

## **Article II**

Paloniemi, P. (2024). Emerging hospitality practices in the sharing economy. *Hospitality and Society*, 14(2: Hospitable Destinations), 153–175. [https://doi.org/10.1386/hosp\\_00076\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/hosp_00076_1).

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## Introduction

The hospitality landscape has changed over the past few decades, and hospitality practices are increasingly being mediated through technology (Lugosi 2021). Technology-related innovations are truly transforming hospitality practices (see Lugosi 2021; Tuomi and Tussyadiah, 2020). This study explores emerging hospitality practices developed through Airbnb. In this context, the platform serves as a choreographing template for interactions in acts of hospitality among people around the world (Bialski 2012; Roelofsen 2018). Many resources at destinations, such as accommodation and local knowledge, are becoming shareable via these types of digital platforms (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Germann Molz 2013; Sigala 2017). Therefore, it is important for destinations to understand the changing dynamics of hospitality practices (Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin 2012), especially when practices and value are, at least partly, constructed and facilitated by international digital platforms and on terms defined by the organisations that operate them.

Technology mediates everyday encounters and offers new practices for hosting and guesting (Germann Molz 2018). This study explores hospitality practices developed on Airbnb in the geographical context of Finnish Lapland. The hospitality practices emerging from the data are analyzed using the social practice model created by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012). The data for this study were collected from Airbnb hosts and guests in Finnish Lapland, primarily in Rovaniemi. Rovaniemi, ‘the capital of Lapland’, is a popular tourist destination (Visit Finland 2023). The main tourist attractions in the city are the Santa Claus Village and a wide range of winter activities, such as reindeer, husky, and snowmobile excursions (Visit Finland 2023). Tourism is an important source of livelihood for many people in Rovaniemi. The number of tourists has been growing, and the number of Airbnb lodgings has followed the same pattern (Visitory 2023). In 2022, 968,000 bed nights were recorded in paid accommodations in Rovaniemi, including both bed nights at registered establishments and at Airbnb. The share of registered bed nights was 71% and non-registered 29% (Visitory 2023). The density of Airbnb lodgings compared to the population is higher in Rovaniemi than, for example, in Helsinki or Barcelona (AirDNA 2023).

Digital platforms such as Airbnb are transforming the hospitality landscape at destinations in many ways, bringing value but sometimes also critical consequences for locals, neighbourhoods, and businesses (Dredge and Gyimóthy 2017; Germann Molz 2018; Roelofsen 2018). There have also been heated discussions on the topic of the Airbnb in Rovaniemi. The local people are becoming increasingly involved in this so-called networked hospitality phenomenon (Germann Molz 2018)—some voluntarily as hosts, guests, or service providers, some not always according to their own will as neighbours, locals, or stakeholders in decision-making. There seems to be a strong belief in the tourism field that this type of digitally mediated business model is here to stay and so it is important to analyse its dynamics and consequences in diverse destinations (Heo 2016; Priporas, Stylos, Rahimi, and Vedanthachari 2016).

In the hospitality field, it is beneficial to examine new encounters to understand hospitality practices and their impacts on various stakeholders (Lugosi 2021). This

article discusses the peculiarities of hospitality practices in digital encounters and their potential to yield insights into hospitality practices at destinations. The findings of the research contribute to critical discussions of the role of digital platforms in shaping hosting practices, intimacy, and hospitable destination experiences (see for example Roelofsen 2018; Roelofsen and Minca 2018; Minca and Roelofsen 2021) by adopting a practice theory perspective. The practice theory-informed framework developed in the study illustrates how digital platforms increase the elasticity of hospitality practices. Hence, the digital hospitality practices emerging from the data show how the specialist knowledge and hospitality resources of the local people are being used for the benefit of the hosts, guests, the platform, and destinations when constructing a hospitable and sustainable destination experience.

## **Literature review**

### ***Sharing economy and Airbnb as a context for emergent hospitality practices***

Tourism and hospitality—as social practices and discourses—are increasingly digitally mediated. Airbnb, as the widest global digital hospitality network (Germann Molz 2018), facilitates human-to-human interactions on digital platforms by putting the interaction and intimacy of guests and hosts in the middle of the experience. The tourism experience can be considered to take place everywhere, both offline and online (Neuhofer 2023). Digital platforms facilitate exchanges of both material resources of hospitality, such as food, beds, or rides, and the sociable resources of local information and interaction in the destination. Technologies such as Airbnb also shape tourism and hospitality practices, regarding how and where people travel, and what people get to know about the destination (Ash, Kitchin, and Leszczynski 2016; Minca and Roelofsen 2021).

The sharing economy is characterized by increased elasticity that creates new kinds of value, new markets, and practices, and also transforms the old structures at tourism destinations in a dynamic way (Dredge and Gyimóthy 2015). Social and geographical boundaries lose their meaning when hospitality practices take place online as liquid forms of consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). The reason for the advancement of the sharing economy and Airbnb has been the development of the internet and digital platforms (Belk 2010), as well as the request from tourists to have local experiences and guidance at destinations. In addition to financial benefits, social interaction is an important value for the participants and for their experience in Airbnb (Guttentag 2015; Priporas et al. 2016). Further, many people prefer to have temporary access to material rather than owning resources themselves, including for environmental reasons (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Nowadays, through these social networking technologies, platforms have connected millions of strangers all over the globe in their desire for individual(ized) encounters (Roelofsen 2018).

Airbnb is not only transforming but also diversifying hospitality practices. There are as many hosting styles as there are hosts, guests, and interactions, but certain common hospitality practices that hosts and guests perform can be recognized. In their study, Ikkala and Lampinen (2015) found two typical hosting styles in Airbnb. The first hosting style is called ‘remote hospitality’, in which the host does not share the same

apartment as the guest. The dialogue between the host and guest typically occurs via the digital platform. The second hosting style can be called ‘on-site hospitality’, in which the host is physically present and shares the space with the guest (Priporas et al. 2016). In the latter setting, there is a natural chance for more intimate interaction, where practices may create a ‘horizon of intelligibility’ for people (Schatzki 2005) when living together and sharing the daily practices of life.

