Platform-mediated tourism: social justice and urban governance before and during Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

During the past decade, digital platforms like Airbnb and Uber have enabled the development of a new generation of entrepreneurs in tourism and mobility. The mediation of services through digital platforms was initially presented as a form of a sharing economy led by non-professional providers, but it has grown into a new form of capitalist speculation. This special issue presents theoretical and empirical perspectives on platform-mediated tourism by focusing on Airbnb, which is the most notable digital platform specialising in short-term property rental. The case studies included in this issue show that the impacts of short-term renting on neighbourhoods, residents and tourism operators are uneven, but increasingly significant. The authors explore issues of social justice in terms of residents' quality of life, working conditions, the housing market, urban structure, and the morality of operators who navigate through normative loopholes. They also examine the governance challenges caused by the inadequacy of existing legal frameworks to better regulate platform-mediated activities, and the reactions generated by social movements and city governments. With the outbreak of Covid-19, networks of cities are taking action against platforms to regain their control over data that is needed to regulate platform-mediated tourism services.

Introduction

During the past decade, Internet-based peer-to-peer service platforms have enabled the development of a new generation of entrepreneurs in tourism and mobility. Services that were traditionally in the hands of specialised and certified companies like hotels, restaurants, and taxis, have been integrated with non-professional services, and partly substituted by (in theory) non-professional services. Along with this development, Airbnb, Uber and many more have become an integral part of smart city imaginaries and platform ecosystems, driven by the development of digital technologies and the emergence of "app economy" (Barns, 2020, p. 81; Söderström & Mermet, 2020). The diffused supply of services enabled by these platforms was initially considered to be one form of the "sharing economy," but a remarkable part of it is growing into a new form of capitalist speculation. Sometimes seen as a driver of revitalising neighbourhoods, sometimes as a gentrifier or a disruptive business model, it has rapidly become a driving force of

change in tourist cities, with a processual formation of meanings, cultures, services and infra-structures involving a multitude of actors and serving different purposes and users (Köhler et al. 2019). Not only are digital platforms enabling new types of economic activity such as short-term letting of apartments and flexible provision of taxi services, but they are also shaping the ways in which places are made, perceived and used.

Some of the more drastic impacts of digital platforms in cities are caused by the short-term rental of properties through digital platforms like Airbnb. These include the generation of new forms of inequality through processes like the financialisation of housing, gentrification, touristifi-cation, and deterioration of working conditions. In situations of stress, when residential functions are shrinking due to over-touristification of urban areas, these processes may involve contest-ation and lead to residents attempting to reclaim their rights to the city. Especially in major tour-ist cities like Barcelona and Venice, processes of eviction of residents have changed the popular urban character. For displaced residents, gentrified neighbourhoods are turning into memorial sites of lost identity practices (Navaro-Yashin, 2009). These processes are evidenced by a growing body of literature on critical urban and tourism studies to which this special issue contributes.

By collating explorations of hosts' behaviours and urban changes associated with platform tourism, this special issue continues the discussion on one of the major paradigmatic phenom-ena of our time: the neoliberal globalisation of cities and its consequences in terms of social just-ice and urban governance. Neo-liberalisation has unfolded from the 1970s onwards as a reaction to the crisis of profitability in the global economy (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 1989; Pinson & Journel, 2016). This process has involved a shift from the Fordist-Keynesian system to a Post-Fordist regime of flexible accumulation, underpinned by intellectual currents that have focused on promoting market-orientation as the basis of urban life and new regulatory arrange-ments (Rossi & Vanolo, 2015). As part of this process, cities have turned into "entrepreneurial" actors, which compete against each other to secure a central position in global flows of capital, skilled labour and tourists (Harvey, 1989; Rossi, 2017). Strategies to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities have included investment in cultural infrastructure and innovation, urban regeneration projects, and – increasingly after the financial crisis of 2008 – the promotion of self-responsibilised citizenship and self-entrepreneurialism as a way of fostering vibrant urban life and "authentic" experiences (Rossi, 2017).

