



Authoritative performances of care in home exchange

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the position of home exchange within the sharing economy. Drawing on in-depth qualitative research, we adopt the lens of authoritative performances to explore how home exchangers resolve contradictions between competing endeavours. Taking a pluralistic view, our findings have revealed that home exchangers are entrepreneurial in the meanings they attach to their homes. However, this is softened by authoritative performances of care that replace impersonal exchange with interpersonal relationships of reciprocity and mutual trust. Our findings also offer further contributions by exploring how home exchangers experience the dichotomies of familiar and unfamiliar in tourism and the absent and present host.

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Introduction

"I don't think any book or any description that I have heard has effectively captured the economics that is playing out right now. I don't think it is anti-capitalistic and I think that basic economics are driving a lot of this, but not in the Uber way or the Airbnb way where people are just driven by money. I think there is a utopian level to all of this that is super-exciting, but it is not altruistic either."

[(Steve)]

Tourism has been a key industry contributing to the growth of the sharing economy (Dolnicar, 2019). Reinhold and Dolnicar (2017a, p. 15) define the sharing economy as "facilitated relationships between buyers and sellers who connect to exchange access to resources in return for a monetary or non-monetary reward." This is evident in the range of platforms that facilitate peer-to-peer interactions between tourists and residents. Airbnb, Rideshare, Couchsurfing, and Mealsharing are just some of platforms used to share homes, cars, food and more. Despite this growth, Heo (2016) suggests that further research is needed on the impact of peer-to-peer sharing services in tourism. As Reinhold and Dolnicar (2017b) note, they are more than just accommodation providers, more complex than simple travel agents. One area of complexity is the diversity of business models positioned within the sharing economy. One such model is home exchange. Our opening quote from an interview with the president of a home exchange platform is suggestive of the complexity of home exchange. Steve recognises the role of "basic economics" and the "utopian level," speaking to the different motives and practices at work.

In their frame analysis, Leung, Xue and Wen (2019) find that accommodation is the most frequently mentioned product category in US news articles about the sharing economy, accounting for almost 42 % of media coverage. Airbnb is without question the most widely discussed platform in relation to accommodation sharing (Dolnicar, 2019; Dolnicar & Zare, 2020; Ert & Fleischer,

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2019; Liang, Li, Liu, & Schuckert, 2019; Scerri & Presbury, 2020; Song et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2019). In contrast, other types of accommodation sharing, most notably home exchange with its longer history, have received surprisingly limited research attention, remain underexplored (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020) and are therefore in need of further analysis to understand their character and tone.

Motivational research in tourism has suggested that economic benefits often drive engagement within peer-to-peer travel alongside more intangible benefits like authenticity and community (Decrop et al., 2018; Guttentag et al., 2018). Platforms such as Couchsurfing facilitate a sense of shared intimacy and sociality in line with a moral economy (Germann Molz, 2013). While, for other platforms such as Zipcar, users unambiguously prioritise self-interest over community (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). However, research has not focused in depth on how seemingly contradictory meanings and practices can peacefully co-exist within certain sharing platforms. This is despite Hardy and Dolnicar (2017) suggesting multiple simultaneous motivations exist in both hosts and guests. We seek to address this gap through a qualitative study of home exchange. We are guided by the following research question: How do entrepreneurialism and authoritative performances of care interact in home exchange?

Home exchange works by registering with an online exchange platform, paying a modest membership fee and creating an online profile that includes visual and textual content about themselves, the home, local area, and travel preferences. Members use the platform to seek out exchange partners and negotiate exchange agreements. Following the agreement, home exchangers swap homes for an agreed period. Home exchange is also predicted to grow in the coming years (Gassmann et al., 2021). We find home exchange to be an ideal context to explore how tourists can bring together entrepreneurialism and care. To explore how they manage the contradictions between these competing endeavours, we draw on Arnould and Price's (2000) concept of authoritative performances. In the following sections, we establish the theoretical framing for our paper.

Literature review

The literature review is divided into three sections: an overview of the sharing economy; a contextual review of prior research on home exchange; and an introduction to our enabling theory of authoritative performance.

The sharing economy

The sharing economy has become a catch-all umbrella term with calls made to unpick its meaning (Perren & Kozinets, 2018). Leung et al. (2019, p. 50) suggest that the sharing economy can be regarded as an "ecosystem as it incorporates multiple interconnected 'organisms' (i.e., interest groups) that coexist and interact in a dynamic environment." In a review of the genealogy of the sharing economy, Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015) identify seventeen different descriptors; access economy, moral economy, collaborative consumption, the mesh, to name a few. Some of these suggest that the sharing economy is part of the capitalist economy while others suggest sharing as an alternative to it (Richardson, 2015).

Acquier, Daudigeos and Pinkse (2017, p. 3) attempt to map perspectives on the sharing economy into three "organizing cores": (1) the access economy is based on sharing underutilised assets, (2) the platform economy is the facilitation of market and non-market exchange through digital platforms, and (3) the community-based economy involves "non-contractual, non-hierarchical or non-monetized forms of exchange." Despite attempts to define and categorise the sharing economy, full consensus has not been reached. Some have suggested the sharing economy has low levels of consociality (Belk, 2014; Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Perren & Kozinets, 2018) while other see it as an opportunity for shared intimacy (Germann Molz, 2013). However, there is agreement that the sharing economy has changed behaviour across a range of markets, particularly tourism.