When compared to more traditional hospitality sectors, Airbnb leverages dimensions such as entertainment, education, localness, and personalization more than hotels (Mody, Suess, and Lehto 2017). Andreu, Bigne, Amaro, and Palomo (2020) found that the guest–host experience is important in the sharing economy. In their study, issues such as authenticity, psychological closeness, social presence, home feeling, empathy, and intercultural service encounters were shown to be important factors. Interaction on Airbnb can be described more as an experience than as a utilitarian transaction (Johnson and Neuhofer 2017; Tussyadiah and Pesonen 2015). Tussyadiah and Pesonen (2015) found that guests are eager to develop ‘meaningful social interactions’ with their hosts. Johnson and Neuhofer (2017) called Airbnb a ‘game changer’, as it offers direct access to interaction with the local people and to practices that might also offer authentic experiences in a destination (Johnson and Neuhofer 2017).

Networking empowered by the internet and digital platforms have made it easy for individuals to become active participants in the tourism scene and to share their unutilized resources or hospitality with others (Germann Molz 2018). Often, discussions of hospitality, in the context of tourism interactions, invoke notions of ‘host’ and ‘guest’, emphasizing interpersonal relationships (Lugosi 2021; Lynch et al. 2011). In the context of Airbnb, the roles of the participants are dynamic, changing and transparent. This enforces feelings of community and authenticity, as Airbnb hosts could also be guests in another situation with the same digital profile. The transparent reviews, hosting practices, and ‘proof’ of hospitality can be witnessed on the digital platform. Intelligent quality control qualifies and ranks the hosts, guests, and the everyday lives of individuals into specific ranking. The status of ‘superhost’ is given only to hosts who fulfil Airbnb’s strict hosting criteria (Roelofsen and Minca, 2018). In this setting, Airbnb encourages participants to employ certain hospitality practices in connecting, welcoming, hosting, and guesing. It enables and directs the social practices of interaction but leaves space and takes advantage of individual and personal hosting and guesing. Digital and local social networks at destinations enable dynamic information exchange (Pultar and Raubal, 2009). The agency of the digital platform is remarkable in this setting as hospitality does not always involve human actors on platforms at all (Lugosi 2014). New hospitality-related practices may arise in these encounters and create value and innovation for wider audiences in tourism domains (Lugosi 2021). For example, emergent practices often occur behind the scenes in digital encounters between the hosts and guests, and these practices are mediated and sometimes shaped by the digital platforms. Moreover, artificial intelligence may have an increased role in these encounters. Importantly, the local know-how and hospitality resources are used for the benefit of the hosts, guests, platform, and the destination. This setting makes visible emergent values, such as new intimacies, personalization, and wider conceptions of the service encounters expanding to digital spheres. There could be for example local, community-based, digital hosting services at destinations, creating value for all.

### *Intimacy in Airbnb host–guest relations*

In Airbnb, ordinary people become part of the global Airbnb network and perform as hosts and guests. Indeed, Airbnb brings the hospitality business into the most intimate space: the home. The Airbnb platform operationalizes the key concepts of home, community, and hospitality by digitally creating a world of real and imagined hosts and guests, where a specific set of intimate relationships is put on display in the name of hospitality. The hosts' daily lives and their private places are encouraged to be shown to visitors. The hosts constantly shape the lines between public and private encounters in the digital encounter (Roelofsen and Minca 2018).

Airbnb has turned the hosting or the labour of care of guests during digital encounters into exchange value, creating individual and personalized travel experiences, together with the experience of belonging to or within unknown places (Roelofsen and Minca 2018). Indeed, Airbnb empowers locals to become intermediaries who interpret the places they live in for tourists, and Airbnb hosts can be considered a new type of local tour guide (Richards 2017; Roelofsen 2018). The hospitality practices begin before potential guests arrive at destinations. In fact, the hosts perform as destination guides sometimes for many months, all the way from the enquiry to feedback phase; the host is expected to be constantly available as an information source. Many hosts disseminate their knowledge also by creating materials, such as digital destination guidebooks, and by sharing the data for the platform and for their guests.

Interactions are transformed into experiences, and a form of commercial friendship can emerge (Lashley and Morrison 2003; Price and Arnould 1999). Commercial friendship has several characteristics in common with other forms of friendship, notably affection, intimacy, social support, loyalty, and mutual gift giving (Andersson Cederholm and Hultman 2010; Price and Arnould 1999). In the Airbnb context, financial issues can sometimes be almost forgotten, as the financial transaction has been accomplished beforehand, and there is no need to talk about money in the interaction. Instead, the host can concentrate on employing different strategies to make guests feel welcomed (Roelofsen 2018). Indeed, Airbnb uses intimacy in the process of creating commercial value. Often, the goal of the level of intimacy in this context is close to friendship.

Temporary access facilitated by the digital platform provides the opportunity to experience a new and different lifestyle in different homes, letting tourists imagine how everyday life is in another destination. This is an important motivation for some people to travel (Schuckert, Peters, and Pilz 2018). The Airbnb platform creates imaginaries of homes, where the home can be promoted as an authentic and safe site of belonging in an increasingly alienating world (MacCannell 1973; Wang 1999). Via the platform, guests may buy a connection with a certain person, to a certain hospitable space, for a certain time (Priporas et al. 2016). A close relationship with the host provides possibilities for the tourists to experience 'real' local cultures and to get an identity of 'good travellers' (Gyimóthy 2017: 66; Roelofsen 2018) living with locals in local encounters.

