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The social practices of hosting P2P social dining events: insights for sustainable tourism

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ABSTRACT

In many ways, the expansion of commercial for-profit, P2P social dining platforms has mirrored those within mobility and accommodation sectors. However its dynamics and impacts have received less consideration to date, with a notable paucity of attention to the hosts of social dining events. The aim of this paper is to address this research lacuna. Through its exploration of the social dining platforms VizEat in Athens and Eatwith in Barcelona, this paper identifies, analyses and compares the social practices of hosts around their social dining events in two key tourist destinations in Europe. Data is gathered through multiple methods from participating in and observing social dining events in each city to interviews with key stakeholders in the P2P social dining process (such as hosts, platform employees and ambassadors). The research reveals how dynamic rules, tools, skills and understandings shape and reshape the performance of hosting social dining events. It exposes tensions and ongoing negotiations between hosts and guests regarding matters of authenticity and privacy, an uneven risk burden between hosts and platforms with regards liability and scant regard for matters of sustainability. As a result there is little alignment between P2P social dining and the goals of sustainable tourism.

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Introduction

Digital platforms have become an increasingly familiar means of enjoying, acquiring or exchanging goods, services and experiences in the 21st Century. Indeed, the shift to platform-based trading has been depicted as a "third great economic revolution" (Munger, 2018, p. 391), both in the way that the businesses are organised and with respect to who is involved in the various stages of production and consumption. As this Special Issue highlights, these changes have already been identified as disruptive with respect to mobility (e.g. Uber and other ride sharing apps) and short-term accommodation (e.g. Airbnb and other similar short-term letting sites), with impacts and governance challenges of such peer-to-peer (P2P) service platforms increasingly well-documented, if not resolved (Davies et al., 2017). However, examination of P2P platforms within the food sector has been less forensic (Davies, 2019), with specific consideration of P2P social dining still in its infancy and dominated by the experiences of guests (Corigliano & Bricchi, 2018; Ketter, 2019).

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P2P social dining involves meal-based experiences advertised through an online platform as a means for hosts and guests (including tourists) to connect and socialize over food and drinks. While existing tourism research has documented the value which tourists place on experiencing a domestic setting with locals (Bell, 2015), and benefits which might flow to hosts (Wang, 2007), the practices and impacts of P2P social dining from a hosts' perspective are largely unknown. In response, the aim of this paper is to identify, analyse and compare the social practices of hosting exhibited at P2P social dining events in Athens and Barcelona.

Providing a novel comparative contribution to the literature, this paper examines the rules, tools, skills and understandings that shape hosting practices (Davies et al., 2014) as a precursor to considering the sustainability credentials of P2P social dining. Existing research on the social practices of eating together is examined, before focusing on P2P social dining studies specifically. Highlighting gaps in exsting literature, and drawing insights from tourism research exploring sustainable livelihoods, we consider the opportunities and challenges for establishing the sustainability impacts of P2P social dining. The methodological approach adopted is then outlined, with Athens and Barcelona contextualised and illustrative case studies of P2P social dining events in both cities presented. Finally, key insights from the empirical data are outlined including a prospective agenda for further extending analysis of the sustainability of P2P social dining platforms.

Social practices, social dining and the challenges of sustainability in P2P

Social practices are embodied, routinized human activities which are mediated by a combination of objects, tools and technologies and artefacts (e.g. the material stuff involved in the social practices), and performed in the context of symbolic meanings, ideas and aspirations, as well as skills and understandings (e.g. competencies) (Davies et al., 2014; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016). Practices are also shaped by rules, including social rules and formal legislation, such that while they might be experienced individually they are always socially constituted. Due to this social constitution, practices are dynamic, changing as the rules, tools, skills and understandings involved evolve. We adopt this social practice oriented framework – based on a rules, tools, skills and understandings format – to explore hosts experiences of P2P social dining in Athens and Barcelona.

In the case of social dining, the emergence of platform economies brought new technologies and tools, and by association new opportunities and possibilities, to shape symbolic meanings and aspirations around what it means to share food with others. Certainly social dining, as with eating more broadly, is currently practiced as a matter of convention rather than through authoritative regulation (Janta & Christou, 2019). Although, as will be outlined later in this paper, while P2P social dining might be performed in ways which make regulatory responsibilities opaque, the means and mechanisms of performance do in fact come under the purview of state organisations and regulatory agencies. At the same time, the skills and understandings of what it means to engage in social dining, as both host and guest, will also evolve as access to, and experience of, such platforms expands. P2P Social dining is then a recursive process, where the repetition of ICT-mediated social dining events establishes new ways of doing things, involving new standards and rules. In this paper, our analysis of social dining is informed by the parameters of social practice's theoretical framework as it usefully contests individualist explanations of behaviour, permitting a focus on practical activities and helping to compare the performance of P2P social dining across locations, in this case Athens and Barcelona.

P2P social dining

P2P social dining experiences bear some common characteristics with other forms of commercial platform-based exchange, particularly in the accommodation sector. Social dining often takes

place in people's homes, thus blurring traditional boundaries between domestic and income generating spaces, and they use similar systems of reputational rating as a means to generate systems of trust between all parties. There are also some similarities between the expectations of hospitability from paying guests generated through short-term letting platforms and those who enter the home of a host to enjoy a meal. However, social dining experiences focus primarily on goods that are physically consumed, raising the levels of intimacy involved in the experience. As vital matter, the food consumed at the social dining events also has a limited window of edibility, which brings unique temporal risks to the P2P exchanges (Davies, 2012a; Weymes & Davies, 2019).

