

## Article

# Airbnb and Mountain Tourism Destinations: Evidence from an Inner Area in the Italian Alps

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**Abstract:** Starting from this decade, peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation has witnessed a valuable growth that has interested both urban and rural environments. With reference to the Italian context, the Airbnb platform represents the main platform used by tourists, contributing to reshaping tourism offerings and to the “drive” of the image of tourism destinations. The aim of this study is to present insight into the Airbnb phenomenon in a marginal mountain destination in the Italian Alps, for a better understanding of how the environmental dimension is considered by both guests and hosts. In order to reach this goal, 727 guests’ reviews in 35 Airbnb accommodation facilities of the municipalities of Soana Valley were analyzed through a qualitative sentiment analysis performed with NVivo 14 software. The evidence was compared with the hosts’ viewpoint, thanks to semi-structured interviews with three local actors. Preliminary considerations of the guests’ reviews reported positive comments (79.5%) for both the accommodation per sé (perfect, excellent, beautiful, welcoming, and clean) and the mountainous area as well, particularly appreciated for its natural characteristics. These were confirmed by the hosts’ interviews, who underlined how nature represented one of the main guests’ highlighted aspects. Moreover, visitors’ needs and expectations have increased over the years, forcing the need to improve the quality of offerings. This contribution concludes with a reflection on the opportunities that second home tourism can represent for Italian inner mountainous areas.

**Keywords:** mountain tourism; hospitality sector; peer-to-peer accommodation; Airbnb; sentiment analysis; environmental sustainability



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## 1. Introduction

A sharing economy has developed in recent years as a new field of economics [1], encouraged by many factors such as the internet, technological innovation, and globalization [2]. As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, which introduced the term in 2015, a sharing economy is “an economic system in which people can share possessions, services, etc., usually by means of the internet” [3].

Peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation is a segment of a sharing economy [4], offering an online marketplace in which homeowners can offer their accommodation to tourists and travelers for a limited amount of time, usually at a lower price than hotels [2]. P2P accommodation has been a disruptor in the lodging industry, meaning that its exponential growth has brought profound changes in the tourism and hospitality sectors [5].

One of the most well-known P2P accommodation platforms is Airbnb, a company born in 2007 that has publicly traded since 2020 and counts more than 5 million hosts in more than 100,000 cities [6].

Airbnb has experienced an important growth in the last decade, which has interested both the urban and rural contexts. In this study, we analyzed the Airbnb phenomenon in a marginal mountain destination, i.e., Soana Valley, in the northwest of the Italian Alps

(Piedmont Region), by analyzing the considerations provided by visitors' public comments on the platform and the hosts' viewpoint, with the aim of analyzing the tourists' assessment of the local area and cross it with the hosts' offering. As reported by Garay-Tamajón et al. [7], Airbnb often contributes to creating a commodified image of destination identities and their communities.

Thus, this study is organized as follows, starting with an overview of the P2P mechanisms and a literature review providing insight into the Airbnb platform, with a focus on mountainous areas. The materials and methods section details the case study and the method that was adopted for carrying out the analysis; the results are devoted to presenting the main evidence of this study; while the discussions question the main outcomes. Finally, the conclusions present both limitations and new avenues of research for future studies.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. P2P Platforms

The rise of peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms has been a consequential outcome of sharing economies, aiming to maximize the functionality of goods and services through digital marketplaces where supply and demand are matched [8]. In the tourism sector, this transformative force has significantly influenced the market, altering service provision and consumption patterns [9]. P2P platforms have revolutionized various industries by enabling direct exchanges between individuals without intermediaries [10], fostering the co-creation of value among peers [11].

In the tourism accommodation market, P2P platforms have reshaped the traditional business model, elevating home-sharing platforms to become dominant providers against traditional hospitality industry structures [12]. These platforms encourage resource, service, and expertise sharing among users, fostering a sense of community and empowerment [13]. Social networks, moreover, play a pivotal role throughout the accommodation rental process, efficiently connecting owners with customers who share similar interests, despite not knowing each other [14].

A unique characteristic of P2P platforms is the reciprocity generated through their two-sided market, attracting both accommodation providers and tourists seeking authentic experiences [15]. However, their rapid growth has brought regulatory challenges, raising concerns about fair labor practices, consumer protection, and data privacy, prompting reflections on policy and regulatory choices by policymakers [9].

Despite their significant impact on major urban centers, studies in this sector have largely overlooked small coastal towns, rural, or mountainous areas [16–18]. Additionally, Guttentag's review of Airbnb studies [13] as well as other scholars' reviews [19] show a geographic bias, with the majority conducted in the USA (40.2%), followed by Europe (29.5%), Asia (13.4%), Australia/New Zealand (7.1%), Africa (1.8%), and the Caribbean/Latin America (1.8%).

