Home-sharing as transnational moorings: Insights from Barcelona

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Abstract

Barcelona, one of the main destinations for Airbnb users, has turned into one of the main stages for the now global debate around short-term rentals and their impacts on resident communities. Criticism has mostly focused on the conversion of housing into conventional tourist apartments while less attention has been paid to the problematization of short-term rentals in primary residences. Important questions thus arise as to whether these allegedly genuine forms of home-sharing should be 'formalised' at all through a regulation, and which type of controls should be applied. Our research helps to excavate this issue, shedding further light on the different logics and practices behind the development of home-sharing, and discusses the limitations of a regulation which is being introduced. To this end, it offers an in-depth analysis of the home-sharing supply in Barcelona, tackling its social and spatial logics, which is framed in the broader debate on processes of social change affecting inner cities. It then focuses on el Raval, one of Barcelona's core neighbourhoods where home-sharing practices have become more diffused, revealing how these practices are strongly correlated with high residential mobility and the presence of a single-dweller childless European resident population. Finally, we argue that home-sharing becomes an equally problematic agency of conversion of housing into a mooring for mobile communities, further contributing to potential gentrification and the displacement of residents.

Keywords: short-term rentals; Airbnb; home-sharing regulations; host community; Barcelona; el Raval; transnational mobilities

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Introduction

It is today widely acknowledged that short-term tourism rentals introduce a fundamental distortion in the real estate market and have significant effects on housing affordability and ultimately on the social ecology of the city (Barron et al. 2017). In a previous article, Arias-Sans & Quaglieri-Domínguez (2016) provided an analysis of the spatial and socioeconomic features of Barcelona's Airbnb supply that made it possible to debunk the alleged virtuosity of the model, as did Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015). Like the cases of Berlin (Novy 2017; Füller & Michel 2014), Los Angeles (Dayne 2016), New York (Inside Airbnb 2017; Wachsmuth & Weisler 2017), Lisbon (Cocola-Gant & Gago 2019), Madrid (Ardura Urquiaga et al. 2020); Dublin (Clancy 2020), Venice (Salerno & Russo 2020) and many other cities, homes for sale or rent at affordable conditions in Barcelona seem to have vanished from the market under the pressure of the rise of short-term rentals (henceforth: STR) (Garcia-López et al. 2020), producing new patterns of socio-spatial exclusion and reinforcing existing ones (Cocola-Gant 2016).

These works hint at the 'airbnbzation' (Richards 2014) of cities like Barcelona as an emerging dimension of the restructuring of hospitality (Yrigoy 2016) with specific characteristics which seem to heighten its disruptive nature in relation to resident communities, and guarantee the reproduction of social gaps. As asset-light intermediation companies select their 'hosts' and affirm hegemonic imaginaries and representations of place, STR may in the end produce a distinct social ecology of the city (Katsinas 2019). In this sense, the tourismification of housing (Marcuse & Madden 2016), cashed in on with almost zero risk by footloose digital intermediaries, has dramatically reinforced the fundamental boundary between rentiers (in most cases, specific groups therein who are 'enabled', economically as multi-proprietors, to set a professionalized service) and an increasingly marginalised autochthonous, dependent and place-bound 'tenant class' whose only chance to be connected to this new regime of accumulation is through provision of their casual self-exploitative labour (Stabrowski 2017; Dudás et al. 2017).

Hence, platforms hold a fundamental power of agency. One of the founding myths of the so-called platform economy is that of disintermediation, favouring the direct relationship between peers through digital infrastructure. Airbnb, in particular, has actively promoted this narrative, representing itself as a mere facilitator matching demand and supply. However, research has pointed out how sophisticated computational systems allow platforms to give prominence to 'marketable' content, thus governing possible interactions in the best interest of the intermediary company (Bialski 2016). As noted by Celata et al. (2020), this 'algorithmic mediation' is clearly not neutral, and it is Airbnb

itself that confirms this when it informs users that its search ranking algorithm is aimed 'to help guests find the perfect listing for their trip" (www.airbnb.com). As Langley & Leyshon (2016, 11) indicate, we are facing a "distinct mode of socio-technical intermediary and business arrangement that is incorporated into wider processes of capitalisation".

The development of an 'Airbnb ecosystem' has been further enriched by the rise of a wide range of spin-off activities, among them property management, booking sites and cleaning services, that hint at the progressive professionalisation of the value chain of STR beyond mere p2p intermediation (Sigala 2018; Cocola-Gant et al. 2021a; Gil & Sequera 2021). It must also be noted that the 'mobilisation' of the STR marketplace through micro-entrepreneurialism has inevitably attracted the attention of institutional investors and real estate companies, who buy and transform entire buildings and apartments with the sole purpose of renting them out on these networks (Sigala & Dolnicar 2017) and actively lobby for more favourable regulations (Yates 2021) at the local level (Müller et al., 2021) but also with international bodies like the European Commission (Henley 2018). Thus, the financialisation of urban assets is easily scaled up (Robin & Brill 2018; Cocola-Gant & Gago 2019), while counting on a far larger stock of resources and looser regulations than in the case of hotels. As summarised by Dredge et al.: "*The growth of the collaborative economy tourism accommodation sector at a global level intersects with local policy issues that have evolved over time and are embedded in local institutional structures, cultures and practices at different policy scales and within different horizontal sectors. This is a perfect storm - a coalescence of policy issues at vertical and horizontal scales"* (2016, 18).

