

1 **12 Home exchanging**

2 A shift in the tourism marketplace

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5 **Introduction**

6 Exchanging homes has become a model of hospitality that represents an alterna-
7 tive to stays in commercial establishments for a steadily increasing number of
8 tourists in the last decade. In a wider sense, though, it could be defined as a whole
9 new concept at the crossroads of alternative tourism and the emerging paradigm
10 of ‘collaborative consumerism’ (Botsman and Rogers 2010) or ‘sharing econo-
11 my’ (Gold 2004), which has been triggered by the evolution of social network-
12 ing and user-produced content in the 2.0 internet generation. It is also a
13 phenomenon that sits well in the emerging research agendas on mobilities (Urry
14 2007) and on tourism as a form of mobilisation of places through the transience
15 and negotiation of different populations.

16 Home exchange is not a new thing altogether: it emerged in the 1950s as a prac-
17 tice between friends and families especially in the UK and the USA, and has been
18 growing significantly in the 1990s thanks to the appearance of the internet (Forno
19 and Garibaldi 2011). However, it has been given little attention in research as an
20 economic and social phenomenon, only to gain recent visibility in the wake of the
21 increasing concern of the academy for the sharing economy. Thus, Forno and
22 Garibaldi (2011) analysed the profiles and motivations of Italian swappers from a
23 marketing perspective, while Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis (2013) proposed a
24 conceptualisation of its economic nature. This chapter is concerned with the geo-
25 graphy of home exchanging. Our main thesis is that this ‘new’ hospitality model is
26 reconfiguring processes of attraction, place-making and tourism practices at various
27 scales. In the first place, it is bound to produce a shift from an industry-centred
28 model of place-making, largely estranged from the host communities and germane
29 to the development of dual tourism spaces *à la* Urry (1990), towards an alternative,
30 unmediated community-centred model which offers greater opportunities for nego-
31 tiation between hosts and guests. Second, the geographies of mobility implied by
32 the house swapping model – by which suppliers and demanders are part of a peer
33 community and all types of places are mobilised in both directions – implies a
34 rupture in traditional core-periphery patterns of tourism.

35 This chapter is organised as follows. The next section proceeds to frame the
36 growing popularity of home exchange practices into the broader wave of alternative

1 hospitality models whose dynamics and organisation are founded on online social
2 networking and global consumerism. It then sets out to discuss, at a conceptual
3 level, the transformations of tourism mobilities brought about by the rise of house
4 swapping, and formulates a number of working hypotheses that we then go on to
5 test empirically. The third section presents the results of a statistical analysis of a
6 large sample of listings in the www.homeexchange.com website, analysing the
7 main trends in supply and demand of house swaps, as well as the principal patterns
8 of ‘matching’ established within the swapping community. The chapter then
9 discusses these results through the introduction of a schematic model that concep-
10 tualises peer-to-peer hospitality, of which house swapping represents the ‘purest’
11 case, as a ‘marketplace’ with shifting dimensions and agencies with respect to
12 commercial tourism. Finally, we conclude by elaborating on the concept of house
13 swapping as a potential catalyst of a new platform for mobility distinctively different
14 from commercial tourism.

15 **Home exchange and network hospitality**

16 The boom of peer-to-peer online platforms such as HomeExchange, CouchSurfing
17 and Airbnb has arguably led alternative models of hospitality to gain some
18 centrality in the debate on current tourism trends. In this sense, it could
19 be claimed that one of the main aspects is related to the opportunities enabled by
20 the emergence of the Web 2.0 in terms of its capacity to disrupt the conventional
21 hospitality supply chain. Drawing on the concept of ‘network sociality’, Germann
22 Molz (2011) introduced the term ‘network hospitality’ to describe the advent of
23 online networking systems for searching and/or offering accommodations, while
24 Steylaerts and O’Dubhghaill (2011) refer to ‘web-based hospitality exchange
25 networks’. Both terms highlight the reticulate nature of the systems enabling the
26 access to or the exchange of accommodation. The network evokes the multiplicity
27 of players and the relations between them as alternatives to the more linear and
28 mediated encounter between demand and supply proposed by the conventional
29 hotel industry.

30 Home swapping web pages represent a community of peers interacting in order
31 to temporarily exchange their houses without any third party mediation, or ‘surro-
32 gate parents’ (travel agents, couriers, hotel managers) that relieve them of responsi-
33 bility and protect participants from the ‘harsh reality’ (Urry 1990: 7) and ‘dangers
34 and uncertainties’ (Minca 1996: 126) entailed by the encounter with otherness.
35 Given the transactional and symmetrical nature of exchange and the uniqueness of
36 the item (the home of the hosts), negotiation is a central issue in home swapping.
37 The simultaneous role of each member as host and guest entails a certain degree of
38 flexibility in the time and (especially) spatial scale of the exchange.

39 If the operability of the Web 2.0 explains the emergence of home exchanging
40 from a technical point of view (facilitating ubiquitous accessibility to digital plat-
41 forms and the interactions between members), it could be argued that the boom of
42 network hospitality is significantly related to motivational issues on the demand
43 side. Thus, besides the practical aspect of saving on the costs of hospitality, the

1 growth of the home-swapping phenomenon can be framed in a general reaction
2 to the homogenising effect of globalisation on mobility landscapes, reflected in
3 particular by the conventional hotel model (Germann Molz 2011; Steylaerts and
4 O'Dubhghaill 2011).

