

Local residents' perceptions of sustainability of peer-to-peer accommodation in their neighborhood

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Abstract

The rapid growth of peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodations has introduced new issues to tourism research and practice. Given the growing importance of sustainability in the tourism industry and the lack of academic research on sustainability issues in the P2P accommodation sector, this study aimed to investigate how local residents perceive the sustainability of P2P accommodation in their neighborhoods. Stakeholder theory and the triple bottom line served as theoretical frameworks for the qualitative study. Local residents are key stakeholders who are greatly impacted by the increasing number of home-sharing rentals. In-depth interviews with 15 local residents from Split, Croatia were conducted and analyzed in MaxQDA using a reflexive thematic analysis approach. The findings show that local residents have opposing perceptions of the environmental, social, and economic impacts of P2P accommodation. This raises questions about stakeholder collaboration and policymakers' responsibility for regulating this type of accommodation.

Keywords: peer-to-peer accommodation, stakeholder perceptions, sustainability

Track: Tourism Marketing

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of home sharing and peer-to-peer accommodation has created new opportunities and challenges for the hospitality industry (Fudurich & MacKay, 2020). For example, in Croatia, where the tourism sector has the highest overall economic impact of all 28 EU countries (25%) (Strategija razvoja održivog turizma do 2030 godine, n.d.), home-sharing or P2P accommodation accounts for 61,3% of all tourist accommodation in 2024 (*TUR-2024-1-2 Dolasci i noćenja turista u komercijalnom smještaju u 2024.*, n.d.). Peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation, often offered through P2P platforms, involves a non-commercial provider (the host) selling space suitable for overnight stays to an end user (the guest) for short-term use, with direct interaction between host and guest (Dolnicar, 2019). Although the topic of sustainability in the hotel industry has been extensively researched (see, for example, Farmaki et al., 2023; Shin et al., 2022; Qi & Chen, 2022; and Huang et al., 2023), there has been little research into sustainability issues associated with P2P accommodation. This lack of attention is surprising, given the sector's impressive expansion and the considerable strain this has placed on local communities (Farmaki et al., 2023).

In P2P accommodation, the most relevant stakeholder groups, such as customers, hosts, and local residents, are interdependent (Shin et al., 2022), but they also often have conflicting interests (Cheng et al., 2022; Mody et al., 2023). Customers can bring economic and sociocultural changes to the local community with their behavior, while local residents' lives are impacted by the presence of P2P accommodation in both positive and negative ways (Caldicott et al., 2020; Jordan & Moore, 2018). P2P accommodation can encourage community engagement and entrepreneurship, generate new jobs and income, and promote the use of underutilized resources (Caldicott et al., 2020; Chuah et al., 2022; Garrod et al., 2023; Mach et al., 2025). At the same time, P2P accommodation is seen as a cause of gentrification (Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2020; Park et al., 2023; Gurran & Phibbs, 2017) and rising property values (Colomb & Moreira de Souza, 2024; Farmaki et al., 2023; Ioannides et al., 2019; Shabrina et al., 2022). It is often perceived as having negative socio-economic and environmental impacts on the local community (Mody et al., 2023; Richards et al., 2019; Stergiou & Farmaki, 2020).

Although there is a wealth of literature on the impact of tourism on local communities, few studies have explored local residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism in relation to all

three pillars of sustainability (Schönherr, 2024). However, local residents are a key stakeholder group when it comes to developing sustainable tourism (Gautam & Bhalla, 2023; Shin et al., 2022). They can share their insights on the impact of P2P accommodation on their neighborhood and destination, as well as their perception of its sustainability. Local residents' support for tourism activities has been found to be crucial for the sustainability and success of tourist destinations (Crotts et al., 2022; Fernandes Neves Barbosa et al., 2024). Therefore, improving our understanding of local residents' views on barriers and enablers for sustainable P2P accommodation has the potential to contribute significantly to shaping the future of destination sustainability (Gong et al., 2019). In this study, the following research question is addressed:

Research question: How do local residents perceive the sustainability of P2P accommodation in their neighborhood and destination?

