UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI BERGAMO

Master's Degree Course PGST/ PMTS 03 Workshop of Platforms & Ads in Peer-To-Peer Tourism

Final report 2017/2018
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INTRODUCTION

The University of Bergamo 2017-2018 workshop worked on the web presence of three non-hotel accommodation structures located in the province of Bergamo. The

framework of reference was built on the analysis of the most widespread web tools and platforms, which are used by hosts for the activities of promotion, reservation and monitoring.

The Workshop and its Purposes

The team consists of ten students from Planning and Management of Tourism Systems (1st and 2nd year) who worked together, led by Professor Roberto Peretta. With the participation and the cooperation of the B&B owners: Mrs. Maddalena Defendi for Casa del Curato, Vigolo (BG), Mrs. Chiara for Casa Chiara, Bergamo(BG), and Mrs. Giovanna for B&B Magnolia, Bergamo (BG), a professional investigation has been performed by Cecilija Buklijas, Valeria Fusé, Abir Hamdaoui, Ali Ibrahim, Silvia Luca, Ernesto Martellaro, Marta Notaro, Jessica Onger, Andrea Ruiz Rojas, Polina Baskakova under the workshop's designer and tutor Professor Roberto Peretta.

Our main goal as Master students in tourism was to analyse the web presence of the non-hotel accommodation structures that accepted to participate to this workshop, then to observe the web tools and platforms that are used in order to get more visibility and value improvements, to achieve success and profits.
This report will also suggest appropriate and effective solutions to the owners of each business on their web presence issues.

Methodology and tasks of the research

The attention has been focused on the practical tasks which were only achievable by involving a clear methodological approach, but at the same time we have taken some theoretical lessons regarding sharing economy, "airification", types of accommodations, web visibility and online platforms used by the owners (Booking.com, AirBnB, Genius program). A good management of practical activities was possible only because of the theoretical basis discussed during the meetings. So, we collected information about Bed & Breakfasts and Holiday Houses, we visited the hosts and collected additional material through direct interviews, we analyzed (through

survey) the main trends in promoting and selling family accommodation, we synthesized the outputs and produced the final report and the presentation.

PART 1: RESEARCH

1.1 Sharing Economy

- **What is sharing economy?**

The term covers a sprawling range of digital platforms and offline activities, from financially successful companies like Airbnb, a peer-to-peer lodging service, to smaller initiatives such as repair collectives and tool libraries. Another interesting definition provided by the the European Commission in its 2016 communication explains that the sharing (collaborative) economy 'refers to business models where activities are facilitated by collaborative platforms that create an open marketplace for the temporary usage of goods or services often provided by private individuals'. Sharing economy activities fall into four broad categories: recirculation of goods, increased utilization of durable assets, exchange of services, and sharing of productive assets.

- **Motivation**

Participants are motivated by a range of economic, environmental, and social factors. Sharing economy sites are generally lower in cost than market alternatives. An Airbnb host, for example, can deliver a room more cheaply than a hotel.The platforms also allow people to earn money in ways that had not previously been safely or easily available.

The desire to increase social connections is also a common motivation. Many sites advertise this feature of their activities, and participants often articulate a desire to meet new people or get to know their neighbors .

Airbnb users are taking more trips now and that the availability of cheap ride services is diverting some people from public transportation. That means the platforms result in higher carbon emissions, because their services use energy. The companies can't have it both ways —creating new economic activity and reducing carbon emissions— because the two are closely linked.

- **Impact on tourism**

The sharing economy has a double face-coin impact on tourism in the same time, positive and negative.

Positive effects:

- ○ easy access to a wide range of services that are often of higher quality and more affordable;

- demand for sustainable tourism products as well as more unique and personalised tourism experiences, authenticity and contacts with local citizens;
- flexible work opportunities;
- respond better to peaks and troughs in demand for tourism services.

Negative effects:

- provides unfair competition
- reduces job security-no social security (for instance, no paid sick leave);
- avoids taxes: in a New York 2014 report, at least 72 % of Airbnb rentals violated some law (e.g. zoning laws which prohibit people from running a business in a residential area);
- poses a threat to safety, health and disability compliance standards;
- raises data protection and financial accessibility issues, given the primacy of credit cards and smartphones when using these platforms;
- loss of revenue for hotels because of the rise of accommodation-sharing platforms.

References:

European Parliamentary Research Service, M.Juul, Tourism and the sharing economy, January 2017 [*online*], available at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/595897/EPRS_BRI(2017)595897_EN.pdf

J. Schore, Debating the Sharing Economy, October 2014 [*online*] available at:

http://www.greattransition.org/publication/debating-the-sharing-economy

1.2 Airification of Cities

One of the areas sharing economy has impacted tourism strongly is the hospitality sector; private rooms (or apartments) are nowadays the most attractive accommodation solutions for travelers, since they offer personalization, contact with local people and authenticity, and relatively at an affordable price. Airbnb is without

doubt the major "disruptor" of the sector. Small accommodation businesses like B&B, family hotels etc., are the most affected by the activities of Airbnb, which in most cases problematic when it comes to the issue of taxes and the trend is very difficult to be regulated.

This growing phenomenon prompted the socio-geographical research laboratory of University of Siena in Italy to research more into this growing trend by focusing on some historical Italian Cities. The research is focused on the impact of the ever-growing short-term rental over the "delicate environment of Italian historical urban centers and its socio-economic impacts" (LADEST, 2017).[1] Because of the 'epidemic' nature of the Airbnb phenomenon in some cities, they titled the research the "**Airification of Cities**".

According to the LADEST report, the staggering growth of such phenomenon has induced hosts to give out not only rooms/couch, but entire houses/apartments, representing 57% of Airbnb listings, to increase the capacity and the profitability of their properties. Moreover, what have also been noticed is, short-term rentals generate more revenues than long-term proportionally. And in most of the cities, some operators list several properties to have more share of the revenue. In addition, high share of Airbnb earnings flows towards the central areas of the cities. In major touristic cities of the world, such as Barcelona, Paris, Rome, the supply of Airbnb accommodation is concentrated around the historical centres. In Italy, for example, the numbers are incredible: Florence, Venice and Rome have a proportion of their centres housing stock on the platform above 8%; Matera (Italian City of Culture 2019) has 1 in 4 homes in the "Sassi" area listed on Airbnb.

