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Trust and Tolerance in Online Hospitality Networks

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of the requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Introduction

Philosophers and theorists from many fields keep telling us how technology is continuously making our world smaller and more connected. These days, people interact more with each other than a decade ago. Through different networks we are connected to almost every other person on the planet. Telephone networks, mobile networks, the Internet and thousands of its services (networks of their own) are deeply embedded into the life of a typical representative of the modern civilization. All these networks have had tremendous effect on the life of people — they changed the way people communicate, entertain, travel, study and date. There is hardly anyone who can argue with that. Today the Internet has become a medium where hundreds of different social networks exist. It is no longer sensible to look into the effects of the Internet as a whole. Internet is a huge industry, which consists of many thousands of actors and a lot of industries of their own. It became too big for the results of general research to be valuable without being too generalised. Accordingly, the researchers' attention shifted to the study of the use of specific services available in the Internet. Do so popular social networks affect how we behave in real life or how we think? While the answer to this question is also probably affirmative, the research is on-going. Thousands of papers are published every year, dozens of conferences, workshops and presentations are organised with an aim to gather more knowledge about our new connected lives.

Social network services (SNS) and social media in general are already a huge part of the lives of people worldwide. 860 million people use Facebook, around 280 million use Twitter, both networks are embedded into the everyday routines of modern humans. Social media used in politics, marketing, health, education, entertainment and hospitality industries, adding value and changing way people interact in these fields. Tourism and hospitality sector was probably among the ones most affected by the social revolution. Internet made it much easier to book flights, hotels, rent cars, find and rate restaurants and provide feedback to the businesses. Moreover SNS did not only enhance the existing elements already present in the industry, they created new ways to travel and even the whole new industries. Sites aggregating thousands of properties worldwide and used as an efficient way of finding accommodation in any city of the world were unconceivable before the advance of the Internet technology and now they are robust business models attracting millions in investments. Interestingly social media influence was not limited to

the mass tourism; budget travelling was affected greatly and in various ways as well. First and foremost SNS provided effective platforms for the organisation of large groups of people at comparably low cost.

Present research deals with one kind of SNS used by travellers who want to stay during their travel at homes of local people rather than in a hotel or a hostel. Hospitality exchange online services like Couchsurfing, Hospitality Club or BeWelcome are used as mediators for organisation of accommodation without any financial benefit for the hosting side. As there is no monetary exchange involved, guests pay their hosts by communicating with them, helping them with cooking or housekeeping, sharing ideas or educating skills. Hosts are in turn encouraged to do the same, resulting in cultural exchange as an outcome of every hosting-visiting arrangement. Hospitality exchange practice existed for decades: since 1960s with the help of printed directories and a telephone travellers arranged their stay at other members' houses. Only after the popularisation of the Internet and the worldwide web, this kind of travelling became popular enough to affect significant number of travellers. The largest hospitality exchange SNS, Couchsurfing has already attracted 10 million users (Couchsurfing 2015) and continues to grow. This SNS is in the focus of present research and as all the other hospitality exchange services has combined audience of less than 1/10th of that of Couchsurfing many findings about Couchsurfing apply to other online hospitality networks as well.

The underlying motivations of the hospitality exchange travellers seem to be similar to those of the widely-researched backpackers and budget tourists. These are the people who are more interested in participating in the local culture rather just watching it: willing to stay at homes of the locals as opposed to the commoditised comfort of a hotel. Often putting themselves in opposition to mainstream tourists, Couchsurfing and Hospitality Club participants are the budget travellers who value experience more than comfort, much more tolerant to the possible risks and use travelling as a method of becoming more independent and better skilled socially. Or at very least that is the image of a hospitality traveller that these sites promote. In reality though, now when Couchsurfing reached ten million global users (and Hospitality Club already has 600 thousand) one can hardly create a definitive picture of a hospitality exchange traveller. Among valiant people so vividly described by Couchsurfing's marketers there are surely many of those who participate in hospitality exchange only because it allows them to travel cheaply, using

other people's homes as free hotels and avoiding any kind of cultural exchange unless necessary; as well as those who use Couchsurfing for other reasons: to find a date, to promote one's own product or even to use it as a backdrop for criminal activity. Inevitably any community that started on the basis of common interest with time and popularity gains members, who do not share this common interest, ultimately becoming more diluted and less homogenous, resembling more the variety of a general public. While many of the older Couchsurfing.org users lament the site becoming more popular and losing its underlying philosophy, I see this process as an interesting departing point for a comprehensive research of user attitudes and motivations.

The general objective of the thesis is to understand how social networks and especially hospitality services change the way people perceive others. These changes will be examined through the changes in tolerance, trust towards others and the degree to which respondents accept different ways of life and world-views. Ultimately the research aims to establish whether the participation in these networks is the result of pre-selection by the members during signing up or the participation in the hospitality SNS actively shapes the way an individual sees others. The general objective of understanding the effects of participation in online social network services can be only achieved through measuring the changes that this participation evokes in the social network users. This can be done by defining several important areas connected to the analysed concepts and measuring how the members of the online hospitality networks perform in comparison to the people of similar demographics who have never participated in such networks.

Online hospitality networks is a very recent phenomenon, but even before the age of the Internet, there existed organisations and clubs that had precisely the same function as the hospitality service networks of today: to offer accommodation for travellers in the homes of fellow club members. Naturally members of these organisations used telephone and post to connect with each other and the interaction between the members was very different. To better understand how such clubs evolved into the present-day hospitality networks, what has changed and what did not, the first chapter provides an insight into the evolution and explains the milestones leading to the appearance of the first internet hospitality service networks. At the same time being *online* social networks, hospitality service networks are the part of the social development of the Internet and their history and appearance cannot be explained without taking into account the social processes going on in the Web. All that brings on the more specific objective of the present thesis:

to understand the way participation in the hospitality SNS affects individual trust and tolerance towards representatives of other cultures and whether these effects are related to the amount of experience of using hospitality networks. That is whether users of hospitality SNS become more tolerant and trustful as they use the networks more.

The participation in these networks is not governed by the monetary exchanges but rather facilitated by the structure of the online network and member's trustfulness. The concept of trust plays crucial role in understanding the hospitality exchange as the functioning of hospitality online services is based on trust and the whole existence of these networks would be impossible without trust that their members exercise in other members and in the system. Within the study of social behaviour of individuals online trust is often viewed as a concept closely connected to privacy. On this level online privacy and trust operate in symbiotic manner where shortage of trust may be compensated by more privacy and the other way around (Joinson et al. 2010). From this perspective the use of a website that offers less privacy by requiring more information from the user calls for more trust from a user than a website where one can stay mostly anonymous. Thus online social networks require more trust than non-social websites and hospitality SNS are even more trust-demanding. In hospitality SNS users' trust is expressed through the hosting arrangements made over the hospitality service. Such arrangements can be viewed as composites of hosting-visiting agreements, where one side agrees on hosting the other at its own home, and the other one agrees to visit particular host. Importantly unlike Facebook or similar general-purpose social network services, in hospitality networks the whole system is meant to be used for connecting with strangers rather than people a user may already know. Furthermore as the system is centred on travelling, interactions originating on Couchsurfing and similar websites are much less constrained by the geographical distances between the members. All this and also the fact that offline interactions are very important part of the hospitality SNS makes study of online trust in relation to hospitality networks connected to the study of generalised trust offline.

Similarly to trust, tolerance towards representatives of other cultures is another concept likely to be affected by the participation in hospitality SNS. There is no complete agreement among scholars of whether the use of SNS and the Internet in general contributes to the individual tolerance or even leads to more exposure to the diverse opinions. SNS may be effective places for dialogue and intercultural understanding by

allowing different users to share their opinions and tackle others preconceptions and stereotypes. At the same time the same SNS can contribute to dogmatism and prejudice through clustering of holders of specific political views and ideologies, allowing individuals to consciously filter out undesired information and reinforce their own views and stereotypes (Gaines and Mondak 2009). Which of these two processes is prevalent is a question whose answer is different depending on each network and group of people. Hospitality SNS in their essence are intended to be tolerant contact spaces. While intolerance suggests fewer contacts with people from outside one's in-group and reluctance to approach people from outside one's own comfort zone, hospitality networks are in turn created to foster the opposite behaviour: communication and interaction with complete strangers, who obviously are out of one's social in-group. An intolerant person would be much less inclined to take part in hospitality SNS as on these networks, the interactions with people from group he or she is intolerant of is very likely. Socializing among members is the ultimate goal of the hospitality networks: bringing the world closer, making people more open. Hospitality exchange users put their emphasis on meeting new people, enjoying less touristic places and participating rather than just watching. Hospitality exchange networks are services that are generating contact zones between people from different backgrounds, countries and cultures. Naturally such more involved travelling as well as intensive communication with locals (often the representatives of other cultures) is bound to affect these travellers. While in theory these assumptions sound reasonable, there was no comprehensive research dealing with the study of tolerance in the hospitality SNS. The effect of participation in the hospitality SNS on tolerance, as well as tolerance-based pre-selection of the hospitality SNS users largely remains a field for speculation, whereas this thesis is aimed at providing substantial evidence of whether these effects exist or not. Tolerance is discussed and conceptualised in Chapter 3 of the thesis and tolerance-related questions are included in the thesis questionnaire. Analytical part of the thesis will answer the question of whether more tolerant people would be more likely users of Couchsurfing and whether the prolonged use of the network has effect on individual tolerance presumably through the reinforcement of positive (trusting and tolerant) behaviour.

The search of the effects of participation in Couchsurfing can be articulated with the following questions:

1. Are the Couchsurfing network members significantly different from the other Internet users in their levels of trust and tolerance?
2. Does the use of the Couchsurfing network affect the level of trust of its members towards representatives of other cultures and change the level of tolerance to people coming from different cultures and traditions?

Finding answer to these two questions is the main goal of the present thesis. The research of the outlined questions cannot be limited to the study of online interactions like in analogous studies of general-purpose social networks similar to Facebook, Twitter or MySpace. The study of online hospitality networks inevitably must involve the analysis of both online and offline interactions of the members of such networks as offline interactions constitute a significant (and even dominant) part of participation in hospitality exchange. Offline interactions, i.e. travelling and hosting other members, connect this study to the study of effects of exposure to other cultures and mobility, restricting viewing the phenomenon simply from the point of view of online social networks analysis. There is evidence for the positive effect on tolerance as the result of more diversity in one's personal social network (Harell 2010). While the positive effect of long-term mobility on the tolerance and perception of otherness was researched and proven (Dinesen 2012; Gingerich 1999), the effect of exposure of people to the foreign culture in short-term perspective is much less researched. Finding whether the people actively engaged in Couchsurfing who travel a lot but stay in one place (exposed to a particular culture) for relatively short term tend to be more trusting and tolerant towards others is another interesting question, discussed in the study.

To measure these changes the survey will be designed and conducted in order to cover main aspects of attitudes and perceptions toward foreign cultures, societies and ideas and also toward unfamiliar people in general. Ultimately generalised trust and tolerance will be used as measures of that attitudes and relations, clearly defining the objects of trust and tolerance as "strangers", individuals outside one's in-group. Questionnaires will be offered to two groups of the Internet users: first group will consist of people who are regular hospitality social network users, second group will be composed of regular Internet users who have never participated in hospitality networks but use other online social networks like Facebook, Twitter or Google+. Survey will be designed to measure qualitative differences in responses between these two groups of respondents. This will be done through defining important ideas and notions closely

related to the topic of the research and asking respondents to evaluate them on a specific scale. To tackle the question of whether the experience of participating in Couchsurfing makes people more trustful or tolerant, the amount of experience of every respondent will be measured and the experience values will be compared to their levels of generalised trust and tolerance. To make the results of the research comparable to some more general research in sociology, indexes used in the survey will be adapted from more general surveys (World Value survey, European Social Survey and others). Additional short qualitative survey will be employed to better understand the user self-perception and their thoughts on some of the discussed concepts.

Results of the survey will be used to either support or reject the hypothesis that people who actively take part in hospitality service networks are generally more trusting and tolerant towards representatives of different cultures. This general hypothesis can be broken down into five more specific hypotheses, formulated to tackle two general and two special assumptions about trust and tolerance. General ones are that participation in hospitality social networks positively associated with the level of trust (H1) and tolerance (H3) of a participant towards other people in general. Specific hypotheses assume that people who actively participate in hospitality social networks for considerable time have higher level of generalized trust (H2) and tolerance (H4) than those who do not. The fifth hypothesis looks into the way trust and tolerance is built up: looking into positive and negative interactions that shape the experience of a user in the network. Prediction models will be constructed to find out what combination of criteria is the best predictor for tolerance and trust of social media users (both in the *user* and *non-user* samples) and to what degree individual trust and tolerance may be predicted with the help of Couchsurfing-related variables.

Structurally the thesis is divided into nine chapters plus introduction, conclusions and appendices. The theoretical part of the dissertation consists of several chapters describing the core concepts of the work. They do not form a continuous narrative but rather explore the background of the related concepts separately, narrowing them down into the scope of present work towards the end of each chapter. The theoretical considerations of each chapter are later addressed in the analytical part of the thesis. Chapter 1 provides background on the evolution of social media in the Internet and the development of SNS, providing literature review of the research of the Internet and more specifically social media. Chapter 2 examines the history of hospitality exchange and

non-mainstream tourism in general to figure out the origin of hospitality SNS. It also includes the demographic description of typical Couchsurfing users from previously available surveys as well as an overview of related online tourism services. Next two chapters are a detailed look at the two core concepts of the dissertation: trust and tolerance. In Chapter 3 on tolerance I shortly trace back the history of the concept before applying it to the Internet and ultimately the social networks. Chapter 4 on trust describes the main approaches to the research of trust and talks about generalised trust — the most important concept of the thesis. Fifth chapter discusses the application of trust theories in online environment and the emerging concept of online trust, including an extensive overview of research conducted on trust in hospitality SNS. Hypotheses and survey design are presented in Chapter 6. Five hypotheses related to three main indicators (generalized trust, tolerance and Couchsurfing experience) are described and conceptualized. Survey questionnaire are described and explained in the second part of the chapter.

The Chapters 7, 8 and 9 deal with the results of the survey and describe the findings of the research. More general Chapter 7 provides description of demographics and comparison with other available datasets. It specifically discusses the motivations to use Couchsurfing network reported by its users and negative experiences in Couchsurfing. Eighth chapter includes results on the analysis of connection between generalized trust and the use of Couchsurfing, discussed along with the results of qualitative survey and prediction model of trust. Chapter 9 provides the analysis of tolerance in Couchsurfing and the connection between individual tolerance level and experience of using this hospitality network. In these chapters negative user experience is also discussed in the context of individual trust and tolerance. The dissertation ends with Conclusions chapter and appendices that provide survey codebook and list the indicator values used in the analysis.

With the ever increasing number of internet users in general and the users of various social networks online, one can observe increasing degree of virtualization of human interactions. While involvement of people in the online social networks increases at galloping speed, the research of this extensive sphere is still at its beginning. Less than a decade ago most of the studies of the effects of the digital interactions on the individuals were of very general nature and failed to provide any insight on specific effects of particular internet services. Even now when discussing attitudes and perception of the

individuals, most papers explore the effects of the Internet as a whole, rather than digging into the effects and changes that more specific Internet applications cause in the behaviour and values of their users. Such holistic approach to analysing the Internet might have been sensible a decade ago, but now with the development of the technology, it is at the very least inaccurate and often just plain pointless. As I will explain in the following chapter, analysing the Internet as one homogenous entity now makes no more sense than analysing the whole publishing industry as a combined body when trying to understand its effect on people. This work is aimed at filling the gap of research concerning the specific kind of online social network services — hospitality network services. By determining and evaluating the effects these networks have on their members, present work will contribute to the better understanding of how virtual interactions change the way we think of others and evaluate others.

Intended audience for this thesis are scholars and general public who are interested in the online social networks and their increasing effect on our lives. As the thesis provides detailed explanation of every concept used in the analysis, thesis does not require any specific prior knowledge, except for basic grasp of the Internet technology. First two chapters provide brief account of the developments in social media and modern non-mainstream tourism, while more complex sociological concepts like trust and tolerance are discussed in detail in corresponding chapters to provide necessary background for people who are only marginally familiar with them. Every statistical finding is discussed and illustrated to make the analysis more comprehensible for general public.

As a “hot topic” social networks effects on people are subject to the speculations fuelled by popular media. High public interest combined with insufficient scientific research is likely to lead to the stereotypes and misconceptions. The only way to tackle these misconceptions is to conduct more rigorous scientific research and provide results that can be used to draw valid conclusions on the subject. Current thesis hopefully will become such a solid brick in the wall of online social network studies and provide a reliable starting point for those who will venture on to continue the study of effects that online hospitality networks have on our lives or at least an interesting reading for those who like me are fascinated by the way social networks influence our lives.

CHAPTER 1: Social Network Services

1.1 Defining social network service

The focus of the present work is the online hospitality social network services. To understand how hospitality networks function and how people participate in them, first it is necessary to define what an online social network service in general is. Social network service (SNS), sometimes called Online Social Network (OSN) or often just “social network” is an internet web service that has two vital elements: profiles and connections. Users’ profiles and connections between the profiles are the main building bricks of any SNS. Profiles and connections can have various names in different social networks but their key features and traits remain the same.

Profile is a page created and maintained by an individual user. It includes basic information about the user, added by the user himself and may include member-specific picture, photos, videos, blog posts, recent activity of the member within the network, user-defined elements and applications. Profiles (called sometimes “user pages”, listings, etc.) vary drastically from network to network in their representation and visibility. Some networks permit to control the number of people who are allowed to see one’s profile, while others restrict the visibility to Friends or Friends of Friends. Such limitations on the access are one of the primary ways of differentiating between networks (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Furthermore profiles may be created and administered by a group of people, corporate entity or an organization depending on the network’s terms of use. Different SNSs impose various restrictions on who exactly can have a profile in the network.

By the term **Friend** here and thereafter in this work I mean a typical type of connection within the social network site. From network to network connections may have different nomenclature and may be defined by different terms (alternative names: followers, fans, readers). **Connection** is an articulation of the relations between entities (profiles, pages) within a social network site. Some networks may allow only mutual connections (like Couchsurfing friendship), others allow one-side connections (like friendship on LiveJournal or following on Twitter) or both types of connections (Facebook friendship and follow-connections).

Essentially social network service is a very broad term and the sites defined as SNS are very different in their focus and intended audience. There are many all-purpose

general networks (Facebook, Google +, MySpace) but many are based around particular interests of their users like art (DeviantArt), music (last.fm), photographing (Instagram, Flickr), image-sharing (Pinterest) and video-blogging (YouTube, Vimeo). Some of the networks are created exclusively for dog and cat owners (Dogster, Catster); others are strictly business-networks (LinkedIn). And of course there is a particular kind of networks, called hospitality social network sites like Couchsurfing and Hospitality club, which are the focus of the present thesis. All of the SNSs share common trait of having profiles and connections between the profiles, which make them what they are.

In the scope of this work online social network sites are defined as web-based services that are characterized by presence the following elements: 1) profiles, created and maintained by its members 2) visible and functioning connections between profiles 3) ability of members to interact through the connections with other members and their profiles. Although some may argue against the visibility of connections being the essential characteristic trait of a social network site, the articulation of the links between members is very important. These links may not be always visible to every other member¹; the important aspect is visibility to the members involved in the connection themselves. That is to say an individual who uses social network site can clearly see his or her connections to other individuals, groups, profiles and other entities in the network. Gotta suggests two more “core” traits that characterize an SNS: ability of a member to manage one’s visibility within the network and control over how he or she prefers to be contacted by other members (Gotta 2008, 11). In my opinion, although modern SNS often have features suggested by Gotta, they are not essential traits of SNS, but rather somewhat more sophisticated approaches toward the implementation of profiles and interaction systems (second and third vital elements of an SNS).

1.2 Evolution and idea behind modern Social Network Services

It is important to understand that online social networks are not a separate development that appeared at some point, but rather a result of natural progress of web technologies of the Internet. SNS is an amalgam of a number of technologies already

¹ Although Thelwall and Stuart do argue that such connections have to be public by stating that “public friendship” is the most important trait of an SNS. (Thelwall and Stuart 2010)

available by the time the first SNS appeared. Profiles are very similar to personal webpages that existed years before, messaging was one of the first uses of the Internet at all, photo and file sharing was also available. SNS just combined all these features and rebuilt them around a user. With SNS, a user or rather a user's profile became the central hub of interaction in the service. More personalized, more user-centred experience is the main difference of the SNS from earlier web sites. And although social networks introduced very little novelty in the actual technology, what they created was innovative and immersing experience.

The first social network site fitting the definition outlined above was SixDegrees.com, site launched in the year 1997. Before SixDegrees few web services had some of the features of the SNS, but SixDegrees was the first website to have all of them. Users were able to create profiles, manage connections with other members and such connections were clearly visible as "lists of friends". Although SixDegrees initially attracted millions of users it failed to become a sustainable business and was closed in 2000 (Schneider 2010). In the next five years many existing developed communities evolved into social network sites – they allowed their members to create profiles and connect to other users within the network. AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, and MiGente, already accomplished regional and ethnic communities begin to support networking features. LunarStorm, CyWorld and Livejournal by 2001 already incorporated a kind of Friends-list into their very different systems.

In 2001, new wave of SNS started. That year Ryze, LinkedIn, Friendster and tribe.net were founded. Four networks were created almost simultaneously and their founders were personal acquaintances. These networks tried to target different niches without directly competing (Boyd and Ellison 2007). LinkedIn business network ultimately became the most successful of all four, ranked the 11th website by the number of visitors globally as for July 2014 (Alexa 2015). Back in 2001 though, Friendster was the most promising social network. It was the first really successful one for sure; it attracted more than 300 thousand users in the first year of existence even before the media coverage started (Anderson 2012). Much like SixDegrees five years earlier, Friendster used the concept of Friends to create circles of acquaintances that were intended to help users of the network to find new friends. Friendster gradually lost its popularity among western audiences over the years and in 2010 90% of all internet traffic to Friendster came from Asia. In 2011 Friendster was redesigned as a social gaming website and lost all of its

social networking features (Hitipeuw 2011). After the initial success of social networks in 2001, SNS became the mainstream and a vast number of network sites that targeted particular audiences appeared. SNSs like Visible Path, Xing targeted business people, Care2 was designed for activists, Couchsurfing and Hospitality Club helped to find place to sleep during travel, MyChurch was designed as an internet network for Christian churches and their members. More web-services implemented social network features and ultimately became SNSs themselves. Flickr and YouTube for instance evolved into the SNSs from media-sharing sites.

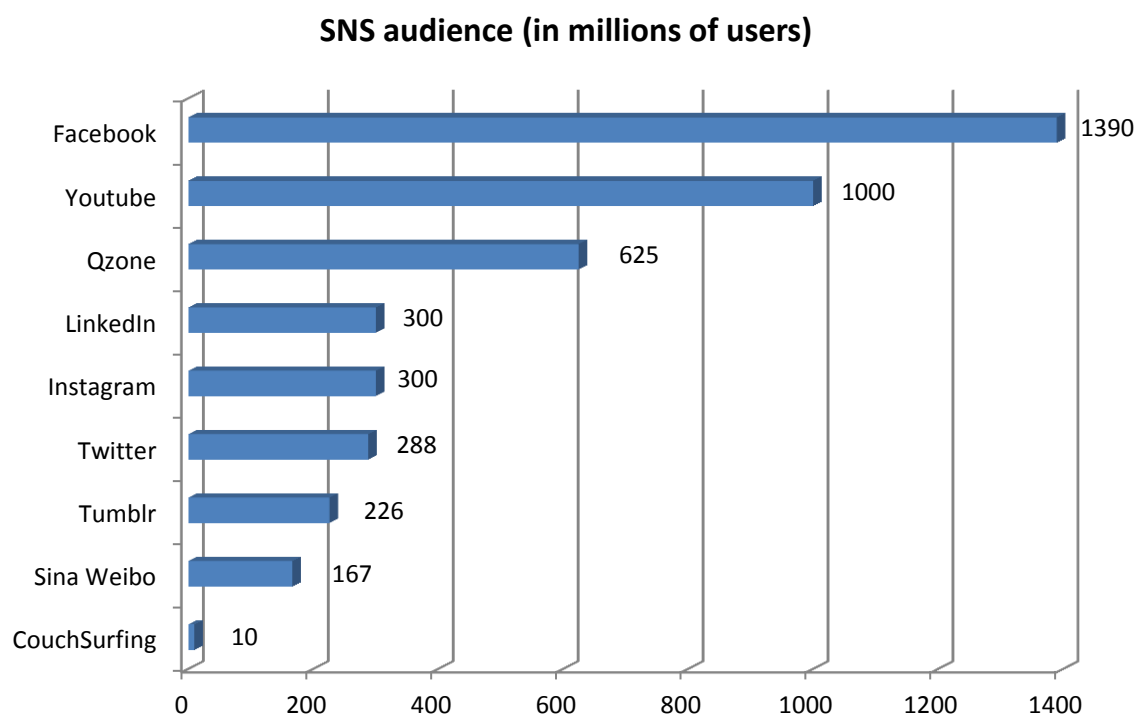
Soon social network services became the most important sites on the internet. No web-service could become successful and attain a decent user base without implementing some of the social network features. Yet after the failure of Friendster there was no clear leader among general-purpose SNS. That situation did not last long though, in 2003 MySpace appeared and quickly became massively successful, attracting millions of people in the first months. Early success of MySpace rests on its client-centred attitude and focus on entertainment industry – MySpace was and still is the place where fans can connect with their favourite musicians and bands. A year later, in early 2004 Facebook began its way to become the most successful present-day SNS. Before its worldwide launch in 2005, Facebook expanded as a closed University network in the United States where it gained enough devoted users for a powerful start. In May 2008, Facebook overtook MySpace based on the number of visitors worldwide (ZDNet 2008). Simple uniform design of profiles on Facebook appealed to people who were tired of MySpace user-modified blistering pages. More serious look of Facebook appealed to mature audiences (Pride and Ferrell 2011, 290) and soon having a profile in Facebook became as important as having an e-mail. Yet as it appeared later Facebook profiles were not simple enough. Twitter was launched in 2006 and gave birth to what was later called the microblogging. User profile in Twitter consists of very simple blogging-page where latest blog-entries are displayed. All entries should be less than 140 characters and can't include any text formatting. Such simplicity in form defined Twitter success: it now boasts of more than 255 million active users, sending 500 million messages per day and is one of the most popular web services in the internet (Twitter 2015). There are also often quite large general-purpose social networks that enjoy popularity in their own countries but much less known on the world scale: QZone in China, VK and Odnoklassniki in the Russian-speaking Internet, Tuenti in Spain, XING in Germany. The common trend is that

in most of the countries bar Russia and China, Facebook outperforms local networks as the most popular social platform (eMarketer 2013).

The proliferation of SNS and especially Twitter led to the phenomenon called social media. Huge topic by itself social media can be defined as “web-based and mobile applications that allow individuals and organizations to create, engage, and share new user-generated or existing content, in digital environments through multi-way communication” (Davis et al. 2012, 1). In academia research of social media is one of the global trends, every year a number of conferences on the topic of social media are organised that attract hundreds of researchers from different disciplines. The advance of social media has had tremendous implication for the society. Drastic change in the way people share and receive information, effects of social media revolution are on par of those of the invention of printing press and radio (Fine 2010). Today social media is a recognized instrument in marketing and politics, education and many other fields (see Al-Deen and Hendricks (2011), Pride and Ferrell (2011)).

Presently (March 2015) Facebook ranks as a 2nd site worldwide (Alexa 2015) and can boast of 1.39 billion monthly active users (Facebook 2015) that makes it the most popular and the largest SNS. Data on the size of biggest SNS can be seen on the diagram below.

Figure 1. Number of monthly active users of some of the most popular social network services



Sources: Twitter (2015), Facebook (2015), Youtube (2015), LinkedIn (2015), Tumblr (2015), Instagram (2015), China Internet Watch (2014a, 2014b), Couchsurfing (2014)

Thelwall and Stuart suggested typifying SNS using the intended usage as the main criterion. Thus authors propose to differentiate socializing SNS, networking SNS and navigation SNS (Thelwall and Stuart 2010, 268). Socializing SNS like Facebook are meant to be used mostly for communicating with existing friends and acquaintances, while networking SNS are those, designed to establish new connections (e.g. business SNS LinkedIn). Navigation SNS in turn are intended to be used for sharing different content and less so for interpersonal communication. This proposed topology concentrates on the aim of the intended interactions by the members and is somewhat artificial as within any network there is conformity of how users interact and why they interact.

The actual ways of “interacting” within SNS are varied. The most wide-spread mode of communication within SNS is through profile updates (they may be called status updates, tweets, blog posts – depending on the network). These updates are a type of mass communication: when an author of an update communicates some information (text, image, video, etc.) to a number of other members by making it available on the author’s own profile and possibly on the profiles of the recipients or their news feeds. Definitive list of people who can see the information is usually defined by the author: these may be network friends, friends of friends or even all users. Such profile updates allow maintaining connection with a number of weak ties simultaneously (N. Baym 2010, 135): as the messages are impersonal they do not suppose an obligation to respond, yet they make a connection once again visible and the information author “closer” to the recipient. Apart from that, most networks also allow their members to leave feedback (usually called “comments”) on the profile page of other members or on the particular entries (if they exist within the network). Additionally some social network sites may have extended means for communication like forums or discussion boards. These discussion platforms are often universal and not limited to the circle of friends (although they may require special rights like membership in a group or special invitation from members already engaged). Discussions may be organized by specific topic, geographically or by account type of the members – some networks have paid subscription that has some advantages over the usual free membership, including access to privileged discussion boards (one example of that is last.fm monthly subscription). Most social network sites also have a

system of private messaging. It is similar to conventional electronic mail; the only difference is that all communication goes through the network's servers. The presence of different communicative means within different networks and their sophistication depends on the history of a given social network site. Communicative possibilities of the members in the networks of different origin can vary greatly. Many SNS evolved to such from discussion boards (Cyworld in Korea), others from blogging services (Skyrock in France) and even instant-messaging services (QQ in China), while others were created as means of social messaging: like Twitter that puts communication on the pinnacle of user experience.

One other online phenomenon that developed in parallel with the evolution of social networks is Internet gaming. Albeit online games appeared only shortly after the appearance of the Internet, at the beginning they had nothing in common with social networks, lacking any social elements. Later whereas broadband connection became cheaper and the permitted bandwidth of a typical user became larger, online games started acquiring certain social features. It resulted in the appearance of Internet games (called MMORPGS²) built around users interacting with other people through their game characters. Most modern examples of such games can boast of a range of instruments used for socializing that surpasses those of any existing SNS. Games like Second Life or Habbo Hotel that are created specifically for socializing do fulfil all three requirements for the SNS, outlined at the beginning of the chapter. They have profiles (user character and its information), visible connections with other members and the ways to communicate through the connections. Online games in this sense usually have much better developed and varied ways of user's interaction. While most researchers clearly distinguish online games from the SNS (Cole and Griffiths 2007), in my view these games provide different interface and graphical demonstration of the same socializing features of SNS. After all, text, photos, videos or moving three-dimensional models are just different ways to transmit information. There is no significant difference between a two-dimensional photo and three-dimensional character as a representation of a person online and thus if an online game complies with the three main characteristic features of an SNS, it may be considered an SNS of a kind.

² Massively multiplayer online role-playing game

1.3 Social networks and their influence on the lives of people

Before SNS became popular enough to constitute an independent object for the academic research, Internet was studied as a phenomenon without focusing on specific sites or even separate technologies. The first question that was asked about the Internet by a researcher was a general one. Does the Internet affect how we communicate? It surely does. But does it affect the way we communicate offline? That was a trickier question that spawned many discussions and research.

The effect of the Internet technology is evident both on the individual and community levels. On the individual level, the absence of negative effect of the Internet on the interpersonal communication was confirmed through a clever experiment in 1999 (K. Hampton 2004, 226). During an experiment a “Netville” was constructed as a neighbourhood from the very beginning equipped with high-speed Internet connection, local neighbourhood-wide network, specific Internet applications and other technologic services. Full-scale two-year long observation of the usage patterns, communication between neighbours both offline and online, accompanied by a survey aimed to reveal differences between resident who used the technology embedded in their homes regularly and those who do not. The research revealed that “wired” residents communicated more both online and offline, had significantly more connections to their neighbours and had much greater number of weaker ties (K. N. Hampton 2003). Hampton argued that Internet would not reduce the importance of other meeting places (cafes, bars) but only provide an alternative, however affecting how people use these places, facilitating coordination by overcoming certain difficulties in communication (K. Hampton 2004). Indeed in almost a decade after this discussions and drastic increase in the number of the Internet users globally, the Internet hardly diminished the importance of real world meeting places. However it had certainly augmented the experience. This change may be attributed mostly to social media services and applications. Foursquare, for example, enriches the experience of visiting different restaurants or bars by allowing its users to attain additional benefits. That benefits stretch from virtual experience points to real bonuses: like free coffees or specific discounts offered at some places. Other SNS also possess mechanisms to widen their influence into the real world environment: they allow their members to check-in at different places, rate establishments or provide tips for other members. All this undoubtedly forms important part of feeling of the network society we live in and surely enriches the experiences in the real world rather than diminishes them.

Hospitality SNS have even more profound influence as they provide means to interact and establish connections with strangers in their private spaces, something that is not usually possible without their use.

The effect of SNS on individuals was studied in many dimensions. Studies revealed that SNS has significant positive impact on their members' engagement in political and civic activities (Gil de Zúñiga 2012), social networks benefit education by improving classroom engagement (Yaros 2012), corporate intranet SNS were found beneficial for the relations between corporations' employees (Steinfeld, et al. 2009), the use of SNS has positive impact on professional hospitality sector (Lim 2010), social media can be effectively used as a channel for health promotion (Korda and Itani 2011). Facebook usage was found to positively affect cognitive abilities of the adolescents (Alloway et al. 2013). The psychology-centred studies of the Facebook included researches on anxiety (McCord, Rodebaugh, and Levinson 2014), jealousy (Drouin, Miller, and Dibble 2014) and loneliness (Song et al. 2014). Other studies of online social networks discussed ethnicity (Gajjala 2007), religion (Nyland and Near 2007) and language (Herring et al. 2007) during the participation in social networks. Social media have profound effects on the emotional life of people, infamously researched through the controversial study by the Facebook itself. In that experiment, Facebook researchers manipulated the output of users' timeline news feed, increasing or decreasing the number of positive and negative publication and then analysing the publications of the user to determine any emotional bias introduced by the news feed (Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock 2014). The list can go on and on, but no matter how complex and multifactorial is the influence of social network services; it always boils down to the interaction between profiles within the networks. The way these interactions are organised ultimately defines the way a particular SNS can be used in different spheres and industries.

Many of the studies described above use surveying as the primary method for obtaining data for scientific analysis. Still the availability of data created by the social network users allows for the objective research of message content. Using methods of text analytics, discourse and content analysis previously applied to traditional media, researchers are able to evaluate the texts generated on the social network sites. Profile text and image analysis was applied to pinpoint the differences in the self-representation of social media users depending on their gender (Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz 2014) as well as

particular traits of the character, e.g. the elevated use of photo sharing by the individuals with neurotic traits (Eftekhari, Fullwood, and Morris 2014), the use of particular phrases and linguistic constructions that predict psychopathy and narcissism of the users (Garcia and Sikström 2014).

Huge and relatively new area of Internet research is the Social Network Analysis (SNA), which views structure and the content of the networks to determine their characteristics. As the creation of user-centric (or any other) networks out of actors and connections in social media is just a matter of availability of the access to data (as they are already stored on the service servers), there is a number of large-scale researches about the connections and interactions online (Catanese et al. 2011; Suh et al. 2010; Lerman and Ghosh 2010). Such studies seem to be very effective for learning about contagious behaviour, opinion propagation and media stories sharing.

The initial idea behind the general-purpose social networks is not the capacity to meet complete strangers but rather to maintain and make visible the real-life connections, to articulate what is called egocentric social network. In social network theory term egocentric social network (or personal social network) refers to the network formed with personal ties of specified individual (McCarty and Bernard 2003, 1321). Indeed studies show that main activity of people who participate in Facebook and MySpace networks is communicating and interacting with people who were already a part of their egocentric network (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Moreover more detailed study of Facebook showed that only 0.4 percent of Facebook friendships are the results of purely online communication (Mayer and Puller 2008). I should note though that such a low fraction of purely online friendships is also the result of the Facebook architecture. Requirement for mutuality of friendship connections coupled with limited capacity to interact with users from outside one's friend circle renders friend-making on Facebook complicated. Research of a more stranger-friendly SNS last.fm showed that significantly more friendships began on the network: 47.1 percent of friendships analysed were the product of purely last.fm communication (Baym and Ledbetter 2008). In both studies, authors report that significant part of SNS users' connections are weak ties. Online social networks are most often used to maintain those weak ties. Such ties are usually characterized by less intensity, duration and fewer reciprocal services than strong ties and typically are casual acquaintances (Flap 1991). Often such weak ties would not be even

established if social networks were non-existent as SNS drastically lower the transaction cost of maintaining such ties and that affects the decision of whether to connect at all (Ellison, Lampe and Steinfield 2009). Connecting via SNS is so easy that even a little shared interest may be a good enough reason to form a kind of connection. Large-scale study by Golder et al. analysed 362 million messages exchanged between more than four million Facebook users. The research revealed that only 15.1 percent of friend pairs ever exchanged messages over a period of 26 months (Golder, Wilkinson and Huber 2007, 5). Gilbert et al. obtained similar results when analysing comments left by friends in Facebook. 43.5 percent of all Facebook friendships were found comment-less (Gilbert, Karahalios and Sand 2008). All this results illustrate that weak ties are the source of the most of friend-connections on Facebook. While as Putnam argues such ties may be more useful to an individual than strong ties (Putnam 2000, 23), they are certainly responsible for much smaller number of interactions between members within an SNS.