### *Changing dynamics of hospitality practices*

Everyday life is full of social practices. Some practices are rising, some are transforming, and some are falling, indicating a changing and liquid phenomenon (Shove et al. 2012). Although practice theory is not homogeneous, all practice theorists share a common interest in trying to understand the practices that make up the frames of organized actions in which people engage to carry out concrete actions (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005).

Socio-material practices and the socio-technological system are deeply integrated in hospitality and tourism within sharing economies (Lugosi 2021). The digital system makes it possible to offer underutilized accommodation resources for the market and, from the guest side, to have access to short-time accommodations in local surroundings, often hosted by a local person. Within Airbnb, actions and interactions take place via various connected practices (Schatzki 2019), which are linked and work together (Shove et al. 2012). Practices include ‘forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things, and their use, knowledge like understanding, know-how, emotional, and motivation related knowing’ (2002: 249). From this starting point, Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) created a model of three practice elements: materials, competence, and meaning. According to this schema, the materials include, for instance, digital platforms, infrastructures, and tangibles, such as the home and the embodied persons—that is, the hosts and the guests. Holistic understanding and practical knowledge are seen together and are referred to as competence. Meaning represents significant social and symbolic interactions during actions. There are interdependent and remarkable linkages between these elements (Shove et al. 2012).

According to Shove et al. (2012) and Reckwitz (2002), practices can be seen as ‘performances’. Individuals are the hosts of a practice, and through performances and doings, the ‘pattern’ is provided and reproduced. In the repeated moments of performances, such as in Airbnb hosting, the interdependencies between elements that constitute the practice are sustained (Shove et al. 2012: 7). Reckwitz does not discuss the qualities of an individual host but refers to ‘elements and qualities of practice in which the single individual participates’ (2002: 259). In the Airbnb context, this means that the hosts and guest take the suggested role of host or guest in the situation at hand, following the perceived or understood rules of the practice. This study follows Shove et al. (2012), agreeing that agencies and competencies are distributed between things, for instance, digital platforms and people, and that social relations are embedded in everyday life (Shove et al. 2012: 10).

This study follows Schatzki (2005) in recognizing that practices create ‘horizons of intelligibility’ for people, and they can be described as ‘open-ended spatial-temporal manifolds of actions’ and also as ‘sets of hierarchically organized doings or sayings, tasks, and projects’. Practice theory posits that ‘action is only possible and understandable in relation to common and shared practices and that social order is actually constituted by different practices’ (Giddens 1984). This study also agrees with Warde’s (2005) and Schatzki’s (2005) notions that practices include, for instance, various activities and representations. Practices may be configurations of different mental frames, materials, technology, values, and symbols. According to Schatzki (1996: 3), intelligibility and understanding structure human action, and ‘social order and individuality... result from practices’ (Shove et al. 2012: 4).

A combination of the different elements makes up practices that can be described as ‘routinized ways in which bodies are moving, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood’ (Reckwitz 2002: 250). According to practice theory, practices may limit or enable interactions. Human and non-human relations can be understood through the theory of practice, where technologies, including digital platforms such as Airbnb, can be defined as ‘configurations that work’ (Rip and Kemp 1998) and add value when they are assembled together into effective configurations (Suchman et al. 1999: 399; Shove et al. 2012). Hospitality practices in the Airbnb context depend on a specific combination of materials, competence, and meanings, and hospitality practices evolve dynamically as these change. Airbnb is an innovation, a technological configuration that has been able to create a community of hosts and guests for the business of intimacy. Participants perform hosting and guesting practices independently according to their competence and experience but under the control of the platform. This study analyses the emerging hospitality-related social practices that are facilitated by this digital platform, using three practice elements: materials, competence, and meaning.

## Methodology

This research followed the interpretivist paradigm: participants' perspectives, researcher involvement, and contextual understanding and interpretation of data had a central role in the research process. Therefore, the research was transactional and subjectivist, and the findings were created as the investigation proceeded in an interpretive process combining the existing knowledge with the data of this research. The interpretive social sciences paradigm recognizes that experiences, their meanings, and values are fluid as they are continuously being socially and culturally (re)constructed and (re)interpreted (Jennings 2010).

Altogether, the data consisted of 11 Airbnb host interviews, and analysis of 38 correspondences between the hosts and guests on the Airbnb platform, and reviews from the same 38 guests on the platform. Data were collected between February and July 2021. 20 hosts were initially identified through purposive sampling, and 11 agreed to participate in the data collection and research process. The hosts allowed the author to access their correspondence. As the correspondence data also involved guest viewpoints, the hosts contacted their former guests to ask for permission for the correspondence to be analyzed. Most of the contacted guests were willing to take part in this study; some of them expressed positive feelings about receiving greetings from their former hosts in Lapland. The correspondence and the reviews are from the Airbnb platform and show examples of 'authentic' interaction between the hosts and guests in that digital setting.

The hosts were asked to be interviewed, and all of them agreed. Ethical issues and the background of the study were introduced to the participants, and informed consent was gained according to the protocols prescribed by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2023). The host interviews lasted 1.5 to 2.5 hours, producing 330 pages of transcribed text. Five of the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and six via Microsoft Teams, mostly because of the pandemic.

The data presents diverse hosting styles. Around 36 % of the hosts practiced 'remote hospitality', while 64 % of the hosts accommodated the guests at their home or very close surroundings to their home, which can be described as 'on-site hospitality' (see Ikkala and Lampinen, 2015). Thus, it is relevant to note, that on-site hospitality is more the dominant hosting style in the data of this study.

The thematic analysis was chosen for this study, as the aim was to analyze social practices in this context. A thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, which is an interpretive and naturalistic approach. The data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo12). However, the first step was to get to know the data thoroughly (Braun and Clarke 2006). Next, notes were taken on interesting data items and the connections between them. After that, the coding began with the NVivo12 system using an inductive approach. The examples of the codes included the following labels: getting to know local life, welcoming, taking care, feeling like at home, sharing, communicating on a digital platform, interacting, giving presents, empathising, and learning.