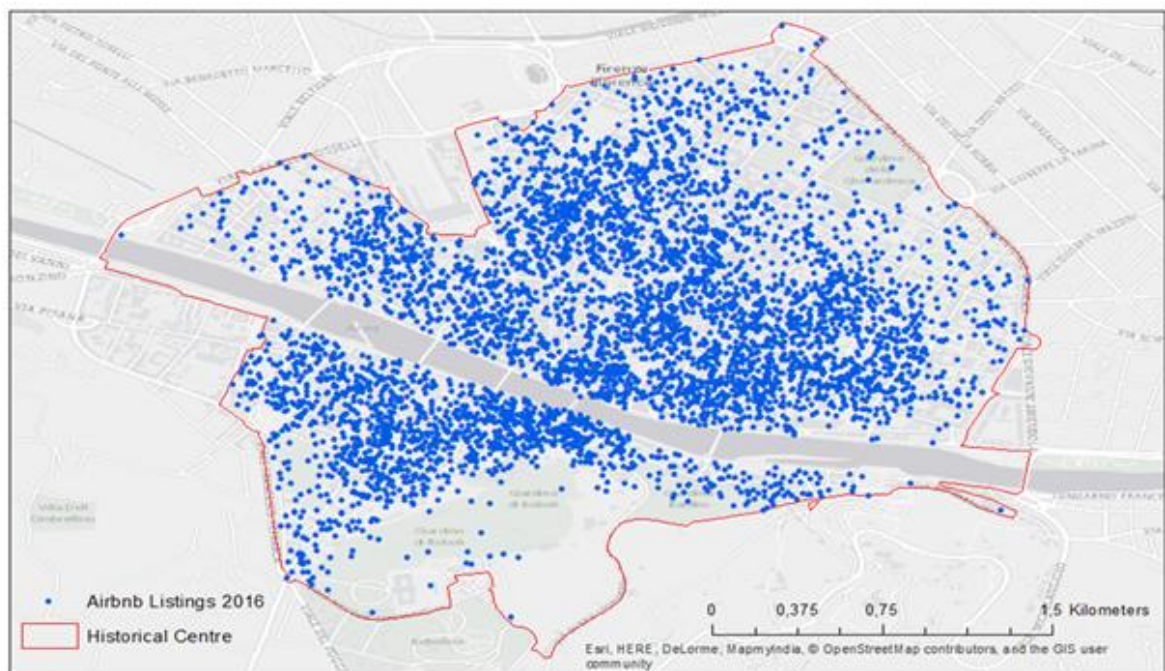[1] http://ladestlab.it/maps/68/the-airification-of-cities

Figure1. Map of Airbnb offering in the medieval town of Florence

These goes to say that the trend of short term rentals is increasing, since it generates more revenue for the hosts. Some hosts are now offering more than one accommodation on the platform, which creates inequality between them; the result is "a handful of operators listing several properties are capable of amassing more than two thirds of the total revenues generated on the website" (LADEST, 2017). The risk is that, agencies or big investors may start listing third-party properties, pushing out smaller competitors from the platform.

Airification is having strong impacts on cities, from different points of view. The most affected are the locals and, to some extent, the environment. Firstly, long term rentals are getting more expensive for the residents due to the driving up of rents on short term basis, hence they are moving out from the centers to the peripheries; secondly, the neighborhoods are adapting to tourists' needs; and visitors may not have the same care for the environment as the locals. However, there are those among residents who are benefitting from such a phenomenon: those hosting the tourists in their houses and those who are providing tourist products and services. This is the case in Venice and Florence, which have gradually become "Cathedrals of Consumption", losing part of their cultural values and authenticity.

As long as there is a strong tourism demand, Airification is likely to grow even more. The only possible solution is to have some regulations which will create a balance between getting revenues and sustaining the local community life.

1.3 Booking.com VS AirBnB

- **Genius Program VS Select Program**

Besides trying to address the new needs of customers, such as the need of personalization, Booking.com is employing some strategies to keep its predominant position on the market. To reach professionalism by matching loyal customers and the best receptive structures on its online platform Booking.com launched the Genius Program.

In order to participate to the program, hosts have to fulfil some requirements: they need to be among the most outstanding receptive structures with the best performance in their area and to have an average rate of 7.5 in at least 5 reviews (Biancolin, 2017).

As far as the guests are concerned, customers that book at least 5 times in 24 months enter automatically in the program without any entrance fee and have some advantages: they receive either a 10% discount or some benefits when they book at Genius receptive structures (Biancolin, 2017). Among the benefits reserved to Genius guests there are "late checkout priority and freebies such as welcome drinks and free airport shuttles" (Schaal, 2016).

This program has some advantages for the hosts since it can help them to reach a full occupancy rate all year round, also during the low season and to increase their bookings by about 7% (Biancolin, 2017). In addition, the program enables hosts to obtain more visibility in the search results and to have access to international travelers who usually spend one more night than the average guests in the accommodation premise (Biancolin, 2017). The Genius program has also some disadvantages for hosts since, by joining it, they will lose some revenue and customer loyalty (Delgado, 2017). The accommodation premises, indeed, being always compelled to provide the Genius travelers with some benefits, will lose some revenue during the high season when they do not need to offer discounts and gifts to fill up their rooms. Furthermore,

as customers know that they will always have some advantages by reserving through the platform, they will become loyal to the program and not to the receptive structures.

