# The home as a consumption space: Promoting social eating*

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## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the food economy and the way it falls into a collaborative consumption model based on sharing, assisted by the internet. Starting with a review of the sharing economy, the chapter evaluates food-sharing platforms that are taking the social dimensions of dining to new levels.

We use the term "food sharing," as it is possible to sell meals that are home cooked to someone in your city via internet-facilitated platforms. It is claimed that this has positive environmental and social effects and the act of sharing could bring people together. Food sharing comprises diverse concepts, indicating a new phenomenon that people in urban spaces, particularly in cities, share land to produce food (e.g., community gardens). Such practices blur the boundaries between work and home. Given the novelty of this phenomenon, the case study of food sharing platform BonAppetour.com is presented as an exploratory approach to this relatively new and unique topic.

The number of people involved in the so-called sharing economy is growing rapidly as alternatives to more traditional approaches to consumption emerge. The focus on consumption is no longer simply on ownership of a commodity, but increasingly involves a consideration of *the means* of acquisition of commodities, along with the experience of acquiring them. There is an emphasis on the sharing or pooling of resources, where products and services are redefined via the use of technology and the peer communities who use it.

The sharing economy has become a term used to define configurations of economic activity and collaborative consumption based on sharing. A solid definition of the sharing economy that reflects common usage is almost impossible; however, it is said to be "economic activity that is peer-to-peer, or person-to-person, facilitated by digital platforms" (Schor, 2015, p. 13). One of the mechanisms which

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enhances the sharing economy is that of social networks, where consumers actively participate in online communities to share information, products, knowledge, and suggestions about a new initiative and/or brand. In reality, there is significant debate concerning conceptions of sharing as part of economic or social practices (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2015). Examples of sharing ventures that fit this definition are "Airbnb" for apartment sharing, "Enjoy" for car sharing, and "BlaBlaCar" for ride sharing. Sharing has become a global phenomenon, due to the expansion of platforms to other countries, as well as the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT), and because the idea of sharing has caught on around the world, following and aided by the economic crisis.

The internet is intrinsically linked to the rise of the sharing economy, providing the means by which sharing can and often does occur. The internet and new technologies have become an integral part of our lives making it easier to communicate, research information, and purchase any kind of product and service. Online transactions are becoming simpler and faster and have definitely made people's lives easier, as with just one click consumers are able to acquire whatever they want in a matter of days. In 2017, there were 3.7 billion internet users in the world with significant penetration ratios in Asia (50.1%), as well as European countries like the United Kingdom (62%), Germany (72.2%), and France (56.3%) (Internetworldstats, 2017). The increase in usage can be explained by the proliferation of content accessible through the internet, mobile apps, and platforms, which has grown exponentially. Beyond new technologies, consumers using digital platforms tend to be motivated by economic, environmental, and social factors, along with a mixture of internal motivations, all of which cause them to use these technologies. Consumers are also increasingly looking for ways to earn or save money, which is why they are currently more receptive to peer-to-peer business models centered on consumer needs, as both potential suppliers and buyers.

The rise of the sharing economy via the medium of the internet has had far-reaching impacts, including in the field of food. Within this domain, there are crucial challenges and opportunities. Food has been identified as a key area for consideration in the challenge of sustainable consumption, due to increasing evidence of the impact of the prevailing food system on the environment, local communities, and social justice. Social eating is seen as a positive thing in order to enhance sustainability and understanding of community action in the development of new food systems. Social eating can be reconsidered and seen as a form of grassroots innovation in itself (Seyfang & Smith, 2007).

Sharing models now exist at all stages of production and distribution for food: from the land to the plate, and from restaurant to home. A good example is food that falls into the collaborative consumption model that is based on sharing, with facilitation by the internet. Whilst cooking can be a burden for some people, for many, cooking and eating is a relaxing leisure pursuit. The kitchen is a place where work and consumption are inseparable. It can involve the development and utilization of websites, social media and apps in order to share skills, spaces or "stuff" (e.g., food itself, meals, devices, tools, etc.); related to growing, preparing, or eating food that dominates consumption in terms of food sharing. These mechanisms offer

the possibility of sharing food with wider communities. Essentially, ICT is stretching the spaces over which food sharing can occur.