The codes and data extracts were then checked, and potential, significant themes were searched (Braun and Clarke 2006). At this point, deductive analysis was also employed, and existing theoretical frameworks informed the development of the themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). For instance, the frameworks created by Warde (2005), Shove et al. (2012), and Camilleri and Neuhofer (2017) informed this stage. As mentioned before, practice theory was the guiding interpretive framework for analysing the elements of practices between guests and hosts. The aim was to attempt to understand and explain the phenomenon by analysing the hospitality-related practices. The four practices constructed in this study are corresponding, welcoming and being welcomed, hosting and being a guest, and closing. The data presents examples of hospitality practices that are being constructed through the digital platform.

To discover even more about the dynamics of social practices in this context, the findings were analyzed using the scheme created by Shove et al. (2012) and presented accordingly. This model is based on three practice elements: materials, competence, and meaning. The definition and description of each practice element were written (Braun and Clarke 2006), and the data extracts were selected to illustrate key features of practices and practice elements. The aim was to write a story that explained the phenomenon. A formative reliability check was conducted, as examples from coded content were compared to the deductively labelled practices. In the findings section, each element of practice is analyzed in detail with support from extracted quotes. The host interviews are marked with (H), the correspondences between the hosts and guests are marked with (C), and the reviews with (R) in the findings section. Table 1 demonstrates the hospitality practices and the elements of practices occurring on the digital platform, with examples of the contents from the data-driven analysis, which are described in more detail in the findings section.

	Description	Materials	Competence	Meaning
Corresponding	Salutary actions on the digital platform Getting to know each other Instructions Questions from each other on digital platform Confirmation: online payment	Digital platform Informative digital materials (e.g. profiles, photos, and destination guidebooks)	Communicating Informing on the important issues related to the destination Asking and answering the questions at hand (linguistic, cultural, social, technological skills)	Getting to know each other Building the relationship Helping Co-creating the destination experience
Welcoming and being welcomed	Getting into the temporary home Physically / digitally facilitated welcoming Instructions and rules	Being there Check-in with the electronic system (sometimes videos) Giving what promised, for example, a 'home-like accommodation' Presents, brochures, guidebooks	A warm meeting Easy access (instructions) Welcoming and being welcomed to a temporary home Empathising	Getting closer, building a relationship Intimacy Feeling 'at home' and safe
Hosting and being a guest	Communication mostly via the digital platform Taking care Informing, helping, and giving tips	Sharing materials, such as children's winter clothes and sleds Giving and getting something extra, like presents	Constant digital connection (digitally via the platform) Giving and getting local tips Learning from each other	Being there for each other whenever needed ('a friend at the destination') Feeling safe at the destination Hosting everyone

			Spending time together (sometimes)	
Closing	Finishing actions and feedback	Giving gifts (for example handmade woollen socks) Written feedback on the platform for each other	Thanking Giving feedback orally and on the platform (benefits both)	Getting the most of the destination experience Sharing farewell feelings

**Table 1. Hospitality practices and elements of practices on the digital platform**

## Findings and Discussion

### *Materials related to hospitality practices*

According to Shove et al. (2012), the materials of social practices include ‘objects, infrastructures, hardware, and the body itself’. In the sharing economy, these materials include digital platforms, technological infrastructure, equipment such as computers and mobile phones, digital, and physical materials such as accommodation facilities, photos, destination guidebooks, narratives of the host and guest, presents, and other tangible objects, and the hosts and guests themselves. In what follows, some materials related to hospitality practices are presented, supported with quotes from the data.

The internet and digital platforms can be called ‘technologies of hospitality’ (Bialski 2012), creating rules of engagement and participation in online encounters. Hospitality-related socio-material and socio-technological practices shape experiences (Lugosi 2021). The international digital platform is the most important material in this context. The reputational mechanisms of the platform create a level of trust that makes it safe to participate in the sharing economy (Germann Molz 2013). When signing on to the platforms, the technological process validates the identity of the user, simultaneously forcing the participant to agree to the rules of the practice.

The platform is easy to use and user-friendly. The mobile version works really well, and you can put automatic messages there. The platform is a prerequisite for us to be involved in this at all. (H5)

Digital material and narratives, such as photos and digital descriptions, are created and shared. These materials provide information on the facilities and on the destination; the platform gives provides templates, and encourages the hosts to create materials such as destination guidebooks for the guests. Further, the platform proposes that the hosts create automatic answers to the most typical questions it recognizes by the platform algorithms (see Airoidi and Rokka 2022) and even helps with language translations. Interestingly, the platform-dictated interaction scripts may seem to help the host, but they also strongly shape the interaction and distributed agency.

The hosts and guests create digital profiles and narratives of themselves. The home, surroundings, and destination are represented on the platform to potential guests as a hospitable place offering experiential possibilities. Often, the hosts are introduced as local

residents. People's relationships, private spaces, and homes are being digitally reproduced and transformed to be sites for and of production and consumption (Roelofsen and Minca 2018; Roelofsen 2018). In these materials, the hosts also inform the guests, at least indirectly, about their hosting practices.