The study reported here is part of a larger project exploring how various stakeholders perceive sustainability issues in P2P accommodation. The project includes research on customers, hosts, local residents, and policymakers. The research is grounded in stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and highlights the importance of the various stakeholder groups involved in P2P accommodation. It also employs the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Caldicott et al., 2020, Huang et al., 2025) to assess the impact of P2P accommodation. The TBL framework can be used to evaluate the sustainability of a project or system by considering its economic, social, and environmental impacts (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008; Lee et al., 2012; Showkat & Nagina, 2024). Value creation based on sustainability is related to stakeholder theory, which focuses on creating value and benefits for different stakeholders (Freeman, 2010).

The research question regarding local residents' perceptions and experiences of sustainability practices in P2P accommodation is explored using an abductive approach to data analysis, focusing on both semantic and latent meaning within a critical realist experiential framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

2. Methodology of the study

In order to develop a better understanding of the topic, qualitative research was conducted with local residents in Split, Croatia. Split is the second-biggest city in Croatia and a popular tourist destination with a predominant P2P accommodation sector. To gain a better understanding of participants' perceptions and obtain more detailed information, semi-structured, in-depth

interviews were conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Denzin et al., 2023). The semi-structured interview guide for local residents was informed by two frameworks: TBL framework (Elkington, 1998) and Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, Behavior (COM-B) model (Michie et al., 2011; Michie et al., 2014). The interviews were conducted in English and Croatian.

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021a, 2024). The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated. The anonymized transcripts were then analyzed using MaxQDA. Transcribing and translating the data helped us become familiar with it, as did repeated rereading in MaxQDA. This allowed us to take note of interesting points that were raised during the interviews. We then moved on to coding, incorporating semantic and latent approaches. We developed the suggested codes using literature and data as a basis. In the following phase, we generated initial themes by organizing the codes to create potential themes. Codes were divided into parent codes and subcodes. This process involved refining the codes and assigning them to different potential themes. Then, we reviewed and further developed the themes. Finally, we defined and named the themes discussed in this paper. The analysis process was not linear. Rather, each phase was revisited several times, and the data were partially recoded and the codes reorganized into different themes.

The participants were local residents from Split, Croatia. These local residents were recruited using snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2014) through hosts from a related study, who were recruited through purposive sampling. Participants from the local residents' stakeholder group are neighbors of the hosts participating in the study, or neighbors of other hosts in Split, whose everyday lives are affected by (non-)sustainability of P2P accommodation. The final number of participants was 15. The number of participants was determined by information power (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, 2021b; Malterud et al., 2015), which involved evaluating the quality of data obtained from interviews as interviews progressed.

3. Results

Overall, participants raised several concerns about the sustainability issues associated with P2P accommodation. However, they also noted some positive impacts and potential ways to promote the sustainability of P2P accommodation. The main topics were interpreted using the Triple Bottom Line framework. We defined the following themes: Environmental Practices or Lack Thereof, Social Changes in the Community, Economic Possibilities and Inequalities,

Policymakers' Responsibility. The last theme, Policymakers' Responsibility, was highlighted by participants as a possible solution to different difficulties they face due to P2P accommodation.

Theme 1: Environmental Practices or Lack Thereof

The environmental impact of P2P accommodation is perceived by local residents as inconsistent and dependent on the individual behaviors of both hosts and tourists. Some participants noticed a lack of sustainability in P2P accommodation as some hosts do not behave responsibly and that sustainability is not their primary motivation. Participants also mentioned limitations related not to P2P accommodations themselves, but related rather to policymakers. Some suggestions for improving environmental sustainability included the idea that hosts should behave responsibly to set an example, which usually comes from more engaged individuals. Some participants highlighted that tourists are often more environmentally conscious and behave responsibly towards their surroundings, but not always. Split is facing a new generation of tourists who are mostly party-goers and do not care about the environment. One participant expressed these concerns:

LR4: Generally, excessive tourism pollutes the environment. All these tourists bring their rubbish; okay, nowadays many people act responsibly and pick up after themselves, but still, it remains an issue and affects the environment.

Theme 2: Social Changes in the Community

This theme covers various aspects of social sustainability, such as the impact on everyday life, interaction with tourists, tourist behavior and how P2P accommodations encourage tourists to take part in local activities. Participants noted that tourists are likely to engage in local traditions and socialize with locals, and that some local residents are interested in doing so as well. Participants mentioned hosts who encourage social sustainability by offering local activities and sharing traditions. However, they suggested that more hosts should do so. The perception of how the city has changed due to tourism and its effect on their lives and aspects of sustainability was ambivalent but slightly more negative. Issues raised included the city being busy with tourists, the infrastructure being adapted to tourist needs rather than those of locals, and the displacement of locals due to excessive tourism and P2P accommodation, which leads to lower quality of life for the remaining residents. Participants also noticed lack of accessibility options but this is often not due to P2P accommodation hosts, but rather due to the existing infrastructure. As one local resident highlighted:

LR9: You know, so if the town is actually behaving like a tourist place, it's losing their identity, culture, ethnology, it's losing, you know, the local way of life... but it's also a rate on the current infrastructure, you know, electricity, water, and also, you know, garbage infrastructure...