In 2020, the EU Commission reached a groundbreaking agreement with major platforms like Airbnb, Booking, Expedia Group, and Tripadvisor, enabling data sharing and granting Eurostat access to crucial information for analysis. According to Eurostat's data from 2022, more than 547 million guest nights were booked through collaborative economy platforms (Airbnb, Booking, Expedia Group, Tripadvisor), averaging 1.5 million guests each day, translating to 90 stays booked per minute [20]. This landmark agreement has not only provided valuable insights into the dynamic market but has also promoted transparency and informed decision-making in the collaborative economy, overtaking the lack of transparent and public data on the extent of the phenomenon [21].

In conclusion, P2P platforms have revolutionized the tourism accommodation market, reshaped traditional business models, and transformed how travelers experience and access lodging options. However, their rapid expansion and concentration in major urban centers have sparked regulatory and geographic disparities which warrant further attention from policymakers and researchers alike. The 2020 agreement laid the groundwork for

more comprehensive and data-driven analyses, offering an opportunity to understand and address the complexities posed by P2P platforms in the tourism sector.

## 2.2. Airbnb

Airbnb, as the largest and most popular, peer-to-peer, short-term, rental platform [13], has witnessed remarkable growth [22] since its inception in 2008, offering over 7 million homes, apartments, and rooms for rent. Extensive academic studies have explored the impact of Airbnb, delving into both its positive and negative effects [23–25]. The existing literature highlights two opposing perspectives concerning Airbnb's expansion.

Assuming positive perspectives, advocates praise Airbnb for its potential to generate extra income, promote tourism, and provide affordable housing options [9]. The platform has enabled ordinary homeowners to become providers of tourist accommodation, fostering a sense of community and economic empowerment [13]. By facilitating personalized transactions and utilizing underutilized assets, Airbnb aims to offer more authentic, diverse, inclusive, and sustainable travel experiences compared to traditional hotels [12].

However, considering negative perspectives, critics argue that Airbnb's growth has raised concerns about its deviation from the sharing culture and its impact on local communities [9]. Airbnb's disruptive impact extends beyond the hotel sector, often causing disturbances in communities worldwide as local residences are transformed into tourism lodging [13]. Many studies explore the perception of Airbnb's contribution to the cultural and identity commodification of localities, strategically emphasizing authenticity and genuineness to attract tourists [7,26]. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in rural contexts. In the Southern European countries, Airbnb is seen as a tool, intensifying the use of second homes and vacant housing in rural areas [27]. As the platform expands its presence, concerns arise regarding the potential commodification of rural landscapes and its impact on the local way of life and social fabric. These trends prompt researchers and policymakers to analyze the consequences of Airbnb's presence in rural communities, seeking to understand its implications for cultural heritage, economic sustainability, and community well-being.

Issues such as rising rent, gentrification, and the displacement of residents have been attributed to the platform [23,25]. The destruction of the pre-existing social and commercial fabric in city centers, and the ousting of daily proximity services and neighborhood shops, have been observed as the "Airbnb effect" [16,18]. Airbnb's disruption of the hotel sector is mirrored by its impact on local communities, transforming residential spaces into tourism accommodations. The focus on authenticity and cultural identity commodification adds to the complexity of this issue, particularly in rural contexts. The phenomenon's prevalence in the Southern European countries warrants further investigation and highlights the need for responsible and sustainable approaches in integrating the collaborative economy into rural communities.

The literature predominantly examines Airbnb's impact in central urban areas [28] and recently gentrified districts [29–31], while studies on smaller cities, resorts, and rural areas have been relatively limited [16,18]. Nationwide studies generally indicate a positive correlation between Airbnb supply and tourism demand, aligned with traditional accommodation capacity [12,32]. However, finer spatial scales have revealed potential variations between the two, making mountainous areas particularly interesting for further investigation [33].

Quantitative methods, particularly spatial analyses, have been widely employed in Airbnb research, utilizing software such as AirDNA, Inside Airbnb, and DataHippo, among others, for data analysis. Geolocation studies have focused on examining the concentration and distribution of Airbnb structures [29,34].

