Understanding Peer to Peer (P2P) Sightseeing Tours

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***Abstract**. One of the typical activities on holiday, in addition to rest and recreation, is sightseeing. The peculiarity of peer-to-peer sightseeing stems from the fact that sightseeing, as a service, can be provided by anyone, not just licensed tour guides, and therefore the purpose of this paper is to raise awareness about the growing trend of this type of unconventional tourism product. Currently the EU is in the process of modification of the legal framework in order to remove obstacles to an adequate development of the sharing economy. This paper focuses on peer to peer tours as a growing part of the sharing economy in the tourism sector and uses multidimensional analyses. The goal of this paper is to gain an insight into the local residents' attitudes and roles and the preferences and attitudes of tourists towards P2P sightseeing on the destination case example (Croatia). Based on a literature review, market survey and interviews, implications, limitations and further research questions are provided.*

***Keywords:** sharing economy; tourists; peer to peer; guided tours; sightseeing; urban tourism.*

Introduction

Among other industries, sharing economy impacts tourism in many different ways, including aspects of accommodation, hospitality, travelling, entertainment and leisure activities (Fang, Ye, & Law, 2016; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Heo, 2016). As tourists are seeking ways of trimming their budgets without cutting their comforts, the trend of internet-based sharing has been greeted with much enthusiasm. The hype started with shared accommodation, enabling peers to rent a spare room or their whole homes to visitors and, with shared local transportation, to provide taxi services (Peeters, Dijkmans, Mitas, Strous, & Vinkensteijn, 2015).

The opportunity to gain an insight into the knowledge of the hosts led to the emergence of peer-to-peer (P2P) sightseeing services, replacing the services of traditional and accredited tour guide services. However, P2P sightseeing, as a form of sharing (or collaborative) economy, seems to have received little scholarly attention.

Various P2P tour guide and activity start-ups face many challenges in the market (Schaal, 2013a; Sundararajan, 2016) as they still have not won broad acceptance. The fragmented market of tours and activities is one of the major issues that need to be overcome by P2P services (Schaal, 2013b). Although there is a general tendency for many sharing economy platforms, when becoming successful, to attract the attention of investors (Peeters, Dijkmans, Mitas, Strous, & Vinkensteijn, 2015), the tours and activities sector is still trying to prove that it is a viable market (Schaal, 2013a). However, some of the established travel companies have invested in this market. For example, Viator, one of the largest online tours-and-activities booking agencies (B2P) was acquired by TripAdvisor in 2014 (O'Neil, 2014). Among the challenges for digitally enabled peer-to-peer exchange Cohen & Sundararajan, (2015) raise the question of regulations as P2P services blur the line between personal and professional and often involve semi-anonymous transactions. Finally, Slee (2015) even claims that successful sharing economy platforms avoid safety costs while publicly stating their commitment in this area.

The paper makes complex contributions to knowledge. It tries to fill the missing gap in literature dealing with P2P sightseeing. Although general literature on sharing economy issues in the tourism industry is emerging, the segment of P2P sightseeing is still scarce. Also, the paper gives an insight into a destination's perspective towards P2P tours on the example of Croatia.

Theoretical background

The notion of sightseeing

Tourist excursions, consisting of transport services, hospitality services, guide services and different events, come together as a complete experience (Syratt & Archer, 2004; Hjalager, 2010). They last less than 24 hours and do not include overnight stay services and, most often, include road and sea transport. Excursions and guided visits are organized in tourism destinations where tourists are staying and have for their goal enrichment of tourist offer and realization of increased tourist traffic, and can be organized as permanent, planned and fixed forms of short-distance travel within short periods of time (Čavlek, 1998), usually by tourist agencies, in several languages.

Tourist guides acquire their certification by education in high education institutions and are members of professional associations for which they pay membership. Certification in the traditional tourist guiding, therefore, represents a mark of standard and quality, at the same time limiting inventiveness and flexibility in realization of special programs and satisfaction of specific demand needs, which require authentic experiences and presentation of a destination's special, "off the beaten track", features. The response to the demand is recognized in sharing economy and peer-to-peer organized guided tours. However, given the organizational and educational aspects, as well as the issues of volatile demand, the aforementioned two forms of tourist guiding are often opposed regarding the legislative framework and tax liabilities also in the area of the grey economy, where cash monetary transactions and issues of tax payment dominate (UTVA, undated).