5 For an increasing number of travellers, staying at another member's home is
6 seen as the opportunity for experiencing domesticity 'away from home' and as an
7 alternative to the impersonal and highly predictable settings of commercial
8 facilities. In other words, swapping and other home-stay hospitality models
9 would offer access to allegedly more 'authentic' (Steylaerts and O'Dubhghaill
10 2011) and personalised experiences. Unlike CouchSurfing and (in part) Airbnb,
11 home exchange does not offer the opportunity for offline encounters with the
12 local host member during the stay. Nevertheless, the embedding of the swapping
13 experience in an everyday life environment is (and branded) to provide
14 meaningful interactions with other representatives of the local community, such
15 as next-door neighbours and local commerce, or the materiality of a 'lived
16 environment' such as a home. Home swapping, it could be said, is thus not just
17 about accommodation. Temporary living in a stranger's home could arguably
18 imply a differential cognitive process of 'discovery' of a destination, and thus
19 stimulate patterns of activity of the visitor at destinations that shift away from
20 'mainstream' tourism.

21 The largest swappers' website, HomeExchange, was established in 1992 out of
22 the founders' 'belief in home swap as a comfortable alternative to high priced
23 hotels and typical tourist vacations, and towards a way to experience an area as a
24 local, not a tourists' (HomeExchange.com). It currently hosts more than 65,000
25 listings but has hosted throughout its period of activity more than 230,000. For a
26 moderate annual fee, subscribers can upload information and pictures about their
27 property, mostly first homes but also second homes or sections of a larger property.
28 The information in the listings includes the location, type, size, sleeping capacity
29 and facilities of the houses, plus the main features of the areas or neighbourhoods
30 where they are located. Cars and other transport means (bikes, boats, etc.) may also
31 be offered or swapped together with homes. Members may indicate their list of
32 'wanted' swaps, which can include a specific place and/or period, a more generic
33 indication of a region or city and the season, a type of property; or, as frequently
34 happens, leave all that open to any proposals.

35 Visitors can scroll through large columns of listings in a given region or city
36 (and even at neighbourhood level in big cities) to seek for the best matches, but
37 the advanced search utility of the website also allows the user to filter for the
38 various property features. Most exchanges are simultaneous, but if second homes
39 are involved there is more flexibility with dates. The next section provides details
40 on the swaps that are effectively concluded, but it is intuitive that whoever
41 can offer attractive properties in the most desirable and upscale places gets the
42 most propositions from which to select. Eventually the laws of supply and
43 demand produce a sort of 'evening out' of property levels by which swaps are
44 approximately in the same quality range, although properties in top destinations
45 are more likely to swap with those of a higher standard in less attractive places,

1 and vice versa. This pushes up the supply from popular destinations, as residents
2 there may expect to have relatively high chances to swap on very good
3 conditions.

4 In our research, we wish to test the hypothesis that home exchanging makes a
5 difference in the way that tourists approach and select destinations. We assume
6 that the practice of house swapping involves a switch away from a narrative
7 focusing on the ‘exceptionality’ of tourist places towards one that hints at the
8 attractiveness of mundane landscapes (Maitland 2008) built on negotiation
9 between hosts and guests, of which the trust involved in swapping is possibly the
10 most evident trait. From this point of view we could characterise swappers as a
11 category of tourists that partake in the livelihoods of other groups of citizens –
12 mostly ‘mobile’ cosmopolitan middle classes – with distinct patterns of spatial
13 activity and place performance, as nuanced in Russo and Quagliari Domínguez
14 (2012). We also wish to test another hypothesis, brought in by a geographical
15 perspective on house swapping. Traditional conceptions of the tourist space are
16 built on duality, between cores and peripheries. This duality can be defined in
17 purely spatial terms (Miossec 1976), but also in terms of economic, political and
18 even cultural power (Minca 2007). These perspectives differentiate between a
19 powerful, ‘travelling’ northern and western world and destinations in the southern
20 and the eastern ‘pleasure peripheries’: warm, welcoming, but needful, ‘weak’, and
21 fictionalised though agency: a pattern that has been variously used in postcolonial
22 critiques of global tourism but could easily apply within national systems in Italy,
23 France, US, etc. Contrasting with this ‘asymmetrical’ world, the geographies of
24 mobility supposedly involved in the house-swapping model – by which suppliers
25 and demanders are part of a peer community, and all types of places are mobilised
26 in both senses – may well imply a rupture in such traditional core-periphery
27 patterns, both at the wider global scale and at the finer scale of the spatial organi-
28 sation and specialisation of space within destination regions.

29 **The mobilities of home exchanging**

30 In this section we look into the data on home swaps collected through the analysis
31 and classification of information in 1,041 listings published (in May–June 2012)
32 on the www.homeexchange.com website: 2.8 per cent of the total at the time at
33 which this survey was carried out. This sample has been selected randomly, with
34 the constraint that the breakdown by region of origin (location of the offering
35 party) is similar enough so as to allow statistical inferences by regions based on
36 the sample without the need of adjustment. For every listing, we collected and
37 codified the information included in the sample as shown in Table 12.1.

38 The macro-regions by which we have subdivided the offer and the number of
39 listings overall and in our sample are shown in Table 12.2. Thus, approximately
40 half of the published listings (49.9 per cent) are located in European regions and
41 concentrated to a very large extent in Western Europe. Europe is followed by
42 North America, with 37.2 per cent of the listings (the US West and Pacific region
43 alone counting for 16.4 per cent of the listings), and by Oceania, counting for

Table 12.1 Variables collected and measured from the sampling of listings in www.homeexchange.com

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Data and classes considered</i>
Location of offering party/ property	Coded by regions and macro-regions (as in Table 12.2)
Class of place	City centre; Suburban / resort town; Small city / town / village; Isolated / rural
Class of location	Coast / lake; Inland; Mountain; Island
Available sleeping capacity	1; 2; 3-4; >4
Prior exchanges	N.
Size of offering travelling party	1; 2; 3-4; >4
Auto offered	yes/no
Private pool available	yes/no
Exchange open to groups with children	yes/no
Demanded destination (places) x (x: 1...4)	Region and macro-regions coded as in supply locations
Demanded destination (class) x	Large city / national capital; Heritage city; Seaside resort town / island; Rural; Mountain
Demanded period or season 1	High season / Low Season / Long duration

Table 12.2 Breakdown of listings published in sample and universe by regions and macro-regions.