One of the drivers of the growth of peer-to-peer markets has been a shift in trust (Ert & Fleischer, 2019). Botsman (2017) considers that a downfall in institutional trust has been replaced by distributed trust. This means that where trust used to flow upwards to leaders, experts and governments and run through intermediaries such as courts and corporations, it now flows horizontally between individuals enabled by platforms, networks and technologies. Distributed trust is unlocked by technology (Hawlitschek, 2019) and evident in the increased tendency to put trust in strangers based on their online reputation. Khodyakov (2007, p. 124) argues that "it seems more logical to treat trust not as a variable with different levels of strength, but rather as a process of its creation, development, and maintenance." This means that trust is dynamic and that individuals can be agentic in building trusting relationships with others. Ert et al.'s (2016) study on Airbnb is a case in point as they highlight the role of visual-based trust. Their findings reveal how assessment of the host's trustworthiness is linked to their personal photos. Similarly, Luo and Zhang's (2016) investigation of interpersonal trust in Couchsurfing demonstrates how trust can emerge in virtual tourism communities.

Home exchange

Unlike paid online peer-to-peer accommodation such as Airbnb (e.g., Dolnicar, 2019), home exchange has not received much academic research attention. Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis' (2013) conceptualisation of home exchange is the most comprehensive but there is a dearth of empirical studies. For them, home exchange is a form of non-commercial hospitality that stands in opposition to capitalism. They define home exchange as "a vacation alternative to market escape, which involves immobile, bilateral, unserviced and asymmetric exchange of accommodation, based on high levels of trust, domesticity and authentic local experiences" (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2013, p. 12). Forno and Garibaldi (2015) explore the socio-demographic characteristics and motivations of home exchangers in Italy. They reveal that the most popular motivations are to save money, travel more often and

gain authentic cultural experience. This rhetoric of authenticity and local interaction is like other forms of structurally organised exchange, such as hospitality exchange or work exchange (Kannisto, 2018).

There is a vast literature on the meaning of home which is effectively distilled by Zhu et al. (2019) who demonstrate that home is constructed in relation to three meanings: home-as-practical, home-as-social and home-as-attachment. Zhu et al.'s research on Airbnb is consistent with research that reveals that a sense of homeyness (McCracken, 2005) can be experienced beyond one's own home. Indeed, "as an omnipresent referent to distinguish the familiar from the strange, home is unavoidably a constituent of tourist experiences" (Wang, 2007, p. 796). Wang (2007) elaborates that tourists' search for home drives the production of a staged or customized authenticity that combines the familiar and the unfamiliar. The combination of homeyness or familiarity and mobility or unfamiliarity experienced within tourism accommodation provides a basis for well-being (Light & Brown, 2020).

Although the non-commercial nature of home exchange contrasts with the construction of the commercial home by tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs (Sweeney et al., 2018), home exchange does involve a certain level of entrepreneurial thinking. Entrepreneurialism refers to an "effort and willingness to sacrifice to take advantage of available resources and opportunities and to adapt to circumstance" (Huefner & Hunt, 1994, p. 59). In the tourism literature, entrepreneurship is argued to be under explored (Solvoll et al., 2015). This is unfortunate as it is evident home exchangers use their permanent home to facilitate access to a "temporary vacation home" without the burdens of ownership and with increased spatial-temporal mobility (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020, p. 10). For Belk (2014), this kind of open sharing is rare amongst strangers which reinforces the significance of the need for research within this context.

Whereas previous work has critiqued the ambiguity of the sharing economy and its "lack of scientific precision" (Dolnicar, 2019, p. 249), the recent offering by Eckhardt et al. (2019) adds conceptual clarity by spelling out the defining and typical characteristics of the sharing economy. In Table 1, we outline how home exchange fits with these characteristics.

In Table 1, we outline the enhanced role associated with hosting but the dual role of host and guest (i.e., simultaneously on demand and supply side) in reciprocal home exchanges must be acknowledged (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020). Previous research on peer-to-peer tourism has considered hosts and guests to be different with distinct motivations (Hardy & Dolnicar, 2017). This dual role in home exchange aligns with presumption within tourism entrepreneurship (Sweeney et al., 2018). Hosting tends to be viewed as a social practice that is based on co-presence and at least some face-to-face interaction (Janta & Christou, 2019; Scerri & Presbury, 2020; Sweeney et al., 2018). For example, within Airbnb, successful hosts offer a "hybrid experience" that combines a home feeling with professional-level hospitality (Zhu et al., 2019, p. 318); while the moral affordances of Couchsurfing are based on authenticity, intimacy and relations of care (Germann Molz, 2013). Given our focus on reciprocal home exchanges, we provide an alternative perspective by emphasising the absent host. We explore how care can be central to hosting even in contexts of physical distance. To do so, we adopt the lens of authoritative performances, and provide a brief overview of this concept in the following section.

