

**Daniela Gračan**

E-mail: danielag@fthm.hr

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Primorska 42,  
51414 Ika, Croatia

**Azra Ekmečić**

E-mail: ekmeciczra@gmail.com

**Iva Musa**

E-mail: ivamusa21@gmail.com

---

## **Couchsurfing User Preferences and the Impact of the Platform on Destination Tourism**

### **Abstract**

Couchsurfing is a website, i.e., a platform that provides services to those who dare to use free accommodation in someone's home and a platform that offers the opportunity to socialize with other Couchsurfers and join groups where mutual experiences on tourism and destination activities are exchanged. Given that the concept of Couchsurfing is unusual in comparison to other platforms of sharing economy, the aim of this research paper is to determine the profile or characteristics of platform users and the impact of Couchsurfing on destination tourism. The main goal is to answer the question on how a platform that provides free accommodation in a foreigner's home contributes to the development of tourism and the recognition of the destination. For this purpose, a survey questionnaire on the attitudes of users was conducted, as well as an in-depth interview with the hosts. Methods of analysis, comparison and descriptive method were used. The focus of the research is Croatia as a tourist destination and the key results include financial analysis in terms of consumption and registration of tourists on Couchsurfing who do not pay the sojourn tax, as well as the effects of supply, demand and marketing through tourists' activities in the destination including social media and other destination image forming activities. These aspects were complemented by research on the safety and future of Couchsurfing.

**Keywords:** Couchsurfing, sharing economy, destination, impact on tourism development, user preferences

### **1. Introduction**

At the end of the 20th century, traditional practices in tourism together with the needs and wishes of tourists began to change towards a modern, innovative way of consuming services. The trend of digitalization and individualization has begun and the global financial crisis of 2008 accelerated changes in the market, thus creating a

modified approach to consumption and ownership transforming the existing economy into a sharing economy [26].

The sharing economy is defined as the sharing of underutilized assets and services, monetized or not, between private individuals, using an online platform [33]. It affects almost all industries, mostly tourism and hospitality throughout new platforms that range from accommodation (Booking, Airbnb, Couchsurfing), transport (Uber, BlaBlaCar), customer reviews (TripAdvisor), travel guiding (Tours by Locals), food and beverages (EatWith), among others [25]. The new business concept with its practice supports the great dispersion of consumers and manufacturers which in the context of a tourist destination has the greatest impact on the accommodation offer. The shift of responsibility into the hands of private renters and the change in market order were reflected in the redistribution of wealth in the destination, security, advertising, marketing activities, and ultimately the process of managing the destination. Numerous studies talk about positive and negative impacts of accommodation platforms such as Airbnb or Booking on the destination. The influence of Couchsurfing is less known, both in the world and in Croatia, which is why it was chosen as the topic of this paper.

Couchsurfing is one of the most well-known sharing economy platforms with over 14 million users in more than 200,000 cities worldwide [8]. Couchsurfing users provide and request free accommodation, namely a couch in their own home, which is why the emphasis is placed solely on the experience, cultural exchange and getting to know the destination in which they are staying. One of the goals of this paper is to create a profile of Couchsurfing users and explore their preferences in the destination; what they visit, what means of transport they use, how much time and money they spend, whether they promote the destination and more. Hosts on Couchsurfing often recommend cheaper restaurants, free attractions or similar activities to their guests that tourists would not otherwise visit. Given that they have a strong influence on the above preferences, the question arises as to how much the destination profits and how much it loses from Couchsurfing and what this means for its future development. The rapid popularization of the sharing economy has caught destination managers off guard, with very little understanding of the size and distribution of the sector affecting future growth and development planning, tax payments, quality standards management and concerns about visitors and hosts safety. In other words, what respondents think about safety on Couchsurfing and how is it managed in Croatia, are there any regulations? What financial and marketing benefits does the destination have from Couchsurfing? How does Couchsurfing affect destination offerings?

## 2. Overview of Previous Research

Accommodation is a fundamental part of tourism and plays a very important role in the tourist experience, but it is also their biggest expense. The economy of sharing accommodation is gradually reducing this cost for tourists precisely because of the

unconventional form of providing accommodation. While a significant number of the conducted research exploring different dimensions of the P2P accommodation has been mainly focused on profit type accommodations such as Airbnb, there is a paucity of empirical research on nonprofit platforms, such as Couchsurfing [19].