In the identification of areas of attractiveness which can become objects of tourist visits, organized tours and sightseeing, as segments of particular importance, Pančić Kombol (2006) recognizes: archaeological sites, architecture (ruins, famous structures, whole cities), cultural institutions, including museums, galleries, festivals and various events, performing arts in the form of music, dance, drama, theatre and movies, linguistic and literary studies, religious events and pilgrimages, as well as whole cultures and subcultures. The listed categories represent a basis for the development of classical, traditional tours (guided tours and sightseeing), but also for specific themed tours, based on special interests and hobbies and which are organized and carried out through sharing, peer-to-peer economy, in the tourism destination.

When considering traditional guided tours, their characteristics are emphasized, as is evidenced in the short term of sightseeing, in achieved psychological safety, in avoidance of undesired situations with the local population and thus, by means of them, expenditure and choice of locations which tourists visit (Vukonić, 2003). At the same time, traditional guided tours combine passive participation with active ways of organization of time and activities and it is possible to achieve the users' segmentation itself by the criteria of income, demographics and areas of interest (Dulčić, 2005; Migacz & Petrick, 2018).

McCannel (2011) shows how strategies intended to attract tourists carry unintended consequences when they migrate to other domains of life and reappear as "staged authenticity." When considering the perceived value of sightseeing, Altinay and Poudel (2015) claim that sightseeing, as one of the most popular holiday activities, tends to be remembered by tourists as an activity that ensures fun and enjoyment rather than educational value.

Peer to peer sightseeing

Sharing economy is a trend that has been growing increasingly popular over the years and rapidly changing the face of tourism (Grueman, 2018; Davidson & Infranca, 2015). P2P guide services emerged as one of the trends in the social media, dealing with the travel industry, together with other services such as recommendation engines for travel, travel friend finders, special interests' networks (e.g. Peakery), tools to share trips and communities based around products (e.g. AirBnB). It is difficult to categorize each P2P encounter, namely sightseeing experience, discuss Johannesson and Lund (2017) and continue that each tourist encounter is a moment of collaboration, a becoming space of co-creation that can turn out in different ways.

Various tourism motives are an important dimension in tourism research, state Seabra, Vicente, Silva, & Abrantes (2014) and continues that many key questions related to tourism activities can be answered through motivation study, such as why people travel, why they visit some destinations and choose certain activities. Tourist motivation is the crucial factor to success in the tourism industry and the concept of motivation and attraction is related to tourists' satisfaction at the destination. Destination marketing affirms possibilities of arranging more tourism activities and organizing niche products involving personal engagement, co-creation and innovative concepts (Zatori, 2016). For instance, Kolar (2019) combines motivation concepts and themes and presents sightrunning as an idea that synergically mashes together running as the main and themed as an addition to local knowledge tours at a proper pace, further mediating and affecting participants' experience. Accordingly, when considering tourism products, the preferences for different types of sightseeing tour providers emerge. Sightseeing tours related to niche tourism present a platform for new experience development (Risen, 2013). By definition, tourist niches are segments of the tourist market focused on specific consumer tourist groups and on consumers' needs themselves; as a rule, they are characterized by the aspiration for informality, sustainable development and preservation of the environment and they determine the tourist niches. Product development and tourist niche services are related to the very character of tourism, which is activated by tourist niches, elaborate Pavia, Grzinic, and Floricic (2014). Namely, tourist niche tourism is active tourism, oriented towards new events and experiences, as opposed to the standard destination holiday tourism.

In principle, tourist niches and the form of tourism they represent can be divided into five main groups, which are the basis for selective P2P sightseeing tours: (1) Physical activity and sports orientation, (2) Environment oriented tourism, (3) Learning oriented tourism, (4), Cultural tourism and (5) Lifestyle oriented tourism, state Pavia, Grzinic, and Floricic (2014).

The main goal of online tour and activity sharing services is to connect travelers with small, independent companies on the ground or individual experts and other volunteers to help plan and deliver tours and related experiences (Coldwell, 2016). The offerings are as diverse as the activities that can be found in any destination, from roller skating tours, tours in a convertible, a week tour with food and wine in addition to culinary classes, night life, photography, art, yoga or a nudist beach visit (Schor, 2014). Besides the variety of activities offered, one of the main advantages pointed out by users of P2P sightseeing lies in personal experiences with real people as guides. P2P users usually do not enjoy massive group tours with the same script for every group (Kane, 2016).

Younger tourists, who were born in the era of social networking sites and who are accustomed to online sharing behavior are more prone to this kind of service (Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016). Although direct distribution of travel activities is still dominant as the vast majority of tours and activity sales come from suppliers, a 2011 PhoCusWright study on the U.S. tours and activities sector found that the online distribution of travel activities is growing rapidly (Schaal, 2013b; Schetzina, 2011; Risen, 2013).

