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The Commodification of Hospitality.
An analysis of tourism encounters between interculturality and difference in regard to Turkish Couchsurfing experiences.

GRADUATE THESIS

Tara Spitz

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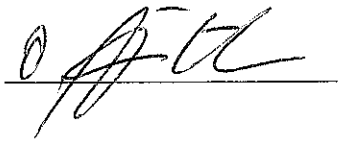

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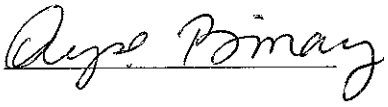

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ABSTRACT

The Commodification of Hospitality.
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Couchsurfing emerged as a reaction to a package tourism of the masses that was increasingly perceived of as an unauthentic experience of foreign cultures and even potentially harmful to the hosts' culture and country. The new creed of Couchsurfers was thus "Authentic experience on a par with the hosts", telling of cosmopolitanism and a relationships of deeper socio-cultural value. Wondering to what extend such aspirations can retain their integrity in a mostly economy driven world, I tested the Couchsurfing model against several cultural theories and came to rather disenchanting results.

Keywords: Couchsurfing; hospitality networks; toursim encounters; commodification; intercultural communication; representation

Özet

"Couchsurfing" giderek yabancı ülkelerin otantik olmayan birer deneyimleri olarak algılanan ve hatta ev sahibi ülkenin kültürüne ve şehrine zarar verebilecek nitelikte olan paket turlara tepki olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu sebeple de "Couchsurfer" diye nitelendirilen bu yeni üyelerin, derin sosyo-kültürel değerlerle yakından ilişkili olma fırsatına sahip oldukları söylenebilir. Ancak merak ettiğim, acaba böylesi bir istek, ekonominin bu kadar hâkim olduğu bir dünyada ne kadar ayakta durabilirdi? Bunun üzerine, "Couchsurfing Modeli"nin karşısında pek çok kültür teorisi test ettim ve daha çok küçümseyici sonuçlara ulaştım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Couchsurfing; misafirperverlik bağlantıları; turizmin karşılaştıkları; nesneleştirme/metalaşma; kültürlerarsı iletişim; sunuş.

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1. Introduction

My first Couchsurfing experience happened in the year 2009. A friend and I planned an extended weekend trip to Gothenborg. It was the classic low budget Ryanair trip so many of us ('us' meaning students from the Universität Bremen) went to at least once a year. We successfully managed to get a very cheap flight. When looking for hostels, we realized that accommodation in the Swedish city would cost us more than getting there. My friend suggested finding a place to sleep on the Couchsurfing network. I have heard about Couchsurfing before but did never 'surf' a couch myself. We ended up at a young web designer's place; we had our own room, got keys for his apartment and only saw him twice during our stay. One night, we cooked dinner for the three of us because we thought that's what the guests do for the host and it turned out to be a nice evening. I remember very well how it seemed to be the only thing we did outside of the 'tourist bubble' during our three-day stay. During the rest of our trip, we relied on what our Lonely Planet travel guide told us to do in Gothenburg.

The second time I surfed a couch was a couple of years later in Tel Aviv during a trip with a couple of friends from university. I was not involved in any of the pre-trip organization and one of the other girls suggested that we should couchsurf instead of booking a hostel. In fact, we did not only get a free place to sleep but also good talks, two evenings of cooking dinner together and accompanied walks around the city without being in need to study a travel guide before. Compared to my first

Couchsurfing trip a couple of years earlier, this one manifested itself as somewhat ‘authentic’ and very personal travel experience. From my subjective perspective, it felt like a trip, which happened ‘off the beaten track’.

During my life as a student, Couchsurfing was something very present since so many of my friends have been practicing it. For me, it has been a two times experience so far but nevertheless the network has fascinated and interested me for years. When I moved to Istanbul for my Double Degree I came into close contact with a lot of people from all over the world and travelling was one of the main topics to talk about in our free time. I realized to what extent travelling is part of our lifestyles. However, this lifestyle was not ‘tourism’ as we knew it from trips to Spain with our families in the past but an alternative way of travelling. Apparently, ‘backpacking’ and ‘Couchsurfing’ are believed to be ways to travel that happen in a higher socio-cultural level than ‘ordinary’ kinds of tourism. In this thesis, I aim to analyze the complex and interdisciplinary area of tension regarding encounters within this touristic context. My goal is to find out if and in which way hospitality is, on the one hand, a basis for intercultural encounters and, on the other hand, how hospitality is subject to a process of commodification. Within this setting, I will especially focus on the ‘Couchsurfing’ network and will discuss how the protagonists of hospitality tourism interact within a cosmopolitcal and privileged context.

In particuar, I will take a look at the theoretical framework of 'difference' and 'stereotypes' as well as communication in tourism encounters. Furthermore, I will try to answer the question of how hospitality-based tourism can provide a foundation for interculturality and cultural exchange and how tourism is always subject to cultural and economical power structures. Moreover, I will analyze the 'Couchsurfing universe' and its members from a critical perspective on cosmopolitanism. For this, I will provide a detailed overview on cosmopolitanism and the cosmopolitan protagonists in alternative tourism encounters as well as a couple of examples from German-Turkish tourism encounters. In the end, I will raise the question of how hospitality is subject to a process of commodification.

2. Culture and tourism

Even though the main theme of this thesis, Couchsurfing, is a so-called hospitality network, it is strongly connected to the act of travelling and thus needs to be studied in the broader context of tourism. The area of tourism studies is a highly complex one: "Tourism is grounded in real world relationships – historical, economic, political, social and cultural" (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 31). As a result, it is no surprise that different academic disciplines are dealing with the characteristics and impacts of tourism. In this thesis I try to offer an interdisciplinary approach to a certain way to travel; that is, travelling on the basis of the network 'Couchsurfing'. The Couchsurfing universe will be further introduced in the following chapters. In

general, it is to say that Couchsurfing counts as an alternative way of travelling; in other words, it is believed to differ from 'mainstream' tourism.

In contrast to mass tourism and 'All inclusive' packages, alternative forms of tourism, whether eco tourism, sustainable tourism or community and hospitality tourism are commonly represented as "morally superior alternatives to the package holiday" (Butcher 2003: 1). But of course every opinion on 'good' and 'bad' tourism should be subject to a critical analysis:

> Yet the celebrated alternatives […] are subject to their own critique. Does it blaze a trail for the masses? Does it expose even more remote parts of the earth to the threat of tourism? Is it self-defeating – if you are motivated by a belief that tourism is prone to damage cultures and environments, wouldn't you be better off at home? […] Those who do travel are advised to 'travel well' – to seek out and revere the culture of your hosts… but not to get too close for fear of offending cultural sensibilities (Butcher 2003: 2)

One could claim that the popularity of a place can originate in an alternative kind of tourism, like Couchsurfing, before the 'all inclusive masses' follow. Butchers critique implies that most alternative tourists seek for a 'close' cultural encounter which may be perceived as offensive to the host culture. Moreover, there is a risk of that 'secret' place might get very popular for the masses over time. In this respect, alternative or hospitality tourism in specific, does not occur in a socio-cultural vacuum that remains untouched from global economic power. Butcher mentions that tourism is "big business – by some measures the biggest" (Butcher 2003: 6) and therefore any kind of tourism is in a way driven by global economic development as well as by technical progress and as a consequence, an increased number of people is

able to travel around the world. Alternative tourists may claim that their movement is a socio-cultural answer to the economic driven masses. In a way, a 'good' and a 'bad' way to travel is established:

> The moralization of tourism involves two mutually reinforcing notions. First, Mass Tourism is deemed to have wrought damage to the environment and to the cultures exposed to it, and hence new types of tourism are proposed that are deemed benign to the environment and benevolent towards other cultures. Second, this ethical tourism is deemed to be better for tourists, too – more enlightening, encouraging respect for other ways of life and a critical reflection on the tourist's own developed society (Butcher 2003: 7)

In other words, a flexibly tailored form of tourism has emerged at the same time as mass tourism took over and in recent times, these alternative forms of tourism became more and more important. The overall goal seems to get a travel experience outside of the bubble of common mass tourism with a more people-orientated approach of travelling. Apparently, culture is more of a weight in alternative ways to travel. In general, tourism can be defined as phenomenon in which social, cultural as well as economic elements of power are interconnected with each other. The balance of power between these elements may vary depending on what kind of tourism is being observed.

In general, culture does play an important role in the general tourism discourse. It can be said that regardless of mass tourism or an individual nature trip, the experience of culture – whether it is 'stereotyped' or 'authentic' – is an important issue of every form of tourism. Since culture is strongly influenced by economically driven forces in the context of tourism, it is important to discuss it. Culture never

happens in a vacuum and thus, regarding tourism, is subject to not only social and historical but also political forces and power relationships:

> 'Culture' in this usage is often refracted through a distinctly Western lens; one that both elevates the host's culture and at the same time restricts to its development. There are three facets to this: first, the status quo in society. Change becomes defined as an attack on culture. Second, culture is rooted in the past, in tradition, rather than being connected to the making of a future. Third, and most vitally for this discussion, culture is seen as what makes people different from one another – culture is read as cultures (Butcher 2003: 81).