	<i>Sample</i>		<i>Total homeexchange.com</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Northern Europe	57	5.5%	2,192	5.9%
Eastern Europe	10	1.0%	230	0.6%
South Eastern Europe	8	0.8%	191	0.5%
West-Central Europe	279	26.8%	10,336	27.9%
South Western Europe	158	15.2%	5,562	15.0%
TOTAL EUROPE	512	49.2%	18,511	49.9%
US Northeast	70	6.7%	2,292	6.2%
US Midwest	9	0.9%	333	0.9%
US South	70	6.7%	2,591	7.0%
US West & Pacific	171	16.4%	6,066	16.4%
Canada	70	6.7%	2,516	6.8%
TOTAL NORTH AMERICA	390	37.5%	13,798	37.2%
Central America (insular Caribbean)	10	1.0%	337	0.9%
Central America (non insular)	17	1.6%	647	1.7%
TOTAL CENTRAL AMERICA	27	2.6%	984	2.7%
South America	15	1.4%	573	1.5%
TOTAL SOUTH AMERICA	15	1.4%	573	1.5%
Africa North (Maghreb countries)	4	0.4%	72	0.2%
Rep. South Africa	4	0.4%	167	0.5%
South Eastern insular Africa	4	0.4%	64	0.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa & other African countries	1	0.1%	26	0.1%
TOTAL AFRICA	13	1.3%	329	0.9%

(continued)

Table 12.2 Breakdown of listings published in sample and universe by regions and macro-regions (Continued).

	<i>Sample</i>		<i>Total homeexchange.com</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Middle Orient	4	0.4%	142	0.4%
Indian peninsula	1	0.1%	27	0.1%
Central Asia	1	0.1%	1	0.0%
South Eastern Asia	7	0.7%	282	0.8%
China and neighbouring countries	4	0.4%	133	0.4%
Japan & South Korea	1	0.1%	15	0.0%
TOTAL ASIA	17	1.6%	600	1.6%
Australia	53	5.1%	1,906	5.1%
New Zealand	11	1.1%	335	0.9%
Oceania other countries	2	0.2%	56	0.2%
TOTAL OCEANIA	66	6.3%	2,297	6.2%
TOTAL GENERAL	1,041	100.0%	37,092	100.0%

Source: Our elaboration of information published in www.homeexchange.com, last accessed 15 June 2012.

1 6.2 per cent. A first question that arises from this table is the degree of similarity
 2 of the homeexchange.com ‘supply side’ with the regional structure of the inter-
 3 national tourism system, represented by the actual distribution of commercial
 4 accommodation, as illustrated in Table 12.3.

5 These differences hint at an important first fact in our analysis. Commercial
 6 accommodation is especially available in ‘destination regions’. Rather than a
 7 tautology, this should be seen as the result of a process by which specific regions
 8 go through a process of discovery and infrastructure development, responding
 9 to a market opportunity determined by both demand pressure (with important

Table 12.3 Supply of bed-places in macro-regions of origin.

	<i>Offered bed-places in homeexchange.com sample</i>		<i>Available tourist bed-places as recorded in UNWTO statistics^a</i>	
	<i>Estimated number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Estimated number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Europe	2,443	48.5%	14,762,651	35.9%
North America	1,896	37.7%	9,603,780	23.4%
Central America	132	2.6%	1,903,164	4.6%
South America	78	1.5%	3,908,103	9.5%
Africa	68	1.4%	1,500,525	3.6%
Asia	89	1.8%	8,695,786	21.1%
Oceania	329	6.5%	752,974	1.8%
TOTAL	5,035		41,126,983	

^aMost recent available data. Missing data for 75 countries among which: Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Montenegro, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Macedonia, United Arab Emirates, Tanzania, Vietnam
 Source: Our elaboration of information published in www.homeexchange.com, last accessed 15 June 2012, and UNWTO (2012a).

1 variations determined by agency in the tourist industry) and political and entre-
2 preneurial initiative. Yet in the case of the house-swapping system the parties
3 demanding and offering accommodation are part of the same community and
4 there is no commercial intermediation involved. This means that the localisation
5 of supply represents by and large the spatial distribution of the community of
6 swappers rather than portraying places where people want to go or that are fash-
7 ioned as tourist destinations. This tends to overrepresent the most populated
8 places, and places where the cultural attitude towards swapping is more open,
9 whereas it may underrepresent 'tourist places': unlike accounts of the tourism
10 infrastructure, it is a picture of demand rather than of supply.

11 It can be seen how Europe, North America and Oceania offer a relatively wider
12 supply of swaps than commercial beds, whereas destination regions like Latin
13 America, Africa and Asia are underrepresented in the swapping community in
14 relation to their commercial supply. In this sense, the Asian case is arguably
15 exemplary. In fact, this continent has one-fifth of the global commercial supply,
16 mainly in the two economic powers and regional tourism giants, Japan and China,
17 while their representation in the homeexchange.com network is very limited. The
18 cultural element also seems to matter: newcomers in the tourism market and
19 places and societies where the sense of home and privacy imply a certain 'cultural
20 resistance' (Forno and Garibaldi 2011) to swapping with strangers.