On a larger scale, SNSs have not only profoundly changed the lives of individuals but also have deeply affected the communities. Social networks connect digital lives of millions of people in hundreds of different ways. Social network services forever changed the way people share their photos, find friends and play. But perhaps the most astonishing and important capacity of the SNSs is the capability for collaboration and group action. A very important sociological effect of social media is that they allow the formation of new groups much easier than any tool has allowed before. What online social networks have essentially done is they removed ever-existing problems in the formation of large groups: difficulties in coordination and communication, and the high cost of organization. Cost of organization and coordination of even vast groups of people have plunged dramatically. With SNS most of the barriers for group action have collapsed, allowing people to gather in all kinds of online groups and undertake actions, previously thought of as unachievable (Shirky 2008, 22). Everyone recognized the organizational power of social networks behind Arab Spring uprisings, where Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were used to coordinate the protests and promote the ideas of the protesters (Bunt 2012). Social networks were also adopted for the same purposes, infamously, during the riots in London of 2011 (Baker 2011; Procter, Vis, and Voss 2013). Later Facebook and Twitter were actively used by the Ukrainian protesters during the 2013-14 anti-governmental protests (Ronzhyn 2014). Livejournal SNS is one of the main instruments used by the Russian opposition in their struggle against Putin's regime (Koltsova and Shcherbak

2014) and by numerous protesting groups worldwide from Spain (Postill 2013) to Middle East and the United States (Langman 2013).

Social media-fuelled protest movements are well-known large-scale examples, but there are countless smaller feats achieved by groups and communities using SNSs: Clay Shirky provides an entertaining review of a dozen of cases where organization with the use of social media proved to be very successful and effective (Shirky 2008). Recognizing such an immense power behind the social media even led to the appearance of a special collaboration model: crowdsourcing. It is a practice to transfer the solution of particular problems or tasks to the undefined public³. Technically crowdsourcing is usually realized through SNS-like community tools. There is no denying the fact that the most influence SNS exercised in changing the way people form groups. The need to form groups and feel a part of the group is one of the most important innate characteristics of humans. Socialization and ability to cooperate for the greater good is what draws a line between humans and other primates. This is possibly the most valuable ability that allowed humans to endure as a dominant species on Earth. Overwhelming majority of all the tasks from simplest to the most sophisticated are carried out by groups, rather than individuals. The groups are so important for lives of people that anything that changes the way groups function has profound effect on everything from commerce and media to government and religion.

Simultaneously online social media led to the amateurisation of media. In the digital age of today anyone can embark on doing what just several decades ago was the work for professionals. Amateurisation process affected almost every industry conceivable. Online travel guides, created by Internet community are already more extensive and detailed than any printed edition, amount of music shared online has already topped that distributed through traditional chains, several previously offline newspapers have relocated online and paper book publishing is nearing its doom. While some authors see this process as a degradation of the society and art (Keen 2007), others underline new capacities for self-expression (Somerfield 2014), creative organisation (Peppler and Solomou 2011) and even see social media as a source of new forms of expression (Kuznetsova 2014).

³ The idea of crowd intelligence is researched and developed by James Surowiecki in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds* (2004). Author also provides examples of manifestation of collective intelligence along with real life ideas for implementation. See also Haythornthwaite (2011) for classification of crowdsourcing projects and its relation to knowledge communities.

One thing the social media pessimists and optimists are bound to agree about is that social media is the power that is shaping modern communication. In the modern Internet-centred world social networks become platforms for creation, exchange and dissemination of information with efficiency impossible ever before in the history of the mankind. Now are still the early days of social media and global connectedness, but even now most of the industries and spheres of human activity have already adopted social media for their purposes. One of the most fascinating examples is the adoption of social media for the purposes of travel. Organisational potential of the online social networks allowed to popularise form of travelling that before the Internet was confined to relatively small groups of enthusiasts. Hospitality exchange tourism on the scale it is practiced today would be impossible without the social networking technologies.

CHAPTER 2: Modern Tourism and Hospitality Social Network Services

2.1 Tourists, tramps, drifters, backpackers and couchsurfers

Understanding hospitality exchange tourism from perspective of motivation and practice requires distinguishing it from the more traditional and common mass (or mainstream) tourism. The mass tourism is the product of consumerist society, which arose shortly after the end of the Second World War when American army men returned from their journey to Europe and Asia, having experienced not only fighting but also the joy of exploring and understanding other cultures (V. L. Smith 1998). In the next decades a powerful industry was built with the aim to accommodate increasing demands of international travellers. Naturally as with any developments, in the case with tourism there are people who acclaim the progress and following universalisation or commoditisation of travel and others, who prefer to dissociate themselves from the mainstream.

Before the rise of modern tourism in the 1950s, travel was seen in a very different light. Rather than the activity for the masses, before the 20th century possibility to travel to other countries was available only to the chosen elites. In the 17th or 18th centuries young European aristocrats would conduct a Grand Tour, travelling tour as a symbolic act of separation from their family and entrance into the adulthood (Goeldner, Ritchie, and McIntosh 2000, 53). Stemming from the pilgrimage and religious travel, Grand Tour was primarily a formative experience (Hibbert 1987). With the Industrial Revolution travel was adopted by the working class youth. Tramping, travelling out of necessity to find job and establish one as an independent individual was necessary for living in the economy of the 19th century (Adler 1985). Tramping as a social practice subsequently declined with urbanisation and mechanisation at the beginning of the 20th century, just when popular tourism was increasing. Hotel industry was booming and airplane fares slowly came within reach of the middle class. Soon afterwards the distinction between institutionalized (or mainstream) and non-institutionalized (or non-mainstream) tourism arose.

In the 1960s and 70s non-mainstream tourism was associated with subculture of hippies. Cheaper airline and surface transport, more possibilities for youth travel resulted in incredible growth of tourism, both mainstream and non-mainstream. Often called

drifters, young travellers of the time expressed their ideological opposition to the mass-culture tourism through their own approach to travelling. Cohen (1973) describes drifter as a person who tries to keep away from the established tourist infrastructure, travel on his own and immerse himself into the host culture by participating. Another characteristic of youth travel of the time was connection to the drug culture, when drugs along with travelling were used to escape routine and pressures of the institutionalized society. Travelling of the time is closely connected to individualism: autonomy and desire for the freedom of action are the main motivations for the “wanderers” of the time, the act of travelling rather than the actual experiences during travel are important for self-determination of a young traveller (Vogt 1976).

The image of a non-mainstream traveller changes in 1980s as hippie travelling gets replaced by the “road culture“. It refers to the practice of spending prolonged amounts of time travelling, but with significant difference from earlier drifting. In the analysis of travellers who spent more than a year travelling, Riley (1988) paints a picture of a contemporary explorer very different from travellers of previous decades. New traveller is now middle-class, at a juncture in life and is college-educated. Budget travelling is no longer connected to the use of drugs, doing nothing and begging. Experiences become more important motivation to travel (Riley 1988).

Certain return to the easy travelling of the earlier days is the budget travelling, carried on by many people now. Many of the modern tourists travel light not because of the budget constraints; they rather consciously choose such form of travelling. Among budget tourists one group was researched and examined by academics much more thoroughly than any other. Backpackers who were the embodiment of travelling light were the focus of countless papers after Philip L. Pearce introduced the term (1990). Backpackers are travellers who, as implied by the name, travel with nothing more but a backpack, carrying their possessions on their backs during their sometimes quite long journeys. Backpacking (even if it was not called so before) is much older concept than couch surfing or using hospitality exchange but very similar to it in many aspects. Backpackers, just like hospitality exchange travellers put their emphasis on meeting new people, seeing places from not-so-touristic point of view and participating rather than just sightseeing. Germann Molz (2013) provided a recent review of Couchsurfing in the context of the development and moral economy of non-mainstream tourism. Couchsurfing like many other alternative forms of tourism is characterised by certain

“moral agenda” proclaimed in its mission statement (Germann Molz 2013): it serves as both a way to distinguish hospitality exchange travelling from mass tourism and a shared context that helps to create a couchsurfer identity (Parigi et al. 2013).

Interestingly the perceived image and motivations of a backpacker is very similar to those of a today’s hospitality SNS traveller. Similarly to hospitality travellers backpackers tend to be more open to other cultures, more tolerant to uncertainties and possible risks (Larsen, Øgaard, and Brun 2011). A backpacker is often a young adult who sees the goal of his or her travel in self-development and regards travelling and communicating with people during the travel as a formative experience (Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002). Learning new and improving their skills is deemed so important by the backpackers, that Pearce and Foster (2007) proposed using term “university of travel” recognising travel experiences as an important formative tool. In their survey authors revealed that most frequent skills learned in this “university” were self-confidence, open-mindedness and management of financial resources. Ability to effectively communicate and to deal with different kinds of people were also rated highly, indicating that social skills are of the highest importance for budget traveller (Pearce and Foster 2007).

Attempting to discriminate budget travellers according to the motivation behind selecting this form of travelling, Hannam and Diekmann (2010) proposed using term “flashpacker” to describe travellers who chose to travel on budget without economic necessity and whose travel practice is characterized by the extensive use of technology: mobile devices, computers and the Internet. While some researchers consider flashpackers to be a subculture within the backpacking culture (Paris 2012), I rather see them as an evolution of backpacking culture, just as backpackers were the result of development of the culture of drifters. Usage of the Internet during travel makes the image of flashpacker similar to that of a digital nomad, a person who is able to work from anywhere in the world using the Internet and to travel without actually disconnecting from own everyday life (Makimoto and Manners 1997). To some degree hospitality SNS users can be characterised as digital nomads as well but of course not all of them can be described as such, as fluidity with technology is not a crucial prerequisite of using either the hospitality service networks or the SNSs in general. While the economic reasons are also important for couchsurfers, so often the use of Couchsurfing cannot be explained without taking into account budgetary constraints, in this thesis survey one will see that economic considerations are not the main reasons for using hospitality networks.

The similarities between hospitality networks users and backpackers by and large can be explained by the fact that couchsurfers and backpackers are part of one group of travellers: budget travellers, the group that in literature is often opposed to mainstream tourists. Surely frequently couchsurfers and backpackers are the same people. Couchsurfers who often prefer to travel cheap, use budget airlines like Ryanair or EasyJet, travelling with only hand luggage, which is in many cases a backpack for practical reasons, are indistinguishable from backpackers. Just as with hitchhiking, backpacking may be one of the aspects of budget hospitality network mediated travelling. In their origins though, hospitality networks had little to do with drifting and long-term tourism.

2.2 From hospitality networks to online hospitality networks

In order to understand the sources of the present day online hospitality services, one should apprehend the history behind the whole hospitality exchange movement. The concept of hospitality exchange, also known as “accommodation sharing”, “home stay networks” or “hospitality services” refers to the organized social networks of individuals, generally travellers, who offer and/or seek accommodation without monetary exchange and can contact each other aiming to arrange accommodation. In general such networks function as follows: there is a list or directory of members of the hospitality network, along with contact details and possibly addresses. This list is available to other members after a registration process. In offline hospitality networks registration usually involved a specific membership fee (usually paid yearly) to cover operating costs, while online hospitality networks have free registration.

History of hospitality networks officially started in 1949 when Bob Luitweiler founded the first (obviously offline) hospitality service called Servas Open Doors. It was a volunteer run cross national organization that promoted interracial and international peace. In 1965, Traveler’s Directory was set up by John Wilcock. This was a listing of friends willing to host each other when travelling. Directory existed for more than twenty years and was on the verge of shutdown, when Joy Lily rescued it and subsequently renamed to Hospitality Exchange or Hospex. Hospex eventually became the first internet hospitality exchange service, going online in 1991 (Hospex 1995). It was managed through mailing lists and FTP and was limited to a small number of enthusiasts, but failed to achieve popularity. Government was also interested in hospitality exchange initiatives:

in 1977 Jimmy Carter, the president of the United States founded the Friendship Force International (FFI), people-to-people program which allowed its members to stay at each other's homes when travelling without paying anything except for the program registration fee (Raymond 1992, 182). FFI⁴ exists until present day (July 2014) and has 377 clubs in 60 countries totalling 18000 members worldwide (Friendship Force International 2014).

However only with the wide proliferation of the internet, hospitality networks became big enough to transform the way of travelling for broad masses of people. In 2000, Veit Kuhne founded Hospitality Club, the first internet based hospitality exchange service. It grew rapidly and soon became a worldwide network exceeding any travelling directory that ever existed before. Later, in 2004 Casey Fenton started CouchSurfing.com website that subsequently surpassed Hospitality Club and became the biggest hospitality service network in the world. Today it boasts of more than 7 million members who represent 250 countries (Couchsurfing 2014).

From its beginnings Couchsurfing used very peculiar philosophy embodied in its mission and widely used by its members in their own statements, profiles and references. The main idea based on non-monetary exchange, free sharing and participation rather than observing was embraced by both rebellious youth and disillusioned middle-age office workers. Such association with counter-culture with a pinch of anti-capitalism surely contributed to the growth of the network in its early days, but it also appeared to be the Couchsurfing's limitation. When Couchsurfing.org management decided to transform the company into the for-profit corporation it sparked the discontent among most-experienced and involved members. The perceived disregard of the "Couchsurfing spirit" led to the appearance of several alternatives, most notably BeWelcome, launched as an open-source and non-profit service in 2007 with the aim to preserve the values of the old Couchsurfing. It became rather popular alternative in Europe and attracted more than 65 000 users as for 2014 and continues to grow (BeWelcome 2014). Lastly Airbnb was created introducing monetary compensation for hosts significantly changing the nature of relations between guests and hosts. For now however Couchsurfing continues to be the largest and most widely used hospitality social network. It is the most suitable hospitality network for looking into trust and tolerance as it both provides rich means for online

⁴ <http://www.friendshipforce.org/>

interaction between members (as opposed to Hospitality Club) and is not based on monetary exchange that can compensate for the lack of trust or tolerance (unlike Airbnb).

Several other hospitality exchange services that followed the success of Couchsurfing deserve a mention as well. GlobalFreeloaders.com was founded in 2005 by Australian Adam Staines. The whole website is a directory style listing of all the members in all countries. It does not exhibit any of the social network service features, though currently GlobalFreeloaders with more than 60 000 members is the third hospitality service online. Other hospitality exchange networks, including the online representation of Servas International haven't engaged significant number of members and therefore will not constitute a part of the present research. The list of existing online hospitality networks (most of them do not qualify to be an SNS according to the definition in the first chapter) together with total number of their members is shown below.

Table 1. Popular hospitality exchange services

Organisation	Total members
CouchSurfing*	10 000 000
Hospitality Club*	647 240
GlobalFreeLoaders	105 243
BeWelcome*	76 000
Affordable Travel Club	2 400
Pasporta Servo	1089
Hospitality Exchange	200
Lesbian & Gay Hospitality Exchange International	500

* - hospitality services that are SNS

Sources: Hospitality Club (2015), Couchsurfing (2015), GlobalFreeloaders.com (2015), Pasporta Servo (2015), BeWelcome (2015), The Affordable Travel Club (2015), LGHEI (2015), Hospitality Exchange (2015)

Couchsurfing can be also defined as a type of Location Based Social Networks (LBSN). LBSN were defined by Zhou and Xie as “social network services where people can track and share location related information with each other, via either mobile or desktop computers” (2009, 1). While primarily this definition is applied to the services where location-sharing is the main aspect of the network experience, Couchsurfing may also qualify as an LBSN (Pultar and Raubal 2009) as location-sharing is a necessary part of acting as a host and all the activity on the network is constrained geographically, being intrinsically connected to the offline spaces.

While conventional social networks concentrate on communication between members and sharing content, hospitality networks serve the ultimate purpose of meeting each other in real life for travelling together or hosting each other in their own houses. Different final objective makes hospitality networks (like Hospitality Club or Couchsurfing) different from general social networks. The difference lies not only in the sole purpose of the networks but also in other important things like attitudes towards privacy, allowance of “strangers” and risk-assessment. Despite social networks enjoying immense worldwide popularity not every Facebook or Twitter user will ever try Couchsurfing or other hospitality service: and while physical limitations (like absence of proper living space for hosting) should also be considered, the reasons are mostly subjective ones. These reasons will be discussed and analysed further in the thesis.

2.3 Hospitality Club and Couchsurfing

Hospitality Club was founded in 2000 and became popular very quickly. Though eventually it lost the title of the largest hospitality exchange network, Hospitality Club still boasts of more than 645 000 members in 231 countries (The Hospitality Club 2014). Membership is free for all members. All participants have their profile with basic information on about themselves and their hosting arrangements. The main aim of the website is to provide free accommodation. The same profile is used for acting as a host and as a traveller. Members can contact each other and enquire about the possibility of accommodation with the help of Hospitality Club’s messaging system. When hosts accept the enquiry, members exchange contact details. The main idea remains unchanged from the time of offline hospitality networks: all hosting is meant to be provided for free. What is also important is that social interaction is encouraged – so guiding a guest to the town or allowing the guest to participate in the life of a host is meant to be a “correct” behaviour for Hospitality Club members (Hospitality Club 2012).

Hospitality club has specific reputation system that allows members to evaluate their respective hosts or guests after the interaction has occurred. Apart from socializing function reputation system is aimed to provide more secure experience for the individuals involved. Members with higher reputation are being hosted more easily as there are others who “guarantee” the good will of those members by contributing to their reputation. Every user profile has specific fields that list users whom a user trusts and reversely the list of users trusted by a user. Although such system is usable enough to provide simple

indication of trustworthiness of a given user, the trust itself is too complex to be represented as a binary variable. Likewise negative connections are also absent thus limiting user feedback to positive (“I trust him”) or neutral (no feedback left). Although Hospitality Club users have profile and can connect with each other with ratings, the network does lack most of the typical SNS features.

While the main reason why people use Couchsurfing is the same as with Hospitality Club, the underlying philosophies of the two networks are very different. From the very beginning Couchsurfing.com (later renamed to Couchsurfing.org) was planned and developed as a social network service. It had much more in common with Friendster or MySpace than with directory listing sites. Its developers put strong accent on the social interactions between users, even beyond the home sharing process. Creators of Couchsurfing were right to foresee that network members would want to share photos, communicate with other members and form interest groups, just like members of Friendster did before, and Facebook users would do afterwards. Photo sharing possibilities were introduced early, allowing members to share their precious memories with other fellow-adventurers. Couchsurfing also featured extensive connection capabilities: apart from traditional lists of friends or connections there is a separate system of references. When one member is hosted by the other, they leave bi-lateral references that include short description and a rating of the encounter, which can be negative, positive or neutral. Reference ratings add up to show specific evaluation of a member by those who met him or her. There is also an additional evaluation method, called “vouching”: member who has been vouched for by three other members can in turn vouch for others whom he or she knows and feels that they are trustworthy. This system was started by allowing the founders and core service administrators to vouch for others from the start of the project and it is spreading quickly.

In the early years of Couchsurfing, information about the website was shared mainly by word of mouth. Existing users invited their friends or friends of the friends, who tried the service because of their interest or because they liked the idea. Typical way of how a new person was introduced to the hospitality network is described by Bialski and Batorski (Bialski and Batorski 2010). First CS users were perceived as outsiders, though now with the growth of the user base it might not be the case. Couchsurfing followed a way of development of a typical community: its perceived elitism was shattered as it reached popularity. Ultimately as a result of Couchsurfing uncontested

monopoly in the field of hospitality SNS and vast popularity, it was converted by its owners into a B-class corporation in the August of 2011. That led to discontent of some among of the most active CS members. One of the undeclared reasons for that is disenchantment of the altruistic and in a way anti-capitalistic aura which surrounded the Couchsurfing, whose members perceived selves as marginal to the world where everything is decided by money.

Couchsurfing experience is created through a series of interactions between users. Interplay between users in the Couchsurfing network occur not only during “couch surfing” itself, but also on the discussion boards. Members are actually encouraged to make friends not only offline but online as well. There is even a special type of a friend connection in Couchsurfing – “Online Friend”. Offline website user meetings are also something much more typical for Couchsurfing than Hospitality Club. Meetings or CS Meetings are organized by local representatives of the hospitality network. A meeting is usually a party in a local bar where members can talk and establish new connections. Sometimes a meeting can be held in the form of a hike or a picnic. There exist a number of regular CS meeting dedicated to a particular theme: like weekly Thai food meeting in San Francisco (Couchsurfing 2012). In the recent years another tradition developed within Couchsurfing community: CS camps, similar to the meetings but extending for several days in a row and attracting much more people, often from other countries. Just for the august of 2014, twelve international multiday Couchsurfing camps were held in different parts of the world with the biggest of them spanning for 12 days in Serbia (Fish 2014).

The main problem that researchers face when dealing with social networks is that the Internet is a booming market and the situation changes very quickly. Studies conducted only five years ago are completely outdated today as some SNS quickly develop a solid user base while others fade into becoming unpopular. Several years-old data are too different from the current state of affairs and may be irrelevant. Luckily hospitality SNS are somewhat more stable subject to study: from the time Couchsurfing appeared there was no real shift of popularity and no other network was able to come even close to the user base of this SNS. Partly this is due to the hospitality SNS being less commercialized and more niche products (at least until recently), where the number of the existing members is very important factor for new members because of the way these networks function. More existing members attracting more new members was why over

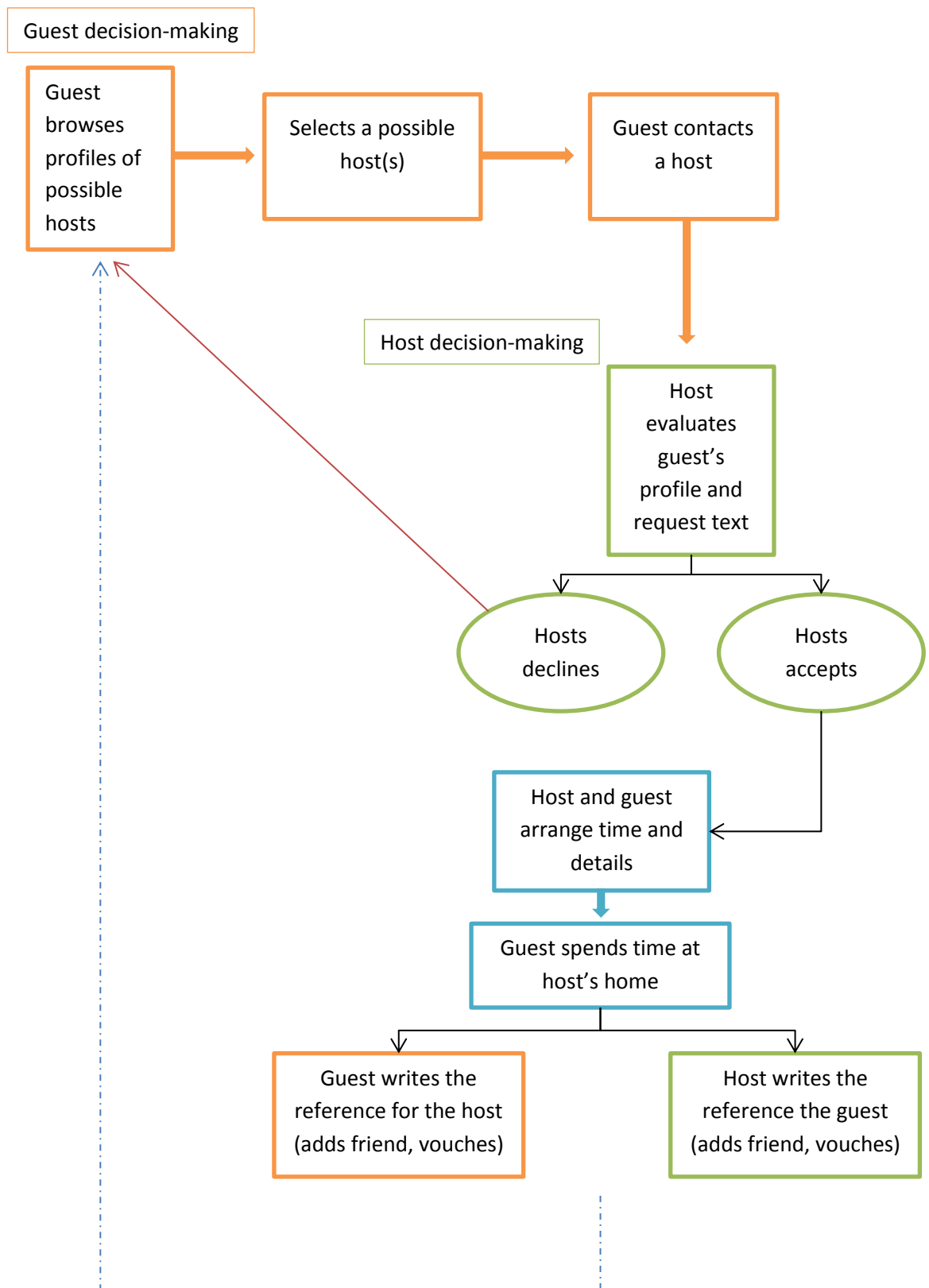
the years Couchsurfing acquired almost a monopoly position in the hospitality service segment. Its dominant stance is the main reason why out of all the social networks in the field, Couchsurfing.org was chosen as a subject of this thesis.

2.4 How Couchsurfing works

The mechanism of arranging accommodation through Couchsurfing is a multi-stage process that involves decisions made by two actors (the guest and the host) at different times. Flowchart in Figure 2 shows how the accommodation is agreed and arranged.

At some point later when a user of the network decides to travel to a specific destination, he or she contacts other member (or often several members, especially in busier cities) listed at that destination to inquire about the possibility of being hosted. This request is made through internal messaging system and in the request letter (often called just a “request”) guest provides brief information about him/herself and explains own travel plan, providing the dates when he or she would like to be hosted. Requests are meant to be personal, hand-crafted for a particular host, while generic and too brief request letters are viewed as a kind of freeloading and treating host just as a source for free night’s stay. The requests are often regarded as no less important for the evaluation of trustworthiness than profiles of the users (Cherney 2014). After the request is sent out, the initiative goes to the host who can either agree or decline to host a particular guest. If contacted member agrees to host, time of arrival is agreed upon and some additional information is shared. After all this exclusively online interaction, guest visits the host on the arranged date and stay at host’s home for some time. The stay often involves some kind of shared activity like cooking, playing board games, going to party or walking around in the town. After the stay both the host and the guest are supposed to leave references for each other describing the stay and rating it as positive, neutral or negative experience. Additional actions may include establishing the friendship-connection and vouching for other party as a further expression of trust and good will. References, friendships and vouches can be modified or deleted by the author anytime at their own discretion. User profile lists all received and given references, friends and vouches of the profile owner, providing a guidance for future hosts and guests thinking about hosting or visiting a particular user.

Figure 2. How hosting-visiting arrangement works in Couchsurfing



2.5 The overview of related Internet services

When discussing hospitality social networks it is also worth to mention four other types of online services that partially relate to the idea of hospitality exchange. These are the bed and breakfast, Airbnb, home exchange and hitchhiker websites. Short review of each of these categories can clear up the relation of hospitality networks to adjacent travel-related Internet technologies.

2.5.1 Bed and breakfast

One hospitality exchange related concept is Bed & Breakfast homes (frequently abbreviated as B&B). Also called guesthouses or “commercial homes”, these are private living houses, where hosts also provide paid hospitality services for their guests. Such type of accommodation presumes much closer and more intimate interactions between guests and hosts than usual hotels or hostels. When a guest is hosted in such home, he or she may engage in conversation or some other casual activity with the host. That “casual activity” may be a short excursion, taking part in some of the hosting family’s traditions or just accompanying the host on the way to the nearest town. While the nature of host-guest interactions may be similar to those occurring as the result of participation in hospitality SNS, the economic component in the relations, leads to different motivation on the hosting side and arguably makes the relations more commercial. For more information on this kind of accommodation see for example Lynch, Di Domenico and Sweeney (2007). In the Internet there exist special directories that help to find a B&B home in the desirable destination. Majority of these websites don’t go beyond simple cataloguing of the available accommodation, which can be accessed by a user through a simple search. On the contrary to the hospitality SNS, communication on these websites are essentially one-sided: guests contact the B&B host and later leave their review of the lodging. Only hosts have an online profile of a kind, while guests may have none and consequently are not rated or referenced by the hosting house. This way, online part of the B&B experience is much more similar to arrangement of the accommodation in the hotels and hostels than through hospitality networks.

2.5.2 Airbnb

One recently established service that deserves a separate mention is Airbnb. Despite including BnB as a part of its name, Airbnb service created in 2008 is very different from

classic Bed and Breakfast services, especially if to consider the angle which is adopted in the present research. On Airbnb users who would like to offer the accommodation register a profile of their property including the price per night and then guests browse properties and book the place, not unlike the way the booking is made on B&B or hotel websites. For now (July 2014) Airbnb offers more than one million listings in 190 countries (Airbnb 2015) and continues to grow. Having attracted millions of dollars in investments, Airbnb already established itself as an effective business. Early research suggests that continuing growth of Airbnb will have profound effect on the established hospitality industry (Zervas, Proserpio, and Byers 2013). One important difference from Bed and Breakfasts is that on Airbnb hosts are individuals, most of the places offered are private accommodations, often with room for just one group of visitors, rather than several rooms offered at most B&Bs. Other difference is the interaction between hosts and users. Just like in hospitality exchange, on Airbnb property owners have final word on whom to host or not to host: the interaction is similar to that on Couchsurfing where guest sends request and the host has to approve it. Airbnb also puts accent on the interactions with the host culture: advertising the possibility to feel oneself a part of a host culture as one of the advantages of the service compared to usual B&Bs and hotels (Airbnb 2014).

In July of 2014, Airbnb announced brand overhaul and adopted “Belong anywhere” slogan, trying to emphasise its non-monetary aspects. In the blog post explaining the rebranding, one of the founders of the Aribnb uses discourse very similar to that of Couchsurfing and other hospitality SNS: concept of belonging, idea of home and non-commoditised tourism emphasised as core offerings of Airbnb (Chesky 2014). From this point of view, Airbnb position itself as a kind of hospitality exchange, devoid of one of the core principles of the hospitality exchange — the absence of monetary compensation for hosting.

2.5.3 Home exchange

Home exchange or home swapping is a practice of exchanging accommodation on a usually temporary basis. Online home exchange services are designed to connect people from different parts of a country (or different countries) and help them arrange the swap of accommodation. Home swap websites, similarly to hospitality exchange services, position themselves as a worthy alternative to traditional tourism (HomeExchange.com 2013). It is meant to be both a cheaper way to stay at other places, and also a way to

immerse into local culture. Just like hospitality SNS, home exchange websites offer “more real” way to experience foreign places. However similarity with the hospitality SNS ends here — in the end home exchange experience is devoid of the most acclaimed and promoted virtue of hospitality networks — communication with other members. Naturally, home exchange networks are meant to be used for what they are named for — exchanging homes. As you move to the house of other member, the other member simultaneously moves into your house. Offline communication is minimal if at all present. For that reason the SNS design is also different — in order to provide greater security and command over the general experience — much more control is exerted during every step of the home exchange experience. Greater controlling leaves little place for trust and interpersonal communication, making home exchange networks much less compelling object for the study of trust.

2.5.4 Hitchhiking websites

Hitchhiking websites are another concept that became possible when the Internet became ubiquitous. These are special online services that can be used to arrange sharing a car for travelling. Similarly to hospitality exchange websites hosting arrangement, first people list a specific route of their future trip and offer others to share a ride. Hitchhikers then can search through the listings of proposed travel itineraries and contact the driver to negotiate the trip. While in theory, it looks very similar to the way people arrange hosting on Couchsurfing or Hospitality Club, there are three core differences. Firstly, hitchhiking websites are not SNS, they lack one or more of the social network’s essential traits: usually users do not have profiles and list their routes like people post announcements on the free classifieds websites — anonymously, including just their telephone number or an email for further arrangement. Secondly, these services lack the “non-monetary compensation” part of the hospitality networks’ idea. More often than not, they assume some kind of compensation for the driving expenses — typically at least the cost of the fuel should be reimbursed to the driver. Finally there is no assumption of communication between the driver and the passengers: as passengers are paying, they don’t have to give anything more in return: hence the communication is not a vital part of the hitchhiking activity arranged with the help of such Internet services. Although Paula Bialski ties hitchhiking services to hospitality SNS in her study of communication during mobility

(Bialski 2012), for the purposes of this work these kind of online services will not be analysed.

2.6 Portrait of a couchsurfer

In this work I use term “couchsurfer” when I refer to online hospitality exchange network user, not necessary specifically a Couchsurfing user as I think that couchsurfer has already become a part of internet lingo denoting a person who participates in the hospitality exchange. While practical part of this thesis specifically deals with users of Couchsurfing network, many theoretical ideas are applicable to hospitality network users in general, especially in the way they differ from conventional mass tourists.

Before going into the discussion of the survey data actually gathered from the users of Couchsurfing.org website, I will describe the image of a hospitality network user based on the previous research, much of which will be further described in the chapters on tolerance and trust. Hospitality network user is foremost a budget traveller, not unlike a backpacker, who tries both minimize his or her expenditure for the journey, but in the same time maximize experiences and allow more interactions with local people and culture. A hospitality network user is thought to possess the following traits:

- Flexibility. Hospitality networks allows for greater degree of flexibility as there is no need to arrange hotels in advance in fear of hotel prices going up closer to the actual date of arrival. Although there is certain degree of planning ahead as accommodation has to be arranged beforehand, often such arrangement are not made for more than a couple of days ahead, especially for longer journeys with many stops. Number of user postings into the “emergency groups”⁵ on every city’s forum is also an indication of many users failing to plan ahead and counting to get hosted in the last minute.
- Independence. Without pre-booked activities and accommodation usual in the mass tourism practice, travel using hospitality SNS demands greater degree of self-organisation and more decision-making: from whom to trust to how better organise the budget.
- Tolerance for higher level of uncertainty and risk. This trait is one of the most typical traits among the backpackers (Larsen, Øgaard, and Brun 2011), and surely can be

⁵ These are the groups used for arranging last minute accommodation (for today’s night). In the bigger cities these groups can be very active with as many as a 5-10 postings a day.

applied to Couchsurfing travellers as well. Hospitality networks are much less predictable way to travel than usual tourism, hosting arrangements can break down and building up certain attitude towards eminent failures, changes in plans and problems, using hospitality SNS for travel may be too stressful.

- Knowledge of the technology. While it is not necessary to be computer-savvy to use hospitality SNS, certain dexterity of using the Internet is important. That was especially true in the earlier days of hospitality SNS when social media was not so ubiquitous.
- Openness and tolerance to the other cultures. Whilst modern tourist industry creates a homogenous environment for a traveller offering the same chain hotels and chain restaurant anywhere in the world, greatly reducing uncertainty and room for interaction with foreign culture, hospitality exchange as well as backpacker travelling is aimed at maximising interaction with the host culture. Openness also relates to readiness to share own culture and engage into common activities with the representatives of the host culture. At Couchsurfing such behaviour is specifically encouraged and often mentioned in the positive references left to other users.
- Relatively high trust towards strangers. Discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 5, this trait is necessary for hospitality SNS users as participation in these networks supposes behaviour possibly stressful and difficult for people without high level of generalised trust.

Last two traits of the hospitality SNS users are the focus of the present research. Tolerance and trust are extensively discussed in the following chapters, while my own findings on these two topics are presented in Chapters 8 and 9 along with the results of the surveys. We can learn about the couchsurfers and how they behave when using hospitality SNS from qualitative studies like those described in the literature review of Chapter 5. At the same time we can get a more general view on the practice of hospitality exchange by either using official statistics or looking into the results of quantitative surveys conducted among hospitality SNS members. The survey designed specifically for the present thesis also contributes to the study of couchsurfers as a new kind of budget traveller.

Information one can get from the official statistics is usually scarce and only allows apprehending a very general picture. According to the official Couchsurfing statistics, more than 6 million total users surfed 5.6 million nights and left a total of more than 11.5

million references. The average age for a Couchsurfing user is 28 with almost two-thirds of users being younger than 29 (18-29 age group). 46 percent of all users list themselves as available for hosting. Around 47 percent of individual Couchsurfing members are female, making it a rather gender-balanced network (Couchsurfing 2014). At the same time 70% of all members are from Europe and North America, which makes it a primarily western-oriented SNS (Bialski and Batorski 2010, 186).