Authoritative performances

Edensor (2000) develops the metaphor of tourists as performers as a helpful lens to understand the diverse meanings of tourist spaces. He argues that "the form of space, its organization, materiality, and aesthetic and sensual qualities can influence the kinds of performances that tourists undertake" (p. 327). Drawing on Rickly-Boyd and Metro-Rolands (2010) assertion that prosaic, mundane or background elements of space are core to tourist performances, we argue that the space of dwelling – in our case, the space of home exchange – is worthy of investigation. It is noteworthy that the metaphor of performance has also been identified as central to understanding the sharing economy. Drawing on Gibson-Graham's (2008) work on diverse economies, Richardson (2015) suggests that attention to performances can deconstruct the contradictions of the sharing economy and bring to the fore new ways of thinking. In this paper, we adopt the lens of authoritative performances to enable us to better understand experiences of home exchange.

Authoritative performances "are collective displays aimed at inventing or refashioning cultural traditions" (Arnould & Price, 2000, p. 140). Arnould and Price (2000) suggest that the concept of authoritative performances is helpful for understanding

Table 1
Mapping home exchange onto the characteristics of the sharing economy.

	Applicability to home exchange
<i>Defining characteristics</i>	
Access oriented	Home exchangers gain temporary access to accommodation for a fixed period as agreed in the exchange agreement.
Economically substantive	Exchange value is central to the reciprocal relationship between home exchangers.
Technology-based matching platform	Although home exchange pre-dates the Internet, there is now a range of internet-based platforms to connect home exchangers. Most have broad membership although some are targeted at demographic groups (e.g., teachers).
Enhanced consumer role	Home exchangers take on roles traditionally associated with accommodation providers such as marketing their homes, preparing properties for exchange (home décor, cleaning), and providing tourism advice.
Crowdsourced supply	Aggregate supply of homes from platform users.
<i>Typical characteristics</i>	
Reliance on Reputation System	Used across home exchange platforms with possibilities to offer feedback and ratings for communication, cleanliness, and whether the home matches descriptions.
Customer and resource owner are peers	Customers are both users and providers of homes for exchange.

the individual's relation to community. This is because authoritative performances help cement and secure the community through creating a collective sense of identity. For [Arnould and Price \(2000\)](#), the community orientation of authoritative performances complements authenticating acts that are aimed at the individual construction of the self. Authoritative performances can therefore act as a sign of group membership. They have a dramaturgical quality and involve scripting, rehearsal, stylization, ritualization and the invocation of tradition ([Arnould & Price, 2000](#)). Authoritative performances therefore sustain the community and can be viewed as "redressive activities that organize and repair breaches in social order" ([Arnould & Price, 2000, p. 147](#)).

The limited research on authoritative performances suggests that they can be an important means of achieving community and kinship ([Beverland et al., 2010](#); [Healy & Beverland, 2013](#)). For example, [Arnould and Price \(2000\)](#) concentrate on authoritative performances that resist the conditions of postmodernity (globalisation, deterritorialisation and hyperreality) that can be problematic for the self. Another example is found in [Beverland et al.'s \(2010\)](#) analysis of niche subcultural sport communities where authoritative performances of kinship and belonging offer escapism for those who seek an alternative to mainstream sports. The parlance of authoritative performances aligns with our context, and we explore the cultural scripts of home exchange as authoritative performances that enable home exchangers to resolve contradictions and uncertainty. Such performances are as [Abrahams \(1986, p. 60\)](#) extols "learned and rehearsed and practiced together." Here authoritative performances are best understood as a socially constructed practice of care-making, driven by a desire for imagined community and affiliation which serves to reinforce social bonds and shared experiences. In the following section we outline the methodology for our study.

Methodology

We adopted a qualitative approach, drawing on methods that enable deep insight. To sensitise ourselves to home exchanging, we began this project in 2015 with collection and analysis of textual and visual data from an online home exchange platform, including property listings. Online technologies are integral to the contemporary home exchange experience and this form of data collection helped us to understand the representations of space ([Farmaki et al., 2020](#)). We focused on 90 homes in the UK and Ireland that were being offered for exchange, drawing only on publicly available information. For ethical reasons, we decided not to use this dataset directly in our findings as drawing attention to specific homes through the reproduction of photographs and text could be a violation of home exchangers' privacy. However, this stage was helpful in alerting us to issues and themes suitable for further exploration in our main data collection. In order to reach multiple perspectives, we conducted interviews with two groups: (1) those professionally employed in the home exchange market, and (2) home exchangers themselves. University ethics approval was gained prior to commencement of data collection.

Based on our online sensitisation we approached five home exchange platforms and secured access to four. From this we were able to conduct interviews with their presidents and country representatives (see [Table 2](#)). Three were associated with home exchange platforms that are open to everyone (Steve, Adriana, and Ian), and one was from a platform that specialises on home exchanges for academics (Ola). These interviews were structured around various "grand tour" questions ([McCracken, 1998](#)) related to platform history, membership profiles, relationship with members and perceptions of home exchange trends. Alongside the interviews, we gathered information on guidelines and policies from the platform websites. Developing strong relationships with these market stakeholders was helpful in negotiating access to home exchangers as two of these platforms agreed to circulate our call for interviewees to their members encouraging those interested in participating to liaise directly with us.