21 A glance at destinations that swappers query in their listings returns another
22 important element, as illustrated in Table 12.4. It appears that the geographical
23 distribution of 'wants' adheres to a higher degree to the distribution of commercial
24 accommodation capacity. Within the community of swappers, the most solicited
25 destinations are Europe, and within Europe especially Western Central Europe
26 including countries like France and the UK, followed by North America, where the
27 lion's share is represented by the Pacific West US and California in particular.
28 These are followed by Oceania (with Australia getting the largest share), while
29 South and Central America, Asia and Africa get only a small share of preferences.

30 A more finely grained analysis addresses the main trends in the associations
31 between destinations (available supply) and wishes (queried destinations).
32 Concretely, for the sake of statistical reliability we focused on the eight countries
33 with the highest numbers of homexchange.com members, namely the United
34 States, France, Canada, Spain, Italy, Australia, the Netherlands and the United
35 Kingdom. We used 2010 outbound data from the UNWTO Compendium of
36 Tourism Statistics (UNWTO 2012a) database for each of these countries
37 expressed in terms of arrivals of residents to countries of destination. The latter
38 were aggregated into our macro-regions and compared with the preferences
39 expressed by swappers in our sample. It is important to note that the UNWTO data
40 registers 'real' trips while the destinations mentioned by the swappers are just
41 preferences for future possible exchanges. We deemed it useful to consider all
42 queried destinations (a maximum of four for each user) and compare these with
43 the actual flows in order to point out at least the most outstanding mismatches.

44 One of these is the significant appeal of Australia among swappers from
45 several countries. This country is frequently mentioned among the destinations

Table 12.4 Solicited destinations in homeexchange.com and inbound tourism movement

	<i>Destinations indicated at least once in desiderata</i>		<i>Total number of indications</i>		<i>UNWTO Tourism movement dataa</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Inbound visitors 2010</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Northern Europe	55	3.17%	64	2.85%	26.538	2.34%
Eastern Europe	17	0.98%	21	0.93%	156.397	13.77%
South Eastern Europe	31	1.79%	32	1.42%	78.918	6.95%
West-central Europe	432	24.93%	619	27.56%	189.884	16.72%
South Western Europe	345	19.91%	522	23.24%	108.819	9.58%
TOTAL EUROPE	880	50.78%	1,258	56.01%	560.556	49.37%
US Northeast	134	7.73%	149	6.63%		
US Midwest	14	0.81%	15	0.67%	59.793	5.27%
US South	70	4.04%	91	4.05%		
US West & Pacific	150	8.66%	207	9.22%		
Canada	70	4.04%	78	3.47%	16.095	1.42%
Non spec. North America	68	3.92%	68	3.03%		0.00%
TOTAL N.AMERICA	506	29.20%	608	27.07%	75.888	6.68%
Central America (insular Caribbean)	36	2.08%	42	1.87%	19.694	1.73%
Central America (inland)	44	2.54%	48	2.14%	30.697	2.70%
TOTAL C.AMERICA	80	4.62%	90	4.01%	50.391	4.44%
South America	49	2.83%	52	2.32%	22.616	1.99%
TOTAL S.AMERICA	49	2.83%	52	2.32%	22.616	1.99%

North Africa (Maghreb countries)	14	0.81%	14	0.62%	32.991	2.91%
Republic of South Africa	16	0.92%	16	0.71%	8.073	0.71%
South Eastern insular Africa	4	0.23%	4	0.18%	1.74	0.15%
Sub-Saharan Africa & other African countries	3	0.17%	3	0.13%	22.354	1.97%
TOTAL AFRICA	37	2.14%	37	1.65%	65.158	5.74%
Middle Orient	8	0.46%	10	0.45%	42.046	3.70%
Indian peninsula	6	0.35%	6	0.27%	8.707	0.77%
Central Asia	–	0.00%	–	0.00%	7.62	0.67%
South Eastern Asia	30	1.73%	39	1.74%	73.203	6.45%
China and neighbouring countries	9	0.52%	9	0.40%	200.323	17.64%
Japan & South Korea	20	1.15%	20	0.89%	17.41	1.53%
TOTAL ASIA	73	4.21%	84	3.74%	349.309	30.76%
Australia	67	3.87%	75	3.34%	5.885	0.52%
New Zealand	31	1.79%	31	1.38%	2.512	0.22%
Oceania other countries	10	0.58%	11	0.49%	3.102	0.27%
TOTAL OCEANIA	108	6.23%	117	5.21%	11.499	1.01%
TOTAL number of indications	1,733	88.2%	2,246	90.7%	1,135,416	
Open to any destinations	231	11.8%	231	9.3%		

^aMost recent available data. Missing data for 27 countries

Source: Own elaboration of data from sampling of listings in homeexchange.com and UNWTO, 2012b.

1 sought by members from the Netherlands (15 per cent), Canada (12 per cent),
2 United States (7.4 per cent) and United Kingdom (7.4 per cent); the actual arrivals
3 of residents from these countries to Australia, however, represents respectively
4 0.18 per cent, 0.4 per cent, 0.63 per cent and 1.2 per cent of the total outbound
5 trips. The United States and Canada also score high in swappers' queries, with a
6 significant increase over the destinations chosen by Europeans in commercial
7 tourism. For instance, more than one-third of the users from France (38.6 per cent),
8 Italy (35.0 per cent) and Spain (38.1 per cent) express an interest for swapping in
9 the US, while just a little over the 3 per cent of the outbound trips from these
10 countries have the US as destination. Instead, 7.4 per cent of the British residents
11 travelled there in 2010, while more than half of the swappers from the UK
12 expressed a wish for exchanging homes with the US. About a half of users from
13 the US (45.9 per cent), Canada (53.4 per cent) and Australia (50.0 per cent) quote
14 at least one destination belonging to the Central-West European macro-region, but
15 these shares respectively shrink to 38.9 per cent, 34.5 per cent and 27.3 per cent
16 of users in relation to queries for swaps in the South-Western European region.