It is interesting, that the first thing that probably comes to most people's minds when thinking about traveling, is visiting a place. In fact, tourism is not just to travel from one geographic place to another but is interconnected to a variety of experiences: "Tourism processes have broader cultural meanings which extend far beyond the actual consumption of tourism products and places" (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 3). Thus, tourism experiences and encounters entail a variety of manifold feelings and establish complex relationships and have to be seen in a broader context. One can say that representations of culture are being shaped, constructed, exchanged and consumed as a part of the tourism experience. Butcher (2003: 82) mentions that the host society is often romanticized by the tourists who travel to find something authentic. As a consequence, culture and cultural representations are subject to Western constructions of culture. One observation is that the 'authentic' tourist experience has strong roots in the past and tradition of a culture: "The host culture is held to possess something that the tourist's culture has lost; a sense of community […]" (Butcher 2003: 84). However, this longing is usually combined with a return ticket to home. This is an interesting and important fact about tourism: Most journeys

have a clear start and ending point and usually, those two are the same geographical place.

The beginning of this chapter aimed to show what a complex and interdisciplinary field of study any study on tourism is. As a next step, I will give an overview on some of the main concepts of tourism studies, which are important to consider when dealing with cosmopolitanism and Couchsurfing in chapter 3.

2.1 Cultural representations and communication in tourism

In the context of tourism, Couchsurfing and cosmopolitanism I aim to take a closer look to the concepts of cultural representation as well as intercultural communication. My goal is to point out how concepts of culture, communication and tourism are interconnected to each other and that tourism encounters deserve to be analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective. The foundation of my further discussion is to take a closer look on Stuart Hall's writings on representing culture with a special focus on the concepts of 'difference' and 'stereotypes'. The theoretical framework of Stuart Hall et al. is then applied to the specific topic of the cultural dimension of Couchsurfing tourism.

Stuart Hall describes in detail how representations, language and culture are interconnected with each other. He says that "culture is about 'shared meanings'" (Hall 1997:1) and that language is "the privileged medium in which we 'make sense'

of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged" (Hall 1997: 1). Language, according to Hall, is the foundation to share meanings and cultural values:

> In language, we use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings (Hall 1997:1).

In other words, whenever one talks about culture and cultural actions, one has to consider that culture is dealing with processes of producing and exchanging meaning between different members of a group. This group can of course contain of members of the same cultural group or of people with different cultural backgrounds. Hall is dealing with the important questions of how meaning is being generated and produced in different contexts and; furthermore, is concerned with the question of how the socio-cultural world is "constructed and represented to and by us in meaningful ways" (Barker 2000: 7). It is obvious that Stuart Hall's concept of culture differs from a common concept of 'high culture':

> Belonging to the same frame of reference, but more 'modern' in its associations, is the use of 'culture' to refer to the widely distributed forms of popular music, publishing, art, design and literature, or the activities of leisure-time and entertainment, which make up the everyday lives of the majority of 'ordinary people' […] (Hall 1997: 2)

Obviously, tourism encounters perfectly fit into this definition of culture. Hall says that "whatever is distinctive about the 'way of life' of a people, community or social group" (Hall 1997: 2) is, in the end, culture. Therefore, Couchsurfing tourism is a topic that can and should be analyzed from an academic perspective of cultural and social sciences, since this kind of tourism has a strong 'lifestyle' connotation.

Human beings are social creatures and thus a big part of our everyday lives is about exchanging meaning. The exchange, or communication, of meaning can only be meaningful if the people, who are part of the exchanging process, interpret the world in more or less the same way. This communication implies attitudes, emotions and experiences (Hall 1997: 2f). In the end, there is no social interaction that takes place in which no meaning is being exchanged: "Meaning is also produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural 'things' […]" (Hall 1997: 3), which again is a statement that can be applied to the 'consumption of culture' within a tourism context. Stuart Hall describes very clear how culture and communication are interwoven:

> Members of the same culture must share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, and thus to interpret the world, in roughly similar ways. They must share, broadly speaking, the same 'cultural codes' […] Similarly, in order to communicate these meanings to other people, the participants to any meaningful exchange must also be able to use the same linguistic codes […] (Hall 1997: 4).

To make it more clear, people must in a way speak the same language – which does not necessarily mean 'the English', 'the Turkish' or 'the German' language but the same socio-cultural language. Language can consist of many things: words, gestures, images, clothes and many more. All these elements function as signs, which signify. As Hall states:

> They don't have any clear meaning in themselves. Rather, they are the vehicles or media which carry meaning because they operate as symbols, which stand for or represent the meanings we wish to communicate. To use another metaphor, they function as signs (Hall 1997: 5).

Strictly speaking, a gesture is not important itself, its function, the way it signifies, is the essential aspect. Whenever one is analyzing the complex connection between culture and communication, sooner or later, everyone stumbles over the concept of representation. Basically, representation is the connecting element between culture and communication. In regard to the topic of this thesis, a closer look at two concepts of representation is necessary: difference and stereotype. Representing difference is a common theme and must be subject to a critical analysis:

> Representation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fear and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way (Hall 1997: 226)

The problem with representations of difference is not the difference itself – since difference is a necessary element without the world would not make sense. Difference is crucial to generate meaning and thus to form cultures and societies as well as the individual (Hall 1997: 238). However, difference seems to always go along with 'good' and 'bad', with 'right' and 'wrong'. In recent years, and in contrast to a semiotic approach, a discursive perspective to the field of representing difference has become popular. This approach covers the broader meaning of representation in the world. Here, the study of representation is strongly connected with its impacts to the social reality; in other words, the politics of representation (Hall 1997). The reality of representations deals with themes of majorities and minorities, of 'us' and 'them'. Of course, there are different types of representing difference. One that is important within the discourse is the stereotype. Hall states that "'stereotyped' means 'reduced to a few essentials, fixed in Nature by a few simplified characteristics'"

(Hall 1997: 257). The problem with stereotypes is not only, that they are strongly reduced forms of representations but exaggerated at the same time. Besides, stereotypes are very difficult to change once they have been established. Hall mentions another aspect of stereotyping, which is the "practice of 'closure' and exclusion" (Hall 1997: 258). Here, the concept of 'Othering' appears:

> Stereotyping […] is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up frontiers between the 'normal' and the 'deviant' [….], the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them (Hall 1997: 258).

At this point, it becomes clear that stereotypes are representations that are strongly connected to power. As a next step, I will give an overview of how power relations within cultural tourism representations can be analyzed.

2.2 Power and tourism

According to Hall, power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group and further argues that every stereotype only tells "half of the story" (1997: 263). In fact, stereotypes are a very good example of how cultural difference and power are being interconnected. Power, in this context, is often a symbolic power, one that classifies expulsion in terms of a broader socio-cultural perspective. However, also economic power is part of the game. Rutherford (1990: 11) argues that the globalized capitalistic world "has fallen in love with difference". Again, the relevance of difference in any tourism context becomes clear. At this point, it is important to say, that again, difference is ambivalent and Hall states that power is no

‘one way street’ but should be seen as a circulative construction with the opportunity to reclaim cultural power.

Just as most journeys are a circuit from home to destination and back home, tourism is also about other circuit structures. Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 36f) come to the conclusion that cultural meanings in a tourism context are always elements of a circuit of power: Who is represented by whom in which way? They point out that any representation has an impact on ‘reality’. That is, the represented and consumed touristic reality is of course not necessarily the socio-cultural reality of the host culture. However, the danger of cultural representations in tourism is always that they affect the broader social living environment of the host culture – often, but not always, in a rather negative way since those who are represented are often not the ones in power of the representation. Nevertheless, the host culture is not always the powerless within constructed cultural representation: “Of course, tourism is not always seen as destructive in relation to the host culture. It is sometimes seen as a positive factor when it reinforces social practices” (Butcher 2003: 88).

Butcher points out that it is interesting how both parties (for and against tourism development) tend to try to maintain cultural difference. As aforementioned, cultural difference is necessary to construct meaning and thus a crucial element in order to shape cultural identity. He further writes that seeing integrity of culture as the end of culture itself may help to generate an awareness of the complex tensions of the field of tourism and culture but at the same time one should take a look on how tourism

driven cultural encounters are a basis for intercultural communication and intercultural exchanges. Also, the aforementioned power structures within culture and tourism are not stable:

> Our world is constantly changing, power centres are shifting, old orders are giving way to new, and there are emergent economic, social, political and cultural powers – all of which has important consequences for tourism (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 93).

As a matter of fact, power is usually seen as something political or economical. However, there is also a social and cultural dimension of power in the world. Power is happening 'within' societies. In this context, "tourism is merely one more way through which people's cultures and relationships change, through contact and through the incomes generated by the industry. The outcomes are not necessarily negative" (Morgan and Pritchard 1998: 181). Whereas in mass tourism, 'the industry' seems to be in the center of power, alternative forms of tourism, like Couchsurfing, try to emancipate themselves from that industry and try to focus on the people experience. Nevertheless, Morgan and Pritchard (1998: 181) argue that in the end, tourists are products of the socio-economic systems "and so share with those responsible for tourism marketing common values and perspectives". One could say that 'alternative' travellers, as Couchsurfers, see themselves as independent from the mainstream tourism power structures and thus miss to reflect about their way to travel.

