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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine home swap - a form of non-commercial hospitality that has witnessed a great expansion in the last decade. In conjunction with prior writings on various subjects related to home swap, this study can be utilized in compiling a preliminary conceptualization of home swapping, as a form of non-commercial hospitality, with its own characteristics. In particular this study identifies six dimensions of home swap, namely (a) escape of the market; (b) asymmetric exchanges (c) need for trustiness; (d) use of a hospitality exchange network; (e) demand for domesticity and (f) quest to experience local authenticity. The results of this study are being utilized to construct a preliminary conceptualization of home swapping as a distinct vacation alternative building on old virtues and using new technology.

Keywords: exchange, alternative non-market economies, market escape, authenticity, domesticity, home swap.

1. INTRODUCTION

For those scholars, e.g. De Soto (2001) and Fulcher (2004), who celebrate the advent of commercialization and argue that capitalism is the only feasible way to organize a modern economy, the search for an alternative to capitalism is fruitless. For others, for instance Ratner (2009) and Merrill (1995), who oppose to the continuing incursion of commerciality, the search for alternatives to capitalism is a must. Capitalism is a result of the way that a free market operates. Thus, any opposition to capitalism eventually becomes an opposition to the markets (Merrill, 1995, p. 317). While a dominant capitalist discourse of a single and pervasive market economy is uttered by many academics, economists and politicians who choose to reduce the economy to mere monetary values, various scholars (e.g. Williams and Nadin, 2010; Leyshon, Lee and Williams, 2003) explore types of social exchanges that do not comply with the rules of a capitalist market economy.

In reality, there is a spectrum of economic practices ranging from relatively market-oriented to more non-market oriented economic practices and from wholly non-monetized, through gift exchange and in-kind practices, to wholly monetized economic practices (Colin, Williams and Nadin 2010, p. 57). Based on this spectrum, Gibson and Graham (2006) distinguish transactions upon where they are taking place, namely, into three sub-categories, markets, alternative markets and non-markets. They argue that transactions taking place either in 'alternative markets' or 'non-markets' differ from the mainstream ones in that the former encourage non-monetary transactions. In a market economy, goods and services are exchanged for money with the aim to increase the welfare of their owners, usually without caring about other people's welfare (Kozinets,

2002; Ratner, 2009). On the other hand, when exchanges are not treated as market commodities, a different set of calculations of efficiency may come into play, which escapes the monetization of goods and services and the focusing is about sharing with others (Arnould, 2007; Ratner, 2009).

Through the ages exchange optimized human behavior (Sherry, 1983). Whole exchange systems have been based on bartering as their major mode of exchange. Early trading was accomplished through barter because of the lack of coinage to act as a medium of exchange. However, barter continued to be a major means of effecting trade long after money had been invented (Wilson and Wang, 1996, p. 34). In modern times, the notion of exchange is an intriguing universal behavior which has an intuitive appeal. Indeed, humans are remarkable for the extent to which they become involved in different forms of exchange, including negotiation, gift-giving, and direct or indirect reciprocity (Cheshire, Gerbasi and Cook, 2010, p.175). Since people have different needs and preferences, virtually, any tangible or intangible resource (object, service, and experience) can be transformed into an appealing exchange (Sherry, 1983). Nevertheless, exchange is predominately considered as a material phenomenon where societies promote their social and economic interests by means of trade, sharing and gift-giving. As a result, most exchange theory has evolved around physical goods and the intangible exchange has not been singled out for observation.

The topic of exchange of goods and services without the use of money has attracted academic interest for a long time from a variety of disciplines, including economics (Hansen, 1969; Vint, 1964); anthropology (Bohannan, 1955; Levi-Strauss, 1955; 1969; Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1925; Sahlins, 1965a; 1965b); and social psychology (Gergen, 1969; Schwartz, 1967). While early studies contributed significantly to the development of exchange theory, and the appeal of exchange for the society continues to be stressed by many scholars (see for example Hughes, 2005; Lawler and Shane, 1999; Molm, Whitham and Melamed, 2012; Nettle and Dunbar, 1997; Skvoretz and Lovaglia, 1995), a literature review reveals that the phenomenon of exchange has not yet been interpreted satisfactorily by various disciplines within the social sciences (see Sherry, 1983, p. 157). A remarkable example is tourism where the pervasiveness of exchange has received very limited attention. Despite recent tourism research into many aspects of reciprocal exchange (Kotůlek, 2011; McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006) primarily in the form of non-commercial hospitality, tourism research has paid little or no attention to forms of negotiated exchange.