"Private cuisine" in the home can be viewed as a place where meals are served, just like in restaurants. Cooking is an activity that so often appears to be outside the relations of paid work and consumption (Cox, 2013); instead, individuals cooking in their own kitchen entails a new sharing activity. Home restaurants have become a competitive area of consumption in the hospitality sector. Although dining out means searching for experiences outside the home, this can be misleading. The home can be an important part of dining-out experiences; and the co-production and co-consumption of food services with customers in the physical setting of the home is a key aspect of home restaurant services (Honggang & Qunchan, 2015). There are many influences on what makes a home restaurant successful; ambiance for example, is different in every home. Other things that may vary are word-of-mouth customer-to-customer marketing; customer service beyond simple product advice; community embeddedness; and informal but meaningful interpersonal relations between owners and customers of the home restaurant. These are some of the key pillars of the strategic marketing approach pursued by the "new home restaurant" concept on the web. This could indicate a counterbalance to globalization because the approach promotes home-cooked meals with a localized feel. The role of the home is fundamental to the success of such businesses and to promoting a localization agenda.

Food tourism has also increasingly attracted the attention of practitioners, consumers and researchers over the past decade (Robinson & Getz, 2014). The search for culinary authenticity, in a cultural context, is an important topic related to motivation and helps broadly explain food tourism experiences (Beer, 2008; Sims, 2009), particularly in event settings (Robinson & Clifford, 2012). Food is an inherent part of culture and national identity and as such, it has a connecting power, bringing people, communities and businesses together. The attitude of restaurants toward using and championing local food is crucial in promoting local food production and bringing authenticity to the experience that tourism destinations deliver to the market (Presenza & Del Chiappa, 2013). Restaurants can play a strategic role in transmitting new information to diners about food and possibly influencing their tastes and preferences. The home restaurant links the hospitality of home with appreciation of local food and traditional cuisine.

BonAppetour.com is a social dining platform that allows you to organize meals and gastronomic events at home as a social dining marketplace. It connects travelers with local hosts for home-dining experiences, including dinner parties, cooking classes, etc. Potential diners can see the menu in advance, and read details of the venue and the host. The following case study clarifies the interrelationships between the social contexts in which people learn food practices. It points out that different social spheres may sometimes apply contradictory influences and that food learning involves emotional and social experiences, with the aim of helping people create healthy, economically vibrant neighborhoods through the development of local food systems.

Currently, research on sharing business models is still in its infancy but, without doubt, certain sectors, e.g., mobility and tourism, have already adopted such models. However, there are no rigorous methodologies for success at the moment and further studies are needed. This case study is a first attempt to explore the field and to provide a starting point for future studies. The case study emerges as an interesting example and offers some insights into the role of food in connecting people who want to make dining a time for sharing, conviviality, and discovery. The overall aim of this chapter is to link theory on the sharing economy and food sharing, through an exploration of the case study as an example of collaborative consumption in practice using new technologies.

## 6.2   Forms of the sharing economy: a literature review

The sharing economy (or collaborative economy or collaborative consumption) was first defined by Benkler (2004). It is a type of economic activity, as connoted by the term "sharing economies," which can involve production or consumption. Social sharing and exchange is becoming a common modality in meeting valuable needs at the very core of the most advanced economies in the information, culture, education, computation, and communications sectors (Benkler, 2004). As Belk (2014) has argued, sharing implies interdependence, an obligation of care, and responsible use by those involved; it creates a social bond and gives rise to an (implicit) debt.

It is a collaborative economy which has accessibility at its core, where a continuation of the ongoing economic crisis means consumers are looking to supplement their income with new revenue opportunities to save or purchase at low cost and for short periods (Belk, 2014). The sharing economy may help consumers achieve this aim because they actually just want cheaper services and less hassle. The sharing economy also involves online platforms that help people share access to assets, resources, time and skills (Wosskow, 2014). The European Parliament (2015) defines it as "a new socioeconomic model that has taken off thanks to the technological revolution, with the internet connecting people through online platforms on which transactions involving goods and services can be conducted securely and transparently."

With sharing models, the goal is not always to maximize profits. This calls into question the current capitalist model and replaces it with a cooperative model based on shared objectives that will allow redistribution of wealth. The central point appears to be that emphasis on the *possession* of property or goods appears to be shifting to the *use* of them and the quality of services themselves (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Goods and services are offered to the consumer, but it is necessary to distinguish how they access them. In many cases, the use of shared goods is financially compensated, thus resembling a simple market transaction, where the only difference is the means through which the exchange is intermediated (but in other cases, financial compensation is substituted by a nonmonetary exchange).