Critical studies on the rise of STR and their related social and economic effects such as the accumulation-by-financialization, the impact on housing prices and affordability, and the intensification of already existing gentrification processes, have been focusing empirically on the supply of whole dwellings, or, more specifically, on hosts controlling multiple listings, who concentrate the majority of the revenue generated in platform hospitality (Cocola-Gant et al. 2021b; Morales Pérez et al. 2020). However, research on the impacts and the business logics of home-sharing, namely the renting out of a part of a permanent residence, is comparatively scant. Yet this dimension of platform hospitality is quite relevant. Firstly, because – as will be discussed in this paper – in cities like Barcelona that have implemented a strong regulation of apartment rentals, this type of offer eluding existing regulations is on the rise. Secondly, because of its discursive characterisation: in the face of mounting critiques to the STR model, platform companies and their supporters (the so-called "Home-sharing clubs") are eager to claim that home-sharing represents a precious source of income that allows families to actually resist gentrification pressures and maintain tenancy and house ownership, especially in contexts where downturns like the global financial crisis of 2007 have

greatly curtailed the economic conditions of significant shares of the working and middle classes (Stabrowski 2017; Semi & Tonetta 2020). Although platforms such as Airbnb have progressively abandoned the sharing economy rhetoric without ever really defining exactly what they meant by home-sharing, room rentals have been set apart from other rental practices (Interian 2016; Ferreri & Sanyal 2018) in a way that takes for granted their supposedly virtuous effects in letting people 'make ends meet' (Goyette 2021). In this sense, the case of Barcelona is a very interesting one, as public debate has been intense not just in relation to the impacts and the regulation of whole apartments (Lambea Llop 2017; Aguilera et al. 2021), but also, more recently, to 'home-sharing', which has become the object of a new regulation (a 2020 amendment of the Catalan Tourism Law). Hence, as a counterpoint to the now commonly understood disruptive effects of the loosely regulated STR of whole apartments, the configuration of host communities, spatial logics, and impacts of room rentals in primary residences need to be the object of further scrutiny.

This paper thus focuses on social and spatial characteristics of the short-term rental of rooms in 'shared' homes in Barcelona, with the objective of bringing to the fore the main differences between 'home-sharing' and professionalised STR supply. At the same time, we hope to contribute to the debate on the controversy surrounding the regularisation of home-sharing as an economic activity, to be implemented through the same planning device that this city already uses to regulate all kinds of tourist accommodation, including STR.

The paper is organised as follows: in the next section we introduce the case of Barcelona, explore the main dimensions of home-sharing and its geography through an elaboration of data on properties and related hosts in Airbnb provided by the 'Inside Airbnb' platform[4], and present a brief state of the art on the extant regulatory framework. The third section develops a qualitative analysis of the publicly available information on the Airbnb website related to a sample of 363 hosts in the neighbourhood of el Raval, characterised as an emblematic area of concentration of this type of supply, and contrasting the characteristics of this community of hosts with that of the registered residents of the area. Based on these insights, the last section aims to contribute to the open discussion about the need for regulating and limiting home-sharing activities, within the broader dialogue on the preservation of the right to housing in the face of tourismification trends in the city.

The 'airbnbzation' of Barcelona and the newest gentrification battlefront

[4] The data set is sourced from the information publicly available on the Airbnb website on 8th December 2016 and is available at http://insideairbnb.com/get-the-data.html.

The city of Barcelona has been widely concerned with the explosion of holiday apartment rentals as an accommodation modality, one of the most significant new trends in travel cultures and a key marketplace reconfiguration of tourism in the information age. The penetration of apartment rentals is such that Barcelona has become one of the main destinations featured in the Airbnb platform by dimension of the supply.

In a city where, in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2007, thousands of families have lost their homes due to the impossibility of paying the rent or the mortgage (around 14,000 between 2013 and 2017 only) (Russo & Scarnato 2018), it is unsurprising that sizeable sectors of the community have bought into the opportunity to make an extra income engaging in rental practices which eschew (or plainly infringe) regulations (Lambea Llop 2017). A few years later, however, in a context of the persistent rise of long-term rents (a 30% increase of prices per m^2 between 2013 and 2017 all over the city), grassroots movements and resident associations have triggered a vivid public debate, pointing to the proliferation of STRs as a major driver of housing unaffordability and the withdrawal of a large number of homes for rent from the residential market, feeding a new stage of housing crisis. The societal demand to tame these trends has been met by the city council with new regulatory instruments (Arias-Sans & Quaglieri 2016; Russo & Scarnato 2018; Aguilera et al. 2021). As some authors have evidenced, the expansion of STR in recent years has had a direct impact on the rise of transaction prices and rental rises in Barcelona, more pronounced in area of high concentration of this type of offer (Garcia-López et al. 2020), which de facto replicates the spatial logic of the conventional hotel supply (Gutiérrez et al. 2017). However, besides the direct impacts on the housing market, research has brough to the fore other dimensions of the relationship between STR and the intensification of gentrification processes in Barcelona related with tourism activity (Cocola-Gant 2016; Arias-Sans 2018), with a notable role of transnational mobile populations as key agents in this process (Füller & Michel 2014; Cocola-Gant & López-Gay 2020; López-Gay et al. 2021).