From this sampling frame we recruited a purposive sample of seventeen home exchangers to participate in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. In selecting our sample, we looked for home exchangers from the UK who had been primarily responsible for arranging or completing at least one exchange (either in the UK or internationally) in the previous six months. Since they were recruited through the home exchange platforms, we could also be confident that they were active home exchangers. We had no further demographic or lifestyle criteria rather, we were led by the demographics of this community and our final sample comprised men and women, 40 to late 60's, working in professional occupations or retired (see [Table 3](#)). Our lowest number of exchanges was Chloe with three who had been exchanging for around one year. It became evident, through our screening discussions, that participants usually began to home exchange in their 30's and 40's when they owned their property and felt it was 'good enough' for exchanging. Once in the community they would typically exchange a few times per year so that by their 50's and 60's they could have experienced upwards of fifty exchanges like Elaine, Lesley, Harry and Joanne.

The interviews were primarily conducted via video-conference calls to allow for the broad geographical scope of home exchange and to encompass exchangers from across the UK. Topics covered included arranging and preparing for exchange, motivations and expectations when opening homes to accommodate others. In addition, we sought to gain reflections on integration into the host community,

Table 2
Details of home exchange organisations.

Pseudonym	Platform characteristics	Role	First involvement with the organisation
Steve	Describes the platform as a "23-year-old start up" with 66,000 homes. Identifies as the leader in the home exchange market.	President	2012
Adriana	Started by 2 home exchangers dissatisfied with other platforms and facilitates 25,000 exchanges per year.	Founder	2005
Ola	Academic home exchange platform with 400–700 listings at any time.	Founder	2000
Ian	Started by a group of teachers, now a community in 45 countries with 30,000 members. Identifies as the original home exchange organisation predating digital platforms.	National Representative	1972

Table 3
Details of home exchangers.

Pseudonym	Location	Age	Number of exchanges	Occupation
Daphne	London	42	6	Marketing
Philip	Northern Ireland	50s	15	Retail Manager
Peter	East Scotland	49	14	Social Researcher
Rachel	South England	65	22	Retired Teacher
Eva	Central Scotland	43	8	Teacher
Elaine	North Wales	60	50+	Civil Servant
Sara	South England	63	25+	Retired
Chloe	West Scotland	40s	3	Academic
Lesley	South England	Late 50s	50	Company Director
Mike	South England	54	15	Salesman
Tracey	South England	51	45+	Senior IT technician
Ross	London	64	20	Retired social worker
Norma	Central England	62	30	Semi-retired teacher and photographer
Joanne	North England	56	50	Retired, last job audit commission inspector
Harry	London	Early 60s	52	Freelance researcher
Fraser	South England	66	15	French teacher
Caroline	South England	50s	11	Small Business Owner

interaction with their temporary home and feelings about their own home, to continued contact with the exchange family and finally future home exchange plans. Interviews lasted up to approximately 2 h. Interview transcripts were imported into NVivo, and the research team collaboratively engaged in the interpretive process. We began with reading the transcripts multiple times to increase familiarity with the interview data. In practice the analysis was iterative (Spiggle, 1994) and proceeded through open coding of each interview and comparison between interviews looking for commonalities and differences.

Our data set enabled us to understand the motivations, relationships, labours, spaces, and experiences of home exchange. We coupled this with participant insights from one of the research members being an active home exchanger during the duration of the project, arranging over ten UK and international swaps. This enabled insider knowledge of the home exchange experience, of the practices involved and how trust is formed. Finally, our understanding from the literature was used to restore the text to a living communication (Tan et al., 2009) and fuse our horizons with the participants, recasting understanding of the phenomenon (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). These procedures guided us towards a focus on how seemingly conflicting ideals can interact and co-exist in home exchange.

Findings

The motivations of the home exchangers in our study reinforced those identified by Forno and Garibaldi (2015):

- To save money, e.g., “I was not working, and we could not really afford holidays and we came up with this idea because we were cash poor” (Elaine).
- To travel more often, e.g., “a lot of people do 5-6-7-8 per year and so a lot of those are long weekends” (Lesley).
- To gain authentic cultural experience, e.g., “I saw home exchanges as a way to broaden our experience and go to places further afield and really get more immersed in the culture than you do if you are staying in a holiday home, which is usually very, I don't know, sterile and minimal” (Daphne).

To build on this existing knowledge base, we use our findings to illustrate how seemingly conflicting ideals can interact and co-exist in home exchange. First, we reveal how home exchangers are entrepreneurial and the forms of trust produced. Second, we discuss how home exchangers enact authoritative performances of care that speak to forms of imagined community-making enacted through tourism. Third, we consider what happens when authoritative performances of care go wrong.

Home exchange: performances of trust and entrepreneurship

Our findings reveal that home exchangers perceive their homes as ‘assets’. Relative to other possessions, the home has a high economic value that home exchangers seek to maximise:

“I had a modern, semi-detached 70–80s property until about 1987 when I moved into an Edwardian house here in XX [seaside town] and when that happened you realise that actually you have got a property that is actually an asset which other people might want to come and stay in. We have a purely economic view of this, it is an asset and you are exchanging an asset and that asset has saved us through 15 exchanges, probably £30,000 in holidays.”