The sharing economy can be divided into three groups: P2P (peer-to-peer), B2B (business-to-business) and B2C (business-to-customer) [19]. Couchsurfing belongs to the B2C economy [28], i.e., the internet media and services industry [2]. It was formed on April 2, 2003 as Couchsurfing International Inc., a nonprofit organization in New Hampshire, and on June 12, 2004, Couchsurfing.org website was launched [30]. Since its creation Couchsurfing has had problems with the tax administration, which has consistently refused to register it as a non-profit organization, forcing it to switch to a special form of a profit, benefit or B-corporation that could receive donations but not make a profit, which was extremely important to the managers in order to follow their beliefs and keep loyal users [4].

The sharing economy has positive and negative impacts on destination tourism. Accommodation platforms such as Airbnb and Couchsurfing can contribute to destinations by expanding tourism products, services and other tourism offerings, through new revenue opportunities, increasing access to market, dispersion of tourists in a wider geographical area, market expansion, rental of accommodation and through the sale of domestic products to foreigners [33]. The sharing economy is often associated with an increase in domestic and foreign tourism [11]. It also supports the local population, influences destination arrivals, consumption, and motivation, helps people with less purchasing power to keep their finances stable and enables vulnerable groups of people (especially the elderly) to participate in the global value chain. The positive impact on the example of Airbnb is evident in Africa where the platform has fully opened or activated the market upon arrival in 2008, with 3.5 million new arrivals and \$400 million in rental profits [34].

By blurring the line between customer and producer, the sharing economy disrupts the traditional model of business where companies own and people consume [20] which negatively affects the legal regulations of these platforms, which then partially and sometimes completely self-regulate their business under the pretext that turning over such information would violate users' privacy [32] which then violates their regulations.

In addition, the sharing economy can have a negative impact on the destination through socio-economic inclusion that creates a widening gap between poor and rich countries, competitiveness, licensing, taxation, noise, security issues, potentially endangering the quality of life of locals, overtourism, increasing house prices and rents, and lack of organization and presentation of the destination as one community [33].

The latest trends in tourism show that modern tourists are increasingly seeking genuine, authentic, local, unique and, especially, memorable experiences [27] which implies involvement in local community activities and sustainable tourism. Their preferences drive the demand for non-traditional forms of accommodation that correspond to the offer of accommodation platforms of the sharing economy. There are

two user profiles; those looking for accommodation to make their trips more convenient and those who use it mostly for social reasons [27]. This also determines their activities in destination; those who want to indulge in local population and traditions, which includes Couchsurfing users, prefer to visit places or attractions where they can experience such an authentic experience and support local businesses and community.

Couchsurfing as a platform offers the option of writing blogs on its website where one can find “travel guides, advices and stories” [5] about destinations which benefit their promotion and marketing. During the COVID-19 pandemic when human contacts and travel were limited, Couchsurfing tried to adapt to the situation through articles such as “Five ways to use Couchsurfing at home” [7], which unfortunately, did not improve the crisis they were going through which forced managers to seek help in the form of contributions through verification from the users themselves.

### **3. Analysis of the Couchsurfing Impact on Destination**

Based on the survey questionnaire, a profile of users who use Couchsurfing on their travels and originate from Croatia or surrounding countries was created. The questionnaire was divided into three parts: user profile, demand and marketing, and safety and the future. It was conducted online via social media in the period from March to April 2021. In the same period, three in-depth interviews were carried out with randomly selected hosts from Croatia with the aim of gathering information on their impact on the preferences of users in the destination and how this ultimately affects the destination. Interviews were also conducted online through social media.

Of the 87 responses collected, the majority were women on Couchsurfing and most respondents belonged to the 25-40 age group. They are mostly from Croatia, and the least from Slovenia and Germany. Almost half or 49.3% have completed graduate studies at the university and are highly educated. According to income, majority of them have a household budget of more than 1,500 euros. Many have an income of more than 1,000 euros per month and therefore higher purchasing power which allows them to travel more frequently to a destination.

Table 1 – Sociodemographic profile of respondents

Characteristic	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)	Characteristic	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Degree of completed education</i>		
Male	30	34,5%	Primary school	1	1,1%
<b>Female</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>64,4%</b>	High school	18	20,7%
Other	1	1,1%	Academy	5	5,7%
<i>Age</i>			Undergraduate study	17	19,5%
18-24	16	18,4%	<b>Graduate study</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>49,3%</b>
<b>25-40</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>71,3%</b>	Doctorate	3	3,3%
41-60	8	9,2%	<i>Councilors status</i>		
60+	1	1,1%	<b>Employed</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>71,3%</b>
<i>Permanent residence</i>			Unemployed	24	27,6%
<b>Croatia</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>78,2%</b>	Retired	1	1,1%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7	8%	<i>Household income</i>		
Serbia	10	11,5%	<500€	5	5,7%
Slovenia	1	1,1%	501-700€	15	17,2%
Germany	1	1,1%	701-1.000€	15	17,2%
			1.001.-1.500€	22	25,3%
			1.500€+	30	34,5%