We have drawn on critical urban scholars' notion of cities as socially constituted entities (e.g., Fainstein, 2014; Lefebvre, 1968, Harvey, 1973; Zukin, 1980). This means that our focus is on the interactions between urban residents, economic ownership, and government that underlie tour-ism and hospitality, as well as the outcomes that these social relations produce in terms of social justice and urban governance (Fainstein, 2014; Fainstein et al., 2003). Digitally-enabled platforms in tourism, hospitality and leisure are the "next step" in the social constitution of cities under the neoliberal ideals of market-oriented urbanism. Previously, cities responded to changes in their competitive environments through a range of strategies, such as the regeneration of urban cores and waterfronts, and the attraction of mega-events and brands (Rossi, 2017). These develop-ments have directed attention to questions of social sustainability, such as the rights of the mid-dle class in relation to those of the poor (Fainstein et al., 2003; Jamal & Higham, 2020). While these questions are still relevant, the more recent developments driven by digital platforms are raising new questions as to how neoliberal globalisation escapes from global regulations and dir-ectly produces impacts locally, creating new pressures on local communities and their represen-tatives, and calls for responses from them.

The aim is for these contributions to bridge academic and policy-relevant discussions within tourism and urban studies. The case studies from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the United States have a particular focus on the short-term rental (STR) Airbnb platform. In addition, one paper examines the peer-to-peer social dining platforms VizEat and EatWith. Each study draws on explicit theories and conceptualisations: the performance approach (Christensen, 2020); moral identity theory (Farmaki et al., 2019); the social practice theoretical framework (Davies et al.,

2020); GIS-based morphology of the tourist city (Celata & Romano, 2020); the short-term city (Salerno & Russo, 2020); rights to the city (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2020); social movements as transnational assemblages and politicisation through digital protests (Wilson et al., 2020); externalities, community perceptions and regulatory responses (Muschter et al., 2020); evolutionary economics and gentrification (Ryan & Ma, 2020); social representation theory (Cheng et al., 2020); and workforce income accounting (Chen et al., 2021). Through the case studies, the authors address various sustainability issues caused by the diffusion of platform capitalism in urban tourism, illustrating a crisis that the outbreak of Covid-19 has made even more evident. Before presenting the themes and articles included in this special issue, we delve into the background of platform-mediated tourism services as performing agents in urban restructuring, as well as their consequences for social justice.

The emergence of digital platforms as drivers of tourism development

While the impacts of internet-based tourism platforms on cities have become evident only relatively recently, the existence of a peer-to-peer market of tourism services is nothing new. Even before the creation of Airbnb in 2008, scattered offers of private lodging, as well as home cooking, tourist guiding and transportation, food delivery etc., existed worldwide, especially informally. What is different is that now an increasing proportion of the offers is managed by private entrepreneurs and mediated through platforms, positioning STRs and other so-called shared services as structural components of the tourism services offer. This change is based on other large-scale social transformations, including a shift from mass to 'post-Fordist', individualised or "collaborative" (tourism) consumption (Nilsson, 2020); the introduction of an entirely new business model and economic infrastructure around digital platforms (Barns, 2020; Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019); and the emergence of self-entrepreneurship and post-work ethos as the basis of urban citizenship (Farmaki et al., 2019 in this issue; Hua & Ray, 2018; Stabrowski, 2017).

The origins of peer-to-peer platforms in tourism can be traced to new business models and technological innovations that started to transform tourism from the 1990s onwards. These included the emergence of low-cost airlines with dense networks, the development of computer technology, the availability of the commercial Internet and, finally, in the 2010s, the growing popularity of smartphones offering fast access to social media and expanding repositories of user-generated content. Social media and peer-to-peer marketplaces created new preconditions for tourism production and consumption, breaking tourists' dependence on large tour operators and enabling increasingly flexible, specialised and individualised travel (Nilsson, 2020). The integration of social networking in global consumerism and increased mobility brought changes in the hospitality sector, starting with home swapping webpages, where suppliers and demanders are part of a peer community without any third-party mediation (Russo & Quaglieri Domínguez, 2016). These webpages paved the way for a new business model invented by a new generation of entrepreneurs who harnessed the opportunities offered by the increasingly social Internet for profit making (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). These entrepreneurs developed digital platforms that specialised in the mediation of accommodation and other tourism services, tapping successfully into what was known as the "sharing economy" - a form of economy that is based on consumers giving each other temporary access to underutilised physical assets and driven by values such as "transparency, humanness, and authenticity" (Botsman, 2015; Frenken et al., 2015).

