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Title: Modes of Hospitality: The diversity of Airbnb hosting

Abstract:

This study examines the diverse practices of Airbnb hosting, identifying five distinct modes that challenge traditional boundaries between public and private spheres. Through qualitative research with 33 hosts in Copenhagen and Philadelphia, the research explores how these modes emerge from complex interactions between social relations, housing, and economic motivations. The findings contribute to understanding of the evolving nature of platform economies by revealing the pluralistic and performative dimensions of hospitality work. The research argues for a nuanced approach to Airbnb that considers the interplay between hosting performances and local urban contexts.

Keywords: Platform Economy, Airbnb, Modes of Hospitality, Diverse Economies, Performativity, Qualitative Research

Introduction

This paper explores the diversity of Airbnb hosting and the evolving nature of platform economies by revealing the pluralistic and performative dimensions of hospitality work.

Launched in 2008, Airbnb boasts over 6 million active listings worldwide, hosted by 4 million people who have collectively earned over $150 billion (Airbnb, 2022). Going public at the height of the pandemic, the company nearly doubled its pre-pandemic valuation, making it amongst the largest IPOs of the year (Cam and Rajjaque, 2020). Initially, Airbnb was heralded a pioneer of the 'sharing economy' (Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Gansky, 2012). At its core, the sharing economy encompasses peer-to-peer exchanges of resources or services facilitated through a digital infrastructure (see e.g. Crommelin et al., 2018 for insights on definitions). However, critics quickly argued that Airbnb represents capitalist exchanges masquerading as sharing (Belk, 2014) and recent debate uses a range of terms such as the collaborative economy. As debate around terminology unfolded, Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015) highlighted how all terms framed the phenomenon as an alternative digital economic model combining previously incompatible ideas by conjoining economic terminology of efficiency and value creation with cultural perspectives. This implies that the cultural is being performed in a new way within an economic context, by transgressing existing categories of commercial, private, and public realms. Nevertheless, in spite of early attention to these seemingly contradictive terms, limited effort has been dedicated to empirically explore this tension through the performances of users (for early exceptions see Cockayne, 2016; or Richardson, 2015).

The platform enables a large diversity of hospitality performances: from people hosting occasionally to those with listings booked back-to-back, from listings of small bedrooms to lavish homes, from hosting as a small side project to people making a living and a business out of Airbnb. However, it is hardly surprising that these hosts will have different approaches and experiences of hosting on Airbnb. Such diversity entails different socio-economic constellations and is expected to have different

impacts across locations as the diversity of hosting intersects with local structures and challenges. Considerable recent attention has focused on the role of professionalization within Airbnb (see e.g. Bosma and van Doorn, 2024; Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021; Deboosere et al., 2019; Gil and Sequera, 2022; Iacovone, 2023). Indeed, platform logic appears to favour professional hosts, enabling them to earn significant profits. However, regardless of market share, most active hosts are not professionals (Iacovone, 2023). Although the phenomenon of professionalization is valuable for understanding market dynamics, this paper contends that it offers an incomplete perspective by not addressing the breath of individuals involved in hosting. This paper therefore moves beyond a singular focus on professionalization to explore how a range of motivations, experiences and strategies are manifested in a variety of hospitality performances. Additionally, research indicates that there is significant spatial variance of the centralising of listings (Demir and Emekli, 2021). This resonates with calls to explore the diversity of urban experiences outside touristic hotspots that has informed extensive debate on professionalism (Semi and Tonetta, 2021). Working with hosts active in Philadelphia and Copenhagen this paper contributes with insight from locations less intensively studied.

Whilst commercial, Airbnb hosting also intersects with private and public spheres. The capacity to host is contingent upon specific circumstances. These include legal frameworks that might restrict hosting, surplus living space, infrequent occupancy, social networks that facilitate reciprocal arrangements, and the significance of the income for the individual hosts. This makes it productive to examine how the strategies and experiences of hosts, as hosting draws public and private categories together in novel constellations, are reshaping performances of hospitality itself.

This paper seeks to answer the following questions: which modes of hospitality are expressed through Airbnb hosting and how do these express transgressions of existing public and private categories? Subsequently, this paper aims to explore the diversity of Airbnb hosting performances and the complex ways hosting is entangled with other relationships.

By examining how host performances emerge from specific historical, geographical, and institutional contexts, this paper aims to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of hospitality produced within this platform. Framing Airbnb as a spectrum of hospitality

performances expands our understanding of the diverse forms of peer-to-peer hospitality. This approach offers a new and productive way to analyse both Airbnb and the broader platform economy by utilizing a performative framework to understand the diversity of peer-to-peer based hospitality. Secondly, the paper offers empirical contributions in developing an empirically grounded typology of hosting performances encompassing a breath of distinct cultural-economic subjectivities. The diversity of cultural-economic performances is broadly relevant for scholars interested in diverse economy perspectives, beyond platform economies.

These insights are not solely relevant for academic purposes, rather framings of such performances are highly contested and actively used to influence political processes (see e.g. van Doorn, 2019). Whilst specific political debates are outside the scope of this paper, findings on host differences can be used to inform discussions about legislative choices and their potential local effects. This research contributes to both public discourse and academic conversations on how platforms like Airbnb intersect with existing economic, legislative, and cultural structures.

Next, the growing literature exploring Airbnb hosting will be discussed with attention to the diversity of hosting performances, then the paper attends to literature pertaining to economic performativity and diverse economies with regard to hospitality. The analysis is based on qualitative research with 33 active hosts from Copenhagen, Denmark and Philadelphia, USA and structured on the development of five different modes of hospitality. The paper will argue that each of them represents a distinct socio-economic constellation and unique combination of Airbnb set-up, motivational structure, economic reliance, and social entanglements.

Diversifying Airbnb hospitality

In exploring the diversity of Airbnb hosting and its intersection with the lives of individual hosts most research focuses on the tension between sharing and capitalism, often to distinguish between home-sharing and corporate short-term rentals. However, this distinction can be notoriously elusive and risks oversimplification (Adamiak, 2019; Kadi et al., 2022). Quantitative studies have long measured the prevalence of professional hosts by examining factors like multi-listings (see e.g. Cócola Gant, 2016; Demir and Emekli, 2021), listing types (e.g. Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021; Wachsmuth

and Weisler, 2018), and legal compliance (Guttentag, 2017; e.g. Shabrina et al., 2020), or a combination of factors, such as the number of listings, listing type, and annual availability (Ioannides et al., 2019).