A clear example is that of music streaming (access) and music downloaded (possession). Whilst there have been numerous literature reviews discussing the negative impact of file sharing on music sales (Connolly & Krueger, 2006; Liebowitz, 2006; 2016), this phenomenon has eliminated many of the intermediary organizations usually involved in the consumption process, such as commercial structures, financial and traditional institutions. It has thus setup new patterns of consumption without ownership. This trend toward *access* rather than *possession* of goods and services can be seen as an extension of a rental or leasing model, where ownership is not the focus of consumption activity (Goudin, 2016).

Energy, transport, communications, and tourism seem, at present, to be the sectors most affected by the sharing economy. Airbnb is one of the most cited examples in this regard, but the spectrum of conveyed goods or services via the web is not limited to tourism (Guttentag, 2013) though it is based on the idea of relational goods (i.e., goods which are enjoyed through the establishment of interpersonal relationships) (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). More rarely discussed is the way such services replace less formally regulated activities, along with ideas about the legal obstacles or barriers that prevent the sharing economy from reaching its full development potential (EPRS, 2016). Besides selling and renting, other forms of sharing include lending, donating, and bartering, where non-anonymous agents share something more than just goods, namely, solidarity and a sense of belonging.

Sharing may be one possible alternative market structure that can be adopted by anticonsumption proponents (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010). Sharing is obviously not an extreme form of active market rebellion (Dobscha, 1998), but possibly more similar to minimization behaviors such as the downsizing of consumption practices and needs (Fournier, 1998). Sharing could be a new services model; a platform that changes the way companies manage their value chain and address changing customer needs and wants. As sharing is a communal act, it may connect us to others and create feelings of solidarity and bonding (Belk, 2007, 2010). Four forms seem to emerge, but they are fast changing (see Fig. 6.1).

In summary, the main issues or dimensions that the literature associates with the sharing economy are surrounding collaboration and access. Celata, Yungmee Hendrickson, and Sanna (2017) tell of three crucial dimensions: connectivity, reciprocity and trust. This implies intimacy between people and means social trust, i.e. between consumers and workers as they need to trust both the platform they are using and the people they are connecting with (Heinrichs, 2013). The primary and most formal way to increase trust is via insurance and/or refund systems, which have been implemented by almost all platforms. Many online social networking sites have also implemented reputation systems which are becoming an increasingly important component of online communities. They are based on members' digital footprints and feedback received, which encourages good behavior, collaboration and new mechanisms for trust between individuals anywhere in the world. Tripadvisor is a good example of a platform regulated by such an implicit reputation system.

The most diffused mechanisms for increasing trust are digital reputation systems or feedback, which give participants time and space to think and learn from each
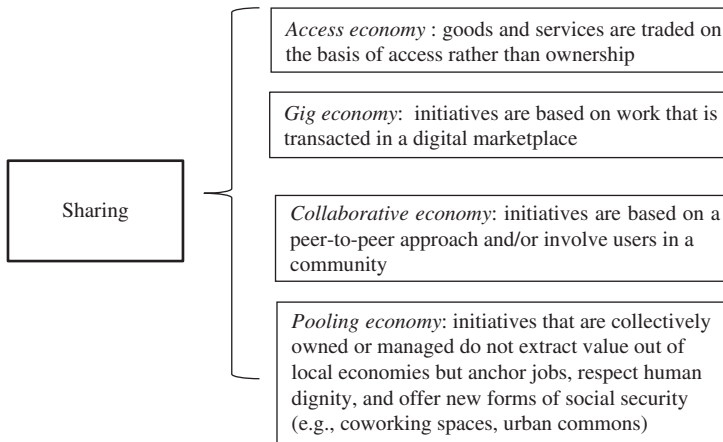
**Figure 6.1** Forms of sharing initiatives.
EU Commission for Economic Policy (2015).

other, and to take into account reputational scoring and rankings (Wosskow, 2014). Sharing platforms emphasize the idea of being a "community marketplace," and even part of some sort of social movement based on an ethos of sharing, solidarity and alterity with respect to traditional, impersonal, and standardized markets (Celata et al., 2017). Indeed, community spirit is also of pivotal importance to sharing platforms (Albinsson & Perera, 2012), as are economic and environmental benefits, emphasized by the fact that local jobs can be created by the localization agenda of sharing (Hamari & Ukkonen, 2013); cost saving and convenience; enjoyment motives (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012); application of high technology; and the need for a certain level of digital access. In terms of the latter, it is argued that low levels of digital access could be a significant obstacle to the geography of the sharing economy (Goudin, 2016).