[[Fraser]]

The language of economics within Fraser's words illustrates how his appreciation of the aesthetic value of his Edwardian home led him to home exchange. In prior research, the economic benefits of participation in the sharing economy tend to be framed in

terms of generating extra income (e.g., [Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016](#)). In contrast to this money-focused perspective, the economic value of home exchanging facilitates lifestyle shifts in terms of enhanced travel opportunities.

Sara's trigger for becoming involved in home exchange was a divorce. Indeed, without home exchange, she would not have the financial means to travel as often and as far as she does:

"When I found myself living on my own in 2007 and on reduced income, I thought well I am paying a mortgage, I might as well make this housework for me. It is very expensive to stay in a hotel as a single person, you are paying single person rates for probably the worst room in the hotel and so why would I do that when I could have a whole house for free. So, I think that has to be the biggest benefit is the financial benefit. It enables me to have more holidays, longer holidays and gradually over the years I have got more and more adventurous."

[(Sara)]

Through home exchange, Sara feels *"more like a traveller and less like a tourist."* The decision to unlock the value of her home through exchange has undoubtedly been a positive one for Sara and her enthusiasm for travel shines through the interview as she recounts stories from her 25 plus home exchanges. Through her experiences she has reached the conclusion, that *"the whole world is just an exciting place."* Drawing on [McCracken's \(1986\)](#) ideas on the flows of cultural meaning, the meaning of home for home exchangers goes well beyond utilitarian value.

To a certain extent, this entrepreneurial perspective is reminiscent of profit-focused platform capitalism ([Hardy & Dolnicar, 2017](#)). However, it is important to note the distinctions between home exchange and paid online peer-to-peer accommodation. This distinction is an issue home exchange platforms are keen to convey. When discussing the change and growth within the home exchange market, Adriana suggests, *"with home exchange you create a bond, much more than with commercial renting and the fact that your exchange partners stay in your home and vice versa means that you will probably be more responsible."* This is an example of [Botsman's \(2017, p. 259\)](#) concept of distributed trust whereby home exchangers relate to each other in a way that is "honest, inclusive and accountable".

Home exchange is a significant decision because the home is more than an economically valuable asset. Unlike [Hardy and Dolnicar's \(2017, p. 173\)](#) AirBnB 'capitalists' who "are not attached to the space they are renting out," our participants cared greatly about their homes. However, this was not a deterrent and many of our home exchange participants echoed the sentiments of Adriana:

"They are opening up their home to me and so it is like a mutual trust, if it was just me opening up my home to a stranger and that was it, but they are doing the same thing and so I think there is a mutual trust with that."

[(Chloe)]

The formation of such 'mutual trust' in the home exchange experience thus becomes paramount. Harry added another factor which underlies the formation of mutual trust, the feeling that others are trustable and like-minded:

"On the whole you look at the occupations, teachers, lawyers, medics, academics, architects, engineers, so there is a kind of unspoken trust level based on class, or occupation/profession. Where you think okay, I am roughly similar kind of lifestyle thing and I actually talk about it, I think it is really, really important, if you were really randomly swapping with anybody in another town that you did not know much about it could be very disappointing. There is a certain quality assurance."

Trust here relates to lifestyle similarities and the class-based dynamic of home exchange which brings with it a certain sense of ideological like-mindedness so that sharing becomes possible and a willingness to take such a risk ameliorated. For Elaine, trust is symbiotic and emerges as *"I am in their house, and they are trusting me with their house."* Here a like-for-like mentality resolves the tensions over handing over one's home to a stranger. For others, locking a room with personal belongings becomes a solution to the risks. Daphne here spoke of how having to persuade her husband on the viability of home exchange resulted in this tactic being employed: *"we lock things away in there, it is a tiny room, and we don't even put that on the details of the house so there are no expectations."*

Home exchange platforms therefore must carefully negotiate platform development and growth so as not to erode the underlying principles of mutual trust and reciprocity. This is best expressed by Steve (President of Home exchange platform) who sought to replicate the "overnight phenomenon" of Tinder, the dating app:

"Our biggest priority as a company is what I call Tinderising the concept of home exchange. [...] you could have your first home exchange committed within your first 10 minutes on the site, [...] we are trying to find that fine line to walk where the core community that we have and the vision we have, the Utopia we are creating, we are not throwing that in the trash but we are making it easier for more people to experience it."

[(Steve)]

Steve recognises the complexities in navigating the “fine line” between platform growth and over-commercialisation, sacrificing vision and community for profit. While some online peer-to-peer accommodation, such as Airbnb, have become increasingly professionalised and characterised by capitalist tendencies (Farmaki et al., 2020), Steve makes efforts to develop the platform in a way that is not associated with having “sold out” the community to ensure that the fragile ‘utopian’ vision which underscores the practice is not damaged irrevocably. The online platforms essentially act as intermediaries that define the rules (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015) of home exchange. Our findings reveal that one means that home exchangers use to downplay the entrepreneurial nature of home exchange and be protective of the forms of imagined community being re-enacted is through authoritative performances of care. We elaborate in the following section.