Research has begun to explore the characteristics and motivations of those who seek social dining opportunities (Corigliano & Bricchi, 2018). Both quantitative (Ketter, 2019) and qualitative studies (Privitera, 2016) conclude that social dining guests are consumers "looking for the commodification of the sharing economy into a trendy, authentic and social consumption experience" (Ketter, 2019, p. 1072). Both also find that guests stress the importance of intimate social interaction and the added (albeit unpredictable) benefits that may be generated through social dining compared with restaurant experiences. For guests, conviviality and commensality (Mortara & Fragapane, 2018), alongside the evocation of an authentic geographical sense of place through food, are key motivators. The food consumed in social dining settings, as with other studies of collective feasts, becomes more than mere sustenance and transforms itself into an immaterial "cultural artefact" (Everett & Aitchison, 2008, p. 151). This has been discussed by interrogators of culinary tourism (Bell, 2015) as a mechanism to build and exchange cultural capital, with tourists hoping to penetrate further inside cultures, learning about food history, production and everyday food practices. As such, tourists engaging in social dining engage in a form of networked relational tourism (Marques & Matos, 2020), emphasising interpersonal relationships, interactions and exchanges for participants mediated through the platform.

While few studies have explored the impacts of P2P social dining on hosts in settings which are both commercialised and domesticated, there are clear parallels with analyses of travel homestays (e.g. McIntosh et al., 2011). This literature expresses concern that the commercialisation of domestic spaces compromises the ability of hosts to be their authentic selves (Wang, 2007). Certainly, further understanding is needed with regards to how hosts in commercial P2P social dining settings create "complex hybrids that convey competing conceptions of home and work, inclusion and privacy, domestic hospitableness and commercial hospitality" (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007, p. 336). Potential sustainability issues of homebased P2P social dining in terms of its impacts on social structures, income diversification and environmental resource consumption are addressed in the following sub-section.

Sustainability of P2P platform economies: insights from sustainable tourism

For tourism to be sustainable, economic, environmental and social impacts must all be considered (Xu et al., 2020). However, establishing impact across these arenas is not always straightforward, not least because it relies on access to appropriate metrics and data (Mackenzie & Davies, 2019). In the P2P sector to date, most studies have focused on one dimension of sustainability rather than conducting comprehensive sustainability impact analyses. For example, in the P2P accommodation sector, which perhaps has most synergies with P2P social dining, one study found Airbnb to be more ecologically sustainable when compared with traditional tourist accommodation due to its lower level of resource use and waste generation (Midgett et al., 2017). In another case, P2P accommodation sharing was found to be financially beneficial for consumers in some contexts as it introduced greater competition into the marketplace, lowering hotel room pricing (Zervas et al., 2017). Research in the US also identifies spin-off benefits for overall employment in the hospitality, tourism, and leisure industries (Dogru et al., 2020). However these benefits can also create challenges. It is clear that increased short-term letting in cities, for

example, has produced negative social externalities, such as rising rents, overcrowded city centres and displacement of local communities, leading to reactions from residents and regulators aimed at reducing these impacts (von Briel & Dolnicar, 2020).

While sustainability analyses of P2P social dining have not yet occurred, studies of sustainable culinary tourism (Alonso et al., 2018) and sustainable livelihoods analyses of homestays (Anand et al., 2012) provide some preliminary insights and important synergies with the social practice framing utilised in this paper. Livelihoods include the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required to create a means for living. Capabilities map on to social practice's notion of skills, while assets incorporate both the notion of understandings (social resources) and tools (material resources). Under the livelihoods framework, sustainable livelihoods will be achieved through access to, and protection and enhancement of, these livelihood capabilities, assets and activities (Scoones, 1998). Central to the framework is attention to a range of formal and informal organisational and institutional factors that influence sustainable livelihood outcomes. We consider these factors in our social practice reading as rules (which can be social or legal). A sustainable livelihood is then defined as one that "can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base" (Chambers & Conway, 1992 cited by Tao & Wall, 2009, p. 91). Being people-centred, a sustainable livelihood through tourism "should not be the driver of community lifestyle if this direction overrides local community needs" (Wu & Pearce, 2014, p. 444), with Wu and Pearce (2014) also flagging the impact of sporadic and complementary income from tourism on the sustainability of livelihoods. This paper explores the relevance of these insights for establishing the practice and sustainability potential of hosting P2P social dining events through in-depth examination of P2P hosting experiences in two cities. The methodological underpinnings of this research are outlined in the following section.