It followed that digital platforms were discursively aligned with progressive urban politics associated with the peer-to-peer collaborative model, technological advances, and open, ubiquitous and mobile internet (Barns, 2020; Oskam, 2019). They have also been referred to as "liberation technology," allegedly able to "expand political, social, and economic freedom" (Diamond, 2010, p. 70). Because Airbnb and its many counterparts were repeatedly discussed in this framework, many policymakers, tourists, and residents initially praised them for introducing a "green"

and inclusive transition to tourism and hospitality. New digital peer-to-peer platforms were associated with enabling more efficient use of resources, creating employment, and empowering residents through the decentralisation of the economy (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Fang et al., 2016). Since then, the marketing of Airbnb has relied heavily on promoting an idealistic view of the authenticity of the Airbnb community as well as the neighbourhoods in which its listings are located, giving tourists the impression that by choosing Airbnb they can "live like a local" (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016, Paulauskaite et al., 2017). Accordingly, the activities enabled by Airbnb have been associated with the generation of social capital in alignment with a quest for just, inclusive societies (Jung et al., 2016).

However, in recent years, increasingly critical concerns have been voiced with regard to the impacts of the business model of Airbnb and other peer-to-peer service platforms in tourism. Several researchers have shown that digital platforms are based on accumulation of capital through extraction, management and analysis of data enabled by the facilitation of transactions and exploitation of people searching for self-actualisation and efficient, meaningful ways of life (Boswijk, 2013; Brand & Rocchi, 2010; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016; Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). The emergence of this new business model has been documented in detail by Nick Srnicek (2017) and Shoshana Zuboff (2019). While their approaches differ in some respects, they share the view that we have recently witnessed the emergence of an entirely new form of capitalism, which they termed "platform capitalism" or "surveillance capitalism," respectively. This form of capitalism is based on a business model that utilises companies' ability to derive data and turn it into products and predictions that can be further sold to advertisers and other external parties, while outsourcing everything else, including workers, maintenance and training (Srnicek, 2017, pp. 33–35; Zuboff, 2019).

Policymakers have embraced this new form of capitalism for at least two reasons. First, it has enabled the capitalist system to respond to the declining profits from manufacturing industries and renew itself in the aftermath of the crisis of the "dot-com" sector that was related to the early phase of commercialisation of the internet in the 1990s (Srnicek, 2017). Secondly, this form of capitalism has seemed largely unavoidable because it has been in the interests of the digital platforms to portray the technology behind their operations as an autonomous force with inevitable implications for our economic system, consumption patterns and ways of life (Zuboff, 2019). As a consequence, the data-driven business model has been flexibly adapted to the most recent manifestations of "urban entrepreneurialism" (Harvey, 1989; Rossi, 2017) - an urban condition that emphasises the market principle as the basis of the operation of the city and directs attention from the channelling of capital from innovation centres, technology parks and cultural building projects towards more spontaneously produced and ephemeral spaces that foster value production through urban culture and digitally enabled "sharing economy" (Moisio, 2018; Rossi, 2017). Furthermore, in many cities, businesses based on digital platforms have been reconciled with "smart city" imaginaries, which, according to Vanolo (2014), are seemingly neutral but powerful devices in attracting investments and creating "smart citizens." Through this development, cities themselves have become increasingly conceptualised as platforms that encourage entrepreneurial activity and produce new urban subjects who use the urban space in creative ways, participate in value creation, and take responsibility for their own wellbeing and livelihoods (Barns, 2020; Jokela, 2020; Rossi, 2017).

As part of this self-responsibilised and self-governed urban citizenship, the urban middle class has used digital platforms to facilitate self-entrepreneurship as a way of coping with the economic insecurity associated with the financial crisis of 2008. In Southern Europe, the recession followed a decade of urban regeneration interventions, also involving EU funding, that improved the attractiveness of city centres as spaces for leisure and consumption, paving the way for private entrepreneurial investments and processes of gentrification (Semi & Tonetta, 2019). The entanglement of urban entrepreneurialism and digital platforms has manifested itself in what Filip Stabrowski (2017) calls "spaces of domestic entrepreneurialism" - that is, homes and

neighbourhoods where people have adopted an entrepreneurial attitude. As Torkington and Ribeiro (2020) show in this issue, this is especially evident among young people who are renting apartments to tourists or temporary residents as part of their flexible lifestyles, which involve the accumulation of economic and social capital for the purpose of maintaining cosmopolitan cultural identities and making individualist decisions. This view of individualism and cosmopolitanism is aligned with an imaginary of a post-work and post-capitalist society, in which automation and robotics are freeing people from the oppressiveness of capitalist working conditions to enjoy leisure activities and self-actualisation (Snape et al., 2017). The platforms promote this view by portraying their users as "peers": white and empowered to earn "what they need" flexibly, to maintain their personal lifestyles.