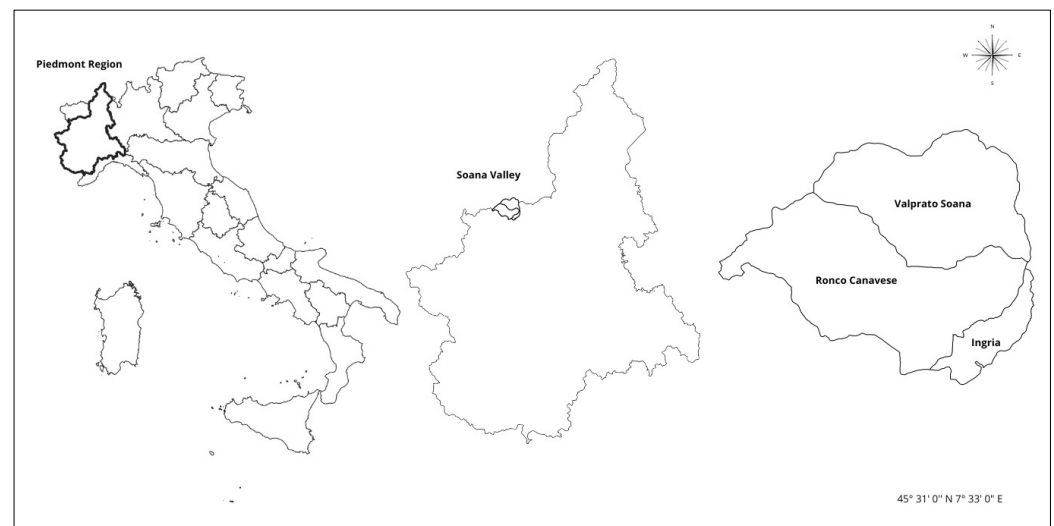
This literature review will highlight the diverse perspectives of Airbnb's impact on peer-to-peer short-term rentals and local communities. This research aims to pay more attention to both mountainous regions' small communities and the type of analysis, i.e., user perception, whether guests or hosts, to enrich the evaluation framework on the full

scope of Airbnb's effects. In particular, this study will refer to a small mountain tourism destination in order to cross the guests' considerations with the hosts' perceptions, with a focus on understanding how the environmental and social dimensions (local traditions) of sustainability were considered by both the tourism offering and demand. Acknowledging both the positive and negative aspects will enable policymakers and stakeholders to address the challenges and opportunities presented by Airbnb's growth while promoting sustainable development in a collaborative economy.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. The Area of Investigation

This research was carried out in a secondary mountain valley with medium–high levels of marginality [35], i.e., Soana Valley, a mountainous community in the Piedmont Region (northwestern Italian Alps). Soana Valley embodies three municipalities—Ingria, Ronco Canavese, and Valprato Soana, as reported in Figure 1—for a total surface of around 182,870 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 455 inhabitants. One of the main characteristics of Soana Valley is the presence of the Gran Paradiso National Park (GPNP), the first Italian national park established in 1922, which covers 71% and 69% of Ronco Canavese's and Valprato Soana's territories, respectively.



**Figure 1.** The area of investigation.

The presence of a national park contributes to local development. A local economy is based on agricultural and tourism activities, which are said to have an integrated vision [36] with local food products being an important asset for the local tourism sector [37,38]. Furthermore, the conservation role played by the presence of a national park made it possible to preserve the biodiversity of this area and hiking and outdoor activities represent one of the main reasons for visiting the valley [37].

At the time of the search, in Soana Valley, the tourism sector was represented by 13 accommodations (hotels) and 2 other kinds of rent typologies. In terms of available beds, it was possible to host 144 visitors per night. Valprato Soana alone represented around 60.4% of the total available beds.

According to a VisitPiemonte Tourism Statistical Report—Year 2022—arrivals were calculated as being 1700 visitors and the foreign component counted for around 25%; this may be the main reason why the average length of stay (ALS) was quite low, at 1.85 (which means that each visitor stayed 1.85 days in the area). These data are consistent with previous research which defined these communities as niche and sustainable tourism destinations [39].

### 3.2. Methodology

Soana Valley's Airbnb accommodation facilities were identified by researching on the platform. Thus, structures were analyzed for collecting various information such as specific locations, beds, bedrooms, costs per night, reference links, the presence and number of comments, general ratings of the structure, ratings of cleanliness, accuracy, communication, location, check-ins, and value for money.

An analogue collection of all the reviews was performed, dividing them by month, year, author, text in the original language, and text in Italian. For translating the Italian language into English, the Google Translate tool has been used. We collected a total of 727 reviews for 35 accommodation facilities, in the municipalities of Ingria, Ronco Canavese, and Valprato Soana and their hamlets. The reviews covered 8 years, from August 2016 (first comment ever) to 31 August 2023. The review collection took place in September 2023. All the reviews filled an Excel file and qualitative sentiment analysis was performed to analyze the online comments to understand variables that influenced guests' perception [40–42]. The analysis was performed by using NVivo 14 qualitative analysis software for text mining [43,44] and for the categorization and coding steps [45] of all the reviews. NVivo 14 has been widely used as a research method in several research domains [44,46,47] as well as in the tourism and hospitality sectors [43,48–50]. The reviews were analyzed following three different steps. The first level of analysis was to find recurring words, using the function "Word Cloud". Stop words were introduced to exclude from the word cloud single terms that were not descriptive of the visitors' impressions of the place such as "accommodation", "place", or "house". The adjectives connected to the words, however, are still shown in the analysis.