While the hospitality sector operates and follows a logic that actively promotes commodification, new players, who resist commercialization, have been increasingly popular. These new players, in the form of homestays, contrast to other forms of accommodation provision, because guests stay in private and local people's homes, instead than a commercial hotel (Gu and Wong, 2006). Whilst each type of homestay has the similar focus of having paid guests, there is also the practice of non-commercial hospitality where most, if not all, elements of monetary and commercial nature are removed. Non-commercial hospitality goes back to the notion of a "barter exchange" in economics where goods and services are exchanged for other goods and services without the use of money (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones, 1992).

Provided that a group of people, at any moment, has needs and preferences that are demanded by another group of people and that the later group can offer an exchange

of goods and services to the former's, this exchange will be mutually beneficially to both groups, as it will increase the welfare of each group, and will satisfy its needs and preferences. Of course, this barter exchange has its own limitations (coincidence of needs, indivisibilities etc.), which entails that the scale of barter exchanges cannot be that large as the scale of exchange taking place within a fully monetized market.

Non-commercial hospitality has witnessed a great expansion in the last decade, (see for example Farbrother, 2010; Luca, 2007), and it can be exemplified with the case of home swapping. Although the origins of home swapping are believed to date back to 1950's (Ekici, 2011; Grit, 2008; 2011), up to now little effort has been directed toward the understanding of the concept, as well as, toward examining the experience underlying the actual swapping of houses. A literature review on home exchange by Grit (2008) found 126 different instances of popular articles in newspapers and magazines dealing primarily with the experiences of home swappers, descriptions of the home exchange process and the financial advantages of home swapping. However, Grit (2008) found only one academic study on home swap, the master thesis of Arente and Kiiski (2006) which examined the phenomenon of home swap from the aspect of motivation, lifestyle and identity of home swappers. A more recent literature review by the authors of this paper identified only a small body of additional academic literature in English language, having explored home swap from a tourism perspective. Among these studies, de Croote and Nicasi (1994) analyzed the Belgian home exchange market by exploring various supply and demand factors; Grit (2008; 2011) contributed to a better understanding of the home exchange phenomenon by analyzing the development of home exchange organizations; and Mosedale (2011) examined alternative economic examples in tourism, including home swap, as cases of alternative non-market exchanges. Also, five papers were found in the Chinese language. However, the inability of the authors to read Chinese did not permit them to incorporate these studies in their analysis. In addition to the aforementioned sources, another source of information used in this study for locating data on home swap were the sites of home swap agencies and newspaper articles.

Though a literature review undertaken for the purpose of this study, it is evident that hospitality and tourism scholars have ignored to a large extent the role of particular types of non commodified forms of homestay exchange, such as home swap. Given that so little is known about such alternatives of non-commercial hospitality and that in the light of severe economic problems in many countries, the demand for lower cost holidays is expected to increase; there is a clear necessity for exploratory research in the topic. Bearing this in mind, the aim of this study is to revisit the case of decommodified tourism that has witnessed a great expansion in the last decade by exploring home swap as a form of non-commercial vacation alternative and its surrounded dimensions.

2. MODES OF EXCHANGE AND NON-COMMERCIAL HOSPITALITY

Exchange is an ancient phenomenon practiced in all societies. It involves three main elements: the person giving, the person receiving and the object exchanged (Abraham and Millar, 2011, p. 691). Theoretical discussions on exchange, see, for example, Biau (1964); Ekeh (1974); Heath (1976); Homans (1958); focus their attention on two primary modes of dyadic exchange, namely negotiated and reciprocal, in which two parties engage in a direct or indirect exchange where A provides benefits to B and B

to A. Exchanges may also involve more than two parties but for the sake of simplicity in our analysis we are only considering two exchanging parties.

According to Molm, Schaeffer and Collett (2009, p. 3) the forms of an exchange can be distinguished on two main dimensions: (1) contingent outcomes for actors; and (2) the information actors have about the terms and timing. Negotiation exchanges focus on the terms two actors negotiate to reach a mutually beneficial agreement (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Hence, self-interested individuals know in advance through binding agreements what each is getting for what is giving. Prior communications help the flow of benefits to be bilateral, both actors agree upon at the same time, and neither of them can profit without making an agreement that satisfies both (Molm, Schaeffer and Collett, 2009, p. 3). On the other hand, in reciprocal exchanges the lack of communication in the decision process makes exchanges more risky and uncertain, with one of the actors not knowing what, if anything, will be reciprocated (Molm, Schaeffer and Collett, 2009, p. 6). Thus, exchanges differ by the form of exchange, with primary difference based on the level of communication and the risks/uncertainties that each form creates, with negotiated exchange including lower risks and higher levels of communication.