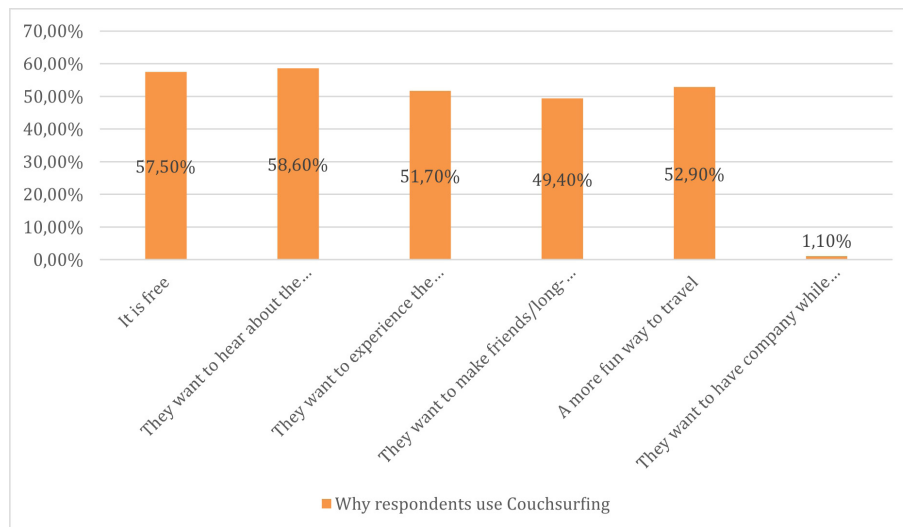
Source: Authors

Respondents showed that they most often travel 2-4 times a year, precisely 56.3% of them. 16,1% travel more than seven times a year, 14.9% 5-7 times a year and the rest 12.6% once a year. Although they are all active travelers, they do not primarily use Couchsurfing on their travels. 88.5% primarily use other sources of accommodation, mostly apartments, hostels and hotels. Only 11.5% use Couchsurfing as their primary source of accommodation, which means that respondents generally rarely opt for this form of service.

The following graph shows the motivation behind using Couchsurfing. Respondents were able to choose from multiple options and the results showed that there was no large gap between the given components. However, respondents primarily use Couchsurfing because they want to hear about the destination firsthand, and then because it is free. The desire for travel companionship and making long-term friendships are behind the motivation for a more fun way to travel and desire to experience the culture and way

of life in the community, so it can be concluded that Couchsurfers strive for a unique experience rather than long-term travel connections.

*Graph 1 – Why respondents use Couchsurfing*



*Source: Authors*

The second part of the survey refers to demand and marketing which too creates a profile of tourists, but also speaks of the financial impact of their preferences on the destination. Although the survey is related to platform users living in Croatia and surrounding countries, if one considers previous research that lead to the same or similar profiles of users around the world, it can be concluded that foreign respondents would have the same or similar answers to the questions asked and would behave the same upon arrival in Croatia as a tourist destination.

On average, respondents spend 4-7 days in the destination. 23% spend more than seven days and 20.3% spend 1-3 days which is approximately equal to the national average where guests spend 7.6 nights in the Adriatic and 2.9 nights in Continental Croatia [15]. The unwritten rule on Couchsurfing is that tourists do not stay for long with their hosts unless they agree so in advance, so they wouldn't interfere with their daily duties. Hosts usually rent a couch in the living room if they do not have an additional bedroom or room where guests could stay, so they spend a lot of time with them during the day. Of course, the rules of the platform do not obligate hosts to spend their time hanging out with guests over lunch or coffee. It is enough to provide them with a couch and all additional practices depend on the host individually and the cultural environment in which they live. Paid accommodation brings comfort and

freedom of one's own space, and those who decide to take free Couchsurfing will have to comply with the host's house rules even if it means adjusting their own plans in the destination or shorter stay, which in both cases does not contribute financially to the destination they visit.

According to the method of arrival at the destination, 59.8% of respondents arrive by plane, 18.4% by bus, 17.2% by their own transport, 1.1% by train, and the remaining 3.3% use everything equally or combine transportation depending on the distance of the destination from the place of residence. Although 60% of tourists come to Croatia by their own means of transport [15], Couchsurfers prefer cheaper, airline transport, which is not an unexpected result given the increase in the number of low-cost airlines. In the destination itself, as many as 79.3% of respondents prefer public transport, and 50.6% of the attractions visit on foot. The rest use their own transportation, and a very small number car rental. Public transport has always been the most affordable option for moving around the city. Considering that Croatia does not have the highest standard in Europe or the world, public transport prices cannot be higher either. Most tourists in Croatia primarily use their own car or vehicle (60.7%), then public transport (27.2%) and taxi (22.3%) [15] which again, differs from the preferences of Couchsurfers who prefer cheaper options.