Debates about the balance between different types of hosts have more recently focused on the increasing professionalization of Airbnb, allowing a small number of actors to capture a disproportionate share of the revenue, as the platform is experiencing a professionalization, concentration and monopolization of hosting. This professionalization is seen as central to Airbnb's strategic pursuit (Bosma and van Doorn, 2024) and to transform Airbnb from a peer-to-peer model towards a market dominated by fewer, larger players. Whilst a distinct review of the research on professionalism is beyond the scope of this paper, the arguments are well-established in the existing literature (See e.g. Cocola-Gant et al., 2020; Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021; Deboosere et al., 2019; Gil and Sequera, 2022; Iacovone, 2023). Of relevance to the diversity of hosting, Cocola-Gant and colleagues (2021) explore how the use of intermediaries increases professionalism within Airbnb. They argue that these business models not only lead to higher profits and improved service but also obscure accurate statistics on professionalization. However, with an analysis framed by market-optimizing rationality the work fails to account for alternative measures of success, different host motivations, or the contexts associated with the use of intermediaries.

Bosma's (2022) recent study represents an advanced approach to the diversity of Airbnb hosting. Focusing on processes of professionalization, this work moves beyond binary distinctions, avoiding the assumption of professionalization as a granted category. Based on qualitative fieldwork in Berlin, Bosma identifies three distinct modes of professionalization and argues that 'professionalization processes produce inequalities and power asymmetries both on and off the platform, between hosts as well as between the platform owner and platform users' (2022: 595). This work expresses sensitivity to developing dynamic conceptual understanding of hosting by emphasizing process over distinct dichotomies and a nuanced understanding of entanglements with everyday lives. This paper builds on such thinking by analysing host motivations. However, it moves beyond a singular focus on professionalization, arguing that not all hosts are solely motivated by profit and that their development is not always a linear process. Rather, an emphasis on performances of hospitality is expected to reveal

diversity beyond processes of professionalization. The current research addresses this gap, by exploring theoretically and empirically how hosts navigate a range of different motivations and agendas. Although studying the rise of professionalization is useful for understanding market trends, it only provides a partial view. Importantly, the research at hand explores hosting beyond discussions of professionalism to understand how the platform is experienced by a breath of hosts and to recognize the various ways professionalism can manifest itself in a range of hospitality performances.

Whilst a large body of research effectively analyses the professional aspects of Airbnb, it does not sufficiently engage with the breath of hosting diversity and often overlooks the specific strategies, and motivations of individual hosts. However, some recent research is beginning to address this gap. Cocola-Gant and Gago (2021) identified four distinct profiles of Airbnb hosts in Lisbon, based on the social positions of the host. These profiles included: resident hosts sharing their homes, homeowners renting out former residences after relocating, local landlords replacing long-term tenants with short-term guests, and buy-to-let investors. Arias-Sans et al. (2022) analyse host profiles to understand the diverse performances, backgrounds, and life stages of hosts. Meanwhile, other research, like that by de Janasz et al. (2022), explores the work-life balance of hosting by examining the blurry lines between personal and professional life. However, this research often frames hosting strictly as 'work', failing to account for the various other roles it can play in a host's life. The research also overlooks how hosts negotiate and experience the entanglement of their personal lives and hosting spaces, beyond how the two interfere with one another. Maier and Gilchrist (2022) explore class subjectivities through the lived experiences of female hosts. By focusing on the narratives of hosts, especially those with limited traditional employment options, this research highlights the precariousness many face, offering more complexity than simply framing platforms like Airbnb as drivers of gentrification or rentier capitalism. In their qualitative study of middle-class hosts, which they term 'marginal' compared to more upscale 'digital rent extractors', Semi and Tonetta (2021) demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of how individual circumstances shape hosting. They distinguish between 'serendipitous entrepreneurs' and 'active entrepreneurs' based on their degree of agency and choice. However, their focus remains largely on motivation, leaving room to more thoroughly examine how the material and social aspects of different Airbnb setups influence hosting performance. The current research aims to

expand this work, meeting the call for a more nuanced approach to platform suppliers by examining how different social and material relationships, as well as a range of motivations, bring different modes of hospitality into being. In doing this, the work will explore how hosts, through their hospitality, bring together not solely economic, but also social and cultural realms.

Callon (2010) explores how certain parts of the world become constituted as being economic. This perspective recognizes the fluidity between cultural and economic framings of performances, acknowledging that they are not inherently fixed categories. Such framings happen at multiple levels ranging from the individual to organizations and collective discourse, over more congealed understandings expressed in legislative structures. Researchers have previously uncovered deliberate attempts to frame Airbnb hosting to sway political debate (for an excellent example see van Doorn, 2019) and how public policy teams orchestrate home-sharing clubs, strategically assembling groups of hosts to advocate for favourable policies (Yates, 2021). These insights demonstrate two key points: Firstly, framings are crucial for shaping perceptions of economic performance and guiding collective responses. Secondly, recognizing the political importance of collective framings necessitates an understanding of hosting practices that extends beyond the strategic application of narratives.

Whilst a performative approach was suggested as an analytical framework at the emergence of the sharing economy (see Cockayne, 2016; Richardson, 2015), it has been largely overshadowed by the dominance of political economy perspectives (see e.g. Bosma and van Doorn, 2024; Cócola Gant, 2016; Wachsmuth and Weisler, 2018). This has resulted in limited empirical attention, although some notable exceptions exist, such as Roelofsen (2018) which explores Airbnb hosting through a performative lens. The focus here is on the production of home and a deeper dive into the diversity of performances and the ongoing negotiation of boundaries between economic and non-economic spheres within these contexts that remains largely unexplored (see also Farmaki et al., 2019; Knaus, 2020; Ravenelle, 2017 on experiences of Airbnb hosting).