Much of the literature dealing with forms of modern tourism has been revolving around the commodified aspects of the tourism industry. Commodification has been explained by Cohen as a process “by which things and activities come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade” (1988, p. 380). In the case of tourism scholarship, research has been focused primarily on the commodified aspects of guests-hosts interactions resulting from the production and consumption of tourism products and services and only a relative small number of studies have explored aspects of non-monetary exchanges. The majority of these studies have been focused on a reciprocal exchange which has been manifested in the following five forms.

First, gift giving has been confined to vacation souvenirs offered to express love and thanks to family and friends (see Kim and Littrell, 2001; Park, 2000). Second, although by default, the generic understanding of exchange is rooted in the study of physical goods (Clarke, 2008, p. 530), non material gifts in the form of holidays have been explored in academic discourse with scholars, such as Clarke (2008, p. 532), to identify specific features when applied to non-material gifts such as tourism and leisure services as opposed to physical goods. Third, reciprocal exchange has been explored from the aspect of labor and collective production of public goods in online travel communities. Among these studies, Adams (1992) conducted a research on Sherpas, a Budist minority in Nepal, and found that in the case of mountain tourism reciprocal labor in the form of kinship, takes place, and, Heuman (2005) has identified, for working tourists in Dominica republic, non-monetary reciprocities in relation to the duties and obligations of guest-local interactions. Finally, Jeong (2008, p. 355) explored organization and technological aspects of two online travel communities producing freely available accommodation and travel information in a collective manner.

Fourth, a small number of studies have explored bartering activities in tourism and hospitality. Among these studies Damitio and Schmidgall (1995) studied the bartering activities of hospitality firms; Eckhaus (2011) undertook a survey of small and medium-sized enterprises from Europe and Turkey in an attempt to enhance their economic performance in relation to their bartering activities, and Zhao (1994a; 1994b) explored barter tourism along the China-Russia border as a negotiated exchange of

tourists , where each country received the same number of tourists and provided the same services in terms of accommodation, catering and sightseeing without using foreign currency exchange. Finally, exchange may take the form of non-commercial hospitality, such as couch surfing, where the host has an overt willingness to offer accommodation to a stranger in return of some kind of reciprocity; for instance the guest may bring any type of present, e.g. a bottle of wine, flowers or a box of chocolates. However, reciprocity in all four cases above is not known in advance, it is asymmetrical and may differ in each host and guest encounter (Farbrother, 2010).

While tourism research has explored non-commercial hospitality and reciprocity quite recently, exchanges in tourism are not a new phenomenon, but they have their roots in ancient Greece. Indeed, Zeus, referred as Xenios (God of travelers), was the patron of hospitality and guests, and Hermes was the protector and patron of travelers. In fact, offering hospitality to strangers was a custom that inspired ancient Greek culture. “Hospitality” or “guest-friendship”, known as “xenia”, was synonymous to generosity and courtesy which ancient Greeks showed to those who were far from home. This generosity was expressed through the formation of long-lasting, reciprocating friendships formed through the exchange of gifts and goodwill (Budin, 2004, p. 136).

Moving to the contemporary world, the most researched form of non-commercial hospitality is couch surfing which has been explored from various perspectives such as hospitality exchange networks (Leung, 2010; Molz, 2012; Pultar, Raubal and Goulias, 2012), authenticity (Priskin and Sprakel, 2008; Steylaerts and Dubhghaill, 2012); trust (Rosen, Lafontaine and Hendrickson, 2011; Tan, 2010), information disclosure (Peterson and Siek, 2009), as well as, on the way that couch surfing is practiced in non-western societies (Chen 2012). On the other hand, a few authors (see for example Kotůlek, 2011; McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006; McIntosh and Campbell, 2001) have explored negotiated exchange by undertaking research on Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) and in more detail, willing workers’ volunteer offer of manual labour in exchange for food and accommodation, as well as, decommodified experiences in a living organic farm.