In the Airbnb context, at times, the hosts welcomed the guests personally, but sometimes, human welcoming was replaced with an automatic system or by robotic and digital hosts, as used in many self-service hotels. Sometimes, the welcome was enriched by materials (Bialski 2012; Gill et al. 2022). These authentic and customized materials showed signs of hospitality and intimacy. Often, the materials were shared by the hosts, with no compensation. This may have offered a feeling of intimacy and care; the hosts were concerned about the safe and positive experience at the destination:

We have a self-made destination guidebook that tells about Rovaniemi and also about our family and our life here in the north, and then we usually have knitted woollen socks for children. I always ask if there are boys or girls coming and what age they are, so that I know a little about the size. Then there is Finnish chocolate and gingerbread cookies. (H7)

You can use our children's winter overalls. (C6)

We'll show them where we have the sledding hill, the kicksledges, reflective vests and headlamps. We tell them that if you go on that road, please put them on. (H6)

Typically, in Airbnb, hosts welcome guests to their homes or home-like accommodations. A home, including a commercial home, can be considered a material space where guests are welcomed. The Airbnb home can be considered an 'exhibit of itself', an intimate and safe place. Some hosts selected the materials and practices that were seen as valuable by their visitors to satisfy the guests' desires for an 'authentic' experience of a typical home in the region. These aesthetic materials were also shown in the marketing materials of the Airbnb home (see Roelofsen 2018). Home-like accommodation or the possibility of visiting a 'real' home of a local host seemed to have been an interesting experience for the guests:

We do have an authentic environment; it is not clinical but, of course, clean. Unique and different. The sauna is a thing, and they like the fireplace too. The hotels don't have these. And whoever wants to visit our home will see a Finnish home. At least the Australians wrote that 'absolutely highlight was the visiting the home', and some others wrote that 'they even invited us to visit them'. (H4)

Some hosts were willing to show a little bit of the backstage (MacCannell 1973). However, there was often a limit, for example, access to the upper floor of the house where the bedrooms were located; or sometimes the hosts were embarrassed about the untidiness of the backstage. However, this might be a sign of authenticity for the guests. Roelofsen (2018) noted that some hosts bordered certain intimate spaces, such as their bedrooms, or shared some intimate practices only with certain guests but not with others. By performing imaginary 'insides' and 'outsides' in the home, the hosts

attempted to protect their own sense of ‘homeliness’ while having guests in the house (Roelofsen 2018).

Many people come to our house. For example, an Australian female couple had a Christmas meal with us. There was a lot of food, so it was good to share. We have a two-story house. Upstairs, I have not been with anyone. We have been pretty much in the living room and in the kitchen. We have a mess in the utility room, and someone wanted to do their laundry, so I had to say, ‘sorry, it looks terrible’. Once, one couple wanted to have more wood, and we weren’t there ourselves. I said that you can go to the shed, but take it as an experience; it is a Finnish shed. If you see a children’s swimming pool there, let it tell you that it is sometimes summer here. When you have to show something really ugly, it is a tough thing to me. (H4)

Some guests were eager to have a cultural experience by spending time with local families and getting to know the everyday life in the local surroundings at the destination, whereas other tourists were not. The sharing economy may modify tourism flows in destinations, for example, by transforming neighbourhoods or seldom visited places into the tourist sphere and spreading tourists more widely. This means ‘that various scales of hospitality—such as the home, neighbourhood, or town—mix in complex ways that require tourists, residents, and other inhabitants to share these spaces and resources in new ways’ (Germann Molz 2018: 232).

It may be so that people haven’t seen tourists pulling suitcases in our neighbourhood before, but on the other hand, it brings more users to the neighbourhood services, for example, to our bars, so as far as the tourists themselves are responsible like what we’ve had, they probably won’t cause problems. And it’s so nice that tourists can see more than the city centre—such a typical neighbourhood of front-line men’s houses [old, traditional wooden houses built after the Second World War] and the Finnish cultural landscape. (H4)

Sometimes, materials such as presents were exchanged during closing practices. This emphasized feelings of intimacy in contrast to ordinary commercial accommodation businesses. This type of ‘commercial friendship’ is close to other forms of friendship, with aspects such as social support, loyalty, and reciprocal gift giving (Price and Arnould 1999; Andersson Cederholm and Hultman 2010).

The guests bought flowers for us, and many times, they left a letter. It’s wonderful! Once, I had said that I liked tulips, so they wanted to leave a bouquet of tulips here. That was nice! (H6)

The Airbnb platform self-controls the quality of the experiences and the behaviour of the users. The digital system lays the responsibility of expectations and experiences on both guests and hosts in the sharing economy (Roelofsen 2018). Performances largely rely on the platform’s trust technologies and on how such technologies may both enable and obstruct ‘participation in community’ (Richardson, 2015: 125; Roelofsen and Minca 2018), as good feedback is vital to both hosts and guests to be a part of the community.

Feedback is also important for shaping the material related to the experience, as shown in the extract below, in which the host shares her own material with the guest:

Yes, they were indeed the first guests, and we asked how everything was there, and they said, well, that there could be a microwave oven, so we right away gave them our own microwave. (H4)

Materials related to hospitality practices are important in the production and consumption of hospitality and tourism experiences in digital encounters in the socio-technological system of sharing economies (Lugosi 2021). The digital system as material makes it possible to offer underutilized resources for the market and, from the guest side, to have access to short-time accommodation in local surroundings often hosted by a local person. Materials such as the digital platform and the algorithms also have an agency and steer hospitality practices in this process, as intimacy is used to create commercial value.