While this image is powerful, it is largely at odds with reality. As Cheng et al. (2020) show in this issue, Airbnb has contributed to an alteration of labour force structures, leading to an increase in jobs that are low-paid, seasonal, and outsourced through external companies. Several other studies have shown that a large proportion of workers in the platform mediated industry (Airbnb apartment cleaners, Uber drivers, Wolt or Foodora bike deliverers) are working class women and immigrants, who are non-unionised and missing income stability or social protection, which are integral to decent work as defined by the International Labour Organization (Acevedo, 2016; De Stefano, 2016; Hua & Ray, 2018; Sundararajan, 2016; Williams & Horodnic, 2017). With the professionalisation of the STR market, the services offered by this precarious and mostly informal workforce cover all the tasks that customers would expect from the official hosts, from the management of reservations, to reception, cleaning, laundry, and on-site availability.

In addition to labour casualisation, there are also other mechanisms through which peer-to-peer platforms in tourism reduce the quality of life of residents and especially that of vulnerable groups. The wide use of residences in the tourism industry has serious impacts on the real estate market and thus on housing affordability, and is a cause of population change and social exclusion. These are other critical dimensions of the sustainability of the Airbnb model.

Sustainability and social justice

Short-term rentals (STRs) and other tourism services mediated by digital platforms interact with policies on sustainability globally expressed through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) introduced by the United Nations in 2015. In particular, they relate with: SDG11 "Sustainable cities and communities", especially for target 11.1 "By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services"; SDG12 "Responsible consumption and production", target 12.B "Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products"; and SDG8 "Decent work and economic growth", target 8.8 "Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers". Therefore, in this section we will discuss how these platforms affect the local dynamics on housing, culture and production, and labour in tourist cities, all relevant components of social justice.

The fact that digital peer-to-peer service platforms in tourism position themselves primarily as intermediaries or enablers of "sharing" has an impact beyond those who depend economically on the platforms. Research has shown that the high profitability of short-term renting compared to long-term renting creates a gap between actual and potential rental income, encouraging homeowners, companies, and real estate investors to convert apartments from residential use into tourist accommodation (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018; Yrigoy, 2019).

This business of networked hospitality thus encourages multiple listings that have little to do with the original idea of home sharing, but rather use apartments as a commodity for financial investment (Gil & Sequera, 2020; Jokela & Minoia, 2020; Rolnik, 2013, Oskam, 2019). Many studies have shown that these forms of transnational gentrification cause disruptive social, spatial and

economic transformations of urban and rural landscapes (Hayes & Zaban, 2020a). The globalisation of rent gaps has caused severe problems of housing affordability, social polarisation and displacement of residents in the affected areas (Cocola-Gant, 2016; Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2019; Yrigoy, 2019). While gentrification and depopulation of city centres are not new phenomena, the platformisation of tourism has accelerated these processes, transforming residential homes into tourist accommodation and causing a loss of neighbourhood businesses and social services that were devoted to residents (Lees, 2012; Sequera & Nofre, 2020). Professionalisation and densification of STRs thus constitute a threat to residents' right to affordable housing, paving the way towards built spaces without residents, or "short-term cities" (Salerno & Russo, 2020, in this issue). Empirical studies show the global dimension of these effects, e.g., in New York City (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018), Barcelona (Garcia-López et al., 2020), Raglan in New Zealand (as illustrated by Ryan & Ma, 2020 in this issue) Cuenca in Ecuador, (Hayes & Zaban, 2020b), Jerusalem (Zaban, 2020), and San Miguel de Allende in Mexico (Navarrete Escobedo, 2020).

Traditional businesses are replaced by new ones designed to match global tastes, especially in situations of "overtourism" - the overcrowding of popular tourist areas – where the lack of everyday life-services decrease residents' quality of life (Dodds & Butler, 2019). In popular touristic cities, an alliance between platforms such as Google Maps, Airbnb and Uber, creates "superserved" areas and directs people to areas and routes that are already crowded. This further jeopardises the principles of the sharing economy, such as authentic encounters between hosts and guests. Studies have also shown that the use of authenticity as a competitive edge for tourism business may lead to a situation in which the local setting becomes commodified through "staged authenticity" that is adapted to tourists' desires and expectations at the expense of locals' needs (Chhabra et al., 2003; MacCannell, 1973; Minoia, 2017; Ye et al., 2018). Interactions between hosts and guests are limited and depersonalised, more focused on the service uses than on the human relationship (Ert & Fleischer, 2019; Jung et al., 2016).