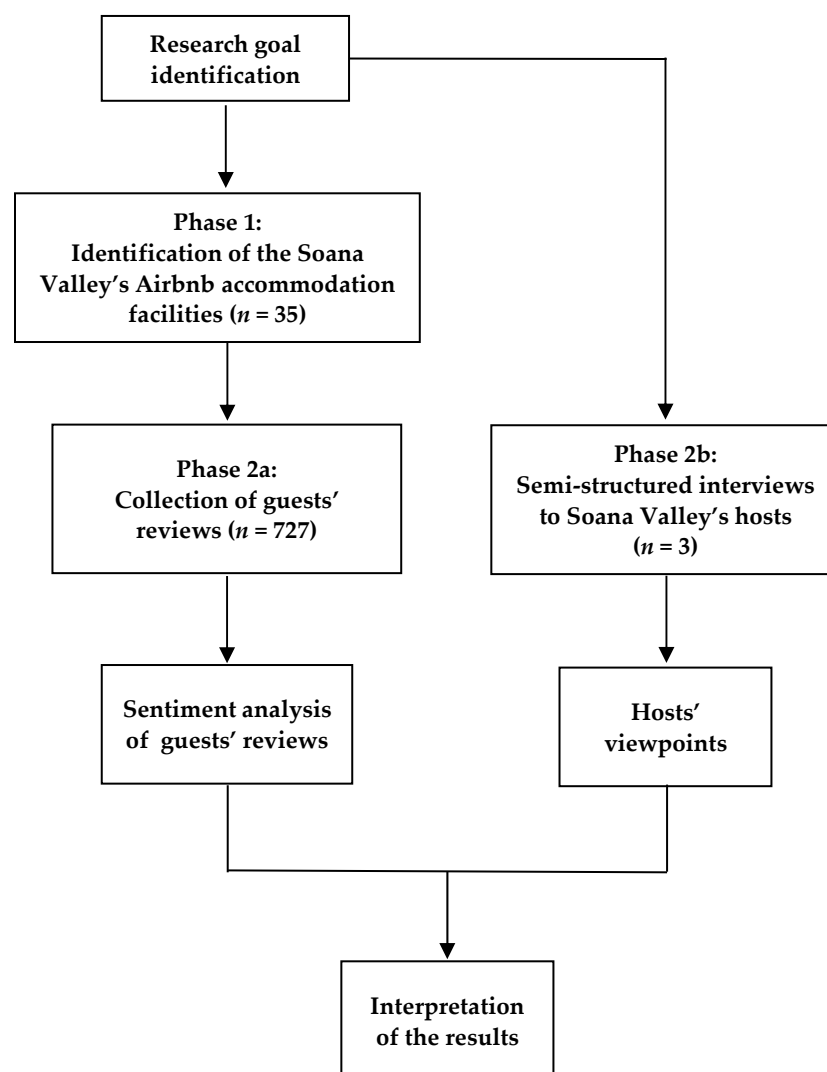
The sentiment analysis helped in understanding tourists' feelings and impressions of the valley, from which the main strengths and weaknesses of the tourism sector of the area could be deduced.

As far as the host' viewpoints were concerned, 3 Airbnb hosts were selected. The selection criteria were the following:

1. Location—We decided to involve one host for each municipality. Even if the valley was relatively small compared to other mountainous areas, the three municipalities had some differences and specific characteristics. Valprato Soana was the starting point for all the most interesting hiking purposes, while Ronco Canavese was the commercial hub of the valley with all the retailer activities. Ingria was the first village of the valley and, in the meantime, the only municipality with no land in the national park.
2. Number of comments—For each municipality, we selected the Airbnb with the higher number of comments.
3. In-the-field experience—The number of operational years was the third criterion.

In order to understand the hosts' viewpoints, semi-structured interviews, adopted in several research analyses such as in marketing [51], agriculture [52], and tourism [53], were carried out. The semi-structured interviews were based on a questionnaire of 8 open questions, they were performed by phone, and they lasted between 30 and 45 min. The interviews took place between 26 February 2024 and 8 March 2024.

Figure 2 summarizes the research steps.



**Figure 2.** Research phases.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Airbnb in Soana Valley

Table 1 contains an insight into the presence of Airbnb accommodation facilities in the area of investigation and the rating system used.

**Table 1.** Soana Valley's Airbnb accommodation facilities.

Municipality	No. of Airbnbs	Total Beds	Average Beds	No. of Comments	Average Rating out of 5	% Star-Rated Answers per Municipality
Ingria	2	8	4	171	4.91	100
Ronco C.se	16	58	3.625	189	4.751	56.3
Valprato Soana	17	74	4.353	371	4.547	64.7
Total/Average	35	140	4	731	4.736	73.7

No. of Airbnbs refers to study period, i.e., September 2023.