Methods

One field researcher resided in each of the two case study cities – Athens and Barcelona – immersing themselves in P2P social dining, exploring the online spaces of social dining platforms, interviewing key stakeholders and engaging in dining events as guests. These two cities were selected for comparison because they are both member states of the European Union and therefore have similar overarching governance frameworks as a result. Both are key tourist destinations in their respective countries and both had active hosts on P2P social dining platforms at the time of the research. Initially, all procedural guidance, reviews, events and hosts profiles on the platforms were examined and a user profile was set up in order to book social dining events. Social dining events were then selected at a variety of price points to experience the range of events being offered. The research essentially followed the process of social dining from start to finish, tracing the dining experience from the online booking stage, to attending the meal, making fieldnotes, posting a review, viewing others' posts, and interviewing key stakeholders to hear their reflections on those hosts from the company's perspective. In this paper, data from engagements with Eatwith in Barcelona and VizEat in Athens are presented as illustrative cases. VizEat, founded in Paris by Camille Rumani and Jean Michel Petit in 2014 (now operating under the name Eatwith following its acquisition of that USA-based competitor business in 2017) operates in more than 130 countries. VizEat has raised multiple millions of dollars from financial backers and acquired other competitors including GrubClub (in 2018) and Cookening (in 2015). Eatwith, initially a US company headquartered in San Francisco, was established in 2012. It had hosts in more than 50 countries at the time of its acquisition by VizEat in 2017. VizEat's acquisition of Eatwith was seen as a means to expand its global profile by connecting its global tourism partners with Eatwith's active hosts. Rather than being a pure P2P exchange platform, VizEat also uses tourism agents to provide block bookings for hosts.

The research on Eatwith in Barcelona occurred between March and June 2017, prior to VizEat's takeover of Eatwith in September 2017. There were approximately sixty active hosts on the platform in Barcelona at the time, although around two hundred hosts had been approved. While the website appeared to offer numerous events, many were the same event run by the same host repeated weekly. In Barcelona, the researcher attended events described as: Catalan traditional; international cuisine; and "demo" meals (where new hosts menus and events are vetted by the platform's Country Manager). Interviews with Eatwith hosts and the Eatwith Country Manager were conducted, recorded and transcribed, and four social dining events were attended where the researcher engaged with all participants and created field notes.

In Athens the research took place over a period of seven months from April 2017 to October 2017 during which time the platform was only emerging as an active space for social dining. Initially the platform indicated there were 17 hosts listing events in Athens, ten of which were already providing tourist services in the city, such as gourmet walking tours and culinary schools, six marketed themselves as private hosts and one was registered as a food company that provides work experience for migrants and refugees. Only one host, the food company, provided an alternative to Greek traditional food. This company served food from the culinary traditions of the migrants and refugees who it worked with. Applications to participate in events offered by all six private hosts were made. However, only one host answered within the stated 48 hours limit set by the platform and so the other five applications were cancelled. The one host who did respond provided direct connections to the other five private hosts and in total six dinners were attended. Interviews with all hosts were conducted after social dining events. Two Ambassadors for VizEat who were promoting the platform in Athens, were also interviewed.

In both cities the interview transcripts and fieldnotes from engagements and experiences were transcribed and entered into NVivo, a qualitative analysis software package, and then coded to a suite of nodes relating to the practice of social dining. This included identifying data related to the tools of social dining such as hosts' domestic settings and access to ICT, as well as the material dimensions of their offerings (i.e. the food itself). Nodes relating to skills and understandings include data from questions around the motivations and experiences of hosts, while the rules component of the social practice involves data relating to both social norms and regulatory legislation. Unique identifiers are provided for quotes from interviews and for data from each social dining event which was attended. This identifier details the nature of the participant (e.g. Host, Country Manager, Researcher), the location (Athens or Barcelona) and interview or social dining event number. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

P2P social dining platforms: hosting experiences in Barcelona and Athens

The similar operational procedures of VizEat in Athens and Eatwith in Barcelona open up possibilities for comparative research, particularly as both cities also have tourism as a key economic activity and were negatively impacted by the economic recession that took hold globally post-2008. Nonetheless they also exhibit unique characteristics. This section presents a summary of the cities contexts and two illustrative social dining events, which exemplify the rules, tools, skills and understandings that underpin them from the hosts' perspective.

Barcelona

Barcelona is Spain's second largest city and one of the most densely populated European city-regions (Area Metropolitana de Barcelona, 2019). Following the economic crash of 2008, Barcelona has continued to suffer from unemployment and economic austerity along with the rest of Spain. Economic precarity has fostered the creation of diverse economies, including social and solidarity activities that go beyond typical capitalist approaches (Ajuntament de Barcelona ND). However, until the COVID 19 lockdown in early 2020, unemployment was typically lower in Barcelona than other areas, with a buoyant

tourist economy partly responsible for this. In 2019, Barcelona was the 33rd most visited city worldwide and 8th in Europe (Yasmeen, 2019). Within the tourist industry, gastronomic and culinary attractions such as food markets (e.g. La Boqueria), high profile restaurants (e.g. El Bulli, El Celler de Can Roca) and its world famous chefs (Ferrán Adriá, Joan Roca) have contributed to Barcelona and Catalonia being noted as one of the top culinary destinations in the world. This booming tourist industry is, however, placing pressure on residents' quality of life and leading to anti-tourist protests and movements (Hughes, 2018). Fieldwork took place during the uprising of the Catalan Independence Movement where increased protests and demonstrations were experienced across Barcelona and Catalonia.

High-end Catalan cuisine with Eatwith

The meal is highly anticipated – numerous reminders for the upcoming event are sent with supporting directions. On arrival we find our hosts' (Marta and Anna) apartment is a hidden gem with clean polished surfaces, a well-set table, and tasteful paintings and ornaments on display. All elements of the apartment are impressive – a clean, open-plan, well-organised kitchen with modern gadgetry. To add to the performance, the final touches of meal preparation are conducted by the host in front of guests. As the Country Manager stated, "it's an amazing space. I just wanted to live there. I'm like, 'you can go to my house, I go to your house!'." Guests take photos to capture their experience, the apartment and each other.