It is important to specify that there are an increasing number of different actors involved in this model of sharing. Actors act simultaneously as consumers and as operators of services. They create new firms where possible, finding large entrepreneurs offering web platforms with a high number of contacts. Given its rapid development, this kind of economy and social norms are yet to be fully established or adapted to the changing reality. It appears that sharing platforms will not be a temporary phenomenon. As Martin (2016) affirms, the sharing economy can be viewed as a niche of sociodigital experiments, with the paradoxical potential to promote more sustainable consumption and production practices, and to reinforce the current unsustainable economic paradigm. The sharing economy has therefore started to transform many aspects of our current social economic system by allowing individuals, communities, organizations and policy makers to rethink the way we live, grow, connect, and sustain.

Recent debates about the future of the sharing economy also address the development of "platform cooperativism" (Scholz, 2016). Sharing platforms are turned

into cooperative structures where the former platform "users" also become owners and decision-makers and gain parts of their livelihoods from these platforms. This is a reaction against the global, contemporary, for-profit sharing economy platforms, which build on peer-to-peer production and sharing of resources (Bradley & Pargman, 2017).

## 6.3 Understanding the context of food sharing

There is a real interest in the culture of food on the part of both consumers and the media, with celebrity chefs, for example, seen as "heroes of the kitchen." Food is the subject of television programs, movies, social networking, sharing on social networks and other imagery. Many actors play different roles to create or change new models of consumption, new lifestyles, or different food networks. In the emerging systems of food, the reincorporation of production processes and local consumption is spreading quickly, taking on different forms such as the so-called Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) or Food Community Networks (FCNs) (Feenstra, 2002; Goodman, 2004). Forms of AFNs are, for example, farmers' markets and box schemes. This form of participation practiced by consumers and producers could contribute to confirmation of a new paradigm of development based on agricultural, eco-compatible, multifunctional models; and on sustainable consumption. FCNs originate in a specific social and cultural background, aimed at increasing social and democratic equity among all members of the community (Feenstra, 2002). FCNs are a particular type of self-organized collective action whose goal is to find a cooperative form for sustainability based on the active participation of actors involved in agriculture and food production and consumption. These experiences represent a possible solution where consumers and producers actively build an economic model founded on human relations (Migliore, Forno, Dara Guccione, & Schifani, 2014). Thus, consumption of food can be tied to the community of the web, where the preference is to favor different solutions and create new entertainment options online. In this domain, there is complete freedom regarding access to multiple foods and nutritional patterns and styles. Online consumption communities are therefore "affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities" (Kozinets, 1999, p. 254).

As for the literature in general, a scarcity of studies on the food-sharing marketplace is apparent. The development of case studies that illustrate different degrees of organizational, technological and social change for more sustainable eating, including community eating containing more social and communal elements, is limited. Social innovations (e.g., slow-food events and online food-distribution communities) are organized and initiated through bottom-up, citizen-led approaches (Davies, 2013). The impact of web platforms is shaped by both their market orientation (for-profit vs nonprofit) and market structure (peer-to-peer vs business-to-peer). These dimensions shape the platforms' business models, logics of exchange,

and potential for competing with conventional businesses. While all sharing economy platforms effectively create "collaborative markets" by facilitating exchanges, the imperative for a platform to generate a profit influences how sharing takes place and how much revenue devolves to management and owners.