Authoritative performances of care

Paid online peer-to-peer accommodation is often considered as a welcome contrast to the pre-scripted service delivery found in hotels (Scerri & Presbury, 2020). Our findings suggest that we should not be too quick to assume that peer-to-peer accommodation is unscripted. Rather, home exchange operates on an alternative script of care that participants learn over time through their interactions with the platform and other home exchangers. For example, Joanne recalls her first experience of home exchange as being significant in introducing her to this script:

“The first long exchange we did, like I said, was to Denmark, and that family had exchanged numerous times and they were brilliant because what they did was, they stuck post-its all over the place. There is some stuff in here, ice creams for Andrew, our son, help yourself to this, help yourself to that and so you did not feel like you were intruding, and we learned an awful lot from that first exchange.”

[(Joanne)]

The use of post-it notes to label cupboards and guide visitors suggests that preparing the home for exchange is not simply about maintaining standards of cleanliness but also supporting exchange partners to settle into their new accommodation, or in Ross' words, “*prepar[ing] your house for someone who doesn't know it, to live in.*” Edensor (2000, p. 327) suggests that “communal conventions about ‘appropriate’ ways of acting” need to be learned. For Joanne, this initial home exchange experience was an important learning opportunity that has shaped her own behaviour as she emulated this practice in subsequent home exchanges. Such performances are as Abrahams (1986, p. 60) illustrates “learned and rehearsed and practiced together.”

Gift-giving can also be central to expressing care. Some home exchange platforms explicitly encourage leaving a welcome gift but, even in exchanges where it is not a specified recommendation by the platform, gifts have become common practice:

“Bottles of wine are quite common, boxes of chocolates or things like that but I like to be different and so I thought very hard about something that was local to my area and I leave a couple of bottles of cider, different sorts of cider and some local cheeses and biscuits and probably a welcome card ... If they are arriving late afternoon or early evening, I would leave the makings of a dinner in the fridge ... If they are arriving late in the evening, and I know that they have maybe stopped on the way for their dinner, then I would leave things for breakfast. The list is endless of the kindness that people do”

[(Sara)]

Somewhat like the appropriation process for feeling at home in rented accommodation (Frochot et al., 2019), these nesting practices anchor home exchangers within their new surroundings. Frochot et al. (2019) demonstrate that nesting in rented accommodation involves organisational skills, for example, the pre-purchase of groceries or food preparation. In contrast, the performances of care enacted in home exchange ease nesting. While this results in practical benefits in terms of a reduced organisational burden, the emotions catalysed by these performances of care are also crucial, as Norma explains:

“It is like home from home isn't it, you go into somebody else's house, and it is all set up ready for you, and literally you just move into their home, and it is a homely experience [...] so it is a totally different holiday from hotels because you are catering for yourself, and you are stepping into somebody else's lifestyle really, I suppose.”

Here we see how performances of care constitute “welcome anchorages” (Lynch, 2017, p. 179) that enable home exchangers to feel at home in another's abode. Previous work has highlighted the importance of the “meet-and-greet” to distinguish the arrival in peer-to-peer accommodation from the transactional nature of a hotel (Scerri & Presbury, 2020, p. 7) and indeed has shown that hosts may want to befriend their guests (Decrop et al., 2018; Hardy & Dolnicar, 2017). Our findings extend these perspectives and show that when hosts are absent, these welcome performances are underscored by practices of care which becomes an effective substitute for face-to-face interaction.

The authoritative performances of care discussed thus far relate to reciprocal home exchanges. Another interesting aspect of care within our findings is the extension of this mutual care between home exchange partners to care for the broader home exchange community. One illustration of this from Caroline demonstrates how help from the broader community rescued her holiday:

“The lady that we had originally agreed to swap with last October she became ill, quite seriously ill, about two weeks before we were due to go. I just sent off an email to everybody who lived and had sort of flexible dates on the East Coast of the States, and I had some fantastic replies from people who couldn't exchange but just said, come and stay with us if you cannot find anything else and then a family offered us their lake house for the month and so we stayed in their lake house. It was sorted out in about four days and I kept the emails that I had from people because I thought that if anything ever goes wrong again it is just lovely to read the letters and I think the sentiments that were in the emails in terms of people saying, well we cannot exchange, I don't think there is any possibility that we will ever come to England but please if you have not got anywhere to stay then just come and stay with us and I must have had about half a dozen to eight replies, which is just lovely.”

[(Caroline)]

As Caroline's experience attests, although the standard script of home exchange is one of reciprocity, there is scope to redefine the rules when necessary. The sense of community cohesion evident in the emails that Caroline received clearly contrasts with the impersonal and standardised relationships that characterise the commercial accommodation sector. The genuine hospitality evident in this example demonstrates that performances of care for the other can be enacted without any expectations of personal benefit. This prioritisation of social over monetary attitudes points towards how authoritative performance of care can “hold out the promise of community revival” (Arnould & Price, 2000, p. 151).