On the other hand, as already mentioned, 'culture' is not automatically in the position of the powerless. Especially in hospitality tourism people's goal is to encounter each

other as independently as possible from constructed representations of the tourism industry. The mobility of tourists enables people, the members of the visiting and hosting culture, to meet, communicate and interact with each other.

2.3 Intercultural opportunities in tourism

Based on the theoretical framework above it becomes obvious, that intercultural encounters and communication offer chances and risks at the same time. Intercultural communication is likely to happen when travelling, when crossing borders and when experiencing a different way to live than at home: „Wenn eine Person einer Kultur eine Botschaft an einen Angehörigen einer anderen Kultur sendet, findet interkulturelle Kommunikation statt“ (Kartari 1997: 9). I want to mention, that culture is never a fixed entity but rather, cultures are most likely to be very entangled; however, difference always plays a role in the context of intercultural meetings. The extent of difference may differ:

> Je größer die Kulturunterschiede zwischen den Kommunikationspartnern sind, desto größer sind die Unterschiede zwischen Wort-, Verhaltens- und Symbolbedeutungen. Gründe für diese Unterschiede sind: die Wahrnehmung ist selektiv, die Wahrnehmungsmuster sind gelernt und kulturgeprägt […] Unsere Interessen und Wertvorstellungen funktionieren als ‚Kulturfilter‘ und führen zur Verformung, Blockierung und zur Erzeugung dessen, was wir zur Wahrnehmung ausgewählt haben (Kartari 1997: 10).

Or to say, the ‘Kulturfilter’ of any person is strongly connected of what is familiar and what is not, what is exotic or different. When it comes to Couchsurfing, the Internet is full of newspaper articles and blog entries about Couchsurfing in general and the individual Couchsurfing experience. Regarding the Couchsurfing culture in

Turkey, there are about 10.000 users, fifty percent of them in Istanbul (Lloyd 2008). Again, the ambivalent character of Couchsurfing can be noticed. On the one hand, cultural stereotypes do play a role in the encounter of Western travellers:

> When guests come to Turkey[…] they often expect it to be an Arab country and are surprised to it is very European. Levent said one guest even exclaimed upon meeting him: You don't have a moustache! (Lloyd 2008).

On the other hand, Couchsurfing gives the opportunity to challenge stereotypes about the culture of a destination because hosts and guests share, at least that is the idea, an everyday-life together for a short while, guests are shown places which might not be mentioned in Western travel guides. This statement fits into the debate on stereotypes and cultural difference as presented in chapter 2. In a German-speaking travel blog that thematizes Couchsurfing experiences from a German girl in Turkey, you can also find proof of how stereotypical Couchsurfing travel experiences can be: *Am ersten Tag hat Berfin mir den alten Basar gezeigt, danach haben wir zu zweit gemütlich in einem Café gesessen, Wasserpfeife geraucht, Backgammon gespielt und Tee getrunken. Alle türkischen Klischees vereint.* (Blog-Entry, Anna 2015). Even though a cliché might be perceived as more positive than a stereotype, it still is a fixed cultural representation. In this blog, I found another interesting paragraph: *Zur gleichen Zeit habe ich auch zum ersten Mal ausprobiert, wie es ist, zwei Tage lang komplett ohne Geld auszukommen, meine Lirareserven haben nämlich noch genau für zwei Fahrten mit der Fähre gereicht. Um einmal quer durch Istanbul zu kommen, bin ich also sowohl eine ganz schöne Strecke zu Fuß gegangen als auch getrampt, was selbst in der Innenstadt erstaunlich gut geklappt hat. Abends habe ich, inspiriert*

unter anderem von Michael Wigge's Dokumentation "Ohne Geld bis ans Ende der Welt", in Bäckereien und Obstläden nach übriggebliebenem Essen gefragt. Das Ergebnis war überwältigend: Nicht nur habe ich haufenweise Essen geschenkt bekommen, nein, in einem Obstladen wurde ich sogar zum Tee eingeladen, habe mich eine halbe Stunde mit den Mitarbeitern unterhalten und versprochen, nochmal vorbeizukommen, falls es mich irgendwann wieder nach Istanbul verschlägt (Blog-Entry, Anna 2015). While encountering 'the Other' in Istanbul this traveller is apparently searching for something that is not possible to find at home - to spend a day without spending money. This can be seen as a somehow 'romantic' desire to find an experience very different to the common consuming culture the person lives in at home.

In addition, Couchsurfing is a platform which is not only used by short-term travellers but also by people who plan to stay for longer – if not forever: "I've gotten job advice, help with lesson planning, friendship, flat advice, advice on where to buy spices, people to have Thanksgiving with" (Lloyd 2008). Moreover, Couchsurfing offers political activities:

> The goal of the Turkish and Greek Friends Group, boasting nearly 500 members, is to leave the problems of history behind. To that end, in the fall of 2007 the group set up an exchange trip where a group of Turkish CouchSurfers were hosted in Athens, and Greek members were hosted in Istanbul (Lloyd 2008).

In other words, a network like Couchsurfing can function as a social, cultural and political counter movement where people can organize beyond maintained and officially governed power structures. Again, as discussed in chapter 2, power

structures are not necessarily stable and social movements can challenge established systems. In the end, intercultural communication is characterized by a thin line of understanding or not understanding, of maintaining stereotypes or to challenge them. Interculturalism and intercultural communication are very broad subjects that can be applied to many social, economic and political discourses. For this thesis, I will now show the ambivalence of intercultural encounters based on an analysis of the hospitality network Couchsurfing and cosmopolitanism.

3. Couchsurfing and cosmopolitanism

In this chapter, the theoretical foundation of chapter 2 - which is essential for every approach of cultural studies regarding tourism – will be connected to the hospitality network Couchsurfing and the topic of cosmopolitanism. I will start with a descriptive introduction to the Couchsurfing 'universe'. As a next step, I will introduce the participants and their motivation to join the network. Then, I will give a historic and a contemporary mapping of cosmopolitanism. All this is leading to an analysis of Couchsurfing and cosmopolitanism between the poles of hospitality and commodification within the 'sharing economy'.

3.1 Hospitality networks and the Couchsurfing universe

Hospitality is something that is probably as old as humankind. In this thesis, I only focus on contemporary online hospitality networks. In general, hospitality exchange networks have a long history, first starting 'offline' with the 'Servas Open Doors'

association founded shortly after WW2. Its goal was to bolster understanding and peace. Being recognized by the UN, Servas is the most official one among all the hospitality networks. In order to become a member, an interview is required (Blog-Entry "allthatiswrong" 2010). Apparently, Couchsurfing is not a new invention but based on a traditional concept of hospitality and even as a network, it had forerunners. Nevertheless, there must have been a reason for why Couchsurfing became popular:

> Changes in tourist styles are not random, but are connected to class competition prestige hierarchies, and the succession of changing life styles, as well as to external factors such as the cost and modes of transportation, access to regions and countries, and the state of economy (Graburn 1983: 24).

Couchsurfing draws on the age-old notion of hospitality and inserts it into a modern paradigm, the social networking website. As an internet-based thing, Couchsurfing soon became a global phenomenon. In order to understand the network, I will delineate the complex and interweaved system by breaking down its core features and practices.

Couchsurfing is a free of charge online hospitality exchange service and social network, which "connects travelers across the globe who share experiences ranging from hosting one another in their homes to having a beer to becoming close friends and travel companions" (Couchsurfing).[1] Founded in 2003 as a non-profit organization and launched one year later in 2004 by the US Americans Casey Fenton, Daniel Hoffer, Sebastian Le Tuan and Leonardo Bassani da Silveira,

[1] http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/press/. Accessed December 2016.

Couchsurfing has grown steadily since then, being now the largest and most popular website of its kind. Its name has become synonymous with the practice itself as well as its users, the Couchsurfers. According to its website statistics, at present the Couchsurfing community consists of allegedly 14 million members, who live in 220,000 cities and hosted 550,000 Couchsurfing events (Couchsurfing)[2]. Like many other online communities, Couchsurfing establishes personal connections between people through shared interests and activities. It allows its members to interact across the globe primarily online, but more important and extraordinarily, also face-to-face. The whole online communication process is supposed to result in offline interaction, be it attending an event together, meeting up for a conversation over a drink, a sightseeing tour of the town you are visiting or hosting and being hosted in another member's home. First and foremost, the aim of Couchsurfing is to connect travellers, who are in need of a place to stay with those who are local to the particular area and willing to host. The exceptionality and premise of Couchsurfing is that all stays, activities and kinds of exchange are conducted without any monetary transaction. But rather enable people to "create meaningful connections" and "respond to diversity with curiosity, appreciation, and respect" (Couchsurfing).[3]

From the very beginnings the website has always prided itself on promoting authentic cultural encounters, generous hospitality and sharing one's experiences and homes. Till today, Couchsurfing's propagated mission is to create 'a better world'

[2]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/about-us/. Accessed August 2016.
[3]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/values/ . Accessed: November 2016.

and become a better global citizen through travel, connecting with strangers and sharing one's life, experience and home (Couchsurfing).[4] Taking up a stance on anti-capitalism, deliberately opposing commercial mass tourism and consumerism, Couchsurfing claims that "everyone can explore and create meaningful connections with people and places they encounter" (Couchsurfing)[5] by "being a conscientious and generous Couchsurfer" (Couchsurfing).[6] As outlined in chapter 2, Couchsurfing is clearly positioned on the 'alternative' side of tourism that aims to regain power from the tourism industry:

> The rule that accommodation has to be offered free of charge ensures the absence of economic interests. The motivation for hosting as well as for surfing is the desire to learn about different cultures, which enables people to better navigate and respect cultural differences, rather than making or saving money (Lipp 2012: 4).