Marta and Anna are friendly, polite and welcoming, and able to converse comfortably in English. A seat is offered and a drink placed in your hand while other guests arrive. The hosts are middle-aged and middle-class, they have travelled extensively, understand tourists' needs and desires, and offer small talk about the city and themselves as an introduction to the meal. They explain how they find pleasure in cooking and are keen to see where this economic opportunity takes them. The income they receive from Eatwith events is complementary to their main employment currently, but they are exploring possibilities for transitioning from amateur host to professional chef. P2P social dining is a testbed for them. As Marta explains, "I love cooking anyway, so … I became hooked! And, you know, like one hundred and fifty people later already I'm still doing dinners."

The positive reputation of the hosts means they rarely have an empty seat at their table, despite the event being priced at the higher end of the Eatwith spectrum. To ensure maximum capacity they also offer this meal on other social dining platforms, including VizEat and Trip Advisor. Guests on this occasion include a young Canadian couple on their honeymoon who could not afford to experience such high quality food in restaurants and a cluster of American couples seeking more personal insights of Spain. According to the Country Manager, most of the guests to this event are middle income or higher with an interest in culture and "they always love to have a different experience. They don't feel like tourist people." Many guests become repeat customers. Indeed, the young honeymooners had attended this event three times in total.

Marta and Anna use highly-valued, organic Catalan ingredients sourced that morning from the local, fresh food market. Guests mentioned "Michelin Star" elements of the social dining experience in terms of the quality of ingredients, the presentation of the food and the hosting. As this meal has a high price compared to average restaurant choices in Barcelona it places the offering firmly in the wealthy international tourist bracket and too expensive for many Barcelona natives. During the meal, each dish is carefully described, where it comes from, its history, and how it is prepared. As Marta said:

> We don't just serve a menu. We talk to them [the guests] and we show them our culture or our costumes … and every time we give tips for restaurants, to go out to the places that aren't very touristic, because they don't want to be part of the maze of tourist people.

Non-national cuisine dining event with Eatwith

While many events advertised during the research focused on expensive Catalan cuisine as described above, there were also menu offerings from beyond the region and Spanish cuisine

more broadly. This meets demand for diverse food events from both travellers and locals. As the Country Manager for Eatwith explains:

> In some other countries, for example, Israel, it's basically only locals. I mean, others such as Paris it's only foreigners. So it's like a pretty special case [in Barcelona] that we have like half of it of foreigners and half of it of locals, and I think that it is because we have a very diverse offering.

One "meal from elsewhere" offered by Eatwith Barcelona is a Palestinian Feast by Adela who is in her mid-thirties, initially from Palestine, but well-travelled. Her profile on Eatwith reads: "I used to work as a journalist back home, then as an information consultant in an asylum seekers reception centre in Norway, and now I am working in Booking.Com."

The meal consisted of affordable ingredients served at a much lower price point than the high-end Catalan cuisine event. The host prepared a very full table carrying a multitude of dishes, and the Country Manager explained, "She's making the food of her mum and she's making huge amounts of it." Adela describes this meal on the Eatwith website as follows:

> [The] Middle east is like most Mediterranean regions, food is a huge part of our culture. I used to help both my grandma and my mum in the kitchen and I got all these small secrets which made their dishes … Due to the fact that I am living in Barcelona where I have the same climate which offers the same kind of fresh veggies, tasty fish and meat, I thought that this is the perfect chance to start serving traditional, healthy, tasty food made with love and enough time, served and presented in a modern way …

Adela's place is a shared, rented apartment. It is like going home to eat, where the dining space feels intimate and where the kitchen is tucked away and used, rather than put on display. It was described by the Country Manager as "not the most beautiful apartment." The homely feel creates an urge to help carry dishes to and from the table, yet being a paying guest creates the expectation of "staying put" to be served. While the food is enjoyable, it is the personal stories behind the meal that make the evening special. Explanations of the meanings, methods and ingredients bring diners together in a unique and unexpected way. The meal attracts a very mixed international crowd from multiple locations and the menu sparks conversations that are sometimes quite political and charged, departing from the "polite" dinner conversations experienced in other social dining settings.

Adela also welcomes her own friends to events, creating even more diverse social gatherings. At this event a Syrian guest arrived later in the evening, when cultural alcoholic beverages were offered beyond the set menu. The conversations continued to flow. Music was put on and the dining room transformed into a dance floor until the early hours of the morning. When the guests finally left, many exclaimed how much they would like to hang out together in Barcelona again and phone numbers were exchanged.

In terms of authenticity, this meal certainly provided direct experience of food from the hosts' life. The experience was like being at the table of a friend or family member, where conversations rise and fall, and the meal satiates mind, soul and body. Due to setting, the food and the hosting, social connections developed over the meal. The experience felt both "at home" and "social," rather than being only a commercial exchange.