Also, work is challenged by the logic of profit making on tourism, especially in neoliberal markets that overlook issues of economic distribution and workers' rights. Bianchi and de Man (2021, p. 358) recognise a "hidden dimension of sustainability" in the systemic presence of exploitation and informality that are overshadowed by orthodox managerial studies on tourism economy. Outsourcing, sub-contracting and occasional calls make the traceability of work arduous. The "demand-economy" of platforms has further exacerbated the already precarious conditions of workers in low-income service sectors, whose conditions depend on race, gender and class (van Doorn, 2017). As explained in the previous section, platforms are active infrastructural agents in the fragmentation of the workforce, hired in the form of independent contractors rather than employees. These service-agreements are beneficial to entrepreneurs who avoid the costs of employment, but erode employee protection with respect to accidents, unemployment, and their unity in collective bargaining.

Cause-and-effect relationships involved in these interconnected processes - the emergence of professional hosts, overtourism, increasing rent prices, the flight of residents from popular tourist areas and work insecurity - are complex and context-specific. Policy-makers have only recently started to address the real impacts of peer-to-peer platforms in tourism. In many cities, fines and lawsuits have been advanced against Airbnb and there have been attempts to impose the cancellation of unlicensed listings. For example, Barcelona, Paris and Amsterdam have imposed rental caps (maximum number of days per year) as to limit the STRs of apartments, but the enforcement of the regulations is difficult because of the lack of access to data on rentals. In the EU, the activities of digital intermediation services like Airbnb are regulated under the directive on electronic commerce in compliance with a ruling of the European Court of Justice. According to this ruling, Airbnb is a provider of an information society service rather than a real estate agent that would be subject to more stringent regulation (Curia, 2019; Feuer, 2019). As a result, Airbnb has been able to avoid cooperating with the cities by giving them access to its data (van Sparrentak, 2020). Nevertheless, these trials show that a stronger political awareness has been

formed, especially in large cities. Debates on the future of tourism within a remaking of the city as a complex functioning ecosystem continue, as the following section based on the case studies presented in the articles in the special issue shows.

Themes addressed in this special issue

The articles in this special issue articulate the critical aspects of peer-to-peer platforms and tourist cities, through the following themes: socio-legal loopholes and morality in hosting performativity; STRs as drivers of gentrification, financialisation of housing, impacts on neighbourhoods; diverse stakeholder positions, and government responses.

a. Socio-legal loopholes and performative morality

Authors have observed a fundamental problem of framing the platform-mediated services. Julie Wilson et al. (2020) define platforms as socio-technical assemblages for trading, although they are promoted as enablers of non-professional sharing practices. This confusion in their very definition creates socio-legal uncertainties and loopholes that are used instrumentally by entrepreneurs, as argued by Mathilde Dissing Christensen (2020). The absence of official regulatory frameworks has directed attention to the diffused responsibilities of "communities of practice" formed around the platforms. The study by Farmaki et al. (2019) shows that the perceptions of moral responsibilities of Airbnb hosts and their subsequent efforts to self-regulate their behaviour vary depending on the degree of the hosts' professionalism. The lack of official regulatory frameworks may reduce the hosts' willingness to adhere to law, because hosts can justify irresponsible behaviour by claiming that other hosts are behaving in the same way. The stabilisation and wide diffusion of these practices produce forms of illegality that have impacts on taxation and on the public control over the use of residential apartments for tourist accommodation, this being what concerns STR. A range of unethical acts against guests (e.g., cheating on service quality) and society (e.g., causing disturbance to neighbours, or hiding the business to avoid paying tax) become consolidated in the absence of specific regulations and due to low risk of being detected and sanctioned. Muschter et al. (2020) have shown that hosts are in favour of unrestricted STR letting, whereas non-hosts would prefer a stricter code. In the case of social dining, Davies et al. (2020) note that while platforms claim that they have insurance for hosts and guests, the parameters of that insurance are poorly known by those involved in social dining. In alignment with previous studies (Edelman & Luca, 2014, Kakar et al., 2018, Piracha et al., 2019), Christensen (2020) claims that whiteness, high education levels, good socio-economic status and pleasant physical appearance pave the ground for stronger positions, while different conditions may cause marginalisation and exclusion from either sides of the transaction.