A very important question is how much respondents spend per day to which the vast majority or 77% answered that they spend less than 50€. 19.5% spends 51-100€, and only 3.4% spends more than 100€. Before the beginning of the pandemic, the average daily consumption of tourists in a destination per person per night was 98€ (115€ in Continental and 97€ in Adriatic Croatia) [14], which is significantly higher than the 50€ spent by most Couchsurfing respondents. Of these, 54% of expenditure relates to accommodation services, 17% to food and beverage service outside the accommodation facility, and 29% to all other services (equally in both regions) [15].

The survey showed that almost a third of respondents, i.e., 30.5% use family accommodation [15] which in relation to the total daily expenditure on accommodation is:

$$\frac{54}{100} \times \frac{30.5}{100} = 16,47\% \quad (1)$$

At the time of writing, there were 92,367 hosts on Couchsurfing and 426 active passengers in Croatia [6]. Although the exact number of hosts who are active and who are inactive is not known, as well as the number of travelers looking for accommodation and who are just hanging out with the locals, if it is assumed that all the hosts are active and accept all the mentioned travelers into their home, Croatia as a destination makes a loss from accommodation:

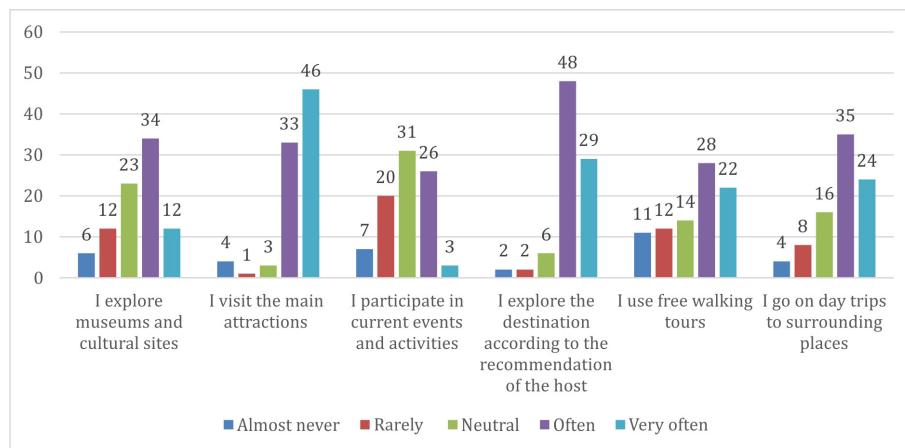
$$98\text{€} \times 16.47\% = 16.14\text{€} \quad (2)$$

$$16.14\text{€} \times 426 = 6.875,64\text{€} \quad (3)$$

which amounts to 16.14€ per day per passenger, and 6,875.64€ for all passengers. If the average daily consumption is reduced by the amount of accommodation that Couchsurfers do not pay, an amount of 81.86€ is obtained, which they should spend on other services. However, the results of the survey showed that this is not the case because most spend below average, a maximum of 50€ per day, which means that they do not spend to their maximum, so the destination does not make its maximum profit. Reduced consumption is also evident in the example of a place where they usually dine where 74.7% of visits opt for street food, 52.9% go to a restaurant, 43.7% have a lunch together with the host at his home, 31% go to a bistro or tavern, 28.7% choose cooking and 1.1% get food from the market.

As for activities in the destination, respondents most often spend their time visiting the main attractions and exploring the destination as recommended by the host. Approximately the same number of respondents often take day trips to the surrounding towns and explore museums and cultural sites. They are neutral in terms of participation in current events and use free walking tours the least. The role of tourist guide in the destination is often assumed by the hosts so tourists do not need to rent tours, which is evident in the following graph.

*Graph 2 - Activities of respondents in the destination*



Source: Authors

According to the research of the Institute for Tourism, most tourists in Croatia spend their time sightseeing in cities (52.8%) [15] so it often happens that renters on Airbnb and similar platforms leave their homes in the city center to turn them into apartments that are rented and thus make additional profits. Although suitable for tourists, this creates many problems for the local community such as inflated property and annuity values, disloyal competition for hotels, avoidance of income and property



taxes, and since tourists come on holiday to have a good time, also complaints about waste, improper parking and noise disturbances that together threaten the quality of life of the local population [13]. Destination management organizations are increasingly aware of this problem and are trying to distribute tourists and their activities to the whole city to preserve the quality of life, as well as the quality of stay of tourists in the destination. Sustainable development of the destination and the tourism carrying capacity are active topics at the moment, and since it is not necessary to have a furnished apartment for rent on Couchsurfing nor do tourists want to see only the main attractions, this platform works in accordance with the achievement of these goals. The hosts state that tourists on Couchsurfing want to see what they recommend whether it's a lesser-known attraction or a restaurant in the wider part of the city.