17 That does not necessarily mean that closer destinations are neglected. For instance,
18 the Central-Western and the South-Western European macro-regions are rather
19 popular among European swappers. As these regions record the highest demand
20 among the whole swapping community, this trend is likely to be influenced more
21 by the attractiveness of the region itself than by geographical proximity.
22 Nevertheless, the comparison of the two indicators considered in this analysis
23 hints at a higher significance of three main intercontinental flow axes in home
24 exchanging, namely those connecting Central-Western and South-Western
25 Europe with North America and Australia, and those between the latter regions,
26 while popular but closer destinations in the rest of the Mediterranean or in Asia
27 are relatively under-considered. Figures 12.1 and 12.2 compare graphically the
28 main (potential) flows of swappers and those related with all the outbound tour-
29 ists from two countries concentrating the highest number of users and represent-
30 ing two specific cultural landscapes of the Western world: the US (Figure 12.1)
31 and France (Figure 12.2).

32 To refine the analysis of the patterns of 'matching' we have considered the
33 demand for a given location showcased in a listing in terms of the number of
34 exchanges concluded in the past. *A priori*, this indicator would depend upon the
35 quality characteristics of the property (both in terms of its features and amenities
36 and in terms of location in a specific destination) and upon the relative 'scarcity'
37 of properties on offer with those same characteristics. All other things being
38 equal, however, it would proxy the 'realised attractiveness' of places (as opposed
39 to an ideal, *a priori* attractiveness as expressed by users' declared preferences
40 with respect to destinations). The results confirm the strength of the main destina-
41 tions detected through the analysis of the swappers' preferences, although some
42 differences concerning their ranking can be singled out. Western-Central Europe
43 confirms its primacy: indeed, this is the area where the largest number of swaps
44 took place (27 per cent of all prior exchanges considered). It is followed by
45 South-Western Europe (16.3 per cent) and the West-Pacific area of the United

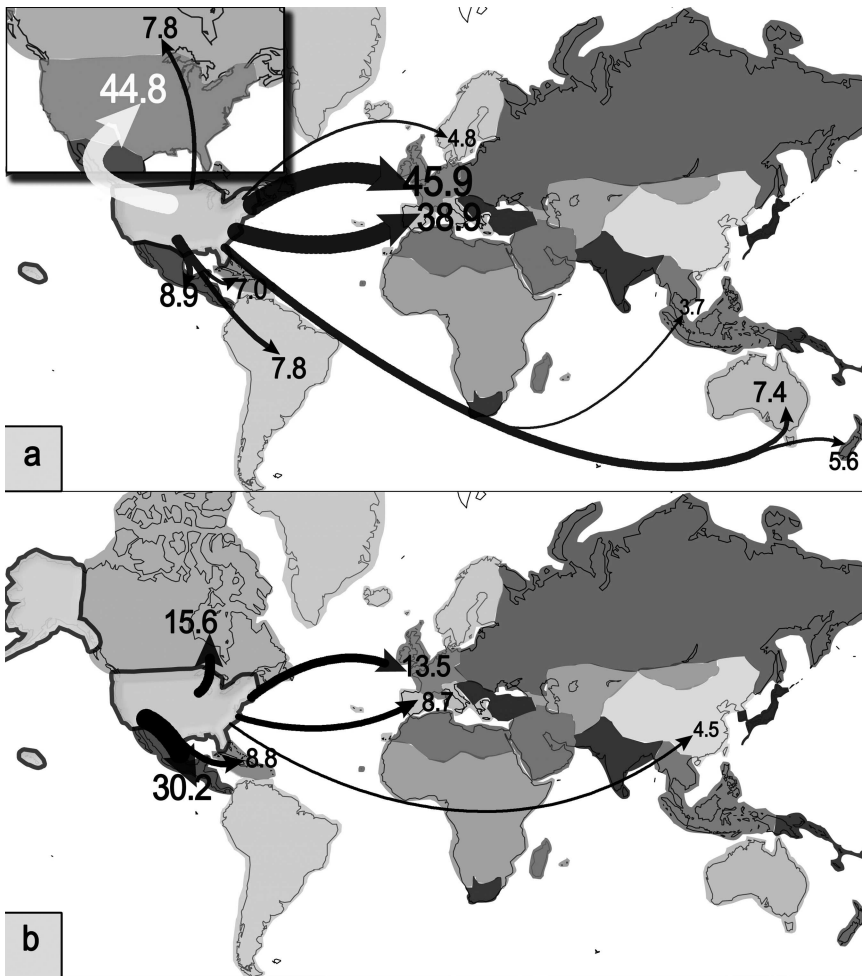


Figure 12.1 Main flow patterns by share of visitors to macro-regions of destination of (a) house swappers from the US (declared preferences) and (b) registered outbound tourists from the US

Source: Own elaboration of data from sampling of listings in homeexchange.com (retrieved 15 June 2012) and UNWTO (2012a)

- 1 States (10.8 per cent). After that, the North-Eastern US region – the fourth area
- 2 most frequently mentioned among the preferred destinations – is surpassed, with
- 3 4.2 per cent of the swaps concluded by the Southern US region (9.6 per cent),
- 4 Oceania (7.2 per cent), Northern Europe (5.4 per cent) and Canada (4.3 per cent).
- 5 At the country level, the United States (26.2 per cent) and France (18.2 per
- 6 cent) confirm their leadership as tourism destinations (respectively second and