The regulations implemented by the city council in 2016 consisted of a series of measures to contain the number of STRs, and to detect and penalise the rental of unlicensed apartments as an illegal activity (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2016; 2017a). In this regard, it must be noted that Catalan Tourism Law considers STRs as *Dwellings for tourist use* (in Catalan, *Habitatges d'Ús Turístic* - HUT). Said law circumscribes this status to whole apartments, fully furnished, rented for periods of less than 31 days. Thus, the STR commercialised by platforms such as Airbnb had to conform to this formal type of accommodation to be considered legal listings, subject to both the requirement of a licence according to the planning instruments in force at municipal level, and the obligation to display the license number in the offer published on the platform. Under this legal framework, Barcelona set up different regulatory instruments affecting the legal accommodation supply. Following some partial

zoning plans established in 2005 and revised in 2010 and 2013, which capped new hotels and HUT in Ciutat Vella (the historical centre district), the city council set up a moratorium for new HUT licences in 2014, with the purpose of designing a new zoning plan for HUT all over the city. However, with the change of municipal government in 2015, a new moratorium on all kinds of accommodation was introduced anticipating implementation of a new regulatory instrument called the 'Special Plan for Tourist Accommodation' (PEUAT), approved in 2017. Despite strong opposition from hoteliers, tourist rentiers associations, platforms and Home-sharing clubs, the PEUAT limited the concession of licences for any type of accommodation facilities in the central districts, allowing a restricted number for hotels and hostels in peripheral neighbourhoods, and, most importantly, capping the number of HUT licences to less than 10,000—the amount existing at the moment of the moratorium's implementation in October 2014. Realising that a large amount of the stock on offer in vacation rental platforms did not hold such licences, the city council also intensified the enforcement of controls and sanctions on illegal rentals for entire apartments without licence, with almost 3,000 sanctioning proceedings carried out between July 2016 and 2017 (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2017b). A long legal standstill eventually resulted in Airbnb presumably following other platforms and withdrawing from its portal the great majority of unlicensed entire apartments.

Yet, every law contains a loophole. While the STR of whole apartments, regardless of whether the dwelling was a primary residence or not, was regulated by the aforementioned Tourism Catalan Law and by planning instruments at the municipal level, this regulation did not hold for the rental of rooms in the habitual residence of the owner. Since the beginning of the Airbnb hype, the offer of rooms in 'shared' homes was remarkably high in Barcelona (some 40% of the bed places offered in Airbnb in 2015), signalling the existence of an abnormally large stock of household situations with a surplus availability of rooms. The absence of regulations on short-term room rentals in Catalonia in the face of the tightened crunch on the rental of whole apartments has paradoxically given impulse to the rentals of rooms in 'shared' homes. In 2019, the ads for rooms became a majority among listings (53%). One can only speculate that a substantial part of the listings of the whole apartments withdrawn have since been quartered and rented out as rooms. The legal vacuum for home-sharing practices meant that both the characteristics of this supply and the liability of the owners were undetermined. It was neither recognized as a formal typology of lodging, nor prosecuted as illegal, despite the growth of the number of listings on different platforms. Faced with this, and under a new pressure to regulate this typology, the Regional Government approved in August 2020 a new Tourism Decree recognising 'home-sharing' as an accommodation typology subject to regulations. After five years working with several drafts and an internal dispute among the two coalition parties of the Catalan government, the Decree considers 'home-sharing' (in Catalan *llars compartides*) as the rental

of no more than two rooms for a maximum period of 31 days in primary residences requiring the presence of the permanent dweller (either the owner or the tenant with the explicit permission of the landlord). We are aware that the concept of home-sharing is quite ambiguous and could refer to highly contextualised practices, to the point that different cities such as Amsterdam, Berlin or Paris have different conceptions and regulations of the partial rental of a first residence (see Colomb and Moreria da Souza 2021, for a discussion). In the case of Barcelona, however, the question of whether a whole apartment is a permanent residence or not is not binding, because entire apartments for rent are regulated through the legal figure of HUT. Yet, the approval of the Decree is not free from controversy either, as will be discussed later, since it has to be transposed at the municipal level and adapted to extant planning regulations. The analysis of the home-sharing offer in the following section thus aims to clarify the scenario before the approval of the regulatory Decree and its ties with the broader socioeconomic and socio-spatial geography of Barcelona.

Home-sharing in Barcelona

According to InsideAirbnb, in December 2016, Airbnb advertised 17,369 holiday rentals in Barcelona, 8,762 of which (50.4%) were entire housing units, 8,405 private rooms (48.4%) and 202 (1.2%) shared rooms, for a total of approximately 60,000 bed-places. This corresponded to the 37.5% of the total supply of bed-places in 'official' tourist accommodation establishments registered in 2017 (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2017a). Moreover, the estimated occupancy rate of the Airbnb supply was 27.2%, a figure that cannot compare with the occupancy rates of hotel establishments (around 78%). The analysis that we perform in this paper, however, should be taken with the warning that any data gauging the performance of the vacation rentals sector as a whole is likely to cloud the great variety of practices and profiles of hosts involved.