Other online platforms are following this trend towards professionalism, improving their services in order to enlarge their potential customers. It is the case of AirBnB, which is trying to position itself as an alternative to traditional hotels. To this extent, last summer AirBnB launched a pilot program called Sonoma Select in Sonoma (California), whose objective was to test this new service appealing to travelers seeking a high-quality, hotel-like experience to extend it to other cities (Ting, 2016). Therefore, AirBnB is addressing this program only on invitation to Superhosts, "hosts who are already accustomed to providing a higher level of service and hospitality to guests" (Ting, 2016).

Hosts are encouraged to participate to this program because of the better positioning they will reach in a new section of the platform (Zaleski, 2017). They will have also access to a professional photographer, who will provide them with better pictures to display their accommodation on Airbnb and they will have the opportunity to consult an interior decorator who will give them some advice on how to improve their structure (Zaleski, 2017).

As far as the guests are concerned, it seems that there are no requirements for customers who would like to stay at Select houses since the program does not aim to strengthen customer loyalty, but to offer a service to people who usually prefer to stay in hotels.

Besides taking into consideration the advantages of turning their property into a Select premise, hosts should be aware of the consequences of this decision: in order to participate to the program, indeed, they are required to offer Instant Booking and 24-hour check-in (Ting, 2016). Offering Instant Booking means that the hosts do not have the control of who goes inside their property any more. Providing their guests with 24-hour check-in, furthermore, requires the hosts to be available whenever the customers arrive, even though it may be uncomfortable for them.

In conclusion, online platforms are trying new strategies to maintain their position on the market, to turn their clients into loyal ones and to reach new potential targets.

A strategy that has been undertaken both by Booking.com and by AirBnB is the challenge to provide guests with a more professional experience.

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1.4 Questionnaire

The survey has been conducted in collaboration with *Visit Bergamo* and *Associazione BERGAMO B&B and Co*. The questionnaire was carried out by ourselves.

The purpose of the survey was to acquire information about the ways family accommodation managers communicate with their guests, what channels they use to manage reservations and what platforms they use for advertising.

Properties in Bergamo and province invited: 355.

Number of respondents as of February 1st, 2018: 47.
Survey format: Google forms online questionnaire.

The full text of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix**.**

- **Survey results: Platforms**

Platforms used for reservations management (percent of respondents use the

following platforms) :

Booking.com - 70,2%

Own website - 57,4%

Airbnb - 55,3%

Platform that bring the majority of reservations:
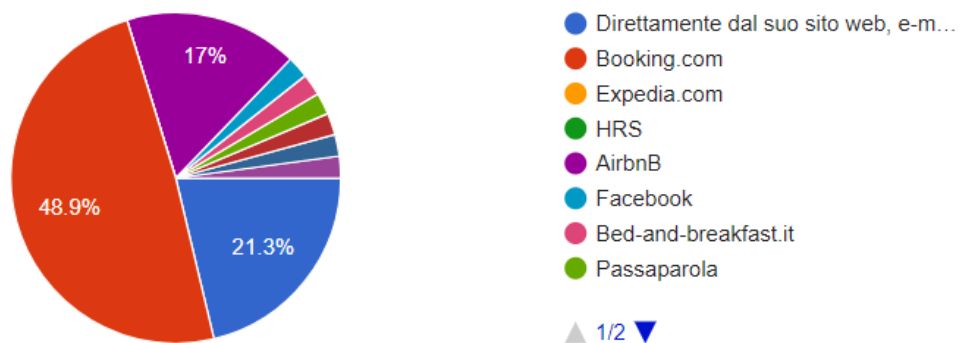
- **Survey results: Ads**

Advertising channels used by property managers:
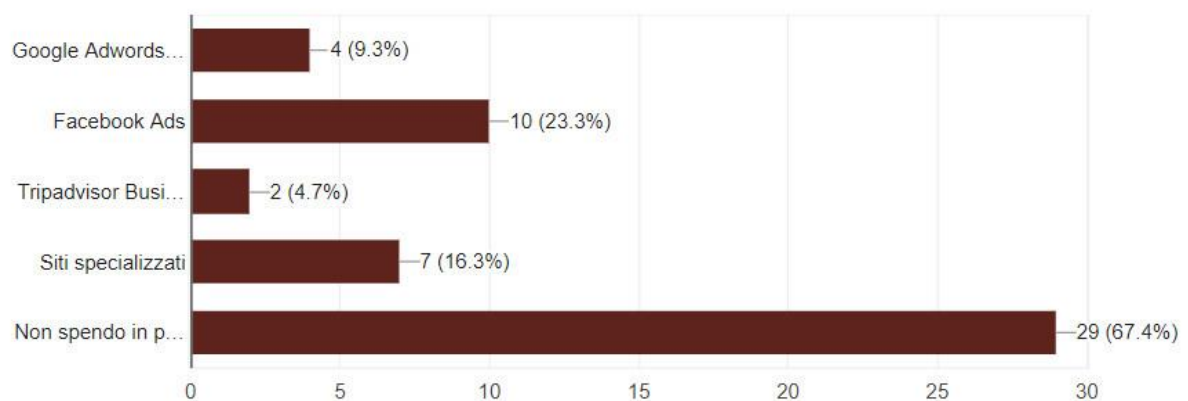
- **Survey results: Airbnb - positive or negative trend**

The majority of property managers and owners considers that Airbnb has positive impact on the market or both, positive and negative. The major concern is that the platform might permit non declared economic activities.

The full survey report is available [online](#).