This research offers a distinct contribution to the literature by utilizing performative approaches to explore the diversity of hosting. This theoretically driven approach addresses the gap in knowledge of exploring diversity beyond notions of professionalism and brings further attention to how a range of socio-material

relationships (re)shapes the pluralistic nature of hosting. This necessitates a shift in focus, moving beyond strategically employed framings of Airbnb hosting to examine the 'contingent and complex articulation' of performances within the lived experiences of hosts. Such an approach recognizes Airbnb hosting not merely as a specific type of economic activity, but also as a form of hospitality that dynamically renegotiates the boundaries between public and private spheres.

Performing diverse economies

Much research seeks to understand Airbnb hosting as either part of capitalism or as an alternative, as professional or non-professional, rather than encompassing the possibility of being both simultaneously. In illuminating the diversity of Airbnb hospitality, this work will illustrate how such different approaches are entangled. Therefore, this research is more concerned with exploring the heterogeneity within Airbnb than labelling Airbnb hosting as either one thing or another. The research draws conceptual inspiration from theoretical frameworks of diverse economies and performative economic approaches to conceptualize the diversity of Airbnb hosting.

As part of their activist project Gibson-Graham seek to illuminate economic diversities to 'reveal a landscape of radical heterogeneity'(2011: 2). Economic diversity is not only shaped by the contexts economies exist within, but also inherently present within their structures. Consequently, they view economies as hybrid systems made up of various agents pursuing their own agendas, needs, and goals (Gibson-Graham, 1997). The implication for Airbnb is that diversity is found, not simply between different locations, but also between different hosts.

By exploring the diverse forms of economic performance, this argument challenges the notion that capitalism is the only means of productivity. Rather, economic landscapes consist of a complex entanglement of capitalist and non-capitalist activities, incorporating a multitude of ownership structures, financial arrangements, forms of exchange, and both salaried and non-monetarily compensated labour (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008). Building on Gibson-Graham's ideas, Richardson contends that: 'the sharing economy is best understood as a series of performances rather than a coherent set of economic practices. In their contingent and complex articulation, these

performances help explain the paradoxical potential of the sharing economy, in that they construct diverse economic activities whilst also inviting the deconstruction of ongoing practices of dominance' (Richardson, 2015: 127).

These arguments suggest an 'ontological reframing' moving away from the idea of a fixed, pre-existing system and towards one that is constantly being performed into existence (Gibson-Graham, 2008). This view is informed by a Butlerian understanding of performativity, which differs sharply from Goffman's (1956) dramaturgical model. Whilst Goffman's theory sees performance as a conscious act by a pre-existing self, Butler (1990) argues that performance is the very foundation of the self and the social, which is continuously (re)created through repeated actions. Consequently, economic concepts and processes are not 'pre-given entities'. What we define as 'the economy' or 'economic' is a product of ongoing, diverse performances (Butler, 2010: 147). The act of listing a room on Airbnb, for example, is not just an action within a pre-defined 'economy'; it is an act that actively creates and shapes what that economy is.

This idea aligns with Gregson and Rose's (2000) argument that performances are more than theatrical displays. They are interrelational and deeply tied to power dynamics and established knowledge systems. Whilst performers may draw on social scripts, they and the scripts themselves are not immune to power. Crucially, performances also have the potential for improvisation. This means they can challenge and destabilize social categories that we often see as fixed. Because economic systems are a result of relational effects, the relationships involved in any performance are essential to creating that performance. These relationships are not just a backdrop: they are a co-constitutive part of the performance itself.

This approach offers a powerful alternative to existing research that often treats economic agents and systems as separate, static entities. By highlighting the dynamic, relational nature of economic activity, it positions our understanding of the economy as a living, breathing process shaped by every interaction. This lens is particularly productive for examining how Airbnb hospitality integrates into hosts' daily lives and provides a distinctive contribution to the existing literature. It presents both a theoretical and empirical challenge: to understand how hosts perform and navigate the entanglement of economic, cultural, and social performances of hosting. Hosting is a set of performances deeply entangled with a string of relationships. For example, a

host's listing is intertwined with the capital circuits that structure housing finance and rental markets, whilst the practice of hosting is built around monetary exchanges. Such relationships structure hosting, but are in turn affected by, at least the cumulative effects of, hosting. Hosting performances are also shaped by relationships that are not traditionally seen as economic. Hosts might be motivated by a range of factors and find that their personal relationships can either restrict, enable, or support hosting. Furthermore, the sheer scale of Airbnb creates a different public perception compared to other forms of home use, like lodgers or home swapping.[1] In this sense, the performance of Airbnb hospitality can be understood as simultaneously economic and cultural, blending what were once considered distinct categories.

Whilst significant research exists on the diversity of economies, diversity in the intersection of hospitality and platform economies remains relatively under-explored. However, this makes it an especially interesting case, as the lowering of entrance barriers enables a vast diversity of performances. Such potential relates in part to the peer-to-peer element, allowing participants to interchange between the role of host and guest. Additionally, new manifestations are linked to the digital components, supporting peer-to-peer platforms and organizing new networks around short-term hospitality rentals developing 'the novel articulations of the economy that are manifest in the complex relationship between the virtual and the material' (Richardson, 2015: 121). However, such points urge attention to the various ways people engage with Airbnb hospitality.

Hospitality refers to the reception of guests within and beyond the commercial realm and has been profoundly influenced by Derrida's (2000) ideal of absolute hospitality. This paradoxical concept 'requires one to give all one has to another without asking any questions, imposing any restrictions or requiring any compensation' (Westmoreland, 2008: 3). Such absolute hospitality is inherently unattainable, as it simultaneously presupposes and negates ownership. Western hospitality, however, has always been contingent upon rights, duties, and obligations. This tension between the

[1] Even when no money changes hands such arrangements still allow both parties the benefit of affordable holiday accommodation.

ethical ideal of absolute hospitality and concerns of safety and resource allocation is fundamental to hospitality.

Hospitality can be understood as a dynamic, relational process shaped by affect, interaction, and social context (Duncan et al., 2013). As such, hospitality is produced through relational performances containing and reproducing power balances, inequalities, and existing social norms. Hospitality exists on a continuum between the unattainable ideal of absolute hospitality and the equally impossible notion of purely transactional exchanges. Even market-based interactions are imbued with social and cultural meanings. Consequently, hosting is influenced by factors such as property ownership, social networks, and economic dependence. To fully comprehend hospitality work, it is essential to account for the complex interplay of social, cultural, economic, and political factors.