Athens

Athens is the capital and largest city of Greece. It, along with the rest of Greece, was deeply impacted by the 2008 financial crisis and during the data collection period unemployment levels remained the highest in Europe, with youth employment in Greece peaking at 44% in 2017 (OECD, 2018). In response to the financial crisis, Athens, like Barcelona, has witnessed a flourishing of social and solidarity economy practices (Rakopoulos, 2014), with some of these focused specifically on supporting refugees and people seeking asylum. In 2018 alone, the number of asylum applications in Greece increased by 14%, reaching 65,000 (OECD, 2019), many of whom

arrive in Athens. At the time of the research Athens was re-establishing itself as a tourist destination (Panas et al., 2017).

Greek cuisine dining experience with VizEat

During the research period, all except one host on the VizEat platform in Athens offered a Greek dining experience, with baked aubergine (moussaka), spinach pies (spanakopita), and the wide variety of appetizers that are commonly shared at a beginning of a Greek meal (mezedes). Anna's meal was no exception. A highly educated woman in her late thirties, Anna welcomed us into a sleek minimalist flat in Kolonaki, an affluent area of central Athens. Guests were invited into her cosy dining room, which was separate from the small modern kitchen. There was no table cloth, but colourful placemats underneath the serving platters at the centre of the table. Anna's menu consisted of six mezedes, a main course and wine. The price, €46 per person, was high when compared with mainstream restaurant meals in Athens' at the time, where it was possible to eat well at a mezedepoleio – an informal restaurant serving mezedes – for about half the cost.

However, social dining is more than the food itself. Guests attend in order to have access to the way locals live, cook and share a meal. As Anna highlights below, she found that guests really want to meet a local and converse over food:

> The motivation is not the dinner, definitely. It's the communication with the locals. To sit down, not only have dinner – because they can have it everywhere – it's to exchange views with the locals. […] I wanted to use my love for food but to share it with other people and spread our culture, the Greek culinary culture to the world.

However, it is not that the hosts were without cooking skills. Anna, for instance, attended culinary school and the choice of dishes she prepared for dinner mirrored her knowledge of Greek traditions. She explained the history and the provenance of each dish, such as fried sardines savoro with vinegar, rosemary and onion, which dates back to the Venetian domination in the Aegean. Anna also takes pride in offering seasonal mezedes, pinpointing that during the summer, zucchini fritters served with tzatziki had to be part of the menu. Anna was highly skilled cook with a passion for the Greek culinary culture but she explained that the commitment to hosting entails considerable planning, shopping and preparation. It took a lot of effort to be a "good host":

> You should be very inviting, full of energy, because people are coming over; to start a conversation. For me, I have to say, I'm not the most extroverted person, so when I do this kind of home-dining … it takes a lot of energy […] you try to be as enthusiastic as possible because this is the reason why people come over to your house.

Anna was not only familiar with ICT, but also with P2P technologies which made the transition to becoming a VizEat host smooth. She was already familiar and comfortable with the concept of "stranger sharing" that P2P interactions generate. Anna was optimistic that technology would provide new ways for connecting people beyond their usual social networks, although she explains that hosting strangers had challenged her understanding of the rules of hospitality. For example, interest in the financial crisis and its economic and social consequences meant guests sometimes asked personal questions about how much hosts earned or how much they paid in rent.

On occasion, the regulatory rules of social dining were flagged by hosts as a matter of concern, particularly regarding hosts' liability for food safety, hygiene certification and taxation with respect to their VizEat activities. At the time of research these issues were a grey area for legislation in Greece. As Anna noted, navigating such greyness was something familiar to many in Greece:

> I don't feel a hundred percent safe, to be honest, although VizEat says that they are covered by an insurance company, by Lloyds. But at the local level I don't think I'm covered. […] Everybody's asking. But in Greece people are a bit used to trying to find the ways to go to get around it.

Non-national cuisine dining experience with VizEat

In Athens, the only non-Greek social dining experience offered during the fieldwork was "Homemade African Dishes" for €22 and it was a listed as being offered by a collective of chefs. The first request by the researcher to attend the African meal via VizEat was not answered within 48 hours, so the app automatically rejected it. After a few failed attempts, they wrote back apologising for not having answered and communicating that they would liaise with the chefs to establish their availability. A date was agreed via email and the platform was used only for paying the dinner fee for the researcher and their Greek research assistant. The day before the event the researcher received an email explaining that it would be more a party than a sit-down dinner, with the promise that many of the chefs would cook their own specialities and there would be music. All exchanges were with the collective's founder John, who managed the events and the online presence.

The dinner party was hosted on the rooftop of an apartment block, close to Nosotros, a reclaimed shared urban space in the buzzing heart of Exarcheia, a radical neighbourhood of Athens associated with anarchist groups. At the main entrance there was a buzzer with John's name and a shabby steep staircase that led up to John's apartment, where all doors were open and a Senegalese man indicated to continue straight to the rooftop. The poorly lit rooftop was arranged in a simple and minimal way, a plastic table and chairs for people to sit around, most of which were already taken by the chefs and their friends and families. A large wooden table served the buffet and a smaller one served as the bar where all the disposable plastic tableware was placed. Most of the food was pre-cooked and had already been placed on the buffet. Two barbecues were being used around which many men were busy grilling meat and fish. Arabic music was playing from a cell phone connected to a mini Hi-Fi, with power supplied from John's apartment with extension cords. The lighting was poor, with just a few lamps and scattered tea-lights meaning it was hard to move around the space comfortably, especially not knowing its layout and with cables running up from John's apartment.