The aspect of free walking tours comprehended within the collaborative economy (Del Leal Londono & Medina 2017) present the tours as a manifestation of post-industrial tourism that creates a new economic relationship based on access to services and products without structured payment. The concept "pay what you want" discusses the free exchange of knowledge, experiences and skills. The prices which are paid are formed both as voluntary tips and as a recommended or predefined fee. Customers are able to test product quality and not to feel obliged to pay for it and, in that way, although new non-economic values are created, potential issues of quality, fair pricing and safety emerge. Furthermore, Bremser and del Mar Alonso Almeida (2018) discuss "lights and shadows" of the sharing economy, pointing to challenging issues and questions that should be discussed.

The market shows different levels of acceptance of peer tour guides. According to ShareTraveler repository in April 2017, there were over 40 similar services offering various P2P tours (O'Neill, 2014). In 1992, Big Apple Greeter in New York started as the first welcome visitor program, allowing residents to guide tourists and show them the local life for free (USA Today, 2010). However, globally recognized originators of the P2P guide model were found later, such as Toursbylocals in 2008, or Vayable in 2010 (Sharetraveler, 2017).

There are 490 peer-to-peer tourism related companies. According to the primary service they offer, a new classification could be proposed. According to the new typology, P2P companies could be diversified and grouped into:

- activities
- hospitality services
- transport services
- other travel related services (e.g. currency exchange, pet sitting, package delivery etc.).

The sharing economy companies offer their services from globally to locally. According to the geographical diffusion, Europe dominates the offer side, followed by North America, while the Africa and the Pacific regions are left a bit behind. That is possibly related to the economic status of the local residents of each region and the facilities that they are ready to offer which should meet the standards of the globalized world.

In 2017, according to Sharetraveller (2017), there were 490 P2P companies in tourism, out of which 40 were related to tours. In 2019, the total P2P tourism companies listed on the same source is 500, of which 44 are providers of tours alone or in combination with other services. This represents an increase of 10%, which indicates that P2P tours are on the rise.

According to the authors' empirical research of the number of P2P tours in European capitals (2017, unpublished), Paris was at the top of the list, featuring 555 tours available, followed by London (302), Madrid (246), Amsterdam (240) and Rome with over 200 tours. Riga was the only capital with no tours offered on any website researched, based on the list provided by Sharetraveler (2017). These figures should be viewed with caution, as the same tours might have been listed on more than one website, and therefore further qualitative analyses are necessary. In 2014 Amsterdam was the first city to launch the "Sharing City" campaign and to officially become Europe's first named sharing city. This city has embraced a diversity of sharing activities, in both digital and non-digital forms of the sharing economy (Dredge & Gyimothy, 2015, 2017).

Methodology

The authors chose Croatia to gain an insight into P2P sightseeing from local residents' and tourists' perspectives. To gain an insight into local residents' attitudes and their role in offering P2P sightseeing, a questionnaire was developed and completed by a convenience sample of 73 graduate and undergraduate students of Juraj Dobrila University of Pula. Besides the classical socio-demographic questions, the survey consisted of just a single question about whether they are familiar with, have offered/currently offer or if they will offer tours to tourists. The sample of students consisted of 44 (60.27%) of female respondents. Most students were 18-23 years old (60%). All students came from Croatia.

The survey of tourists' attitudes towards peer-to-peer sightseeing was conducted in March 2017 in the Croatian region of South Istria. The research included a questionnaire and the sample consisted of 117 participants, representing a response rate of 81%, which was processed using statistical methodology. The questions included demographic issues, level of personal experience and knowledge and Likert 1-5 scale of attitudes. The demographic indicators showed that 48% of respondents were male and 52% female. The classification according to the respondents' age points to the fact that 46.3% of young to middle aged tourists (up to 35 years of age), 44.4% of middle to older aged tourists (36-55 years of age) and 9.3% of older aged tourists (over 85 years of age) took part in the survey. In relation to the nationality and country of origin, it was evidenced that respondents came from the following seven emissive markets: Germany 22.9%, Italy 20.8%, Austria 16.7%, Croatia and Great Britain 9.4% each, Slovenia 6.25%, Switzerland 3.1% and other emissive markets, among which are Portugal and Japan, with 11.4%.

Results

An insight into peer-to-peer guided tours in Croatia - local residents' and tourists' perspectives

As stated above, the local residents' perspectives were obtained from the younger population. The majority of surveyed youngsters are familiar with the possibilities of sharing economy in tourism (results presented in Table 3) and have heard of P2P sightseeing (96.83%). Only five respondents (7.94%) have offered or are currently offering tours themselves. Also, five respondents are willing to provide this service in the future, whereas for two of them it would be a debut. The results are also presented in table 3 in comparison with tourists' answers.