One of the sources of the research on Couchsurfing network is the Stanford research team who was granted access to Couchsurfing.org 2003-2009 data and published results of their data analysis. These results (Cook et al. 2009) uncover several important traits of the Couchsurfing network:

1. Trust is determined through experiences. Experience in the network influences user trust.
2. Users are often either hosts or travellers. There exists certain specialization of users' roles within Couchsurfing community when users tend to be either hosting or travelling more and not both equally.
3. Strong local networks. Researchers uncovered the existence of vast geographically-determined networks as core elements of the Couchsurfing community: created through the connections between earlier groups of friends who joined Couchsurfing together (Cook et al. 2009).

To describe the Couchsurfing users quantitatively one can look into the available data: presently at least four different datasets collected among Couchsurfing users are available. Short overview of a typical Couchsurfing user based on collected data is presented below. During the period from February until May 2010, Josh Shapiro and Carl Berning surveyed 1281 Couchsurfing.org members. The analysis of available dataset permits us to observe some real-life indicators behind the practice of hospitality exchange. 46.5 percent (688) of the total number of respondents both hosted and were hosted and another 30.8 percent (456) participated in Couchsurfing by engaging in one of these main activities.

The reported mean age of the respondents is 30.7 with 67.4 percent (793) of all respondents in the 26-35 age range. 12.6 percent of respondents reported they are older than 36 years with four people being older than 60 years old. 46.8% of respondents are male and 47.8% are female, such distribution indicates that Couchsurfing is a gender-wise

balanced service (compared to Facebook or Twitter where 60% of users are female (Pingdom 2012). The reported Couchsurfing member age and gender distribution is similar to the results of Adamic et al. research (Adamic, Lauterbach and Te 2011).

English is mentioned as a native language by 28.3% of respondents. Other popular languages include German (15.7%), Spanish (10.6%) and French (9.4%) it indicates that most of the sample comes from the Western cultures. Still 68.9% of respondents mentioned English as their foreign language which was expected as the survey was conducted exclusively in English. This may present certain language-based selection bias. Generally the sampled Couchsurfing members have respectable language skills, 58.9% reported knowing three or more languages. Regarding education, 74.3 percent indicated their completed education level as college or higher with 33.7% reporting that they are still students.

Table 2. Education levels of Couchsurfing users

Education	Number of Users	Percentage
Primary (Elementary and Middle School)	8	0.6
Secondary (High School)	169	13.2
College / University	755	58.9
Post-Graduate (PhD, Professional Degree)	197	15.4
Other	27	2.1
Missing	125	9.8
Total	1281	100.0

Source: Shapiro and Berning (2013)

60.5 percent of all respondents indicated their household income to be 1599 US Dollars or under. In the surveyed sample 45.2% stated that they are employed full-time. 69.7% of total respondents identified themselves as the members of white ethnic group, other ethnic groups are represented with significantly fewer number of survey participants (Hispanic/Latino 9.1%, Asian 7.2%, Black or African 1.6%).

Around 12% of couchsurfers are simultaneously using hospitalityclub.com. Other hospitality networks are rarely used along with Couchsurfing, less than 3% of Couchsurfing users mentioned bewelcome.com, servas.com or globalfreeloaders.com. This may be partly due to them not being popular enough and partly because some of them (like bewelcome.com) are positioned as an alternative to Couchsurfing and new BeWelcome users have likely deleted their profiles before switching networks.

Survey showed that 53.8% of Couchsurfing users agree that their profile contains private information, and only 20.9% state that there is no private information about them

available on the Couchsurfing profile pages. 24% of respondents indicated that common interest is the most important factor in determining if the person is suitable to be the host or the guest. Further 29.5 percent list interest as the second most important factor. Overall interests are reported second most important indicator of worthiness of a person to be hosted or to host — only after the references (which in turn of course can also be used to understand if a person is similar and interesting). Age is not rated high in that respect, only 10.6% rate age as one of the two most important factors for choosing a host or surfer, while attached pictures of the person(s) behind Couchsurfing profile is evaluated higher (18.7%). More than two thirds of respondents said that there is a common bond between all couchsurfers and more than a half (60.1%) noted that they found their own worldview and interests similar to those of other members they encounter on Couchsurfing. This relates to Bialski's observation (Bialski and Batorski 2010) about the homophily as a very important factor in deciding whether to interact with particular Couchsurfing user or not.

The results of the survey once again underline the importance of references for the functioning of the Couchsurfing system. 42.4 percent of respondents list references as the most important factor when deciding their attitude towards a host or a surfer. 19% of users reported having negative experience with Couchsurfing. In the survey itself only 6.9% of respondents admitted ever leaving a negative reference. Most people feel uncomfortable leaving a negative reference and would rather give a neutral reference or no reference at all if the experience was not pleasant. In the actual network the negative-positive references ratio is only 1 to 2500 (Teng, Lauterbach and Adamic 2010).

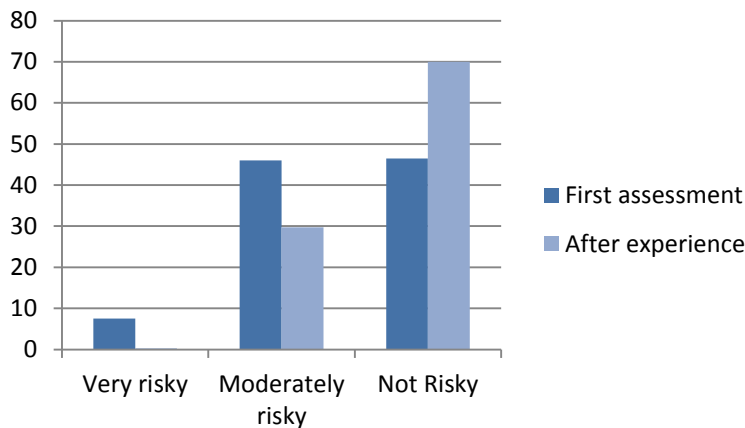
Only just 6 percent of members admitted they did not carry on any Couchsurfing acquaintance further in life. Overwhelming majority of users (81.1%) indicated that they developed friendship with people they met with the help of Couchsurfing. Romantic relationship (19.1%) and business contact (8%) are other possible development of hospitality network's links. Answering a more general question, 63.5 percent of couchsurfers agreed that they generally stay in touch with their hosts or surfers. When prompted to evaluate these relationships considerable amount of CS members saw them as important or very important (35.4% and 27.9% respectively), while only less than 1% deemed them as "unimportant". Survey respondents were almost unanimous when asked whether Couchsurfing promotes understanding of different cultures. 96.4% of those answered agreed or agreed strongly to the statement, with only less a percent disagreeing.

Still more than two thirds of the respondents (68.3%) agreed that Couchsurfing network contributes to world peace, while 7.8% disagreed. Such bold assumptions by the users correspond to the goals and mission proclaimed by the network itself and declared on the website.

Shapiro's questionnaire included the binary version of the trust index question. When asked the standard trust question 63.5% of respondents expressed their trust, while 15.4% answered that they can't be too careful when dealing with people. Two further trust-related questions were included, first asking whether the people would take advantage of a respondent or try to be fair, and second asking if people are generally helpful or just looking for themselves. 69.1% of respondents stated that people are generally trying to be helpful, while 68% answered that people would be fair rather than take advantage of others. 80.2% of surveyed couchsurfers stated that their experience with Couchsurfing service positively influenced their trust in strangers and only 3.8 percent suggested that Couchsurfing had negative effect on their trust. When asked more specific question about trust in the foreigners, the results were similar: 80.2% of respondents reported the increase in their trust and 3.7% noted they had become less trusting in the foreigners. Such correspondence might be explained with the fact that a significant number of people whom a person meets on Couchsurfing are from different countries and stranger on Couchsurfing is very often a foreigner at the same time.

Respondents were also asked to assess the risk of engaging in Couchsurfing activities on two points of time: "when you first heard about CS" and "after experience on CS". With experience of using Couchsurfing service individuals tend to perceive it as much less risky, significantly less people indicated that it is "moderately risky" after using it, and the number of people viewing it as "very risky" fell drastically.

Figure 3. Risk assessment of the user of Couchsurfing service



The survey fails to provide a measure of experience of a respondent on the Couchsurfing website and thus it is impossible to establish any connection between how much actual experience is needed to change the hosting-sharing risk-assessment of an individual. Consequently measuring exact effect of the experience on the risk perception is also impossible. Current study aims to fix that problem by measuring an individual's experience on Couchsurfing service and measuring its effects on other important variables like trust, tolerance and assessment of risk.

Majority of Couchsurfing users tend to tolerate ambiguity and unpredictability well (61.1%) with only 13.9% admitting the opposite. This can be attributed to the notion that hospitality sharing is still widely considered to be a risky and adventurous activity, contributing to the certain pre-selection of more venturing types to become members of Couchsurfing. Travelling with the help of Couchsurfing contributes to more “authentic” and personal experience and makes the world feel smaller. 88.8% of Respondents believe that Couchsurfing makes them feel more connected to the world and other people, still only one fourth (26.5%) disagree that the destination is more important than the people when choosing next place for their visit.

When asked to identify their primary geographical group respondents, more than a third (35%) respondents have chosen “World as a whole” as a primary region they self-identify themselves with. *Country as a whole* (23%) and *Town or city* (21.3%) options were the next most popular. The question to specify the second most important region of self-identification provided much even distribution: *country* option (27.7%) was most often chosen, the *world* was selected by 22.9% of respondents. Such apparent cosmopolitanism of couchsurfers connects well with the idea of representing modern

travellers as digital nomads (Makimoto and Manners 1997), who do are not constrained by the borders and have no needs in them.

While the described survey paints a more vivid and detailed picture than any official statistic does, the fact this data was collected in 2010 may serve as indication of that it may not be representative of the current state of affairs. Since the first part of 2010 when the Shapiro and Berning's survey data was collected, number of changes within Couchsurfing.org website took place. The continuing increase in the number of users means that more new and unexperienced users arrive, making the Couchsurfing more known to general public and further stripping its image of the gild of being unconventional and elitist. According to the official statistic total number of users grew from less than 2 million to 6 million members between 2010 and 2014 (Couchsurfing 2014). Moreover in 2011 Couchsurfing ceased to be a non-profit organisation and officially became a for-profit corporation, attempting to gather investors and eventually become a public corporation (Perlroth 2011). As Couchsurfing was non-profit from its inception, this commercialization created backlash of many of its devoted members. Number of active users and contributors to the CS community denounced the decision and left the network (Johnson 2011). Furthermore in 2012 the change in the legal terms of use sparked accusations of violations of privacy (BfDI 2012). The changes of the website design and functioning as a measure of modernisation and trying to appeal to more general audience were not without controversy as well. Very often throughout my research I encountered users who were quite bitter about the changes in the Couchsurfing SNS, especially changes in forum/groups system, which are thought to have had negative impact on the cohesion of the Couchsurfing community, in the same time promoting spam and messages misuse for unrelated to Couchsurfing practice activities (Reddit 2013) (Roth 2013).

Although it is not known to what degree all these factors influenced the Couchsurfing member-base and the community as a whole, it is clear that because of them one should be very cautious while making judgements about current state of the Couchsurfing community using the four-year old data. With these considerations in mind, the research will be further referenced in the analytical part of the dissertation where results obtained from my survey will be compared with those from Shapiro and Berning's dataset as well as other available datasets of Couchsurfing users.

CHAPTER 3: Tolerance in the age of the Internet

The term “toleration” — from the Latin tolerare: to put up with, countenance or suffer — generally refers to the conditional acceptance of or non-interference with beliefs, actions or practices that one considers to be wrong but still “tolerable,” such that they should not be prohibited or constrained. There are many contexts in which we speak of a person or an institution as being tolerant: parents tolerate certain behaviour of their children, a friend tolerates the weaknesses of another, a monarch tolerates dissent, a church tolerates homosexuality, a state tolerates a minority religion, a society tolerates deviant behaviour. Thus for any analysis of the motives and reasons for toleration, the relevant contexts need to be taken into account (Forst 2012).

That is a definition of toleration (or tolerance, in this work these terms will be used interchangeably) taken from *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, it is just one of many. Toleration is one of the most acute and important topics in the modern discourse; the definition of toleration is unsurprisingly a subject of heated discussions. In the chapter I will try to make a short overview of the history of toleration and the modern state of art concerning the topic and then explain how the concept of toleration can be applied to the studies of online social networks and what exactly is understood under the concept of tolerance in the scope of present work.

3.1 History of toleration

Traditionally toleration was understood as a concept related primarily to religion. Term “toleration” was initially used in religious discourse during early Christian time⁶. Up to the 20th century all works dealt with religious toleration (sometimes ethnic tolerance was discussed, but as in the case of Jews it was just another angle of religious tolerance). It was only in the last century and a half when the concept of tolerance was

⁶ Tertullian and Saint Cyprian are two important authors in that respect. Tertullian was advocating toleration towards early Christians in Roman Empire and Tertullian viewed tolerance as a rather one-sided permission of dominating society towards Christian religious minority (Stroumsa 1999, 102).

widen to encompass other spheres of human life and emerged the idea of Tolerance as a universal notion that deals with all the aspects of life in society.

Possibly one of the most eloquent works on toleration in the earlier times was one by Voltaire. The French writer and historian published his *Treatise on Toleration* in 1763. That work is famous for the following passage:

It does not require great art, or magnificently trained eloquence, to prove that Christians should tolerate each other. I, however, am going further: I say that we should regard all men as our brothers. What? The Turk my brother? The Chinaman my brother? The Jew? The Siam? Yes, without doubt; are we not all children of the same father and creatures of the same God? (Voltaire 1763)

Such rhetoric may seem trivial for the present-day reader, but these ideas were very brave for the time. These views exercised by Voltaire had their effect on *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* adopted the French Revolution and later on the Bill of Rights ratified in the United States.

It was not until John Stuart Mill's famous work *On Liberty* in 1859, when the modern understanding of tolerance first emerged. *On Liberty* marked the transition in the awareness of the tolerance. Mill suggested that in the modern world toleration is required to deal with various kinds of differences, not only the differences in religion. Mill outlines three arguments for toleration that can be briefly summarized as follows:

- Different views and opinions should be tolerated as they may give rise to new positive ideas and advances that lead to scientific progress and therefore contradictory opinions should be discussed openly and tolerated, not simply left aside.
- Different tastes and views towards common things, individual lifestyles should be tolerated within the society as society is moved forward by individuals. At the same time "general average of a mankind" is very moderate in intellect and exhibits strong opposition towards anything original and different.
- Exercise of force by government or dominant social group is justified only to prevent harm dealt by one person to another, and not when it is aimed at enforcing ideas shared by dominant group. Individual liberty should not be limited except for the situations when it is harmful to others (or even to the individual himself). (Mill 1869)

Thus starts the modern understanding of toleration as a notion not restricted to the domain of religion, but rather encompassing all the spheres of life in a society. Some 80 years later, after the bloodiest war in the human history the first universal document on tolerance and human rights was adopted. In 1948, United Nations General Assembly adopted Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948)

The declaration was not binding by itself, though it have served as a basis for various national laws and constitutions of different countries, as well as policies of many international and regional institutions dealing with toleration and human rights.

After the World War II toleration is seen as an individual act. Citizens are encouraged to tolerate individual choices and behaviour of other members of society – individual acts of religious affinity or individual enactments of other cultural differences (Halfdanarson 2008). Such changes go in line with the spread of Western worldview where individual liberties are granted the highest importance. The importance of toleration in the modern society was underlined by UNESCO, when it decided to proclaim the 1995 the United Nations Year of Tolerance. UNESCO also outlined several main directions of how the intolerance can be countered, including individual awareness to the problems of intolerance (UNESCO 1995). The *individual awareness* will be the subject of close examination in the present work as the changes in the individual's attitudes are the supposed effects of the participation in hospitality social network services.

3.1.1 Modern understanding of toleration

From the very beginning of liberal theories, toleration was perceived as one of its core principles along with the liberty. With Liberalism being a dominant ideology of our times (Wolfe 2009, 93), importance of practices of toleration cannot be overestimated. Especially now as today there is much more interaction between different cultures than there was even half a century ago. There is little demand on toleration in societies where

all the population shares common values, but as soon as society becomes more diverse in the cultural representation, the need of tolerance occurs. Toleration is an approach that should be taken by truly liberal state when it comes to managing different groups in the society. Apart from the situation when the divergent group's actions or views may be directly harmful to other members of society, toleration should be the way of treating differences. Hans Oberdiek sums that up in the following passage:

As long as no one is harmed or no one's fundamental rights are violated, the state should keep hands off, tolerating what those controlling the state find disgusting, deplorable or even debased. This for a long time has been the most prevalent defense of toleration by liberals...It is found, for example, in the writings of American philosophers John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Ronald Dworkin, Brian Barry, and a Canadian, Will Kymlicka, among others (Oberdiek 2001, vi).

Although the idea explained earlier may seem obvious and straightforward, it is very challenging to follow as it is extremely difficult to set the limits of toleration and define what can be considered a "violation of fundamental rights" and what is not, especially when it comes to the international relations. The Rushdie affair in the late eighties and more recent Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy showed that some obvious liberties like the right of free speech cannot be granted and exercised without respect to other cultures and certain degree of censorship, or rather "self-censorship" should be used to avoid controversies which can lead to serious international conflicts. Because of such acute difficulties the question of toleration and limits of toleration remains one of the central questions in politics, ethics and human rights.

There is one important difference in the modern understanding of toleration when compared to the historical one. In the last hundred years, focus of the toleration moved from the toleration towards groups to the toleration towards individuals (Walzer 1997, 14-27). Modern definitions of toleration tend to emphasize an individual as an object which is tolerated and given freedom to organize life in the private realm without discrimination but with possible restrictions when it comes to public expression of one's identity. This distinction is another factor of the Islamic controversies mentioned above. Western society that treats individual freedoms as the greatest value is forced to accept the necessity to somewhat restrict those freedoms facing the possible conflict with collective values of different culture. Such necessity raises resistance of liberal philosophers, though these controversies cannot be solved purely through academic

discussions and therefore liberal societies should just accept the need to restrict their own freedoms to avoid possible conflicts (Walzer 1997).

The Internet is a vast contact area for representatives of different cultures as it is practically not confined by borders (apart from several states that opt to censor the net). Absence of borders greatly simplifies cross-cultural interactions but in turn requires greater tolerance from the people. More complex and more intense interactions in the Net naturally lead to more conflicts. Considering the digital life is becoming increasingly important part of everyday experience for millions of people, it is very possible for an online conflict to be brought offline, impacting *real* life of people and communities. One example of such a conflict in recent memory is the 2014 Gamergate controversy, an example of gender intolerance online that was widely discussed, covered in media and resulted in number of academic papers on the problem (Wofford 2014).

3.2 Conceptions of tolerance

There is considerable argument between researchers of what should be defined by tolerance and what tolerance is and what it is not. Rainer Forst distinguishes several conceptions of toleration and proposes to view the modern differences in understanding toleration as differences between these four conceptions (Forst 2012).

First view can be titled the “**permission conception**”. According to this conception toleration is a kind of permission to live in a different way given by a majority group (typically one with legal authority) to the minority groups. Toleration is granted usually with condition that display of differences will be limited to private sector and also that minority groups will not try to acquire some kind of official recognition of their tolerated practices. Toleration in this case is thought to be a lesser evil for the majority that does not approve of the dissident practices and open confrontation may lead to disturbances in civil order. Such view was shared by many philosophers in Middle Ages and later during Enlightenment and Reformation. Toleration according to this conception is a conditional practice that can be exercised one-way: by majority tolerating minorities.

Coexistence conception is somewhat similar to the previous one. Though according to this conception toleration is the relations between two groups roughly equal in power, who agree on being tolerant towards each other’s practices to maintain peace and social stability. Such toleration may not be long-lasting and may end when one party gains enough power to subdue the other. Using this conception to define tolerance, some

researchers argue that it was already present long ago in ancient Empires. Michael Walzer uses a term “toleration regime of multinational empires” to define the condition of coexistent toleration, when tolerance was promoted and sustained by the state and individual officials for the sake of sustaining the empire (Walzer 1997, 15).

Respect conception of toleration differs from the previous ones as it requires a different kind of moral respect between the parties. This conception supposes that groups in question share some basic political and social views in the society and perceive their similarities (e.g. common citizenship and political equality) as more important than differences. Differences in this case usually lie mostly in private domain and deal with cultural differences and traditions. Such conception is commonly used in modern secular societies where all the differences in religious views are limited to private realm, while secular State treats its citizens as equals. In this case conflicts may arise when religious traditions require public presence, such as in the case of the forbidding the Muslim scarfs in French schools (see Galeotti (1993).

Another conception described by Forst (2012), an **esteem conception**, can be viewed as a variation of respect conception, where different groups not only respect each other, but also recognize the importance of others’ views and regard them as valuable for the society, though possible wrong or not as good as their own views and values. Esteem conception of tolerance is used by UNESCO; that can be inferred from the explanation of what is tolerance at the UNESCO website:

(...) tolerance is neither indulgence nor indifference. It is respect and appreciation of the rich variety of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance recognizes the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. People are naturally diverse; only tolerance can ensure the survival of mixed communities in every region of the globe. (UNESCO 1995)

As maintaining cultural diversity is one of the key goals of UNESCO, tolerance, both individual and collective is an important requisite of assuring the preservation of diversity.

All this conceptions presuppose the awareness of the difference – one cannot be tolerant of something if one is ignorant of it (Gardner, 84). Awareness of the difference constitutes one of the necessary conditions for toleration; another is the disapproval of the conduct that is tolerated. As it was noted earlier disapproval needs not to be total, one can

disapprove of some of the practices of the group tolerated, while regard other practices as important and/or valuable (as in respect and esteem conceptions). And though the condition of disapproval is regarded as necessary by most of the researchers, Gardner for instance argues that one may still be tolerant toward something he or she likes: “people may be tolerant where others but not themselves do, would or would be likely to disapprove. People may be tolerant towards what they like.”

It is important to note that the conceptions explained above do not illustrate the evolution of the idea of toleration, they rather show the distinct approaches used in different societies and during different periods in the history. Some conceptions may be more useful in specific cases and one should carefully evaluate the history of the conflict to understand which approach should be undertaken in every given case. For the purposes of the present thesis the respect conception will be used to define interpersonal tolerance observed in the participants of online hospitality social networks. The methodology for measuring and evaluating individual level of tolerance will be outlined and discussed in Chapter 6.

3.3 Toleration and the Internet

It was not until the Internet considerably grew in popularity that the studies dealing with tolerance in the world’s Net appeared. David Resnick argues that at its inception Internet was very tolerant place and tolerance itself was one of the grounding principles of the Internet (Resnick 1996). One of the reasons for that was the almost total anonymity of users in the early days of the Internet, its subculture positioning and the absence of globally enforced regulations. Since that time however, various regulations and control mechanisms only increased and anonymity of a user gradually diminished up to the point that some services require public real names and documents to confirm member’s identity⁷.

Michael Margolis and Gerson Moreno-Riaño describe the Internet as a “contested terrain”, explaining that it is the place where tolerant co-exist with intolerant and while the underlying fabric of the Internet is tolerant and open, there exist a vast number of

⁷ Such approach is frequent on websites dealing with financial data, but some social networks also require the use of real names for the registration. Facebook for instance explicitly states that in the legal terms of the service (Facebook 2012)

websites promoting intolerant and hateful content (Margolis and Moreno-Riaño 2009). As the Internet increasingly becomes a more refined model of real world society – world's extremism and xenophobia are reflected in it. Just like corporations have their representatives online, marginalized groups also manifest themselves in the Internet. The number of intolerant and xenophobic websites grew considerably over the years and while it is near impossible to be measured, special projects developed to monitor hateful and racist websites were consistent in their reports. Simon Wiesentahl Center published a 2011 report citing a 22% rise in the number of social networks, forums, blogs, and Twitter accounts that promote hate from 11500 in 2010 to 14500 in 2011. The same report names social networks as the sites, where hate activity have grown the most (Simon Wiesenthal Center 2011). Awan (2014) sees online xenophobia as dangerous as offline one and argues it should be given the same level of attention. Apart from blatantly xenophobic, there are also websites that may not be openly intolerant but allow the exhibitions of hate and intolerance by their users as well as web hosting providers who allow hate websites being hosted on their servers. An extensive list of such websites and services may be found in yearly published reports by hatedirectory.com (Franklin 2011). On the flip side the Internet is also used to promote toleration. There exist a number of websites (run primarily by non-governmental organisations and initiative groups) that concentrate on the problems of intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia often as well monitoring the activity of hate websites in the Web. Many of them encourage participation and tolerance education offering interactive content and teaching kits to support the education of tolerance offline. As the web becomes more similar to offline world, it attracts more attention of the government officials. There have been already a number of cases when activity on the Internet related to free speech resulted in the punishment by the intolerant state, most recently when Saudi Arabia punished a blogger by public flogging and years in prison (Angus McDowall 2015).

During the early years of the Internet it was possible to clearly distinguish two groups of people: users and non-users of the Internet. On the basis of these two groups different surveys and studies were conducted: such approach was used in the survey by Robinson, Neustadtl & Kestnbaum (2004) for example. While such approach was totally justified at the time of the study, with the ubiquitous nature of the Internet nowadays, it hardly makes sense to contrast users to non-users and to study the effects of the Internet through such a comparison. On contrary, now the effect of the Internet may be discussed

only through the analyses and comparison of different groups of Internet users: based on the membership in various Internet communities, country or region of origin, or differentiating by Internet usage patterns.

The discussion of how (if at all) the use of the Internet affects the attitudes and dispositions of the users is still on-going. The main argument for the positive impact of the Internet on tolerance of individual users is the assumption that people may become more tolerant when exposed to the wide diversity of viewpoints and ideas, which is the case with heterogeneous encounters in the Internet. Indeed research showed that people who live in more diverse societies and frequently more exposed to other cultures (like dwellers of the big cities) tend to be more tolerant than those who live in isolated societies (see for example Flanagan (1993, 35–36) or Sunstein (2009)). At the same time this may not be exactly the case with the Internet. While the Internet undoubtedly enables people to find any information they like and communicate with people from around the world, it's often people who decide not to do this. Robert D. Putnam explains that in the Internet place-based communities are replaced by interest-centred communities (Putnam 2000). When people tend to communicate primarily with users whose views are similar to theirs, this may not lead to the increase in tolerance, but may have even opposite outcome — such as the rejections of other viewpoints and dogmatism. This leads to the exact opposite assumption: that the communities created in the Internet and based on a particular worldview may lead to the decrease in tolerance of their members. Gaines and Mondak's (2008) small scale study of Facebook confirmed certain degree of clustering by users' ideological views, while more comprehensive research (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2011) showed that ideological segregation of news consumption by the Internet users was low in absolute terms and much lower than ideological segregation of face-to-face communication. The aforementioned study by Robinson et al. (2004) used General Social Survey of 2000 data in attempt to find out if the use of the Internet is related to higher levels of social tolerance. Results indeed showed that a typical internet user is more socially tolerant and open than a non-user⁸. While such correlation was not discovered in all tolerance-related survey items, difference was deemed significant. Interestingly, it was found that the actual amount of internet use is not that important; the tolerance level

⁸ However such relations were found only at some of the tolerance-related survey items. Howard's and Jones "Society Online: The Internet in Context" (2004) book gives a 2004 account on relation of Internet with religion, politics, economy and traditional media.

typically didn't increase along with the amount of internet use (Robinson, Neustadtl and Kestnbaum 2004). Whilst the results of the described survey are interesting, they use data from 2000 and with the tremendous increase in both the number and diversity of internet users in this decade, these results cannot be extrapolated for today's situation. I would suggest that today when Internet penetration is as high as 70.5 percent in Europe and 87.7 percent of total population in North America (Internet World Stats 2014), it is not sensible anymore to conduct internet studies in these societies using user/non-user groups and activity in the Internet communication should be used as a criterion to examine the effects Internet on the users. Still in places where internet penetration is not high enough tolerance can be studied using the distinction between users and non-users. The Ludvig Foghammar's study (2012) of remote pacific islanders from island Niue revealed that the people of Niue who used Internet for more than one hour per day were found more tolerant than those who used it less or didn't use at all. This effect was especially pronounced for immigration and religious tolerance.

In the book *The future of the Internet: Ubiquity, mobility, security* Harrison Rainie and Janna Quitney (2009) Anderson explore several scenarios for the future of the Internet. One of the scenarios suggests that by 2020 people will be more tolerant than they are at the time of the study (2009) and the main reason for that is as follows: "wider exposure to others and their views that has been brought about by the Internet (...)". Exploring this idea authors found out that whilst 33 percent of the experts asked to evaluate the scenario agreed that it may be true; most of the experts (55%) rejected this idea as unlikely. Whilst the main arguments used by both proponents and opposition of the proposed scenario were the same: more openness, wider exposure to different people and worldviews, and the apparent ease of the information exchange; these properties of the Internet were used both pro and contra the idea of more tolerant future. (Rainie and Quitney Anderson 2009) Such variety of answers with basically the same concepts but different reasoning can be explained by the nature of the Internet: it is already a huge and heterogeneous environment. The Internet has already become an important part of everyday lives of millions of people around the world. People use it for different reasons and fulfilling different needs. Evaluating Internet as a whole is a tough thing to do and not much more sensible than judging the effect of books in general. Such general estimations (like measuring tolerance) can be applied only to specific services or applications of the Internet and not to the Internet technology as a whole, since it is just a medium and within

it there will always be both services with negative and positive effect on practically any given area.

Social media is expected to have much more profound effect on individuals' attitudes than any other type of Internet services, because when using social media people do not passively consume the information but also actively participate in producing it, hence the name *social* media (Swigger 2013, 590). At the same time there is still little research on the effects of specific internet services on people attitudes and perceptions outside the domains of marketing and political engagement. There are many speculations on the negative effects on Facebook but they exist mostly outside the scientific research: regularly published in popular magazines and on tabloid websites. The scarce scientific research that exists deals primarily with effects of Facebook as the most popular social networking service, and concentrates on the domain of psychology. Larry D. Rosen is one of the contributors to the research of the psychological effect of using Facebook and MySpace networks. He published a vast number of articles and research papers about how Facebook MySpace and cyber technology in general shape and change the behaviour of the users⁹ (his work deal primarily about adolescents and young adults). Recent research conducted by Larry D. Rosen shows that participation in an online social network (namely Facebook) is positively correlated with online empathy. Interestingly there was found no correlation with offline empathy (Rosen 2011). That is an interesting result in the perspective of this work as empathy arguably is an important requisite for toleration. Looking into other areas connected to tolerance, Swigger (Swigger 2013) found strong correlation between the use of Facebook and personal blogs and support for civil liberties, especially among younger Americans. In less democratic countries, social media is often used to promote democratic values (often including tolerance) among the government opposition (Bunt 2012; Howard et al. 2011; Ronzhyn 2014).

In the course of this research I will not argue for the idea that Internet as a technology fosters social tolerance; I will rather try to prove that participation in the specific services of the worldwide web may contribute to the individual tolerance and significantly affect behaviour and attitudes of individual users. In the present thesis toleration will be used as a measure of one's acceptance of representatives of other

⁹ Comprehensive list of publications by Larry D. Rosen can be accessed at <http://www.csudh.edu/psych/lrosen.htm>

cultures or groups and the absence of prejudice towards those representatives, without the necessary requirement of disapproval of those others. So basically in this work I will use the “respect conception” of toleration by Rainer Forst as described earlier. More precisely the tolerance in the context of the discussion can be defined as *acceptance of other’s views, beliefs or practices despite viewing them as wrong or no as good as one’s own and perceiving this differences as less important than similarities between parties*.

Hospitality networks, both online and offline, in their essence are intended to be tolerant contact spaces. Intolerance suggests fewer contacts with people from outside one’s in-group and reluctance to approach people from outside one’s own comfort zone. Hospitality networks in turn promote the opposite: the idea of communication and interaction with complete strangers, who obviously are out of one’s social in-group. Intolerant person is less inclined to participate in hospitality social network as interaction with people from group he or she is intolerant of is very likely. It may be argued that the sole sign-up for the network suggests that person has certain (high) level of intercultural tolerance. The question is whether the participation in the network’s activities increases one’s toleration towards others or the high level of tolerance is itself a reason for such activity.

CHAPTER 4: Trust: classification and origins

Trust is one of the most widely used concepts, both in daily life and in scientific context. The concept of trust is of truly interdisciplinary nature. It is used and researched primarily within disciplines of psychology and sociology, although trust is an important notion in philosophy, economics, political theory, anthropology, management, ethics and many other areas. It is named a core component of a functioning society and a key indicator of social capital, contributing greatly to individual life satisfaction, promotion of democratic values and the growth of market economy. An important phenomenon, trust surprisingly was almost completely neglected as an area of investigation up to some 40 years ago, when in 1973 Morton Deutsch published his book “The Resolution of Conflict”. After the original Deutsch’s work there was a flood of literature devoted to studies of trust (Nooteboom 2002, 2). As an interdisciplinary concept, the question of trust was tackled by researchers from different fields of science, consequently spawning a number of definitions of trust that notably differ from one another.

4.1 Trust and its benefits

In the most casual way trust can be described as one’s expectation towards the supposed behaviour of the other. Deutsch in the previously mentioned work defines trust as "confidence that one will find what is desired from another rather than what is feared" (Deutsch 1973, 149). More positive definition states that trust is an expectation or one's belief that the other party will behave in a dependable, ethical, and socially appropriate manner (Hosme 1995; Zucker 1986). Or even as a belief that others, through their action or inaction, will contribute to the well-being of the person granting trust and refrain from inflicting damage upon him or her (Offe 1999). Some researchers tie trust to the subjective belief of fulfilment of the commitment (Rotter 1961). Others go as far as describing trust as an emotion. According to Baier, just like dealing with emotions, one cannot decide to trust, trust cannot occur just because one wants to trust (Baier 1986). In any case, trust is an expectation based on certain assumptions and evaluated against possible negative outcome. Such a possibility of negative result is usually defined as risk. Apart from (optimistic) attitude toward a person to be trusted, trustee should be

vulnerable to failure of the trusted person and accept that vulnerability (Becker 1996). “What is feared” part of the Deutsch’s definition suggests just that: for the trust to occur, possible failure should bear negative consequences for the trustee, not the lack of consequences or neutral outcome.

Risk is an important attribute of trust. Without a possibility of trust to be betrayed, trust cannot exist by its definition. Without risk, one will speak about confidence and not trust. Offe argues that in this context confidence is the opposite of trust (Offe 1999, 44-45), although I would not go that far. As trusting someone should involve some degree of risk, trustee can’t be absolutely confident of positive outcome – as in that case trustee is not consciously risking anything by granting trust. In the case of trust it is more sensible to speak about optimism rather than confidence. In a sense, trust is the substitute for the lack of complete confidence. The less confident an actor is, the more risk will be involved in trusting someone and therefore more trusting he or she should be to agree to take the risk. So trust is a balance between gains and risks involved. Trusting too few people in few respects leads to the loss of opportunities, whilst opposite situation leads to blind trust. Trusting begins when gains begin to outweigh risks. Consciousness of the risk is very important as trust is a subjective concept and is impossible to be measured outside its subject. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran defined trust as “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (1999).

Trust as a social phenomenon is of tremendous importance for the existence of a society. It is commonly seen as vital prerequisite for friendship, love and any other essential social relationships. On the global level trust is thought to be the basis on which the whole social and political structure is grounded (Inglehart 1999; Fukuyama 1995). As a phenomenon observed on many levels trust is viewed as a bridge that connects micro-macro gap in social theory (Offe 1999). In the same time trust is not just a requisite for the development of a healthy society, but also a result of its organic evolution and growth. Scott argues that essential level of trust in a society can be developed only naturally through its growth and later facilitate the production of all kinds of social products (Scott 1999, 276). An undemocratic political system can exist virtually without trust but in this case those at the head of the state have to use more resources to control their subordinates, whom they don’t trust. As trust always involves risk to be betrayed, in a theoretical situation of an unlimited resources and capabilities of control, one can reject

trust as a less effective mechanism of managing relationships with others and thus avoid any trust-related risk (Offe 1999). From this point of view trust and control over other social resources can be seen as complementary: the less one trusts, the more resources one should use to compensate for the absence of trust and allow any useful interactions with other members of a society. This uncovers the main advantage of trust: it is a resource-saving device.

Trust is important on both the interpersonal level and on the level of power relationships between government and citizens. The opposite of trust is control and while trust doesn't require any expenditure as it is an attitude, controlling others requires plenty of time and money. On the level of a country, more trusting relationship between citizens and the state can result in significant savings in law-enforcement. On a personal level, if a person trusts the other, he or she can disregard certain risks in the relationship as improbable and do not spend time and money on the measures to minimize those risks. On the interpersonal level trust can propagate and facilitate the establishment of new social connections. Naturally we are more likely to trust those who are trusted by our friend and people, whom we trust. I will trust a dentist, recommended by my friend, and save time searching for one in the internet directories or elsewhere. Thus trust can be measured in negative behavioural terms: as an absence of investment in information, monitoring and sanctioning (Levi 1996: 7).