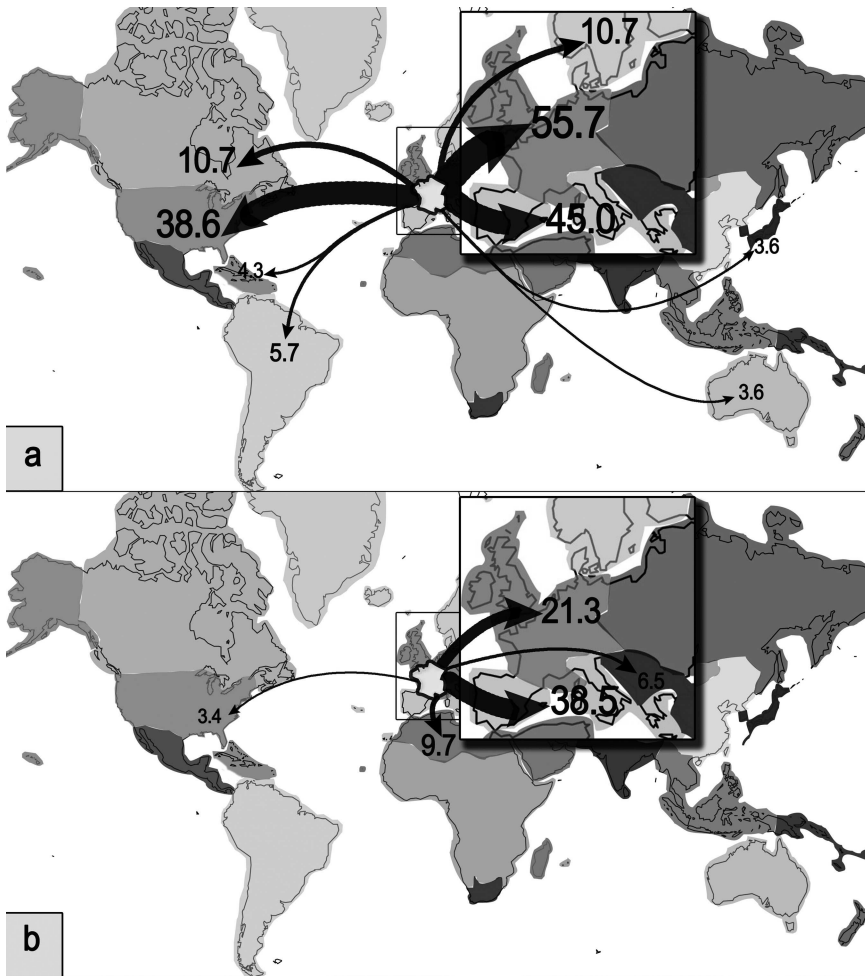


Figure 12.2 Main flow patterns by share of tourists to macro-regions of destination of (a) house swappers from France (declared preferences) and (b) registered outbound tourists from France

Source: Own elaboration of data from sampling of listings in homeexchange.com (retrieved 15 June 2012) and UNWTO (2012a).

1 first in world destinations in terms of international arrivals as noted by the
 2 UNWTO 2012a). Particularly significant is the popularity of Australia where 1 in
 3 20 exchanges (5.2 per cent) takes place, while the country is not even among the
 4 top 40 destinations according to the UNWTO international arrivals ranking.
 5 Instead, China, third in that ranking, confirms its marginal role in the swapping
 6 community. Besides, we have seen that if the data from UNWTO shows in

1 several cases higher travel rates to closer destinations, as is to be expected, the
2 analysis of preferred swapping destinations highlights a comparatively high
3 demand for faraway destinations. This is not necessarily an outstanding fact in
4 tourism: people long for exotic and iconic places, but not everybody has the
5 resources or the time to actually travel there. The significant fact is that home
6 exchanging, to some degree, allows people to realise their dreams, because of the
7 saving in accommodation costs that it implies. As a matter of fact, being fully
8 aware that expressing a desire for a destination does not necessarily turn into a
9 real trip, we can state that intercontinental destinations are relatively more valued
10 among the specific community of swappers than the actual distribution of
11 'commercial' trips may suggest, and among these, some clear origin-destination
12 patterns emerge.

13 There are various possible explanations to this. One might be the cultural prox-
14 imity and flows that relate countries like France and UK with their overseas
15 territories or former colonies, which to some extent the home exchange system
16 facilitates, establishing a dialogue between parties who may share a common
17 linguistic or cultural domain. Other reasons (especially for the stratification of
18 origin-destination flows) may relate to the characteristics of the exchanges that
19 are proposed. While the features of properties offered and of the offering party do
20 not vary sensibly across the sample, cross-analysing origins with the type and
21 location of places offered yields some useful insights. Hence, unsurprisingly, the
22 large majority of properties on offer are located in metropolitan areas (65 per cent
23 of the sample). A very similar concentration is obvious looking at demand data
24 in terms of prior exchanges (64.9 per cent). Within macro-regions, 'urban' prop-
25 erties are more frequent in Western and Northern Europe, as well as in the US
26 North-East and Canada, whereas South-Eastern Europe, the US South and Pacific
27 West are more frequently featuring coastal and suburban developments.

28 Interesting matches in flows can be observed between types of places exchanged
29 (offered and requested). In this case we do not have to pay too much attention to
30 the merely 'potential' nature of desiderata, as the data indicates a general trend: if
31 somebody wants to stay in a seaside resort and cannot find a perfect match in terms
32 of location, they are likely to conclude a swap in a similar type of destination
33 elsewhere. Thus, we note that swappers offering (and mostly residing in) central
34 city locations are consistently (also in a statistical sense, with a Pearson test indi-
35 cating a 1 per cent significance value) looking for other urban destinations,
36 whether in large urban areas, national capitals or heritage cities. Offers in suburban
37 communities and resort destinations are more likely to seek exchanges in coastal
38 and island resorts. Similarly, swappers offering rural, island or isolated settings are
39 more likely to be looking for similarly non-urban locations. This, again, is not a
40 banal finding. Traditional sociological theory indicates that the need or the desire
41 to 'escape' represents a central push factor for holidaying (Edensor 2001; Cohen
42 2010) also in term of locations chosen as destinations. A 'break in the routine' for
43 urbanites means vacation in coastal resorts or rural settings, whereas people with
44 properties in such settings are expected to long for an experience of life in the city.