From one point, home swap is often linked in sequence with other forms of non-commercial hospitality and shares some of their features. For instance, although WWOOF and house exchanges serve different purposes, their commonality is that both have a certain degree of perceived risk and uncertainty involved, due to the fact that arrangements are initiated online amongst strangers. On the other hand, home swap presents significant departures from other forms of exchange of non-commercial hospitality. First, the lack of the physical presence of the host during the guests’ stay in home swap allows the guest to flee from the control of the host. Second, in contrast to other forms of non-commercial hospitality where reciprocity is expected, but not known in advance, in home swap the item of exchange (i.e. the use of a house) is known. Finally, as far as the WWOOF experience is concerned, although both WWOOF and home swap are forms of negotiated exchanges based on loose agreements of mutual obligations, in WWOOF the object of exchange is of unequal basis (hospitality versus labour), although in home swap, despite several variations that may exist dependent upon the type of properties exchanged and the conditions involved, the object of exchange is of rather similar nature.

3. DIMENSIONS OF HOME SWAP

In practice, there are three different forms of home swap, the ‘traditional’ home swap which implies that one partner travels at the same time with the other and stays at the primary residences of each other’s; swapping secondary residences, which means that each partner can travel at different times, and exchanging hospitality where each partner stay at each other’s house as a guest while the host is present. This paper deals with the first two forms of home swap for the reason that the presence of the host during the guests’ stay in the third form, does not allow the guest to flee from the control of the host and, as a result the home swap experience, is of a different nature.

In order to further specify the scope of the present inquiry, it is useful to consider the different dimensions that may be attributed to the process of home swapping. These dimensions and our present theoretical knowledge of them are analyzed below.

3.1 Home Swap as Hospitality Exchange Networking

While exchanges in the form of bartering have been around long before e-commerce, only recently an electronic network of various businesses interested in barter transactions has emerged, which has resulted in a new form of an e-marketplace system enabling businesses and individuals with many exchange opportunities (Eckhaus, 2011, p. 133). In our digital world, the internet has made bartering easy for individuals and has changed the structures of the hospitality industry. While once the travel agent was the primary mediator between the tourist and a multitude of travel services, nowadays web-based hospitality exchange networks enable consumers to interact with travel services directly from the comfort of their home (Gasser and Simun, 2008, p. 83). Prior to the widespread use of internet, home swappers received from agencies print directories and sent exchange offers by mail. Thus, arranging an exchange was a laborious and time-consuming process. Nowadays, although exchanges can be organized individually, there are online agencies (such as HomeExchange.com, Home Base Holidays, HomeLink, Digsville and Intervac) which offer online hospitality networks with the purpose of bringing together potential swappers.

When an individual becomes a member of a home swap exchange network, he creates an online profile containing information about the property to be exchanged (location, photos, size, amenities, as well as, a description of neighborhood); on the travel patterns (destinations wish list, proposed dates of exchange and exchange type); as well as, on the members’ personal descriptions, including details of family members with ages of any children, occupation and lifestyle. These profiles are intended as an online self-representation of each member. Based on these profiles, members have the chance to encounter online individuals who are willing to help them not only to coordinate physical travel and provide travel information, but also to offer hospitality. Also, for nothing more than a modest membership fee, interested partners can post an advertisement in agencies’ online database and send requests for accommodation. Thus, these internet-based social networks function as a marketplace to view and evaluate home exchanges.

Although free accommodation amongst members is a product on offer by agencies, the philosophy behind their mission is to create and spread relationships. While meetings between swappers are not always possible and many home swappers keep the relationships virtual, some others overlap their swaps by a day or two so they can meet face to face. Sometimes people may swap their second home rather than their primary one, in which case there is greater flexibility and more chances for personal

conduct, since there is no need the stays to be concurrent and as a result no need for owners to leave their house. Since the whole concept of home swap relies on building a relationship of mutual trust and goodwill (Rosen, Lafontaine and Hendrickson, 2011), the bonds resulting from home swap may last beyond the duration of the initial transaction. Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (1992) acknowledge the importance of the social relations involved in such exchanges. While relationships in simultaneous barter are discontinuous and unstable in that no additional transaction is needed to satisfy the wants of the actors following completion of the exchange (Cellarius, 2000, p. 75), there are swappers who maintain their relationships online long after successful home swap experiences, although it is not necessary for the parties involved to have further contact. As one home swapper stated about one of her past experiences: “the families quickly grew close, and have seen each other every year since ... Twelve years later we are still exchanging, only this time it's not houses. It's our friendship (Rosenbloom, 2006).”