Sharing platforms, particularly nonprofit ones that provide a public benefit, can also function as "public goods" (Schor, 2014). Food sharing can take the form of selling as well as donating and bartering initiatives (Falcone and Imbert, 2017). Food sharing is not a discrete empirical object; it is something that is emerging through a combination of practice and performance (Davies et al., 2017). Food sharing initiatives have also been rising in most developed societies through a variety of forms such as web food networks, underground restaurants, public refrigerators, or simply private initiatives within specific households consisting of unrelated people like students (e.g., Kera & Sulaiman, 2014). Consumers choosing sharing economy initiatives are mostly driven by economic rather than environmental reasons. However, food sharing practices can be viewed within the classifications of "alternative food initiatives" demonstrating practical and varied connections to food. One dimension established by food sharing is that of "facilitating access" to experiential learning, which it is argued can have more enduring or transformational impacts on participants (Sharp, Wardlow, & Lewis, 2015). The principal forms of food sharing are summarized in Fig. 6.2.

The most diffused models of on-line food sharing are donation-based, especially within the distribution marketplace where consumers swap food. In some cases, this empowers communities to transform food waste, surplus and loss into new value and resource efficient (Davies & Doyle, 2015) platforms that bring together people who have a passion for home-grown food. In this sense, food sharing practices can help with the creation of sustainable food (Heinrichs, 2013); encouraging healthy, sustainable food choices, and offering direct environmental benefits such as
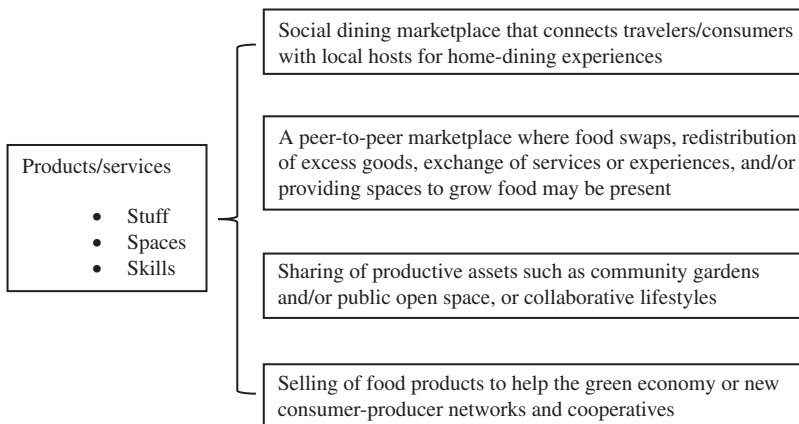


**Figure 6.2** Forms of food sharing initiatives.
Adapted from Davies et al. (2017).

"servicizing": "a business model that holds the potential to support a shift toward more sustainable production and consumption by selling to the consumer the product's function, rather than the material product itself" (Plepys, Heiskanen, & Mont, 2015, p. 117).

Sharing models now exist at all stages of production and distribution for food, from the land to the plate. Examples include:

- Pop-up restaurant platforms such as Grub Club, which connect food lovers and creative gourmet chefs in temporary home restaurants.
- Supper clubs and meal sharing platforms such as Casserole Club to help tackle the growing social problems of loneliness and malnutrition among older people, whilst at the same time helping connect people with their neighbors.
- I Food Share, a web platform allowing users, retailers or manufacturers to offer food surplus for free.
- VizEat, which is a social dining platform that allows individuals to organize meals and gastronomic events at home. Potential diners can see the menu in advance and read details of the venue and the host.

While some new food sharing platforms represent substitutes for existing food distribution and retailing practices, others are likely to cover sectors, geographical settings and consumer groups where the reach of food sharing is limited. Indeed, in many cases the goal is to build something completely new and separate from existing food systems (DiVito Wilson, 2013). The aim is also to help people create workable, healthy, economically vibrant neighborhoods through the development of local food systems.

## 6.4   Methodological approach

BonAppetour is a real-world example that provides additional insights into social eating. It is a platform for connecting people who want to make the meal a moment for sharing, conviviality and discovery. It aims to teach how to prepare favored dishes, and open up new food experiences. The BonAppetour case was chosen in order to have sufficient robustness to capture the distinct characteristics of the observational units of analysis (i.e., the different food sharing platforms, and the drivers and activities of related service organizations), and because the aim of the study was to understand collaboration and sharing practices in a real-life context. Data were collected through observations and interviews with members of an online sharing community that involved social eating between guests, which was useful for gaining a better understanding of the community's physical, social, cultural and economic dimensions. A survey of guest groups was carried out in Italy during early 2017. A pilot questionnaire was created and conducted with 10 online respondents. The recruitment of the sample was realized by word-of-mouth. Data were collected via 33 completed questionnaires. Various aspects of respondents' behavior were explored, especially the emotions arising from the experience of social eating and their leisure preferences. Another section of the questionnaire examined the

type of social eating experiences respondents carried out and meals selected. At the same time, the study also involved secondary data taken from the BonAppetour website. This represents a "real-world" case study that provides additional insights into social dining but also into food tours, cooking classes, tastings, etc.