Method

This study explores how the complex entanglements with everyday lives inform hosting performances. The empirical cornerstone is provided by in-depth qualitative interviews with active Airbnb hosts. The construction of narratives occurring during the interview situation can be understood as an integral element of the performance, as meanings are articulated and legitimized in this process. Consequently, the narrative construction of performances is intrinsic to the performance itself (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Haldrup, 2004).

Airbnb is entangled with economic, social, and cultural structures and this interrelatedness will influence which types of hosting occurs. As the aim of the study is focused on understanding the evolving nature of platform economies by revealing the pluralistic and performative dimensions of hospitality work, the study will take its starting point in a particular spatial-temporal context. The study incorporates hosts active in Copenhagen (CPH), Denmark, and Philadelphia (PHL), USA. Designing the study in two locations was intended to develop an understanding of the diversity of Airbnb hosting, beyond the manifestations apparent in one specific locality, and to help illuminate the diverse ways Airbnb interacts with and is shaped by context. Whilst existing research focuses on the spatial variance of Airbnb hosting (e.g. Garha and Azevedo, 2021) or compares the prevalence of multi-listing hosts (across European

cites: Demir and Emekli, 2021; or US metropolitan areas: Schor, 2017), this study prioritizes exploring the diversity of hosting itself. The study is thus using different locations to flesh out diversity, rather than direct comparisons.

Copenhagen and Philadelphia have their own distinct hosting compositions. The profile of hosts in Table 1 indicates a significantly higher frequency of Airbnb hosting in Copenhagen over Philadelphia. Additionally, Philadelphia has more hosts running multiple listings and fewer full homes listed.

Table 1: Key hosting features in Philadelphia and Copenhagen

	PHL	CPH
Inhabitants	1,580,000	720,000
Active Airbnb hosts	4,202	10,790
Percentage of listings run by multi-listing hosts	64%	22%
Host attached to solely one listing	73%	94%
Full home listed	56%	81%

(Airdna, 2018a, 2018b; Copenhagen Municipality, 2018; Frederiksberg Municipality, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2022).

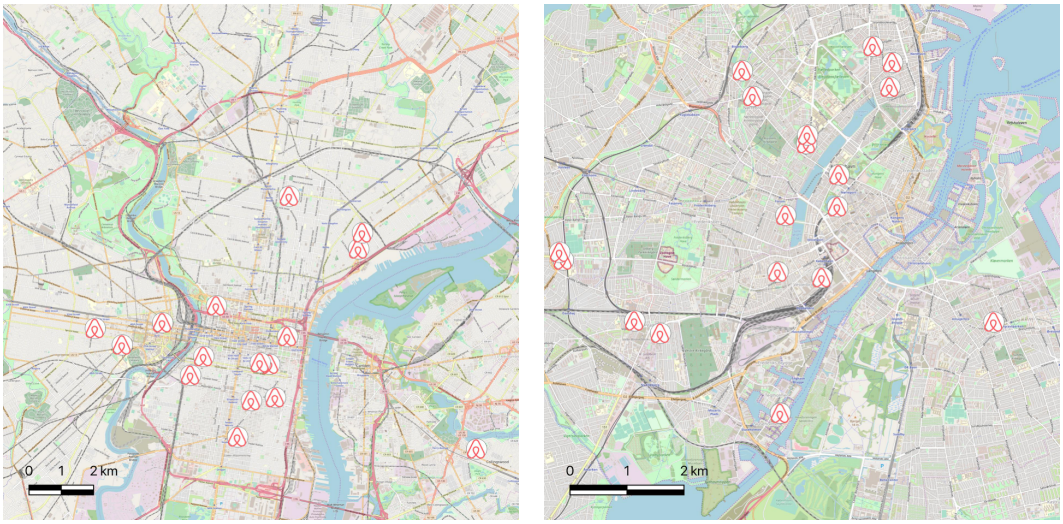
At the time of the fieldwork neither city had legislation designed to accommodate short-term rentals. However, Airbnb hosting intersected with a range of different legislative structures, e.g. related to fire safety, the rental market etc. These aspects will be discussed in the analysis where they prove relevant for the diversity of hosting (for an in-depth analysis of socio-institutional frameworks in the two cities please see Christensen, 2022).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore various aspects of the hosting experience. An open-ended interview guide was used, often beginning with the question, ‘Can you tell me about when you first got into hosting?’ To accommodate interviewees’ preferences, sessions were held either within their listing space or at a nearby café. Saturation was reached when new interviews added only limited insights to the existing identified patterns. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematic codes were manually developed by the author and evolved into analytical categories.

Respondents were recruited through a multi-pronged approach: by searching Facebook groups for hosts in the given locations, contacting hosts the author had previously stayed with, and through snowballing within extended networks. Whilst acknowledging the inherent limitations of qualitative sampling, this multifaceted approach aimed to minimize the impact of individual recruitment strategies and maximize the diversity of respondents. Beyond demographic features like age, gender, race, and class, the study considered the types of listings and different neighbourhoods.

Airbnb listings held by interviewees were predominantly in central and rather attractive middle-class neighbourhoods (see Images 1 and 2). This aligns with findings from other cities, e.g. Ioannides (2019) who found that listings in Utrecht were clustered in neighbourhoods that were both close to the city centre and existing services. Similarly, in Barcelona, studies identified only a limited supply of listings in the periphery of the city and with listings predominantly concentrated in middle-class areas (Arias-Sans and Domínguez, 2016).

Image 1 + 2: Placement of Airbnb listings of interviewed hosts in Philadelphia and Copenhagen



A total of 33 hosts were interviewed, split between 19 women and 14 men, ranging in age between early twenties to seventies. The sample corresponds reasonably well with the general population with regard to housing ownership. In Copenhagen four hosts

were renting their home,[2] five owned their home, and nine owned their home as part of a co-op association. This correlates with a citywide distribution of 21% owner-occupied dwellings, 29% of the housing is rental, 20% social housing and 29% co-op associations (Copenhagen Municipality, 2022). Whilst only two thirds of Philadelphia hosts volunteered insights on housing, they were evenly split between renters and owners, reflecting the distribution of 52% owner-occupied dwellings in the city (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Whilst all interviewed hosts had a right of disposal for their listings, a couple had a few listings (2-4) and one host had a medium-sized portfolio, managed with a partner.