3.2 Home swap as asymmetric exchange

Non-monetary exchanges are based on what the economist Jevons (1875) referred to as a “double coincidence of wants”, which are performed on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation (Ames, Flynn and Weber, 2004, p. 463). Therefore, the focus of contemporary exchange work has been concentrated on equality in the value of benefits received (Molm, 2003, p. 10). In a monetary economy where money plays the role of a measure of value of all goods and services, values can be easily measured against each other (Andrei, 2011). However, the role of money is absent in any form of barter transactions. In home swap there is a dispute of the criteria which can be used to judge that one house is equal in value to the other. As Cellarius states “participants in barter exchanges may have different evaluations of a single transaction” (2000, p.75). In contrast to many other forms of exchange, home swaps in the majority of cases abide between actors with no necessarily prior history of interaction. In these one-shot transactions, both sides engage in a joint decision process where each actor individually chooses whether or not to agree to an exchange based on the terms of an agreement and the benefits of equal or unequal value that each actor receives (Molm, 2003).

Although balance in the exchange process is a crucial objective, there is always an uncertainty involving the magnitude of value of the house that each actor exchanges. In this context, the house of exchange may be referred to subjectively perceived valuation, and thus the object of exchange may be differentially valued by different actors, especially when actual differences in houses are involved. In the case of hotel based accommodation the same product is offered to different people. Home swapping offers different products to different people thus it is appropriate to people feeling individuality as basic part of their travelling and this in turn increases the asymmetric satisfaction that people may pursue while on their vacations. Even more this asymmetry may be enhanced further the fact that home swapping involves also possible unexpected events that should be faced and managed by the home swapper him/herself rather than somebody else acting on his/her behalf.

Since inequities may affect the terms on which exchanges are made, it is important to assess inequities between houses before considering exchange. In a home swap exchange it is very difficult to judge the equivalence of properties on exchange based on the comparison of their market value. Thus, a very asymmetric exchange can be considered as balanced by the parties, if each party appreciates the contribution made by

the other. Therefore, a major advantage of the barter exchange is that an even trade is not required (Eckhaus, 2011, p.137). According to Mosdale:

the houses do not necessarily need to be of equal value (in terms of housing market or in terms of standard), as location (country, proximity to tourist destinations or urban centres) plays an important role in the exchange as evident in the following quote from an interviewee: 'But if we want to exchange with a family from the south of France ... maybe we would accept a two bedroom's [sic] apartment. We can't expect a big villa with the swimming pool. And it will be all right, because the south of France is more appealing to us' (cited in Arente and Kiiski, 2005, p. 58) (2011, p. 199).

3.3 Home swap as a Vacation Alternative to Market Escape

Commodity exchange impedes genuine social solidarity by encouraging the conversion of social relationships into standardized, calculated interactions (Ratner, 2009, p. 49). Ratner (2009, p. 51) believes that all transactions involving commodities inculcate commodified social and psychological elements in individuals, such as exploitation, autocratic management, competition, and greed. To overcome commodification, Mosedale (2011) suggests going beyond a capitalocentric understanding of the current economic framework in which the tourism sector operates through a better understanding of the diverse economies. While the tourism literature assigns monetary values to all tourism products and services by concentrating on tourists' willingness-to-pay, recently the profound socio-economic changes that many societies are facing has resulted to an increased demand for free products (Richards, 1998). Against the backdrop of severe economic crisis and commercialisation, one of the smartest and most affordable ways to travel is to swap the use of your home with someone else's home. In the words of Eckhaus:

While concerns of the global economic downturn are rising and fears of the worst to come are howing up, one of the most interesting options of international countertrade that is becoming more appealing in recession times is barter—an exchange of goods and/or services—ideally with no currency involved. One of the many areas in which barter has proven to be successful is tourism (2011, p.133).