As John confirmed, only the researcher and her assistant were paying guests. Nevertheless no one welcomed them on arrival, and they felt they were the uninvited ones at a private party. The researchers stood awkwardly between the buffet and the charcoal barbecues, facing the round table, and trying to make a connection with the people already conversing near the buffet. John finally introduced himself by offering some home-brewed beer. However, this first interaction was short, because the men around the barbecue called him to help. There was a sense of improvisation in the event. It did not seem that the group would usually organize this type of events for tourists or travelers. The atmosphere was extremely informal, as many guests seemed to know each other and were surrounded by their kids, roaming around freely and playing loudly around other guests.

When kebabs and octopus were brought to the table, people gathered around the buffet and started eating. The researchers were not invited to dig in and after waiting for others to finish helping themselves, they managed to get a plate of what was left on the buffet, meaning pies with rice, minced meat and nuts, a salad with lettuce, cucumber and parsley served without dressing, and a cold dry lasagna. Later, desserts like baklava, dates stuffed with pistachio and coconut, and cookies stuffed with walnuts were brought in by a Syrian woman. They were the most delicious part of the dinner and the researcher approached the lady, who spoke neither English nor Greek. Her son helped with the translation and explained that she made them at home. One Senegalese chef apologized because he had been unable to prepare any food for the event, having spent the day busy with a catering job. He also explained that every two weeks, they organised a free supper club where chefs can improve their skills trying out new

recipes. They saw this event as one of those rather than a dinner party with guests. The price of the ticket was €22, but the researchers ate very little.

Before leaving, the researcher approached John to say goodbye. He said that the collective's use of the platform was sporadic, because they prefer to take on large scale catering jobs which make more sense financially. Nonetheless, he was proud of the food on offer and remarked that it would not be financially sustainable to host dinner for that price. John also explained that the collective is registered as a food company, which was founded in 2015 motivated by the realisation that many newcomers were arriving in Greece with a strong culinary expertise but without the skills and certification necessary to run a food business. It was imagined as a means to provide job opportunities and food education for unemployed chefs, migrants or refugees. John was also skilled technologically, managing the IT aspect of the collective, using tools such as Trello and Excel, in order to manage the workload smoothly. Their aim was to provide steady salaries to a core group, but at the time of the research everyone was paid whenever a catering job was secured.

Comparing practices

The illustrative examples of hosted events outlined above provide an initial picture of the hosts perspectives on social dining, specifically identifying the opportunities and challenges generated by the events they host. While each host has a unique life history, a number of broad and common themes emerged. First and foremost, all private hosts took pleasure in cooking and sharing their culinary cultures and life experiences with others. The private hosts interviewed also had similar levels of education (e.g. high levels of education), socio-economic status (e.g. middle-class), digital technology skills and experience of other places and cultures (e.g. well-travelled). They recognised the importance of understanding the needs and desires of their guests, and all spoke good English. Other similarities revolved around the hosts common experiences of post-recession austerity, which made the economic opportunities that P2P social dining offered attractive. Although hosts appreciated the extra income gained from organising events, they all acknowledged that it was currently not sustainable as a full-time occupation. This was primarily because of the unpredictability in P2P guest requests and the seasonality of tourism, but also because of the physical and mental effort it takes to host regularly and successfully.

There were some differences between the cases examined. In Barcelona, Eatwith was well-established, while VizEat was at an early stage in Athens. While the researcher could attend a meal as an individual in Barcelona, in Athens the researcher needed to join an established tourist group to access the social dinners. Hosts' embeddedness in tourism also varied across the two platforms and cities. The hosts interviewed in Athens were already involved in tourism, where VizEat further promoted a range of activities tailored for tourist groups, such as pie making classes or market food tours. After VizEat bought Eatwith in September 2017, the company model changed to reflect the experience in Athens rather than Barcelona. There were also differences between the cities with respect to the types of food and service provided. This is more than the obvious material differences between Greek and Catalan cuisine and refers to the different types of events offered in the two cities. In the Athens events, the food was proudly home cooked, exemplifying simple, tasty and hearty fare. In Barcelona, the social dining events were more diverse both in preparation and presentation.

There were differences too in terms of technology and user experience of the P2P platform. With Eatwith in Barcelona all communication relating to the dining experience between guests and hosts was done through the platform, while in Athens and VizEat the platform was used only for the initial contact and for payment. All other communications were moved to non-platform mechanisms such as email or WhatsApp. This promoted more intimacy between host and guest as personal phone numbers had to be exchanged.

With respect to hospitality, dining experiences in both cities raised questions about how to act and interact during social dining events. This was particularly challenging during meals on the lower end of the price spectrum where homeliness was often emphasised in hosting styles and simple, tasty cooking is provided. The contrasts between the two social dining events in Barcelona illustrate this well. During social dining events in Athens the issues of developing socially acceptable practices for both host and guests related more to issues of boundary setting. Guests often expected access to personal spaces and information; looking inside fridges or asking the host how much hosts earnt. There were also more concerns around privacy expressed in Athens, perhaps because the hosts were less experienced than those in Barcelona, but also because they had experienced challenging behaviour with guests publicly posting photos of hosts and their homes on social media without asking permission. Strategies to manage matters of privacy were developed by hosts themselves or through networks the hosts created.