As reported in the table, the 35 Airbnb facilities accounted for 140 beds, and their offerings were the same as the more classic accommodation structures. More importantly, the average number of beds for a single accommodation showed this kind of offering was particularly suited for hosting families or couples.



The average rating value, moreover, was quite high for all the municipalities, with an average value around 4.7 out of 5, which means that visitors were generally fully satisfied about their experience in the valley's Airbnb facilities.

#### 4.2. Tourists' Feelings and Impressions

Figure 3 shows the 100 most frequent words used in the comments. Among them, the six words with the highest count are colored in orange as the following: "perfect", "excellent", "beautiful", "village", "welcoming", and "clean". Table 2 below shows how many times the first 10 recurrent words appeared in the comments.



Figure 3. Word cloud of 727 comments.

Table 2. First 10 recurrent words in the comments.

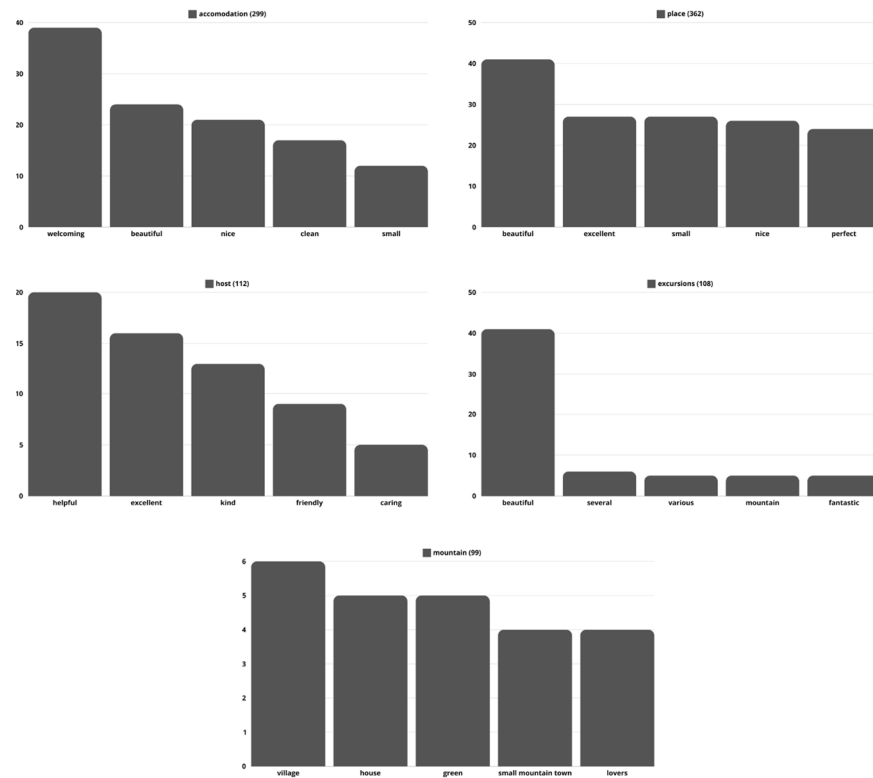
Word	Count	Italian Guests	Foreign Guests
beautiful	237	120	117
excellent	203	113	90
welcoming	157	105	51
clean	156	113	43
village	141	58	83
perfect	131	73	58
well	128	87	40
kind	123	97	26
nice	120	63	57
helpful	119	94	25

The word cloud was also performed after dividing the comments by two main clusters, Italian tourists (domestic tourism) and foreigners (inbound tourism), which counted, respectively, for 432 and 295 comments. In this way, a comparison of the preferences of national and foreign tourists was possible.

The word clouds show that among the most recurrent words were some similarities and differences. The first two used words were the same in both groups and were "beautiful" and "excellent". However, the other words were different. Domestic tourists frequently mentioned the words "clean" and "welcoming", while in the other group, "village" (83 times) and "excursion" (64 times) were the most reported. In fact, only four words were in common between the two groups: other than the abovementioned "excellent" and "beautiful", "welcoming" was found in 4th place in the Italian cluster and in the 9th in the other, and "perfect" was, respectively, in 9th and 6th place.

A second level of analysis was reached by performing a thematic analysis of the comments, which highlighted the most recurring themes in the dataset and organized them into nodes. NVivo 14 software allowed for the classification using nodes [43]. Each

main node represents the main subject, whereas child nodes describe the specific attributes of each theme. Figure 4 contains the first five key themes, and, for each key theme, the first five child nodes are reported (the other key themes not considered in Figure 4 were “Stay”—77 times, “Valley”—71 times, “View”—59 times, and “Paths”—42 times).



**Figure 4.** Thematic analysis.

Themes with similar meanings were incorporated in a single node. Thus, “place” also contained “village” and “location”, “accommodation” encompassed “apartment” and “house”, and “excursions” included “walks”.