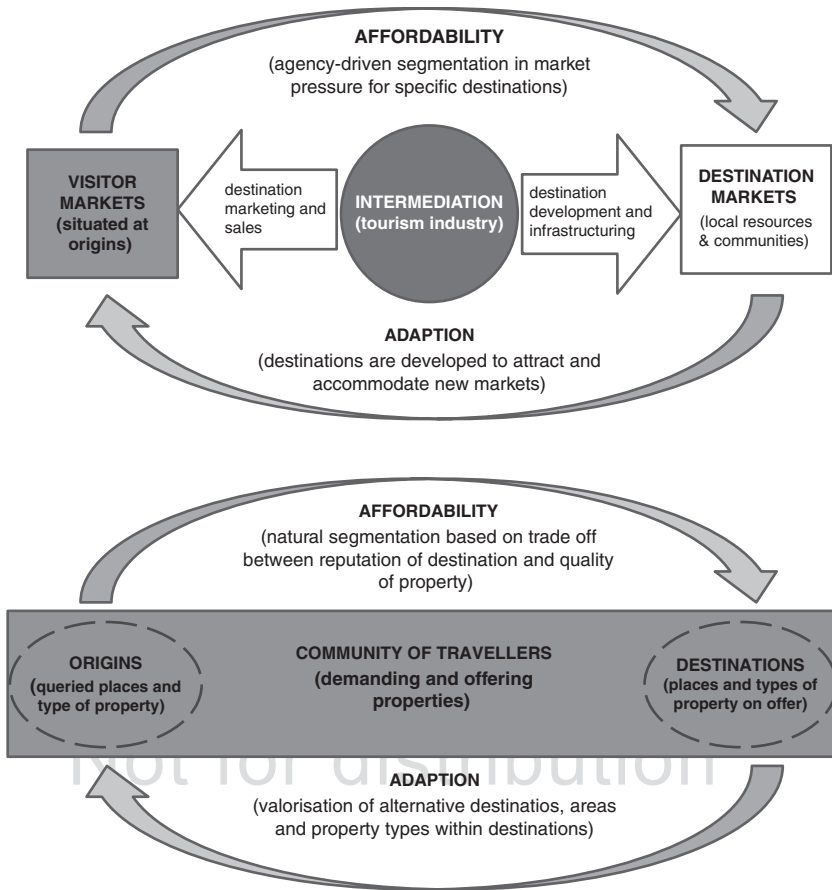


Figure 12.3 Alternative models of the home exchange marketplace and its dynamics: commercial tourism (above) and home exchanges (below)

- 1 In our community of home exchangers, however, experiences of place and tourism
- 2 cultures seem to be pushing in the opposite direction.
- 3 We can make sense of these results when we nuance how the home exchange
- 4 ‘marketplace’ actually works, based on previous conceptual knowledge on tour-
- 5 ism drivers and effects, but also on the most relevant insights from this research,
- 6 as illustrated in this section. We consider both the structure – the characterising
- 7 elements that constitute demand and supply and their transactional logics and
- 8 channels – and the evolutionary dynamics of the marketplace: that is, how, faced
- 9 with a constant evolution of demand and supply (in terms of socio-demographic
- 10 trends, technology, etc.), the agencies of tourism develop new opportunities for
- 11 such matching. Thus commercial tourism (see Figure 12.3) abides to a
- 12 ‘mainstream’ model by which the key components of the marketplace are

1 demand – constituted of pools of actual or potential travellers – and supply, which
2 can be understood either in terms of places to be visited or in terms of the infra-
3 structure that makes them an actual destination. The tourism industry intermedi-
4 ates this marketplace, first by ensuring that places are equipped to receive tourists
5 on profitable conditions, and second by developing distribution chains that
6 connect demand markets and supply. However, demand and supply structures
7 shift continuously. The agency of the tourism industry fosters those changes to
8 unearth new opportunities for business. It does so through marketing destinations
9 in ways that select markets according to their capacity to pay, the result of which
10 is that more ‘elitist’ destinations are offered to markets that can afford those
11 higher costs. On the other side, the industry ‘makes space’ for increasing numbers
12 of visitors through physical and symbolic development of incumbent and novel
13 spaces which are fashioned up as tourist destinations. Thus, destination develop-
14 ment is the result of a constant dynamic adaptation between affordabilities and
15 growth; the ‘soft’ agency of marketing and the ‘hard’ agency of construction
16 ensure that opportunities for tourism are always available and commercialised to
17 all existing and potential demand markets.

18 The marketplace of home exchanges – the purest model of peer-to-peer
19 hospitality – functions in an altogether different way, illustrated in the lower part
20 of Figure 12.3. First, its structure is constrained by community. There is no
21 ‘supply’ and ‘demand’, or at least they cannot be ontologically separated: a party
22 can be a supplier only if it is simultaneously a customer. Moreover, ‘demand’ and
23 ‘supply’ agents cannot be separated from the places in which they live – there is
24 only a degree of flexibility in cases where second homes are exchanged. Thus we
25 have, ontologically, only a separation between places offered for swaps and places
26 that accept swaps. The agents that produce a matching and a transaction are,
27 however, remarkably different, because such a transaction is not of an economic
28 nature – it does not become ‘business’. When destinations achieve high occu-
29 pancy rates for the properties offered there, there is no new development: markets
30 get segmented and transactions regulated on the base of property qualities – either
31 inherent or contextual ones – but also, as we have seen in our study, on the basis
32 of elements of cultural proximity between exchanging parties. On the other side,
33 adaptation does not mean new development but rather that new places are popu-
34 larised as ‘alternative’ locations – both destination regions and sites that can offer
35 attractive features to exchangers (profiled above as ‘expert’ cultural explorers)
36 and new places within destinations that provide the type of properties and ameni-
37 ties sought by such collectives, which are typically residential.