The focus on social and intercultural interactions is thus a crucial element of Couchsurfing which is, most importantly, nothing you have to pay for in order to experience it.

Since its launch in 2004; Couchsurfing turned into a global phenomenon that received a lot of enthusiastic praise and media coverage. In its beginnings, to many it might have come across like a hippie concept, but soon especially the relatively young got extremely intrigued by the idea of traveling the world not paying a cent for accommodation, experiencing a place like a local and besides, making international friends. Despite the obvious and appealing financial benefit of free accommodation,

[4]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/values/ . Accessed: November 2016.
[5]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/values/ . Accessed: November 2016.
[6]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/resource-center/ . November 2016.

Couchsurfing strives to eradicate this utilitarian motivation by propagating an ideology that rather highlights the "various cultural, educational and self-reflective benefits" (Bialski 2007: 20).

Even though there were other hospitality exchange services before Couchsurfing, owing to modern technologies, increased mobility and densification of social bonds, it definitely found its market niche. Till the year 2011, when Couchsurfing transformed from a non-profit into a for-profit Benefit-Corporation, with a first investment of $7.6 million from Benchmark Capital and Omidyar Network, Couchsurfing's funding was only raised through its verification system and donations from passionate members. Benefit-corporations are a new class of corporations that "must have an explicit social or environmental mission, and a legally binding fiduciary responsibility to take into account the interests of workers, the community and the environment as well as its shareholders" (The Economist 2012). Now legally allowed to make profit, the two co-founders Casey Fenton and Daniel Hopper explained their decision in a Youtube-video[7] made for the Couchsurfing community. In that video Fenton and Hopper look earnestly into the camera, saying that as the government had denied them the 501c(3)-status[8] for many years now and in order to cope with the mass of inquiries and maintain the service and quality of the site changes had to be made. Reassuring the community that their focus is still on creating a better world and staying true to their ideals, they now

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psZmGAASK7Q . Accessed: June 2016.
[8] http://www.opencouchsurfing.org/tag/501c3/ Accessed: June 2016.

would be able to maximize their ability to achieve their mission and embrace new and better ways of getting things done. Without judging this maneuver, it becomes clear that Couchsurfing is nothing that exists outside of economic structures.

3.2 About the 'who', 'why' and 'how' of Couchsurfing

In this chapter, I want to take a closer look at the participants of Couchsurfing, the motivations to join as well as the limits of being part of the network. As Couchsurfing is a members-only community, first of all it is necessary to sign up with your email address or Facebook account and create an online account on couchsurfing.org. Basically everyone can become a member of the online network, which is also positively promoted in the websites statements. Once logged in, the first task is to set up your profile and preferably fill it in with as much information about yourself as possible. The members' profiles are the heart of the Couchsurfing system, as they are essential for getting a sense of knowledge about the other person, which is important for further interaction with other members. The website's vast database is comprised of personalized profiles of the members, which give information about oneself, including among others your name, age, gender, place of residence, interests, job, photographs, personal descriptions, details about the provided couch, past travel experiences, language skills, references and friend lists.

By means of the online form, Couchsurfing encourages new members to give a deeper insight in their lives, asking for personal description, interests, what types of

people you enjoy, one amazing thing you have seen, or done in your life, or your philosophy on life. According to one of the co-founders of the website, “questions are structured in such a way that 'it brings out the essence of people. And when people’s essence is visible, it contributes to the building of trust” (Bialski 2007: 7). Like in any other online community, where people exchange goods and services, there is a strong need to build trust among its users. Pictures, as a component of one’s profile, play an enormously important role in the process of trust-building within Couchsurfing. Profiles without any photos are likely to be considered as not trustworthy and decrease the chances of being hosted. Therefore it is advised to put up a lot of pictures, showing you while performing your hobby, or being funny, or you and your couch or your pets, so users get an idea of who you are. Having a variety of information about a potential host or guest makes them less a stranger and helps to build a certain sense of security and trust. In fact, Couchsurfing among all other websites of its kind has the highest use of photo images (Bialski 2007: 7), maybe not least because the website actively encourages its user to add pictures because hosts like to see who you are, spotlighting the increased chances of being hosted when they do.

Once a picture-rich, personal and preferably funny profile in, this is important to notice, English language is set up; the user can search for activities and groups in her local area or a host in the place she is travelling to. When looking for couches in popular cities like Berlin, Barcelona or Istanbul, the list of profiles can be overwhelmingly long, so that a filtered search might be helpful, specifying the

requirements imposed on the host. Keywords like “vegan” or “musician” can narrow down the results considerably. Having clicked through a number of profiles of potentially suitable hosts, a couch request will be send to those, who match with one’s own personality and interests or meet whatever criteria one has in mind. On part of Couchsurfing it is strongly advised to take your time to read profiles and references carefully when searching for a host. References are, besides physical verification and vouching, shortly to be explained, the core element of Couchsurfing’s multi-faceted reputation system (Lauterbach et al 2009). Every time somebody surfs a couch in the private home of another member, both have the opportunity to leave a personal reference for each other and evaluate their encounter. References cannot be deleted and are visible on the profiles. They are a crucial factor when it comes to judge a member’s trustworthiness, which is based on the past behaviour and interaction with other members.

When writing a couch request it better be personalized, individualized and creative, as copy-and-paste requests, if obviously recognizable as such, are perceived of as mere indifferent search for a place to stay for free. Moreover, Couchsurfing makes sure that the users get a sense of what kind of person they are interacting with. Before sending a couch request, the field “Tell your host why you’d like to meet him/her” needs to be filled out. Next, it is the turn of the potential host to check profiles and decide whether to trust and subsequently host that person or not. Here comes into play another big part of the trust-building and safety mechanisms within Couchsurfing – the vouching system. Couchsurfers, who previously met personally,

can vouch for one another, if the vouching person has received at least three vouches him/herself. These vouches being visible for the community, present another factor for users to evaluate the trustworthiness of a person. The third option for increasing trust and security in interactions, is the physical verification. Couchsurfing offers – in return of an 18€ 'donation' – to prove that one is living at the provided address. Couchsurfing will send a regular postcard with a unique code, which confirms the address when send back to them via the websites system. In order to get the users to verify, Couchsurfing promotes verification with reference to benefits like increased safety and community-building (Couchsurfing).[9]

When the host thinks that she might click and get along with the requesting guest, a meeting will be set. Usually a few emails are exchanged, clarifying the meeting time and place, house rules the host might have and maybe how much time both have at hand. Even though the premise is that the stays are free of cost, guests usually bring little gifts for their host, or invite them out as a thank you. This is not obligatory, but among the recommended guidelines for being a great Couchsurfer.[10] After their face-to-face interaction, people generally add each other to their friend list, another feature of the platform to specify one's profile. When adding new friends to that list, a set of questions regarding duration and intensity of the friendship needs to be answered. This encompasses statements on the beginnings of the relationship and the degree of trust that one puts into the added person. A long friend list is usually

[9]https://www.couchsurfing.com/get_verified . Accessed: November 2016.
[10]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/guidelines/ . Accessed: November 2016.

desired, as it depicts one as an active member. Moreover, it is an indicator of how popular and reputable one individual is. The latter is reflected by the declaration on trustworthiness required by the afore-mentioned set of questions (Bialski: 2007: 22f).

Yet another form of personal status, specific to the Couchsurfing framework, can play a significant role in the formation of a profile – 'the ambassador'. From the beginning of Couchsurfing there had been volunteers who would, e.g. translate the website into a new language, create YouTube-channels on how to use the website, organize weekly events, or as Couchsurfing puts it "live the community's Core Values in the way they live and share their lives" (Couchsurfing).[11] For these people Couchsurfing implemented the Ambassador Programme as an appreciation for their contributions to the community. An ambassador-title can be received upon either being nominated for it by other members, or nominating oneself. Usually, an increase of trustworthiness comes along with credits like an ambassador-title. This effect extends on persons who are friends with ambassadors, too. This is in line with Bialski's research findings that the "type of person one is friend with matters just as much as the number of friends one has" (2007: 21). In short, the aspects of popularity and trust have both, quantitative and qualitative dimensions. More importantly, one has not only to have internet access but needs to meet the requirements of understanding the interconnected features and mechanisms of trust, representation and belonging within the community, Couchsurfing offers a transnational network of seemingly open-minded and tolerant world citizens to connect and interact with.

[11] http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/ambassadors/ . Accessed: November 2016.

After giving this overview on how the network works, the focus will now move to the people who are using it.

The number of people around the world, who are intrigued by the hospitality network Couchsurfing, is constantly growing. Regarding this phenomenon a set of questions concerning the participants and their motives comes to mind, which I subsequently treat in the following. Firstly, it might be useful to shed some light on the question of what kinds of people are engaging themselves in this practice and what ideological force is driving them?