PART 2: FIELDWORK

Case Studies

General Introduction

The topics discussed during the meeting sessions of the workshop have been translated into practice through actual visits to the selected B&Bs and the holiday houses, carried out during the months of November and December 2017.
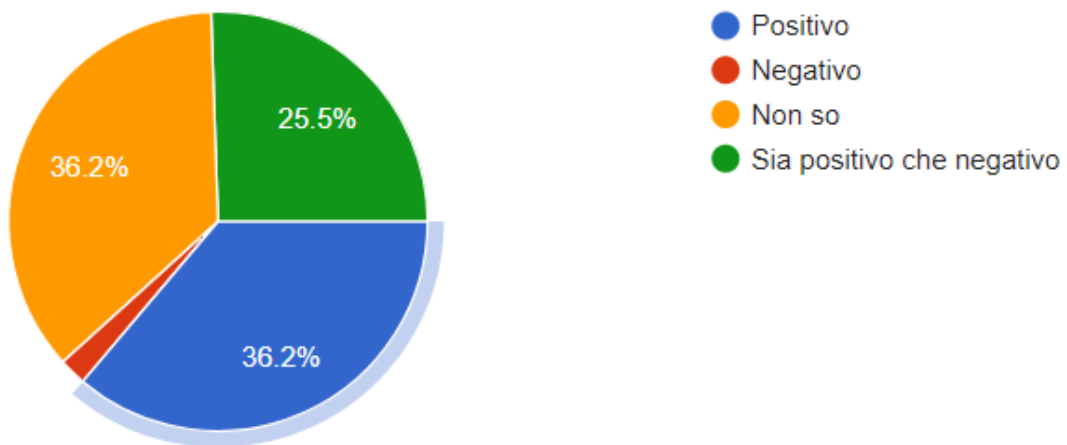
All the hosts demonstrated an incredible interest towards the workshop: beyond the stunning welcome offered to our group, they were extremely collaborative, always willing to share their experience and open to practical suggestions. Furthermore, this fieldwork revealed that the perceptions of students do not always correspond with the owners' ones, as different points of view focus the attention on different aspects of the businesses.

Starting from the beginning, the team analysed the web presence of each B&B and holiday house before the actual meeting and prepared a set of questions to be answered and discussed, mostly about the weaknesses and strengths of the

accommodation, bearing in mind the scope of the workshop, which looks at online platforms and advertising, rather than daily hospitality operations.

The subsequent step was the encounter with the hosts at their premises: Casa del Curato, Casa Chiara and B&B Magnolia.

In the following section we are going to analyse each specific case.

2.1 Casa del Curato Vigolo (BG)

- **Introduction**

La Casa del Curato opened last year. The stakeholder Maddalena Defendi, inspired by the growing amount of tourists brought by the successful Christo's "The Floating Piers", decided to fulfill what she herself defined as 'the dream of her life'.

She was supported by her family, friends and the community of Vigolo, some of them became her guests whereas others brought her new visitors since the beginning.

- **The Beginning**

Coming from a family of retailers working for a popular company of vending machines, and having already some skills and knowledge in marketing, Maddalena started her own activity with no previous experience in the tourism/accommodation field. There are not many hotels and facilities for tourists in the area, so she has the advantage of uniqueness. In addition to this, she knew how to take care of her guests since the beginning, being friendly and available. We personally witnessed it during the visit to her property. She even decided to host for free a class of musician students. During the opening period, she implemented the use of *word of mouth* (WOM), sponsoring the B&B to the local community and to some friends only by speaking to them.

The disadvantage is that Maddalena has no English knowledge. But, still, she relies

on gestures and friends who speak different languages. Just imagine that with the help of some friends who know foreign languages, she managed to write some signs to put on closets or shelves inside the house with descriptions of what stays inside, especially in the kitchen, to help guests to find the stuff they needed. The guests seem to appreciate this kindness. She was and is currently receiving the help of other people living in Vigolo, such as the owner of "Bar Giusy", who provides some furniture in the houses and takes care of food as well. In a very small village such as Vigolo, the best information source is still provided by locals who know everything.

- **Structure of the B&B**

Casa del Curato consists of 2 houses both rented by the stakeholder and named "Water Apartment" and "Stone Apartment". They are fully equipped and independent, with either a garden or an outdoor terrace. The *stone apartment* is where Maddalena has been currently living for 27 years and which is destined to become a holiday flat. It has a capacity of 10 bed places. The *water apartment* was instead a property owned by a couple of elder people who didn't come very often to Vigolo, but decided to restore it during their stay. This building used to be the old oratory of the village, which also gives the name of the activity Casa del Curato. It dates back to 1300. The name "Curato" maintains the historical aspect of the building, as it comes from "cura" which means priest. With an agreement, the stakeholder managed to pay directly to the elder couple the rent while hosting some guests inside. This second house works as a B&B with 7 bed places that can be rented separately as each room has its own bathroom. The stakeholder likes to leave to her guests some vital space because she wants them to feel comfortable and not annoyed by other guests. If they want they can receive some specific services, such as breakfast, if not, they have the freedom to arrange their stay and breakfast as well by themselves, but according to legal conditions, the products are bought by the owner.

- **Guests and identity**

  - **The target of la Casa del Curato**

Usually large groups up to 7 and 10 people but also couples and big families come to

la Casa del Curato. Visitors' main interests are not only the Iseo Lake and the surrounding attractions, but mainly to the territory. Guests like to go trekking in the nearby hills or simply enjoy the nature.

As far as concern the nationality, there are mainly foreign people, the stakeholder mentioned Brazil, Japan, Emirates, Germany and Holland. The foreign visitors are considered as open-minded, adaptive and curious with a fervent willing of travelling and discovering. Instead the incoming Italian tourists are more difficult to manage, they are considered too demanding in terms of housing, advice and also in decision-making.

○ **About Vigolo and its identity**

Vigolo is a small village in the province of Bergamo in the area of the Iseo Lake with currently 600 inhabitants after the several migrations to Switzerland. Brescia is 24.1 km from La casa del curato, and Desenzano del Garda is 48.3 km from the property. It is also 27.4 km away from Bergamo. The closest airports are Orio Al Serio Airport (25.8 km), Linate Airport (64.3 km) and Villafranca Airport (76.9 km).

The locals of Vigolo mainly owe small enterprises and are skilled builders and farmers. As a matter of fact, they run farms, in particular cheese factories. Speaking of identity, there is a typical local cheese produced only in Vigolo named Monte Bronzone, which is a type of stracchino cheese. Inhabitants have maintained the 'close minded attitude' towards the big changes concerning the area, but according to Maddalena many locals in the village seem to be happy about the B&B that brings more tourism to the area.