Sustainability and the social practices of hosting

Building on the insights gained from hosts' perspectives on P2P social dining, in this section we reflect on the rules and tools, skills and understandings that shaped hosts' performance of social dining activities in different settings. We conclude by consolidating the sustainability implications of these insights and provide a prospective agenda for future work at the intersection of P2P social dining platforms, tourism and sustainability.

The rules and tools of social dining

It has already been established that social practices of eating are replete with all kinds of social rules (see Warde, 2016) and social dining is no exception, even if these rules are in a constant state of negotiation. However, despite the tight regulations around land use and food safety in the realm of P2P food sharing (Davies et al., 2019), few hosts volunteered information about regulatory rules or other formal checks and balances governing their activities either during interviews or dining events. When prompted to discuss these rules, hosts largely said they trusted the platform to manage any regulatory requirements and risks if they were to arise. At the time of research there had been no cause for exploring whether this trust was justified or not.

However, trust issues have long been a point of contention for platform economies generally (Molz, 2014). A key way that P2P platforms, including VizEat and Eatwith, have addressed trust has been through online reputational rankings. Digital reputations become currency, even capital, in online platforms. On the VizEat and Eatwith platform, you could explore hosts' profiles, you could contact hosts through the platform and you could read reviews left by past guests (either on the platform or on TripAdvisor, a partner of Eatwith). However, the ranking is one-way; it only makes visible guests reviews of hosts and does not allow hosts to also review guests.

Beyond the procedural vetting process for hosts, both platforms state that they hold insurance for hosts and guests. This provision was acknowledged by interviewees, although there was little understanding of the parameters of that insurance. Indeed, in interviews neither Country Managers nor hosts were able to say what and who would be covered in the event of an issue at a social dining event. Ultimately, the bulk of responsibility falls on the guests and hosts to find out what local regulations might be in place in relation to food safety, taxation and liability more broadly. Such uneven allocation of responsibility between hosts and platforms has been identified as problematic in other P2P sectors (Woodcock & Graham, 2019), with calls for stronger standards for those who labour through them.

The tools employed by social dining hosts include their homes, kitchens, toilet facilities, storage and preparation devices, utensils and the very food itself. P2P social dining reflects a

networked kind of hospitality (Molz, 2014) in which ICT enables strangers to connect online and arrange offline encounters. The P2P platform provides no material supports for the acquisition of tools for delivering P2P social dining. Neither do they make allowances for differential access to digital devices and technological skills for engaging with them (addressed below). It is unsurprising then to find that those who were able to participate in P2P social dining were those who were already well-equipped with technological resources and material possessions that enable them to host dining events in an acceptable fashion for the platform. It is only available as a livelihood strategy for those with existing resources. So while the platforms offer additional and complementary income diversification opportunities, these are not accessible to everyone equally. As such it cannot be argued that P2P social dining provides an accessible option to achieve sustainable livelihoods in the absence of foundational material resources.

Skills and understandings of P2P social dining

While there were multiple reasons why people became social dining hosts in both cities, there was also some commonality, with hosts citing the career development and up-skilling opportunities that cooking at home for paying guests provided. Social dining events offered hosts the space to design and test new dishes in their homes and to learn new sets of cooking and hosting skills in the process without great financial burden and risk. However, while some hosts saw social dining as a way to get themselves "restaurant ready," others saw it as a means to get away from the busy, high-pressurised restaurant environment whilst still earning an income from cooking. Despite the existence of multiple motivations, a key driver for becoming a host was to generate income. As with other "sellers" on P2P platforms, such as car sharing drivers (Peticca-Harris et al., 2020), the social dining platform provided a means to generate this income while avoiding a large capital investment and significant bureaucracy. Yet none of the hosts' interviewed in this research used social dining as their only source of income, despite prices for the immersive experiences on offer being higher than many mid-price restaurants in central areas of both cities. This premium price also elevated expectations of guests at social dining experiences, which brings its own set of challenges.

As existing studies have already established (Corigliano & Bricchi, 2018; Ketter, 2019; Privitera, 2016), many guests are attracted to social dining to escape the commercial spaces of restaurants and experience authentic homecooked food, even if the food they are served is of restaurant quality and commercially priced. In the case of P2P social dining these culinary adventures take place in domestic spaces, and therefore create unparalleled moments of intimacy (Gyimóthy, 2016). Indeed, the Eatwith platform states that "discovery begins at home" and that social dining offers the opportunity to "eat something the way locals enjoy it." As with other P2P sectors (see Moon et al., 2019), hosts from both Athens and Barcelona were drawn to the interactions and social capital that social dining generates, describing the unexpected and positive social interactions they experienced through hosting. However, in both cities the curiosity of some guests about hosts lives and livelihoods was felt to be intrusive and there were several instances where hosts felt guests had overstepped the mark in terms of personal questioning, the publishing of photographs without permission or the exploration of personal spaces, such as fridges. Agreeing boundaries of hospitability and privacy is not a straightforward matter when social dining is based on a commercial transaction in a domestic setting as different economies of worth come together (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006). In our research, hosts articulated uncertainties about how best to navigate the line between being hospitable and open to contextualising the immersive and authentic experience that guests are seeking, while maintaining a degree of privacy and their own personal security.

