digitalization of intermediation activities, especially due to the expansion of companies such as Airbnb over the last decade. Indeed, the boom of digital economy, tightly bound to the one of the so-called sharing economy and of the peer-to-peer economic model, henceforth makes it very easy to connect individual people who have an underutilized property (whether it is a room or an entire home, whether it is temporary or not) with a highly spatially scattered tourism demand, through the use of digital platforms.

This workshop aims to explore the breadth of the changes induced by the development of these short-term rental digital platforms from an interdisciplinary perspective. It intends to go beyond the debate regarding the competition between this new form of tourist accommodation and more traditional types of stakeholders (hotels, hostels, guesthouses, etc.) which has already been covered by numerous papers. Beyond this issue, we aim to shed some light on the changes triggered by both the digital nature of this accommodation and its unseen flexibility and volatility, which challenge the definition of the “economic” sphere, the current regulation of economic activity and work, but also the methods used to measure it. Therefore, the workshop aims to analyse the breadth of these changes through (although not limited to) three entry points.

Monitoring peer-to-peer tourist accommodation: the data issue

The development of these peer-to-peer digital platforms raises totally new issues regarding the monitoring of this new supply. The digital nature of such platforms greatly facilitates the acquisition of data, since it publicly showcases all the available listings worldwide on internet websites in detail. Techniques such as web-scraping, web-crawling, etc. allow anyone to automatically harvest detailed information as organised databases. Such data are today widely used, whether it is to a commercial purpose (by companies such as Airdna which sells databases to help Airbnb hosts to assess the best price for their listing) or to a more critical end (by data providers such as the Inside Airbnb project which aims to “add data to the debate”). Most of the papers published on Airbnb to this day relies on such databases. Nevertheless, this new way to access data raises a range of issues that we seek to analyse in this workshop:

- Such databases actually generally provide a snapshot of the supply available on a platform at a given moment. Yet, this kind of peer-to-peer supply is characterized by a very high flexibility and volatility. What is the reliability of such data? To what extent should one be careful in their interpretation? How to overcome the limits of these databases?
- What are the legal issues surrounding these new methods of data acquisition?
- Likewise, what ethical issues are raised by the analysis of such databases?

Regulating peer-to-peer tourist accommodation: the legal and tax issues

The expansion of such intermediation activities represents a huge challenge for local authorities of tourist cities. The peer-to-peer economic model does not fit the current legal frameworks regulating tourist accommodation, as other economic activities, in most countries. Many local authorities are currently experimenting different kinds of regulation which are not easy to implement. We would like to explore the following:

- Regulating and taxing this new kind of short-term rentals requires local authorities to be able to know which physical person correspond to the digital profile (often anonymous) and to know who lets what, how often, and what are the income earned from this activity. Therefore, local authorities need to collaborate with these digital companies, which control these data and are generally based abroad. What are the new power relationship between digital short-term rental companies and local authorities that result from this situation? How do local authorities work with Airbnb and similar companies? To what extent does the issue of access to data hinder the implementation of regulation?
- Different forms of regulation are currently being tested in all tourism metropolises, and their implementation is generally delicate. We seek to identify the reasons that make the implementation of regulation difficult, and especially the avoidance strategies that are developed by digital platforms as well as hosts.

Digital short-term rentals platforms and new forms of entrepreneurship: the work issue

Sharing economy also causes deep changes in the nature of work (Sprague, 2015). Platforms such as Airbnb provide local people with the opportunity to earn a supplemental income by taking advantage of an underutilized room/house. Nevertheless, it requires an investment of personal time to run this activity: managing the listing, cleaning the accommodation, welcoming and taking care of the host, etc. Airbnb even recently launched a new service giving the possibility to hosts to create customised “experiences” for their guests (visiting a place, eating with a “local”, etc.), transforming them into tour operators. Moreover, the boom of such activities gives rise to the creation of companies aiming at providing Airbnb hosts with specific services, such as managing listings, cleaning, etc, “reflecting the growing professionalisation of the sharing economy” (Stabrowski, 2017). Yet, mirroring the broader debate on the “uberisation” of work, little is known about the nature of work in this new type of tourist accommodation:

- To what extent do Airbnb hosts develop entrepreneurial behaviours? How? And with which economic trajectory? And how do digital platforms foster and facilitate such behaviours?
- How do such new forms of work challenge the separation between the domestic and the economic spheres?

The workshop aims to provide an interdisciplinary platform for the meeting of different approaches on digital tourist accommodation platforms from a wide range of disciplines (social sciences, computer sciences, legal studies, etc.). Likewise, we welcome both analyses based on quantitative and/or

qualitative approaches. Finally, we would be especially interested in gathering different perspectives on the topic, from academics, data scientists, policymakers, activists, etc.

Submissions: Please e-mail abstracts of up to 500 words to Anne-Cécile Mermet (anne-cecile.mermet@univ-paris1.fr) and Maria Gravari-Barbas (maria.gravari-barbas@univ-paris1.fr) by January 5th. Successful applicants will be contacted no later than January 31st.

Scientific committee

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