● **Main platforms involved in the activity**

The B&B has a web presence on the following online platforms: its own webpage, Facebook, Airbnb, Booking.com, lago d'Iseo, Bed and Breakfast.eu.
Coming from a small village and being part of a generation that has always preferred words to text messages and the Internet, Maddalena has the feeling that she is not ready to manage everything that concerns her web presence. In this sense, there are many problems she is currently facing, especially in terms of updating. The own website has been carried out by the *Bergamo B&B association,* so Maddalena doesn't know exactly how it works, because she doesn't directly manage it. In addition to this, the website doesn't have its own booking system because it will be too expensive for

such a small activity, moreover it will require specific skills to be managed in its entirety. Anyway, Maddalena never received emails from the website, which means that the guests coming to her house, mainly use platforms otherwise they come because of the WOM.

But despite the problems with the website, she is still a smart and active stakeholder and dealing most of the time with foreign people, she started to set up different tours, Bergamo included, producing brochures and leaving them in the proximity and in nearby travel agencies. As far as concern the Facebook page, Maddalena stated that she cannot manage it all alone. She started to post some pictures last year close to Christmas, but then she realized that the use of social platforms demands a lot of time which unfortunately she hasn't. Her current job and her lack of digital skills represent two great obstacles for a future improvement. As regards the other platforms mentioned, she doesn't know about them and she didn't know that her activity was on such websites.

- **Booking versus Airbnb**

Maddalena realized almost immediately after the opening that except the WOM which is always useful, she needed the use of platforms to improve the visibility and the bookings. So her activity went for the 'online'. The association of retailers of Galleria Fanzago in Bergamo helped her to keep informed about the new trends concerning the use of social platforms and intermediators. In the end she decided to implement Booking and Airbnb. Maddalena is probably the only stakeholder we met that prefers Airbnb to Booking. The fact is that Booking is more expensive than Airbnb requiring from 15 to 18% of commission compared to 3% of AirBnB. Moreover, Booking's payments are made by bank account one month after the customer's purchase, whereas Airbnb transfers the money directly during the customer's arrival day.

In addition to this, her guests, being mainly foreigners, are travelling for more than 2 days, and expecting the real comforts of a house, so AirBnB is better in efficiency, quicker in payments, easier in booking and more reliable. The stakeholder declared that it is now her biggest supplier of guests. Of course she knows that she should increase the awareness about the use of platforms, but because of her lack of digital skills, she doesn't know *how* and above all *when* starting to improve. Then, Booking and Airbnb are quite independent platforms, and this fact doesn't help her in the

knowledge of the procedures involved, because everything is already guided.

- **Advantages and disadvantages of platforms**

According to Maddalena and also many other stakeholders, the platforms are a good tool to catch customers. In the case of Casa del Curato, having most of the times foreign guests and having not very professional English skills, a platform is considered the perfect intermediator to solve problems of visibility abroad and simultaneous translation. Therefore, there are almost positive judgements and in particular, no disadvantages with Airbnb. Instead, Maddalena declared that there have been some problems with Booking. At the very beginning during the building of her own website, Booking was already recruiting guests and once the website was ready and open she got immediately 7 bookings without knowing how to manage them. In the end she succeeded in compelling Booking to delete them and start again.

It is possible that Booking creates to the stakeholder more disadvantages because it is a platform that works mainly for hotels and bigger activities. Moreover, working alone for an activity can also be a disadvantage, since checking simultaneously more platforms demands time and attention that a single person cannot provide. Maddalena is thinking about an implementation of the use of platforms, but this improvement would also require the presence of at least another qualified person.

- **Conclusions and suggestions**

From our visit to Casa del Curato, we understood that the activity seems really successful in hosting tourists and that its visibility on platforms is increasing quickly. But in order to strengthen its online image and to spread its popularity in the surrounding areas, Maddalena has to face some difficulties.

First of all, there is a territorial issue concerning the marketing and promotional activity of the surrounding area. Compared to the Lombardy region and the province of Bergamo which are quite well promoted, Vigolo runs the risk of being hidden by their popularity. Indeed, to reach the village of Vigolo the use of a car is required, as there are no buses or other transportation means along the hills. Secondly, she should improve her web presence producing a better content for the Facebook page. In addition to this, she may decide to increase the visibility of her website and its awareness among people, so that she can start to receive bookings with no

commissions directly from her platform. Increasing promotion, advertising and marketing communication are therefore the key points to arouse interest among people and to strengthen the value of Vigolo's identity. And last, but not the least, Maddalena promised us that she will attend an English course to keep update and establish better relationships with her guests.

Our suggestion regards mainly the management of both B&B and its territorial context. In the management process, it is important to focus on marketing strategies, such as the services and products offered to customers and the processes of delivering and communicating it. As marketing is based on the development of services in terms of customers' needs and their satisfaction, it is important to understand who is the target in the market. As regards the territorial context, from the analysis of Casa del Curato, it is possible to assume that tourists are interested in natural environment and in local culture. Their escape and immersion in a green context such as the hills next to Vigolo is intended as living a local experience, so their interest may be that of tasting local products to fulfil their authentic experience. Promoting Monte Bronzone cheese can be a good example that may bring benefit to customers, stakeholders and even Vigolo's village.

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2.2 Casa Chiara B&B

Casa Chiara B&B is a property located in Bergamo which has been welcoming guests since few years ago . Chiara, the owner, started her own activity with no previous

experience in the tourism/accommodation field, but passion, dedication and being autodidactic making this property one of the most important B&B in Bergamo area.

- **Structure of the B&B**

Casa Chiara It is a charming Bed & Breakfast located in the western part of Bergamo (Lower Town), in a quiet neighbourhood. Its strategic position, efficiently served by the urban bus network (100 m from the nearest stop), it's close to the central train station (2km),to the airport Orio al Serio (5 km), to the historic centre in Upper Town (1,5 km) and a number of points of interest, theatres and restaurants,free public parking is also available nearby.