As was predictable, considering this kind of peer-to-peer platform, the great majority of comments was devoted to qualifying the accommodation, place, or host, with several recurrent child nodes (Figure 5). Nevertheless, it can be noted that words related to naturalistic aspects played a central role in tourists’ comments, with subjects such as “excursions” and “mountain”, related to extremely positive adjectives, being among the most recurrent main nodes. Interestingly, even if the presence of a PNGP could also be seen as related to the node “valley”, the word “park” was not so recurrent among the first indications. On the other hand, however, some adjectives such as “wildest”, “breathtaking”, “wonderful”, “gorgeous”, and “magnificent”, clearly refer to an uncontaminated environment, pointing out the role of the park in preserving the wilderness and biodiversity of the area [36,39]. At the same time, tourists highlighted the quietness and relaxation that they could enjoy in the valley, which appeared to offer comfortable and equipped accommodations through Airbnb for customers (“welcoming” and “comfortable”, related to “accommodation”). These adjectives, observed with the ones related to the overall stay in the valley, describe a rustic but welcoming and authentic valley, in which tourists felt welcomed and part of the local community. Interestingly, the fourth child node is represented by “clean” (17 times), underlying how environmental hygiene and personal health are a topic to which guests paid attention, especially after the pandemic crisis [54].



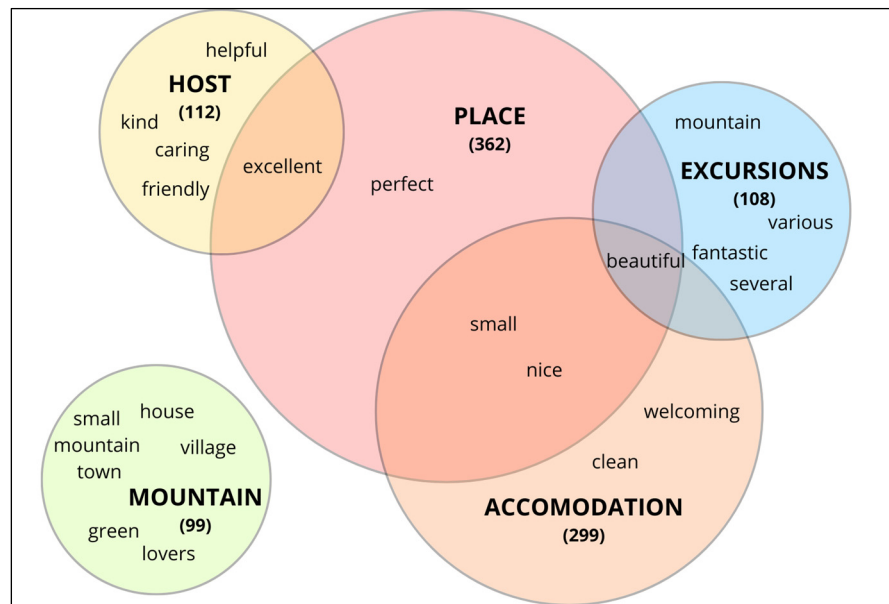


Figure 5. Map of themes and child nodes.

It is also interesting to note how the third most used main theme, after “place” and “accommodation”, was “host”, which confirms how Airbnb aims to create an intimate and direct relationship with its users [7,26], highlighting the effect created by hosts on the Airbnb guests’ experiences [55]. Immediately after, however, “excursions” (108 times) underlines the main outdoor activities that could be practiced in this mountain valley, characterized by several paths within the border of the national park.

As reported in Figure 5, some child nodes are shared by two or more main themes. In considering the first five child nodes for each theme, it is worthy to note how some adjectives (“small”, “nice”, “beautiful”, and “excellent”) appeared in more than a single principal topic. In particular, “beautiful” encompassed “accommodation”, “excursions”, and “place”, being the most used adjective. On the other hand, “mountain” did not have a direct correlation when taking into account the first five child nodes.

Lastly, an analysis was performed to identify the perception of tourists towards their stay in Soana Valley through their comments on the platform. Among the 727 comments, 578 were positive, 78 mixed (positive and negative), 69 neutral, and 2 were negative, as reported in Table 3 and summarized in Figure 6.

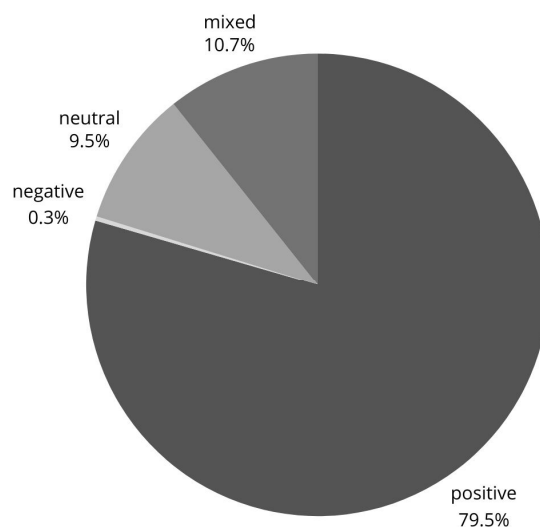


Figure 6. Sentiment analysis.