b. Gentrification, financialisation of housing, and impacts on neighbourhoods

Contrary to a popularised narrative of Airbnb as a facilitator of sharing of underutilised rooms in hosts' homes, the databases of *insideairbnb*.com and *AirDNA* reveal that a large proportion of listings are of entire apartments, and that professional enterprises handle multiple listings. Tourism platforms are therefore discussed as drivers of commodification, consumption, and financial speculation over social goods that feed the industry: private homes, public spaces and neighbourhoods. Multiple acquisitions in the same buildings that lead to hotelisation of buildings show the speculative nature of these hosting activities, extracting value from social goods (Salerno & Russo, 2020). STRs channelled through platforms, increase the rent gap in tourist areas, and accelerate financialisation of housing, i.e., investments ensuring capital gains that outstrip interest rates on bank deposit accounts (Ryan & Ma, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). In Italian tourist cities, the acceleration of speculation in STRs is particularly concentrated in areas that are crucial for the residents' sense of belonging (Celata & Romano, 2020). Housing stress especially hits the lower and middle classes even when their jobs remain in the tourist city, as illustrated by Cheng et al. (2020) in the case of Queensland, Australia.

Tourism-driven speculation on properties is also studied in relation to its effects on resident communities. Ryan and Ma (2020) contribution presents the example of Raglan in New Zealand, a small coastal town, in which STRs have affected several dimensions of place attachment and identity. Torkington and Ribeiro (2020) on Lisbon and Porto, as well as Muschter et al. (2020) on Byron Shire in New South Wales, Australia, expand the discussion on the transformation of public spaces as centres of leisure and entertainment. Many of the authors in this collection (Cheng et al., 2020; Muschter et al., 2020; Ryan & Ma, 2020; Salerno & Russo, 2020; Torkington & Ribeiro, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020) have observed an increased perception of risk, noise and discomfort from living in places where residents can no longer recognise their neighbours. At the same time, increasing cost of urban services such as waste, parking lots, traffic, public toilets, street cleaning and maintenance have to be borne by local taxpayers. These higher costs, together with increases in prices of food and other everyday supplies, make residents' lives harder especially in over-touristed cities where residents are forced to use services designed for tourists (Salerno & Russo, 2020).

c. Diverse positions and government responses

Different groupings and positionalities can be recognised in relation to platform-mediated services: a) hosts, who can have different interests depending on their status as resident or non-resident hosts, non-commercial or entrepreneurs, responsible or opportunistic, non-professional or holding multiple listings with high financial returns; b) workers, on flexible work conditions based on-demand and without social insurance; c) guests of STRs or customers of social dining platforms; d) residents, individually impacted, or members of housing companies, residents' associations or wider social movements; e) the hotel industry, mostly positioned against the rise of STRs; f) *sharing*-advocates and other tourism-related businesses; g) platforms; and h) local authorities, reacting in different ways, from laissez-faire, to semi-interventionist or strongly regulating policies.

Within all groups, different sensitivities, political orientations, agency and organising settings exist, as the Byron Shire community survey presented by Muschter et al. (2020) shows. Effects of platform-mediated services are not uniform and different social groups are affected in different ways depending on their positions in relation to the platforms, as well as the economic interests and social rights that the parties involved seek to protect. An interesting case is the impact felt by the traditional hotels of Queenstown, New Zealand, suffering from a loss of personnel attracted by the new flexible work offered by STRs (Ryan & Ma, 2020). The case of Sydney presented by Chen et al. (2021) shows the extreme vulnerability of the hyper-exploited workforce, that has been the most severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The atomisation of workers, and the invisibility of professional hosts, keep problems submerged and unaddressed. Residents have been reacting in different ways. In the case of Copenhagen illustrated by Christensen (2020), shareholder assemblies are entitled to control apartments' uses and oppose their conversion into tourist accommodation. However, the most common visible reaction is through protests.

Social media provide spaces of protests. The digital amplification of activism transcends local spaces of communities by permitting remote participation of ex-residents of tourism cities and supportive outsiders (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2020; Wilson et al., 2020). An example of international movement is the Southern Europe against Touristification (SET) described by Salerno and Russo (2020), which involves local movements and researchers, claiming housing rights and preservation of local commerce, public services, jobs, and urban environments in tourist cities.