Casa Chiara B&B offers two independent rooms, with private toilet, and a common space to be shared between guests for breakfast. In addition, for those guests who require higher privacy, there is also a separate apartment, available as holiday house. The rooms of the B&B, named "Sole" and "Luna", are soundproofed and equipped with beds of wrought iron. The last room, "Luna", has been recently restructured with a new design. The available services are: free Wi-Fi, satellite TV and a great breakfast in the morning, offered for gluten free, celiac, lactose intolerant, vegetarian and vegan guests. The simply and cozy design of Casa Chiara make you feel like home away from home.

- **Main platforms involved in the activity**

Casa Chiara boasts a strong web presence, which is mainly determined by the experience and the steady activity of the owner, Chiara, who is aware of the most useful digital tools necessary to promote and control her business.

The B&B has a web presence on the following online platforms: its own webpage, Facebook page, Instagram page, Airbnb and Booking.com. The B&B is also visible on the official website of VisitBergamo.

Regarding the Official B&B Website, Chiara has created few years ago by herself and continuously updated it. Through the website is possible to get information about the property and Bergamo, also guests can make reservations and contact Chiara for specific requirement. The site is available in every language, thanks to google translate tool, therefore users can get useful information in their own language.

Moreover, guests can register to Chiara's mailing list to receive special offers, information about events in Bergamo, etc.

The increasing number of visits on Casa Chiara's website comes partly from the updated information provided, but the main source of visitors come from the dedicated work on the social media linked to the website.

Facebook and Instagram page are managed directly by Chiara. There is a frequent update of content which follows a structured strategy by Chiara, posting content according to a calendar, to create more involvement with the social media platforms. Another strategy carried out by the owner are the sponsored campaigns - paid advertising on Facebook. It consists by selectioning a specific target in an area, followed by a preselected picture and phrase to create a post visible only by the chosen target. Also, on Facebook there is the "Book now" option which links the Facebook page with the booking page on its own website. Moreover, the property is "very responsive" to messages from Facebook, which it induces users to be in contact with the property. Chiara started working on social media 2 years ago, because she realised how import these platforms are for the visibility of the property and the number of reservations. These strategies brought to her many satisfactions, as the increasing number of direct bookings (it represents around the 40% of total) and the increasing number of likes and followers, because nowadays the number of likes/followers play an important role in online presence.

Talking about reservation platforms, Booking.com is the one that provides the highest returns in terms of customers and visibility to the B&B, since it provides about 60% of bookings. According to Chiara, such platform is rather easy to manage, does not require excessive time, resembles the procedure of hotel reservations and sends every payment directly to the owner; the only controversial aspect is the high intermediation fee, around 18%. Moreover, as already observed in previous sections, Booking.com offers the Genius program, that calls host to provide additional services and cares to their guests, hoping to enhance the quality of experience. Casa Chiara makes a large use of this opportunity: firstly, half of the reservations on Booking.com comes from Genius; secondly, the owner is willing to offer a high-standard service; thirdly, the on-line (and off-line) feedbacks of customers reward such choice (9.5 is the average score on the platform).

Another important reservation platform for tourist properties is Airbnb. Differently compared with the other properties analyzed, this platform represents only a low percentage of bookings for Casa Chiara. The owner uses Airbnb only to offer the holiday house mentioned above.

According to Chiara, even though Airbnb has a lower commission (only 3%) compared to Booking, this platform takes more time to complete each reservation. One strategy on Airbnb carried out by the owner is "immediate booking", in order to reduce the time to complete each reservation, so it is not necessary an answer from the host to accept the guest booking request. On the platform there are only few reviews from guests because it does not represent the main reservation platform.

- **Airbnb Vs Booking**

Casa Chiara's main reservation platform, as mentioned above, is definitely Booking.com. Despite of the higher commission of Booking (around 15% and 18%) compared to Airbnb (3%), Chiara feels at ease managing the reservations coming though this platform. Also, as she is part of the Genius program, she gets some benefits: has a good visibility and an excellent reputation on this platform.

Furthermore, Airbnb reservation procedure takes more time to complete it than Booking. According to Chiara, the payment method used by Booking is better for her, because she prefers to receive the payment once the guests are arrived. Also, Airbnb advises to reduce the price to be more competitive on that platform, but she prefers to follow other strategy, which is more in syntony with Booking. She has a bit higher prices than the competitors, but adding more value to her offer like facilities and premium services.Those are the reasons why Chiara choses and gets most of her reservations from Booking than Airbnb.

- **Guests Identity and customer care**

Regarding guests, there is not a specific target, they are composed by families, single travellers, couples and businessmen. They are multinationals, divided into foreigners (50%) and Italians (50%). According to Chiara, the type of guests change according to the seasonality; during Spring and Autumn (April, May, September and October) the guests are mainly foreigners, then the rest of the year is dominated by the Italian ones. Then, approximately 50% of her guests reserve through the Genius program,

getting more privileges and extra services like welcoming facilities and early-late check-in/ check-out, among others.

In any case, whichever is the reservation channel adopted by her customers, Chiara makes admirable efforts to establish a direct communication with them and to provide a service of high value. From the beginning of their stay, guests have the opportunity to personalize their experience, in terms of breakfast (they can choose different types, such as celiac, vegan vegetarian, sportive...), travel advices (for example city tours) and special needs (they can ask for pick up from and to the airport). All this is actually not a problem for Chiara, who stated to love her business and considers customer's satisfaction as her prior objective.