More than just being a money-saving device, trust is a vital requisite of modern democracies. Although as I explained earlier, authoritarian state theoretically can substitute trust for control in the vertical relationship with its citizens, modern democracies have much more limited amounts of resources and therefore cannot function without trust. There is a concept of institutional trust used to explain the way trust works on a state level. The more conventional way of thinking of institutional trust is as of a trust towards the institutions (Zucker 1986), though Offe argues that institutions cannot be trusted because they are merely artificial entities, but in the same time the existence of such institutions lowers the risk of trust for the citizens in a society and allows higher levels of trust towards the fellow citizens (Offe 1999, 23c). In a sense, institutions can be seen as special conditions that allow propagation of trust in a society and through their existence decrease the possibilities to betray trust either by the state or by the fellow citizens.

4.2 Classification of trust

One way to classify trust is by the relationship established between actors in a social hierarchy relevant to the subject of trust. From this point of view trust may be either vertical or horizontal¹⁰. Horizontal trust is a trust exhibited between actors on the same social level, where one of the actors doesn't have any clearly established ways to influence behaviour of other actor(s) through the relationship of power. Horizontal trust is more typical for non-formal relationships on the interpersonal level. Vertical trust is a particularly important topic in political science and business. Very often a term "managing trust" is used when dealing with vertical trust. It is a *mortar* that binds hierarchical relations in a system and makes them stronger. This way in politics and economy trust is often seen as a resource managed by the trust-actors of the higher hierarchical level. Vertical trust illustrates the asymmetrical nature of the trust in general, when actors who occupy higher level of hierarchy in a system can more easily decide whom they trust and whom not, while their counterparts usually devoid of such a privilege. Trust itself is not necessary a rational decision. The basis for trust (or distrust) can be either of rational or irrational nature. While rational trust (sometimes called cognitive trust) occurs through careful consideration of the one who is trusting and may be based on reasoning and experience, irrational trust can arise the risk is incorrectly estimated or when the decision is affected by faith (Huotari and Iivonen 2004). In the latter case one speaks of either unjustified trust or blind trust.

Moreover trust is usually conditional. It works through three its elements that can be understood through a simple formula: A trust B to do X. With this scheme in mind Delhey and Newton outlined three distinct forms of trust. Particularized form of trust is the strongest type of trust that is exercised within close interpersonal connections. Such trust is limited to people who know each other personally and exists in closed groups (Delhey and Newton 2004, 3). Particularized trust often correlates with friendship. Instrumental trust is a type of trust that is based on rational decision and calculation. The prime motive for the instrumental trust is self-interest and in this case actors of trust may not have any strong interpersonal connections (Delhey and Newton 2004, 3). Third type - generalized trust is argued to be the most widely spread type of trust in modern urban

¹⁰ Offe proposes another axis and suggests that horizontal and vertical trust can each be either mass or elite (Offe 1999, 44). Such more detailed partitioning can be useful in politics studies.

society. Dubbed “thin” or “impersonal trust”, it may be exercised by an individual towards other members of society collectively, even if these other members of society are complete strangers (Delhey and Newton 2004, 3). This kind of trust is considered to be very important requisite for the functioning of the society (Fukuyama 1995) (Uslaner 2002). The degree of generalized trust on an individual level is important factor that should be taken into consideration for the purposes of present work. As members of the researched hospitality service networks do not know each other prior to their interactions within the networks, trust towards strangers (and that’s what essentially the generalized trust is) is an important factor that forms attitudes to other members of the network and ultimately shapes the interaction process. Discussing the question of generalized trust it is worth mentioning that some researchers, most notably Uslaner argue that generalized trust is highly stable over long periods of time and can also be transmitted from parents to children (Uslaner 2002, 60–68; Uslaner 2011), while other studies (Dinesen 2012) show that environment can affect individual trust.

Looking at the scheme from another angle more politics-inclined researchers distinguish three different forms of trust as follows: particular social trust, general social trust and political trust (Zmerli and Newton 2011). This classification doesn’t concentrate on the reasons for personal trust using the same definition “particular social trust” for both particularized and instrumental trust from Delhey and Newton definition, differentiating a specific field-related kind of trust that deals exclusively with the relations in the realm of politics. One of the most important discussions regarding trust is the problem of relation between different kinds of trust is how particular and general social trust relate to each other and to the political trust. For more detailed research on the relations of different types of trust see papers by Newton and Zmerli (2011), Zmerli and Newton (2011), Uslaner (2002), and Brehm and Rahn (1997) .

Trust can be also classified according to the way it is built. Offe distinguishes experiential trust and trust through obligation (Offe 1999). Experiential trust is built as a result of experience, while trust through obligation is based on moral reasoning or customs established in the society. Offe tends to tie experiential trust with self-interest, thus matching it to the instrumental trust from Delhey-Newton classification. While feel of obligation is an important factor that influences behaviour of people in a society, it is not sensible in my opinion to contrast self-interest and obligation when discussing the

origins of trust. It may be argued that conforming to moral rules in a society may be in the interest of an actor as opposing or breaking such rules leads to undesirable outcome.

Some authors suggest different classifications of trust and distinct forms or types of trust. Giddens for instance elaborates on difference between trust in people and trust in abstract systems (1991). Other possible types include self-trust and even spiritual trust (Sunderland 2007). Although these other types can be used during study of online social networks, they are not relevant for the purpose of the present work. The classification by Delhey and Newton explained earlier will be used in this research with the focus on generalized trust. This kind of trust may be also referred to as general social trust or trust towards strangers. For the unambiguity in this work it will be always referred to as generalised trust. Generalised trust is defined as one's expectation or belief towards people outside one's in-group that they will act in dependable, ethical and socially appropriate manner.

4.3 Origin of trust

Going back to the problem of trust in a society, origin of trust is a particularly discussed question of the topic. There are two main approaches related to the establishing of the origins of trust. First approach views trust as an important personal property of an individual that is determined and influenced by both different personal characteristics and the environmental factors like the place of an individual in the society and his or her demographic features. Second approach sees trust as a characteristic of the social system, where the structure and features of a particular social system determine the level of trust in a society (Delhey and Newton 2003). Relation of culture to the development of democracy and creation of high trust society was discussed by Inglehart (1999, 88), who argues that interpersonal trust is an enduring characteristic of a society and it reflects the historical heritage concerning different factors of people's life. Specific factors that increase the level of generalized and interpersonal trust in a society were researched and discussed in the works by Newton and Zmerli (2011). The level of generalised trust exhibited by the society was proven to depend on a variety of factors and it is generally higher in societies with Protestant traditions, lower ethnic diversity, good government and lower income inequality (Delhey and Newton 2004). Newton and Zmerli write that more than 90% members of modern democratic society exhibit particular trust, less than a half

of the population are high on general social trust, while about one-third are thought to have high level of political trust (Newton and Zmerli 2011).

Within a society level of trustfulness depends on a great number of variables and there is a significant disagreement among the researchers on what factors are more important and influence the level of trust more than others. Comprehensive comparison of different trust theories was attempted in the paper by Delhey and Newton, where authors tested six different trust theories using the data collected in seven different countries. Research showed that success in life, membership of voluntary organisations, high level satisfaction with the political life and community services and sizable network of friends all predict higher level of trust of an individual (Delhey and Newton 2003). Delhey and Newton suggested that individual-level variables have greater impact on the trustfulness of an individual in the generally low-trust societies, while in high-trust societies environmental factors are of greater importance (2003).

The widest generalized trust-related research was carried out using the data collected during the fifth World Value Survey¹¹. To determine the level of trust in a given society a particular standard question was used: *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?* (World Values Survey 2005, 3) Coupled with two mutually-exclusive answers, question V21 provided binary data on the presence or absence of trust towards other people in general. This question was the first attempt to measure levels of trust on such a global scale. The results of the survey provided valuable input to further research, later the validity of the standard question was criticized by Jan Delhey et al. Authors point out its obvious weakness of the absence of universal definition of “most people” mentioned in the question wording (Delhey, Newton and Welzel 2011). As some cultures may imply broader or narrower perception of the “most people”, meaning of generalized trust will be different when compared across countries. To tackle this problem authors proposed a concept of “trust radius” and suggested a different set of questions to measure trust in a society with correction regarding the radius of trust common in a given society. It was found that certain properties of a society correlate with the length of the trust radius. Particularly it was found that Confucian tradition is related to the narrowing of trust radius, while Protestantism as a dominant belief in a society when combined with

¹¹ For the information on the World Value Survey refer to the official website of the organization: <http://worldvaluessurvey.org/>

modernization contributes to the increase of the trust radius (Neumayr and Meyer 2008). Later adjusting the results of the fifth World Value Survey according to their own findings of the difference in trust-radius, Delhey et al managed to create what they believe to be more accurate representation of generalized trust levels across different countries. Adjusted rankings show notable changes in the global trust-ranking chart¹² of some of the Asian countries like Thailand and South Korea, which fell down 17 and 18 places correspondingly, while China lost roughly 10 places (Delhey, Newton and Welzelc 2011, 797). Torpe and Lolle (2011) also report problems with the cross-national generalization of the standard trust question: in their research authors found considerable differences across some clusters of countries in the trust directed to “strangers they met the first time” as opposed to “strangers as people of the different nationality”. As the standard trust question provides no distinction between these two groups of unknown people, cross-national comparison of trust values is pointless as what is measured in Western countries differs from what is measured through surveys in Asia or Africa (Torpe and Lolle 2011).

Discussing trust research it is important to mention one of the big problems of the topic: the problem of cause and effect. Whether people are more trusting because they are more satisfied in life, participate more in voluntary organisations and have big social network or it is the other way around. There is no clear and definitive answer that will suit every variable relation to trust. Each correlation between the measure of trust and one of the independent variables should be evaluated and measured separately. Delhey and Newton suggest that many of such problems may be solved through casual observation and common sense (2003).

Formation of trust is complex and multidimensional process; it is influenced by great number of factors acting on various levels. Environmental, national, cultural influences shape individual generalised trust to different degree. In this research I attempt to pinpoint the possible effects of participation in hospitality exchange networks on individual trust levels and construct a viable model of how individual trust is affected in this particular type of online networks. To do that however one inevitably needs to address the issues of trust in the online environment. Specific features of online space (greater anonymity, no physical presence requirement and asynchronous interactions)

¹² Compared to the ranking created on the basis of a single question trust data.

affect how people build their trust and evaluate others in the Internet. This warrants the use of term “online trust” when discussing trust-mediated interactions online. The next chapter provides the insight into the concept and academic research of the subject.

CHAPTER 5: Trust in Couchsurfing

5.1 Relationship between trust offline and online

The relationship between offline and online trust is not straightforward. The Internet environment possesses a number of traits that make the direct use of offline trust definitions and concepts problematic. Relative anonymity of the Internet users, lack of sufficient cues and more controlled interactions create very different kind of communication online. Some researchers suggest that large corpus of offline trust studies should and can be applied to studying trust online (Corritore, Kracher, and Wiedenbeck 2003), while others argue that online behaviour is very different from offline behaviour (Tidwell and Walther 2002). One of the reasons for the latter approach lies in the object of trust, which is often two- or threefold: a website, entity behind the website and often the technology as well (Shankar, Urban, and Sultan 2002). Thus it was found that relationship between the experience in using the Internet and trust is of inverted U-shape, where novice Internet users are relatively trustful but as they accumulate experience they become aware of possible problems with privacy and security and their trust declines (Aiken and Boush 2006). Even when the object of trust is another user (which is the case in SNS), the interaction with this object is different from face-to-face interactions offline. Indeed in the web it is often difficult or impossible to identify important attributes of an interlocutor, having to rely only on the limited amount of cues and usually pre-selected (by the interlocutor himself) information. Capacity to control the interactions relates not only to ability to control the content of the messages online, but also to select what personal information is available and how the individual is self-represented. Schouten et al. (2007) call this property of online communication “controllability”. Relative anonymity and controllability lead to the interaction of online identities of the individuals rather than by the individuals themselves. Understanding this apparent difference between a person and his or her online representation is crucial when comparing trust-related behaviours and measurements online and offline. As it will be later discussed one of the possible implications of this difference is more intimate and open behaviour of the users when they tend to build relationships faster and disclose more personal information online than offline. Individual’s habits online may be so different from his or her behaviour

offline that Mensch and Beker (2010) state that people tend to have different norms for offline and online self-disclosure and the approach to sharing personal information offline is a weak predictor for the online personal information sharing behaviour of an individual.

Regarding trust, Mesch (2012, 1476) showed that only 20% of variance in the online trust can be attributed to the offline trust. For the study Mesch uses only a single measure of disclosure of personal information — disclosure of personal name. However I do not think that disclosure of the name cannot be used as a reliable indication of the willingness to share personal data for two reasons. Firstly very often without any additional information the name is not a unique identifier of the person (especially in the web and big social networks), so it can serve only as an indication of an insignificant disclosure of personal data. Secondly Facebook as an important part of the Internet experience requires real name and thus the participation of the Facebook and compliance with its terms of service easily skews data showing willingness to disclose personal data where there can be none.

Early studies showed evidence that people who are more trusting in general tend to be more trusting online (Katz and Rice 2002). Similarly individual predisposition to trust was found to influence trust in e-commerce vendors (Gefen 2000). However these results might be explained by the fact that during the earlier years individuals have not formed the online trust attitude as e-commerce was far from ubiquitous during those years and tended to use their trust habits developed over the years of interactions with offline retailers. Later research showed that trust in a particular company rather than generalized trust is more important for trusting online (Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa 2004) as well as previous experience of an individual with specifically online transactions (Metzger 2006). More recent study in Britain presented evidence that trust in the Internet depends on individual's trust towards social institutions (Dutton and Shepherd 2006). In the attempt to understand the relationship between online and offline (face-to-face) trust, trust in individuals and institutions were found to be associated with online trust. Still only online trust was found to be associated with the disclosure of personal information (Mesch 2012). The comparative study by Dwyer, Hiltz and Passerini (2007) suggests that in SNSs trust is less important for the establishing of new relationships compared to the real life. Such difference is of crucial importance for the topic of the present work. Without presumably more relaxed approach towards new acquaintances in the Internet and more

openness to online friends and “friends”, one can hardly imagine the existence of today’s social networks, especially hospitality networks.

The researchers of online trust are often concerned with the question of antecedents of trust: what makes people trust online and what are variables that can predict the trust of an individual in the Internet. Familiarity with online service (Gefen 2000) and ease of use of the website (Flavián, Guinalíu, and Gurrea 2006) were found to contribute to trust of the users towards websites. For a comprehensive review of sources of online trust I recommend consulting Beldad, de Jong and Steehouder (2010) literature review on the topic.

There is a considerable discussion of whether cultural measurements on the national level can be at all applied to individuals making their trust-related choices. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2001) often were in the focus of the researchers and research showed evidence both for (Yoon 2009) and against (McCooy et al. 2005) the use of cultural dimensions for determining individual choices, highlighting difficult and incomplete relationship (Ford, Connelly, and Meister 2003). Hofstede’s dimensions were however found to influence the adoption rates of the three major SNS: Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter (Sample and Ara 2014). In a more specific study Hwang and Lee (2012) showed that at least one of the Hofstede’s dimensions, the uncertainty avoidance played an important role in trust-related behaviour online.

5.2 Existent research on social networks and trust

In the recent decade the research of trust entered the field of information science. Trust was proven to be an important factor in the adoption of online technology, online commerce, e-government (Colesca 2009) and e-health (Sillence et al. 2004). Study of trust within information technology research is connected with the research of the Internet and primarily of the online social network services. SNSs have become important everyday contact zones for millions of people and as they became larger, the need have arisen to study and regulate the relations between users of such networks. Within the study of online social behaviour of individuals trust is viewed as a concept closely connected to privacy. There are three main directions of researching trust within SNS with regard to the purpose of the research. First one deals with possibilities of computing trust indicators for agents of the social network in order to make the SNS more secure and allow users to manage their privacy within these networks better. Second direction is the

research of trust for the marketing purposes: consumer trust and online branding. And the third one is the studies of how social networks' users manage their connections and interact with each other, taking into accounts social indicators and values.

5.2.1 Computing trust

First direction is taken by information technology studies and is only marginally connected to the topic of the present work as it is basically aimed at computing and objectivizing trust which has nothing to do with individual behaviour and attitudes of social network users. The Internet has long become public domain and as in any public area, one's encounters with other agents should be managed with care. Important and extensively discussed phenomenon of online privacy and confidentiality of sensitive data led to the talks about possible solutions of how to make the Internet in general and SNSs in particular a safer place to be. From this point of view trust is closely associated with privacy – central theme for the most of the on-going Internet research in general. Within this direction of study, researchers are using concept of trust when they define who are worthy to be shared sensitive data with.

In SNS studies there are models aimed at answering the question of whether A can trust B that use social network analysis techniques to create trust networks and computationally evaluate trustworthiness of B for A using the transitivity property of trust (Jiang, Wang, and Wu 2014; G. Wang and Wu 2011). From the other side, there are models for predicting trust and distrust between users in SNS (Kim and Ahmad 2013). While there are possibilities and elaborated projects of computationally managing trust in the Internet with the objective of serving users reliable and trustworthy content (see Smith (2009), Golbeck (2005) and Furht (2010)), most of them are still rather theoretical concepts that, however, may be introduced in the near future. For now, managing networks of trust still remains the area controlled primarily by the users. With a little of technical help users can decide who is trusted to be granted access to their content, personal information or other data. Question of how the Internet users manage such their connections has become the focus of the second direction in the research of trust online (Bhulyan, Josang, and Xu 2010).

5.2.2 Marketing trust

Much of the research of trust is conducted within the area of marketing. Exploring how Internet users build their trust, what brands and websites they consider trustworthy and what is the best way to manage online image of the company are the popular topics of research in online marketing. I believe that much of the marketing research of trust is of limited relevance to the current work as the studies are often very narrow in terms of the subject of the research, concentrating on a formation and development of trust towards websites or web services, while much smaller number of papers in the marketing research touches on the effects of generalised trust on trust online.

One interesting insight we can gain from the marketing research of online trust is the importance of the structural elements of online websites. They have proven to be important for the formation of users' trust: trust assurances (Li, Jiang, and Wu 2014), strong privacy policy (Lauer and Deng 2007) and the perceived site quality in general (Corbitt, Thanasankit, and Yi 2003) as well as absence of errors (Bart et al. 2005). All these elements of user trust-building are incorporated into the popular social media websites either by the network designers or through governmental guidelines (like European regulations on Internet privacy and data protection (European Commission 2015)).

5.2.3 Social trust

The studies that form the third direction of research deal with the sociological and behavioural aspects of participation in social networks, privacy issues and the way the personal social networks of the members are built. With the omnipresence of the Internet in today's life, privacy has become a major concern and subject for investigation. In 2010 more than a half of US respondents reported that they are more concerned with Internet privacy issues than they were 5 years ago (Hoofnagle et al. 2010). The mere number of cases opened by the European Union against companies accused of privacy violations over the Internet indicates the rising awareness of the issue among the general public and the policy makers. Regulation of the practices in the Internet and enforcing the privacy rights is meant to contribute to the creation of trustworthy environment in the Internet where the user is one who regulates one's privacy and can remain anonymous at will. In reality the current state of affairs is far from this ideal and privacy violations are still very

common. For more research on online privacy and user self-disclosure please see Paine et al. (2007) and Trepte and Reinecke (2011).

On the individual level online privacy and trust operate in symbiotic manner where shortage of trust may be compensated by more privacy and the other way around (Joinson et al. 2010). Thus to use a website that offers less privacy (requires real name, payment details), a user have to have more trust than for using a website where one can stay anonymous. From this perspective naturally SNS require more trust than usual non-social websites and hospitality SNS are even more trust-demanding (as they ask for even more personal details, so users have less privacy).

Papers that discuss the concept of trust in the SNSs tend to concentrate on several of the most popular SNSs. Most of such studies deal with measuring trust and trustfulness of people who use Facebook as the most wide-spread SNS (see Johnson et al. (2011) and Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini (2007). During the recent survey by Pew Internet, Facebook users were asked the aforementioned generalized trust question. 41 percent of American Facebook users said that most people can be trusted (Hampton et al. 2011, 32). This is somewhat higher but still comparable with the WVS results of 39.3 percent of Americans answering that most people can be trusted (World Values Survey Association 2005).

5.3 Trust in hospitality social networks

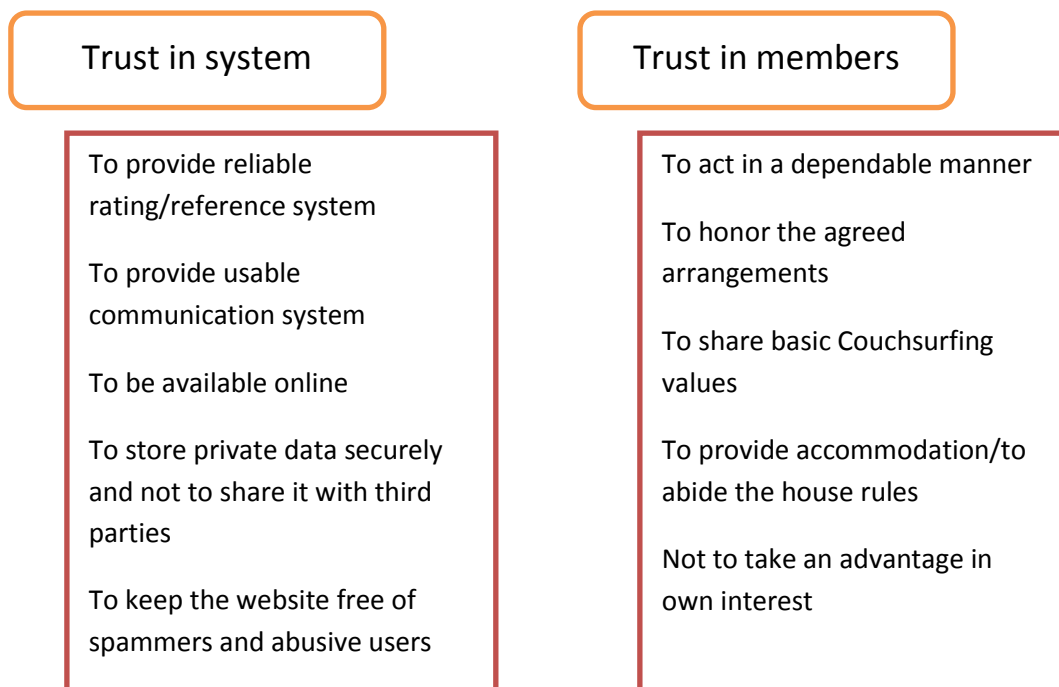
Relationships in modern society are opaque in a sense that behaviour of other people (people outside of a small non-anonymous group of close friends, colleagues and family members) cannot be easily monitored and evaluated. Thus it is difficult to allocate trust and manage trust towards strangers as not enough information is available beforehand. It is even more so online. In the Internet when dealing with strangers experiential or familiar trust is not a main source of trust (if at all).

All hospitality online service functioning is based on trust and the whole existence of these networks is impossible without trust that members have in other members and in the system itself. If the members of these networks opt to trust each other, why they do that? To get the answer to that question, one should first redefine the question more specifically. When talking about trust in hospitality social networks, we talk about the generalised trust of their members towards other members of these services who are previously unknown to them. It is assumed that other hospitality service members are “strangers”, because as it was mentioned earlier in contrast to networks like Facebook,

where member usually socialize with their real life weak ties, hospitality SNS are designed to interact with unfamiliar people. When mentioning “other members” I mean a certain circle of hospitality network’s members, which includes people who are not friends and not immediately trustworthy. For practical purposes such approach equalizes problems of trust in the hospitality SNS to the discussion about trust in strangers. As trust is a specific attitude towards a situation people usually trust others to do certain things, rather than trusting them unconditionally. In the context of hospitality networks this means that members trust each other in that their respective hosts or guests will act in dependable, ethical and trustworthy manner, primarily when it comes to offline interactions. As the relationships between actors are unfolding online, one does not rely on face-to-face communication to build trust, so there got to be another source of trust. One interesting view on the source of trust in strangers is the Offe’s idea, who suggests that trust in strangers is derived from the fact that we share the same institutional space with these strangers (Offe 1999). Functioning institutions thus provide necessary background for the trust in strangers to “function”. While obviously this idea relates to the sphere of politics it may be also used to explain online trust. Applied to the online hospitality social networks discourse, this means that the existence of specific rules and regulations within the networks allows the existence of the networks by facilitating trust between their members.

In other words trust exercised by the users in Couchsurfing is twofold: trust in the system and trust in the specific members with whom one interacts within the system. The subjects of trust in both cases are different. Trust in Couchsurfing described in Figure 4 corresponds to the “provision of service by the trustee” form of trust outlined by Grandison and Sloman (2000). The trustors (users) have confidence that Couchsurfing service is reliable enough to manage references/rating of the users in a way they can be useful for actually deciding whether a particular visitor or host is to be trusted solely on the basis of the information stored in his or her profile. The prolonged use of Couchsurfing service in this case can be the best indication of the expression of trust in it.

Figure 4. Twofold nature of trust in Couchsurfing



The trust in members is expressed through the hosting arrangements made over the hospitality service. Such arrangements can be viewed as composites of hosting-visiting agreements, where one side agrees on hosting the other at its own home, and the other one agrees to visit particular host. Such agreements are the product of online interactions of the network members, which are mediated through messaging system: either internal of the website (e.g. private messaging) or external (e-mail, online chats, Skype). Most simplistically this scheme looks as follows: accommodation-seeking member sends request to the intended host, manifesting the intentions; and hosting member replies by either accepting the request or declining it (either directly or indirectly by ignoring the request). Flowchart and detailed description of this process on Couchsurfing network is provided in Chapter 2.6. Trust is crucial at all the points of decision-making by the both sides. Intended guest member has a choice of possible host members (their profiles more specifically) at the location he or she plans to visit and makes a decision of whom to contact at the first place by evaluating the profiles of possible hosts. Trustworthiness of the future hosts is one of the priorities during the decision, but of course other factors also play significant role (location of accommodation, accommodation features, common language to mention a few) and in each case exact values of factors are different. The

hosts in turn also have to decide and evaluate the trustworthiness of the possible guest. After having received the request, hosting side makes decision to accept or decline the request. Again other circumstances play significant role in decision-making, but while all aforementioned auxiliary factors, which affect decision making in hospitality networks, should not be neglected and they will be considered during the research, the question of what makes some members trust others remains central for this thesis. The grounds for the appearance of trust in this case may be of external and internal nature. Unlike many real life offline interactions, in online social networks users are exposed to a very limited amount of information about the person they have to evaluate. As the external information for making the decision of trust is very limited, it can be easily described and analysed at any given time. Basically the external information used in decision making in hospitality social networks is the contents of a member's profile. Information that may be contained in the profile varies from one social network to another but generally it can be of two types: either created by the profile owner (biography, likes and dislikes, favourites, description of hobbies and other texts) or be the result and indicator of the member's activity in the network. The activity information is of the utmost importance as it cannot be manipulated at will by the profile owner (or at least certain difficulties are imposed to prevent such manipulations). It may include: information on previous hosting and visiting experiences, references written by other members and possibly some kind of profile evaluation by other members or the system itself. All the available information in the end meant to be extensive enough to make the translation from online to offline communication as seamless as possible. When individuals meet each other in the real life for the first time, they presumably know everything the profile of the other party contains and do not perceive that person as a total stranger. Available references from other users also contribute to the sense of familiarity and safeness. There has been a specific study on how different types of ratings and references are apprehended and used by Couchsurfing users in decision-making process (Adamic, Lauterbach and Te 2011). Couchsurfing.org features the most elaborate and extensive rating system¹³ and the findings of the previously mentioned study is valuable for conducting any research concerning hospitality service networks and are used for the purposes of this thesis as well.

¹³ There are total four types of ratings at couchsurfing.org, three of which are available to other members of the service on the user's profile page. These ratings are briefly discussed in Chapter 2.3

Within the hospitality SNS trust can also be treated as a kind of social capital. It can be built through accumulation of references and friend connections and later be “spent” to increase the chance of being hosted during the travel. Thinking about trust in Couchsurfing as a resource helps to understand its nature. Different sources of user connections provide different amounts of trust-resource. While actual weights of various connections in Couchsurfing were not researched, we can speculate that more significant friend-connections value more than references within the system and friends in turn are less important compared to vouches, just because the latter are more difficult to earn. Pultar (2011) explores the contribution of different reference-connections to user’s social capital within the Couchsurfing network distinguishing between connections primarily based on geography (distance from the individual). His focus group-based research provided evidence that connections further away from the individual contribute more to the perceived social capital of an individual in the network. Apart from actual number of kilometres that separate the connections, important are distance in terms of number of borders and constraints that hinder the connection (like visas).

One other idea that is connected to the concept of trust in the online environment and is worth mentioning is the “Leap of faith” phenomenon. “Leap of faith” concept comes from religion studies and when applied to the study of trust in the Internet can be modified into “Leap of trust”. One of the theorists of trust, Möllering, argues that “leap of faith” is integral for the whole process of trusting as it is needed for the occurrence of new relationships (Moellering 2006). When applied to the hospitality social network services “leap of faith” concept implies that significant trust in a stranger is required to let that stranger in your own house. So basically before an offline interaction a member of hospitality service network has to exercise trust not in the real person but in the digital incarnation of the person – his or her profile. Such trust may be considered irrational as it is not backed up by experience but rather grounded on digital evidence. This kind of trust is important for the sole existence of hospitality SNS as for such networks to function, it is important that their members trust other members of the network enough to be able to allow complete stranger into one’s home.

5.4 Previous research of trust in hospitality social networks

It is worth noting that while many conclusions drawn from the research of general purpose social networks like Facebook or Twitter can be applied to the hospitality SNS,

there are also certain differences. Naturally more condensed and interest-oriented networks can have more profound influence on the members of the SNS as they stimulate more specific use of the network. So for example while Facebook is primarily used for everyday socializing and maintaining existing connections (Joinson 2008), Couchsurfing.org is more oriented towards fostering real life interactions and socializing of the members while they are travelling. Certainly, hospitality SNS also allow more casual interaction but that is considered to be secondary feature and there are active members who never used these capabilities. One of the first attempts to study hospitality SNS was made by Jennie Molz. In her short chapter Molz (2007) explains the workings of several hospitality SNS and describes how different host-guest encounters happen, concentrating on reciprocity and hospitality as reciprocal exchange. She touches on the reputation system in Couchsurfing.org and HospitalityClub, discussing what traits are essential for being a good guest or host during interactions initiated on the hospitality SNSs. Somewhat descriptive in its nature, Molz's paper is the first attempt of comparative analyses of the structure of different hospitality SNS.

There exist several papers that deal specifically with the study of trust in the online hospitality networks. The study by Adamic et al. (2011) that was mentioned earlier concentrated on one particular aspect of trust management in Couchsurfing hospitality social network — how users use other members' ratings to decide whether these members are trustworthy. In the case of Couchsurfing ratings are an important and objective indicators of the user's activity within the network they may contribute to understanding how they influence trust and trustworthiness of hospitality service members. Study provides examples of how users use different ratings and evaluate their experiences. The research reveals that many users tend to overrate other members being afraid that they may provide reciprocally negative reference or rating (Adamic, Lauterbach and Te 2011). Zhu (2010) confirms the problem in underrepresentation of negative references and underlines that when present even one negative reference has huge impact on perception of user's profile, up to the point that many other members would decline hosting a user because of a negative reference.

Paula Bialski (2007) explores the trust in Couchsurfing.com community through the notion of intimate mobility or intimate tourism. She argues that people who socialize through hospitality network service tend to be more open and revealing about the personal (intimate) facts and stories. Bialski argues that this is possible due to the brief

nature of such interactions and place where such interactions occur (the hosting member's home). Whilst "intimate tourism" idea as described by Bialski is definitely connected to trust, author herself acknowledges that trust was not exactly the focus of the thesis and the connection between participation in hospitality social networks and trust were not discussed (Bialski, *Intimate Tourism* 2007). Later book by the same author (Bialski 2012) extends the idea of intimate mobility and provides extensive and detailed information about the way interactions between members of hospitality networks are initiated and managed, yet again without explicit focus on trust.

Other research paper by Tran (2009) tackles specifically the phenomenon of interpersonal trust in the hospitality networks. Again the Couchsurfing social network becomes the centre of attention and author investigates how members of this community manage their trust by conducting a series of semi-structured interviews surveying 6 members and 6 non-members of the mentioned network. Tran outlined the origins of trust in the network by discussing what information exactly members of the Couchsurfing network use when deciding to trust or not to trust others within the network. Generally the study tends to concentrate on risk assessment and evaluation component of trust, discussing how members of Couchsurfing.org manage risks, while paying little attention to how the participation in hospitality network can influence these components (Tran 2009).

Bialski and Batorski tie trust to the concept of familiarity. The authors assume that trust in the hospitality social network (they use Couchsurfing for the research) is created as a result of feeling of familiarity users experience when using this service. Using an online survey of 3000 network's members, supplemented by thirty personal interviews, Bialski and Batorski outline three stages of participants' experience, when the trust emerges. These are: pre-selection of users, website and profile navigation and offline contact. All of these stages contribute to the creation of "familiar world", which in turn leads to appearance of trust between members of the community (Bialski and Batorski 2010, 180). The second stage of familiarity-trust formation is arguably the most important one. The affordances and limitations of a hospitality Internet service create specific unique user experience ultimately contributing to one's perception of the service as familiar and trustworthy. The second stage idea of familiarity of navigation as a prerequisite or precursor of trust is related to the idea of institutional space by Offe (1999). According to the authors, profiles are the main source of trust in the SNS (Bialski

and Batorski 2010, 202) — “navigation within the network” is actually the navigation through a series of user profiles. Although contrary to the idea of trust propagation in hospitality SNS discussed earlier (the one based on Offe’s assumptions), Bialski and Batorski concentrate more not on the way profile is structured and composed, but more on the content of profile information. The profile in the Couchsurfing is composed of structured answers to the specific set of questions: “what is your mission?”, “what people you enjoy?”, “most amazing thing you’ve done?” and others. Authors argue that the way these questions are proposed and laid out contributes to the trusting environment on the network. Here they connect familiarity to similarity — more similar users trust each other more than different ones. The data confirms that there are more friendship connections among users who are more alike: analysis of friendship pairs in the Couchsurfing SNS based on 2006 data showed the trust being the greatest between similar users (Bialski and Batorski 2010, 190). To some degree, of course, most of the hospitality social network members may be considered similar. This assumption stems from the presence of perceived shared interest: the interest in participating in this network’s activities, that is, travelling and hosting other travellers. Such apparent similarity leads to the appearance of what is defined by the term “social reality”. According to Lewis and Weigert (1985), social reality is the situation characterized at least by the basic level of trust, caused by the similarity in the community’s ideals and goals. As in Couchsurfing the stated goals and ideals are thought to be shared throughout the community, basic level of trust between the members is always present. This is yet another explanation for the trust occurring in the hospitality SNS.

There is one other research where the concept familiarity is connected to hospitality service research. Qualitative interviews about Couchsurfing-use motivations conducted by Ayers-Greenidge (2012) confirmed the importance of similarities as a factor in selecting possible host. The similarities were primarily evaluated using the textual information stored in user’s profile (Ayers-Greenidge 2012, 70). Zhang attempted to measure the familiarity in the SNS in an effort in formalization of trust. Author proposes five main factors that affect familiarity during the usage of a website: prior experience, repeated exposure, study duration, level of usage and forgetting rate. (Zhang 2004, 23) Applied to initial use of the hospitality SNS, these factors contribute to the user feel of familiarity with the service. Using formulae to measure all these factors numerically, it is possible to evaluate a familiarity of any given website. This approach is somewhat more

technical than that of Bialski and Batorski as it doesn't account for the community on the website and interactions between the members, concentrating instead on the architecture and design of the website. Zhang's familiarity is very dependent on the previous experience with other Internet services (Zhang 2004, 25).

On the other side of trust-spectrum, Vaicekauskas (2010) explored the generalized trust within the Couchsurfing.com hospitality network using as a basis the comparison of Baltic and Nordic countries. This short paper was obviously inspired by earlier discussed work of Delhey and Newton and used its concept of generalized trust. By comparing the European social survey (ESS 2008) results with own survey of 188 Couchsurfing network users from different countries, author found out that the level of trust exhibited by the users this hospitality service network generally does corresponds to the ESS 2008 level of trust in the general population. Another interesting finding of this paper is that intensity of Couchsurfing.org usage correlates with the average trust indicator from the ESS 2008 survey (Vaicekauskas 2010).