Couchsurfing delineates its ideology explicitly and repeatedly on its website, presenting itself to be "determined to change the world by providing greater access to the kinds of meaningful travel experiences that depend on connecting with people" (Couchsurfing).[12] Their self-stated purpose is that they are "here to make the world better, to enhance each other's lives and to become stronger in that purpose by coming together" (Couchsurfing).[13] Couchsurfing strongly cultivates the idea of creating a better world through alternative travel behaviour and experiencing the world outside the "realms of commercial tourism transaction" (Picard and Buchberger 2013: 14) simply in a way money cannot buy. According to Couchsurfing, "Hotels and tour companies can give you a bed or show you the sites, but they can't make your trip truly meaningful or memorable. People do that"

[12]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/jobs/ . Accessed: August 2016.
[13]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/values/ . Accessed: November 2016.

(Couchsurfing).[14] By clearly distancing itself from mass and package tourism, and rather focusing on the people who make these unique and meaningful connections between each other, Couchsurfing stresses its ability to facilitate those connections and, moreover, suggests an authenticity that cannot be gained through conventional forms of travelling. Couchsurfing members are enabled to enter the social intimacy of a private home, thereby gaining access to the host's life and wider social network of family and friends, which gives the Couchsurfer the feeling of experiencing 'authenticity'. Opposed to regular tourists, who are ill-reputed to represent the superficial, exclusive and unauthentic experiences and practices of mass-tourism, Couchsurfers like to consider themselves as travellers, who immerse in the host's culture, engaging in their lifestyle and make unique, authentic experiences (Nejezchleba 2011: 47). Interestingly, the 'Couchsurfer' and the 'conventional tourist' seem to distinguish themselves by using two rather simple stereotyped categories. On the one hand, we have the 'good' traveller who seeks for authentic people-orientated travel interaction and, on the one hand, the 'not so good' consumer of the mass tourism industry. One could say, there is an ascription as well as a self-ascription of a tourist stereotype.

Through the social and moral process of accepting and appreciating the kindness of strangers, respecting and celebrating differences, according to the Couchsurfing conviction, we all can become better people and move towards a community of global citizens. Couchsurfing draws a picture of "cosmopolitan openness"

[14]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/press/ . Accessed: November 2016.

(Nejezchleba 2011: 133) which, in combination with the passion for travel and the encountering of 'the Other' constitutes a cosmopolitan ideology that seem to be what attract and connect the enormous number of participating people.

The conception of being a global citizen or cosmopolitan is an idea that pervades most of the Couchsurfing members' self-perception. By just joining the Couchsurfing network people pursue a desired identity, imagine to be making a certain statement about their identity, as it is the general perception that only people with a certain individualistic and cosmopolitan predisposition sign up for this in the first place (Bialski 2007: 38). The community regards itself as a global community of 'like-minded' (Molz 2004); defined by cosmopolitan openness which postulates "a willingness to become involved with the Other" (Hannerz 1990: 239). This also applies to members, who are predominantly, or only, hosting, as they share the 'Couchsurfing spirit' by inviting the stranger to their home in order to learn from their difference. Sharing the networks stated values and goals; a collective identity is formed thus creating a sense of solidarity.

But who can be part of this community? With regard to social demographics, the average Couchsurfer can be identified as young, white, Anglophone university students and young professionals from primarily Western industrial countries (Molz 2012: 95). In general, they are relatively well-educated, highly media-literate (Bialski 2013: 169) and speak several languages. According to a Couchsurfing statistic, the average age of users is 28 years, constituting of 47% women and 53% men, with the

majority coming from North American or Western European countries.[15] These statistic figures on the 'who'-question reveal a less diverse picture than the geographical representation of users might suggest and suggest a rather homogenous community. In other words, the heterogenic dream seems to differ from the more homogenous reality.

What is it that all these people feel attracted to? What reasons and motivations are behind a practice, which comprises the free hosting of strangers in your private home, often entrust them even with your keys In a network of strangers and especially hospitality communities, trust is a crucial aspect to their effective functioning. In an online environment, where identities and intentions are hard to determine, a feeling of trust and safety is indispensable. Couchsurfing, in order to create a trustworthy community, provides a number of tools, which are supposed to create a certain level of familiarity and facilitate members' trusting decisions. As made clear in the previous chapter, the Reference system, Vouching and Verification are important features deliberately imposed to foster trust and encourage members to do the "leap of faith" (Möllering 2006). By enhancing the community's trust level, Couchsurfing seeks to ensure safety for the actual offline meetings that are supposed to come about. In the following I will present the mechanisms of trust-buliding within Couchsurfing and how the personal data provided in those processes leads as well into structures of interpersonal control.

[15]"Countries with the largest number of Couchsurfers: 1.United States, 2. Germany, 3. France, 4.England, 5. Canada, 6. Spain, 7. Italy, 8. Brazil, 9. Australia, 10. China". https://infogr.am/couchsurfing-statistics Accessed: June 2016.

Couchsurfing seeks to create familiarity, consequently trust and consequently safety, by prompting its users to expose themselves to the community. The website repeatedly points out that user-safety is taken very seriously and thus all members are obliged to follow the robust Safety Policy and procedures (Couchsurfing).[16] In accord with Luhmann "trust is only possible in a familiar world" (1979: 20), which Couchsurfing tries to create when persistently asking for detailed information and photos during the whole process of registration, requesting for couches and adding of friends. But furthermore, familiarity has a cultural dimension and therefore it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of Couchsurfers have a very similar social and cultural background – even though there are, of course variations regarding factors of class, mobility, race, gender and age. In relation, the motivation of every Couchsurfer, even though an individual intention is always part of travelling in a certain way, is based in certain cultural structures.

Based on empirical research of Jennie Germann Molz, commonly given reasons for joining the network are the cultural exchange that is taking place in the encounters, the emotional intensity that is experienced, the shared compassion and generosity, and the feeling of a kind of solidarity between the community members (German Molz: 2012a: 123; Germann Molz, 2007: 69). People see various cultural, educational and self-reflective benefits (Bialski 2013: 168) in the practice. Moreover, in the plenitude of interviews Bialski and Batorski conducted for their research on

[16]http://www.couchsurfing.com/about/guidelines/ . Accessed: October 2016.

online-familiarity and offline-trust, most Couchsurfers expressed that they feel differentiated; intending to oppose the mainstream by adhering to a different set of rules as regards friendship and familiarization (2010: 182-183). Practising Couchsurfing is regarded as a way to dissociate from the discredited mass tourist and reject profit models of commercial tourism (Germann Molz 2012a: 124). Drawing on Nejezchleba's (2011) field research, however, the pragmatic and economic factor of travelling low-budget is interestingly one of the three main motivational variables that influence people's participation in hospitality networks, such as Couchsurfing. This stands in opposition to the propagated anti-capitalist spirit its members are supposedly possess. The other two main motivations, besides saving money, are the desire to build global social relations and networks, and the longing for an authentic encounter/ engagement with the local culture of the land they are travelling to. As the economic aspect of saving money is always mentioned as subordinate, one should nevertheless keep in mind that money is a limiting factor that is not to be underestimated in a community, of which students constitute the greater part. Social motivations like building a global network and encountering the Other are emphasized much more, though, and imply an aspiration for personal growth. According to Bialski's (2007: 26) research, personal growth is indeed an expected and hoped for outcome of travelling in general and likewise forms motivation to participate in Couchsurfing, as stated by more than half of the interviewees. Returning to Nejezchleba's findings, the most crucial motive is the desire to experience 'authentic' daily life of the people at the particular travel destination. 'Realness' and authenticity are experiences commonly sought after by tourists and

travellers. This phenomenon has received considerable scholarly attention; especially by MacCannell (1973) who formed the dictum that the search for authenticity in the Other is the central motivating force in tourism and that the tourist is doomed to failure in his/ her pursuit of it. Still, most of the Couchsurfers are driven by the idea of experiencing the 'real' lifestyles of people, thus becoming an 'insider' of the local culture. Reasons for that might be a personal or existential fulfilment gained from 'authentic' travel experience, and/or it is an expression of the pursuit of cultural capital, as some scholars suggest (Wearing et al 2010).

Thus, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural, social and symbolic capital (1983), the accumulation of knowledge, experiences and the membership in certain groups can vest prestige, privilege and reputation. This theoretical framework of Bourdieu allows for another, utilitarian perspective on the practice and motivations of Couchsurfers. In today's network society and in Couchsurfing especially, having and extending a broad, well-connected social network is essential for one's reputation. Social status as well as contemporary identity relies on social interactions (Wearing et al 2010: 45), which are translated into some kind of currency (Wittel 2001), an "exchange value that provides access to shared goods, experiences and lifestyles" (Molz 2014: 17). Thus, the conscious or unconscious amassing of these kinds of capital described by Bourdieu can be observed in tourism in general and serves as motivation particularly in Couchsurfing. Being associated with international people goes along with a heightened social status and prestige of being cosmopolitan, what is a much desired outcome for many in the Couchsurfing

community (Schéou 2013). Especially in some non-Western countries relations to foreigners are perceived to positively affect one's own reputation, favouring Westerns as guest over local Couchsurfers (Schéou 2013). In fact, the managing of cultural difference is a highly valued status marker in many circles (Skrbis and Woodward 2011: 59). China's established "rent-a-foreigner industry" (Borenstein 2015) for example, well illustrates the presumed increase in social recognition when associated with foreigners, especially white Westerners. "To have a few foreigners hanging around means a company has prestige, money and the increasingly crucial connections -- real or not -- to businesses abroad" (Farrar 2010). In some regard, hosting a Western Couchsurfer may be perceived as a possibility to transcend the own physical immobility. As shown, there are multiple purposes when joining the Couchsurfing network that transcend utilitarian and less self-interested benefits. For many, the prospect of being part of the cosmopolitan fantasy that Couchsurfing is propagating and establishing international ties, constitute a strong motivation to join the Couchsurfing network (Chen 2013, Nejezechbla 2011). But what is it to be a cosmopolite? From the outlined motivations above different interpretations can be derived. Is cosmopolitanism to see as many places in the world and get to know as many people as possible? Or does it mean to build deep connections and help others when in need (of a place to stay)? And can everybody be cosmopolitan? Where does a lifestyle end and a culture begin? Given these questions, in the next chapter I will turn to the concept of cosmopolitanism and its diverse meanings and implications throughout history.