Only a few interviewees had a non-white background, and the majority held a university degree. In Philadelphia two interviewees were black, whilst one was of middle Eastern heritage. As the city has just under 40% of the population self-describing as white (United States Census Bureau, 2022), this indicates a strong bias towards whiteness. Since early research showed discrimination of Airbnb hosts based on names (Edelman et al., 2017), others have identified racial inequality of review acquisition (Yu and Margolin, 2024), and showed that discrimination affects prices and the amount of bookings (Cansoy and Schor, 2016; Zhang et al., 2022). Such findings illustrate the racialization of participation on Airbnb, and speaks for broader issues of platform capitalism and racialization as platform interfaces amplify racial inequalities, in some instances through predatory inclusion through extractive gig-labour (Cottom, 2020) or in the case of Airbnb hosting benefitting a white, middle-class group of hosts. Whilst inviting future attention into how diversities of hosting intersect with racial identities, no clear patterns were identified amongst non-majority hosts by the current research.

All case studies are limited by their spatial and temporal scope. The temporal scope is especially relevant, as data collection occurred in late 2017 and 2018, a time when Airbnb was well-established in both locations, often debated in media but not integrated into legislative structures. The data collection was followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which raises questions about how the pandemic has affected patterns of diversity in Airbnb hosting. A study on Polish cities (Kowalczyk-Anioł et al., 2022) found varying impacts of the pandemic on Airbnb, with some cities experiencing host

[2] In all four instances from a family member.

consolidation and others the opposite. Copenhagen data from 2024 showed that 86% of listings were still held by single-listing hosts[3], suggesting some level of stability in this aspect (InsideAirbnb, 2024). Meanwhile recent data indicates that a small handful of hosts in Philadelphia manages roughly 9% off all listings and that 38% of listings are available for more than 181 days a year (Airdna, 2024). Notably, this study aims to illustrate how social, cultural, and economic factors entangle to shape the diverse ways people host. Instead of capturing the latest snapshot of hosting composition, this research conceptually and empirically explores the pluralistic nature of hosting. This pluralism, as has been well rehearsed for case studies (Mitchell, 1983), will always be an expression of a specific time and place.

Modes of hospitality

Five distinct modes of hospitality were developed inductively through the coding of the transcripts. The different modes were informed in part by differing levels of financial reliance, different Airbnb setups, some renting rooms and some full homes and different social entanglements, some finding that social relationships enabled or restricted certain modes of hospitality. Each mode is thus a distinct combination of socio-economic performances and was developed based in part on the role hosting played in the life and finances of the host, how hosts interacted with guests, and how their performance influences local structures. As such, each mode represents a particular (re)negotiation of socio-economic realms and influences perceptions of Airbnb and the effects of hosting.

Whilst host performances will contain more variety and nuance than expressed by such categories, developing distinct modes will nevertheless highlight the patterns found within this diversity. Rather than attempting to reduce the complexities of Airbnb hosting, it is the ambition to develop a vocabulary for the diversity of hosting. Table 2 indicates the names and distribution of each mode.

[3] And 67% of multi-listing hosts holding solely two listings.

Table 2: Distribution within the modes of hospitality

	CPH	PHL
Travelling host	5	0
Precarious host	3	4
Entrepreneurial host	1	3
B'n'B host	5	6
Vacated host	4	2

The modes of hospitality are constructed as performative categories, or by the adoption of dramaturgical metaphors; each mode of hospitality can be understood as a character played within the larger script of Airbnb, with a certain robustness, characteristics, and performances specific to each character. However, each performer is also likely to bring their own improvisations to the performance. Hosts are not confined to be perpetually playing one role, although the hosts interviewed restricted themselves to occupying one at a time. The interrelated nature of performances means that as scenography such as home or financial or family circumstances alter, hosts adjust their script, adopt a new character, or leave hosting all together. Consequently, the cultural-economic performances of hospitality are not fixed modes, but rather a result of multiple 'modes of ordering' that are performed and alternated between.

The modes of hospitality are, like any performance, not built from scratch, but rather adaptations and variations of existing social categories, as they build on existing performative scripts and knowledges. Thus, Airbnb hosts are continuously making adaptations to, or combinations of, familiar performances. Like a great theatre play reflects cultures, social norms, and currents of change, so are the modes of hospitality intimately entangled with the society they are set in and express specific power relations and knowledge. As such, the modes of hospitality are produced as a development of historical, geographical, and institutional organizational forms, whilst simultaneously reproducing or challenging such forms. Consequently, a geography of hospitality is produced, with spatial disparities evident in the range and composition of hospitality modes across different places. This additionally speaks to the intensive interrelatedness between socio-economic landscapes and economic performances, where not only the

formal structures of the labour market inform economic performances, but also family structures, housing markets, patterns of holiday, and other social entanglements. Where such localised conditions enable or limit certain performances, it will be discussed when presenting each mode.

As the sampling strategy explicitly searched out diversity this distribution does not illustrate the distribution of modes in each location. Additionally, existing research clearly indicated significant interurban spatial variation in the composition of different hosting performances. Whilst many southern European studies find evidence of listings centralised in a few hands (see e.g. Iacovone, 2023), other studies showed significant spatial diversity with single-listing hosts comprising 80% of Parisian and 86% of Copenhagen listings (InsideAirbnb, 2024), compared to 33% in Lisbon and 35% in Barcelona (Demir and Emekli, 2021). Clearly such numbers only offer indications, and do not tell us the full story of the performances associated with the listing, illustrating the necessity for in-depth qualitative work. Additionally, it is worth highlighting an increased presence of corporate entities on Airbnb, as well as traditional hotels and Bed and Breakfasts listing their accommodation there alongside traditional outlets. Whilst exploring this tendency falls beyond the scope of this paper it does add to the complexity of describing the diversity of hosting performances.