Stanford research team (Cook et al. 2009) found out that user trust is mainly determined through the experience in the network. They found that previous positive experiences within Couchsurfing make an individual more likely to trust while negative experience make one more cautious towards others. Furthermore research showed that negative information, experience or reference have much more significant effect on one's trust than positive experiences. That goes along with the hypothesis of the presence of link between experience using Couchsurfing and generalised trust of an individual, which will be tested in this thesis survey.

While existing papers on the online social networks and their effects on the trustfulness provide evidence for the increase of trustfulness of the participants (Tan 2010), there was no comprehensive research on the problem. This paper aims to provide substantial evidence of the existence of the (positive) effect of the participation in hospitality social networks on trust and trustfulness. Also with the substantial increase in the number of Couchsurfing users (fivefold since the 2010 study (Couchsurfing 2015), there is need for an actual view on the topic that will take into account the increased diversification of the SNS userbase.

5.5 Relation between trust and tolerance

As tolerance and trust form two most important concepts used in the work, it is worth establishing the relation between them. Research suggests that trust and tolerance display moderate correlation. More trusting people are somewhat more likely to be more tolerant as well (Sullivan et al. 1993, 155). Just like we speak of generalized trust on hospitality networks, we may use the concept of “generalised tolerance” to define tolerance of other hospitality network members. Particularly tolerance towards different cultures, religion and ethnic groups is of importance in the scope of this work. Generally hospitality exchange networks include tolerance as one of their primarily values but implications of that vary from network to network. Hospitality SNS like Couchsurfing or Hospitality Club are open to any member around the world and because of that many intercultural interactions happen as a result of participation in these networks. In the same time networks like LGHEI¹⁴ or Pasporta Servo¹⁵ intentionally limit the pool of their potential members. It may be argued that such limitations and rules are intolerant in their nature, but in fact such restrictions appear to be of a declarative nature. In the case of LGHEI for example, network’s conditions doesn’t mention any particular requirements for the participants (LGHEI 2012). In the analytical part of the thesis, the connection between individual trust and tolerance levels will be tested to see how they relate to each other and other hospitality network variables.

¹⁴ Lesbian & Gay Hospitality Exchange International - <http://www.lghei.org/>

¹⁵ Hospitality network for Esperanto speakers - <http://www.pasportaservo.org/>

CHAPTER 6: Hypotheses and Operationalization

The main objective of the thesis is to understand how hospitality social network services change the way their members perceive others and deal with cultural differences. These changes are observed through the changes in levels of tolerance and trust of individual users towards other unfamiliar users and observable differences in trust and tolerance in relation to the non-users. Trust and tolerance are two main concepts that are examined in the present research. Literature review of the topic presented in the previous chapters revealed that there exists no apparent confirmation of whether participation in the hospitality SNS affects the users of the networks to a degree when attitudes and dispositions of the users are significantly influenced. So preceding the testing of the assumed positive effect of the participation in the networks, it is necessary to confirm if they have any effect altogether and how significant that effect may be. Looking into the cause of possible changes in trust and tolerance during the social network use, two particular components are the most interesting. These are the overall experience of using the Couchsurfing network and the negative component of such experience. It would be possible to frame Couchsurfing experience as the ratio of positive to negative interactions mediated by the network, but “ratio” in this case will be an *overestimation*: due to very low number of negative experiences reported in the network we can discuss the absence/presence of negative experience rather than its proportion when using the social network.

To fulfil the objectives of the research the following five hypotheses are proposed. Out of these four hypotheses two (H1 and H3) correspond to the more general objective of determining whether the participation in the hospitality social networks has any significant on the dispositions of the members at all. The H2 and H4 hypotheses assume that participation in the hospitality SNS has positive effect on trustfulness (H2) and tolerance (H4) of the active members of these networks. H5 looks into the effect of negative experience on user trust and tolerance levels. The H2, H4 and H5 are more specific hypotheses and they could not be confirmed without the confirmation of corresponding more general ones of H1 and H3. Fifth hypothesis consists of separate two parts, corresponding to the concepts of trust and tolerance as measures being affected by negative experiences. The discussed hypotheses will be accepted or rejected on the basis

of the analysis of data obtained with the help of the quantitative and qualitative surveys whose designs are described in the Chapter 6.2.

6.1 Hypotheses

There have been some discussions considering how Internet and more specifically new social media affect the dispositions and values of people who actively use and engage in this media. While the actual evidence may be controversial and incomplete, it is normally agreed that Internet in general and social networks in particular have significant impact on the life of people: both on everyday routines and more profoundly on the way people perceive ideas and form their attitudes (Wang et al. (2012), Bargh and McKenna (2004), Wellman et al. (2010)). The first hypothesis of the thesis assumes that people who actively engage in Couchsurfing hospitality network have significantly different levels of generalised trust compared to the hospitality non-users who use only general purpose SNSs like Facebook or Twitter.

***H1.** Participation in hospitality social networks is positively associated with the level of trust of a participant towards other people in general.*

Trustfulness of people in the web and the way trust propagates in the network environment are two of the most interesting attitude-related questions of the effects of ubiquitous connectedness on people. With a *fivefold* global increase of the number of Internet users in the last decade, 42.3 percent of total Earth's population now has access to the global network, with every 3 in 4 people enjoying the web in North America, Europe and Oceania regions (Internet World Stats (2014), OECD (2015)). Every third person living on the planet has access to broadband mobile Internet and in some countries already more people access the Internet via mobile device than using a desktop (ITU World Telecommunication 2014). People become more open and share private information easier (for better or for worse), but was that a natural evolution of human society that caused that changes, that in turn led to the appearance of social media and social networks? Or maybe the appearance and popularity of social media led to the changes in lifestyle and everyday habits of people? Both approaches may be argued for and I am sure that both of them make sense as these two processes go in parallel. But with the penetration of social networks that we have now it is hard to ignore them as mere

consequences of social evolution online. Online network services have already become a phenomenon that shapes people's mind-sets.

When talking about trust of hospitality SNS members towards others in the context of the present work, trust is always meant to be understood as generalized trust (as defined by Dehley and Newton (2004) and described in Chapter 4. Generalized trust as the trust directed towards out-group (usually complete strangers) is one of the most important personal qualities of the users that allow hospitality exchange model to function. While members' generalized trust is what influences the experiences in the social networks, it is natural to suppose that the participation in these networks influences the way and degree the members trust. The H1 will be tested by comparing the generalised trust levels of people who participate in Couchsurfing with trust levels of those who are not members of this network. Individual levels of trust are measured through the quantitative survey, while qualitative survey will help to understand what may be the reasons of the difference in the generalised trust between the two groups.

This leads to the second hypothesis of the dependency of individual generalised trust from the amount of experience using the network.

***H2.** People who actively participate in hospitality social networks for considerable time have higher level of generalized trust than those who do not.*

H2 is a more specific assumption about the effect of hospitality SNS. According to the proposed hypothesis more experience in hospitality social networks is associated with higher level of individual trust. Hospitality exchange experience for this purpose is measured with the number of questions in the survey that relate to the frequency and depth of the offline interactions with other people organised through the Couchsurfing social network.

Trust is the single most important concept in the functioning of hospitality networks be they online or offline. Being trusting (and trustworthy) is a necessity for a member of such networks, as all these "casual interactions", "home sharing" or "intimate mobility" (Bialski 2012) are impossible if parties do not trust each other to a particular degree. As it was explained in Chapter 5, to host a person in one's own house a significant level of trust is needed, akin to the level of trust people show towards their close friends and relatives.

If the Hypothesis 1 turns out to be true and Couchsurfing members are indeed more trusting then the question of the origin of such difference arises. The possible difference may be explained either with pre-filtering of users (more trusting people choose to use Couchsurfing, while less trusting do not participate) or with the assumption that participation in the network is what makes people more trusting and creates this difference. Both of these explanations are likely to contribute to the explanation and finding out which of the reasons is more important is one of the research questions posed in this work.

There is no denying that some pre-filtering of the members occurs when people start to participate in the hospitality SNS. Without an appropriate level of trust a person will not be able to host other member for the first time, or even if so, will cease participating in the hospitality network after a short time. Of course, there might be other reasons to register in the hospitality social network (like casual interest or the invitation of a friend, more comprehensively discussed in Chapter 7.3), but still the majority of cases presupposes high level of trust in other members of the system. Conversely the leap of faith phenomenon discussed by Möllering (2006) and explained in Chapter 5.3 may play an important role. Basically it supposes that a relatively low-trust individual if put in a situation where more trust is needed (and where certain risks may be mitigated by the environment) may exhibit high-trust behaviour. Such behaviour consequently is reinforced with repetition (more hosting and visiting by the member) and leads to adopting more trusting behaviour on a wider scale, outside situations managed by the hospitality network.

To test the hypothesis I will use a quantitative survey with a number of trust-related questions along with the additional qualitative survey of hospitality SNSs members with different levels of experience. Contributing or related factors are also analysed. Demographics of the sample, activity in different aspects of the hospitality network of the users are studied to find out how they can contribute to the increased (or decreased) level of trust in the user sample as compared to the non-user one. Motivation change between the time the user started using Couchsurfing.org website and the time of the survey as assessed by the respondents themselves is measured and used to provide more reliable conclusions.

Trust and its connection to the Internet is a popular topic, mostly because trust relates to the most well-researched (and controversial) theme of the Internet research: privacy in the Internet. The question of tolerance in the Internet in turn is much less developed. Although there is research devoted to the question of tolerance online, as it was explained in Chapter 3, the main problem of existing research is that it tends to view the Internet as a single entity (*Rainie and Quitney Anderson 2009*). Whilst such approach could have been appropriate in the early days of web, now undeniably researchers should focus on a particular type of Internet activity and specific online services to get any practical result. On the more specific level (tolerance and particular social networks) there still exists an apparent lack of research.

***H3.** Participation in hospitality social networks is positively associated with the level of tolerance of a participant towards representatives of different cultures.*

This thesis is aimed to establish a connection between the use of hospitality social networks and tolerance as a person's disposition to the otherness, filling the gap in the academic field. H3 is the assumption of existence of significant difference in tolerance levels between users of Couchsurfing network as compared to the non-users. To evaluate the difference (or lack thereof) and confirm or reject the H3, the levels of individual tolerance will be compared between users of Couchsurfing SNS and people who do not participate in it.

***H4.** People who actively participate in hospitality social networks for more time have higher level of tolerance than those who have less experience participating.*

While the research on how the use of social media widens the horizons and makes people more open to different experiences is still scarce and deals primarily with Facebook and Twitter, most available data supports the idea that new social networks contribute to the openness of the society and consequently to the levels of openness and tolerance of individuals in the society (see for example Silverman (2007), Howard and Jones (2004), Ala-mutka and Punie (2010) or Foghammar (2012). There is no confirmation of possible positive effect of the participation in the online hospitality SNS on the tolerance of their users. For the purposes of this research, data obtained from both quantitative and qualitative surveys will be used to confirm or reject the hypothesis of positive effect on the individual tolerance that hospitality SNS use brings. The same

measure of hospitality network use experience as in H2 will be used to test the hypothesis.

The H4 is clearly related to the H3, while tackling the question more specifically. H4 assumes that hospitality SNS users with more experience in the network also acquire a higher level of tolerance. H4 does not necessarily presupposes the acceptance of hypothesis 3, although the situation when the users and non-users are similar on their level of tolerance and in the same time experienced users are more tolerant ones is extremely unlikely as it possibly supposes the lower tolerance levels among users with little experience compared to the non-users. The exact increase of the tolerance will be measured in the analytical part of the thesis, but the assumption is that significant positive relation between the amount of use of the hospitality networks and level of generalized tolerance is present.

The supposed difference in tolerance level is assumed to appear as the result of the exposure of an individual to a variety of different cultures and lifestyles, during the time he or she spends being a member of the hospitality SNS. The positive effect of more diversity among one's contacts on tolerance was found by Harell who concluded that people with more diverse social networks are more tolerant of social diversity (Harell 2010). While some researchers argue that the general use of the Internet does not necessary lead to the increase of tolerance because Internet users tend to visit sites that reflect their own opinions (Putnam 2000; Robinson, Neustadtl and Kestnbaum 2004), at least in some cases the introduction of new media and the Internet led to positive influence on levels of discrimination and tolerance in society, particularly religious tolerance (Foghammar 2012). Moreover recent research of the American news consumption habits uncovered that ideological segregation of online news consumption is only marginally higher than segregation in the more traditional media (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2011). Signs of the ideological clustering are also present among the college-aged population but it is also not dramatic (Gaines and Mondak 2009). The two last studies concentrated on Facebook as the most populous network and might not reflect the state of art in the more specialised SNSs. Hospitality networks in particular are likely to produce significant influence on a person's tolerance because of the way people communicate in these networks. First and foremost the difference is in the presence of the offline face-to-face interactions, which are not important in Facebook but are central to

hospitality networks. Secondly the circle of people with whom Couchsurfing member connects is a much more diverse number of strangers compared to a circle of friends or acquaintances of the personal network in Facebook. Couchsurfing users just cannot have significant control over the people they choose to host or visit. As all the hosting and meeting arrangements are organized through the interaction with user profiles and user profiles provide incomplete information about the owner, it is somewhat difficult to organise one's usage of the network hosting and visiting only people with similar views. From this standpoint use of Couchsurfing inevitably results in certain exposure to differing worldviews and values.

Two factors are very important: firstly, in the hospitality SNS members predominantly communicate with people outside their in-group (so interest-centred grouping feared by Putnam (2000) or ideology-clustering are less spread) and secondly, members' communication is not limited to online interactions — in the most of the cases it leads to offline meeting in person. Online communication did not contribute much to the people becoming more tolerant, so it is during the offline communication, discussions and casual talks that the individual's views and attitudes are influenced. It is the offline component of the hospitality online networks that presumably makes the networks' users more tolerant.

Fifth hypothesis deals with the mechanics of the influence of Couchsurfing experience on trust and tolerance of the users. Individual trust and tolerance tend to increase with the amount of positive experience in the network. More positive experiences lead to more trust in the network and people who are members of this network. With each new positive experience user becomes more trustful and/or tolerant. As it was discussed in Chapter 1.9 the references left by users within Couchsurfing are overwhelmingly positive. Almost every interaction that resulted in the reference was a positive one. From this point of view counting the number of references would be the same as counting positive experiences on the network.

***H5.** The increased trust and tolerance through participation in Couchsurfing is caused by reinforcement of more trusting and tolerant behaviour through positive experience. Conversely, in case of negative experiences, trust and tolerance levels are decreased though the participation in the network.*

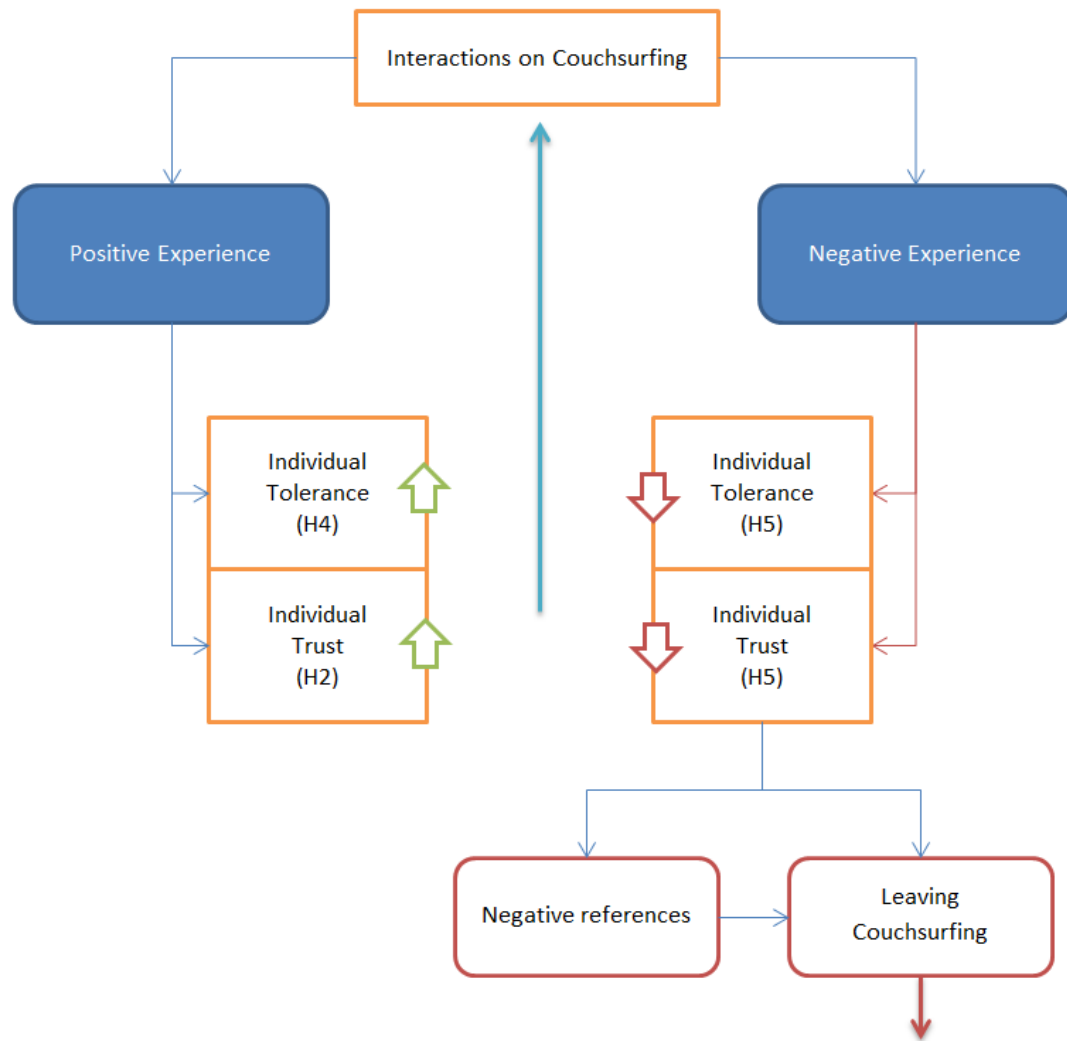
The environment — the network itself — that creates trustful background that allows people to trust each other more without risking too much and by that creating “a habit of trusting”, which later would be transmitted to other experiences online and consequently offline interactions. From this point of view negative experiences would break this habit and significantly affect the individual’s perception of others and consequently their trust and tolerance. The hypothesis 5 will be tested through measuring negative experiences of the users and their effect on individual trust and tolerance levels controlling for positive experience. Positive experience in this case is represented by the total experience measure used for testing H2 and H4. The strength of the effect can be measured through the comparison the trust and tolerance measures of similarly-experienced users who had negative experiences with those who did not. If users’ trust and tolerance levels are affected by negative experiences then respondents with negative experience will have lower trust and tolerance scores controlling for overall (positive) network experience.

Both actually written and unwritten negative references (mentioned by the users in the survey) provide a good measure of negative experience of the users. It is likely that the vast majority of users would not have more than several negative experiences and their ratio is unlikely to be very high (although of course much higher than the reported network’s 1:2500 (Teng, Lauterbach and Adamic 2010), so measuring the absence or presence of negative experiences of the user should be sufficient. Previous studies (Zhu 2010) confirm that even one negative experience can have a huge influence on individual image in the network, so it is safe to assume that dichotomous differentiation of the users based on the negative experience is adequate for the purposes of the current study.

Sources of negative experiences are also important. The results of the qualitative survey as well as user comments from the quantitative questionnaire are used to distinguish what exactly the negative experiences are, how they differ from one another and whether the type of negative experience significantly changes the effect it has on individual trust and tolerance levels. Qualitative data will also allow assessing other possible contributing factors and whether specific variables contribute to the possible effects of the negative experiences.

This hypothesis is closely connected to the previous ones. The effect of negative experience can be measured in terms of changes in individual trust and tolerance levels. It assumes that there is connection between experience using Couchsurfing network and trust and tolerance of the users, so to consider H5, hypotheses 2 and 4 should be confirmed. It is also possible that negative experience is associated with changes in one measure and do not affect other measure at all. So the hypothesis 5 actually consists of two separate parts. Association between negative experiences will be tested separately with trust and tolerance indexes to confirm the hypothesis.

Figure 5. Conceptual model of relation between tolerance, trust and Couchsurfing experience



6.2 Methodology and user survey

To evaluate the hypotheses, the quantitative survey was designed and shared among the users of Couchsurfing SNS. Each respondent received a questionnaire consisting of twenty-four questions thematically divided into several sections corresponding to the different hypotheses of the thesis: personal information section, tolerance section, trust section, and the SNS use section. The data collected through the survey was then analysed aiming to answer the thesis research question and contribute to the social network and hospitality exchange research.

Technically the questionnaire is designed as an online survey created and hosted on one of the survey-management services¹⁶. Full list of questions and corresponding answer options are provided in the annex 1. The survey was available for online for 2 months in April and May of 2014 to any Couchsurfing user who is willing to participate in the study. The survey link was shared by me through place pages on the Couchsurfing SNS. Place pages are special forum listings organised geographically where anyone can publish a message with a question or request related to the corresponding city or area. Place pages were introduced early in 2013 and although not universally used have become the place for organisation of local events, parties as well as posting of last minute couch request. Survey link accompanied by the message describing the aim and nature of the study was posted in total to 310 of European place pages with highest number of Couchsurfing users living in city or area (this statistic is available on the place page). The invitations to participate in the survey were not published in one day but rather uniformly during the whole two month period of data collection alternating between countries to minimise possible effects of local festivities, university exams or other occurrences that might affect the response rate. That tactic also helped to avoid possible accusations of spamming or excessive messaging of which I have received none. Additionally the request to fill out the questionnaire was posted to several Couchsurfing-dedicated Facebook pages (19 in total). Judging by the responses received as comments to specific messages, the number of respondents coming from Facebook groups was much lower than from Couchsurfing pages. Also on Couchsurfing place pages and CS private messages (but not in Facebook) I regularly received encouragements and users' thought on the research or critique. Some users were willing to share more data relevant to the study or were interested in getting the results of the survey. Some of the data received through this messages and comments I used in the qualitative section of the research, described in Chapter 6.4.

After the survey data collection was done the results were filtered, selecting only those respondents who fulfil the eligibility criteria: age from 18 to 35, residence in a country of the European Union, completed survey and at least some experience in using hospitality exchange services. Age filtering is necessary to take into the account the largest group of users, both by sheer amount of individual profiles and by the activity in

¹⁶ Smartsurvey (smartsurvey.co.uk) service was used for hosting the survey

the network. Geographical filtering is used to assure certain level of homophily in views and starting conditions of the network's members. Residing in the European Union a user is very likely to be exposed to certain Western values (like tolerance and relatively high generalised trust) and thus can be evaluated more precisely. Also that would restrict the possible difference in the perception of hospitality and those stemming from the differences in the Hofstede's cultural dimensions that may distort results of the survey if representatives of Western and Eastern cultures would be surveyed together.

6.3 The questionnaire design

The survey was designed as an online questionnaire for a number of obvious reasons. Firstly, of course, this research is concerned of the hospitality online services — networks that function in the Internet — 100% of all CouchSurfing.org users have access to the Internet and at least some basic skills of using it. Secondly, for the same reasons, hospitality SNS users are hard to contact outside the Internet as no telephone numbers or addresses of the members are freely available. And thirdly, Couchsurfing is a global network and even the limited sample of respondents would be very difficult to reach as they may span over significant distances in many different countries. Online survey is supplied with an introductory text where the aim, author and affiliation of the author of the research are provided to ensure that the request to participate in the survey would not be considered as spam or a concealed marketing survey.

For the most of the questions the Likert answer scale is used. Enabling certain flexibility in answers, it should provide more precise information about the respondents' views and attitudes. When used, Likert scale will provide a respondent with five mutually-exclusive answers: "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree", "Strongly disagree" that would measure a respondent's level of approval of particular statements. Several other questions use matrixes where respondent is asked to evaluate certain number of variables on an 11-point scale. In a number of questions fixed set of relevant options is listed. All questions except for the first three are provided with "prefer not to answer" option and are not marked as obligatory: so a respondent alternatively can just choose not to fill anything before submitting the answer.

The first introductory group of questions contains questions about the respondent's sex (1), age (2) and the country of residence (3, the country where a person hosts during

his or her Couchsurfing activity). Fourth general questions enquire about the occupation of the respondent. To conserve more relaxed and casual tone of the questionnaire, I decided to abstain from asking about the personal income and limit the survey to one social stratification indicator: the occupation.

4. *What is your main occupation at the moment?*

Several perceivably most common answers are provided along with “other” option and possibility to decline to provide an answer by using “prefer not to answer” option.

First two hypotheses of the thesis deal with the assumed positive relation of the duration and intensity of the usage of hospitality social networks to the level of generalized trust of an individual. Subsequent group of questions is aimed at measuring the level of trust of an individual with the goal to find its correlation to the experience of the participation in the Couchsurfing SNS.

When talking about trust as an attitude directed towards a kind of unspecified group, like “others” or “strangers”, one inevitably deals with the concept of generalised trust. As it was explained in Chapter 4, I will use the classification proposed by Delhey and Newton, defining generalized trust as a trust exercised by an individual towards other members of society collectively, even if those are complete strangers (Delhey and Newton, *Social Trust: Global Pattern or Nordic Exceptionalism?* 2004).

In order to measure the level of generalized trust the “standard trust question” is used. It is formulated as “*Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted, or can't you be too careful in dealing with people*” and was used in great number of different trust research surveys since 1956 when it was first used in the study by Rosenberg (1956). The standard question was included in American National Election Studies, Quality of Life Survey, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Pew Center, Niemi-Jennings socialization study, Afrobarometer (Uslaner 2007) among others. The most important recent cross-national survey the World Values Survey (WVS) included the standard question into questionnaires of all of its four waves. The wording used in the World Value Survey “*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*” (World Values Survey 2005, 3) is used for the present research. In WVS this question provided binary

data of whether a particular respondent had or didn't have generalized trust towards other people collectively. Notably a simplistic way to measure such a complex concept like trust, this particular question was criticized for its vagueness and ambiguity. "Most people" proved to be a problematic point as different societies and cultures might have distinct image of how wide or narrow are definition of "most people" is. To compensate for this problem the use of trust radius correction was proposed (Delhey et al. 2011). For the purposes of the present work though, there is no need to apply specific corrections and modifiers to compensate for different perceptions of the "other people" as survey respondents would be the representatives of European countries and thus mostly of the Western culture, where are no significant differences in the width of the trust radius (Delhey et al. 2011, 793). For that reason the standard question of the World Values Survey is used in this work's survey as a first question aimed at measuring the level of generalized trust of the respondent. To make the answers more precise and refined though, the 11-point scale (from 0 to 10) is used instead of the binary yes/no options of the WVS questionnaire. This particular question was already used with an eleven point scale in *The Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (CID) surveys*¹⁷ and the *European Social Surveys (ESS)*¹⁸, while *Pew survey of Metropolitan Philadelphia* of 1996 applied the four-point scale.

5. *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*

"0" corresponds to the "*you need to be very careful*" while "10" refers to "most people can be trusted" statement. Points in-between relate to the different levels of trust of an individual respondent.

6. *Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?*

7. *Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?*

¹⁷ <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid/>

¹⁸ <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>

Questions 6 and 7 were adopted from the WVS questionnaire as well, but again using an 11-point scale instead of two mutually exclusive options. These two questions together with the standard trust question are used to ensure more refined trust index value, calculated using data collected with the three questions. All three of the trust questions in a binary form were used by Shapiro and Berning (2013) in his Couchsurfing questionnaire.

The next group of questions deals with the concept of tolerance. Hypotheses H3 and H4 assume the positive relation between the duration and intensity of the usage of hospitality social networks to the level of tolerance of an individual. The level of tolerance evaluated through the analysis of responses to the following questions will be compared with the experience measures of individuals to find significant correlation of these two indicators (or the absence of correlation) in order to accept or reject the tolerance hypotheses.

Measuring the level of tolerance is possible through measuring the level of (the absence of) prejudice towards others. Once again for the purposes of the study I used tolerance questions from the abovementioned WVS. The “otherness” here is defined through the concepts of race, nationality and religion. In these two questions the exact choices are unimportant, while the absence or the presence of “undesired” others are what is evaluated to form the tolerance scale.

8. On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours. (People of a different races and ethnicities as options)

9. On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours. (People of different religions as options)

These questions are very similar to those in the trust section, as the concept of tolerance is strongly connected to trust. While a person who tolerates others may not be trusting them, a person who trusts the other group inevitably tolerates that group. For that reason strong correlation in positive response for specific trust and tolerance questions is expected. During the data collection these questions’ wording had to be amended to

explicitly include indication that “not selecting any options is also a valid answer” as several respondents did not realise that they can select nothing at all and complained about the question as luring the respondent into selecting an intolerant option. While the additional clarification seemed to have solved the ambiguity, data obtained through this question is treated with caution during the analysis.

Further questions in the tolerance section explore the attitudes towards the situation in the society, where a person lives. As the sample is territorially limited to Western Europe, the situation in regard to immigration and diversity in general is similar: there are a significant number of immigrants, high diversity and certain degree of controversy regarding the issue¹⁹. So the CS members are asked what they think regarding the situation in the country they live in presently.

10. There are too many immigrants in the country I live.

11. It is good to have immigrants from many different cultures.

12. It is good that people in the country I live can have different values.

13. Ethnic diversity is a good thing.

14. It is good that people in the country I live have different ways of living.

Question 10 adopted from the European report on intolerance (Zick et al. 2011, 54) while questions 11-14 are a set from the ACCEPT Pluralism questionnaire used as a part of their tolerance indicators toolkit (Triandafyllidou & ACCEPT Pluralism 2013) adapted for the Likert scale of the current survey. Together with questions 8 and 9 they form the basis for calculating the tolerance index used in the research. These questions in the actual survey are combined into one matrix for easier apprehension by the respondent.

As a significant number of CS members are people who just happen to live in a given country, naturally their attitude towards immigration does not represent the general trend in the society they live in. Thus next questions are used to understand the solution of the possible problem of intolerance and discrimination in relation to the hospitality SNS.

¹⁹ See for example (Zick et al. 2011) for a recent report on that.

15. Exposure to other cultures through travelling would reduce the discriminatory attitudes and prejudice.

16. Hospitality Exchange services (like Couchsurfing) might be the right way to decrease discrimination in the society.

As the tolerance is multifaceted concept and examining all possible aspects of tolerance would either make the questionnaire unreasonably big, or if using only a couple of questions for each aspect it would be too shallow to provide robust results. That is why I limited the enquiry to the intercultural tolerance, also partly including the religious tolerance, which is connected to the intercultural one. The reason for ignoring other possible aspects of tolerance (gender, sexual or political) is that a user of a hospitality SNS is not necessarily exposed to these kinds of diversities, while contacts with other cultures are very likely and generally occur frequently. At the same time it might be reasonable to research the other aspects of tolerance at some time in future; for that purpose one might need more sophisticated sampling approach and possibly use different survey methods.

Questions of the last section, named “SNS usage” are relevant (and available) only to actual members of the hospitality SNSs and deal with a user’s experience in the network. The responses in this group of question will help to understand the way a person uses Couchsurfing network: how much, why and in what manner.

Arguably the most important indicator of a CouchSurfing.com member for the purposes of the present work is member’s experience in using the network. The experience will be measured through separately measuring the number of times a person have hosted anyone and instances he or she was hosted.

17. In total, approximately, how many times did you visit other Couchsurfing.org members and stayed at least one night at their place?

18. In total, approximately, how many times did you host other Couchsurfing.com members, coming through the Couchsurfing.org?

Each question is provided with several options: *less than 5, 5-10, 11-20, more than 20, never hosted/was never hosted*. As for the purposes of the research all the members

are stratified according to their experience in the hospitality SNS, correct responses to these two experience-related questions will ensure the validity of the research.

Next two questions examine the motivation behind the usage of Couchsurfing social network. First question measures the motivation of a user during the initial registering in the network, while the second one deals with the question of why a person continue to use Couchsurfing.org at the time of the survey, presumably after having used it for some time.

19. Can you rate the main reasons for you to start using hospitality exchange services?

20. Why do you use hospitality exchange services now? Please, rate the main reasons.

These two questions are provided with two identical matrixes, listing several predefined options (*prospect of saving money when travelling, possibility to meet new people, desire to share my culture and life style, plain curiosity* (only for question 19) *possibility to learn about other cultures, desire to help others by hosting*) that are to be evaluated by the respondent with the help of 11-point scale ranging from 0 (not an important reason) to 10 (very important reason). The possibility to provide own custom reasons or comment is also provided. Two questions use different wording while bearing almost the same meaning because pre-test showed that when worded similarly they tend to confuse the respondents.

In the Josh Shapiro and Carl Berning's Couchsurfing questionnaire (2013) there is a similar question, worded "Why did you sign up and create a profile on www.Couch Surfing.org?" providing five possible answers: *Make friends/ Cheap travel/ Friends invited me/ Build community / Other*. I would suggest that this question was not very well designed as it didn't allow to measure relative importance of different factors and provided too few options. In the original survey two main options (make friends, cheap travel) were selected by two-thirds of respondents each. 18.3% of respondents have chosen "other", such high percentage suggesting that the presented options are not wide enough. Some of the *other* answers given by the respondents of the Berning and Shapiro's survey are included into this question's options. Particularly "cultural exchange", "helping others" and "curiosity" were mentioned quite often.

Questions 21 and 22 deal with the amount of time respondent spends with other Couchsurfing members. This relates to the depth of hospitality exchange experience. Together with the experience questions (17 and 18), responses to these questions are used to determine the level of participation in the network.

21. What is the typical time you spend at one host during Couchsurfing?

22. What is the typical time a Couchsurfing guest spends at your place?

Both questions provide the scale of four answers: *1-2 days, 3-6 days, 7 days or more*, along with an additional option *I never hosted/was never hosted*.

The last subset of questions examines the patterns of use of Couchsurfing.org service. Respondents are provided with a set of activities and a four-option scale to evaluate how often they engage in the given activities. Possible options are the following: *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often*.

Following activities are listed in a table: *participating in CS meetings, participating in CS groups, maintaining contact with CS members outside CS, preferring CS rather than a hotel/hostel wherever you go, engaging in common activities with a host/guest (cooking, gaming, partying), showing the guest around the city I live*.

This will allow to stratify the members of the network more thoroughly and also to determine the frequency with which the members take part in other activities organized through CS, but that not fit into hosting-sharing scheme. These related activities were not studied before and there is scarce quantitative evidence of their use beyond statistics shared by the Couchsurfing.org.

Last question of the usage-section of the questionnaire deals with negative experiences in CS. While the overwhelming majority of interactions in the network are reported as positive (Couchsurfing 2012), negative experience also happen and in the analysis of 2010 website data were reflected in 1 in 2500 ration of negative to positive references (Teng, Lauterbach and Adamic 2010). These experiences may have an effect on the individual trust/tolerance as suggested by H5. To understand whether it is the negative experience change how tolerant and trustful one is; the following question is included in the survey:

24. Did you have any negative experience at CouchSurfing.com?

Respondent also may be more specific regarding the negative experience and include his or her own experience or thoughts in the text field, providing qualitative view on the question. At the end of the survey respondents are asked to provide any further comments or questions by contacting the researcher via email.

The responses in the trust and tolerance sections of the questionnaire are coded to provide two measures: *the generalized trust index* and the *generalized tolerance index* for each respondent. These two measures are analysed in relation to the *experience index* constructed on the basis of the hosting and surfing experience reported by the members. SNS-usage section will also provide information on involvement in CS-activities as the depth of the use of the system to further distinguish respondents according to their Couchsurfing experience, forming the metric of the Couchsurfing involvement. The presence (or absence) of correlation between the levels of trust and tolerance and the experience in the network will be analysed to establish the relation between the measures and accept or reject the H2 and H4 hypotheses of the thesis. Complete questionnaire is included as appendix 1 at the end of the present thesis.

6.4 Control group and qualitative survey

A separate survey for control group who never used hospitality service was designed and shared through Facebook groups related to travelling and primarily European-based. The survey was available online through the same service as *the user survey* during July and August of 2014. It included the unchanged trust and tolerance sections (questions 5 to 15) from the first questionnaire. Naturally, Couchsurfing experience section is omitted in the non-user survey. The general section with questions about sex, country and occupation of the respondents included additional question asking about the social networks respondents are using.

A1. Which of the following social network services do you actively use? (at least once a month)

Options include all the most popular SNS as well as “hospitality networks”, the option to be used for filtering out the respondents who do not satisfy the condition of

being a “non-user”. Non-user survey provided trust and tolerance indexes to compare with the *user survey* for either confirming or rejecting hypotheses H1 and H3 as described in the Chapter 6.1.

A2. How often do you travel? (not counting daytrips or week-end trips)

A3. Do you consider yourself a budget traveller?

These two additional questions included in the non-user survey general section aimed at measuring travelling habits of the respondents of the control group and provide possible insight into variation of the main indexes within the group. The A3 question uses standard *yes/no* options the A2 has several mutually exclusive answers: “rarely”, “once or twice a year”, “usually every couple of months” and “monthly or more often”. Apart from these three questions and the absence of the experience section there is no differences between *user* and *non-user* surveys.