Many scholars have examined the spatial logics of Airbnb in Barcelona, but focusing mainly on the 'entire apartments' typology. In this regard, it is important to underline the spatial concentration of the supply of whole apartments in the two central districts, Eixample (32.3%) and Ciutat Vella (23.6%), and their clear correlation with the formal accommodation supply – hotels, hostels and HUTs – (Arias-Sans & Quaglieri Domínguez 2016) and a greater degree of clustering of Airbnb listings around the 'sights' and tourists spots of Barcelona (see Gutiérrez et al. 2017 and Lagonigro et al. 2020). Also important here is the work of Arias-Sans & Quaglieri Domínguez (2016), who have demonstrated both a positive spatial correlation between entire apartments listed on Airbnb and residential mobility— i.e., the higher the supply, the higher the rate of residential displacement per neighbourhood—and that the vast majority of the listings in Barcelona clustered in middle-upper

income neighbourhoods. The geography nuanced by these findings is not surprising. While Airbnb claims in their corporate communication that they help spread hospitality benefits towards 'off the beaten track' residential neighbourhoods, thereby also supposedly contributing to the fight against the massification of central districts (Airbnb 2018), scholarly research shows instead that STR practices enable rent value extraction from properties with the highest value in the hospitality market in central locations. It thus confirms that the commercialisation of STR through platforms such as Airbnb, along with the rise of corporate landlords triggered by the financialization of the real estate market, has become a key driver of the fifth wave of gentrification (Aalbers 2019). As pointed out by Cocola-Gant et al. (2021a), the commercialisation of STR through digital platforms constitutes a primary device for speculative investment in the housing market and a tool for middle-class individuals to augment their incomes.

In the present paper, however, we focus on the socio-spatial logics of home-sharing, as described by the Catalan Tourism Decree 75/2020. We tackle the question of whether the proliferation and the impacts of this typology in Barcelona could be deciphered using the same lenses of the literature based on the STR of whole apartments, or whether there are any nuances which need to be brought into the debate. Thus, we categorise home-sharing in this paper as a situation in which one or two rooms are rented *in the main dwelling of the host, when this is not offered also as a whole housing unit*. After some data crunching of the Airbnb database, excluding the listings with more than two rooms in the main dwelling or those who offer entire properties in Barcelona or elsewhere, we came up with a delimitation of the listings that can be classified as home-sharing according to these parameters. This broad category may include diverse practices of hosting and host profiles, which have been examined by authors focusing mainly on the nature and bordering of 'shared domestic spaces' (see for instance Farmaki et al. 2020; Knaus 2020). Accordingly, some common traits could be fathomed: a presumably low level of professionalisation, the sharing of common spaces and home services and utensils, and a certain volatility of the supply.

The dimension of this type of offer is of 4,993 'active' dwellings (30.6% of the total supply of dwellings commercialised on Airbnb in Barcelona). Hence, we estimate that less than one third of the Airbnb supply in Barcelona may refer to practices of home-sharing as defined above. A total of 4,240 hosts promote this supply, or 45.6% of hosts offering dwellings in Airbnb. In Figure 1, darker-coloured neighbourhoods have a higher percentage of dwellings categorised as home-sharing on the total Airbnb supply in that area. The map shows a strong concentration of home-sharing supply in central neighbourhoods, following a very similar distribution pattern of entire apartment listings and the traditional accommodation supply (see Figure 1). However, the Lorenz curve presented in Figure 2, comparing the concentration of different kinds of accommodation per neighbourhood, shows how

home-sharing tends to be relatively more spatially spread all over the city than hotels beds or HUTs (see Figure 2). Yet, in absolute terms, 50% of the home-sharing supply in the city is still concentrated in the first 9 of 73 neighbourhoods. Moreover, neighbourhoods that are farthest away from tourist areas present the smallest supply, between 1 and 15 ads, with no correlation with family income levels.

Figure 1 – Percentage of Airbnb home-sharing listings per neighbourhood of Barcelona. December 2016. Source: own elaboration of data from insideairbnb.com/