38 These two forces mean that home exchange develops as a force that remaps
39 tourist places, from the centre to the periphery, in all senses. As we have seen in
40 our research, what is now substantially a ‘Western affair’ is bound to mobilise
41 cosmopolitan middle classes across the globe in a condition of parity: the most
42 popular places can be increasingly visited only if the ‘periphery’ is also visited,
43 both locally and globally. The impacts of home exchanging at destinations have
44 been explored by Russo and Quagliari Domínguez (2014), exclusively in terms
45 of the activation of alternative areas within two emblematic tourist cities

1 (Barcelona and Paris). Further research is needed to make sense of such shifts
2 also in relation to other network hospitality models (Airbnb, CouchSurfing, etc.).

3 **Conclusion**

4 In this chapter, we have presented a glimpse of an alternative tourism model that
5 could be characterised as a ‘dream world’, where networking and collaborative
6 consumption are strongly reducing the agency of mediation, and tourism devel-
7 opment is almost exclusively driven by existing opportunities and untradeables.
8 The main results of our analysis can be summarised in the following points. The
9 users’ location and the main flow patterns identified suggest that the swapping
10 phenomenon is very much a ‘Western affair’, for the time being. Cultural aspects
11 seem to matter in this regard, in terms of the conception of home and the degree
12 of tourism ‘maturity’. At the same time, Western countries appear more suitable
13 and accessible – for Western swappers at least – for experiencing individually a
14 destination without the mediation support and the ‘safety net’ of the tourism
15 industry; in other words, ‘like a local’. In this regard, it could be argued that
16 Western societies have been more deeply affected by the spread of global patterns
17 of consumption and standardised everyday spaces and landscapes. Therefore, it
18 seems that this process, described by some as McDonaldisation (Ritzer 1993),
19 produces both the premises and the conditions for home swapping. On the one
20 hand, it would push experienced tourists to claim for non-standardised accom-
21 modation and more personalised experience of the territory; on the other hand,
22 increasing numbers of travellers seem able and willing to approach these destina-
23 tions autonomously. This is thanks to the proliferation of familiar ‘moorings’
24 (Hannam *et al.* 2006) that make destinations – even out of tourist precincts –
25 ‘legible’ to a global audience and reduces the perceived riskiness and unpredict-
26 ability of the territory.

27 Another point we discussed based on the available data is that property avail-
28 ability to some extent ‘forces’ swappers towards regions with a high concentra-
29 tion of other swappers, so origin–destination flows take place mostly within the
30 Western world. Moreover, the comparative analysis of users’ preferences in
31 terms of destinations and outbound tourism for the main countries has shown that
32 in general swappers are much more inclined to long-range travel as compared to
33 the global demand. Particularly significant are the flows between Western Europe
34 and North America and from these two macro-regions to Australia and New
35 Zealand: expensive trips, especially for large travelling parties; but economising
36 on accommodation costs can make such travel much more affordable.

37 Our final remarks regard the degree of ‘desirability’ of home exchanges over
38 commercial tourism, and the possible insights on the foreseeable evolution of
39 tourism models in the future. In our study we suggested that home exchanges may
40 be activating alternative places and area types as tourist spaces, which is one of
41 the mantras of tourism policy and planning in mature tourist destinations.
42 Moreover, the ‘non-intermediated’ nature of home exchanges is certainly
43 welcome to the extent that it reduces the agency of commercial actors and capital

1 in general in the restructuring of places, their meanings and collective identities.
 2 Authors who have studied the construction of tourist places (for instance, Judd
 3 and Fainstein 1999; Gill 2000) claim that this process of ‘harmonisation’ is not
 4 without its consequences for destinations, both in terms of new opportunities for –
 5 and unwanted effects on – socio-economic development, and in terms of how
 6 change makes places more or less attractive at subsequent stages of development,
 7 as in life-cycle theories (Agarwal 2002). It may then be argued that in a ‘home-
 8 exchanging world’ that does not involve the industrial intervention of the tourism
 9 industry in filling this need gap, places could be more resilient to the externalities
 10 and impacts provoked by tourism development.

11 The non-monetary nature of house-swapping ‘transactions’, indeed, is a central
 12 point of this argument. The absence of profit excludes the intervention of commer-
 13 cial actors and the processes of ‘standardisation’ of the urban landscape that gener-
 14 ally drive large-scale operations – thus its alleged loss of authenticity (see Ponzini
 15 *et al.* 2016). It must be noted that the emergence of alternative strategies of tourism
 16 development and new actors are not alien to such processes, as demonstrated in
 17 relation to the operation of Airbnb by Arias Sans and Quagliari Domínguez (2016).
 18 However, in the case of a ‘pure’ peer-to-peer model, it is not likely that house
 19 swaps alone fulfil the demand to visit specific places. Thus to some extent the
 20 mainstream and the alternative hospitality systems should be seen as complemen-
 21 tary, with the latter possibly leading to a slower-paced and perhaps more sustain-
 22 able process of place development, more genuinely ‘negotiated’ between
 23 communities. In the future, we may expect the home-exchanging system to keep
 24 growing, but also to become more specialised in terms of involving specific audi-
 25 ences and their peculiar needs, for instance on a regional or cultural basis.

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