Quantitative evaluation of the trust and tolerance is only one possible view at the problem. Another interesting aspect of the relation between trust, tolerance and hospitality network experience is the user self-perception of whether participation in Couchsurfing led to them becoming (or not becoming) more trustful and tolerant. To explore this question qualitative analysis is more useful. With these considerations in mind, a separate subset of questions, mostly open-ended ones was used as additional survey shared among people who contacted me via email asking how they can contribute to the research further. These questions are meant for qualitative assessment as a complimentary tool for evaluating the results of the quantitative survey. The questions address the following interests that have arisen during the research: *nature of negative experiences on Couchsurfing and whether they result into a negative reference, self-assessment of one’s tolerance and the effect of Couchsurfing on it, the global effect of Couchsurfing on the society, the importance of computer literacy for a modern traveller* and some others. The results of the qualitative enquiries will be presented along with the results of the quantitative survey in Chapters 8 and 9.

The survey generated much feedback and many respondents eventually contacted me asking to provide the results of the survey when they become available. Some of them volunteered to provide more information regarding their experience on Couchsurfing website by participating in qualitative interviews. 18 respondents, almost everyone asked,

eventually responded providing answers to the set of open-ended questions that touch on the similar topics as the main survey but aimed at better understanding of the underlying motivations and attitudes beyond the numbers and indexes of the quantitative study.

Along with the questions about the country and hospitality network experience, survey included three open-ended questions:

Did participation in Couchsurfing affect your trust in other people? Especially strangers? Why do you think it happened?

*Do you think that Couchsurfing made you a more tolerant person?
If yes - please provide a short explanation of how it happened.*

*Do you think Couchsurfing as a practice is beneficial to the society?
(That is if more people would travel that way, the society becomes better)*

The questions are aimed at understanding how a user of the hospitality networks assesses own changes in his or her trust and tolerance and explains these changes, providing a qualitative angle at the indicators assessed in the surveys. Some answers were very short and didn't provide much insight, while almost half of all respondents provided long and comprehensive feedback, greatly contributing to the present research, enriching the results obtained through the quantitative survey.

CHAPTER 7: Demographics, Experience and Motivation

The dataset analysed in this chapter was created as a result of two online surveys conducted specifically for this thesis. The surveys' questionnaires are described in detail in Chapter 6. First survey was used to collect responses from a sample of Couchsurfing users and hereafter referred to as *user sample*. The second sample comes from the survey of a control group of social network users who did not participate in hospitality networks hence referred to as *non-user sample*. This chapter contains analysis of the *user sample* separately as well as comparison of the two samples with the aim to uncover important differences relating to the hypotheses about trust, tolerance and Couchsurfing experience that were defined in Chapter 6.1. Prediction models are created to quantify the effect of participation in the Couchsurfing service on individual levels of trust and tolerance. Finally where appropriate the obtained results are compared with three other available Couchsurfing datasets and previous research on online social networks and Couchsurfing.

7.1 Demographic data

The link to the *user survey* was shared through Couchsurfing.org city and regional pages as well as through discussions topics and group pages both on Couchsurfing website and on Facebook. Total of 1149 respondents completed the survey from April to May 2014. The survey link was also shared by one of the Couchsurfing managers on Twitter, although in the end the vast majority of the respondents came from the link shared on the Couchsurfing.org website rather than Twitter.

As current research is focused on the users living in the European Union users, link to the survey was shared primarily on the pages related to European segment of Couchsurfing. Obtained data was checked for incomplete and false cases, duplicates and outliers. 916 surveys were submitted by users self-identified as living in European Union (Switzerland and Norway users were included as well). Only these cases were used in further analysis, both when speaking about effects of trust and tolerance and when analysing differences between Couchsurfing.org users and non-users. Country-wise the sample is varied with highest representation of people living in Germany (14.6% of total

sample), France (10.8%), the United Kingdom (7.2%) and Spain (7.2%); smaller countries like Luxembourg, Cyprus and Ireland are represented only by a few respondents. 54 percent of all respondents in the user sample admitted they live and host as couchsurfers in the country they were born. 5% of all European Union couchsurfers in the sample came from the United States and further 7.1 percent from other countries outside Europe.

Figure 6. Map of respondent distribution by country of residence

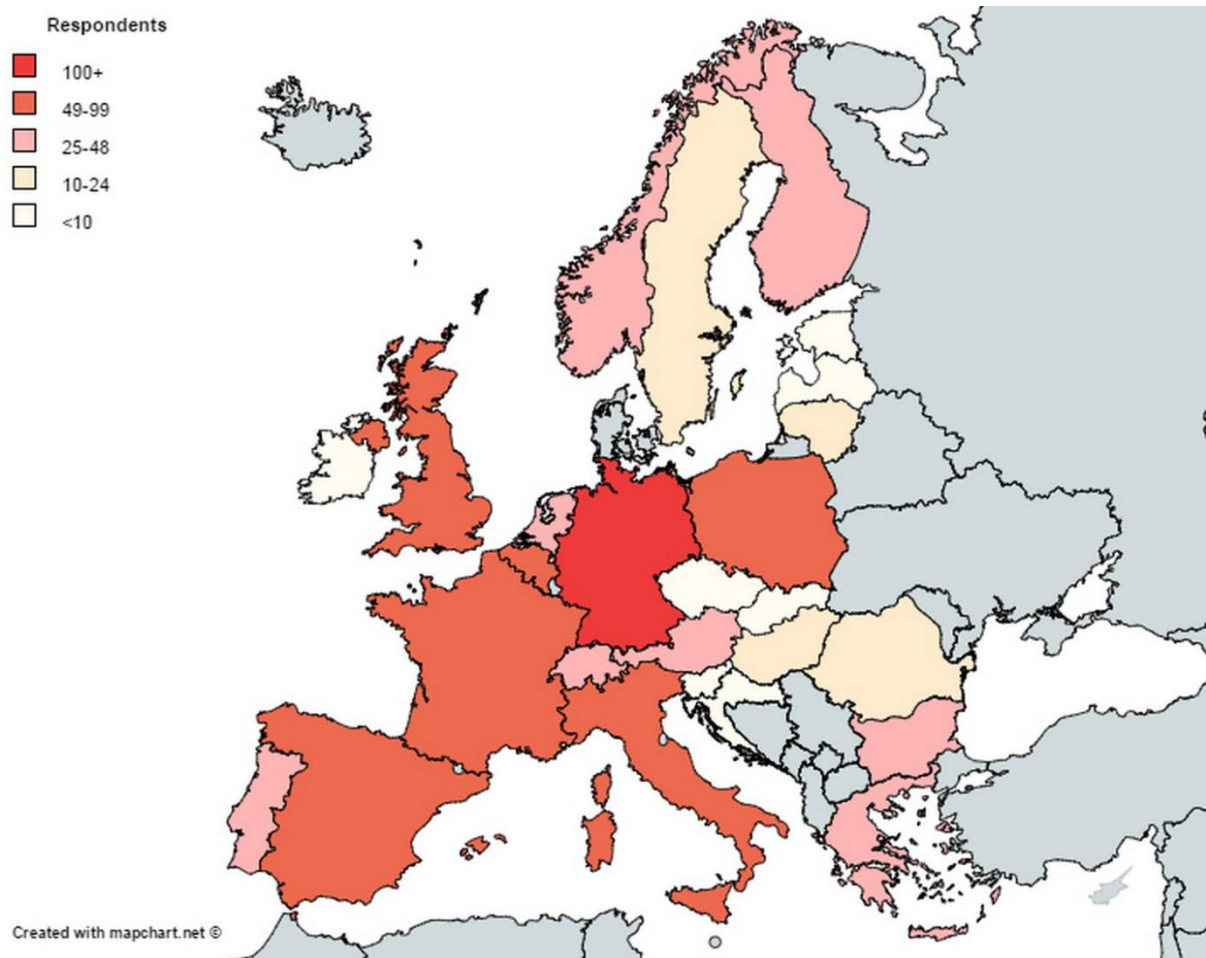


Table 3. Geographical distribution of the user sample (source: own data)

Country of residence			Country of origin		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Germany	134	14.6	Germany	119	13.0
France	99	10.8	France	82	9.0
Spain	66	7.2	United Kingdom	64	7.0
United Kingdom	66	7.2	Italy	55	6.0
Poland	63	6.9	Poland	52	5.7
Italy	58	6.3	United States	46	5.0
Belgium	49	5.3	Spain	40	4.4
Switzerland	39	4.3	Austria	33	3.6
Finland	38	4.1	Belgium	33	3.6
Austria	35	3.8	Switzerland	30	3.3
Greece	35	3.8	Russia	28	3.1
Norway	29	3.2	Greece	25	2.7
Bulgaria	27	2.9	Netherlands	24	2.6
Netherlands	27	2.9	Finland	22	2.4
Portugal	26	2.8	Norway	22	2.4
Denmark	16	1.7	Bulgaria	20	2.2
Sweden	16	1.7	Hungary	15	1.6
Hungary	13	1.4	Portugal	15	1.6
Romania	13	1.4	Sweden	14	1.5
Lithuania	12	1.3	Turkey	13	1.4
Slovenia	9	1.0	Ukraine	13	1.4
Czech Republic	8	.9	Slovenia	11	1.2
Latvia	8	.9	Canada	10	1.1
Croatia	7	.8	China	10	1.1
Slovakia	7	.8	India	10	1.1
Estonia	6	.7	Romania	10	1.1
Cyprus	3	.3	Latvia	8	.9
Luxembourg	3	.3	Lithuania	8	.9
Malta	3	.3	Slovakia	7	.8
Ireland	1	.1	Brazil	6	.7
			Croatia	6	.7
			Australia	5	.5
			Czech Republic	5	.5
			Estonia	5	.5
			Argentina	4	.4
			Denmark	4	.4
			Pakistan	4	.4
			Serbia	4	.4
			Ireland	3	.3
			Luxembourg	3	.3
			Malta	3	.3
			Tunisia	3	.3
			Other (N≤2)	22	2.4
Total	916	100.0	Total	916	100.0

Both sample age and gender distributions are relatively close to those of the Couchsurfing network. 44.8% of all respondents fall into 24-30 age group, while older age groups are also represented, with 8.7% of all users being between 41 and 60 years old and seven respondents reportedly older than 61 years old. Relatively high number of older users in the network can be empirically observed when using Couchsurfing.org, although it does not get mentioned by the official statistics. The dataset obtained by Shapiro also shows significant number of mid-aged and older users with 15.8% of all respondents indicating being older than 36 years old (Shapiro and Berning 2013).

Table 4. Age distribution of Couchsurfing user sample

Age groups	Frequency	Percent
17-23	239	26.1
24-30	410	44.8
31-40	180	19.6
41-60	80	8.7
61+	7	.8
Total	916	100.0

Source: own data

58.8% of all respondents in *user sample* are female, which is somewhat higher than the percentage of the female network users as indicated in the official data (Couchsurfing 2014). Certain gender bias in responses to online surveys was observed by previous researches (Sax, Gilmartin, and Bryant 2003; G. Smith 2008). Female response rate is significantly higher both for the web and paper surveys, 9-16 percent more depending on the type of survey (Sax, Gilmartin, and Bryant 2003, 418) with typically around 12 percent more for exclusively online surveys (G. Smith 2008, 9). This might be the reason for increased number of female participants in this survey. Such gender imbalance is more pronounced in the *non-user sample*, where more than 60 percent of respondents are women. See Chapter 7.5 for further demographic comparison of different Couchsurfing samples.

Table 5. Gender distribution of Couchsurfing *user sample*

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	374	41.0
Female	537	58.8
NA	2	.2
Total	913	100.0

Source: own data

The second survey targeted at non-users (people who do not currently use Couchsurfing network) was conducted through a link shared in Facebook groups related to travelling activities in Europe. The survey was open through mid-July until the end of August 2014, and 563 completed questionnaires were obtained. To check whether the respondents qualify as “non-users” a question prompting to list used social networks was included. As the survey link was distributed through Facebook, 96.6 percent of all respondents indicated using Facebook, 46.2 percent admitted to using YouTube or another video social network, while 24.7 percent used Instagram or other image-centred social network. Hospitality networks (Couchsurfing, Hospitality Club, BeWelcome or others) were used by 21.7 percent of all respondents. These 122 completed questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. Furthermore a total of 216 respondents satisfied the conditions of both living in the European Union country and not using hospitality networks. These 216 cases formed the second, *non-user sample*. The country of residence distribution in this sample is similar to that of the main sample with the United Kingdom (15.7%), Germany (13.4%) and Spain (8.8%) having the highest number of respondents. Age distribution in the *non-user sample* is somewhat different with 113 respondents (52.3%) within 17-23 age range. Further 33.8 percent of respondents are 24-30 years old, while older people somewhat underrepresented compared to the *user sample*. There were also more females in the sample (65.7 percent of the total).

Table 6. Age distribution of *non-user sample*

Age groups	Frequency	Percent
17-23	113	52.3
24-30	73	33.8
31-40	14	6.5
41-60	15	6.9
61+	1	0.5
Total	216	100

Source: own data

7.2 Experience index

Along with two indexes (trust and tolerance) described in the following chapters, experience index was used to assess individual engagement in the network and test Hypotheses 2 and 4. Calculated for the *user sample*, experience index is the value that denotes the involvement of each respondent within Couchsurfing. It consists of two components: reported frequencies of hosting and visiting other Couchsurfing users by the respondent. The index is measured on the scale from 0 (no experience) to 8 (very experienced). Reported experience of the users 18.4 percent of all the respondents have experience index of 2 or lower, indicating little to no experience of actually using the service. At the same time 53 respondents (5 percent) stated they both visited and hosted on more than 20 occasions each, corresponding to the experience index of 8 points.

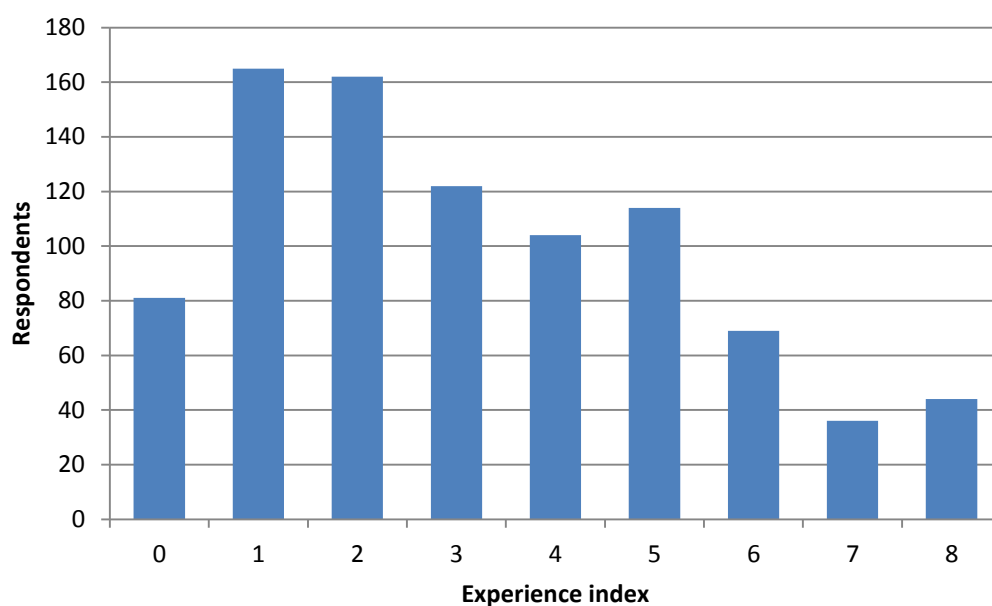
Table 7. Reported hosting/visiting duration

	1-2 days	3-6 days	7 days+	I was never hosted/was hosted	Total
Hosting duration	477 52.10%	196 21.40%	7 0.80%	194 21.20%	874 100%
Visiting duration	518 59.70%	195 22.50%	7 0.80%	147 17%	867 100%

Source: own data

The number of hosting/sharing instances was used to evaluate the experience of the individual as the meetings were found to be quite similar in timespan. Typical duration of the Couchsurfing arrangements is only 1-2 days; more than a half of respondents selected that option for the typical time spent either hosting or visiting. Only around 1 percent of users in each case indicated they typically stay for more than a week. Such distribution permits to reliably use the count of hosting/visiting events by each member as a measure of network experience.

Figure 7. Couchsurfing experience distribution in *user sample*



Source: own data

Experience index correlates with age ($r = .253$, $p < .01$): older users are more experienced in using Couchsurfing. Male users also have higher experience ratings on average than females. Among experienced members from older age groups there are more males, while among the least experienced users there is little difference in respondents' sex. More experienced users are more likely to have had a negative experience in the network. 38 percent of users with experience index of 5 or higher had negative experiences, while that is true only for 19 percent of those with experience rating of 4 or less.

Connected to experience is the measure of preference towards specific kind of activity on Couchsurfing. As it was earlier observed by Cook et al. (2009), considerable number of network tend to devote more time either towards hosting or visiting but not to both activities equally. Such specialisation may be the result of different factors from the objective reasons like the absence of suitable personal space for hosting or residence in an unpopular destination to personal motivations for using Couchsurfing or travel habits. The preference can be measured as a difference between hosting and visiting experience components of the participation in the network. Hosting/surfing affinity index is calculated on a scale from -4 to +4: -4 for respondents who visited on more than 20 occasions (highest experience visiting) and never hosted, +4 for the opposite situation of people who hosted for more than 20 times but were never guests. Hosting/surfing affinity

has most of its scores distributed around the zero meaning no preference for specific activity (mean= 0.188, standard deviation= 1.408). Out of users who indicated having hosted more than 20 times, 36.4 percent admitted visiting others five times or less (affinity score of +4). Conversely among very experienced travellers 11.1% hosted on less than 5 occasions (affinity score of -4). In his study Pultar observed that among experienced guests there are younger and male members, while more seasoned hosts were older than average (Pultar 2011, 87). In the current study older Couchsurfers indeed appear to host more and among most experienced hosts (with more than 20 hosted members) two thirds (67.5 percent) are men. Interestingly, among most experienced guests (with 20+ visits) the majority are women (58 percent) in stark contrast to the results of Pultar's research (2011).

Looking into hosting/surfing affinity in more detail, several interesting correlations can be uncovered. Among students the number of people with negative affinity scores (strong preference for visiting) is the highest among all the occupations. Likely constrained by the absence of suitable living space for hosting others, students much more often play the role of a guest. More of those who prefer visiting rather than hosting perhaps unsurprisingly are more motivated by the money saving capacity of couch surfing and tend to prefer Couchsurfing to hotels. Interestingly, the regular hosts have stronger tendency to choose a hotel or a hostel rather than an apartment of fellow Couchsurfing member. Participation in Couchsurfing discussion groups or meetings is similar among hosts and the guests.

7.3 Motivation to use Couchsurfing

Motivations to use Couchsurfing were assessed by the users at the two points in time: when they first signed up (Q19) and at the time of the survey (Q20). Each suggested reason could have been given a score on a 3-point scale ("not an important reason", "moderately important", "very important reason") and possibility to input any additional reasons using the "other reasons" option. First table shows the users' thoughts about the main reasons that caused them to start using the Couchsurfing service. Table 7 demonstrates the evaluation of the reasons to use Couchsurfing.org at the time of the survey. Figures in the brackets reveal the difference from the Table 6 values.

Table 8. Can you rate the main reasons for you to start using hospitality exchange services? (percentages)

	Not an important reason	Moderately important	Very important reason	DK NA	Total
prospect of saving money when travelling	23.4	29.7	45	1.9	100
possibility to meet new people	1.2	12.1	84.5	2.2	100
desire to share my culture and life style	18.6	35.0	44.7	1.7	100
possibility to learn about other cultures	2.5	17.2	78.3	2	100
desire to help others by hosting	12.9	31.8	51.5	3.8	100
plain curiosity	17.4	32.2	46.6	3.8	100
Other reasons (learning languages, self-improvement, accepting a challenge, etc.)	6	3.1	10.8	80.1	100

Source: own data

Table 9. Why do you use hospitality exchange services now? (percentages)

	Not an important reason	Moderately important	Very important reason	DK NA	Total
prospect of saving money when travelling	27 (+3.6)	31.8 (+2.1)	36.7 (-8.3)	4.5	100
possibility to meet new people	1.3 (+0.1)	9.7 (-2.4)	84.3 (-0.2)	4.7	100
desire to share my culture and life style	13.4 (-5.2)	29.7 (-5.3)	51.5 (+6.8)	5.4	100
possibility to learn about other cultures	2.1 (-3.8)	14.0 (-5.8)	77.5 (+6.6)	6.4	100
desire to help others by hosting	9.1 (-3.8)	26.0 (-5.8)	58.1 (+6.6)	6.8	100
Other reasons (learning languages, self-improvement, accepting a challenge, etc.)	6.3 (+0.3)	3.5 (+0.4)	11.7 (+0.9)	78.5	100

Source: own data

Users tend to evaluate more “appropriate” and promoted through the network’s mission statement reasons as more important than neutral (curiosity) and materialistic (prospect of saving money) reasons. Possibility to meet new people and learn about different cultures is the main reasons people join Couchsurfing, highlighting high potential of Couchsurfing network for learning. The importance of these two reasons

remains high after some time using the network, which means users are usually not disappointed with what hospitality exchange has to offer. Altruistic “desire to help others by hosting” was rated as very important by the half of all respondents. While for many people who join Couchsurfing helping others is a crucial part of the participation, acquiring knowledge overall is a more compelling reason for participating. “Prospect of saving money when travelling” was deemed not an important motivation when both taking up Couchsurfing and after some time using it possibly for two reasons. Firstly “saving money” is clearly against the stated Couchsurfing network ideology and often in extreme cases (freeloading, using host as a free hostel) is regarded as an example of very negative behaviour by the guests, so it is likely that even respondents who use Couchsurfing to save money would downplay the importance of this reason. Similarly in Ayes-Greenidge’s study 8 of 10 respondents mentioned saving money as one of the initial motivation to start couch surfing, but all of them added that that is clearly not their main goal (Ayers-Greenidge 2012, 64–66). Furthermore, this reason applies only to the guests as evidently hosts are not able to somehow “save money”²⁰ using Couchsurfing, so people who are primarily hosting would not select this reason as important. Possibly this factor is even more significant as among hosts who hosted more than 20 times, 36.4 percent had not been guests on more than 5 occasions (hosting/visiting affinity score of +3 or more). Indeed, 44.4 percent of very experienced hosts deemed “saving money” not an important reason (compared to only 27% of the total sample). Conversely among very experienced (20+ occasions) guests the situation is reversed: 37.5 percent of them think that saving money aspect of Couchsurfing use is very important and only 26.3 percent think that it is not important at all. This again underlines the differences of host and guest philosophies at Couchsurfing and highlights how such specialisation changes the users’ views on the functioning of the hospitality exchange.

In both questions “desire to share my culture” was considered as one of the less important reasons by most of the respondents²¹, although data obtained from other questions (about activities and the qualitative question block) seem to contradict that, showing that sharing is one of the most important activities within the network. One

²⁰ However rarely some hosts would actually attempt that by asking for money or suggesting paid services (see Chapter 7.34 for that).

²¹ Still “desire to share culture” had the largest increase in importance (+6.8%) for the users after they have used Couchsurfing for some time.

possible explanation for such discrepancy might be that “to share” in this particular case could have been interpreted by the respondents as “to teach” or “to promote”, having negative connotations of imposing one’s own values.

Only one starting motivation was found to be more prevalent among highly experienced users: “the desire to help others by hosting”. This particular motivation was also more popular among users who host more than visit and can serve as an indication that those users who are more determined to host from the beginning are more likely not to quit Couchsurfing early and accumulate more experience using it. Unlike them, “guests” are more likely to use Couchsurfing less often or just for one particular trip or occasion.

Respondents also had a chance to list their reasons when evaluating the importance of “other reasons”. The most popular single other reason was “language learning”. It was mentioned as an important reason 28 times, making it a major secondary factor for using Couchsurfing. This replicates Pultar’s findings who suggested that language-learning is an important and seldom ignored factor in travelling (Pultar 2011, 124). Previous qualitative or partly-qualitative Couchsurfing studies identified similar themes in user motivations to use the network, they were discussed particularly by Ayers-Greenidge (2012), Liu (2013) and Bialski (2007).

Below the groups of reasons are listed in the order of how often they were mentioned in the *user survey* along with some of the selected quotations:

- Making statement of the way of life
 - “Connect with people, not big corporate businesses” (Norway, 50)*
 - “live a life with less money (less consumption and more focus on community)” (UK, 24)*
 - “destroy capitalism” (Denmark, 54)*
- Getting insider information when travelling
 - “Saves time. Why spend on a tour guide when you can have it in a local's perspective?” (France, 25)*
 - “Tips about their city (where to go and what to see” (Belgium, 24).*
- Searching for love or sex

“...occasionally the girl surfers will want to tour around and go out. They start to like you, and you might like them. Life happens, and you end up dating them, too” (Germany, 31)

“Possibility of find a partner and/or sex - Don't know why there is no such question here, because I think there are many male and a few female members on couchsurfing only because of this” (Germany, 43)

- Connecting with others

“not being alone when travelling” (France, 22)

“making new friends” (Switzerland, 27)

- Sharing and becoming more open

“Trying to help fellow travelers out as I did it in my 20's and wish it was available back then” (UK, 43)

“to show trust in people” (Norway, 29)

- Accepting a challenge

“Challenging myself, as I am by nature not specially social, but I would like to open myself more to strangers too” (Finland, 25)

Sharing once again an important factor, but here more people tend to mention more “selfish” reasons for using the hospitality exchange. Improving oneself through the interactions with strangers contributes to the idea of hospitality exchange use as a transformative tool for the personality. Community-mediated interactions with strangers are used as a training of one’s social finesse. Couchsurfing system provides certain guarantees and safeguards to lower the risk of such interactions, enabling them even for people who are less trusting or open towards strangers.

Looking into previous research on the topic of motivation to use Couchsurfing, ETN questionnaire (Shapiro and Berning 2013) briefly touches on the topic of motivation for the hospitality network use, asking about reasons for participation in Couchsurfing. “Cheap travel” and “Make friends” were selected by the majority of the respondents (by 61.7% and 65.5%) as reasons for signing up the network when asked for yes/no answer. Still when given three point scale in the present study options “possibility to meet new people”, “possibility to learn about other cultures” were selected as “very important

reason” by 84.6% and 78.1% respectively, while “prospect of saving money when travelling” was very important only for 44.8% of respondents, with additional 30.1% selecting it as a moderately important reason. This might be explained with the social desirability bias, when respondents would not rate highly the reason which is generally frowned upon by the community. Also the wording of the question option in this study (“not an important reason”) might be understood differently from “not reason/ reason” dichotomous options of the ETN survey.

Respondents also provided information on activities (or rather behaviour patterns) they engage in as a part of participation in the Couchsurfing network. The use of these activities was utilized to evaluate the depth of interactions with other users with the network. They were not used as a part of experience index, although this “depth index” did correlate strongly with experience index ($r_s = 0.478$, $p < .01$).

Table 10. How often do you engage in the following Couchsurfing activities? (percentages)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	DK/NA	Total
Participating in CS meetings	27.1	30	24.7	15.9	2.3	100
Participating in CS groups	21.4	30.3	31.3	13.8	3.2	100
Maintaining contact with CS members outside CS	9.1	19.8	36.5	30.3	4.3	100
Preferring CS rather than a hotel/hostel wherever I go	7.6	13.0	31.9	41.2	6.3	100
Engaging in common activities with a host/guest (cooking, gaming, partying)	7.3	9.3	27.2	51.7	4.5	100
Showing the guest around the city I live	5.7	8.8	27.8	50	7.7	100

Source: own data

More experienced users were significantly more likely to participate more often in CS groups ($r_s = .223$, $p < 0.01$), offline meetings ($r_s = .230$, $p < 0.01$) and engage in common activities with the guest ($r_s = .353$, $p < 0.01$). So more time spent hosting and/or surfing also results in more engagement with the community and more participation in the

activities not directly related to visiting and hosting. Participation in offline meetings and online groups are also closely correlated, possibly because the scheduling, discussion and organisation of offline meetings are usually done in online groups and discussion forums, so a user is much less likely to go to an offline gathering if he or she were not active in online discussions. Trust and tolerance indexes however exhibited very weak or no correlation with the listed activities.

7.4 Negative Experiences

Negative experiences as a less discussed and even somewhat tabooed topic within Couchsurfing community is another area necessary to observe aiming to understand how the experiences on the hospitality network may shape individual behaviour and perceptions beyond the online community. Hypothesis 5 assumes that the positive experience is what drives the participation in the hospitality social networks. Consequently even a single negative experience would have a significant effect on one's participation, damaging one's trust in the system and fellow members of the network. Possible negative effects of bad experiences on trust and tolerance will be discussed in corresponding chapters (8.3 and 9.3 respectively), here I will provide an overview of what negative experiences are and what actions are described by the users as unacceptable when hosting and visiting other users through Couchsurfing. Both quantitative and qualitative surveys had questions about negative experience using the network.

Similarly to previous studies (Teng, Lauterbach and Adamic 2010) *user survey* revealed that much more people had had negative experience on Couchsurfing than it is reported on the social network. The reasons for the refusal to provide a written negative reference were extensively discussed in Chapter 2. Most people feel uncomfortable leaving a negative reference and would rather give a neutral reference or no reference at all if the experience was not pleasant. In the actual network the negative-positive references ratio is only 1 to 2500 (Teng, Lauterbach and Adamic 2010). The results of both my survey and Shapiro's survey (2013) indicate that around 19 percent of all users had negative experience on the network. Still while invisible in references, negative occurrences profoundly influence user experience in the network.

286 of the total number of respondents left detailed comment on the topic of negative experiences on Couchsurfing. Mentioned problems on the hospitality network

can be divided into three groups shown on figure 3. The most widespread source of negative experiences within Couchsurfing is generally inappropriate behaviour by hosts or guests. Dirtiness, carelessness and general lack of hygiene are mentioned often. Being drunk, rude or unreliable are other frequent causes of discontent.

“Despite being told that I have to work the next morning, a person stayed out longer partying than agreed on, came back very drunk at 6am” (UK, 31)

In some cases respondent tend to downplay the seriousness of the problems, often by mentioning the cultural differences or age differences as an excuse for other party's inappropriate behaviour.

“... maybe that's just a cultural difference, because I am from the north and he was from the south, so I just don't understand the idea of having fun of some southern people” (Lithuania, 22)

“Only once. It was misunderstanding and a big difference between cultures and habits, but nothing bad happened to me, I just moved to another host” (Poland, 26)

Secondly there were a number of people mentioning sexual harassment while hosting others or being hosted. Young girl travellers were most likely to face improper behaviour from the male host (or surfer).

“some guys are looking for a sex company rather than for a guide around the city” (Denmark, 28)

“some guys don't accept that it's not an dating side” (Poland, 21)

In all situations described by the respondents the problem was solved either through the discussion or by leaving.

“It wasn't really negative but a guy who hosted me in Dublin probably wanted to have sex with me (...) I said no and he left me alone” (France, 18)

“At one point I left a host 2 nights earlier than agreed because I started to feel that he was trying to flirt with me” (Denmark, 26)

“A much older, kind and nice, Turkish man tried to take advantage of me during my sleep in NY. It was awful and shocking so I have left immediately.” (Hungary, 21)

Compared to other cases, in the cases of sexual advances respondents were the most likely to leave a negative reference or report the other party to the network's moderators. There exists certain controversy regarding this issue as a number of people (including females) mentioned the possibility to find love or sex as one of the important reasons for using Couchsurfing network.

Third category of negative experiences relate to the perceived betrayal of certain assumed Couchsurfing values and behaviour that goes against these values. As it is underlined in Couchsurfing.org official statements and was extensively discussed in previous chapters of this thesis the main ideas behind the Couchsurfing are openness, culture of sharing, non-monetary exchange and certain opposition to the mainstream tourism. When the guest declines to spend time with the host or treats the visited place as a hostel which is often considered to be a serious faux pas within Couchsurfing ethos.

"A young Polish couple treated me and my parents as if we were running a bed & breakfast. They had no social interaction with us and complained about what we offered them" (Italy, 31)

"A guest in her 30s, with a good job, staying at home for 3 days and having breakfast, lunch and dinner from my fridge without buying food or milk or beverages" (Spain, 48)

Other negative experiences occur when host asks for money or tries to sell something to the guest, even when it is not directly related to the hosting arrangement.

A cs ambassador in the same area of my 2nd host is promoting hostels in their town in exchange of some commission he gets from them. A cs member in another town in Indonesia lures csers for a "cs discount" to hire her car to go to the tourist spots in the city (France, 24)

Not being interested enough in the counterpart or "not sharing enough" are other examples of violated assumptions about the other's adherence to Couchsurfing culture.

"The new generation of couchsurfers often uses CS only as a cheap way of traveling" (Belgium, 56)

One guy in Australia try to take advantage of the guest staying in his place, like getting free drinks, or free food, getting his window washed by CSers (Germany, 26)

While first two categories of reported negative experiences would be considered a significant problem virtually by anyone, the issues of the third type are often specific to the hospitality networks and would not pose such a problem outside the hospitality network-mediated interactions (i.e. during AirBnB, B&B or backpacking interactions). In the follow-up qualitative survey 15 out of 18 respondents indicated having never left negative reference when using Couchsurfing. Still only four in total said they had no negative experience at all.

7.5 Comparison with other available datasets

Three other datasets regarding the research of Couchsurfing were available at the time and their authors provided them for secondary analysis, so I was able to compare the samples with the *user sample* and validate the results of the present research where it is possible.

The three samples discussed in this subchapter are²²:

1. ETN

John Shapiro and Carl Berning's "Couch Surfing: An Ethnography of Transnational Networks, Solidarity, Trust and Resistance in a Globalized Era". (2013)

2. CSBS

Edward Pultar's "Couchsurfing Behavior Survey". (2011)

3. SC&T

Yimei Zhu's "Social Capital, Trust and the Online Hospitality Community". (2010)

All the samples are rather recent and provide insights into different areas of Couchsurfing network analysing it from distinct perspectives: Shapiro and Berning take ethnographic approach, Zhu is looking at Couchsurfing from sociological standpoint and Pultar examines Couchsurfing within the study of online geographies. The following tables illustrate the comparison of the four samples in terms of the main demographic

²² All abbreviations are by the author.

variables: age and gender compositions of the samples. Where appropriate these datasets will be referred to in chapters on Trust and Tolerance.

Table 11. Couchsurfing samples comparison: age groups (percentages)

	17-23	24-30	31-40	41-60	61+	N
User sample	26.1	44.8	19.6	8.7	0.8	916
ETN	4.4	56.3	31.3	7.7	0.3	1176
CSBS	18	44.3	18.9	14.9	3.9	228
SC&T	26.2	56.5	10.3	4.9	2.1	1643
<i>Average</i>	18.7	50.5	20	9	1.8	

Source: Shapiro and Berning (2013), Pultar (2011), Zhu (2010), own data.

Table 12. Couchsurfing samples comparison: gender distribution (percentages)

	Male	Female	N
User sample	41	58.8	913
ETN	49.4	50.4	1212
CSBS	38.2	61.8	228
SC&T	50.5	49.5	1643
<i>Average</i>	44.1	54.5	

Source: Shapiro and Berning (2013), Pultar (2011), Zhu (2010), own data.

All the samples bar Zhu's one show higher number of female respondents. This may be result of self-selection bias (discussed earlier and reported for example by Smith (2008) or may be the indication of more active use of Couchsurfing by female users in the online socializing components of the network like groups, discussions and forums (where the links to the survey are distributed). Couchsurfing is primarily popular among young users with the majority of all users being younger than 30 years old. Still there is a significant amount of users older than 41 compared to some other social networking sites (see Chapter 1.2). The difference in represented age groups between the samples may be attributed to different sampling techniques.

Pultar's (2011) "Couchsurfing Behavior Survey" (CSBS) is a rather specific study that involves fewer respondents, only touching the problem of individual values in responses to the open-ended questions. The CSBS dataset however, in contrast to other

datasets, contains information about the constraints that inhibit using Couchsurfing service by the surveyed members. He applies the time geography *theoretical framework* showing how the hosts and guests in Couchsurfing are subject to the time and spatial constraints. (Pultar 2011, 28–29) CSBS also provides a measure of Couchsurfing experience absent from the ETN dataset.

This survey's experience index can be compared with Pultar's social capital value, which he denotes through a number of established connections with other Couchsurfing users measured with the number of references user has received. As the number of references roughly equals the number of hosting/visiting arrangements organised on Couchsurfing it can be a good proxy for user experience in the network. Among 228 users in the sample, 9.2 percent admitted to hosting on more than 20 instances during the previous year and 18.4 percent stated they played the role of guest more than 20 times during the same period. In the *user sample* the percentages of such highly experienced users are 7.1 and 13.6 respectively.