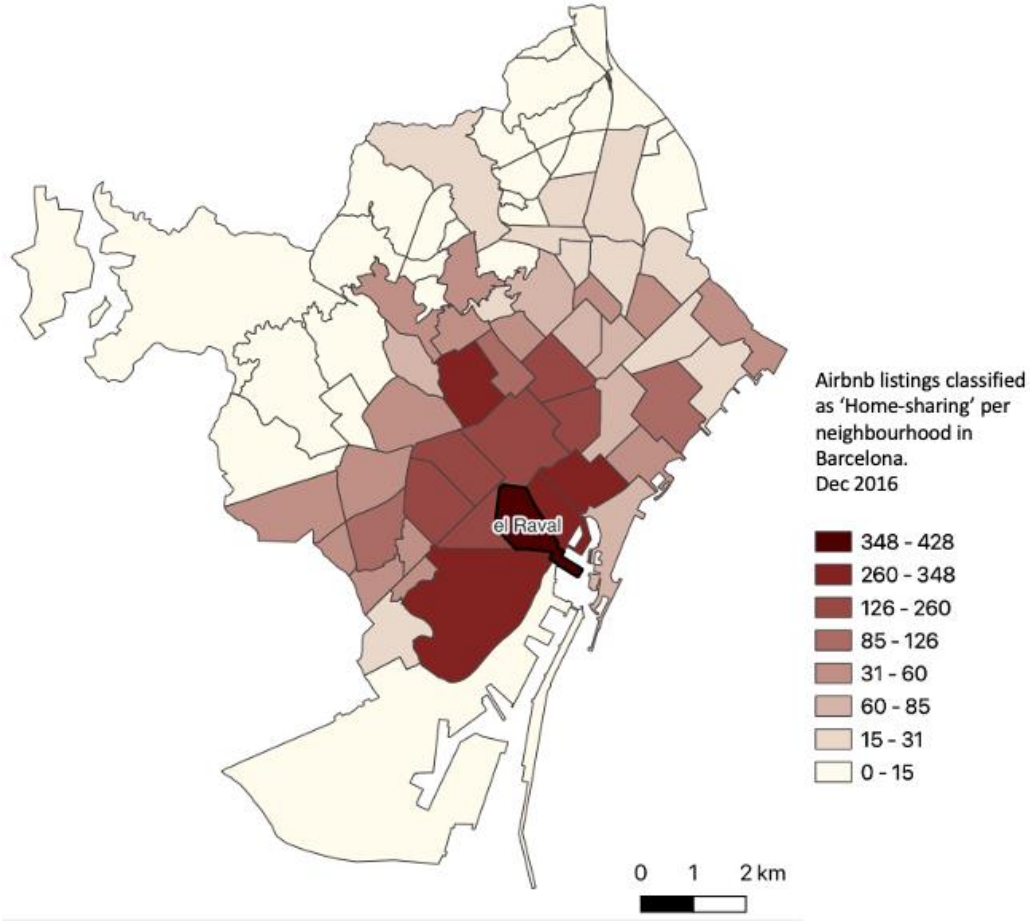
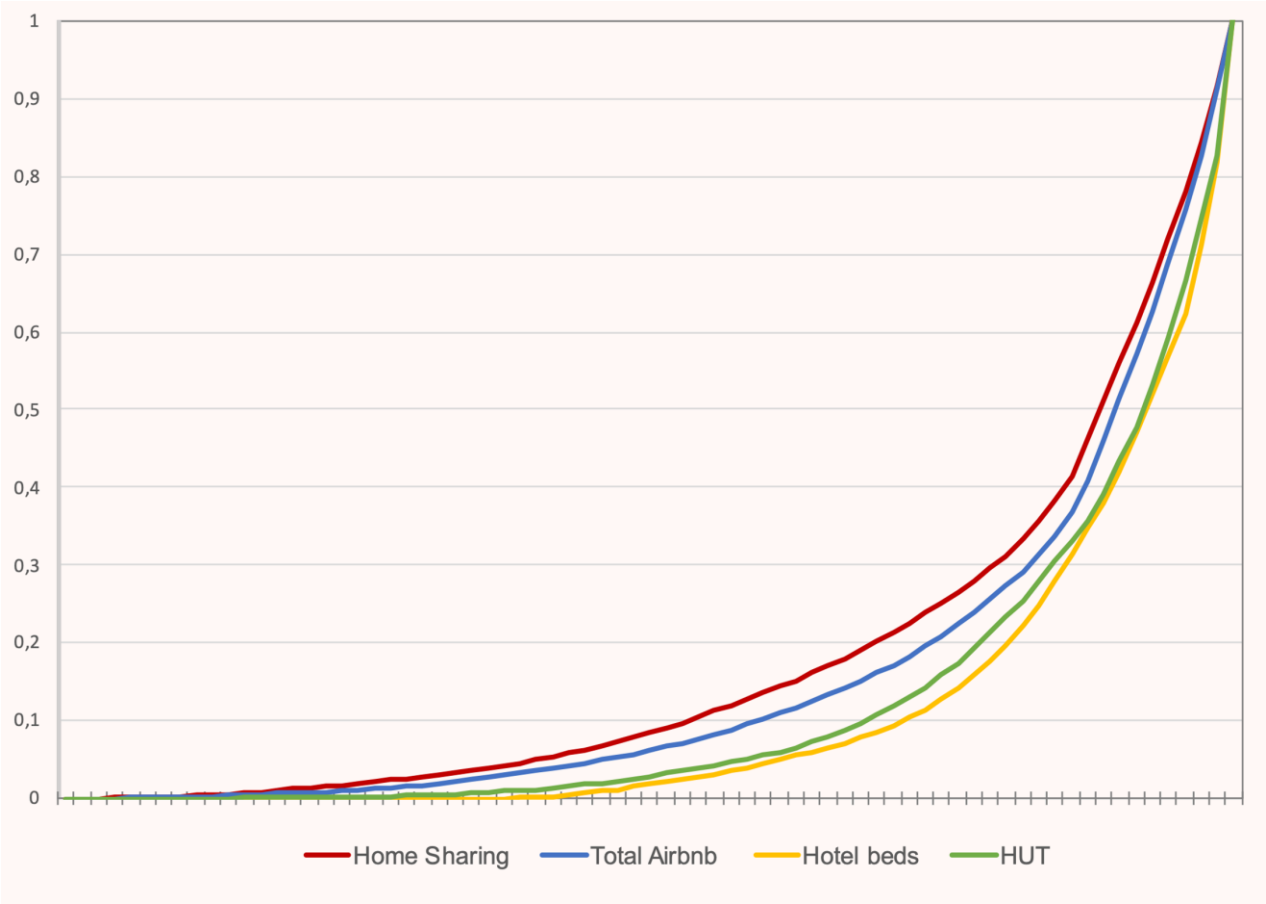


Figure 2. Lorenz curves comparing the concentration of different accommodation supply per neighbourhoods in Barcelona. Source: own elaboration of data from insideairbnb.com/ and Ajuntament de Barcelona (2017)



Before getting into more fine-grained characterisations of the host community involved in 'home-sharing' through an in-depth analysis of host profiles in the El Raval neighbourhood, it is important to explore how this geography of the home-sharing supply associates with other socioeconomic descriptors. In this sense, we present in Table 1 the results of bivariate correlation (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) between different variables, such as the annual cumulative increase of housing prices per m^2 between 2013 and 2017, both transactional and rental; residential mobility (home changes in 2017); and household composition, mainly based on the number and origin of the dwellers. To pinpoint the idiosyncrasy of home-sharing with respect to hotel beds and formal STR dwellings (HUTs), we look at Pearson scores when correlating the spatial offer of such different forms of accommodation with said variables at neighbourhood level.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients based on 73 neighbourhoods. Source: own elaboration of data from insideairbnb.com, idescat.cat and Ajuntament de Barcelona (2017a).