Lastly, documentary sources such as newspapers, books and online sources have been considered as additional sources of information. Given the novelty of the phenomenon under investigation, and the inductive nature of the research questions, we employed a qualitative, case-based approach. At the same time, to improve the understanding of food sharing, the study integrated community development theory (Christenson & Robinson, 1989) to establish a more holistic, conceptual framework to support research and advocacy efforts. Community development refers to a group of people in a community reaching a decision to initiate a social action process to change their economic, social, cultural and environmental situation. Sharing enacted through a community is therefore contingent upon participation and the ability of individuals to contribute to something that will not just benefit themselves. Development is a process that increases choices and means new options, diversification, thinking about issues differently, and anticipating change (Christenson & Robinson, 1989).

## 6.5   BonAppetour: A food community marketplace

BonAppetour is a platform for connecting people who want to make the meal a moment of sharing, conviviality and discovery. It connects hosts and guests from all over the world in order for them to experience new flavors and meet new people, whether they are visiting a foreign country and looking to escape the tourist traps or are locals looking to have a new and unique experience.

BonAppetour is a community marketplace that connects travelers with local home chefs for a unique home-dining experience, anywhere around the world. In fact, the mission is to make home dining an integral ingredient of every remarkable travel experience. In reality, social eating is the desire to be together around the table; a transversal concept moving between notions of public and private, and professional and amateur (Fig. 6.3). Especially in travel and tourism, local food consumption behavior is considered as a social experience to learn about other cultures: "from a local food paella making workshop on a terrace in Spain, to an exquisite Italian feast with a "nonna" in Rome and a traditional tea ceremony experience in Tokyo. You can choose from a range of unique dining experiences hosted by a carefully selected host community" (BonAppetour, 2017).

Founded in 2014, with an initial focus on Italy, BonAppetour has expanded to include dining experiences across Africa, Asia, North America, Oceania, and South America. It is a start-up in the booming sharing economy with an international team. The platform is available in four languages and reaches 30 different cities worldwide. An innovative company, it employs the latest and most up-to-date technology in food systems. Accelerating its growth, the two parties to a food

**Figure 6.3** The mission of BonAppetour.
www.bonappetour.com.

experience exchange—hosts and guests—must register on the website. Hosts list online their available menus and detailed profiles, where they introduce themselves, their cooking styles, their preferred places to travel and things to do, while simultaneously making money to fund their passion. Guests can then browse and book meals. The platform allows access to meals in every price range. BonAppetour takes a 15% guest service fee every time the platform invitation is booked and receives remuneration in the form of a commission in exchange for its contact service.

As with the majority of sharing economy platforms, BonAppetour does not own any of the "spaces" in which it operates; rather the organization acts as a facilitator, matching hosts with guests. Thus, the website serves as a platform for listings and the exchange of information. It has been established to create an alternative option to the traditional food service provided by restaurants.

Testimonials from the BonAppetour website still make compromises between the hedonistic values of food and the location of the home restaurant and friendliness of the host: "The atmosphere was relaxed, authentic and cheerful, the owner was very hospitable and welcoming. The clean and familiar atmosphere makes you feel at home. Excellent food at zero kilometer. Plentiful dishes. Personally I feel I recommend a visit" (BonAppetour, 2017).

As a safety measure, BonAppetour performs background checks on all users and offers a private messaging system for both parties to learn more about each other before agreeing to a transaction. The platform has a number of safety-related advantages built in, including:

- No handling of cash, with payment transferred using PayPal. Payment for the experience is transferred to the host 24 hours after the dining experience. The money is held in order to protect both hosts and guests in cases of any unforeseen circumstances. Transactions are secure and data are protected.
- Profiles of hosts are attached to a reputational mechanism, emphasizing the importance of examining clients' trust-building processes, as well as host attributes and strategies in

facilitating the delivery of products to alleviate any "trust" tension. Trust is clearly important therefore, and is built into the technology on the BonAppetour platform. In the vocabulary of the sharing economy, the function of this platform is that a host's profile acts like a curriculum vitae for other users, and guests in particular, to verify it as credible. The profile is also a medium to market oneself, to elaborate about hobbies, interests, as well as languages spoken. A further dimension is added through the accumulation of profile reviews that are visible to other guests and hosts. The platform still operates as a form of technological assurance as the intermediary of the financial transaction.