Accommodation expenses are the larger part of any trip especially for longer vacations (Manente, Minghetti and Costa, 1996). Thus, reducing the accommodation cost entails significantly lower overall travel costs, which in turns imply that people are allowed financially, to take vacations that they may otherwise were unable to afford. By simply engaging in a temporary mutual exchange of their home, partners can enhance their vacation possibilities fulfilling their individual interests. For those who cannot afford the cost related to prolonged travel, home swapping, as vacation alternative, offers opportunities to travel more frequently, as well as to save money for spending in local services and products. Thus, from the economic point of view, home swapping is a cost effective approach, especially in the recent years of globalised economic crisis in Europe and elsewhere. While the economic benefits of home swap are obvious, it is not possible to estimate the extent of home swappers' contribution to local economies, because of lack of official data for this market segment. As mentioned by Steylaerts and Dubhghaill

(2012, p. 262) informal forms of accommodation are not taken into account when measuring tourist activity, and as a consequence they are missed by standard official statistics. While no statistics are available about the number of home swappers and their economic impacts, it is acknowledged that home swappers contribute significantly to the economy of several destinations, because their spending benefits a wider range of local businesses, including retail shops, entertainment providers, restaurants, cafeterias, transportation, etc.

Thomas (2004) and Winokur (2008) estimate that home swappers save annually approximately \$5,000 by swapping their homes instead of booking hotels. This saving does not only results from accommodation, but also from exchange of items and services, such as catering, car rental, a live-in pet-sitter or someone to water plants and protect their properties. In the words of Arente and Kiinski:

the money saved by home-exchangers can be substantial - up to thousands of dollars, depending on the length of their stay; they are eliminating not only lodging costs, but often car-rental tariffs, too, since many home-exchange arrangements include use of a vehicle; they can also trim their food budget by shopping locally and eating at their temporary home, cutting down on restaurant meals (2005, p. 5).

3.4 Home Swap as Trustiness

From the aforementioned review it is apparent that home swaps provide benefits for both actors. Nevertheless, online relationships involve risk and uncertainty; predominately the risk of giving benefit to another without receiving something valued or expected in return (Rosen, Lafontaine and Hendrickson, 2011). While in negotiated direct exchange the main risk may be that of failing to reach an agreement, since jointly reached agreements are binding on the actors, in home swaps the object of exchange is not present during the exchange process, and as a result it cannot be mutually valued. Thus, there is the potential risk that one partner will defect by failing to fully comply with the terms of agreement. An additional problem is raised by Tan (2010, p. 368), when he wondered how trust can be formed between people who are separated in spatial and temporal dimensions, and rely only on textual information with limited verbal cues.

Due to the immense amount of trust needed to admit a stranger to your own home, home swap relies upon trust as the core of its existence. While Bonacich (1995) supports that trust is unnecessary in negotiated exchanges because terms are known in advance, in home swapping some initial level of trust, is an important condition for building resilient trust. Given that home swappers have no prior knowledge of their hosts, they can make a risk assessment online based on data provided on online profiles and the message correspondences. Accumulate references from others in the network, getting verified, and/or be vouched for by others play a significant role in the initial building of trust, help to build the connections with others and reject those swappers who look potentially unsafe (Rosen, Lafontaine and Hendrickson, 2011, p. 983). However, rules and guidelines are essential in those hospitality transactions which allow strangers into their private home in order to minimize the risks that hosts are subjected to (Tucker and Lynch, 2004). While houses are certainly safer being occupied than left empty

(HomeExchange.com, 2013), the importance of having written-down rules are a foundation for a mutually beneficial experience.

Jointly negotiating agreements are based on structures of mutual dependence. While actors know what they are getting and giving before they honor the agreement, home swappers are still vulnerable to each other's actions. When hosts open up their homes adopt certain expectations of how their guest should act in their home. For instance, de Groote and Nicasi (1994) reports that home swappers are worried about damage that might occur at their properties. Actually, the main reason people hesitate to sign a home swap agreement is their concern about the safety of their own property (Li, Xiao-Xia, Tian-Peng and Ting-Ting, 2008). However, de Groote and Nicasi (1994) in their study of Belgian exchangers found that only 5% complained about minor damages and none for major ones.

3.5 Home Swap as Domesticity

Virtually, home swappers are not entirely motivated by saving money and many of them may think that it is not enough to see the sights when visiting a destination. While home swap is appropriate for those who want to see the world and save some cash by exchanging living quarters, home swappers desire richer travel experiences offered by domesticity. According to Obrador (2012, p. 411) "domesticity has been generally associated with alternative tourism geographies, in particular the world of the summer resident and the second home owner". However, domesticity is not only experienced during the summer second home vacations, but also in houses exchanged.