### ***Competence in diverse hosting practices***

According to Shove et al. (2012), competence refers to multiple ways of understanding and practical knowledge. Competencies in the sharing economy include hospitality, language, communication, cultural, and technological skills that enable operation on the digital platform. Typically, knowledge is co-created when interacting with and exchanging messages on a digital platform. In what follows, some competencies related to emerging hospitality practices are presented, supported with quotes extracted from the data. In the following quote, the host described the most important competences for a good host:

The host has to be willing to help, honest and responsible. You have to react quickly to the situation at hand. Often, we get thanks for being friendly hosts. We're flexible, and we've gotten praise for that too. I think that it's our responsibility to communicate with those guests, and it doesn't hurt if you're a friendly, fair, and nice person. And you have to put in a bit of effort. You have to find out about things and listen, and there are laws and things like that. You have to know what you are doing. But when you get it rolling, it starts to be very nice. And you have to have some kind of language skills. (H4)

The closeness of the relationship varied, depending not only on the style of the hosting but also on the willingness of the guests. The extended time spent chatting with guests emphasized the relationship and may have intensified the feeling of intimacy. As mentioned before, there are as many hosting styles and profiles of the guests as there are hosts, guests and interactions, but certain hospitality practices can be recognized as being related to interaction. In the data, different hosting styles were recognized, including 'remote hospitality' and 'on-site hospitality' (Ikkala and Lampinen 2015). This is an example of the latter:

Necessarily, we don't see the guests at all. We have created a very light process. Sometimes, we don't see or hear from the guests after the booking situation. Yet they know, that I am available all the time. The guest has probably gotten the feeling that they are taken care of. We communicate, we give links to the general

Visit Rovaniemi destination website. From there, they can find services and experiences on what to do in Rovaniemi. (H10)

Guests valued the convenience and flexibility offered by Airbnb, and they particularly appreciated the warm hospitality provided by the host (Priporas et al. 2016). Empathic hospitality competence in the moments of encounter was important for both parties, as can be seen in the extract:

There have been some fantastic encounters. Once, we noticed from the correspondence before the visit that there were really friendly Australian grandmas coming. They were happy when I told them, 'Hello, I can pick you up from the airport'. I took them to the grocery store, and it was super nice with them. So, you also get a lot when you realise that they certainly didn't expect to be picked up from the airport and introduced to Rovaniemi, taken to the shop, and given restaurant and other tips. (H1)

The competence of welcoming was a key practice in hospitality. It was also important to the identity and personhood of hosts and guests (Gill et al. 2022). Some guests preferred personal welcomes, whereas others preferred impersonal digital practices, such as personalized digital messages. However, meeting personally provided more possibilities for interaction, discussion, and getting to know each other. Sometimes, the hosts took guests from the airport and showed them around the town, which was explained as 'just genuine hospitality'.

After the airport, I say that Santa Claus Village is there on the left, and there is the centre of Rovaniemi, and there you can see our home. I drive a bit around, so they can see where the taxis are and the supermarket, and usually, the conversation there has already progressed so far that I know if they intend to go to a restaurant right away to eat, or if they need some breakfast ingredients. I did not plan these conversations. Sometimes, I take them to Sky Hotel's roof to see the scenery. (H1)

The hosts shared the local knowledge of the destination with the guests as local tour guides. They took on this role naturally, as the relationships evolved during the correspondence. The stories were authentic and co-created in those moments, either online or offline as dynamic information exchange (Pultar and Raubal 2009). In online encounters, sometimes the interaction scripts or propositions may have been dictated by the platform and algorithms (Roelofsen 2018). The Airbnb host, as a 'private destination host', provided the information required and even more on the destination for the guest 'as a part of their duty'. The power of this 'invisible' workforce might be underestimated by destinations.

I think they have the right to ask and bother. We'll tell how to get around and how to get to Santa Claus Village; that's what everyone asks. We are like tourist guides. You have to find out about things you don't know yourself, for example, how local transport works. They like the fact that it is a homely destination and then probably also the fact that we are present and hospitable. (H4)

We have a tour guide, but we have found that local knowledge is a much better source of information! (R1)

There are tickets available if you want to see a musical tonight at 6 pm! (C14)

The hospitality and constant digital presence of the hosts were highly appreciated. Although this kind of relationship fostered trust, learning from each other, through shared experience and co-creation, closeness was not always genuine, as certain hospitality acts were performed to get good feedback. This was supported by the review system of the digital platform.

Good feedback is extremely important because the booking platforms follow them, and you have to get 5-star ratings. Of course, sometimes you think that, hah, this is so easy, this time I will get five. But yes, as a person, I am genuinely hospitable, so it's nice to be able to offer a little more than what the customer has expected. (H1)

There might be power tensions, unpleasant situations, and negative feelings during the interaction (Bialski 2012; Germann Molz 2018). Sometimes, these situations were related to the unclear and unspoken roles of the participants. Further, the Airbnb platform interface and the evaluation system may have shaped the behaviour of the participants and even steered the lifestyles of people and places that were represented on the network. (Bialski 2016; Roelofsen and Minca 2018). This might have influenced hospitality practices and required recovery competencies.

Certain competences were required for participants, and not everyone was competent enough to take part. As Shove et al. (2012) expressed, practices can be seen as 'performances', where, through the immediacy of doing, the 'pattern' is followed and reproduced. During these performances, the interdependencies between elements that make the practice an entity are sustained over time (Shove et al. 2012: 7), and this requires diverse competencies related to hospitality skills.

### *Meanings related to hospitality practices*

Meanings related to social practices include 'the social and symbolic significance of participation' (Shove et al. 2012: 23). In the Airbnb context, meanings are related to fundamental reasons for taking part in the practices for the participants and for the destination (Dredge and Gyimóthy 2015). The materials, for instance, the digital platform or 'home', the competencies, including the know-how required such as hospitality or cultural skills, and the meaning of Airbnb hosting are intimately related and constitute a block of interconnected elements (Shove et al. 2012).

At the core of Airbnb's operations lay a set of affective relations between complete strangers forming a global community of hosts and guests. Airbnb communicates values such as home, localness, belonging, and community on the platform (Roelofsen 2018). Airbnb hosts are motivated to take part in the sharing economy for both social and financial reasons; often the ultimate goal for them is to create mutual and holistic experiences for the guests and meanings for themselves (Ikkala and Lampinen 2015).