Muschter et al. (2020) indicate three main regulative options taken by local governments: laissez-faire, co-regulative, and interventionist including prohibitions and penalties. The Italian case studies show a laissez-faire attitude caused by the fear of losing tourist market quota (Celata & Romano, 2020; Salerno & Russo, 2020). In those cases, reactions by local authorities are limited to the production of decalogues for "educating" tourists to behaviours of "public decency", or to the proposal of entry tickets, gates or other mechanisms to limit the number of tourists entering in peak periods. With regard to platform-mediated STRs, the purpose of a recently introduced

obligation for hosts to register is to increase taxation entries instead of restricting hosting in apartments or regulating work service.

Some other cities have used stronger initiatives to limit the expansion of STRs. As we have discussed before, many cities have requested Airbnb to collaborate with them with the aim of regulating STR and collect taxation to forward directly to the fiscal authorities. Most of these trials failed in the pre-Covid era, apart from the city of Philadelphia, which signed an agreement with Airbnb in 2016 (Christensen, 2020).

Covid-19 pandemic: reclaiming the city

When this special issue was conceived, travel and mobility were still growing at a fast pace, as Covid-19 had not yet manifested itself. However, with the pandemic, the consequences of Airbnb and other digital peer-to-peer service platforms in cities have become especially evident, as the most touristified areas have been emptied of people, shops have closed, and an economic crisis has affected workers in this volatile market (Chen et al., 2021 in this issue; Cherici, 2020). This situation calls for a rethink of the relationship between the platforms and urban development, searching for more effective ways to govern with progressive visions of sustainable cities and communities. While some commentators have predicted that the pandemic will take STR platforms back towards the original idea of sharing idle spaces, others find this unlikely. For instance, Dolnicar and Zare (2020) point out that increasingly many professional hosts may return to the long-term rental market to avoid the consequences of future shocks, whereas Agustín Cocola-Gant (2020) maintains that these hosts are likely to continue to extract value from the short-term rental market. This is because the flexibility of the short-term rental market matches professional hosts' view of properties as financial assets, enabling them to use and sell their properties as they wish without entering into stable contracts with long-term tenants, or being constrained by them (Cocola-Gant, 2020).

Thus, while the pandemic has affected the demand for short-term holiday rentals, there is no justification for assuming that this will automatically lead to a significant increase in the supply of apartments in the long-term rental market, let alone a return to the situation that preceded the platformisation of tourism. For instance, Salerno and Russo (2020), and Celata and Romano (2020), both in this issue, have noticed a small increase in the number of apartments being offered on the medium and longer-term rental market, but with some caution, expecting that tourists will soon fill in the emptiness again. Furthermore, as Cocola-Gant (2020) writes, there is evidence that many professional hosts are increasingly using the services of short-term rental management agencies to move properties flexibly between platforms and adjust the prices and lengths of rental contracts to favour mid-term stays until the short-term holiday rental market has recovered. By giving impetus to this kind of flexibility, the ongoing pandemic may foster the incorporation of mid-term renting of apartments into the exploitative logic of digital platforms. For example, if student apartments start to be viewed as financial assets that can be promoted through platforms and managed by agencies, conditions of rental contracts are likely to change accordingly. Increasingly, many tenants may have to enter contracts without being able to view their future homes first.

Furthermore, as discussed by Christensen (2020) in this issue, the halt to tourism is paid by hosts operating through STR platforms and especially their laid-off workforce. For instance, Chen et al. (2021, this issue) point out that according to AppJobs - a digital gig economy platform - half of the workers employed in App-based jobs have lost their jobs since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the Greater Sydney area in Australia, Airbnb hosts have suffered 6.5 times more than the platform itself. As a result, hosts' associations have claimed from national governments the right to subsidies, as given to private companies as compensation. However, in most cases, they have not been eligible for any employment-based social insurance because of the

informal nature of their business. Airbnb established a $250 million fund to compensate the economic losses of Airbnb hosts around the world during the first months of 2020 by covering 25% of the host's cancellation fees, but this support has been limited (Airbnb, 2020; Chen et al., 2021 in this issue; Fishman, 2020).

Workers on other platforms have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in different ways. Informal workers in Airbnb, like cleaners or maintenance workers, are the most vulnerable groups, as they lack employment-based social security (Sundararajan, 2016). The majority of Uber drivers have lost their jobs, although some have been involved in delivery of food and drugs or providing transport to hospitals (Hua & Ray, 2020, Spurk & Straub, 2020). .