Couchsurfing among its users also has those who hold the title of ambassador, who voluntarily promote the values of the platform and are active in the tourism of their communities [9]. They are active hosts and travelers who organize meetings and socialize with other users through the "Hangouts" meet-up option and multi-day events related exclusively to Couchsurfing and who travel in different destinations of the world. Ambassadors have positive reviews on their profiles, both because of the large number of guests and because of the quality interaction, storytelling and experience they offer. "Emotions are core to tourism experiences" [12] and it is this emotional connection they create with their guests that increases the value of the overall travel experience and creates a strong emotional connection with the destination. Hosts' recommendations can also influence tourists' attitudes about returning to a destination or recommending it to others. Tourism and the presence of tourists often influence the loss of the original, real culture, which is replaced by trivial, commodified events and products that then create a staged authenticity in the destination [10] which is not a reflection of reality, and that is the reason why Couchsurfing strives to provide tourists with an authentic experience and value of the destination product through its business concept.

When asked how to inform themselves about the offer of the destination, 89.7% of respondents said that they use websites and social networks, 62.1% talk to the host, 11.5% go to the Tourist Information Center, and 1.1% use books and tutorials such as Lonely planet. When they are in a destination, 77% of respondents share their experiences with loved ones, 73.6% post pictures and videos on Instagram and Facebook, and 3.4% post videos on a YouTube channel. It is evident that social networks are the main promotional channel and source of information. In Croatia, 55.5% of tourists use internet as a source of information about Adriatic Croatia, and 47.6% about Continental, of which 61.1% of respondents use online travel agencies or sharing economy platforms such as Booking and Expedia as a source of information [15]. "Tourists with picturesque and significant memories of their recent trips are more prone to eWOM behavior [29], and since reviews are very important in today's online communication of the destination offer, positive promotion can attract more tourists to the destination and improve its image in the market.

In the third part of the survey, respondents answered a questions about safety on

Couchsurfing. Almost half travel with a partner and the rest equally alone or in a group of people (3+). This way of traveling greatly affects their sense of security, and there are those for whom it does not make much difference. As many as 80.5% of respondents had no negative experiences with Couchsurfing, and the other 19.5% did, most of which highlight problems with the host and accommodation. Studies have shown that from time to time, stories can be heard about Couchsurfers accused of theft or hosts who had an inappropriate sexual approach [1]. Trust has been identified as the main obstacle [19], especially among the female population who is more likely to be exposed to such events. In 90.1% of cases, respondents do not associate the overall picture/impression of the destination with these events, which shows that they do have a positive image of the destination. Trust at Couchsurfing is built through communication and connecting with members who share mutual friends and interests, and through mandatory security measures. There are three types of security measures relating to “references” where comments are left about members that users have met, “verification” which confirms the identity of the user and location which constitutes the main source of revenue for the platform, and the “vouch” assigned by Couchsurfers to those members they have come to know well and in whom they have complete confidence [16].

Security is closely linked to the concept of sojourn tax paid under Article 9 of the Sojourn Tax Act by ‘persons using the overnight service in the accommodation facility where the catering activity is carried out’ [14]. However, according to the Ordinance on the classification and categorization of household services facilities, establishments belonging to that category must meet the minimum conditions laid down by law, which does not include the houses and apartments of citizens renting their couch to Couchsurfers [21]. Although the Law does not state that tourists on Couchsurfing are exempt from paying the tourist tax, they cannot pay it because the host house is not registered as an accommodation facility, which speaks to the fact that Croatia does not have a defined policy for a platform like Couchsurfing. Croatia is not the only country that does not have defined laws on the management of Couchsurfing. The only place where hosts charge for an overnight stay is Cuba where it is a legal obligation to register a guest and pay taxes, which also applies to Couchsurfers [31]. In Cuba, it is illegal to host foreigners in private houses without being charged and they need a special permit to do so. Prices are clearly stated on the host profile, paid upon arrival and for a small fee hosts can prepare meals [31]. On the other hand, if the host’s house is viewed as an un-categorized object, then by law hosts are not obliged to pay the sojourn tax if they are visited by friends [18], but it is not defined whether Couchsurfers can be seen as “friends”. In order for everything to comply with the law, the host must report tourists to the police within 24 hours [23] and to the tourist board [22]. When registering with the tourist board, they must fill out the form and state the reason why tourists should be exempted from paying the tourist tax [22] which is again not defined by law because Couchsurfers do not fall into the categories of tourists exempted from paying the tax, so there may be disagreements. Through interviews, it has been shown that registering tourists is not a practice and most hosts do not register them in the police or eVisitor.