An important outcome of such host-guest relationship is that Chiara is eventually able to engage her customers on her digital platforms, from facebook to instagram, during the stay and even after the trip. This allows her to offer higher care to guests and is also likely to increase her web visibility, which may be translated into additional bookings. In fact, according to Chiara, a large amount of her direct reservations originate from Facebook; her "very responsive" attitude to messages the platform can confirm it. In addition, her prompt and thankful replies to the reviews on Booking.com, Tripadvisor and Facebook strengthen the quality of the digital experience of her guests. Last but not least, another strategy to maintain the relationship with her guests is the newsletter: first, each customer, after booking and before staying, receives a warm welcoming email that introduces Casa Chiara and Bergamo; then, they are able to register to the mailing list and receive communications such as special offers, events taking place in Bergamo or only reminders of the memory of Bergamo and their stay. Chiara is aware about the importance of her guests, the relationship management is one of the priorities in an accommodation business and Chiara respects it.

- **Conclusion and suggestions**

After the visit to Casa Chiara B&B we realized that the owner is rather aware of the paramount role played by on-line platforms the social media, that offer innovative solutions to increase the number of guests, ameliorate the reservation process and, potentially, foster the fidelisation of customers.

The high experience in using Booking.com, along with the Genius program, is helping Chiara to sell her high-quality service. Then, the autonomous management of the

website and the social network pages creates a bond with her guests, generating admirable results (in terms of reputation) and enhancing visibility.

Nevertheless, our team has some suggestions to improve the use of online platforms and fully exploit their potential.

Given that intermediation channels usually require high commissions (as in the case of Booking.com) it is suggested to increase the amount of direct reservation, that in the case of Casa Chiara amounts to approximately 40% today. The owned website might be a fundamental gateway to achieve this goal, thus it shall be designed, managed and updated with a special care. It is already well runned by Chiara, the content is clear and the logo recognisable. What is suggested is to rationalise the menu, that is very dense and does not focus the attention on direct booking, even though, in the "contacts" page, there is a reservation form, the phone number and the e-mail address. We suggest to create a specific landing page to be linked also on the social networks, in order to guide potential customers through the whole process.

A similar suggestion goes to the Facebook page, which is steadily updated by Chiara, but should communicate in a clearer way the possibility of direct booking.

We are sure that the host is already working to make these slight improvements, since she is extremely familiar with the platforms analysed in this report.

References

Casa Chiara Bed&Breakfast, 2018, [*online*] official website available at:
https://www.casachiarabeb.it/

Casa Chiara B&B Facebook page available at:
https://www.facebook.com/casachiarabeb/

2.3 B&B Magnolia

● Structure of the B&B

B&B Magnolia is located in a nice area in the Lower Town of Bergamo, close to the city center and well-served by bus lines.

The Magnolia Bed and Breakfast was opened by Giovanna, the owner, in 2005 in her family house. The name of the B&B, was derived from two magnolia trees which can be seen in the garden of the house. These trees represent the identity of this accommodation since they were planted by Giovanna's grandmother and the owner remembers she used to play in the garden around these magnolias when she was a child.

The Bed & Breakfast offers four carefully decorated single, double or family rooms and a kitchen for self catering. Every room takes its name from the colour of the walls. Their names are: Blue Room, Orange Room, Yellow Room and Attic Room.

The key features of the B&B are the presence of a garden since there are few green areas in the downtown and also, it's breakfast, which is really appreciated by the guests. These features are also highlighted in the website; where it is reported that, "the free parking outside and the possibility to have breakfast in a summer garden

make B&B Magnolia the perfect choice for guests with different needs" (Magnolia Bed & Breakfast, 2018).

● **Guests and Identity**

B&B Magnolia's guests are mainly foreigners, coming from the UK, Malta, France and mostly from the Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine and Poland), but there are also domestic tourists, coming from different areas of Italy.

The guests consist of couples and single travellers, usually businessmen. Also families often opt for this type of accommodation since there are two rooms that are addressed to this target as they have in common a shared bathroom.

In the past, guests used to choose this B&B for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives. Being located near the hospital, this B&B was the ideal place for guests whose friends and relatives were hospitalised. Nowadays, this segment is no more relying on this type of accommodation as the hospital, having been moved to another location, is no more close to the B&B.

● **Main platforms involved in the activity**

Some efforts have been made on some major online platforms though some need restructuring and regular update to improve the image of the B&B.
Booking.com seems to be the strongest platform, both for reviews and for reservations made by guests. There are 100 positive reviews with an average rate of 9.4. Only a few reviews underline some issues: one person was complaining because the B&B was not really close to the train station and another one as she believed she had a shared bathroom, being her private bathroom outside the room. Mrs. Giovanna used to participate in the Genius program, but she decided to stop using it when she realized the program was not in line with her B&B marketing strategy and so was not convenient for her. The high percentage rate of Booking.com (18%) is a disadvantage for the owner.
AirBnB, on the other hand, has a lower fixed cost but doesn't receive many reservations. The website shows only few reviews and is not updated. Guests can not reserve rooms directly on the platform, but they can request a booking. In this way, the host maintains the control over the guests that are going to stay in her B&B. The name "Accogliente B&B con colazione super; Cozy and central B&B with garden" is

much different from the identity name and may be misleading for the guests and doesn't projects its online identity.

Tripadvisor and Youtube display some reviews, mostly positive, with some videos but both platforms are outdated.

Even though Mrs. Giovanna acknowledges the importance of interacting with potential guests through social media networking platforms nowadays, there are no social networks involved in the promotion of the place. There are no Facebook or Instagram pages associated to her B&B because she thinks that, they aren't suitable for her personality and doesn't want to spend time and money in managing them.

The B&B Magnolia has also a personal website. It is efficient but with the same shortcomings as the other online platforms: it is not updated. In fact the last and only "news and promotion" dates back to 2011. Anyway, it shows the identity of the B&B. Reading the reviews, it is possible to find out that the guests are aware that the name refers to the plant in the garden which blossoms in spring. To this extent, the logo represents a tree. Also the pictures stress the identity of the place since the garden is shown.

The section "Booking" does not work, but there are some contacts, such as the email address and the phone numbers in order to allow potential customers to book directly. It's possible to read the website in four different languages: Italian, English, French and German. There are no links or mentions of any social network.

- **Airbnb VS Booking**

Even though Booking.com asks for a higher commission (18%) than Airbnb (3%), Mrs. Giovanna prefers the former platform since she believes it is more professional.