3.3 An introduction to cosmopolitanism

The standard account of the historical development of cosmopolitanism harks back to the Hellenistic period in ancient Greece, where it is said to have its roots in the writings and beliefs of the Cynics, Antisthenes and Diogenes, and was later elaborated and coined by the Stoic Zeno (Fine and Cohen 2002: 138). Reportedly Diogenes when "Asked where he came from, he answered: I am a citizen of the world" (Laertius 1925: 63). By saying this he expressed a detachment from the local, protesting against and opposing the ideological and political construct of the *polis*, which defined people by their local origin and was the main anchor of belonging (Leung 2009: 376). Diogenes declared a sense of openness to the world in which all men of wisdom constituted a single moral community- a city of the world (Cohen and Fine 2002: 138). The beginning of the idea of cosmopolitanism as a political event is recognized to start here. The Stoics followed the lead and further developed the idea of the *kosmupolites*, defining its allegiance "not to a single state government or temporal power, but rather to a moral community deeply committed to a fundamental respect to humanity […], where the primary loyalty of all citizens was to their fellow human beings" (Naseem and Hyslop-Margison 2006: 52). Zeno, precursor of the Stoic tradition, imagined a single human community, which came along with the concept of *logos*, the divine principle of rationality that guides the *cosmos* and is implanted in the humans in the form of reason, thus making them equal to one another (Leung 2009: 374). However, that logos was not considered to be immanent in every person equally, nor was everybody held to be a 'man of

wisdom', what made cosmopolitanism "an option only available to aristocracies" (Pagden 2000: 5). The Stoic vision of a world community with a common law for humanity developed then under Cicero into a simple means of justification of *Roman* imperial practices. Because that common law for all humanity simply was the *Greek* law and cosmopolitanism was "formalized into a prescriptive yet empty category of humanity that suited the empyrean structure of a united Rome and left the antithetically real human being, in all her concrete particularly, at its mercy" (Leung 2009: 375).

Over 2000 years after the Greek Cynicism and Stoicism, the term of cosmopolitanism experienced a philosophical resurgence during the European Enlightenment. In his influential and in the context of globalization often cited treatise "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1917 [1795]), Kant formulates a further developed concept of cosmopolitanism, which bears most relevance to its meaning today. He notes that the earth is a limited space, on which "we cannot be infinitely scattered" (Kant 1917[1795]: 138), thus are bound to live side by side or move from place to place. He declares that the "right to present themselves to society belongs to all mankind" (1917[1795]: 138), implying a 'cosmopolitan right' to mobility and travel. Realizing the problematic nature of this kind of movement and knowing the horrors of war himself, he pondered on which global structure would be most suitable for a peaceful coexistence and minimize or even eradicate the threat of war (Leung 2009: 381). Kant's proposal was a federation of independent states bound to cosmopolitan right, which however had to be conditioned by the law of "universal

hospitality" (Kant 1917[1795]: 137)[17] in order to not interfere with the sovereignty of the nation-state. "Universal hospitality" signifies the claim and right of a stranger to be received and treated without hostility when arriving on foreign territory. Kant did not endorse the abolishment of the nation-state in favour of a world republic, but rather conceived cosmopolitanism as a moral imperative of hospitality that one (as a citizen of the world) is obliged to follow. His concept of cosmopolitanism and Kant himself has been widely acclaimed in the debate of mobility, migration and human rights; however his claims and ideals are doubtful when contrasted with his assertions that "Humanity achieves its greatest perfection with the White race. The yellow Indians have somewhat less talent. The Negroes are much inferior and some of the peoples of the Americas are well below them" (Kant 1999: 223, quoted and translated by Harvey). In this sense Kant follows the Stoic's standpoint, believing that only 'the wise'/white can realize the cosmopolitan purpose for all mankind and those who do not aspire to perpetual peace as highest priority are simply lacking in reason. Nonetheless have Kant's concerns and ideas influenced institutions like the United Nations as an embodiment of those ideas.

After Kant the cosmopolitan thought experienced a decline in the 19th century as Europe witnessed the rise of nationalism, however resurfaced in the 90s especially due to Martha Nussbaum (1996) and her claim for cosmopolitan over national

[17] "The rights of men, as citizens of the world, shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality" (Kant 1917 [1794]: 137).

education. Nussbaum opposes cosmopolitanism to patriotism, arguing that goals of the latter

> [...]would be better served by an ideal that is in any case more adequate to our situation in the contemporary world, namely the very old ideal of the cosmopolitan, the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings (Nussbaum, 1996:4).

She argues, however, that "to be a citizen of the world one does not need to give up local identifications" (1996: 9) and explicitly draws on the stoic model of a self that is at the centre of many concentric circles which represent multiple identification and loyalties, like the immediate family, fellow city-dwellers, fellow countrymen and outside all of these circles as the largest one, humanity as whole. Many of her thoughts are quite commonplace, postulating universalism and humanity as a reference point for moral judgement and practical action, yet her article stirred much rebutting passion on part of academics. Thus, it started a whole range of debates and discussions and rekindled academic interest in cosmopolitanism. Since then more scholars engaged in the many different ways and thoughts on how to practice and imagine cosmopolitanism. This European genealogy of the history of cosmopolitanism has been criticized a lot for its Euro-American, white, male and privileged perspective. Following scholars therefore tried to formulate 'approaches from nowhere' instead of a particular 'somewhere'. This amounts to the ideal of absolute objectivism which is of course practically impossible. As individuals are always entangled in context, circumstances and culture, the tendency of "extending 'domestic'(i.e. interpersonal but putatively universal) criteria of justice to the scale of humanity as a whole"(Calhoun 2003: 534) is likewise always present.

Cosmopolitanism is a concept that has been dealt with throughout history by a wide range of philosophical, social and political theorists. In the course of time it has meant many different things to different people. Having come a long way, cosmopolitanism never had a consistent meaning and still escapes an easy definition. Surfaced from time to time, submerged and being currently en vogue again, cosmopolitanism is an increasingly used and varied term in contexts of globalization, nationalism, migration, multiculturalism and feminism (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 1). In the context of proceeding globalization, a growing awareness of common global risks and a shared collective future, academic interest in cosmopolitanism has increased and led to an extensive body of research. It is a valuable sociological framework and a key analytical tool for understanding the transformative processes the world and the people who live in it are undergoing. Due to all encompassing processes of globalization, the circulation of cultural goods, ideas and lifestyles has enormously increased, enabling a sense of common knowledge and nurturing a cosmopolitan outlook.

What it is that defines a cosmopolitan person is as hard to pin down as the concept of cosmopolitanism itself. Descriptions and characteristics are numerous. In the following I attempt to summarize some of the current approaches towards a definition. Some understand cosmopolitan theory as claiming that "cosmopolitans transcend borders of national societies and actively embrace diversity, differences, and an all-inclusive society of strangers" (He and Brown 2012: 427). Hannerz

defines the cosmopolitan as in "a state of readiness" endowed with "a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting" and "a willingness to engage with the Other" (1990: 239). Whereas according to Urry (1995: 167; 2000: 7), cosmopolitan predispositions and practices are characterized by extensive mobility (corporeally, imaginatively or virtually), the capacity and curiosity to consume diverse places and environments, a willingness to take risks in encountering the Other, the ability to reflect upon and judge different cultures, the semiotic skills to interpret images of various others, and a general openness to other people and cultures. Skrbiš and Woodward regard cosmopolitanism as a "set of structurally grounded, discursive resources available to social actors which is variably deployed to deal with issues like cultural diversity, the global, and otherness" (2007: 730). For other scholars of the topic, following Kant, cosmopolitanism expresses the vision of world democracy and the moral equality of all human beings and for others again it refers to a transnational framework of new solidarities. Regarding the complex body of literature and the multi-layered perspectives on the concept, Vertovec and Cohen (2002: 1-22) offer a useful classification of six varieties of cosmopolitanism which split into political (a philosophy or worldview; a political project towards building transnational institutions; a political project for recognizing multiple identities) and cultural (a social-cultural condition; an attitudinal or dispositional orientation; a mode of practice or competence) contexts.