- Guests and hosts both verify their identity by verifying their official user account and confirming personal details.
- Hosts also have the option of requiring a fixed amount payable before the BonAppetour invitation to cover costs.
- Hosts are covered by up to €100,000 in damages for every meal through the Host Guarantee, for instance when guests damage a host's property.
- A message system occurs between host and guest before an experience. BonAppetour is a social platform so the relationship starts by guests introducing themselves, explaining why they choose a particular event, and identifying who is coming with them. Guests can ask at which time they should come, but also about any special requests, e.g., vegetarian options.

BonAppetour is a place for travelers and foodies who want to find new ways to explore countries and for hosts willing to promote their food culture to make money at the same time. Key elements of BonAppetour's business model are the emphasis on building communities and encouraging social interaction. Platforms with new cuisine advice comprise the most diverse concepts by highlighting various conceptualizations of collaborative consumption, means of use, accessibility, ownership and internet facilitation. This is achieved by introducing and recommending local food to tourists or residents. This business model must endeavor to build a community that desires these types of food experiences. In general, local food is a destination attraction that motivates tourists to visit because it reflects local culture and provides a connection with the place (Cavicchi, Ciampi, & Stancova, 2016; Cohen & Avieli, 2004). For example, a key message on the platform from a host in Florence (Italy) is as follows: "What about enjoying good Tuscan food with a real wonderful view of Florence?" (BonAppetour, 2017). Guests find it important, not only to obtain information from the experience of food, but also to give something back, in the form of reporting their progress and sharing recipes. For instance, a guest reveals: "During the last week, I have managed to cook such delicious food that I have almost burst into tears" (female respondent A). The host in this instance offers tourists and travelers traditional foods, using local products which are strictly seasonal and cooked traditionally; with the aim of showing guests local Italian hospitality and authentic cuisine − all home-cooked of course.

Another option is to join in a food tour that brings the food to you − minus the queues. BonAppetour offers "The Great Singapore Food Tour" which promises the following:

> plenty of tasty Michelin-starred dishes, a professional tour guide who shares the stories behind the dishes and Singapore culture, meals enjoyed in the company of fellow foodies and hosts who stand in line on your behalf − so you get the food without having to endure those agonisingly long queues (BonAppetour, 2017).

At the same time, the presence of the community aspect also means that residents and tourists can coexist and come into contact with each other, thereby sharing services and entertainment and leisure locations. A guest interviewed on the BonAppetour website says:

> Had my first experience with BonAppetour in March 2015 in Florence. The food was delicious! I am pretty open-minded to food and just asked to try any traditional Tuscan dish... The hosts were good about explaining the history of each dish with an Italian food rookie like myself (BonAppetour, 2017).

What is important is building a relationship with the community and that users are engaged in sharing their experiences with others. One interviewee, an adult male, revealed:

> Currently I'm looking for eating with friends to address the issue of social isolation; and I'm looking for my own style and the foods that suit me... so becoming a continuing, living process (male respondent B).

## 6.6 Discussion and conclusions

Our results show that food sharing dynamics can be effectively studied by analyzing communities' shared food practices. Sharing of this type has the potential to compete with many traditional food distribution and retailing business models, like the traditional restaurant for example. In fact, there are opportunities to expand the principles of sharing to the provision of physical, social and recreational infrastructure. Colocation reduces the need for infrastructure and enables more to be achieved with less resource use and at lower cost. For example, land not being used by one government agency may be transferred and used more effectively by another. It is possible to connect with customers anywhere in the world to cut transaction costs and shrink the advantages of economies of scale that larger chains hold. To ignore the sharing phenomenon could indicate skepticism about the autonomy and social aspects of virtual communities (Labrecque, Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013) as a tool for social development that can bring surprising results. However, the sharing economy is best understood as a series of performances rather than a coherent set of economic practices (Richardson, 2015). Equally, the sharing economy presents opportunities to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, which might help create jobs, strengthen community resilience and drive economic growth. Old businesses, firms, and occupations disappear and new ones emerge, enabled by new technologies. A benefit is that users can earn and work more flexibly and operators can complete existing services with sharing models, learn new skills, or support ethical causes.