**Table 3.** Results of the sentiment analysis.

Sentiment Analysis	Count	%
positive	578	79.5%
negative	2	0.3%
neutral	69	9.5%
mixed	78	10.7%

Some examples of comments are reported below as the following:

*“Comfortable apartment in the center of the village, close to all the necessary services and an excellent starting point for trekking in the beautiful Soana Valley. [. . .] was very kind and helpful and also welcomed our two big dogs with pleasure. Ideal place to immerse yourself in the mountains!”*

*“The well-equipped and cozy apartment is located in an (almost) uninhabited village. The only sounds that can be heard are the ringing of cowbells, birdsong and the rushing stream—wonderful! There is a pub opposite the apartment that is probably open every day, but it was very quiet there during my vacation. [...] Beautiful and difficult hikes of varying lengths are possible right from the front door. [...] [Host name]’s apartment is a very good place for peace and active nature experience in the mountains!”*

*“For nature lovers, the small house offered by [Host name], completely renovated, is ideally located in the Grand Paradiso National Park. Near a river you will find peace and serenity with sometimes the possibility of meeting a fox, a shepherd with his flock, beautiful different colors at all times of the day. I recommend this property.”*

As stated in the comments, nature and nature-related activities represented the value added for visitors: beautiful, peaceful, and serene were positive characteristics underlined by guests, which were more typical for secondary tourism destinations.

In conclusion, the sentiment analysis appears to highlight an overall positive effect of Airbnb on the valley. Considering the first five key themes, together with “place”, “accommodation”, and “host”, which already emerged in another analysis [56], two other key topics appeared, “excursions” and “mountain”, by which the positive reviews and comments showed a general appreciation of the area, underlying the environmental heritage of this territory.

#### 4.3. The Host’s Viewpoints

Guests’ comments were crossed with the host’s experience in managing their Airbnb. The semi-structured interview was intended to showcase the host’s viewpoint for analyzing whether the impressions given by the guests were—or not—shared with the local operators (see Appendix A).

Interestingly, the three hosts who were interviewed focused their attention on the role of nature and wilderness in attracting tourists to Soana Valley that, together with the opportunity to relax and enjoy the quietness of the place, was the most appreciated aspect.

*“All the guests who come here, they come precisely because they do like the valley.”*  
(Host 1)

and

*“There’s nothing here except from nature. Uncontaminated nature.”* (Host 2)

This impression confirms the sentiment analysis performed on the comments, which highlighted the importance of wilderness and beautiful nature in tourists’ choice of destination. As above mentioned, the role of the PNGP was crucial to preserving the biodiversity and wilderness of the area. The presence of the park was also noted by the hosts:

*“Many come because they know that the Gran Paradiso National Park is there.”* (Host 1)

and

*“They come here because they know the Gran Paradiso National Park. They don’t care if they go to Cogne or here, because they don’t know the roads, they just not that it’s inside the park and that there’s wilderness.” (Host 3)*

Is the hosts’ opinions, the presence of the national park worked as a flywheel for the tourism sector, being a fundamental pull factor.

The fact that tourists had a target area but no specific knowledge about the different towns was also pointed out by Host 2.

*“Airbnb is important because of that. When you’re looking for an apartment in the mountains, you look for the National Park and then you just pick something in the area. We don’t have fancy facilities, but we show pictures of our beautiful landscape, and we have fair prices.”*

At the same time, the hosts highlighted their personal relationships built with the tourists thanks to a platform like Airbnb.

*“That’s the point of Airbnb. You’re not going to stay in a hotel, you’re going in someone’s house. I love chatting with people and tell them about my valley.” (Host 2)*

and

*“At first the local community wasn’t 100% convinced about Airbnb. They were a bit reluctant to new people. Now the relationship with Airbnb tourists is much better than with the ones who stays in hotels. Through Airbnb you become part of the community, you know the people who actually live here.” (Host 3)*

These hosts’ opinions confirm the results of the sentiment analysis, which suggest an overall positive impact of Airbnb tourism on the Soana Valley, promoting a sustainable and authentic relationship both with nature and the local community instead of commodifying the traditional rural context.

The main negative aspect shared by the hosts was the lack of tourist services in the valley. However, since most of tourists came to Soana Valley especially for enjoying the wilderness and peace, this can be interpreted as both a weakness and a strength of the area.