By exploring the differing rationalities behind the modes of hospitality the paper contributes empirical insights to both the diversity of performances, the production and reconfiguration of economic, social, and cultural spheres and the framing of peer-to-peer hospitality markets.

The precarious host

'I found myself working only part time and I really needed the money. And it is a good way of making some money, rather than having to vacate your home. […] *Later I found myself without a job and I didn't want to go on unemployment benefits and then it really became my income. I also borrowed some money, but that was really it. And I stayed a lot at my sister's; she is alone with two kids, so you can kind of offer a hand and not just freeload.'* (Marie, CPH)

‘*Right now, my main thing is that I am an Airbnb host. It is my main income. Other than that, I babysit one day a week, and I am just starting a new thing that is mostly for tips.’* (Anna, PHL)

The precarious host is listing a room, or small apartment, and hosting has become an industrious endeavour, perhaps one amongst several, deployed to manage through financial misfortune. The precarious host might be between jobs or combining part-time jobs with hosting. Airbnb might not be their ‘main thing’, but they are highly reliant on the income, as they string together various jobs to make ends meet. These hosts carry resemblance to some of the hosts interviewed by Maier and Gilchrist (2022) who experienced challenges in the formalized labour market. As a result of financial necessity, the precarious hosts are prepared to make concessions in their own sleeping arrangements to accommodate guests; some hosts have retreated to sleeping in their laundry basements, whereas others alternate between bedrooms according to demand or vacate homes to stay with a relative.

Marie addresses how intermittent employment was an essential element motivating her to engage with Airbnb. Additionally, she highlights how kinship ties allowed her to host and expounds on the reciprocal exchanges occurring within her family, exchanging domestic help for hospitality. This raises an additional reciprocal aspect of hospitality, where even within family structures the openness of the home is negotiated in a tension between ‘offering a hand’ and ‘freeloading’.

Most hosts express a preference for Airbnb rather than a permanent roommate. Not only does Airbnb generate higher profits but also allows a higher degree of control over the dwelling and the volatility of Airbnb guests ensures that guests with potentially annoying habits remain temporary. This echoes the notions of ownership and control embedded in the role of the host and which would have to be relinquished in accepting a permanent roommate.

‘I once would have thought that three months sleeping in my basement would have been too much, but I’m used to it, I’ve done it before, you know, for a few months, so I don’t feel like it is too much. If I knew that I had friends who wanted to come, then I’d have to block out some time.’ (Mary, PHL)

Although nearly the same number of precarious hosts was interviewed in each research location, there appeared to be qualitative differences. The Copenhagen hosts were all

in their twenties and two were students supplementing their government student stipend, whereas the average age was higher in Philadelphia, with hosts in their thirties and sixties. The precarious mode of hospitality resonates with notions of gig economies, of stringing together an income by combining part time, temporary and flexible jobs. This is a tendency often criticized for undermining the hard-won rights of full-time workers and creating unstable employment structures. Thus, peer-to-peer platforms are affording possibilities for these types of performances which on one side can be perceived as a threat to existing working rights connected to full-time employment and on the other hand it can be argued that such performances are allowing citizens to safeguard themselves against financial hardship and function as a safety net during times of financial misfortune.

The B'n'B host

'People always ask whether it is because of the money, and yes it is! I think most people would lie if they claimed otherwise. But it is a combination of; I can easily stay here and go about my life without that extra money. They aren't essential at all. They are extra money, and I like being a host. I realized fairly early on that I am the kind of person who enjoys organizing stuff. So being a host seemed like an attractive prospect. I enjoy making people feel comfortable.' (Thomas, CPH)

'*On top of the money, you meet a lot of nice people from around the globe. I think I might have a hundred invitations to come and visit people. And I have that Virgo-gene that I want to please and make people happy. That is really important to me.'* (Birgitte, CPH)

The B'n'B host combines cohabitation with guests with high rental activity. Access to this mode of hospitality requires not only an available bedroom, but also a living situation that can accommodate guests, for instance most saw cohabitation with guests and raising children as mutually exclusive. Thus, the social relationships of the individual host are intimately entangled with the financial practices and opportunities of Airbnb hosts. The key difference between the B'n'B host and the precarious host is a difference in financial reliance, which alters several aspects of the hosting experience. Most noticeably the B'n'B host never vacates their private domain to accommodate guests and devotes more effort to screening guests. They prefer to avoid dealing with

the disadvantages of a permanent roommate, which echoes the desire to exercise control found amongst the precarious host. The B'n'B host has full-time employment and perceives hosting less as a profession and more as a side project. As such, they bear only a limited resemblance to the B'n'B hosts interviewed by Cederholm (2015), Lynch et al. (2007) and Sweeney and Lynch (2007) as they are not trying to make hospitality a full-time business; however, the notions of seeing themselves as 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' were widely echoed.

This is the case for Carol, a gardener who started hosting to keep busy during the slow season.

'*My work season is mostly in the summer, spring and fall and in the winter not. So, I actually put up a profile on Couchsurfing, thinking it would keep my mind active and get me to keep my house clean. And keep me from becoming isolated. I had only one guest from Couchsurfing; a young man from Berlin,* [...]*and he said; you know – if you are not working, you have a nice house, and this is a nice room. Maybe you want to list on Airbnb.'* (Carol, PHL)

Thus, her original motivation for hosting was grounded in keeping active during a slow work period. These benefits were strong enough to start hosting non-commercially. Here, returns are reaching beyond monetary realms, and monetary and non-monetary incentives work side-by-side. Rationalities previously not considered part of a monetary domain are entangled with other performances and recreate what is considered economic as the line between social and financial rewards becomes blurred. The B'n'B host thus sees social interactions with guests as a strong motivator and as a way of designing an alluring everyday life with guests bringing a sense of travelling and new inputs into the home.