		Home-Sharing	HUT	Hotel beds
Accomodation supply. 2017	Home-sharing	1.000	0.544	0.642
	HUT	0.544	1.000	0.588
	Hotel beds	0.642	0.588	1.000
Residencial mobility. 2017	Adress changes	0.674	0.304	0.441
Housing Prices cummultive rise 2013-2017	Transactional (m2)	0.344	0.296	0.350
	Long-term Rental (m2)	0.018	0.051	-0.005
Household composition. 2017	Only 1 non-Spaniard	0.835	0.593	0.630
	All Spaniard members	-0.830	-0.454	-0.586
	UE nationality	0.835	0.585	0.672
	Non-UE nationality	0.618	0.193	0.366

This procedure obtains very interesting findings that should be taken into consideration in the ensuing debate. On the one hand, we register a very low correlation between the supply of home sharing and the rise of housing prices (only slight with purchase prices, but nil with rental prices). The same results can be observed in relation to the spatial spread of other forms of accommodation. As we have explained, 2014 brought steep growth in housing prices all over Spain, involving several factors. The growth of STR is partly responsible for such increase especially in prime tourism locations like Barcelona (Garcia-López et al. 2020), but the implementation of tax benefits for bank entities to liquidate the housing stock 'inherited' from the 2008 subprime crisis may also have played a role, along with the global financialization of real estate (García-Lamarca 2020). On the other hand, there is a remarkably strong correlation with two socio-demographic indicators: residential mobility and the composition of households. Firstly, the table shows a clear correlation between the supply of home-sharing and the number of home changes – people moving from one home to another within or outside the neighbourhood. Such correlation is higher with home-sharing than with hotel and HUT supply. Secondly, there is a very strong correlation between home-sharing and two very specific features of household composition: one-person dwellers and European Union nationals. This correlation is again higher for home-sharing than for hotels and HUTs. On the contrary, there is a strongly negative correlation between home-sharing and households constituted integrally by

Spaniard nationals. These findings help to reinforce and elucidate recent studies on the relation between tourism and the so-called "transnational gentrification". As Cocola-Gant and López-Gay (2020) have recently evidenced in reference to the Old City district of Barcelona, tourism and the resulting leisure-related migration are key elements in understanding the gentrification process driven by incomers from high-income countries.

Digging deeper in the sociocultural determinants of hosting: el Raval neighbourhood

For a finer analysis of the host community most likely to be involved in home-sharing practices, we focus on the neighbourhood of el Raval. Once considered a no-go area with limited tourist interest, this neighbourhood of the Ciutat Vella district has undergone an intense process of physical and symbolic transformation throughout the post-Olympic period (Quaglieri-Domínguez & Scarnato 2017). Today el Raval is characterised as one of 'trendiest' and cosmopolitan areas, concentrating some of the city's most iconic cultural venues and relying on a wide range of specialised boutiques, bookshops, art galleries, bars and restaurants. More generally, the area represents a hub for creative lifestyles and new 'liquid' tourist practices (as described by Degen 2010). Its renewed image and its strategic location close to some of the city's main attractions explain its prominence within Barcelona's hospitality market. In fact, el Raval is the neighbourhood with the largest concentration of hotel beds after the neighbourhood la Dreta de l'Eixample, in the tourist core of the city. Contradicting the rhetoric of decongestion associated with the development of the Airbnb model, this profile has been heightened in recent years by the extraordinary development of STRs. El Raval hosts the city's second largest Airbnb host community by neighbourhood, but it is clearly the largest if we only consider the supply of rooms in home-sharing modality, which represents more than the half of the total listings. Moreover, el Raval has a more pronounced residential and working-class character and arguably the city's most heterogeneous and dynamic socioeconomic fabric. In fact, this central neighbourhood is a relatively low-income neighbourhood (71.2% of the Barcelona average in 2017) and features the highest concentration of foreign population, an unemployment rate well above the city average and a high rate of residential mobility. At the same time, the area shows one of the highest ratios of main dwellings under rental status (56% in 2011), which implies a greater exposure of the resident population to the fluctuations of the real estate market. In this sense, it must be noted that it has been among the first neighbourhoods in late 2013 where real estate market trends experienced a marked turnaround after the years of contraction following the 2007 financial crisis. Coinciding with the boom of STR, the transnational and tourism-led gentrification processes and the

financialization of real estate, the neighbourhood registered one of highest growth of prices in the following years (Quaglieri-Domínguez & Scarnato 2017).