***Table 1**. Familiarity with selected P2P tourism companies – a comparison of tourists and young local residents*

Peer to Peer services	Familiarity according to tourists (n=117)	Frequency (%)	Familiarity according to residents(n=73)	Frequency (%)
Airbnb	51	43.6	13	20.3
Couchsurfing	31	26.5	14	21.9
Uber	59	50.4	56	87.5
BlaBlaCar	35	29.9	32	50.0
Home exchange	27	23.1	14	21.0
Other	12	10.3	5	7.8

Source: Authors' research

The results from Table 1 show that, when considering sharing economy companies, most tourists have heard of Uber (50.4%), followed by Airbnb (43.6%) and BlaBlaCar (29.0%). The vast majority of young residents have heard of Uber (87.5%) and BlaBlaCar (50.0%), followed by Couchsurfing (21.9%) and Airbnb (20.0%). The results which show a difference in familiarity among tourists and local residents indicate, when analyzing Airbnb as one of the most popular providers of accommodation services in tourism within the concept of sharing economy, that, although there is a demand of this type of service, the local residents are not sufficiently familiar with this type of accommodation concept. This leads to the conclusion that there is a need for education and knowledge sharing at all levels and segments of society.

Furthermore, the following question was asked in the research: "Are you familiar with sharing economy, services offered through specialized websites where you can use different services that locals offer to tourists?" The results were analyzed, both at a general level, exploring the general sample of tourists, and by focusing on a chosen segment. The authors took into consideration the youth population so that the comparability with the youth segment of services providers was achieved.

***Table 2.** Familiarity with P2P sightseeing – comparison between tourists (general sample), young tourists and young local residents*

Answer	Familiarity tourists–general (n=111)	Frequency (%)	Familiarity young tourists (n=48)	Frequency (%)	Familiarity residents (n=71)	Frequency (%)
I've heard about this service	47	42.34	24	50.00	61	85.91
I've used this service	37	33.33	19	3.58	5	7.04
I will use this service	27	2.,32	5	10.42	5	7.04

Source: Authors' research

The replies presented in Table 2 indicate that, when considering the general sample, 42.34% of tourists had only heard about P2P sightseeing, 33.33% of them had used this type of tourism service and 24.32% of those who took the tours showed an intention to use the service in the future. All respondents were familiar with peer-to-peer services in tourism.

In comparison with the group sample of young local residents' attitudes, a large difference is noticeable. The data shows that 85.91% of young local residents have heard about P2P tours, but that only 7% had used and show an intention to use the service in the future. The demographic sample was further analyzed, and the results show that 50.00% of the youth sample have heard about P2P tours, 39.58% took the tour with a local guide, but that only 10.42% of them showed an intention to use this service in the future. It could be concluded that the young population is better informed about peer-to-peer tours; there were a larger number of consumers within the group who had used the service and a lower number of potential users, which indicates that respondents familiar with P2P tours who wanted to use tours with local guides already did so, thus resulting in a reciprocally lower number of those who did not intend to try this service.

Questions posed to research the attitudes of tourists towards future decisions regarding peer-to-peer sightseeing. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement of each statement where the scale for evaluation was arranged from 1 -5 (Likert scale).

Table 3. *Attitudes of tourists – P2P sightseeing (n=112)*

Attitude **1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I would like to visit attractions in the destination with a local guide, the license is not important.	32	30	28	11	11
%	28.57	26.79	25.00	9.82	9.82
Informal tour guides can better explain and focus on special "hidden" attractions - "discover undiscovered"	29	29	38	9	7
%	25.89	25.89	33.93	8.04	6.25
I agree to pay more peer-to-peer themed informal tour guides because of extra theme and story telling	18	23	41	17	13
%	16.07	20.54	36.61	15.18	11.61
I would choose an unofficial tour guide instead of a licensed one because of cheaper price	20	24	36	15	17
%	17.86	21.43	32.14	13.39	15.18

Source: Authors' research

The results shown in Table 3 show that 55.35% of respondents are willing to visit a tourist destination and its attractions with unlicensed guides while the license is very important for 19.64% of them. More than half of the respondents (51.79%) believe that unlicensed sightseeing guides can better explain and focus on special "hidden" attractions in the destination – "discover undiscovered" while 14.29% of the respondents do not agree with this statement.