We want to do this for many reasons; we are not only business people in this sense. But I emphasize that we also want money; this is not just charity. When you give something like, ' Hello, the weather is good now, and the northern lights are coming, do you want me to go on a hike with you? ' And that wouldn't

matter, since they paid well for our cabin anyway. I know that when we go abroad somewhere, and we have the opportunity to come across this kind of hospitality, it's great. You have to give something to get back something. That's what I believe. (H6)

Guests were motivated not only by cheaper prices but also by a desire to access the 'real' culture, local people, and authentic destination (MacCannell 1973), which might be more difficult to find via the traditional tourism industry (Johnson and Neuhofer 2017; Camilleri and Neuhofer 2017). The hosts shared knowledge of the local culture and of their favourite places to visit and explore. Guests were able to visit the secret places of the local people, which may not be found in brochures (Germann Molz 2014). Guests had opportunities to access backstage experiences of the destination, thus gaining 'authentic experiences' (MacCannell 1973).

When our children are in the yard and playing, we might go to see what our guests are doing. I think I can read them quite well. Some who want to be in peace, we let them be, but the ones who are right away asking, we might ask whether their kids can play together with our kids. Sometimes, they want to hear our stories. We always talk with them, and then we might agree to have a little campfire together one evening. (H7)

Digital platforms enable people to meet other people from other parts of the world and create 'new relationships that mix the roles of friend, acquaintance, or stranger', creating moments of intimacy, closeness, or mutual understanding' (Bialski 2012: 244–245). After many months of corresponding and building the relationship together, one host described the feeling like this:

I feel like we would have our own friends coming over. (H6)

Typically, digital hosting continued throughout the stay and even after the visit. Social relationships and trust were built in the process. There were examples in the data of the hosts who visited the guests on the other side of the world afterward as the social relationship evolved into friendship.

He became really good friends with my husband. My husband went there for a visit just before the pandemic. Later he visited us as a friend, he didn't pay. We get to know each guest before and keep in touch, and we still keep in touch with some. (H4)

There were also examples in the data of the altruistic behaviour and attitudes of the hosts. One host mentioned that she was ready to help guests, even if they might not have chosen her facility for accommodation; she was happy as long as that person came to Rovaniemi. One guest described this kind of host as a 'destination ambassador' for whom the benefit of the destination was an important value. One can only imagine what kind of hospitality value these types of hosts bring for the destination.

You are a great ambassador of Lapland! (R8)

I try to tell them already during the correspondence that you can ask anything. I don't mind, even if the guest chooses another place or goes to a hotel, I'm happy

to help, because in the bigger picture, it is good for us to get them here to Rovaniemi. (H7)

Some practices that were normal at the destination were new for the guests. For example, guests got new insights into the sustainable practices of recycling and saving resources, such as water or energy, at the destination. This emphasized the environmentally friendly and positive image of the destination for the guests and gave more meaning to the experience.

Everywhere in the world, you don't recycle. We also explain the principles and rules of recycling in our digital destination guidebook we have prepared for the guests. Many people take a really long, hot shower after a day outside. I've been thinking whether it's ok to put instructions to warm up in the heat of the sauna and not under running water. Perhaps putting it kindly from the point of view of saving water, water is a precious natural resource. We hosts and the platform could encourage people to take small climate actions even more! (H4)

Pultar and Raubal (2009) found that in the context of couchsurfing, guests were also interested in spending time with their hosts. This can be called co-creation, where customers, experience, and the intensive dialogue is important in the interaction (Chathoth et al. 2013). A similar kind of co-creation of social value also seemed to occur in the context of Airbnb, as the data extracts show from the host's perspective:

I am genuinely interested in those people, the countries they come from, and their stories. And it's fun to see how they react to Finnish home, and catering. We often talk about food, pancakes, and Karelian pies. (H4)

The host in the quote below provided constructive feedback on guests for the benefit of the Airbnb community, which strengthened the hospitality practices:

I give honest feedback to guests because I want to be genuine and honest. Once, I said, 'it's a shame that you had screwed all the radiators closed. In Finland, it can be a challenge'. We gave feedback on that. I think that Airbnb wants communication to work. The knowledge about the guests—whether they are reliable and clean, or how they communicate—helps other hosts as well. I think that Airbnb hosts should cooperate to put genuine feedback there, so you can trust it. Then, the system works well. (H6)

Both guests and hosts are placed by the platform in a transparent relationship based on trust and hospitality. Airbnb's slogans invite the experience of 'local culture', referring to travellers connecting with trustworthy 'local' people. This does not mean only sharing the 'local hospitality' but also creating a travel experience where the hosts open up their most intimate spaces, as well as their neighbourhoods and cities, to strangers, sometimes inviting them to their favourite cafés or local places (Roelofsen and Minca 2018).

In the sharing economy, the host-guest identities are fluid (Germann Molz and Gibson 2007; Lugosi 2008; Lynch et al. 2011; Veijola et al. 2014), and the roles vary according to the setting, which emphasizes the peer-to-peer feeling of the experience. The hosts create their own host identities and hosting styles in this interactive and co-creative

process with the guest and the platform. This peer-to-peer character also includes risks, as the hosts are often not professionals in the hospitality business. The accuracy of the information they offer may also be related to safety issues at the destination. In this context, the concept of a 'hostessing society' introduced by Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen (2008: 176) is relevant. According to this idea, the whole world is not only travelling but also hosting (Germann Molz 2018). Indeed, hosting has spread from the professional tourism industry to local people at the destinations bringing both positive and negative consequences. Everyone with the required competence, materials, and will is welcome to share their extra resources, such as accommodation or local knowledge, to get financial or experiential compensation, and this all builds up the Airbnb community and the culture of hospitable destinations.