Her preference is also related to the fact that, when she opened her Bed & Breakfast, Booking.com was the only option she could rely on to reach new potential customers. For this reason, she tried to enhance her position on this platform and, with the passing of time, her family accommodation became more visible with a lot of pictures and around 100 reviews.

Another motivation depends on the attempt of Airbnb to reduce the price per night of a room in her Bed & Breakfast, while this does not happen for Booking.com.

In addition, one reason why customers reserve the rooms of her B&B more on Boooking.com than on Airbnb is related to the different targets that use these online

platforms: Mrs. Giovanna, indeed, thinks that guests who use Airbnb are looking for independent houses, which is not the case of her family accommodation.

● **Relationship with the customer**

Since the online presence is not updated, the main reason is that the owner aims and works towards another objective, that is not to create an online presence but she just wants to make her guests happy. She considers this task not as a job but as a hobby and the most satisfying thing for her is to see her guests cheerful and wishful to come back. Before the guests' stay, she is able to understand the personality of the guests, with whom she has some interactions through phone calls. During the stay, she tries to make her guests feel at home, having some interactions with them. At the end of the stay, she gives a little gadget to the guests that stayed for a few days at her B&B, such as Polenta flour and the receipt to prepare it like the local people do. After their stay, she keeps in touch with some of the guests. It is the case of a foreign couple, who stayed at her B&B and fell in love with Bergamo so much that, after having been together for some years, they decided to get married in Bergamo. To this extent, Mrs. Giovanna prepared some refreshments in her garden for their wedding party. B&B Magnolia is also promoted by word of mouth. Some people, indeed, choose this type of accommodation based on recommendations by relatives, friends or acquaintances.

● **Conclusions and Suggestions**

At the end of the visit, the group of students drew some conclusions on the experience. It was a very nice and pleasant morning, drinking coffee and tea and chatting with the lovely owner about the management of her B&B. She is very good with her job and she has the expertise and experience to welcome her guests in the best way.

Anyway we have some suggestions to make in order to enhance her visibility on the web. First of all, she should fix the "Booking" section on her own website, providing one of this two options: either to write directly to her guests by e-mail or other means or to reserve through Booking.com (maybe adding the Booking button).

Another suggestion, is to project the B&B's image online and also maintain the same brand name as the different platforms to increase her trademark and remain coherent with her image.

And also since the owner of the B&B is not in tune that much with social media networking, we suggest that she concentrate more on her website and make sure it is

regularly updated. She may decide to increase the visibility of her website, working on Search Engine Optimization so that her B&B may come among the topmost search engine results. She can also share news and events concerning the area, the city or the province of Bergamo to attract potential visitors and to captivate their attention. For this reason, our suggestion is for the owner to be constantly in touch with VisitBergamo, the tourism association of the town, or other institutions that work to promote Bergamo.

The B&B Magnolia has a great potential, with the storytelling of the owner, the old-fashion and charming location and the passion that she has for the job.

References

Magnolia Bed & Breakfast, 2018. *Home.* [online] Available at: http://www.bbmagnolia.it/en/ [30 January 2018]

FINAL REMARKS AND CONCLUSIONS

Every family accommodation is relying on the use of platforms to enhance their online visibility and to reach new potential customers. As far as the platforms are concerned, owners of the accommodation premises we visited have their own way of communicating online in relation to their preferences, their skills and their time availability.

Since the online platforms have high intermediation fees and often offer programs which do not benefit the accommodation premises, hosts are trying to employ different strategies to enable potential customers to contact them directly. To this extent, hosts are making some efforts to enhance the visibility of their website and are relying on social media for customer relationship management to interact with their potential guests.

As nowadays the sharing economy is having a significant role in the hospitality sector, in addition, an important issue which needs to be taken into account is the airification of cities. Short term rentals, indeed, are having a strong impact on the urban environment and on the locals since residents are moving out of the city center due to the high long-term rents and the city center is adapting to the tourists' needs.

The phenomenon of airification, however, seems not to be present in Bergamo as hosts are well-being and responsible.

Our team addresses special thanks to the association "Bergamo B&B and Co." and, in particular, the visited B&B of Casa del Curato, Casa Chiara and Magnolia B&B for the indispensable cooperation.

A significant thanks goes also to Mr. Luca Biancolin and its contribution in explaining its experimental initiative *B2in Suit & Loft* in Capriate San Gervasio (BG).

APPENDIX

Questionnaire for Workshop "Of Platforms & Ads in Peer-To-Peer Tourism"

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1osTIEwz8nF3t0gliqMdO4nfLvqq9deH907m1PlLjO
y

Questionnaire for Workshop "Of Platforms & Ads in Peer-To-Peer Tourism"

* Required

1. What channels do you use to manage reservations? *

Check all that apply.

Own website

Booking.com

Expedia

HRS

AirBnB

Other:

2. Where do you advertise your property? *

Check all that apply.

Google Adwords PPC

Facebook Ads

Tripadvisor Business Listing

Specialised websites

I don't run any paid campaigns

3. What is the source of the majority of your reservations? *

Mark only one oval.

Direct (own website, email, phone, walk-in)

Booking.com

Expedia.com

HRS

AirBnB

Facebook

Other:

4. When was your property opened (year)? *

5. What type of accommodation do you manage? *

Mark only one oval.

Bed and Breakfast

Guest house

Holiday house

Apartments

Other:

6. Which of the following best describes your guests? *

Mark only one oval.

Budget travelers, no age specification

Adventure seekers

Occasional travelers (wedding or another important event)

Young couples and groups

Business travelers

Other:

7. What is the price range (double room, 2 persons) at your property? *

Mark only one oval.

Less than €50

€50-100

€100-150

€150-250

More than €250

8. Do you think that Airbnb has positive or negative impact on the tourism market and local

communities? *

Mark only one oval.

Positive

Negative

Not sure

Both

9. Please, comment here your answer