According to the Sojourn Tax Act under section VII of the criminal provision, an inspector may fine “a person who fails to report or deregister a person’s stay” on the spot and levy a fine of 1,000HRK [14]. Tourist boards can also be fined if they do not keep a list of registered persons, in the amount of 3,000-10,000HRK [14]. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, as of 2017, data from eVisitor is taken for tourism analysis the same year, which means that hosts have to report Couchsurfers because otherwise the data will not be complete or accurate. If there are foreign people who do not log in through these systems, it is necessary to have the police object code and to report foreigners through their web application either by sending a file or by directly entering the data in the web application [24]. When the data is not complete, it is impossible to accurately calculate the financial impact of Couchsurfing on the destination, i.e., the consumption of tourists, the loss of income from unpaid accommodation or sojourn tax. Of course, there are other ways to monitor statistical demand such as statistics of entry/exit of tourists at border crossings, statistics of tourist consumption, attendance of cultural places and more [17], but it is difficult to determine how much of this consumption is on Couchsurfers.

Couchsurfing’s future brings changes in the form of monthly platform maintenance assistance contributions which is \$2.99 with VAT and fees included and \$17.99 per year with VAT and fees [3]. The idea for benefits started on 14 May 2020 when COVID-19 pandemic started due to reduced activity on the platform (as much as 90.8%) which caused a lack of finance to maintain the platform, jobs and other. The number of workers is reduced, they are working from home and the maintenance of the platform implies regular checking of the design and functionality of the site to prevent the decline in SEO optimization. In return, managers planned to allow users to remove all restrictions regarding messages and couch requests because they want the community to thrive, also remove third-party advertising from websites and mobile apps, reduce the price of verification and continue to develop the website and Couchsurfing mobile app. The survey showed that most users were not aware of the new rule on the payment of monthly membership fees. The majority (44.8%) would not agree to pay for it, some responded with perhaps (43.7%), and the fewest were those who would agree to pay (11.5%). Long period of pandemic has had consequences for tourism and completely changed the perception of travel, with 56.3% respondents undecided about using Couchsurfing after the situation improves, 32.2% saying they still want to use Couchsurfing and 11.5% saying they do not want to. In addition to changes in the platform, changes on the spot in interaction with the host are necessary where respondents indicate mandatory social distance, vaccination, guarantee on being healthy and the cleanliness of the space in which they will stay. The latest data shows that tourists have again started traveling actively through Couchsurfing and that new travel articles can be found on the platform’s website [5]. Although it is uncertain whether all these activities will be enough to reach the level of activity from before the pandemic or even surpass it, the future is optimistic according to collected data and with the adjustment to the situation Couchsurfing could survive on the market.

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Platforms of the accommodation economy can have a positive and negative impact on tourism in the destination. The most current topic is their legislation which is often unclear, so they leave a lot of room for self-management and their own renter policy, which certainly does not support increasing the level of security and standardizing the quality of family accommodation, which is currently the most prevalent in Croatia. Couchsurfing is a platform that offers free accommodation but also many other activities such as organizing its own events, socializing with other users and other things that distinguish it from platforms like Airbnb and makes it special in the context of service delivery and destination product.

The profile of the user created with the help of the survey and interview corresponds to the motivation and demand of the average tourists visiting Croatia. Specifications such as the average number of overnight stays and attractions they visit in the destination correlate with others, while the way they arrive and move in the destination as well as the fact that they opt for free accommodation vary because Couchsurfers prefer more affordable travel options to have an authentic destination experience. Most of the respondents on Couchsurfing are highly educated with higher purchasing power, but their consumption in the destination does not reach maximum. Reduced consumption in the destination is their biggest drawback, but the advantage are their unique experiences in destination that they promote on social media and thus contribute to its image. Interviews with hosts showed that they greatly influence the preferences of users through suggestions of what to visit in the destination, but also their overall impression which is also extremely important and positive for the destination.

Accommodation and sojourn tax are the main sources of income in the destination and since tourists on Couchsurfing do not pay them, it can be concluded that the destination from a financial point of view does not generate significant revenues from Couchsurfing. Although finances are very important, the destination is also made up of other components such as supply, demand and marketing.