## **Conclusion**

As new digital technologies and platforms are increasingly being developed, critical examination of hospitality practices in and across international digital platforms is warranted (den Hond and Moser 2022; Lugosi 2021) for the development of sustainable and hospitable destinations. Destinations function through dynamic and personal practices of hosting, guesting, and sharing. When discussing sharing limited resources, moral responsibility, belonging, access, and power have to be taken into consideration. It is important to question who shares what with whom, when, where, and what the conditions are (Germann Molz 2018). This article discussed the peculiarities of hospitality on digital platforms and their potential to bring insights to hospitality practices at the destinations.

The results of this research contribute to the critical discussions of the role of digital platforms in shaping the hosting practices and hospitable destination experiences in the sharing economy (see Minca and Roelofsen 2021; Roelofsen 2018; Roelofsen and Minca 2018). The framework developed for this study was based on practice theory, and the scheme created by Shove et al. (2012) acted as beneficial tool for analysis. According to the findings, elastic hospitality is constructed through the practices of corresponding, welcoming, being welcomed, hosting, being a guest, and closing. The findings were reflected by the three practice elements—materials, competence, and meaning—following the model by Shove et al. (2012). Clear interdependent linkages between the materials, competencies, and meanings were found (Shove et al. 2012). For example, certain competencies are needed to use the required materials, such as the digital platform, and to interact successfully with guests. Competencies, such as communication on digital platforms must be accurate, welcoming, and personalized. The experience is enriched with materials such as digital destination guidebooks and photos. Authentic encounters and guest privileges for local encounters and knowledge create meanings that consolidate the practice. Relationships and the social value between the host and guest are co-created in the interaction, creating meaning. Hosting performances are continuously redefined through learning and self-reflecting in changing social relations and practices between hosts, guests, and the society are being produced continuously (see Roelofsen 2018). Some practices may also disappear in the process if they are not relevant. As it seems that the reproduction and transformation of social practices has implications for patterns of changed behaviour and consumption,

understanding practices, their emergence, persistence, and disappearance is important (Shove et al. 2012).

Hospitality has become an important networking practice, and hospitality is itself increasingly networked. The sharing economy can be considered a transformative innovation that allows a wider set of people to participate in tourism by sharing and using underutilized resources (Botsman and Rogers 2010). Networking technologies enable strangers to create mobile friendships while sharing the intimacies of their lives in intimate tourism (Bialski 2012; Germann Molz 2014; Roelofsen and Minca 2018). Hosting and guesting at home is a boundary-transgressing practice among strangers, where intimacy and privacy are shared and negotiated. Indeed, hosting has spread from the professional tourism industry to local people at destinations. More widely, according to the idea of a 'hostessing society' (Veijola and Jokinen 2008: 176), all society hosts visitors at the destination. This research contributes to the existing knowledge by highlighting how the elastic and emergent hospitality practices make the destinations more meaningful for the visitors but may also force the local community to be involved in tourism in diverse ways.

Digital platforms guide and control interactions, facilitating hospitality practices, while encouraging local hosts to act as 'destination ambassadors', hosting guests via the digital platform. The roles of the hosts and guests are being constructed during these practices, with the hosts being the constant digitally available with precious local knowledge for the guests. Sometimes, commercial social relationships may turn into friendships through these practices and interactions. The role of Airbnb hosts as informants should not be neglected at destinations. The hosts inform the guests of many issues, such as safety at the destination. This can be enhanced by further input from destination stakeholders. For example, Visit Rovaniemi – the local destination management organization – delivered a digital brochure to Airbnb hosts to warn guests about the thin ice on the river. Other destinations could similarly collaborate with the hosts and local stakeholders to plan how to take care of the tourists in a responsible way in the destinations. As personal and digital hosting practices create value, destinations could innovate digital, personalized hosting service encounters to help meet the needs of all their guests in the future. These developments could probably be empowered by artificial intelligence in the near future.

The findings showed that guests appreciate the value that these kinds of hospitality practices were able to provide them at the destination. Guests valued the feeling of authenticity within a local destination, assured through meaningful social interactions with local people. Hosts got the feeling of being active members of tourism destination. Digitally driven sharing economies enabled interactions between locals and visitors. The performances of hosting and guesting were fluid and interchangeable, and new spatial arrangements were opened up for hosting and guesting (Germann Molz 2018). At destinations such as Rovaniemi, peer-to-peer types of tourism may require tourists, residents, and other inhabitants to share the locations and their resources in new ways (Germann Molz 2018). However, it is also important to acknowledge that expanding the scope and scale of hospitality might also have negative impacts, such as rising rents for the locals, noise, fewer apartments on the market, recycling issues, and waste problems, and tourism might have an impact on the everyday life of locals (Germann Molz 2018).

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The study covers only a single digital platform and one destination. Although the hospitality practices identified

here may be similar to those in other destinations, especially regarding the influence of the digital platform, the societal situation may be different in other socio-economic contexts. Rovaniemi can be regarded as a tourism destination, where many people, including the Airbnb hosts, are familiar with the tourism field, which may have an impact on their competence. Comparative studies may therefore show how and why alternative practices operate elsewhere. Furthermore, the majority of the participants in this study represent 'on-site hospitality', where intimacy is a more relevant issue, so future research can widen the sampling frame to better account for the dynamics and implications of 'remote hospitality'.

Hospitality practices constructed through digital platforms will evolve. However, theories of practice offer systematic ways to explore the processes of transformation and stability of social practices. Future research could examine how new social arrangements and hospitality practices emerge through alternative digital platforms. Research should also consider the societal challenges and risks related to hospitality practices shaped by digitalization, including the ownership of and access to data owned by the platforms, the safety of information and the impact of artificial intelligence in shaping practices and experiences (den Hond and Moser 2022). Furthermore, hospitality practices in destinations can have transformative capacities, for example, in the local population, culture, or the economic and material landscape (Lugosi 2021). It is therefore important for future research to assess how the benefits of digitally mediated hospitality practices can be leveraged to support the interests of a wider set of destination stakeholders.

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