The entrepreneurial host

'I had this idea that I wanted to start my own business, but I didn't know with what or how. However, there was the whole thing that if you quit your job, you will be quarantined from unemployment benefits. And if I got a good business idea, I couldn't get unemployment benefits, because then you are already planning a business. That really made me mad and I said, in that case I just don't care! I just don't want the

benefits. [...] *I think that really started me thinking that I had to do something else, and I looked into listing my apartment.'* (Karen CPH)

The entrepreneurial hosts have a full home, or multiple rooms listed on Airbnb and do not cohabitate with guests. The dominant characteristic of this mode of hospitality is a professional approach focused on developing a functioning business. The entrepreneurial host dreams of creating their own business and perceives hosting as a direct means to that end, either as a business itself or as a way of creating financial flexibility whilst starting up. These hosts are strongly engaged with what Bosma (2022) calls processes of professionalization as they work to optimize their financial success on the hosting market and some have developed corporate structures whilst other strive to. Unlike the other modes of hospitality, motivations are explained in individualistic and monetary terms. The entrepreneurial host does not necessarily meet their guests and, unlike the other modes of hospitality, only rarely refer to social interactions as motivating.

Access to this mode of hospitality is conditional on having a dwelling beyond the home of the host, as such, the Airbnb performances of the entrepreneurial hosts are fuelling the acquisition of housing. The entrepreneurial host might have several listings, either in the same city or in different ones and often employs others to assist with the practical aspects of hosting which allows the scaling up their enterprise.

'The angle is to quit our day jobs and be involved in short-term rentals.' (Steve, PHL)

'I had some reservations because Airbnb is taking away, you know, affordable housing, in Philadelphia and elsewhere, but I'm approaching 50 and I'm a waitress, and I really have done my duty, I think, in helping others, and it didn't always go so well, so I'm gonna make some money.' (Sharon, PHL)

Although other modes of hospitality might also have a professional drive, it is the start-up approach that distinguishes the entrepreneurial host. This is evident with Karen, who describes Airbnb as a method of funding her start-up business, objecting to what she perceives to be the rigid bureaucratic structure of the Danish unemployment system. Rather she takes pride in self-reliance and begins hosting as an alternative to applying for unemployment benefits. This is illustrative of the complexity of relations entangled in the network of Airbnb performances, as a more expansive system of social benefits is likely to be part of the explanation as to why fewer entrepreneurial hosts were

interviewed in Copenhagen compared to Philadelphia. Additionally, most dwellings in Copenhagen are covered by a residence requirement limiting the opportunity to legally run an Airbnb separate from a primary residence. As such, we see that mechanisms designed to prevent speculation in housing are also working to minimize some modes of hospitality.

With listings available for booking year-round the entrepreneurial host strives for high rental activity. In Copenhagen 7% of the listings are booked more than seven months per year, whereas 17% are available for more than seven months per year.[4] In Philadelphia 14% of listings are booked more than seven months per year and 33% are available for more than seven months per year. In Copenhagen 13% of listings are by hosts with multiple listings compared to 53% of listings in Philadelphia (all data retrived from Airdna, 2018a, 2018b). The tendency for Philadelphia is to have more multi-listing hosts and more listings with high rental activity: both point towards more entrepreneurial hosts in Philadelphia. Nevertheless, not all high activity and multi-listings are likely to be from entrepreneurial hosts, since both the B'n'B host and the precarious host can fall under the same pattern of high activity and/or multi-listings.

The travelling host

'Going a little further back, we always considered renting out the place or swapping homes with others […] *There was always this desire to see how you could create additional value from living in a lovely place but also wanting to see the world. So, when the opportunity presented itself, it was already something we had considered, and it wasn't to put money aside or become wealthier.'* (Rohan, CPH)

'There is a financial incentive to rent out the place, but that is not only why I am doing it. I don't want to rent out my place and make people feel ripped off. I like the notion of a fair price.' (Rasmus, CPH)

[4] However, being available solely indicates that the listing will pop up in searches, not that hosts would necessarily accept a booking. Failure to update calendar availability or deliberately keeping it open, to see if a good offer pops up, is also found amongst various types of hosts.

The travelling hosts have their full home listed only when travel plans have them away from home. They are not dependent on the income, and it is the schedule of the host that drives availability, not the other way around. Access to this mode of hospitality is ostensibly structured around either an extended travel pattern or by having multiple dwellings at one's disposal, either though ownership or through personal relationships. Accordingly, the social relationships of the host can play an instrumental role in shaping Airbnb performances; both in enabling agency, but also in limiting the room for agency, for instance whilst establishing a new family.

Feeding off and into high frequency travel patterns, this mode of hospitality is performed by upper middle-class individuals, perceiving hosting not as a direct wealth accumulation strategy but as a strategy focused on increasing travel opportunities. Consequently, this mode of hospitality produces a collective rationality where profits stay within an economic circuit focused on travelling and hosts do not contemplate how this vacation funding affects their overall financial situation. Rather, the travelling hosts stress that they are not reliant on Airbnb income and talk about hosting to 'make a little extra'.

'We don't do it, like a lot of other people, to make money, as an extra source of income. It is only when we are not at home and want to give someone else the opportunity to live in our apartment because it is better than a hotel room.' (Julie, CPH)

Julie expresses the dominant normative position, illustrative of a complex intersection between monetary and non-monetary incentives, as the travelling host perceives their hosting as distinct from 'those who are just in it to make money', indicating that the incentives for hosting ought to go beyond monetary gain. Other hosts use terms like 'money machine' as countering their idealistic notions. These considerations indicate that there is more at stake for these hosts than market rationality, and incentives go beyond maximizing profits. Rather, hosts utilize ethical terms of 'a fair price' or even forego payment in situations where they feel a rapport with particular guests.

The study was unable to interview travelling hosts in Philadelphia despite efforts to identify such hosts. This does not eliminate the possibility that such modes of hospitality are performed in Philadelphia but indicates that it is less widespread. In supporting this presumption 81% all Copenhagen listings are full homes, compared to 56% in Philadelphia (Airdna, 2018a, 2018b). Additionally, different lengths of holiday

leave can influence the types of hospitality performed, as generous amounts of leave might increase travel frequencies and support this mode of hosting. Finally, Philadelphia might have different traditions of leasing homes through extended networks and thus not rely on platform-mediated contact.