Theme 3: Economic Inequalities and Possibilities

Regarding the economic aspects of P2P accommodation, most participants highlighted negative impacts and inequalities. These include the fact that everything became expensive at the destination, housing issues (including higher property prices, higher rent, and difficulties of finding long-term rentals), and income generated solely for the hosts. Participants see pricing of P2P accommodation as unfair and too expensive. On the other hand, the economic possibilities that were recognized include the contribution to renovating buildings and flats, as well as the fact that P2P accommodation encourages the local economy. Some participants believe that implementing sustainability would add value to both P2P accommodations and the destination. Both participants who see impacts of P2P as more negative and those who see it as more positive, mention income generation, which includes generating extra or main income for hosts. This improves their spending power and spills income into multiple industries, not only tourism. This demonstrates the destination's dependence on the tourism industry, in general, and the P2P accommodation sector in particular, as well as their importance to the destination. One participant highlighted:

LR5: I think private accommodation contributes by directing income straight to the people — hosts — which increases their purchasing power and allows them to reinvest it locally, maybe even at a broader, macro level.

Theme 4: Policymakers' Responsibility

The theme Policymakers' Responsibility includes several points raised by participants. They highlighted the fact that a lot of sustainability depends on the regulatory level, where they mostly identified the need for official regulations and better infrastructure and city planning. Environmental sustainability issues are often connected to the city municipality, and social sustainability is connected to the tourist board and the local level. Participants mentioned that there are some communal improvements, but there is still room for advancement, mostly in terms of waste management. Traffic issues, a lack of parking and noise were identified as issues rooted in a general lack of infrastructure, and P2P accommodation could only worsen the situation. Some participants mentioned the need for taxation to encourage a sustainable approach to

managing P2P rentals, as well as the need for obligatory education as a way to enhance awareness about sustainability and ways to reduce the negative influences of P2P accommodation. Participants viewed the regulation and the responsibility of policymakers as a solution to negative impacts on destinations and affected neighborhoods, as well as economic issues. One participant mentioned:

LR7: I don't think private accommodation itself is the main problem — it's the lack of regulation. If people are allowed to do whatever they want, they will. That's why the state exists — to set boundaries.

4. Implications

Overall, the study shows that local residents perceive the impact of P2P accommodation as both beneficial and problematic, with the negative impacts being more salient. While participants acknowledge the economic contributions of P2P accommodation to the destination, they also highlight social and economic issues that negatively impact their quality of life. These include housing affordability issues, increased prices, and the fact that their city has changed. As stakeholder theory suggests, value creation processes affect the lives of local residents. A better understanding of value co-creation practices and the role of local communities in resource integration can strengthen informed decision-making (Caldicott et al., 2020). This study shows that local residents believe that policymakers could regulate the impact of P2P accommodation on their city by adapting the infrastructure to benefit both locals and tourists, and by addressing the issues raised. Although the commitment of other stakeholders involved in the value creation process towards sustainability is appreciated by the locals, it is perceived as individual and inconsistent.

The study's findings support those of previous research. In order to regulate short-term rentals with regard to their social and economic impacts, policymakers must understand the implications for local residents (Sainaghi, 2020). Such regulations should improve the management of tourism infrastructure, thereby promoting the well-being of local residents and contributing to sustainability (Helgadóttir et al., 2019; Lima et al., 2021). Previous studies also have shown that the impact of P2P accommodation is perceived similarly in other destinations and by local communities, with positive and negative effects being reported (e.g., Cheng et al., 2022). Although this exploratory study with a purposive convenience sample has limitations in terms of generalizability, the interview results provide a deep and rich understanding of the study

context. The study enhances our understanding of the sustainability issues related to P2P accommodation that concern locals the most and offers insights into how environmental, social and economic impacts can be balanced from a local community perspective. Future research involving other stakeholders could shed more light on the issues raised in this study.

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