Nowadays, people are engaging with globalization and Otherness mostly through media exposure to and the consumption of cultural goods and differences, which can foster a feeling of becoming cosmopolitan regarding interests, practices and imaginaries. Although, human experiences are subtly altered by living in a globalized world, it does not imply that a cosmopolitan outlook toward the world is adopted or the realization of its aspirations advocated. Therefore, it is crucial to make the distinction between political/philosophical and socio-cultural cosmopolitanism. Contributing further to this important distinction, Hannerz (2006) termed the differentiating between political and cultural implications of the concept, the "two faces of cosmopolitanism". He underscores Vertovec and Cohen's differentiation and sees the political face of cosmopolitanism affiliated to world citizenship, global democracy and moral obligations to humanity as a whole. While the cultural face comprises questions of identity and awareness of diversity, and is associated with the aesthetic and intellectual consumption concerning food, fashion and literature from other cultures. Hannerz (2006) captures these two faces in his following suggestion of what a cosmopolitan can stand or has stood for in different times and for different people:

> [I]t may be someone with many varied stamps in his or her passport; or a city or a neighbourhood with a mixed population; or, with a capital C, a woman's magazine, at least at one time seen as a bit daring in its attitudes; or an individual of uncertain patriotic reliability, quite possibly a Jew; or someone who likes weird, exotic cuisines; or an advocate of world government; or, again with a capital C, a mixed drink combining vodka, cranberry juice, and other ingredients (Hannerz 2006: 5).

This listing seems to as well reflect the common, popular understanding of a cosmopolitan nowadays, which refers to "a person who has lived in and knows about many different parts of the world" [18] and "Having an exciting and glamorous character associated with travel and a mixture of cultures"[19]. For large parts of the population cosmopolitanism has come to be commonly associated with wealthy, fashionable and culturally versed people. This outlook is strongly based on cultural consumption and has become an ordinary feature of daily modern life in Western societies (Germann Molz 2011: 35). This understanding falls into the category of cultural cosmopolitanism, and seems to be a more lifestyle related version characterized by global connoisseurship and taste. This connection between cosmopolitanism and consumption is often linked to John Urry's notion of "aesthetic cosmopolitanism", which expresses a "stance of openness towards divergent experiences from *different* national cultures" and "a search for and delight in contrasts between societies" (1995: 167), keen on consuming different places and people. But this type of cosmopolitanism applies rather to a small "privileged, bourgeois, politically uncommitted elite" (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 5), and has been criticized to be based on exoticism, commodification and consumer culture, leading to a mere cultural mix-and-match mentality (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 11). Moreover, this cosmopolitan outlook is often accompanied with a "streak of narcissism" (Hannerz 2006: 7) regarding the skills of handling other cultures.

[18] Definition of "Cosmopolitan" according to online dictionary Merriam Webster. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cosmopolitan. Accessed: January 2017.
[19]Definition of "Cosmopolitan" according to online dictionary of Oxford University Press. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cosmopolitan . Accessed: January 2017.

Aesthetic cosmopolitanism is accused of remaining superficial and perfunctory in its openness and appreciation of global diversity as it is largely an issue of individual taste and of a specific type of experience. As these experiences are based on privilege of wealth, higher education, often physical mobility and "the right" citizenship, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is also frequently asserted of having a "predominantly white/First World take on things" (Massey in Tomlinson 1999: 187). Like Urry, in the analysis of cosmopolitanism many other scholars have been putting great emphasis on the concept of mobility, opposing the flexible, mobile cosmopolitan to the rooted and fixed local, what "can suggest an unpleasant posture of superiority toward the putative provincial" (Appiah 2006: XIII). Advocates of a political, universalistic version of cosmopolitanism, like Martha Nussbaum, likewise regard localities as restricting and resisting the cosmopolitan openness. They thus speak against local ties and bonds and plead for a universal approach in order to embrace humanity and be able to include the (cultural) Other (Habermas 2001: 56). Universalism, however, is always problematic in application and especially in cosmopolitanism studies, which has been criticised to be Eurocentered from its inception (Mignolo 2012: 85), it dictates an equalising view that judges the world, its people and human goodness according to its own (Western) idea of humanity/values. Cosmopolitanism that is dictated or imposed (from above) has all features of global imperial designs (2012: 85). This approach is contrary to other approaches which rather are a "neoliberal version of cosmopolitanism, as in their view it expresses the vision of global democracy and world citizenship" (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 1). Rather, one can formulate the assumption that cosmopolitanism is a privilege that

goes with other privilege (Hannerz 2006: 16) but still cosmopolitanism "is not, and never has been, a 'western,' elitist ideal exclusively." However, cosmopolitanism is not necessarily connected to mobility and exists in many parts of the world, urban and vernacular. Hannerz (2006: 16) sees the misleading connection of mobility and the cosmopolitan in the practice of privileged travellers, calling themselves as such and thus, coining the term. The archetypal image of a cosmopolitan is usually associated with privileged elites who possess higher-education, money resources and fulfil the requirements for mobility, i.e. having 'the right kind of passport' and easy access to visa (Calhoun 2003: 543). Nevertheless, travelling alone will not make you a cosmopolitan (Skrbis and Woodward 2007: 733) and a universal definition will, in the end, never cope with the complex topic:

> Europe and North America have increasingly lost their cosmopolitanism, paradoxically because of a concept of cosmopolitanism that considers Western culture to be definitionally universal and therefore automatically cosmopolitan. Believe it or not, there *is* a cost of dominance, and that cost can sometimes be heavy (Nandy 1998:146).

In order to fulfill the complexity of cosmopolitanism, the aforementioned concept of cosmopolitanism of Craig Calhoun turns out to be a suitable theoretical framework for my analysis of cosmopolitanism in Couchsurfing. Calhoun's insights on Western elites, creating an illusion of an all-encompassing cosmopolitanism, are particular useful when it comes to my initial questions on the problematic nature of stereotypes and difference. We shall see in the following that mechanisms of representation are closely connected to Calhoun's cosmopolitanism.

Globalization can be seen as a starting point for the rise of cosmopolitanism, but not regarded as the only condition for cosmopolitanism to emerge, as "Globalised we all may be but this doesn't make us cosmopolitans" (Skribis and Woodward 2007: 731). Calhoun decries the dominant narrative of Western elite in the cosmopolitan discourse, that is failing to account for their (our) comparative wealth and social privilege, presuming an easy "entering and exiting [of] polities and social relations around the world" (Calhoun 2002: 89) likewise for the rest of the world. Calhoun terms this "the class consciousness of frequent travellers" (2002), who ignore the benefits of their own belonging, which brings privilege for them and restrictions on the mobility of the rest, "turning cosmopolitanism into a mode of social stratification by excluding the non-mobile majority" (Thompson 2012: 60). Calhoun (2010) suggests three classifications within cosmopolitanism that need to be distinguished that are: Cosmopolitanism as Style; Ethical Universalism and Cosmopolitanism of Connections. Based on the preceding portrayal of Couchsurfing and its inherent mechanisms, it can be noted that all three of the stated categories of cosmopolitanism apply to Couchsurfing, thus shall be elaborated on in the following.

Turning firstly to Cosmopolitanism as Style, one is dealing with a consumption-based practice without any deeper understanding or engagement with ethical or political interests. Calhoun describes it as a "term of self-congratulation for those who can eat Asian food with chopsticks, Ethiopian or Indian food with fingers, and pick the right fork for each course at an elegant European banquet" (Calhoun 2010: 76), commonly associated with the aforementioned global/western elite, and the

connoisseurship, well-versed handling and consumption of topics like fashion, food, and travel. This kind of cosmopolitanism denotes a world in which cultural difference is readily available and free to choose from for the individual's pleasure. Often suggesting that being cosmopolitan is a choice of personal attitude that does not require any deeper changes in political or economic structures. This widespread consumerist perspective of lifestyle cosmopolitanism is reserved only for few, as the putatively free individual choice relies on all sorts of resources and capital, may it be social, cultural or economic. Belonging, too, presents one of these needed resources. Lifestyle cosmopolitans, however, regard themselves as autonomous, detached individuals, overlooking their own social belonging, whereas looking down on the adherence of belonging of others, which are perceived of as 'restricting' the cosmopolitan attitude. Calhoun argues that for the 'cosmopolitan elite' the idea of escaping from particularistic solidarities into greater universality looks very different than for those with fewer resources (Calhoun 2003: 537).

The second classification Calhoun suggests is Cosmopolitanism as Ethical Universalism. It is another attempt to grasp cosmopolitanism that fails to acknowledge the reality of connectedness: by postulating an abstract whole, here termed 'humanity', individual belongings are once more not given due consideration. Thus, trying to, rather forcefully apply an ethical universalism that is diametrically opposed to the reality of human manifoldness. Thereby focussing on the equivalence of people as human beings, but not acknowledging the "more complicated and heterogeneous world in which human beings differ for cultural and other reasons,

claim identities and forge solidarities and enmities" (Calhoun 2010: 78). In fact, recent liberal cosmopolitan thought considers belonging as a social constraint from which one ideally ought to escape, presenting cosmopolitanism as "a view from nowhere or everywhere rather than from particular social spaces" (Calhoun 2003: 532). According to Calhoun, cosmopolitan theorists, like Martha Nussbaum, argue that the highest and strongest obligation of each person should be owed to humanity as a whole. This, Calhoun declares as the most radically universalistic approach to cosmopolitanism (2003: 538), as it implies that local, national and religious affiliations should be transcended in order to be able to fully commit to humanity as a whole. Universal cosmopolitanism, which focuses on essential similarities, the abstract equivalence of each person, tends to see differences as potential problems, or even aims to dissolve them. However, cultural loyalties and affiliations with place and history offer variety to the world, join people together and enable individual and collective life.