The vacated host

'I couldn't get out of my lease when I moved, so I just kind of panicked and put it on Airbnb to see if it could pay the rent. The rent was only 1,500 a month, […] *I made 3.000 dollars the first month. That's profit!'* (Logan, PHL)

'I live in the garden allotment during summers, so I thought; that is clever, a really great idea, and then my daughter did it for me the first year, handled everything and I thought it was a lot of work. I still do.' (Ingrid, CPH)

The vacated hosts have a full home listed on Airbnb for a longer consecutive timeframe. Either the host has vacated what was their home, or they retreat to a second home for multiple months. As such, the vacated host effectively vacates and transforms the home into a commercial residence for an extended timeframe. However, the dwelling is still considered to be a home by the host. There are variations between the Philadelphian and Copenhagen vacating hosts. The model of moving to a second home was found only in Copenhagen, whereas the vacating hosts in Philadelphia had no intention of moving back to the Airbnb home.

For some vacating hosts, hosting was a solution to solve a situation of having two rents or wishing a safety net in the initial stages after moving in with a partner and finding Airbnb hosting surprisingly profitable. This was case for Susan, who initially started hosting by practising a cohabitating mode of hospitality, but after moving in with a partner kept her house furnished and listed the whole dwelling on Airbnb.

'You don't make a lot of money in my field, no matter what you do, so I thought; it might be nice to have a little extra money, I have a guest room no one uses. […] *I later decided to move in with my boyfriend, who lives a mile away from where I lived, and we decided to move in to his house, not incidentally, because my house makes money, and his house wouldn't, so I moved into his house, and started renting the whole house.'* (Susan, PHL)

This illustrates flexibility between different modes of hospitality: as circumstances change, hosts adapt to accommodate these changes. The vacated host resembles the B'n'B host in the sense that they host within the private home and are less financially dependent on the income than the precarious host, however, they do not cohabitate with guests. They resemble the travelling host in the sense that they vacate their home, but unlike the travelling host this follows rhythms where the home is effectively vacated, perhaps for longer consecutive timeframes.

There are differing perspectives on economic reliance amongst the vacating hosts. At one end of the spectrum some hosts insist on remaining non-dependent on the Airbnb income, which is seen as an unreliable income stream due to concern about future legislation. At the other end of the spectrum, Airbnb revenue can function as an important component of overall income.

'I need to cover my expenses of having the apartment, but I am not in it to make money. There are several local people saying, you are out of your mind, you could make three times as much. But why should I? I don't want to do that, and if I did that, I would turn it into a hotel business and I want to leave that to the hotels.' (Hans, CPH)

Despite the different significance the Airbnb income has in the personal finances of the hosts, there is an overall narrative connected to reasonable pricing strategies, which are rarely profit-maximizing strategies, but also reflect normative positions and perceptions of economic spheres. Such considerations are highly illustrative of the multiple ways in which economic performances are intimately entangled with and informed by the social and cultural context in which they occur.

Conclusion

This paper argues that study of Airbnb hosting, understood as a dynamic interplay of diverse performances, enriches our understanding of platform-based economies and the evolving relationship between private and public categories within hospitality. The diversity of hospitality modes is shaped by various factors, including socio-institutional contexts, host socio-cultural attitudes, Airbnb setups (particularly cohabitation and socio-economic status), and the interplay of economic reliance, motivations, and ethical

considerations. Each mode represents a distinct constellation of socio-economic performances, building upon and occasionally challenging existing distinctions.

The modes of hospitality challenge how professionalism and privilege might look in the context of Airbnb hosting. Where Bosma (2022) distinguishes between precarious and privileged professionalism, this study illustrates that privilege is found across various modes as the travelling, entrepreneurial and vacated host can display quite high degrees of privilege. Similarly, whilst corporate structures can be understood as a certain variety of the entrepreneurial host, professionalism can look differently and is certainly also present in the B'n'B host, sometimes listing multiple rooms in their own home.

The diversity of performances is useful; not only for academic purposes, but also for understanding how different modes of hospitality impact local areas. Whilst the different modes interact in different ways with local housing markets and social structures, each will have impacts. In particular, cohabiting hosts argued that they were not removing dwellings from the housing market but rather activating spare rooms. However, this still raises questions about the potential impact on other short- or medium-term lodging options. The modes of hospitality illuminates that simplistic distinctions between full homes and rooms fail to fully capture the interplay between Airbnb and housing markets. Rather it is only the travelling hosts and those vacating hosts operating through seasonal cycles both list full homes, which do not remove housing opportunities, as these dwellings would likely remain unoccupied during their absence. This is somewhat paradoxical as those are both modes which might make use of intermediaries, noted as corporate hosting (Cocola-Gant et al., 2021). However, all modes of hospitality introduce tourism into residential areas, leading to potential impacts on residents beyond housing affordability (see e.g. Cocola-Gant et al., 2020; Gurran and Phibbs, 2017).

The modes of hospitality imply that productive hospitality regulation necessitates a multifaceted approach, considering diverse hosting models and their unique combinations within specific localities. The extent to which certain modes of hospitality is seen as problematic, depends not only on normative positions, but also the interplay between compositions of modes and locality and the challenges of that specific place. Just like the different modes motivate different legislative concerns, they also inspire concerns about the protection of Airbnb hosts. Hosts heavily dependent on Airbnb

income, particularly those using it to cope with financial hardship, face significant vulnerability. This reliance leaves them exposed to unforeseen disruptions, such as personal circumstances, regulatory changes, or sudden declines in tourism, as seen during the recent pandemic.

Financial and cultural performances are configured differently across temporal and spatial contexts. Thus, some modes were more prevalent in Copenhagen compared to Philadelphia, and vice versa. Consequently, the modes uncovered are unlikely to be exhaustive of modes of hospitality performed in either city or worldwide. Research conducted in localities with diverse socio-economic and regulatory contexts is expected to uncover a broader range of Airbnb-based hospitality modes, either expanding upon those identified here or revealing entirely new ones.

The variety of modes of hospitality is significant, as the modes can serve as a vocabulary of the diversity of hosting and an illustration of the complicated entanglements between private and public categories expressed in each mode. This supports future research to investigate the types of performances that are afforded through the platform, rather than simplify the object of analysis by creating dichotomies drawing on either the utopian promise of the sharing economy or dystopian imagery of the erosion of working rights or damage to local housing markets.

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