## 5. Conclusions

This contribution focused on the role of peer-to-peer accommodation facilities in bringing insight into its potential role in mountainous areas. In order to achieve this, sentiment analysis was performed on a sample of 757 comments on the Airbnb platform in a specific case study, Soana Valley, where this kind of offering was quite recent. The main perception of users of Airbnb facilities in Soana Valley was decidedly positive, also given the prevalent words used to comment both in Italian and in the original language: “beautiful” and “excellent”. Further confirmation of the users’ sensation was the 578 positive comments out of the 727 total. When considering the environmental and social aspects of sustainability, it is worth underlining how nature plays a fundamental role in defining this marginal mountain destination: beautiful, breathtaking, wonderful, etc., are adjectives that guests mostly adopted to characterize the area. The uncontaminated environment, the beauty of the area, and the presence of a national park were reported as qualifying aspects by the hosts, too.

On the other hand, however, the same attention was not paid for the cultural heritage of this alpine community, which, by contrast, contained some very interesting elements as reported in previous studies in this area [36].

### 5.1. Implications

This analysis has some implications which can be seen at different levels.

### 5.1.1. Theoretical Implications

Most of the previous research on Airbnb was focused on the urban context, analyzing through quantitative or qualitative research the impact of the platform on neighborhoods, on the urban tourism sector, on city changes, and on processes of neighborhoods' gentrification [7,26,45,57]. Little research has been conducted on the role of Airbnb in marginal mountain contexts and, secondly, on assuming both the hosts' and guest' viewpoints. This paper, thus, contributes to filling this gap and to having a first understanding from which may be pulled factors of secondary mountain tourism destinations, by analyzing both the hosts' and guests' indications.

### 5.1.2. Policy Implications

This study can be useful to local policymakers of Soana Valley in understanding the Airbnb phenomenon. Furthermore, this study can help local mayors in managing local real estate properties, by proposing local policies for converting no more unused second homes into the hospitality sector. In this way, not only would a tourism offering be reinforced, but also Soana Valley's local real estate property would be recovered and valorized. Furthermore, in terms of the Airbnb experience, it could be worthy to assess more complex but far-sighted alternatives with a view to valorization, involvement, and community development, such as more sustainable tourist rental experiences (Ecobnb, Fairbnb, widespread hotels). On the other hand, in understanding the development potential of Airbnb in a context like that of the Soana Valley, it is essential to pay attention to the social and geographical implications of gentrification and varied displacement processes [58] that Airbnb could have. As Smigiel [59] wrote, we are referring to phenomena experienced by several large European cities such as direct and indirect displacement through the removal of long-term residents and the potential reduction in services dedicated to inhabitants in favor of activities aimed solely at tourism.

### 5.1.3. Managerial Implications

At a company level, local hosts may have a more complete understanding of visitors' viewpoints and perspectives on their service quality and the more important aspects of the visit.

## 5.2. Limitations and Future Research Agenda

This study contains some limitations that, at the same time, can lead to identifying new potential avenues of research.

The first limitation was detected in the study area itself: Soana Valley, in fact, is a marginal mountain tourism destination and this aspect is reflected in both the number of Airbnb accommodation facilities that were analyzed (35), as well as the number of comments (727). If, on the one hand, the number of reviews may have appeared limited compared to other studies [43,44], on the other hand, they represent all the comments for Soana Valley's Airbnb facilities.

A second limitation may be seen in the involvement of the local hosts, both in terms of the number of operators involved (3) and the methodology adopted. The semi-structured interviews were performed by phone, which may have limited the degree of interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees. Furthermore, local managers of traditional accommodation facilities were not involved in the interview process to better understand whether, in their businesses, they had encountered negative or positive effects or what impact they thought the growing presence of Airbnb in the Soana Valley could also have had.

By stating the main limitations of this paper, it was possible to identify a future research agenda, at three different levels:

1. The direct involvement of the guests with devoted questionnaires for having a better understanding of their expectations and the role of the cultural heritage in their

- Airbnb experience is warranted. Moreover, this analysis may help in understanding whether there are statistically significant differences depending on provenience [60].
2. A direct involvement of other local stakeholders, as policymakers, traditional accommodation facilities' managers, retailers, and food producers is also warranted, in order to achieve a more complete vision of the role of peer-to-peer accommodation facilities on the area.
  3. A comparison with other similar mountainous areas is finally warranted for assessing if the results could be generalized for all the marginal mountain tourism destinations.

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## Appendix A

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. In which year was the Airbnb opened?
2. How many people can be hosted by the facility?
3. How was the structure used before converting it to Airbnb?
4. Is facility management your main occupation/main source of income?
5. How many facilities do you manage?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your accommodation?
7. What are the most demanded/most criticized aspects of your accommodation?
8. What kind of tourism do you offer?
9. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of Soana Valley from the tourists' point of view?

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