Accordingly, Calhoun proposes a Cosmopolitanism of Connections. A cosmopolitanism grounded in our relationships to each other. To fully understand these relationships it requires putting people in context of their place, history and culture. People exist only in cultural milieu, even though in several at the same time, and the world and future we create is always also shaped by our socio-cultural interactions and historical processes. To Calhoun, cosmopolitanism should be explored in terms of webs of connections that position us in the world, what appears to be a more practicable framework for cosmopolitanism than a universalism of

abstract categorical equivalence. Using the example of two major world religions as contemporary cosmopolitan projects, Islam and Christianity, Calhoun demonstrates that they do not dissolve differences into simple unity, but rather provide "common languages, sets of aspirations and occasions for connecting" (2010: 82). This likewise applies to international cities which congregate different and divers people, travellers, migrants and locals, for various missions and reasons. These cities thereby connect to each other and to different parts of the world. Our individual capacities for mutual understanding influenced and transformed by our embeddedness in different networks and solidarities are not simply universalistic. Believing that one lives outside particularistic solidarities is a view only made possible by positions of relative privilege and the dominant place of some cultural orientations in the world at large (2003: 546). The experience of travelling the world freely, appreciating and/or consuming its differences should not be mistaken for a guarantee of becoming cosmopolitan or grasping the world as a whole. Moreover, it needs to be recognized that cosmopolitan is often theorized from "the vantage point of a frequent travellers" (Calhoun 2002: 89) and that there are, in fact, many ways to be cosmopolitan, for which one does not need to be a member of the global elite. Here is where my critique of the Couchsurfing cosmopolitanism applies, as I argue that the gross of Couchsurfers practice a rather consumption-based, universalistic cosmopolitanism, eager to experience and consume difference. In the following I will outline how cosmopolitanism is performed in the Couchsurfing community and how hospitality might be disenchanted through globalised power structures.

4. The disenchantment of hospitality?

As outlined in the proceeding chapters, Couchsurfing tries to create a cosmopolitan community by propagating a network of 'open doors':

> Durch das Öffnen privater Türen und Herzen soll eine kosmopolitische Community entstehen, ein globales Netzwerk inniger Beziehungen, das die Welt zu einem lebenswerteren Ort macht (Nejezchleba, 2011: 8).

This noble vision of Couchsurfing is based in a self-representation of cosmopolitan openness. The limits of this goal and thus the borders within the intercultural encounters shall be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Couchsurfing Cosmopolitans

One of the main themes of the Couchsurfing world is 'openness'. Communities symbolize solidarity, but they also create an ingroup against an outgroup, which imposes a logic of social closure (Nelson 2006). Without an actual manifestation in patterns of behaviour, cosmopolitanism remains an empty phrase. While the connection seems obvious, a person can feel cosmopolitan just by virtue of being well-travelled but without actually showing any concern for global problems or local challenges derived from globalization. Likewise, members may surf only to reduce costs while traveling and host because of norms of reciprocity. Nejezchleba (2011) argues on behalf of this view by claiming that reciprocity is what makes the community work and that it is the principle Couchsurfng is based on. Reciprocity is without a doubt a means to engage people in long-term interactions within the community (Lipp 2012: 6).

One has to bear in mind, that to be part of an online network such as Couchsurfing there are conditions to meet in order to successfully participate. Regarding Couchsurfing, these are international visa agreements, access to economic resources, computer literacy and the ability to generate trust (Picard and Buchberger 2013: 24). In addition, time, mobility, cultural capital do also play an important role. Moreover, there is the distinctive element of the English language that affects every Couchsurfer, that is, because the website is mainly English-speaking: "People whose native language is not English are constantly translating themselves into the dominant global language in order to communicate beyond their own locales" (Cronin 2003: 60). In other words, in order to consume culture and to interact within a certain community one has to be in a position to understand the language.

But back to the openness. As aforementioned, 'openness' is what is supposed to bring people together within the Couchsurfing network. Lipp even calls it an over-enthusiasm for open-mindedness on part of the Couchsurfing members. "The term open-minded does not live up to its reputation if the open-minded person is not willing to accept or even understand people who are not open-minded. Couchsurfng sets out to incorporate both openness and community which results in a structure of partial openness" (Lipp 2012: 52). As long as they make sure that the right kind of persons constituting that community there is nothing to worry about. That, however constitutes a "cosmopolitan paradox", as Germann Molz (2007) termed it, and a gated community of open-minded people is created (Miguel and Medina 2011: 334).

As a consequence, others may feel socially excluded from the dominant cosmopolitan narrative.

4.2 Borders within hospitality and about the sharing economy

It is a paradox that on the one hand, Couchsurfing is propagating an open and borderless network and on the other hand, you discover borders as soon as you start a critical analysis. Nejezchleba (2011) comes to the conclusion that the Couchsurfing community is a fragile one and that its balance is constantly challenged. This balance is dependent on the users' reciprocity. Only when the amount of hosts and the amount of guests are in balance, the mission of Couchsurfing works out. Moreover, Nejezchleba says: "Um Grenzen zu öffnen werden andere Grenzen gestärkt" (2011: 9). Couchsurfing is exclusive, because of its image of openness. In order to maintain a 'safe' way of openness there are a range of safety mechanisms that have been described in chapter 3. These already function as a filter. Moreover, one has to say that the circle of reciprocity only works when everyone who is in that circle, has something to share – may it be cultural capital or a couch. Another aspect, that is worth to be mentioned, is the issue of commodification. Couchsurfing is about cultural capital and about consuming culture, thus, culture becomes commodified. Cultural capital like English language skills is a complex exchange currency in the Couchsurfing universe and can limit people from being part of the community, as without the ability to proper communicate and present yourself in a funny and intriguing way, chances of being of interest as a host or a guest drop considerably. Also, it can be claimed that people deliberately look for hosts/guests with high social

and cultural capital in order gain more of it themselves when they interact with them. Although one seeks something or somebody culturally different 'to consume', personally it has to match with one's own personality. This reveals a quite selective 'pick&choose' character of Couchsurfing, where people are looking for versions of themselves in another culture. It appears to be a "packaged diversity" (Calhoun 2002: 104), according to one's own preferences and desires. It is interesting how the social act of 'sharing' is apparently completely based on the act of 'exchanging'. As a result, you are not entitled to receive something if you have nothing to give. This is the opposite of unconditional hospitality:

> Derrida's formulation of absolute hospitality relies on an unconditional opening up to the unknown stranger […] For Derrida, hospitality based on a reciprocal exchange cannot be hospitality […] Contrary to these criteria, hospitality websites are instead based precisely on an economy of reciprocal exchange, both in the moment of the hospitality encounter and across the community as a whole (Molz 2013: 56).

It should be critically questioned to what extent this act of socio-cultural trade is still 'hospitality' or already 'sharing economy'. Picard and Buchberger come to the following conclusion: "The Couchsurfing website thus cultivates a utopian rhetoric of 'sharing cultures', of increased rapid interconnections and global flows of all kinds" (2013: 20). In the end, the political and economic character of Couchsurfing is brought to point by Germann Molz who describes Couchsurfing as "an economy of hospitality that is negotiated in terms of reciprocity" (2013: 45).

5. Conclusion

The goal of this thesis has been to analyze how the Couchsurfing network and its participants are part of an interdisciplinary phenomenon between the poles of culture and economy. I have aimed to discuss of how the borders between hospitality and sharing economy can be characterized. Thus, showing that Couchsurfing as a hospitality network is subject to a process of commodification, and despite its socio-cultural motivation, a form of tourism. Although no money is being exchanged, hospitality becomes a good that is traded for social and cultural capital in return. Couchsurfing cannot be perceived as independent or detached from economic power structures. Whenever culture and economy are interwoven, the topics of 'cultural representation' and communicating cultural meaning matter within any critical analysis. As an online-base community, Couchsurfing resembles classic cyber-communities. It is a platform to connect geographically dispersed people to interact and engage with each other. However, the crucial difference is that all online interaction aims at offline, face-to-face meetings. This differentiates the Couchsurfing community from all other classic cyber-communities. It enables real-life, intercultural encounters. However, it should be critically observed whether these interactions (that originate in the curiosity for something 'new' and 'different') maintain cultural stereotypes or are able to challenge them. Couchsurfing embodies a cosmopolitan desire for openness and for difference at the same time. In the end, as outlined in chapter 2, our world and the cultures within would not make sense without difference. However, in my opinion it is crucial, that Couchsurfers do not consider themselves as the 'good' tourists without critically questioning themselves

in respect of privilege and exclusiveness. In the end, one can say that Couchsurfers do make a better world in a way. Exchange, connection and cultural learning is facilitated by the Couchsurfing network and practiced by its members, however it can be argued how deep this learning goes and what self-benefitting motives are behind it.

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