The positive side of Couchsurfing includes the fact that most respondents promote the destination on their social networks and are happy to tell their experiences to their loved ones. In tourism, for a long time the focus has been placed on emotions and a unique experience and connecting tourists with locals to emotionally tie them to the destination, promote it and eventually return. Couchsurfing offers just that, and the interest of tourists to visit less known places as recommended by the host improves local businesses and maintains the optimal level of carrying capacity of the destination, which again has a positive impact on the population, ecosystem, infrastructure and economy. Couchsurfing encourages lower-paying tourists to travel, and the fact that hosts do not have to arrange the space in advance to rent a couch allows instant consumption in the destination. Although under Croatian law the host's home cannot be standardized and therefore does not guarantee safety, respondents generally feel safe on Couchsurfing and are happy to recommend platform to others. Those who travel this way do not

represent the vast majority of tourists who visit Croatia, so their financial impact on each destination individually cannot be significant, which is why the authors believe Couchsurfing has a positive effect on tourism in the destination.

In the future, it is necessary to work on the statistics of Couchsurfing arrivals and movements in Croatia so that destination management organizations can adequately record changes and direct the destination towards the desired goals. Although Couchsurfing went through a difficult period of adjustment during the pandemic and almost shut down, new activities on the platform and the number of respondents interested in re-traveling say Couchsurfing has a certain future ahead of it.

Suggestions for further research into this topic include a more detailed survey of user preferences as well as a larger sample frame. Users' preferences for cultural activities in the city were examined which does not represent the full range of activities during their stay in the destination. Couchsurfing does not have the same impact in lesser-known destinations and large cities which leaves room for further exploration. For a full impact analysis, Couchsurfing can be more extensively compared to other similar platforms like Airbnb.

## References

1. Athianou-Gkogka, K., Koutsantinidou, V., Tsourela, M., Paschaloudis, D. (2019) *Experience Tourism, the Case of Couchsurfing*, Vol. 5, Issue 11, 13. Available from: [http://www.iraj.in/journal/journal\\_file/journal\\_pdf/14-616-15785705509-13.pdf](http://www.iraj.in/journal/journal_file/journal_pdf/14-616-15785705509-13.pdf) [Accessed 18th May 2022]
2. Bloomberg. (2022). *CouchSurfing International Inc.* Available from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/profile/company/53662Z:US> [Accessed 12th May 2022].
3. Bren on the Road. (2020) *Is This Finally The End of Couchsurfing? (And What's Next?)* Available from: <https://brenontheroad.com/the-end-of-couchsurfing/> [Accessed 24th May 2022].
4. Couchsurfing. (2003) *A new era for Couchsurfing*. Available from: <https://blog.couchsurfing.com/a-new-era-for-couchsurfing/> [Accessed 12th May 2022].
5. Couchsurfing. (2003) *Couchsurfing blog*. Available from: <https://blog.couchsurfing.com/> [Accessed 12th May 2022].
6. Couchsurfing. (2022) *Croatia*. Available from: <https://www.couchsurfing.com/places/Croatia> [Accessed 15th May 2022].
7. Couchsurfing. (2020) *5 ways to use Couchsurfing without leaving your home*. Available from: <https://blog.couchsurfing.com/5-ways-to-use-couchsurfing-at-home/> [Accessed 12th May 2022].
8. Couchsurfing. (2003). *Share your life*. Available from: <https://about.couchsurfing.com/about/about-us/> [Accessed 12th May 2022].
9. Couchsurfing. (2019) *The Couchsurfing Ambassador Program*. Available from: <https://blog.couchsurfing.com/couchsurfing-ambassadors/> [Accessed 15th May 2022]
10. Dujmović, M. (2019) *Komercijalizacija kulturne baštine u turizmu*, 151. Available from: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/327225> [Accessed 16th May 2022].
11. European Parliament. (2015) PE 595.897: *Tourism and the sharing economy*. Briefing. European Union.
12. Hosany, S., Hunter-Jones, P., McCabe, S. (2020) *Emotions in tourist experiences: Advancing our conceptual, methodological and empirical understanding*, 16: 100444, Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7245290/> [Accessed 16th May 2022].
13. HND Reality, LLC (2019), *Why are Short-term Rentals (Like Airbnb) Bad for Communities?* Available from: <https://hndrealty.com/why-are-short-term-rentals-like-airbnb-bad-for-communities/> [Accessed 15th May 2022]
14. Croatian Parliament (2008) *Decision on the proclamation of the law on the sojourn tax*. Zagreb:

- Official Gazette. 27
15. Institute of Tourism. (2019). *Attitudes and consumption of tourists in Croatia*. THOMAS. Zagreb.
  16. Karagić, A. (2020) *Ekonomija dijeljenja u turizmu*, 25. Available from: <https://repozitorij.unipu.hr/islandora/object/unipu:4886/datastream/PDF/view> [Accessed 18th May 2022]
  17. Kelebut, I., Maple, A. (1998) *Existing and new statistical research in the field of tourism in the Republic of Croatia*. No. 1., 43-60. Available from: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/268441> [Accessed 20th May 2022].
  18. The landlords' club. (2017) *Payment of the sojourn tax and registration of immediate relatives and friends at non-categorised facilities*. Available from: <https://www.klub-iznajmljivaca.com/2017/02/10/vikendice-prijava-rodbine-i-prijatelja/> [Accessed 18th May 2022]
  19. Kuhzady, S., Cakici, C., Olya, H., Mohajer, B., Han, H. (2020) *Couchsurfing involvement in non-profit peer-to-peer accommodations and its impact on destination image, familiarity, and behavioral intentions*, 44, 131-142. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7331519/> [Accessed 12th May 2022].
  20. Mai, S. E., Ketron, S. (2022) *How retailer ownership of vs. collaboration with sharing economy apps affects anticipated service quality and value co-creation*, Vol. 140, 648-692. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0148296321008444> [Accessed 12th May 2022].
  21. Ministry of Tourism. (2015) *Ordinance on the classification and categorization of establishments providing catering services in the household*. Zagreb: Official Gazette.
  22. Ministry of Tourism. (2009) *Ordinance on how to keep a list of tourists and on the form and content of the application form to the tourist board*. Zagreb: Official Gazette.
  23. Ministry of Tourism and Sports. (2022) *Check-in and check-out of guests*. Zagreb.
  24. Ministry of the Interior. (2016) *Instructions for accommodation providers: Registration of foreigners for a short stay*. Zagreb.
  25. Moreno-Gil, S., Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. (2020) *Overtourism and the sharing economy – Tourism cities at a crossroads*, International Journal of Tourism, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2. Available from: [https://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/26785/1/26785%20COCA-STEFANIAK\\_Overtourism\\_And\\_The\\_Sharing\\_Economy\\_Tourism\\_Cities\\_At\\_A\\_Crossroads\\_%28AAM%29\\_2020.pdf](https://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/26785/1/26785%20COCA-STEFANIAK_Overtourism_And_The_Sharing_Economy_Tourism_Cities_At_A_Crossroads_%28AAM%29_2020.pdf) [Accessed 12th May 2022].
  26. Pasimeni, F. (2020) *The Origin of the Sharing Economy Meets the Legacy of Fractional Ownership*. Key aspects of the sharing economy. 3. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348623856\\_The\\_Origin\\_of\\_the\\_Sharing\\_Economy\\_Meets\\_the\\_Legacy\\_of\\_Fractional\\_Ownership](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348623856_The_Origin_of_the_Sharing_Economy_Meets_the_Legacy_of_Fractional_Ownership) [Accessed 10th May 2022].
  27. Pesonen, A. J., Tussyadiah, I. (2017) *Peer-to-Peer accommodation: driver and user profiles*. In Dredge, D. & Gyimothy, S. (Eds.) *Collaborative Economy and Tourism. Perspectives, Politics, Policies and Prospects*. Springer. Pp. 285-303. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317348310\\_Peer-to-peer\\_accommodation\\_drivers\\_and\\_user\\_profiles](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317348310_Peer-to-peer_accommodation_drivers_and_user_profiles) [Accessed 12th May 2022].
  28. Pitchbook (2009) *Couchsurfing*. Available from: <https://pitchbook.com/profiles/company/52697-80#comparisons> [Accessed 12th May 2022]
  29. Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Seyfi, S., Hall, C. M., Hatamifar, P. (2021) *Understanding memorable tourism experiences and behavioral intentions of heritage tourists*, 5. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212571X2100069X> [Accessed 16th May 2022]
  30. Shapiro, D. J. (2012) „*Couchsurfing “: Explorations in Cosmopolitanism, Trust and Resistance*, San Diego. Ph. D. University of California.
  31. Quora (2015) *Under which circumstances do I need to pay the Couchsurfing host?* Available from: <https://www.quora.com/Under-which-circumstances-do-I-need-to-pay-the-couchsurfing-host> [Accessed 18th May 2022]
  32. Walker, R. (2016) NEW YORK TIMES: *Airbnb Pits Neighbor Against Neighbor in Tourist-Friendly New Orleans*. Section BU, pp. 1.
  33. World Bank Group. (2018) *Tourism and the Sharing Economy: Policy & Potential of Sustainable Peer-to-Peer Accommodation*. 11. Glossary. Washington, DC.
  34. World Travel & Tourism Council. (2018) *Airbnb in South Africa: The Positive Impact of Healthy Tourism*. 16. Estimating Airbnb's impact in South Africa. UNWTO.