Pultar's data also suggest that younger couchsurfers tend to travel more, while older ones assume the hosting role more often. There is also a certain difference between genders: when male users act as guests more often than females. Results of the present research confirm the observation about the age: older people tend to host more often and accumulate more experience hosting in general, while younger age groups mostly have less experience both hosting and visiting. In the *user sample* however there is no clear link between gender and hosting-visiting preference. Among male Couchsurfing users there is higher proportion of experienced users, although among most experienced guests (with 20+ visits) the majority are women (58 percent) very different to the gender demographics of Pultar's dataset. This does not however completely reject Pultar's observation. In the qualitative survey several female users do mention the possible problems women may face travelling as couchsurfers in some of the countries. This survey involved users from Europe, continent where female travellers usually do not face substantial risks even when travelling solo, still it is entirely plausible that women travelling in less liberal countries have to be much more cautious. As a significant proportion of Couchsurfing users live outside Western countries, it is possible that on the scale of the whole network, females indeed play the role of the guest less often than the males.

Zhu's Social Capital and Trust Survey (SC&T) is the most similar study to the present one, which however includes older data collected four years ago, in 2010. SC&T looks into the problems of trust and social capital in the hospitality social networks. With 1643 respondents it also includes trust-related questions as well as measures of user experience within the network. Experience in the SC&T dataset was measured through the number of reported times a member hosted and stayed through Couchsurfing. 37 percent of respondents mentioned having hosted more than 10 times, compared to the 29.7 percent of respondents reporting similar experience in hosting in the present survey. 22 percent of SC&T respondents stayed on more than 10 instances (19.9 in current survey). The SC&T also included a prediction model of trust that will be discussed in the next chapter.

The most interesting and comparable Couchsurfing user dataset is the ETN, whose main features and limitations were described in detail in Chapter 2.6. ETN included three same questions included in the current study (Q5-7) albeit in their binary versions. When asked the standard trust question 63.5 percent of respondents answered that most people can be trusted, 69.1 percent of respondents stated that people are generally trying to be helpful and 68 percent answered that people would be fair rather than take advantage of others. ETN and the *user sample* show similar results regarding the trust-related questions and through self-evaluation by the users. As the ETN did not include any evaluation of user experience on Couchsurfing there is no possibility to assess the dynamics of change of users' generalised trust in the Shapiro's sample. Nor it is possible to look into the other concept crucial for the present work – tolerance as there is no evaluation of that either.

Majority of respondents of ETN agreed that there is a common bond between all couchsurfers (74.9%) and confirmed that they are usually similar to their guests/host in terms of worldview and interest (60.1%), confirming Bialski's observation (Bialski and Batorski 2010) about the homophily being the most important factor in deciding whether to interact with a particular person within the Couchsurfing network. According to the survey more than a half (56.7%) of Couchsurfing members would discuss their personal problems with a host or surfer. Even more (72.6%) agreed they connect with other couchsurfers the same way they connect with friends. ETN also measured the perceived risk of using Couchsurfing at two points of time: "when you first heard about CS" and "after experience on CS". With experience of using Couchsurfing service individuals tend

to perceive it as much less risky, significantly less people indicated that it is “moderately risky” after using it, and the number of people viewing it as “very risky” fell drastically.

None of the surveys measured negative experiences, however SC&T survey included question about likelihood of hosting a person with either one or “two or more” negative references in his or her profile. 43% of respondents would unlikely or very unlikely host a person with even one negative reference. Such undesirability of negative references may be both the result of and the reason for very low number of negative references left by the members. Couchsurfing users do not leave negative references because they have such a disastrous effect on one’s network reputation (and because the reference recipient can reciprocate); as negative references are so rare, they have much bigger weight than positive ones. This vicious circle inhibits leaving negative references even when they are justified and results in ineffective positive/negative reference system, where negative experiences happened to the quarter of all users but resulted in a negative reference only once in 2500 references. Such broken system requires re-working by the Couchsurfing management as references fail to provide accurate evaluation of user experience.

CHAPTER 8: Trust and Couchsurfing Use

8.1 Trust and experience using Couchsurfing

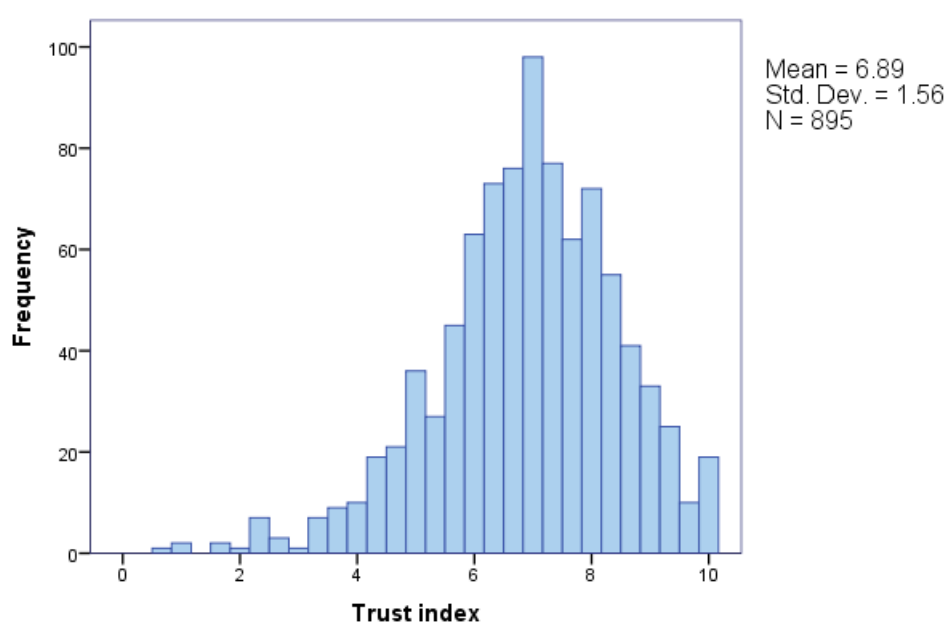
Trust is included in two hypotheses discussed in Chapter 6. H1 assumes that *Participation in hospitality social networks is positively associated with the level of trust of a participant towards other people in general*. More specific H3 suggests that *People who actively participate in hospitality social networks for considerable time have higher level of generalized trust than those who do not*. The concept of trust is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 and defined as “an expectation or one's belief that the other party will behave in a dependable, ethical, and socially appropriate manner” (Hosme 1995) (Zucker 1986). In case of generalised trust this expectation is directed towards strangers in general (people outside one's in-group). In the online environment generalised trust relates also to people who are outside of one's circle of online acquaintances. In context of Couchsurfing these are all the possible hosts and guests who may come in contact with the actor. In this thesis however I am not trying to separate online trust from offline trust but rather measure the level of individual trust towards strangers in general. Despite some researchers (for example Zhu (2010) attempt to distinguish between online and offline trust in Couchsurfing, I think such division is not sensible. The subject of trust in Couchsurfing is not the interactions of the users online (as is in case of online trust), but the offline interactions between the members of the network. Furthermore as the vast majority of possible guests and hosts in Couchsurfing are complete strangers there is no practical reason to measure two different values for user trust.

To tackle the two trust-related hypotheses individual trust index was calculated using the respondent's answers to three generalised trust questions (Q5-Q7 in the codebook), included both in the user and non-user surveys. These three questions are adopted from the WVS and ESS questionnaires and discussed in Chapter 6.2. Respondents evaluated the three statements on an 11-point scale. To confirm or reject the first hypothesis trust index values of the user sample are compared to the trust values of respondents in the non-user sample. Testing H3 involves evaluation of association between Couchsurfing experience and trust index in the user sample. Finally prediction model is constructed to understand what are the major factors that contribute to

individual's trust of the Couchsurfing user and how much of individual trust can be predicted with variables related to the hospitality network's use.

The trust index is measured on the scale from 0 (very low generalised trust) to 10 (high generalised trust). Factors contributing to the trust index showed high values of internal correlations and 0.75 Cronbach's Alpha value, indicating the reliability of the index. The mean generalised trust of 6.893 is higher than the levels of generalised trust reported in more general multinational surveys (World Values Survey 2014). This shows that hospitality network users have higher level of trust than the general population, although the validity of such comparison can be doubted due to significant differences in the methods, study sample and time of the surveying. For that reason to determine how trust of the Couchsurfing users differs from the level of trust of the people who do not use hospitality networks, trust indexes are compared between the *user* and *non-user* samples. The use of the same questionnaire and similar sample demographics in terms of gender, age and country distribution of the respondents helped to ensure comparability between samples.

Figure 8. Distribution of trust index in *user sample*



Source: own data

Comparison of trust indexes in the *user* and *non-user* samples revealed that generalised trust was higher among respondents in the *user sample* (Table 8). Significant difference in the level of generalised trust between users and non-users of

Couchsurfing.org serves as a confirmation of the first hypothesis of the thesis (H1): people who participate in the Couchsurfing are more trusting than those who do not participate in the hospitality networks. The mean difference between the trust indexes in two samples when we do not take into account the experience of the Couchsurfing use is 0.779. When comparing non-users with users who have medium to high level of Couchsurfing experience (experience rating of 3 or more out of 8), the difference is even more notable. Mean difference in the latter case is 1.018. Still even if we limit the *user sample* to respondents with low experience index (2 or less), the difference between the samples is still significant albeit lower at 0.515. Even novice Couchsurfing users are more trustful than non-users and this difference tends to increase over time. Taking into account such dynamics, it is safe to conclude that the use of Couchsurfing shows clear association with level of generalised trust. So the trust pre-selection is not a major factor in explaining the differences between Couchsurfing users generalised trust.

Table 13. Difference in the level of trust between users and non-users

Trust index	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
CS user	893	6.8929	1.56111	.77863	.13046	.000
non-user	213	6.1142	1.74471			

Source: own data

Table 14. Difference in the level of trust between low-experienced users and non-users

Trust index	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
CS user (exp. ≤ 2)	403	6.6294	1.51827	.51520	.14146	.000
non-user	213	6.1142	1.74471			

Source: own data

Amount of experience of using Couchsurfing shows moderate positive correlation ($r_s = .202$, $N = 878$) with generalised trust. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Controlling for the influence of negative experiences on trust, the correlation is higher at $r_s = .211$, $p < .01$ ($N = 833$). People who used Couchsurfing more actively reported higher levels of generalised trust in the study. This confirms the second hypothesis (H2) of the thesis: more experience using Couchsurfing network is clearly

associated with higher level of generalised trust. More interactions with people met through the hospitality network make people more trusting. As we are looking into the generalised trust, the resulting higher level of trust relates not only to the Couchsurfing users but to strangers in general.

Individual trust did not significantly correlate with the age of the respondents, neither younger nor older people were found more trustful to any significant degree. Only in *non-user sample* there was a weak correlation ($r_s = .211$, $p < .01$) of age and trust, when older respondents showed higher level of generalised trust.

In regard to the different types of engagement in the network, higher trust is not associated with participation in Couchsurfing offline meetings or online groups. It is also not correlated to the likelihood of maintaining contact with Couchsurfing acquaintances past hosting/surfing arrangement. More trusting users are more likely to engage in common activities with their guests, although experience level of a user was better predictor for that. So more experienced lower-trust users were more likely to party, play or cook with their guests than less experienced higher-trust users. Such difference might be attributed to better understanding of Couchsurfing norms and “traditions” among more experienced hosts who are more likely to spend more time with their guests. Highest correlation degree ($r_s = 0.175$) could be observed between trust index and the tendency to prefer Couchsurfing to hotels or hostels. This suggests that more trusting members are opting to use Couchsurfing in less than optimal conditions, while people who have more concerns about their safety and don’t trust other Couchsurfing users that much are deciding to stay in hostels, when they cannot find a host that satisfies them enough.

Generally, tendency to participate in different Couchsurfing activities is better predicted by the experience index of an individual as described in previous chapter. This is especially visible when looking into the participation in the activities not directly related to hosting and visiting. Experienced users are more likely to have more connections with other users and therefore have more incentive to participate in both online discussion groups and offline city or country meetings.

8.2 Trust and motivations

Looking into the connection between trust index and user motivations to use Couchsurfing, one can easily see the difference in motivations between high and low-trust users.

Interestingly generalised trust shows variable levels of significant correlation with the assessed importance of all the motivations to use Couchsurfing except for motivation “to save money”. The more trusting a user is, the less likely he or she to deem possibility to meet new people, desire to share culture and life style, possibility to learn about other cultures desire to help others by hosting as “not very important”. More trusting users were also more likely to mark several reasons as “very important”.

There is no clear correlation between level of individual trust and the motivation to save money when travelling. Less trusting people were as motivated by this reason to start Couchsurfing as those who are higher on generalised trust. Experience in using Couchsurfing though was found to be associated with the desire to save money: more experienced users were significantly less likely to choose “saving money” as an important or even moderately important reason. Evaluating the reasons for using Couchsurfing.org at the point of time of the survey, more trustful users tended to emphasize the importance of helping others and learning about other cultures as their reason to continue using the service.

8.3 Trust and negative experience

The H5 assumes that the presence of negative experiences has significant and measurable impact on the trust of a user. As the individual trust of a Couchsurfing member is built through an increasing number of positive interactions created in the network, even one negative experience can affect this trust-building process and have significant deteriorating influence on one’s generalised trust.

The data obtained during the survey confirms the hypothesis. The average trust scores of the respondents who had had negative experience were significantly lower compared to the trust indexes of those who did not report negative experiences (mean trust index of 6.715 to 7.015, $p < .05$).

Earlier studies (Zhu 2010) showed that users tend to actively avoid users that were associated with negative interactions. Just one negative reference is sufficient to significantly decrease Couchsurfing user's chances of being hosted or visited. 43 percent of all users are unlikely to host a member with just one negative reference (Zhu 2010, 65). This is confirmed by Cherney who points out that while some people would consider hosting a person with a single negative reference, those who have two are more a very unlikely to be hosted (Cherney 2014, 95); and Liu who found that negative reference is the single most significant (negative) influence on user's decisions about hosting or visiting a particular member (Liu 2013).

The flip side of negative references is that they provide certain degree of security in the network. One of reasons for positive change in trust with the increase of Couchsurfing experience is the system that provides safeguards and clues for better evaluation of other party. Vouching and reputation systems as well as the design of the user profiles allow making an informed decision about trustworthiness of other party. This relates to the Offe's idea of shared institutional space as a source of trust (1999). Online social network functions as a common space where the interactions between members unfold. Profile information and especially availability of photos are as important as references or connections with other members for initial trust (Zhu 2010, 65). It is worth noting that information provided "by the network" or by third users is more important than self-presentation (Cherney 2014, 93). Thus system (the institution) is more important for initial trust-building than direct communication between members. The availability of additional information in the system lowers the possible risk and thus enables more trust in others, while positive experience reinforces further trust in other hospitality exchange members. Consequently the individual naturally extends his trust from the members of the Couchsurfing to other strangers outside the network, increasing the level of his or her generalised trust. The opposite is also possible, when negative experiences (especially early when participating in Couchsurfing) would result in less trust towards others. This is especially pronounced when a female member is threatened by indecent male behaviour but also happens when member's assumptions about the adherence of other party to "Couchsurfing spirit" are violated.

8.4 Respondents' commentary

The respondents provided qualitative input through the questionnaire described in Chapter 6.4. Out of total 18 surveyed Couchsurfing users, 14 provided detailed long answers to the questions. Their answers regarding the trust and Couchsurfing use allow me to state several interesting patterns.

First, self-assessment of respondents goes along with the finding of this study that participation in Couchsurfing does make you a more trustful person. In relation to trust respondents often mention the three previously discussed ideas of Couchsurfing: openness, trust and sharing.

It's not so easy to trust someone, but when you try to rely on someone's help, it makes you see that all people deserve to be trusted (Germany, 26)

I became - I would say - more open, more talkative, less shy in front of strangers (France, 27)

The mentions of initial problem of overcoming one's fear and allowing oneself to trust strangers shows that the first experiences on Couchsurfing are the most important for forging the trust. These observations explain the measurable difference in trust between even inexperienced Couchsurfing users compared to people who did not participate. This also serves as an illustration for "the leap of trust" effect described by in the Chapter 5.3.

In many ways, Couchsurfing is a real gamble. Any number of horrible outcomes is possible. However, all of my Couchsurfing experiences have been wonderful. I experienced a hospitable atmosphere and a situation in which another human being was ready to go the extra mile to make me comfortable--not because they had to or because they were getting paid, but because they wanted to connect with me and forge a relationship or at least a connection (Greece, 34)

The first time you give a stranger the key to your flat was with a little bit tension (UK, 30)

Other "very experienced" respondents explained the dynamics of trust, when the absence of the negative experiences led to transferring the trust towards other groups of strangers:

I didn't have any negative experience and it motivated me to have that position towards strangers in everyday life (France, 27)

I believed most people in the world are good before I started CS and after I surfed/hosted I believe stronger in there are many ways of connecting people (Netherlands, 35)

In the opposite situation when a user has negative experience early in his use of the network, his trust may deteriorate and he may stop using Couchsurfing altogether.

8.5 Predicting trust

As it was shown earlier in this chapter, participation in Couchsurfing correlates with higher level of trust and tolerance among the social network users. Amount of experience of using Couchsurfing network also positively and significantly affects trust of the individuals: the more time people participate in the community the higher level of trust they have towards other people. Predicting what variables affect individual's trust is done in this subchapter with the help of regression models. Table 13 shows the correlations between the variables tested as criteria for the construction of the regression models.

Table 15. Means, standard deviations and correlations of non-dichotomous variables discussed in the trust chapter

	Mean (s.d.)	Age	Trust index	Experienc e index	Origin Trust	Current Trust
Age	28.27 (8.562)	1				
Trust index	6.745 (1.626)	.087**	1			
Experience index	3.18 (2.208)	.204**	.186**	1		
Country of origin generalised trust	32.104 (15.184)	.023	.191**	.053	1	
Current country of residence generalised trust	33.181 (16.534)	-.033	-.005	.027	.646**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own data

Along with variables collected with the help of the online survey, World Value Survey (WVS) data was used to establish generalised trust values for the country of origin and country of residence of every respondent. Each respondent of the Couchsurfing survey was assigned two different trust indexes that were calculated in the WVS: its country of origin generalised trust index and the country of residence trust index. The

value of these indexes is the percentage of the WVS country sample who answered positively to the standardized trust question: “*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*”²³ The values included in the analysis are the latest data for each country, but as not every WVS survey wave includes data from all the countries, the values come from different waves of the WVS survey (see Appendix 2 for all the values and sources).

Preliminary analysis showed that the country of residence trust index is ill-suited as a predictor for individual trust. Considering its correlation to the Country of origin trust ($r = .646$, for the reason that for 54 percent of respondents it is the same country), it was excluded from the regression model. It is likely that in the majority of cases new country of residence did not influence individual trust. Previous findings on the issue of trust in the high-trust societies of Northern Europe (Dinesen 2012) suggest that destination high-trust country has significant influence on the immigrants who came from a country with low level of generalised trust. At the same time short-term visits to high-trust country did not show influence on the level of trust of the people with a background in a low-trust country. As no data were collected concerning the time spent living in the new country and integration of an individual in the society, it is impossible to pinpoint why exactly this had happened. Still as a significant percentage of respondents are students (41.5%) with plausibly relatively short time spent in the destination country, it is very likely that it is the duration of the stay that inhibits the effect of the country of residence on individual trust in the current sample.

²³ See Chapter 4.3 for discussion of the standardized question

Table 16. Regression model: Trust Index

	Trust index
Couchsurfing use variables:	
Couchsurfing user	.602 (.135)***
Experience index	.084 (.028)**
Had negative experience	-.515 (.126)***
Personal:	
Age	.008 (.007)
Sex	.046 (.113)
Country of origin generalised trust	.019 (.004)***
Occupation (reference=unemployed):	
Student	-.239 (.193)
Office work	-.196 (.194)
Education	-.073 (.233)
Manual work	-.5 (.439)
Service	-0.183 (.235)
Sales	0.198 (.368)
Constant	5.439 (.391)
R²_{adj}	0.102
N	847

Note. Entries are unstandardized linear regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. **p <.01, ***p <.001.
Source: own data

Couchsurfing user. The positive connection between Couchsurfing use and individual trust was proved in Chapter 8.1, concluding that participation in Couchsurfing hospitality network is associated with higher levels of individual trust. Members of Couchsurfing network are more trustful compared to those who do not take part in any hospitality exchange. There is significant difference in trust levels between people who just started using the network (experience index less than 2) and those who never participated in Couchsurfing. Such effect of participation in a hospitality network on trust can be explained through two processes: leap of faith and self-selection. The “leap of faith” phenomenon has been theorised by Möllering (2006) and Tan (2010). The leap of faith takes place when the users have to exercise more trust than they usually do as it is required for the functioning of the hospitality system. The trust is reinforced by the system, which provides certain safeguards and limitations mitigating the risk during the participation. In the case of Couchsurfing when people are encouraged to invite strangers to their home and also stay at the place of people they have never meet in real life, the leap of faith must have taken place immediately after the first several experiences

(staying or hosting). The first hosting or visiting arrangement requires a significant effort from the participants, an exercise in trust. According to this theory an individual has to force his or her level of trust to get higher immediately after registering in the network to be able to participate in the community. Then, after several positive experiences, the users get an impression that the network is safe (taking into account their personal experiences, people they meet and also due to the system of mutual references, vouching and other instruments described in Chapter 2.3) and generally people can be trusted. Then this impression plausibly gets extrapolated to the people outside the network. In case of positive experience, more trusting behaviour is viewed as more natural by a user. Conversely, users who had negative experience (and consequently lower trust index) are likely to stop using the network early. The same may happen to users who due to various reasons (personal experiences prior to participating, psychological barriers and other factors) were not able to make the “leap of trust” and consequently were not able to overcome the perceived risks and insecurities of network use. Such users are excluded from any possible survey of Couchsurfing users, resulting in relatively high average trust index in the user sample. Certain self-selection happens not only at the stage when individuals register on Couchsurfing but also after several first hosting or visiting arrangements. The reason to stop using the network may be the result of own personal traits and views (including own low trust and tolerance levels), objective reasons like lack of time or possibility to host and finally negative experiences (as described below). Another reason might be the lack of motivation to host among those who decided to use Couchsurfing as primarily a way to save money (see Chapter 7.3). Negative attitude towards such users from other members or low effectiveness of such way to travel (the necessity to search for hosts, write requests, communicate) can be the reasons for quitting in this case. Such self-selection also affects the statistic of trust among more experienced members, who had much more time to quit Couchsurfing but had not done that.

Experience index. More experience in using Couchsurfing network predicts higher level of trust. Trust and experience indexes show moderate correlation: controlling for the influence of negative experiences on trust $r_s = .211$, $p < .01$ ($N=833$). People who used Couchsurfing more actively reported higher levels of generalised trust in the study. More interactions with strangers make people more trusting. In this case we are talking about the generalised trust, so it relates not only to the Couchsurfing users but to strangers in general. The members of the network are “trained” by the Couchsurfing community,

which encouraged its participants to meet/ stay/ host strangers. An outcome of this is that the Couchsurfing users after some time are more likely to trust strangers that don't belong to the community, because they are used to such interaction.

Negative experiences while couch surfing profoundly influence one's assessment of risk and trustworthiness of the network. The average trust index scores of the respondents who had had negative experience were significantly lower compared to the trust scores of those who did not report negative experiences (mean trust index of 6.715 to 7.015, $p < .05$). Negative experience is particularly destructive to the less experienced users, who are much less likely to dismiss it as a random occurrence. Seasoned couch surfers would often say about negative experiences that "they are extremely rare" (Sweden, 57, experience index= 5) or "Sometimes I don't fully get along with my guest but it's not enough to say that it was a 'bad experience'" (France, 25, exp.= 7), while less experienced network members are often more direct and quick to generalise: "A lot of free-loaders" (Bulgaria, 36, exp.= 3), "Creepy men" (France, 24, exp.= 3). Such difference in the evaluation of bad experiences adds to suspicion that negative experiences among beginner couch surfers often result in them quitting the service altogether.

The level of **generalised trust in an origin country** as measured by World Value Survey (2004) is a significant predictor of individual Internet user's trust index. Users born in countries with higher level of generalised trust were more trusting than people originating from low-trust countries, despite all the respondents were currently living within the European Union (characterised mostly by high generalised trust).

Trust of an individual did not significantly depend on the age of the respondents, neither younger nor older people were found more trustful to any significant degree. Only among non-users there was a weak correlation ($r_s = .211$) of age and trust index, when older respondents showed higher level of generalised trust.

Best multiple regression model for Trust Index as a dependant variable (table 13) included Experience Index, Couchsurfing user (dichotomous), Negative Experience (dichotomous) and the country of origin's generalised trust level (in percent, most recent available WVS results, see appendix 2 for exact values of the variable). It predicted 10.3% of trust index variation.

Respondents who were Couchsurfing.org users tended to be more trustful ($p < .001$), more CS user experience positively influenced level of trust ($p = .001$). Negative experience when using Couchsurfing usually had significant influence on the level of trust of a respondent ($p < .001$). Finally, level of trust of individual users tends to depend on the average level of generalised trust in their country of origin ($p < .001$). Conversely current country of residence did not predict the level of trust of a user. If the values of the country of origin's generalised trust are substituted for the values of generalised trust of the current country of residence – Beta-value of the coefficient is much lower at -0.013 and using it along with other variables explains only 7.1% of total variance. Respondent's occupation also did not predict the individual trust. Although students mean trust scores in particular were lower than other occupation groups' scores, no significant effect was found in regression. One other variable, travel frequency (collected only for some respondents and thus not included in regression) was found significant on its own at $R^2_{adj} = .034$ if regression model is limited to the people for whom the travel frequency data were collected.

If we look only at CS-related variables (all except country generalised trust index), we can see that participation in Couchsurfing may account for 5.2 percent ($R^2_{adj} = .052$) of individual trust variation among SNS users.

Table 17. Final regression model of Trust index on Country of origin generalised trust, Negative experience, Use of Couchsurfing and Experience index.

	Trust Index
Country of origin generalised trust	.019 (.003)
Had negative experience	-.489 (.124)
Experience index	.092 (.027)
Couchsurfing user	.614 (.133)
Constant	5.531 (.152)
R^2_{adj}	.103
N	1108

Note. Entries are unstandardized linear regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. All coefficients are significant at $p \leq 0.001$ level.

Source: own data

Formation of trust is complex and multidimensional process; it is influenced by great number of factors acting on various levels. Environmental, national, cultural influences shape individual generalised trust to different degree. The difficulty of

understanding the origins of trust are extensively discussed in Chapter 4.3 of the thesis. This survey provides another clue of what can affect trust level of the contemporary person in general and how online communities influence the real life experiences of people.

The findings of this survey suggest that participation in Couchsurfing network contributes to the level of individual generalised trust. People who have spent more time couch surfing are more trusting towards strangers and individual trust tend to increase with the increase in experience. In the same time Couchsurfing may also have negative effect on one's trust. Negative experiences while using the hospitality network may decrease the level of generalised trust of a member. The exact degree to which member's trust is affected by negative experiences is difficult to gauge as some negative experiences might plausibly lead to user quitting the network altogether. Such cases naturally are not reflected in the Couchsurfing user surveys. To estimate the effects of negative experiences on trust more specific survey methods are needed, either by interviewing more general population trying to find people who participated in Couchsurfing and quit or by contacting inactive Couchsurfing users who after having been active for some time ceased any activity on the network.

To better understand the trust and tolerance in the context of hospitality social network, a researcher should inevitably complement the quantitative data with qualitative insight. In the case of this research answers to the open-ended questions of the qualitative survey in some cases provide answers to the riddles that the qualitative dataset is unable to answer. Respondents can perceive and understand the changes in their trust towards strangers: majority of surveyed users noted that their participation in Couchsurfing positively affected their individual trust. Users often connect trust to two other values promoted through the network: openness and sharing. They also consciously assess the importance of the "leap of trust" and accurately evaluate the effects of negative experiences on one's trust²⁴. Qualitative results show that the increase in one's trust is not a subliminal process that is hidden from person's comprehension, but rather a conscious choice of a person who re-evaluates his or her attitude towards others based on own experience and own interactions within the network online and offline.

²⁴ Refer to Chapter 8.6 for quotations and more detailed discussion

8.6 Other datasets

Zhu (2010) used somewhat similar measures of experience²⁵ to construct a regression model of online trust. While R^2 of Zhu's regression model is higher than the one in the present study, most of the explanatory power of the model comes from the measure of the reported "offline trust" of the Couchsurfing users rather than from independent variables. The percentage values of "offline" and "online" trust in the sample are very similar and correlate significantly. This makes the inclusion of the reported offline trust as a predictor for the reported online trust in the regression model a rather questionable decision. Without offline trust as a predictor Zhu's regression R^2 on demographic variables and Couchsurfing experience is very similar to the one presented in this paper: $R^2 = 0.05$ with significant contributions of surfing and hosting experience. Similarly Zhu found that age and gender do not predict the level of trust. Education level absent from the current study did not contribute to the SC&T prediction of trust either.

ETN (Shapiro and Berning 2013) included the binary variant of the standard trust question. The results of my research replicate the results obtained in ETN study. 15% of respondents have trust index scores below 5 (out of 10), which is similar to the percentage of people selecting options corresponding to the lack of trust in ETN binary trust-questions. When evaluating effect of participations in hospitality network, respondents in Shapiro's survey also tend to be very optimistic and indicated positive change in trust towards both strangers and foreigners. 80.2% of surveyed couchsurfers stated that their experience with Couchsurfing service positively influenced their trust in strangers and only 3.8 percent suggested that Couchsurfing had had negative effect on their trust. When asked more specific question about trust in the foreigners, the results were similar: 80.2 percent of respondents reported the increase in their trust and 3.7 percent noted they had become less trusting in the foreigners. While ETN study lacked control group, results of my analysis confirm significant difference in trust between users and non-users as a result of the participation in the social network.

Notwithstanding the difference between sampled population (European users in the present study vs random sample of English-speaking users from around the world in ETN) and difference in four years, trust-related questions seem to show similar results

²⁵ Zhu's Couchsurfing experience measured on a 4-point scale as opposed to 5-point scale in this study. This resulted in less discrimination between more experienced hosts/guests.

both through the standard trust questions and through self-evaluation by the users. As the earlier study does not include any evaluation of user experience on Couchsurfing there is no possibility to assess the dynamics of change of users' generalised trust in the Shapiro's sample.

CHAPTER 9: Tolerance and Couchsurfing use

9.1 Tolerance and experience using Couchsurfing

Discussion of tolerance in Couchsurfing relates to hypotheses 3 and 4. H3 is an assumption that *Participation in hospitality social networks is positively associated with the level of tolerance of a participant towards representatives of different culture*, so people who are members of the Couchsurfing would be more tolerant than those who did not participate in the hospitality exchange. More specific H4 is that *People who actively participate in hospitality social networks for more time have higher level of tolerance than those who have less experience participating*. This hypothesis supposes the relation between the experience using Couchsurfing network and the individual level of trust of the network's members. H3 can be confirmed or rejected by comparing the tolerance levels of users and non-users; the H4 can be tested by examining the connection (or lack of connection) between Couchsurfing member's tolerance level and his or her amount of experience using the hospitality social network.

In Chapter 3 tolerance was defined as acceptance of other's views, beliefs or practices despite viewing them as wrong or no as good as one's own and perceiving this differences as less important than similarities between parties. Individual tolerance levels were calculated through measuring the level of (the absence of) prejudice towards others looking into tolerance in the issues of nationality, ethnic background and religion. Tolerance index used in the thesis is constructed using the set of questions adopted from WVS (2005), European report on intolerance (Zick, et al. 2011, 54) and ACCEPT Pluralism questionnaire (Triandafyllidou & ACCEPT Pluralism 2013) More discussion of the tolerance measure is available in Chapter 6 on the questionnaire design.

Tolerance-related questions Q10-14 of the questionnaire with Q8 and Q9 providing additional fifth index component were used to construct the tolerance index for each respondent. Tolerance index spans the scale from 0 (very little tolerance) to 5 (high tolerance). Factors contributing to the tolerance index showed high correlations and 0.765 Cronbach's Alpha value, indicating the reliability of the index. The values of the tolerance index (and the experience index as well) are not normally distributed, so for the indexes' correlations the Spearman's Rho was used. It is worth noting that Pearson's r

and Kendall's Tau provided similar results in terms of correlation strengths, although only values of the Spearman's Rho are indicated hereafter.

Comparison of the *user* and *non-user* samples showed that there is significant difference in tolerance between those who use Couchsurfing network and those who do not (Table 9). Significant ($p < .001$) mean difference of 0.210 (on a scale from 0 to 5) between the samples serves as the evidence to confirm the hypothesis 3 of the thesis. Couchsurfing users are indeed somewhat more tolerant towards representatives of other cultures and religions than those who are not the members of hospitality social networks. Furthermore there is an observable difference of 0.173 in tolerance levels of low-experienced²⁶ users and non-users. The difference is significant at $p < .005$ level.

Table 18. Difference in the level of tolerance between users and non-users

Tolerance index	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cs user	853	4.1036	.67581	.20307	.05364	.000
non-user	206	3.9005	.69450			

Source: own data

Table 19. Difference in the level of tolerance between low-experienced users and non-users

Tolerance index	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cs user (exp. ≤ 2)	382	4.0733	.65197	.17281	.05767	.003
non-user	206	3.9005	.69450			

Source: own data

The difference is well-pronounced in the two questions (Q8 and Q9) that involve naming specific groups, whom one find unpleasant to live near with. While the percentage of respondents selecting only one disliked group was similar in both *user* and *non-user samples*, among non-users 9 percent less people selected no specific groups and considerably more non-users named from 2 to 6 not tolerated groups. This tolerance index component was influenced the most by the tolerance value of the origin country of the respondent ($r_s = -0.13$). Greece, Poland and Hungary were the countries with highest number of selected not tolerated groups. What groups exactly were not tolerated

²⁶ Experience index equal or less than 2 out of 8

depended heavily on the country and its migration and cultural background. Thus for instance Latin Americans were most often mentioned by people from Spain, while people of Turkish origin were less tolerated in Greece than in most of the other countries. Naturally some respondents from some countries were generally less or more tolerant than the others showing different levels of “generalised” tolerance.

Trust and tolerance indexes of an individual user tend to correlate significantly as it was predicted earlier. People who have higher level of generalised trust are also more tolerant of others. The degrees of correlation are similar in both samples ($r_s = .218$ in *user sample* and $.329$ in *non-user*, both $p < .01$). Tolerance did not significantly depend on the age of the respondents, neither younger nor older people were found more tolerant to any significant degree. More tolerant users however are more likely to engage in common activities ($r_s = 0.175$, $p < .001$) with their guests than less tolerant ones. Preference for either hosting or visiting was not found connected to the tolerance level.

Experience index showed significant influence on individual levels of trust (see Chapter 8), regarding the case of tolerance (H4) though, analysis reveals only very weak correlation between experience in using Couchsurfing and tolerance index ($r_s = .062$, $N = 844$). The observed correlation is below the level of significance ($p = .072$). This allows us to reject the fourth hypothesis that assumed associated between the hospitality network use and the level of tolerance. More experience using Couchsurfing network does not equate with higher tolerance towards other cultures; more experienced social network users are not more tolerant towards others when compared to Couchsurfing users with little experience. As the alternative to the H4, keeping in mind that Couchsurfing users are still significantly more tolerant than non-users, we can speak of tolerance pre-selection among users. People who are more tolerant are also more likely to become members of the Couchsurfing community or at least are more likely to keep using it for longer period of time.

Tolerance seems to be a much more stable measure that is not easily affected by participation in common activities with strangers. Several factors might contribute to this. Trust and tolerance as measures both are the attitudes towards different groups of people, but while trust is exercised towards all unknown people in general, tolerance is about the attitude towards specific groups. Using Couchsurfing a user inevitably has to interact with strangers (the object of his or her generalised trust). Still the same user might consciously or unconsciously avoid interacting with representatives of groups he or she does not

tolerate. In this case, exposure to more strangers and more representatives of other cultures do not equate to the exposure to more not tolerated groups. This is especially true when a user assumes the role of a guest more often and can actively choose with whom to couch surf. Thus the effects of exposure play much lesser role for tolerance than for trust.

9.2 Tolerance and motivation

Learning other cultures, meeting people were the reasons that users with high level of tolerance would be more likely to choose as important. “Helping others by hosting” was not among the important reasons selected by the more tolerant users at the start of their Couchsurfing experience, but more characteristic of them at the time of the survey.

Same as with the trust index, tolerance index showed no correlation with the tendency to mark the motivation to save money when travelling as important. Less tolerant people were as motivated by this reason to start Couchsurfing as those who had higher levels of individual tolerance. Higher tolerance is associated with choosing higher number of reasons as “very important” or “moderately important”.

9.3 Tolerance and negative experience

The second part of the H5 assumes that the presence of negative experiences has significant and measurable impact on the tolerance level of a user. Earlier it was confirmed that negative experience has such an influence on individual trust level. Comparison of two groups: one of those who had reported having negative experience and another of people who did not have negative experience, showed no significant difference in the level of tolerance. Negative experience on Couchsurfing did not influence individual tolerance index, so the second part of the Hypothesis 5 can be rejected.