Sustainability and social dining

We found that the P2P social dining platforms examined in this paper claim to bring opportunities for economic diversification, social interaction and cultural enrichment, but environmental benefits were not mentioned and neither made an explicit claim that their operations contribute towards more sustainable development. Benefits were often framed in an individualistic fashion, to those directly involved in the P2P exchanges, and make no reference to the broader, indirect (and potentially negative) impacts that P2P sharing can have on neighbourhoods, communities and cities.

Following, Verbeek and Mommaas (2008), the benefit of adopting a social practice framing, as we have in this paper, is that it permits analyses to move away from such individualism, connecting organisational and technological (rules and tools) issues with behavioural concerns (skills and understandings) in particular places. Of course, none of this means that a sustainability impact analysis cannot be undertaken of P2P social dining providing suitable data and metrics can be identified. Building on the work of Hunter (2002), existing tools such as touristic ecological footprint analysis could, for example, be applied to understand the demands of P2P social dining on the biosphere with the ecological footprint of a social dining event across its entire life-cycle calculated. However, issues of power, politics and regulatory responsibility would not be captured in such analyses despite being central to sustainable development in the P2P and tourism sector (Scheyvens, 2011). It is also possible to analyse the sustainability of P2P social dining at a municipal (Torres-Delgado & Lopez Palomeque, 2014) or local level (Alfaro Navarro et al., 2020) provided indicator sets are sensitive to the practices of P2P social dining that might go undetected if their work is not visible on municipal balance sheets. However, online tools do exist which have been designed to capture the sustainability aspects of ICT-mediated food sharing initiatives (see Mackenzie & Davies, 2019), which could be utilised by the P2P platforms to identify and communicate their sustainability impacts more transparently. However, it would need modification to establish whether P2P social dining provides a sustainable livelihood for individual hosts.

Conclusion

This paper reveals how dynamic rules, tools, skills and understandings shape and reshape the performance of hosting commercial P2P social dining events. It exposes tensions and ongoing negotiations between hosts and guests regarding matters of authenticity and privacy, an uneven risk burden between hosts and platforms with regards liability, and scant regard for matters of sustainability. As a result there is, to date, little alignment between P2P social dining and the goals of sustainable tourism. Nonetheless, P2P platform-mediated social dining in both Athens and Barcelona does provide alternative opportunities to eat beyond mainstream restaurants through novel experiences of eating together with strangers in the home of a resident. While the scale of P2P social dining remains small compared to incumbent industries in the sector (e.g. restaurants, cafes etc.), it nonetheless offers paying "guests" unparalleled access into the domestic spaces and livelihoods of hosts.

Following Warde (2016), to create a clear picture of the social practice and performance of P2P social dining requires consideration of diverse and often cross-cultural understandings and norms, of procedures and tools, and of routines and conventions. However, the wider governance infrastructure of legal requirements around risk and responsibility are, at best, only a vague feature of those negotiations currently. Drawing on Molz (2013), we suggest such platform-based social dining companies are leaving governance primarily to morals. This is not unusual in the P2P platform economy sector, with Del Romero Renau (2018) and Davies (2019) also flagging unresolved matters of fiscal and other regulation with respect to ICT-mediated sharing.

The commercial P2P social dining exemplified in this paper does not follow a set of deliberate rules, rather hosts and guests respond to situations based on previous experiences and by

implementing procedures they hope are suitable. In the absence of assistance from platforms, participants are feeling their way through new forms of interaction and exchange. These experimental interactions can be problematic. Some hosts struggled with the tensions they experienced from the monetisation of their domestic spaces which blurred the boundaries of public and private spaces, work-life balances, and the performance of domestic hospitableness and commercial hospitality. Without doubt, P2P social dining companies benefit from heightened access to legal advice and expertise when compared to hosts and guests, yet the burden of compliance with local regulatory frameworks remains with the hosts. In the absence of any major incident during P2P social dining events to date, hosts involved in this research were not overly concerned about this uneven power geometry but the risk remains.

There is certainly scope for the P2P social dining platforms considered in this paper to make more explicit efforts to consider the sustainability impacts of their operations. This could be done by: providing sustainability guidelines for hosts and guests; encouraging the use of local organic food produce; supporting the sustainable use of energy and water in the preparation for, and delivery of, a social dining event; supporting hosts to navigate positive socio-cultural interactions and economic shocks; and signing up to global principles for fair work in the platform economy (Woodcock & Graham, 2019). Ultimately, mechanisms to conduct sustainability impact assessment of P2P social dining need to be developed in order to ascertain whether they offer a sustainable livelihood to the host and whether they contribute to the sustainability of tourism within localities more broadly. Data from P2P social dining platforms will be required to do this comprehensively, which may be difficult to access given matters of commercial confidentiality.

To fully grasp the international landscape and sustainability impacts of P2P social dining, the delimited and exploratory research on which this paper is based requires extension. As an emergent arena of activity, further research is required to estabish whether the configuration of hosting experiences identified in Athens and Barcelona is replicated across time, in different places and in relation to other non-commercial models of social dining (Davies, 2012b; Edwards & Davies, 2018). Recognising the diversity of P2P social dining, it would be particularly productive to compare the experiences of hosts on multinational commercial platforms, as examined in this paper, with those which adopt different not-for-profit or social enterprise business models. We recommend a global horizon scanning study and classification of P2P social dining platforms according to the goals and business models adopted, as well as the development of a bespoke P2P social dining sustainability impact assessment tool.

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