Regarding spending and costs of a sightseeing guide, only one third of respondents (36.60%) were willing to pay more for thematic P2P sightseeing, only 26.7% would not do so and the results also show that there were a large number of undecided respondents (36.61%). When considering pricing as an issue, 39.29% of respondents would rather choose an unlicensed sightseeing guide because of the cheaper price, 32.14% of them were undecided, while 28.57% (13.39% + 15.18%) stated that the price is not the deciding factor for their decision.
Sightseeing with a local guide (not certified) is important for inspiring a destination stay – special experience, and thus is rated with 3.4 (average grade out of 5 max.), STDEV 0.8, according to 113 responses.

Interestingly, the statements related to the price of P2P tours provoked the strongest reactions among respondents. Although the strongest attitude is related to the cheaper price ("free" or "recommended tips based") of the unofficial tour guides, the second ranked attitude is related to the willingness to pay additional amounts for extra theme or storytelling provided by informal tour guides. This could be related to the perception of consumers that they obtain a cheaper price and better value when communicating with locals, booked through an innovative and creative distribution platform. Therefore, within this research, the pricing policy importance is investigated and the answer to the question "Are P2P tours really cheaper than classic tours or is it only a perception/cliché?" has emerged.

Stronger attitudes towards extra experiences provided by P2P tours are evident in the high score (Table 4) of the statement dealing with special "hidden attractions" and "discovering undiscovered". The lowest ranking statements from the questionnaire revealed that local guides (certified or not) are not of paramount importance for information gathering and for creating an inspiring destination stay.

Conclusion and further research

The novelty of this study is that it has undertaken a first systematic exploration of P2P tours used by tourists for the enhancement of experience during their destination stay, away from the traditional tour guided services. The results reveal opportunities for more careful investigation of P2P tours to refine tourism theory and practice. The paper extends the ongoing discussion on the role of sharing economy in the management of destination stays. Therefore, from a practical perspective, a number of implications can emerge from the results, mostly for the creation of new and enhancement of existing tourist experiences during destination stays. For tourism companies and destinations, this knowledge can be beneficial to better understand the current state in the P2P tour guide market. This can lead to the development of new services that will respect the current tourist needs. At the same time, traditional tour guide services can be re-designed to make better use of new P2P trends, as the results show that the tour guide license is of paramount importance for most respondents. Moreover, the results indicate a stronger demand for selective niche tourism products and experiences "off the beaten track" and "discovering undiscovered" programs and tours.

The EU sharing economy market is growing and its peak is expected once the legislative framework is in place. There can be several other possible explanations for this, such as the complexity of starting an unorthodox business from the viewpoint of financial support or administrative procedures; the reserves that consumers hold about online activities or the fact that consumers are sometimes reluctant to outsource activities (Demary, 2015). However, sharing economy creates vast economic, social and legal opportunities as well as challenges (Gordo, Rivera & Apestegia, 2016). The assessment of the existing EU and national legislation for the sharing economy confirms that there are significant implementation gaps and areas of poor economic performance (Goudin, 2016).

In the presentation of the tour offer important issues are reliability and safety, which are among the key stumbling stones of modern tourism, so collaborative economy and peer-to-peer sightseeing tour providers should endeavor to continuously pay attention to these, and all other service quality aspects. This situation, therefore, presents a call to action to redefine the concepts of classical tour guides vs. P2P tour providers, while responsibilities, scope of work and adequate monitoring should be clearly prescribed.

Furthermore, in practice, some offers and websites become invalid and non-accessible over time. The situation where local guides resign from guiding activity without cancelling their offer affects the functionality, the quality and the perception of P2P sightseeing tour marketing and promotion.

The sample size of both performed researches of tourism offer and demand for P2P tours is too small to allow generalization, and therefore it should be further expanded. The implications for further research should be focused on generational division and youth. The millennials segment is recognized as a major potential provider and consumer of sharing economy in general and, respectively, peer-to-peer sightseeing tours. A new question arises in consideration of pricing strategies. Namely, it should be researched weather users would prefer P2P tours if the prices of the latter or of an official sightseeing tour guide were the same.

In order to ensure an adequate balance between creative freedom for tourism businesses in the quest for full economic potential and the necessary regulatory protection, new European actions are necessary (Goudin, 2016). This paper tapped the issue of a small part of the sharing economy in Europe before the announced regulations are launched. Future research should definitely focus on assessing the impacts after the new legal framework. Currently, the EU is in the process of modification of the legal framework in order to remove obstacles and threats of the grey economy that would cause tax evasion and legitimacy issues, to the adequate development of sharing economy.

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