Sara offers another example of the relational character of hospitality within the community:

“Sometimes things can be arranged very quickly, and I can give you an example of that. Normally people would not contact house exchange partners by phone, the first contact would be through the website usually but I took a phone call one night, this was a couple of years ago, and she introduced herself as being on the [home exchanger provider] website, they had an elderly family member who had been admitted to my local hospital and they wanted to travel down to XX [rural England] that weekend, it was only two or three days, I can remember it being a Monday or Tuesday evening, and would I be interested in a house exchange in London. Yes, why not!”

[(Sara)]

Within these examples, we witness how the home exchange platform enables moral affordances (Germann Molz, 2013) to emerge as community members exhibit relations of care for others. Here home exchange is presented as a performance of care that responds to the troubles and individualising tendencies of modernity society (Bauman, 2000). This is reminiscent of the work of Power et al. (2017) who reveal how ethical entrepreneurship practices can be linked to values of care, humility and benevolence, where the focus is on relationship-building over individualism. However, we inevitably found some instances where authoritative performances of care go wrong that are discussed in the next section.

When authoritative performances of care go wrong

A view on the positive role of authoritative performances of care must be matched with a more critical bent. It has been recognised that in peer-to-peer accommodation markets, hosts and guests tend to be more positive about their experiences than in traditional tourism (Pera et al., 2019). While our findings broadly support this positivity, we inevitably found some instances to the contrary. Rachel reflects on an experience where trust broke down during the communication and planning of a proposed exchange:

After about a month I thought that we should be booking flights I will just email her and get a more specific starting date. Well I could not get hold of her, she did not answer any emails and she did not respond to any WhatsApp or Facebook, I could not get hold of her anyway, and so in the end I did an internet search and I found that she was a businesswoman and she had a cell phone number, which was listed, so I called it and said, you have entered into a contract with us to exchange and I want to set the date. She said, oh I have changed my mind, we are going to Hawaii instead. I was absolutely furious. If you have got a good rep she comes into her own because after a couple of days I was still angry and so I sent her an email and she was so cross she phoned me back and said, this isn't protocol, we really frown on this behaviour and I am going to report her to the American rep who will call her and ask for an explanation and if we are not happy then we will remove her from [the platform].

[(Rachel)]

The home exchange platform usually plays a background role in negotiating exchanges but, as Rachel explains, its centrality comes to the fore when authoritative performances of care fail. Here Rachel's host transgresses the norms of exchange by backing out of their exchange and failing to communicate. The exchange platform redresses this lack of care by acting and reassuring Rachel that the community has higher standards of care, and such behaviour has no place on the platform. This reinforces Edensor's (2000) point about the role of social control in regulating performance. Here, the home exchange platform has a crucial role in ensuring that scripts of care are enacted in line with community conventions.

Authoritative performances of care can also fail when there is a mismatch of aesthetic and spatial expectations as in Harry's account:

“once or twice, we have been in a house that has been very messy and once or twice we have been a house where the actual kitchen equipment and everything is crap. One place we stayed in the Alps in France didn't have a sofa, it just had a rigid type of it was obviously a person who did not like sitting in comfortable seats, and you think Christ here we are here for two weeks. Occasionally it is the sub-standard physical environment. [...] It is very rare; it is much more common to find places better than yours or equal to yours.”

[(Harry)]

Home exchangers use their images on the platforms and social interactions before exchange to align expectations of accommodation quality and experience. In most cases exchangers find reciprocity of quality and welcome, meaning that they visit homes of equal or better quality than their own. However, it is only when misalignment occurs that problems surface. As Lynch (2017, p. 180) suggests, “welcome serves as a social oil which only becomes remarkable if it somehow fails.” This misalignment is not just about poor quality but also occurs when homes are too perfect:

“It wasn't just that it was kind of immaculate, but it actually was so like an IKEA showroom that you kind of expected arrows on the floor to help you around it and everything was just perfect and everywhere you looked there were photos of them on their wedding day and in dramatic poses and things and we did not feel very comfortable there. And unfortunately, it was the one trip where we had an issue with the car and I reversed their equally immaculate Volvo into a sign saying, 'Beware, Children Playing', and crumpled the rear bumper. In our house if there was Lego it would be in a massive collection in a box, whereas there it was all constructed into Starship Enterprise and on display, on the night before we left Naimh was playing with one of these and managed to drop it and so I was literally online trying to find instructions for the Starship Enterprise or whatever it was to rebuild the thing and we ended up have to confess up saying, look we have not only pranged your car but we have also broken your Lego.”

[(Peter)]

Wu et al. (2018) suggest home brings together three dimensions - a physical home, a social home and a personal home. Peter's account shows how mismatch across all three of these dimensions lead him to feeling a lack of a sense of homeyness. First in terms of the physical home, Peter expresses discomfort with the décor that is reminiscent of commercial staging and an inauthentic home aesthetic. Second in terms of the social home, the dramatic poses in the family photographs amplifies his discomfort in the space while the car damage risks disrupting the social relationship with the exchange partner. Finally, regarding personal home, he uses the example of the Lego to show the distinction between his own ideals of home and a sense of estrangement he feels in the host's home.

These examples show the fragility of authoritative performances of care and their vital importance in the practice of home exchange. Both host and guest can unintentionally, through misalignment of their lifestyle preferences, disrupt the care experiences of others.