Our results provide insights into the dynamics of food sharing that revolve around complex and nuanced lifestyles. Food needs to be not only good to eat but

also have social potential. The advent of social communities through food sharing is mobilized as a framework to facilitate novel forms of participation in the economy. This case study aims to outline innovative solutions in an area that is evolving rapidly in terms of customer behavior in the food industry. But barriers to such development include trust: compared to impersonal market exchanges, sharing implies a number of problems with regard to this, which are directly related to its social depth. As Belk (2007, 2010) has argued, sharing implies interdependence, an obligation of care and responsible use from those involved; it creates a social/communal bond and gives rise to an (implicit and social) debt. The risk of opportunistic, incorrect, mistrustful behaviors is high, especially in the case of nonreciprocation. Indeed, it is becoming clear that the platforms themselves exist in a regulatory grey area where they cannot be held liable as employers or asset holders, nor do they function like many of their traditional competitors.

At the same time, sharing as an economic phenomenon is technology dependent. But technology, whilst being an enabler, can also be an obstacle, as not everyone is familiar or has access to it. This issue could be addressed not only by communication, but also by experts who could focus on designing discrimination-free platform solutions which establish trust (Plewnia & Guenther, 2017). Currently, research on sharing business models is still in its infancy, but without doubt certain sectors (e.g., transportation, tourism) have already seen changes. The trend is toward development of new products and processes located on expert platforms, with work organized on a project-by-project basis and carried out by transitory teams. It is also important to recognize the existence of different economic practices in the marketplace, as DiVito Wilson (2013) affirms, it is a step to rejecting the hegemony of capitalism and a way to rethink and recreate new economic and social realities as the strengthening of social capital within a community. However, it is unclear for the time being how a sharing economy redefines the roles of tourists and locals compared to the conventional market economy (Cheng, 2016).

The sharing economy has clearly not reached its full potential in food marketplaces but continues to grow in scope. The entrance of sharing platforms to the market has led to the introduction of quality products and services at a much lower price. Peer-to-peer sharing can also prioritize utilization of, and accessibility to, products and services over ownership. Online sharing platforms are used to access a global pool of workers on a just-in-time basis. They allow people to eat well at the price of a mid-range restaurant. Furthermore, Web 2.0 and social media have the lowered transaction costs for connecting providers and buyers to almost zero (Allen & Berg, 2014).

Overall, our results imply that food sharing communities can reveal information about consumer preferences regarding ingredients, food consumption habits, and what is considered fake or inauthentic. This suggests that online communities should be considered major partners in developing and marketing new products. The BonAppetour experience represents an exchange of potential tangible and intangible effects, leading to consumer opportunities for a better travel experience. The service is for those people who want to connect, to open their homes, whilst acting as both host and guest at the same time. On the tourism side, BonAppetour

works mainly on the basis of cultural exchange: helping visitors to access a wide range of products and services at a more affordable price; facilitating authentic encounters between tourists and locals; and contributing to the employment and income of locals. It also provides good memories of a vacation for the tourist, with the knowledge of having tasted the traditional dishes of a country. Bon Appetour can also be an important tool to make new friends among people with common interests, and/or where there is a sense of community and belonging, even though this may be mainly virtual.

Despite all these benefits, food sharing has arguments against it: home restaurants increase the casualization of labor in tourism, for example, they can often avoid government regulations designed to protect both consumers and employees. In terms of hygiene and risk of infection, Gullstrand Edbring, Lehner, and Mont (2016), have investigated the attitudes of young consumers to different sharing economy consumption models, affirming this to be an obstacle in all consumption domains because of the great uncertainty there is about what is safe or good to eat. Consumers may prioritize values differently in this regard; for instance, some think that improvising and inventing dishes is better than the safety of their ingredients.

In conclusion, there are no rigorous methodologies for success in online food sharing platforms at present. This case study is a first step in exploring the field. It has reviewed relevant literature on the topic, and has provided a starting point for further studies in the area. Future research could extend our insights with primary quantitative data, comparing profit vs nonprofit online food sharing initiatives, and identifying those factors that impact on their success or failure.

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