The current pandemic has both revealed and exacerbated the negative effects of tourism platforms. The situation calls for new regulations to support cities' efforts to mitigate the harmful impacts. A few local governments have started new actions, especially for the re-urbanisation of city centres. Amsterdam has required every host to request a permit and to register all visitors and has banned STRs in three districts of the old town (De Jong, 2020; Ivens, 2020). In France, a new law has disposed specific regulations for Airbnb locations (Heikkilä, 2020). Barcelona has activated stronger control over STRs and has limited their activity (Sequera & Nofre, 2018; Wilson et al., 2020 in his issue). However, national legislation has found it to be difficult to address the loopholes of the business logic of the platforms (Christensen, 2020 in this issue; Guttentag, 2017). Dorrit De Jong (2020) points out that as long as the platforms do not make registration mandatory, it is practically impossible for cities to enforce the new regulations to control rentals and fiscal compliances.

New promising initiatives have also been introduced at the European level. A new alliance of European cities (involving Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Berlin, Bologna, Bordeaux, Brussels, Cologne, Florence, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Krakow, London, Milan, Munich, Paris, Porto, Prague, Utrecht, Valencia, Vienna and Warsaw) has published a "Position Paper on better EU-legislation of Platforms offering Short-Term Holiday Rentals". The aim is to regain control over data on tourist apartments and limit STRs in residential buildings. Moreover, the European Commission (2020) has prepared a Digital Services Act package that contains interesting rules for the e-commerce, including Airbnb. According to Cox (2020), the Act should enable the access to neighbourhood-level data with addresses and intervene in the regulation of registrations and permit systems. Moreover, it should introduce the principle of platform accountability, i.e., storing only listings that have permit ID numbers.

Conclusions

In this paper, we proposed a discussion on global platforms mediating tourism services, the manifestations of which are contingent on the local cultural, societal and regulatory contexts. Through case studies of tourism cities in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the USA, we could observe the platform mediated peer-to-peer services in tourism as performative agents in cities. The literature emphasises the various forms of urban disruption caused by platforms, especially Airbnb, and the range of interests at stake, the forms of contestation and political reactions. Lines of argumentation have moved across tourism studies and urban studies and have touched on a complex arena of intertwined phenomena: entrepreneurial performances in tourism; neo-liberal political and legal systems protective of the platforms' ownership of data; poor governance mechanisms of control of the gentrification of neighbourhoods and financialisation of housing, considered to be investment assets with high rentability.

The performativity of operators through platforms has produced a direct impact on the principles according to which the economy operates. Zuboff (2019) claims that one of the main challenges in addressing the ethical issues related to what she has termed "surveillance capitalism" is that we rely on outdated terminology that is based on old regulatory frameworks. For example,

talk about "monopolistic tendencies" of big tech companies is based on a twentieth-century imagination, which may keep us from seeing some of the new threats posed by digital tracking done by these companies. Similarly, the discursive alignment of digital peer-to-peer platforms with sharing economy, collaborative economy or other alternative modes of economy veils the capitalist logic that explains the success of these platforms, as well as some of the drastic impacts it is having on our cities – and now, with the pandemic, on the middle-classes affected by the crisis. An intersectional approach is needed "to explore the multifaceted relationships between social groups and structures" (Mooney, 2018, p. 175). It is important to look beyond simple indicators of economic growth and income, and to try to comprehend the positions of the disadvantaged actors.

At the European level, some initiatives have seen stronger agency of city administrators and the Commission, to regain control over the data possessed by platforms. Data will help local governments to enforce their decisions on maximum rental day limits, tax collection and safety-regulations, and to revive residence rights in tourist areas. Moreover, data can also reveal the concentration of apartments in the hands of large corporations. This is proving to be a growing public awareness of the fallacy of STR platforms as *sharing* models and of hosts as local casual residents. It will be important to address other related social problems politically, such as the reality of an industry that uses low-paid labour that find it difficult to find a place to live in those unaffordable city areas. The importance of sharing analyses and successful practices to govern tourist cities, and of data sovereignty reclaimed by networks of cities, aligned with a long-expressed call by social movements, can support new commonly enforced practices on a large scale, leading to a sustainable turn that will finally prioritise cities as equitable living places.

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