In order to test the alleged virtues of the 'making ends meet' (Goyette, 2021) discourse upheld by Airbnb and Host clubs such as *Veïns i Anfitrions* (Neighbours and hosts in Catalan), we analysed the information available on the personal profile page and the related listings of 363 hosts offering home sharing rentals among the Airbnb host community of el Raval. In particular, we scrutinised the information provided about their cultural and professional background or the household composition. A first aspect to be noted is the limited possibility of systematization of information, as users are free to decide how much and which information to publish. A significant number of hosts actually prefer to provide little or no information beyond a nickname and a picture. Another issue arising from the analysis is the extremely dynamic character of this supply. In December 2017, one year after the first data collection on which this study is based, the majority (60%) of the sampled listings were no longer online, while 45% of all sampled hosts were no longer offering accommodation. This trend is particularly relevant for newer users. Thus, 60% of those who signed up as hosts in Airbnb during the six months before December 2016 are no longer there one year later, while this percentage significantly decreases for more senior users. This finding demonstrates the marked volatility of the home-sharing supply. Nevertheless, a change of residence does not necessarily entail ceasing the activity, as it could be transferred to the new property. Reading through the hosts' histories suggests that, for several of them, home-sharing goes beyond circumstantial responses to economic hardships and is instead a structural dimension of their residential strategy. In other words, the sustained possibility of engaging in home-sharing practices and the related additional income raised in this way may be a factor that explains patterns of residential mobility.

El Raval is historically a haven of immigration, with successive waves which in the last 20 years have consolidated around communities from developing countries in Northern Africa, Asia and Latin America, and more recently Eastern Europe, but also with an increasing inflow of migrants from OECD countries attracted by the 'cosmopolitan lifestyle' of the neighbourhood (Degen 2010). In 2017, residents born in other countries accounted for the majority (57%) of the resident population. In such a context, the analysis of the national origin of the hosts can provide insights about the socio-economic and cultural coordinates of the home-sharing community.

The first thing that stands out is the central role of the foreign population. In most of the sampled cases (55.4%), it was possible to identify the user's origin through the information in his/her profile. Of these, a large majority (82%) of the hosts linked to a foreign background. This shouldn't be surprising in a neighbourhood where the majority of the population is born abroad. At first glance,

the host community confirms the multicultural character of the neighbourhood. However, further scrutiny reveals a remarkable distance from the complex socio-cultural structure of the resident population (cf. Table 2). In fact, while Asian residents represent a large majority (59%) of the foreign resident community, no representatives of the three largest foreign national groups – Pakistani, Bengali and Filipino – were detected in the sample. The Western high-income countries' migrant community, instead, seems clearly overrepresented, especially from the EU. In this sense, the characteristics of the Airbnb host community of el Raval appears to be consistent with the population trends driving the transformation of the neighbourhood in the last decade (Degen 2017; Quaglieri-Domínguez 2017).

Table 2 - Breakdown by nationality of el Raval's foreign community and its Airbnb's host community sample. Source: Authors' own elaboration of data from www.bcn.cat/estadistica

	Resident population January 2017	Hosts' sample December 2016
European Union	**19.2%**	**57.5%**
- Italy	*6.5%*	*17.6%*
- France	*2.9%*	*14.5%*
- United Kingdom	*1.9%*	*4.8%*
- Sweden	*0.8%*	*3,00%*
- Netherlands	*0.6%*	*4.2%*
Russia	**0.8%**	**7.3%**
Latin America	**10.8%**	**21.2%**
- Bolivia	*1.4%*	*0.0%*
- Argentina	*1.1%*	*3.6%*
- Brazil	*0.9%*	*4.2%*
- Venezuela	*0.7%*	*4.2%*
Asia	**58.8%**	**3.6%**
- Pakistan	*21.7%*	*0,00%*
- Philippines	*17.4%*	*0,00%*
Africa	**7.7%**	**0.6%**
Others	**2.7%**	**9.7%**
- USA	*0.8%*	*2.4%*

Regarding professional background, just over a third of the sampled profiles offer information. Among these, 9% affirm work in the hospitality and tourism industry while almost two thirds (61%) indicate a 'creative' profession. This suggests that the propensity and capacity to 'share home' with tourists also relates to socio-cultural features rather than just mere economic need. In this sense, the home-sharing host community in el Raval is largely characterised by users who could be tagged as 'western', 'white' and 'creative' and who are able to promote their profiles and their homes in consonance with the cosmopolitan flavour of the neighbourhood. Thus, our analysis highlights the

centrality of residents embodying cosmopolitan lifestyles, whose competitiveness for ‘home-sharing’ could be addressed in terms of capability and appeal. Individuals with a mobile biography, out-of-town youngsters attending university and young adults living in metropolitan areas are in need of flat shares, and are more used to dealing with frequent household rotations. For them, hosting tourists is not fundamentally different from flat shares**,** but rather an interesting and more profitable alternative.

Household composition can also play a critical role in the capacity or propensity to short term rentals practices. Besides ‘community’, Airbnb rhetoric often alludes to another term with a high symbolic charge such as 'family'. According to the last official census, one third of el Raval’s households are families with children. The analysis of the hosts’ household composition, instead, indicates a scarce presence of two-generation households. Mentions of children appear in only 3% of the sampled cases, while the large majority (90%) of the hosts’ households are composed of one or two adult members only. We are aware that the absence of children in the host's profile has to be scrutinized carefully through qualitative analysis in order to understand its logics within the context of el Raval. However, the scant representation of families with children among Airbnb’s hosts strongly coincides with the results of the city data analysis presented in the previous section.

New scenario, new controversy

The evidence presented, beyond the specificity of Barcelona as far as the regulatory framework is concerned (Ratis Legis 2016), questions the very nature of the ‘home-sharing’ practice and the difficulty of regulating it as an economic activity. As mentioned above, the intention to regulate and recognize formally the practice of ‘home-sharing’ led the Catalan Regional Government to proceed with the processing of the Tourism Decree 75/2020 which recognises ‘home-sharing’ as a legal accommodation typology. Although this approach towards ‘home-sharing’ may seem at first sight very similar to that of other European cities like Amsterdam or Berlin, the details of the regulatory framework and the specific context of application in Barcelona are a source of controversy. We can enumerate three aspects to this respect.