Earlier in this chapter the hypothesis 3 was rejected and no association between levels of Couchsurfing experience and individual level of tolerance was found, so it comes as no surprise that negative experiences have no influence on tolerance either.

Table 20. Difference in the level of tolerance between users with and without negative experience in Couchsurfing

Tolerance index	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
With negative experience	200	4.0383	.71646	.09951	.05447	.068
Without negative experience	206	4.1378	.65262			

Source: own data

9.4 Respondents' commentary

Interestingly, in qualitative survey, some respondents reported positive influence of participation in Couchsurfing on their tolerance level. This somewhat contradicts the results of the quantitative survey where the correlation between Couchsurfing experience and tolerance was found to be very weak. When respondents were asked to clarify, changes in tolerance were explained in terms of positive effects of exposure to other cultures that resulted in them becoming more tolerant to those cultures.

When you are connected to a culture through knowing a person from it and knowing about the culture, you are automatically more receptive when you hear about politics or tragedies that affect that regions. You have a reason to care, to pay attention, to remember, to understand what is happening. (Greece, 34)

Of course. I met different people from all over the world, and saw how they grew up in completely different surroundings and naturally have different opinions than mine, but they're still good people. I learned a lot about tolerating differences, maybe even too much! (France, 27)

From such standpoint it would be logical to assume that effects on tolerance from participation in hospitality networks would be greater in more isolated homogenous countries with fewer contacts to outsiders and fewer immigrants. Indeed in the survey respondents from less tolerant (Czech Republic, Greece, as per results of WVS (2014)) admitted the changes in tolerance more readily, while only representatives from more developed European (Germany, UK) countries denied any changes in their trust or tolerance, mentioning that they were already trustful or tolerant when they engaged in Couchsurfing. Instead those respondents emphasised the wider outlook and cultural knowledge they acquired when participating in the hospitality network.

When asked more general question about the benefit of the hospitality networks to the society several respondents again specifically mentioned more trust and tolerance as a positive outcome from the participation in Couchsurfing network. The positive effects of the hospitality network are usually explained as resulting from better connectedness, more contacts and wider exposure to different cultures.

The lack of exposure makes a person judge a person from a different culture based on media coverage and impressions that are not necessarily true than when you are immersed in the place. (Germany, 23)

9.5 Predicting tolerance

In the context of this research, tolerance proved to be a more difficult subject than trust. Users of Couchsurfing hospitality network were found significantly more tolerant than non-users. However tolerance index showed no correlation with individual experience using Couchsurfing or with negative user experience in the network. This part of the chapter attempts to sum all the variables that can be used to predict tolerance and look into the possibility of predicting tolerance with available data. Table shows the correlations between the variables tested as criteria for the construction of the tolerance regression model in this subchapter.

Table 21. Means, standard deviations and correlations of non-dichotomous variables discussed in the tolerance chapter

	Mean (s.d.)	Age	Tolerance index	Experienc e index	Origin Tolerance	Current Tolerance
Age	28.27 (8.562)	1				
Tolerance index	4.065 (.684)	.011	1			
Experience index	3.18 (2.208)	.204**	.047	1		
Country of origin Tolerance and Inclusion index	62.755 (13.233)	.054	.158**	.128**	1	
Current country of residence Tolerance and Inclusion index	66.139 (9.586)	.031	.137**	.046	.443**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own data

Analogously to the generalised trust index used for each country of origin, a country's tolerance index was used to evaluate a certain expected level of tolerance from each individual in the survey. I used Social Progress Imperative evaluation of country tolerance reported in the Social Progress Index 2014 report (2014). The index used is the tolerance and inclusion index which is calculated for every country of the study and forms part of the general Social Progress Index. The index is measured on a scale from 0 to 100 (see appendix 3 for tolerance values for each country) and is comprised of several components: women treated with respect, tolerance for immigrants, tolerance for homosexuals, community safety net (based on Gallup World Poll)²⁷, religious tolerance (Pew Research Center 2014)²⁸, discrimination and violence against minorities (Fund for Peace 2013)²⁹. The index was calculated with the help of openly available countries' data and is thought to be a rather robust measure of tolerance in a given country.

Table 22. Regression model: Tolerance Index

	Tolerance index
Couchsurfing use variables:	
Couchsurfing user	.222 (.060)***
Experience index	-.005 (.012)
Had negative experience	-.129 (.056)*
Personal:	
Age	.003 (.003)
Sex	.022 (.050)
Country of origin Tolerance and Inclusion index	.008 (.002)***
Occupation (reference=unemployed):	
Student	.181 (.086)*
Office work	.042 (.086)
Education	.266 (.103)**
Manual work	.062 (.195)
Service	.147 (.104)
Sales	.143 (.163)
Constant	3.218 (.198)***
R²_{adj}	0.045
N	812

Note. Entries are unstandardized linear regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. *p ≤ .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: own data

²⁷ <http://www.gallup.com/>

²⁸ Pew Research Center Social Hostilities Index (<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/appendix-3-social-hostilities-index/>)

²⁹ FFP (<http://ffp.statesindex.org/rankings-2013-sortable>)

Couchsurfing user. Participation in Couchsurfing hospitality network is associated with higher levels of individual tolerance. As it was shown in Chapter 9.1, members of Couchsurfing network tend to be more tolerant than those who do not take part in any hospitality exchange services. The difference is not big but statistically significant at $p < .001$ level. Biggest difference between users and non-users was observed in the questions about specific groups not tolerated (Q8, Q9). In these questions 9 percent less non-users selected no specific groups and considerably more non-users named from 2 to 6 not tolerated groups. In other components of the tolerance index the difference was not so obvious.

Had negative experience. While for predicting trust the presence of negative experience is an important factor, the effect of negative experiences on tolerance is inconclusive. It seems unlikely that users who experience negative contact with someone at Couchsurfing would transfer their attitude toward a specific group of people. Given that the average tolerance levels among couch surfers are higher than those in general population, the negative effects of unpleasant experience are extremely unlikely. This can be explained by the nature of tolerance that has much deeper roots in cultural background compared to generalised trust that shows significant correlation with personal experience. Tolerance is unlikely to be affected by spontaneous emotions or positive experiences as it is possible in case of trust. The “leap of tolerance” cannot be performed by effort as it while trust can be exercised and then strengthened by positive experiences.

Educational occupation. People who work in education sector tend to be relatively more tolerant than representatives of other spheres. The positive effect of education on individual tolerance is well documented (Helliwell and Putnam 2007, Borgonovi 2012) and among those working in education the percentage of people with higher levels of education is probably larger than among most other groups. While the current survey lacks the measure of respondent education, ETN survey (Shapiro and Berning 2013) included both questions on education and occupation. 68.8 percent of the respondents who indicated their occupation as “Education, training and library” in the ETN sample had also obtained a college or university degree. Further 23.8 percent admitted to possessing a postgraduate degree, considerably higher percentage than in any other occupation.

Student occupation. The positive contribution of being in this occupational group is less pronounced in comparison to the previous one. The possible reason of why being a

student is associated with higher tolerance is the structure of the sample. Among respondents who define themselves as students, the representation of Western countries is higher than in the general sample. The more developed countries of the West are defined as high-trust and tolerance states according to WVS.

Neither user sex nor user age predict the tolerance levels. Amount of user experience on Couchsurfing, perhaps surprisingly, was not found to be associated with the level of tolerance. Sources of individual tolerance appear to be much more complex subject. Tolerance levels are more difficult to predict compared to trust. Without taking into consideration the country's level of tolerance, purely Couchsurfing-related variables explain only 1.8 percent of variation in the tolerance index. This leaves open the question of the sources for individual tolerance. Previous research showed that personal traits (Pratto et al. 1994), political orientation (Brewer and Pierce 2005), education level (Helliwell and Putnam 2007) and parental tolerance levels (Acock, Wright, and McKensie 1981) are much better predictors for tolerance. Tolerance appears not to be significantly affected by participation in Couchsurfing hospitality network, at least not among the European users of the network who form the majority of the sample. It is entirely possible that exposure to different cultures might have different effect for individuals coming from less tolerant societies. This is the question that is worth investigating in future.

It is often difficult to quantify and evaluate human interactions and experience especially concerning such sensitive topics like one's tolerance or acceptance of others. Insights gained from qualitative assessment of users own perception of changes in these important areas can help to understand better how participation in Couchsurfing influence individual tolerance. Some of the respondents who participated in qualitative survey also admitted positive influence of participation in Couchsurfing on their tolerance level. This somewhat contradicts the results of the quantitative survey that showed weak correlation between Couchsurfing experience and tolerance. Interestingly, respondents from countries with lower level of measured tolerance value admitted the changes in tolerance more readily, while only representatives from more tolerant European countries denied any changes in their tolerance, mentioning that they were already tolerant before taking part in Couchsurfing. These respondents more readily underlined the wider outlook and cultural knowledge they acquired when participating in the hospitality network. While this "wider outlook and cultural knowledge" may be framed in the terms of tolerance

increase, some members saw it as the changes in tolerance while others did not. A wider understanding of tolerance by some respondents plausibly resulted in different assumptions about participation in Couchsurfing activities and one's tolerance. Meanwhile more objective measure of tolerance measured through a battery of questions presented in the survey showed that Couchsurfing use has little effect on individual tolerance. Perhaps more unambiguous framing of the concept of tolerance and in-depth interviews in the future studies would provide more accurate measurement of changes of the individual levels of tolerance. With the current results at hand, one has no choice but to acknowledge that evidence of the effect of participation in Couchsurfing on user tolerance levels is inconclusive at best.

Conclusions and Future Research

Online hospitality exchange in the present research is seen as another step in the evolution of non-mainstream travelling. It is the connected travelling of the connected world, where travel is organised through relations between individuals. These relations on Couchsurfing are established between users from different countries and cultural backgrounds so the tolerance plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of the connections. As hosts and guests previously normally do not know each other their relations are affected and governed by trust, more specifically the individual generalised trust. These two concepts, their interrelation as well as relation to the experience using Couchsurfing were analysed in the dissertation.

Travel habits of today are inextricably connected to the affordances of the Internet. Hotel and flight booking, location research, post-travel photo and video sharing on the Internet are now part of travel routines of millions of people worldwide. Most of the services aim to enhance the traveller's experience by making troublesome and time-consuming parts quicker and more enjoyable. Hospitality online social networks are different as they provide an alternative way of organising one's travelling in general from selection of destination to the search of accommodation and travel companions. Hospitality SNSs substitute interactions with businesses for the interactions with fellow travellers. Hosting and visiting counterparts are no longer on different levels; moreover there is even no clear distinction between them online, only during the offline meetings organised through the network host and guest temporarily assume their roles. The practice of free hospitality based on mutual sharing is not new by any means, in its modern form it was carried out since the 1970s. Still only with wide proliferation of the Internet such kind of travelling became usable by significant numbers of people worldwide.

Hospitality exchange practice is connected to budget travelling from the past, most notably to backpacking culture, although hospitality exchange travel does not equate to budget travel. Some users indeed use hospitality exchange as a way to reduce expenditure but such practice is often seen in negative light by other network members and is more of a by-product of the hospitality exchange rather than its goal. In the same time the reasons of using this particular kind of travelling are very similar to those declared by the backpacking community. Online hospitality exchange is represented by several services,

earliest of which started as web directories in the early days of the Internet, and others appeared during the Internet social revolution at the beginning of the new century. Couchsurfing.org as the most popular SNS with more than 6 million users was in the focus of this research.

The research provided insights in how the users utilize the network, interact with each other and deal with negatives. It also helped to understand how the network is functions to facilitate couch surfing activities for its users. The network is built around so-called “Couchsurfing ideology” centred on sharing, intercultural exchange and self-improvement trough travelling. The main values are described in Couchsurfing mission statement and are often re-used by the users in profiles, on system’s forums or in the references. “Sharing”, “exchanging” and “learning” were also frequently used by the survey respondents both when describing the motivations to use the network and when speaking about their experience using it. When presented with a possible list of reasons to start using Couchsurfing, users tend to evaluate more “appropriate” and promoted through the network’s mission statement reasons (possibility to learn about other cultures, possibility to meet new people) as more important than neutral (curiosity) and more materialistic (prospect of saving money) reasons. “Prospect of saving money when travelling” was deemed not an important motivation when both taking up Couchsurfing and after some time using it possibly for two reasons. Both because freeloading is seen as an example of extremely negative behaviour for a Couchsurfing user (it can be easily observed reading user commentary on the negative references) and because it is a valid reason only for people who are usually guests rather than hosts. Hosts are unlikely to be able to save anything by inviting a stranger into their home and those who are committed to hosting would not choose this reason as important. Among other reasons to use Couchsurfing are language learning, getting insider information about local places and self-improvement. Another motivation mentioned several times but disliked by many members is the use of Couchsurfing to find a romantic partner. Often mentioned in negative references, the dating side of online hospitality exchange is a reality that possibly needs further research.

Ultimately it is only the decision of the hosting side to accept or ignore the couch surfing request. By reading the request letter and the profile of the possible visitor, host have to decide whether invite the other party to their home. In this situation personal views and inclinations play an important role in decision-making process. Trust and

tolerance are crucial factors in accepting a particular guest as shown in the model of Couchsurfing use in Chapter 1.7. The survey was used to evaluate three critical metrics: generalised trust, tolerance and user's experience on Couchsurfing. The concepts were comprehensively described and explained in Chapters 2 (SNS use), 3 (tolerance), 4, 5 (Trust, online trust). Two samples were used for the quantitative analysis: the Couchsurfing user sample with 1100 respondents and non-user sample encompassing data from 210 respondents. Follow-up qualitative survey was employed to obtain more contexts for the results. Geographically the research was limited to Couchsurfing users living in the European Union, still the respondents indicated coming from 65 different origin countries. Demographically the obtained sample is comparable to the Couchsurfing samples of the previous studies (Pultar 2011; Shapiro 2012): age, gender and occupation distribution were notably similar. Other important metrics found in some of the earlier samples like experience using Couchsurfing and ratio of positive-to-negative references were also comparable. This enabled to draw cross-sample comparisons and validate research findings on a broader scale.

Trying to draw a portrait of a typical Couchsurfing user, several notable observations can be made. Network experience correlates with age: older users are more experienced in using Couchsurfing. Male users also have higher experience ratings on average than females. Among experienced members from older age groups there are more males, while among the least experienced users there is little difference in respondents' sex. More experienced users are also more likely to have had a negative experience in the network. There is certain preference among users to prefer one kind of activities to another: some users are "hosts" while others are "guests". Such specialisation is more notable among more experienced users: users who hosted more than 20 times, more than a third (36.4%) admitted visiting others five times or less, while among very experienced visitors 11.1 percent hosted on less than 5 occasions.

Trust can be observed in Couchsurfing from two perspectives. First as a quality of an individual user: a reflection of one's worldview, and second as a resource, measure of social capital accumulated within the network. From the first perspective trust equates to generalised trust, user's measure of trust towards other members (and strangers in general). The degree to which a person trusts others can be measured in any individual and there are high profile international and continental studies (WVS, ESS) that include generalised trust as a metric. Trust level of the hospitality exchange users therefore can be

compared to the trust of other people and society in general. From the second perspective trust is a very important resource for the functioning of the Couchsurfing network. It is accumulated by the users through participation in Couchsurfing and is represented with the visible experience of the user (references, friendship connections, vouches shown in user profile). In this sense it is trustworthiness of a user profile as perceived by other members of the network.

The findings of this survey suggest that participation in Couchsurfing network contributes to the level of individual generalised trust. Comparison of trust indexes of users and non-users revealed that generalised trust is higher among members of Couchsurfing. Even novice Couchsurfing users are more trustful than non-users and this difference tends to increase over time. People who spent more time using Couchsurfing are significantly more trusting towards strangers and individual trust tend to increase with the increase in the network use experience. One of reasons for positive change in trust is the system that provides safeguards and clues for better evaluation of other party. Vouching and reputation systems as well as the profiles allow making an informed decision about trustworthiness of other party. This permits to mitigate certain amount of risk when using Couchsurfing by trusting the system. Perception of Couchsurfing service as a safe place helps to lower the amount of trust required from the individual user when hosting or visiting other members. The trust is built through reinforcement of more trusting behaviour by positive experiences: being trusting towards strangers and having positive experience encourages users to continue to be more trusting thereafter. More trust in the other users results in differences in behaviour. High-trust Couchsurfing users admitted preferring Couchsurfing to hotels or hostels significantly more often than users with lower level of generalised trust. Therefore the more trusting members are opting to use Couchsurfing in less than optimal conditions, while people who have more concerns about their safety and don't trust other Couchsurfing users that much are deciding to stay in hostels, when they cannot find a host that satisfies them enough. In such a manner the trust mitigates the perceived risk of couch surfing. Experience using the network is similarly important as noted by Pultar (2011) as well as in the current study.

However Couchsurfing may also have negative effect on one's trust. Negative experiences on Couchsurfing often lead to the decrease of one's generalised trust. The rarity of negative references contributes to their importance and weight, making every negative reference an extremely harsh decision as even a single one is likely to ruin user's

profile. Negative reference as an exception in the network shows the imbalance and imperfection of the reputation system on Couchsurfing. 43 percent of users admitted they are unlikely to host a person with even one negative reference (Zhu 2010), thus a referee has to evaluate one's negative experience against possible destruction of counterpart's CS profile. Furthermore because the network provides means for reciprocal ratings and allows editing the references post-factum, leaving someone a negative reference is likely to result in receiving one as well. All this factors result in that only a small percentage of negative experiences lead to negative references and most of the conflicts between members are left unaccounted for.

While only 1 in 2500 of published references is negative (Teng, Lauterbach and Adamic 2010), quarter of all users admitted having negative experiences according to the present research. Previous studies also admitted that negative experiences are underreported by the users (Ibid. 2010; Shapiro and Berning 2013). User comments in the quantitative survey as well as the results obtained with the qualitative questionnaire helped to understand and typify the negative experiences in Couchsurfing. Mentioned problems on the hospitality network can be divided into three groups: inappropriate behaviour by hosts or guests, sexual harassment and betrayal of the perceived Couchsurfing ideas. Compared to other cases, in the cases of sexual advances respondents were the most likely to leave a negative reference or report the other party to the network's moderators. The negative experiences that fall into the third category are the most interesting. They relate to the perceived betrayal of certain assumed Couchsurfing values and behaviour that goes against these values: "freeloading", insufficient attention to the other party or contrarily too much host's control over the guest. Such behaviour is highly dependent on the context as a lot of actions described as examples of the negative behaviour by the respondents, often would not be considered as such outside of the Couchsurfing domain. This underlines the shared cultural meanings between the users who act within the institutionally regulated interaction space subject to limitations imposed by the community.

User's generalised trust can be predicted to the certain degree with a number of available Couchsurfing-related variables. Still the percentage of trust explained is not very high, underlying the complexity of the subject of trust that is represented in many spheres in our lives and affected by great number of different factors. Best regression model for predicting individual trust included experience index, use of Couchsurfing,

negative experience and the country of origin's generalised trust level. It predicted 10.3 percent of trust index variation. Respondents who were Couchsurfing.org users tended to be more trustful and more network use experience positively influenced level of trust. Negative experience when using Couchsurfing usually had significant influence on the level of trust of a respondent. Finally, level of trust of individual users tends to depend on the average level of generalised trust in their country of origin. Conversely current country of residence did not predict the level of trust of a user. The results of the analysis were validated through the comparison with other available Couchsurfing datasets. Specifically the results of the regression of trust index were similar to the results in the Zhu's study (2010).

Tolerance is even more difficult to predict with Couchsurfing-related variables and it is likely that effect of the quantitative measure of participation in Couchsurfing on individual tolerance is negligible. More experience using Couchsurfing network does not equate with higher tolerance towards other cultures; more experienced social network users are not more tolerant towards others when compared to Couchsurfing users with little experience. Individual tolerance is better predicted with other factors. The country of origin is an important criterion for predicting individual tolerance: people from more tolerant countries are generally more likely to have higher tolerance regardless whether they participate in Couchsurfing or not. Another cue towards the absence of relation between experiences in using Couchsurfing and individual tolerance is the fact that negative experience on Couchsurfing did not influence individual tolerance index. This observation led to the rejection of the second part of the Hypothesis 5 and conclusion that tolerance contrarily to trust does not get reinforced through positive experience on the network and rather remains relatively unchanged during the participation in the network. Previous research (Dinesen 2012) showed that not only brief interactions, but even relatively long stay (residence) in a high-tolerance country does not make a person with low tolerance significantly more tolerant, although in very long term (living as an immigrant) more tolerant society have profound positive influence on the individual level of tolerance. Couchsurfing supposes only short-time stays and that might be the reason why we can see no effect in individual tolerance as the result of participation in the network. High tolerance however is associated with the likelihood of a person taking up the Couchsurfing practice. Couchsurfing users were found to be more tolerant in general than non-users. As Couchsurfing experience does not enhance one's tolerance, it is

plausible that tolerance is a factor in pre-selection of users. People with higher tolerance become regular Couchsurfing users more often. Therefore in the relation to tolerance we can speak about pre-selection as an important factor: users with higher level of tolerance take up using Couchsurfing more readily than those who are not very tolerant.

All being said, we should not disregard a possibility of certain geographical bias among the population of Couchsurfing users. There are many more users registered in Couchsurfing in relatively more trusting European countries like Germany or the United Kingdom than in the Central and Eastern European states with lower average generalised tolerance. The present study is possibly the first study of tolerance in hospitality social networks and one of the few that deal with tolerance in online social networks in general. It provides a starting point for further investigation of the use of social media and its effect on individual tolerance and gives an idea about the nature of their relation.

In the qualitative part of the study Couchsurfing users positively evaluated the effect of the hospitality network on their lives. Self-assessment of respondents confirms the survey findings that participation in Couchsurfing increases level of trust towards strangers. In relation to trust respondents often mention the three previously discussed ideas of Couchsurfing: openness, trust and sharing. Several highly experienced respondents explained their view on the dynamics of trust in Couchsurfing, when the absence of the negative experiences led to transferring the trust towards other groups of strangers: essentially describing the trust reinforcement model used in the research. The users' evaluation of positive effects of the use of Couchsurfing service confirmed the findings of the Pultar's study (2011).

In the qualitative survey, several respondents reported positive influence of participation in Couchsurfing on their tolerance level as well. This somewhat contradicts the results of the quantitative survey that showed weak correlation between Couchsurfing experience and tolerance. Asked to clarify the respondents explained the changes in their tolerance levels in terms of positive effects of exposure to other cultures, similarly to the mechanism initially proposed in the current study. A wider understanding of the concept of tolerance by some respondents plausibly resulted in different assumptions about participation in Couchsurfing activities and one's tolerance. Meanwhile more objective measure of tolerance calculated with a battery of questions in the survey showed that Couchsurfing use has little effect on the individual tolerance. Furthermore respondents from countries with lower level of measured tolerance admitted the changes in tolerance

more readily, while the representatives from more tolerant European countries denied any effect on their tolerance, mentioning that they were already tolerant before taking part in Couchsurfing. These respondents more readily underlined the wider outlook and cultural knowledge they acquired when participating in the hospitality network. Perhaps more unambiguous framing of the concept of tolerance and in-depth interviews in the future studies would provide more accurate measurement of changes of the individual levels of tolerance, which were left undetected by the quantitative survey.

On the question about the benefit of the hospitality networks to the society several respondents specifically mentioned more trust and tolerance as a positive outcome from the participation in Couchsurfing network. The positive effects of the hospitality network were usually explained as resulting from more contacts, interactions with people with different views and exposure to local cultures. While taken out of the context of this study, answers of the respondent might seem to be caused by desirability bias, the statistically significant differences found between hospitality network's users and non-users in relation to trust suggest that this is not the case and perceived changes in one's trust indeed grounded on reality.

One of the **limitations** of the current research is the selection of the sample, which, as is often the case with social media surveying, was based on self-selection of the respondents. Both Couchsurfing users and non-users had to consciously decide to participate in the study, so a portion of the target demographic that chose not to follow the survey link was excluded from the analysis. Certain gender bias, reported in previous studies, when female users are more eager to participate in online surveys, was also present. The limited number of respondents in the non-user group could have also affected the reliability of the comparison. Finally, the survey was available only in English, so while the knowledge of this language among Couchsurfing users is relatively high, those who do not speak English were excluded from the sample.

The thesis was limited geographically to the members residing within the European Union in attempt to allow common understanding of the core analysed concepts by the respondents. Possible future research may broaden the enquiry to the entire user base, which includes more than two hundred countries worldwide. Designing future studies, researchers should keep in mind the cultural and psychological differences between representatives of different cultures. Chapter 4.3 provided an overview of how differently can people perceive the concept of trust when giving answer to a simple standardized

question. One should also keep in mind the sensitivity of the subject of tolerance, when survey items could be easily misinterpreted by the respondents and researcher might not only be left without answer but also accused of intolerance.

Trust is a topic much more often discussed in terms of the online activity and Internet rules and is not as under-researched compared to tolerance. Future trust-related research may include increasing the sample, implementation network-wide analysis and employing social network analysis (SNA) techniques to provide another dimension to the studied phenomenon. Future researchers might also attempt to replicate results of the current study in regard to the established connection between individual's experience in the network and his or her generalised trust. Using more intricate assessment of experience measure may contribute to better understanding of the relation between trust and Couchsurfing use. Future researchers are also encouraged to look at the super-couchsurfers, members with huge amount of experience and hundreds of instances of hosting/visiting organised through Couchsurfing. Observation and surveying of such users can unveil the effects of Couchsurfing on a longer time scale. As there is relatively low number of such members in total they constitute insignificant part of the user sample, a research specifically targeted at such users may be useful.

I believe that current thesis is a valuable contribution to the study of hospitality social networks and the Internet research in general. The study not only provided confirmation of influence of hospitality social media on individual trust but also allowed to understand the context of this influence better through respondents' self-assessment and analysis of obtained qualitative data. It also showed how individual trust is reinforced through positive interactions in the network and deteriorates when negative experience occurs. As Couchsurfing network continues to grow and becomes more popular, the effects will inevitably become more pronounced and significant. With more than six million members on Couchsurfing.org network and several millions on similar services, hospitality exchange is a kind of travelling we cannot ignore. It demands attention not only from Internet researchers but also from academics from the fields of sociology, psychology, leisure studies, geography and many other fields.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaires

Page 1

Q1	Age —	v1
Q2	Sex 1= male 2= female	v2
Q3	Country of residence — (country code)	v3
Q3.1	Country of birth — (country code)	v3_1
Q4	What is your main occupation at the moment? 1= Student 2= Office work 3= Education 4= Manual work 5= Service 6= Sales 7= Arts 8= Unemployed 10= Other (please specify) -99= Prefer not to answer -88= NA	v4

Page 2

Q5	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? Need to be very careful 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 most people can be trusted 10 DK -99 NA -88	v6
Q6	Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair? Most people would try to take advantage Most people would try to be fair DK NA	v7

	of me 012345678910-99-88																																		
Q7	Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves? People mostly look out for themselves012345678910 People mostly try to be helpful10 DK-99 NA-88	v8																																	
Q8	On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours. <table><thead><tr><th></th><th>Mentioned</th><th>Not Mentioned</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Eastern Europeans</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Africans</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Northern Americans</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Latin Americans</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Asians</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Indians</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Romani</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Arabs</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Turkish</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Don't Know</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr></tbody></table>		Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Eastern Europeans	1	0	Africans	1	0	Northern Americans	1	0	Latin Americans	1	0	Asians	1	0	Indians	1	0	Romani	1	0	Arabs	1	0	Turkish	1	0	Don't Know	1	0	v9 v10 v11 v12 v13 v14 v15 v16 v17 v18
	Mentioned	Not Mentioned																																	
Eastern Europeans	1	0																																	
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Turkish	1	0																																	
Don't Know	1	0																																	
Q9	On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours. <table><thead><tr><th></th><th>Mentioned</th><th>Not Mentioned</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Atheists</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr></tbody></table>		Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Atheists	1	0	v19																											
	Mentioned	Not Mentioned																																	
Atheists	1	0																																	

	Christians	1	0	v20
	Jewish	1	0	v21
	Muslims	1	0	v22
	Hindu	1	0	v23
	Others (please specify)	1	0	v24
	Don't Know	1	0	v25
				v26
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?				
Q10	There are too many immigrants in the country I live 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree -99= DK -88= NA			v28
Q11	It is good to have immigrants from many different cultures. 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree -99= DK -88= NA			v29
Q12	It is good that people in the country I live can have different values. 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree -99= DK -88= NA			v30
Q13	Ethnic diversity is a good thing. 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree			v31

	5= Strongly agree -99= DK -88= NA	
Q14	It is good that people in the country I live have different ways of living. 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree -99= DK -88= NA	v32
Q15	Exposure to other cultures through travelling would reduce the discriminatory attitudes and prejudice. 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree -99= DK -88= NA	v33
Q16	Hospitality Exchange services (like Couchsurfing) might be the right way to decrease discrimination in the society. 1= Strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly agree -99= DK -88= NA	v34

Page 3 (**Note:** this page was included only for Couchsurfing.org users)

Q17	In total, approximately how many times did you visit other Couchsurfing.com members and stayed at least one night at their place? 0= I was never hosted 1= Less than 5 2= 5-10 3= 11-20 4= More than 20 -99= DK -88= NA	v35
Q18	In total, approximately how many times did you host other Couchsurfing.com members, coming through the Couchsurfing.org? 0= I never hosted 1= Less than 5	v36

	2= 5-10 3= 11-20 4= More than 20 -99= DK -88= NA																																																																
Q19	Can you rate the main reasons for you to start using hospitality exchange services?																																																																
	<table><tr><td></td><td>Not an important reason</td><td></td><td>Very important reason</td><td>DK</td><td>NA</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>prospect of saving money when travelling</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v37</td></tr><tr><td>possibility to meet new people</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v38</td></tr><tr><td>desire to share my culture and life style</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v49</td></tr><tr><td>possibility to learn about other cultures</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v40</td></tr><tr><td>desire to help others by hosting</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v41</td></tr><tr><td>plain curiosity</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v42</td></tr><tr><td>Other reasons (please specify below if any)</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v43</td></tr><tr><td colspan="7">Own reasons _____</td></tr></table>		Not an important reason		Very important reason	DK	NA		prospect of saving money when travelling	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v37	possibility to meet new people	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v38	desire to share my culture and life style	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v49	possibility to learn about other cultures	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v40	desire to help others by hosting	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v41	plain curiosity	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v42	Other reasons (please specify below if any)	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v43	Own reasons _____							
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desire to share my culture and life style	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v49																																																											
possibility to learn about other cultures	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v40																																																											
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plain curiosity	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v42																																																											
Other reasons (please specify below if any)	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v43																																																											
Own reasons _____																																																																	
Q20	Why do you use hospitality exchange services now? Please, rate the main reasons.																																																																
	<table><tr><td></td><td>Not an important reason</td><td></td><td>Very important reason</td><td>DK</td><td>NA</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>prospect of saving money when travelling</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v44</td></tr><tr><td>possibility to meet new people</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v45</td></tr><tr><td>desire to share my culture and life style</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v46</td></tr><tr><td>possibility to learn about other cultures</td><td>0</td><td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td><td>10</td><td>-99</td><td>-88</td><td>v47</td></tr></table>		Not an important reason		Very important reason	DK	NA		prospect of saving money when travelling	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v44	possibility to meet new people	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v45	desire to share my culture and life style	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v46	possibility to learn about other cultures	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10	-99	-88	v47																													
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	desire to help others by hosting	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	-99	-88	v48
	Other reasons (please specify below if any)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	-99	-88	v49
	Own reasons _____														
Q21	What is the typical time you spend at one host during Couchsurfing? 1= 1-2 days 2= 3-6 days 3= 7 days or more 4= I was never hosted -99= DK -88= NA														v50
Q22	What is the typical time a Couchsurfing guest spends at your place? 1= 1-2 days 2= 3-6 days 3= 7 days or more 4= I never hosted -99= DK -88= NA														v51
Q23	How often do you engage in the following CouchSurfing activities?														
		Never	Rarely	Someti mes	Often	DK	NA								
	participating in CS meetings	1	2	3	4	-99	-88								v52
	participating in CS groups	1	2	3	4	-99	-88								v53
	maintaining contact with CS members outside CS	1	2	3	4	-99	-88								v54
	preferring CS rather than a hotel/hostel wherever I go	1	2	3	4	-99	-88								v55
	engaging in common activities with a host/guest (cooking, gaming, partying)	1	2	3	4	-99	-88								v56
	showing the guest around the city I live.	1	2	3	4	-99	-88								v57
Q24	Did you have any negative experience at CouchSurfing.com? 1= Yes 0= No -99= DK														v58

	-88= NA You may provide explanation _____	v59
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Additional qualitative follow-up survey questionnaire

Q1	1. How experienced do you think are you with Couchsurfing? 1= Just starting 2= Rather experienced 3= Seasoned couchsurfer 4= Very experienced	v1
Q2	Did participation in Couchsurfing affect your trust in other people? Why do you think it happened? _____	v2
Q3	Do you think that Couchsurfing made you a more tolerant person? If yes - please provide a short explanation of how it happened. _____	v3
Q4	Do you think Couchsurfing as a practice is beneficial to the society? (That is if more people would travel that way, the society becomes better) _____	v4
Q5	Did you have any negative experience at Couchsurfing? Can you tell what exactly went wrong? _____	v5
Q6	Did you leave negative reference as a result of the negative experience(s)? 1= Yes 2= No 3= For some negative experiences - yes 4= No, but I left a neutral reference 5= Did not have any negative experiences -99= DK -88= NA	v6

Appendix 2. Country generalised trust indexes

Albania	24.4	**
Algeria	11.2	**
Andorra	20	
Argentina	19.2	*
Australia	51.4	*
Austria	33.4	**
Azerbaijan	20.5	**
Bangladesh	23.5	**
Belarus	32.6	*
Belgium	29.2	**
Brazil	7.1	*
Bulgaria	19.6	*
Canada	41.8	
Chile	23	**
China	60.3	*
Colombia	4.1	*
Congo		
Croatia	20.5	**
Cyprus	7.5	*
Czech Republic	24.6	**
Denmark	66.5	**
Estonia	39	
Finland	58	*
France	18.7	*
Georgia	17.6	
Germany	44.6	
Greece	23.7	**
Hungary	28.7	*
India	32.1	*
Ireland	36	**
Israel	23.5	**
Italy	27.5	*
Japan	35.9	*
Latvia	17.1	**
Lithuania	25.9	**
Luxembourg	24.8	**
Malta	20.8	**
Moldova	14.6	**
Montenegro		
Morocco	12.3	*
Netherlands	66.1	

New Zealand	55.3	
Norway	73.3	*
Pakistan	22.2	*
Peru	10.7	**
Philippines	8.6	**
Poland	22.2	
Portugal	12.3	**
Romania	7.7	
Russia	27.8	
Senegal		
Serbia	25.8	**
Singapore	37.3	*
Slovakia	15.9	**
Slovenia	17.5	*
South Africa	23.3	*
Spain	19	
Swaziland		
Sweden	60.1	
Switzerland	51.2	*
Tunisia	15.5	*
Turkey	11.6	*
Ukraine	23.1	
United Kingdom	30	*
United States	34.8	

Source: Data from World Value Survey wave 6 (2014), except for * World Value Survey Wave 5 (2009), ** World Value Survey Wave 4 (2004).

Appendix 3. Country tolerance indexes

Albania	49.47
Algeria	40.94
Andorra	
Argentina	64.53
Australia	78.70
Austria	66.45
Azerbaijan	39.69
Bangladesh	30.13
Belarus	49.08
Belgium	70.24
Brazil	61.77
Bulgaria	50.09
Canada	86.79
Chile	65.76
China	38.62
Colombia	51.41
Congo	48.91
Croatia	43.66
Cyprus	
Czech Republic	61.14
Denmark	76.64
Estonia	51.48
Finland	78.74
France	62.03
Georgia	30.16
Germany	68.47
Greece	46.13
Hungary	56.98
India	21.54
Ireland	84.46
Israel	33.72
Italy	62.13
Japan	61.32
Latvia	49.67
Lithuania	50.06
Luxembourg	
Malta	
Moldova	38.48
Montenegro	39.40
Morocco	37.61
Netherlands	75.45
New Zealand	82.41
Norway	74.50

Pakistan	25.35
Peru	50.53
Philippines	56.43
Poland	54.05
Portugal	73.06
Romania	37.12
Russia	33.96
Senegal	48.26
Serbia	47.06
Singapore	
Slovakia	56.15
Slovenia	63.53
South Africa	58.35
Spain	72.70
Swaziland	55.58
Sweden	78.13
Switzerland	74.25
Tunisia	36.01
Turkey	32.41
Ukraine	41.51
United Kingdom	70.75
United States	74.22

Source: Social Progress Index 2014 report - tolerance and inclusion index (2014)