Conclusion

In this paper, we follow Richardson (2015, p. 128) who argues that the sharing economy “must be viewed pluralistically rather than monolithically.” Richardson (2015, p. 122) suggests that exploring the *performances* of the sharing economy brings to light “its moments of contradiction and diversity.” By taking on board a pluralistic view, our main contribution is to demonstrate that while home exchangers are entrepreneurial in the meanings they attach to their homes, these are downplayed and softened by authoritative performances of care. This enables us to offer two secondary contributions by exploring two further dichotomies evident in home exchange: first, familiar and unfamiliar; and second, absent and present host.

While others have suggested that the commercialisation of online peer-to-peer accommodation calls into question the relevance of the sharing economy to this sector (Dolnicar, 2019), our focus on authoritative performances of care reveals how home exchange retains relevance to the sharing economy and avoids critiques of over-commercialisation. In contrast to the perception that the peer-to-peer accommodation sector is unscripted (Scerri & Presbury, 2020), we demonstrate the alternative script of care that leads to shared understandings and expectations amongst home exchangers. The Care Collective (2020, p. 76) demonstrate the link between care and sharing: “Market logics do not have the vocabulary, let alone the capacity, to capture or measure such values...we should fully acknowledge that the forces of care and compassion must always override the market-mediated forces of individualised self-interest.” The work of Lynch (2017) acknowledges the role of self-interest in the life politics of hospitality, yet still finds a space for what we would term imagined and practiced community to emerge. We demonstrate that contradictory forces in the form of entrepreneurialism co-exist with performances of care and community-making in the tourism encounter.

Our next contribution reveals how home exchange also challenges the paradox of the familiar and unfamiliar. We find that home exchange offers both simultaneously and addresses tourists' quest to combine “a preoccupied imagery of ‘otherness’ and an emplaced ‘sense of home’” (Wang 2007, p. 797). Authoritative performances of care mean that home exchange is not considered as a mere business transaction but something more meaningful. This means that home exchange retains the communal resistance often associated with authoritative performances (Arnould & Price, 2000), and exchangers invent a new ideal of travel that they regard as superior to mainstream market alternatives. In this way, they benefit from an experience of homeyness “that goes beyond what the market usually offers” (Debeneddeti et al., 2014, p. 909).

Previous research suggests that social and affective needs are just as important to the construction of home feeling as physical accommodation and calls for further research on the “social relationship” between host and guest (Zhu et al., 2019, p. 319). Our findings offer a contribution to understanding of care within the context of an absent host. Previous research on hosting tends to emphasise the co-presence of host and guest, such as research relating to Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) travel, commercial homes and alternative tourism (Choi & Fu, 2018; Germann Molz, 2013; Janta & Christou, 2019). In contrast, we draw attention to how home exchangers can perform the role of host even when not physically proximal to their guests. In discussing the moral economy of alternative tourism, Germann Molz (2013, p. 223) suggests that relations of care are bound up with “a sense of depth and intimacy” in relationships. We advance this work and suggest that care can also be a disembodied social performance. Caring practices create ‘spaces of intimacy’ (Janta & Christou, 2019, p. 175) and somewhat paradoxically we demonstrate how spaces of intimacy can also emerge when interaction is at a distance.

In terms of implications, these findings highlight that it is important for home exchange platforms to retain their distinctiveness from online paid peer-to-peer providers to ensure that these authoritative performances of care remain intact. This suggests two actions. First, they should make concerted efforts to grow in a way that avoids the commercial path of Airbnb so that they are not tarnished by “market-based competition, economic opportunism and capitalistic tendencies” (Farmaki et al., 2020, p. 9). Second, our findings show the central role of home exchange platforms in regulating performance of members. We suggest the platforms should offer clear guidelines of community conventions and should have mechanisms in place that enable them to step in when authoritative performances of care fail. They can issue guidance that compels participants to replace impersonal exchange with interpersonal relationships of reciprocity, mutual trust and care. In this way, the platform can become an “authentic partner” (Beverland et al., 2010, p. 711) that serves to generate kinship within the focal community.

To end on a positive note of cultural politics, the context of home exchange also offers societal implications that address Richardson's (2015, p. 128) call for the sharing economy to be critiqued through its possibilities to meet a “desire for a different world.” Peer-to-peer networks have played a role in the aftermath of various emergencies by housing displaced people and relief workers (Hajibaba & Dolnicar, 2017). While our data was collected before the Covid-19 pandemic, we have observed how authoritative performances of care within the home exchange community took centre stage during the pandemic. Here it is notable that one outcome was a shift to what are termed as solidarity exchanges, where members who had empty homes made them available to medical workers who needed to stay apart from their families to fulfil their professional responsibilities. Future research could consider caring contexts such as those involving migrants and the sharing of homes in times of crises, extending tourism scholarship for social purpose. There remains much scope to reimagine the possibilities and contours of tourism and hospitality; home exchange represents, we believe, one such conduit for change and care to emerge in fraught and uncertain times. If there is a utopian possibility at work, it is to reimagine social relations and the social bond between strangers in a kinder hue.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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