The first has to do with the legal regime affecting STR in Barcelona. As explained in the second section, Catalan law associates the licence of activity with the property, not with the person responsible for the activity. This favours the fixation and perpetuation of land surpluses through STR revenues compared to a long-term rent, or even monopoly rents in the case that a moratorium or ban on the concession of new licences is imposed, as happened in Barcelona with the formal tourism apartments sector. Not only does this scenario trigger an inflation of the value of the dwelling due to the possibility of rent extraction, but it also spurs almost automatically a race to obtain licences in the

absence of urban planning restrictions. Basically, what is supposed to be an eventual and sporadic STR activity to complement incomes and "make ends meet", could easily become a rentier practice very likely to be professionalised - as happened in Barcelona in the past with HUTs and in other cities like Turin (Semi & Tonetta 2020) or Madrid (Gil & Sequera 2020). Secondly, in Barcelona the PEUAT planning tool banned all further concession of licenses for any typology of tourist establishment across the whole central and coastal area of the city, on the grounds of having already reached a saturation threshold of its 'floating population' (visitor/resident ratio) and a very high intensity of use of public space. The formal goal of this measure is in no case the prohibition of new accommodation facilities, but the 'defence of housing rights' as well as the preservation of a 'mix of uses' in the city centre (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2017a). However, the Tourism Decree 75/2020 formalises home-sharing as a new tourist dwelling typology not contemplated in the floating population calculations, obliging the municipality to reopen the process that led to the PEUAT and negotiate potentially again the zoning and ratio parameters for all lodging typologies, including home-sharing. In the third place, the legal recognition of home-sharing would not solve the problem of enforcement for irregular or unlicensed listings, due to the intrinsic difficulty under Spanish legislation to inspect activities in a main residence. It would instead threaten the effectiveness of existing enforcement instruments, weakening also the position of the City Council in the permanent negotiation with platforms for the compliance with the rules.

Thus, the formalisation and territorialisation of home-sharing would reopen the controversy around the regulation of tourism accommodation in the city, but it would also raise new interesting issues for the current debate on the nature and the limits of the sharing economy and networked hospitality in particular, which is moving from the analysis of its effects towards the issues of the desirability and technicalities of regulation (Gottlieb 2013; Gurran & Phibbs 2017; Lambea Llop 2017). A first issue is the need to establish mechanisms of control on residential dwellings engaged in such activity. This would arguably bring to light the existence of a mobile or floating population of medium or long duration, often not included in official registers, especially if, as our findings indicate, a significant role in the host community is played by citizens of other European countries. Furthermore, the debate about home-sharing would shift from the domains of 'tourism' and the 'sharing economy' – currently a mainstream topic in the political and legal debate – towards the proper field of housing and urban politics. This shift could force academics and policymakers to reflect on the value of rooms for long-term rent as a last-resort solution for the housing crisis of Barcelona – and of most western large cities for that matter. In other words, the decision of allowing or not and how to regulate this practice in urban planning frameworks would lead to a necessary debate about the suitability of covering the needs of permanent or floating residents through an 'idle' stock of rooms.

Final reflections

The examination of home-sharing practices in Barcelona carried out in this paper provides insight fort a more complete understanding of the phenomenon and opens a debate about its regulation within the context of a tourist city that incorporates to some extent the different factors emerging from the debate on the impacts of STR of entire apartments. As evidenced in this case study, the reality of home-sharing misaligns substantially with the narrative upheld by platforms such as Airbnb, in which home-sharing allows non-professional hosts to 'make ends meet' (Goyette 2021). On the contrary, our findings nuance a different scenario in which home-sharing becomes a practice that facilitates the moorings for transnational mobilities while reinforcing tourism activities in central areas.

In this sense, although we are concerned about the need to go beyond this by way of more accurate qualitative research, our preliminary analysis evidences a clear bias on who is benefiting from the home-sharing activity. Our analysis suggests that the normalization and further spread of home-sharing practices, integrating commercial functions into the residential use of the dwelling, could be a competitive advantage for the specific host community to develop residential tactics for their temporary dwellings. This could widen already existing gaps and conflicts between segments of the population characterised by different means (and not only in socio-economic terms, but also related to their motility as capacity to be mobile, see Kaufmann et al. (2004)) to dwell in an increasingly valued area. In this sense, research on urban transformations and urban cohesion should pay due attention to the role of home-sharing in providing a suitable 'mooring' for floating populations transiting the city for variable periods, in some cases then turning into new residents and, possibly, new 'local' hosts in the destination.

The volatility of the Airbnb home-sharing supply seems to be related also with the changing conditions of users along a continuum of transnational mobilities that play a crucial role in feeding tourism mobilities, fostering the on-going multifaceted gentrification process. We thus warn of the risk of a new emerging avenue of housing exclusion, by which the diffusion of home-sharing could drive the growth of room rentals in the inner areas of urban destinations, diminishing the affordability of tenancy solutions that until the present moment have represented one of the few opportunities for emancipation for vulnerable groups such as low-income immigrants, single women and students. Room rentals must therefore be considered as a key issue on the current debate on the 'housing crisis' lived by many cities at the proposal of solutions, since they are simultaneously the last resort for low-income groups and a new rentier lure based on the increasing demand from the tourist market.

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