The focus of home swap is on the home and the distinguished experience associated with this rather than on the commercial aspect of staying somewhere. While tourism has been explained as an escape from responsibilities and in opposition to everyday life (Author forthcoming; Obrador, 2012), home swap does not actually involve getting away from home. Instead, home swap simultaneously involves escaping from, and being at home. As Obrador states: "tourism does not always have to be about escaping home, it can also be about making home through different forms of displacement (2012, p. 410)". Due to the particular circumstances of home swappers, the majority are families, either in their 50s-60s with no dependent children or in their mid 30s-40s with dependent children (Grit, 2008, p. 7), their need and desire to experience domesticity is higher compared to other forms of tourism. Home swappers adopt everyday practices of dwelling while traveling in their attempt to connect home and travel together. Thus, the concepts of "dwelling-in-travel" and "traveling-in-dwelling" (Clifford, 1997) can be used to deconstruct distinctions between home and travel away by pointing to the possibilities for home swappers of creating a temporary home away from home.

For those who are uncomfortable to stay at a hotel or apartment and instead prefer the privacy, comforts and facilities offered by a private property, staying in a neighborhood at a local house rather than at a hotel, offers them the opportunity to experience many of the communitarian elements of a neighborhood and at the same time the chance to experience relations of domesticity and sociality. Obrador (2012, p. 410) identifies sociality and relations of domesticity as an integral part to the contemporary tourist experience. In fact, the most commonly reason for home swappers is their homely

feelings and their desire to get away from commercialized resorts and other tourists and get to know a real neighborhood and local people (Winokur, 2008).

While a real home offers home swappers a stable base from which to venture out on day trips, at the same time according to Lynch, Domenico and Sweeney the domestic setting “affects behavior and constrains of conduct that would not occur in a purely commercial setting (2007, p. 135)”. Home swappers enter a host’s private space. This space is a reflection of the host’s life and a means of self-expression (McIntosh, Lynch, and Sweeney, 2011). During their stay in an environment rather cozier than a hotel room, home swappers have the chance to learn about local culture and mingle with the natives. Home swappers, by using co-swappers personal space, books and magazines, kitchens and mingling with their neighbors (Arente and Kiinski, 2005, p. 2), have the chance to temporarily transpose their lives onto someone else’s.

3.6 Home Swap as Local Authenticity

Home swap is not only conceived of as a non-exploitive exchange of experiences characterized by a high level of domesticity, but also by its authenticity. Indeed, travel experiences are more ‘authentic’ when staying at a local neighborhood instead than staying at anonymous hotels and resorts. This is because locality offers opportunities for a higher level of contact within indigenous population. In contrast, to a hotel accommodation where guests may spend most of their time in the hotel and often do not have the chance even to see a local person, home swappers come daily in contact with the local community and have some degree of participation in its ordinary everyday life. As a respondent in the study of Arente and Kiinski stated for his home swap experience: “we were a part of the local society, community where we lived, and that you really can’t buy. You can’t buy that! (2006, p. 64)”. According to Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2007) this connection of tourists with locals can be effective at producing authentic experiences.

Home exchange appeals to independent travelers who search for meaningful non-mediated experiences. In their quest for authentic experiences home swappers visit places off the tourist map which provide them the extraordinary opportunity to avoid the commodification of package holidays and instead to organize an individually customized trip (Andriotis, 2011). Contrary to the realm of commodification, home swappers escape the world of money. By exchanging houses outside the market system, transactions take on an element of authenticity, as opposed to strictly commercial exchange. This shifting from the classical form of touristic consumption through an anti-capitalistic stance and discourse essentially means that the classical institutions, mainly tour operators, are quasi-absent. Although the commodification of accommodation is not a modern phenomenon, and has probably existed ever since money was invented, non-commercial hospitality has brought about an extended variety of authentic experiences.

Local authenticity is an attribute widely promoted by home exchange agencies. For instance, the internet leader agency in home swapping HomeExchange.com has placed on the front page of its website the slogan “live like a local, not a tourist”. The fact that home swappers spend their holidays in local homes offers them the opportunity to absorb the local atmosphere and experience local life (Andriotis, 2009; 2011). Home swappers, like Steylaerts and Dubhghaill’s couchsurfers, “meet the desires of travellers who do not want to eat at tourist-trap restaurants, and who want to veer off the beaten track, away from the formal tourism industry” (2012, p.263). Like, those tourists in

Seattle who hang out in the 'down-home authenticity' of the market where 'real people work and buy' (Miller, 2001, p. 85), home swappers are engaged in 'authentic' interactions with the local population at 'backstage' settings, such as local shops, markets and houses and have the chance to discover the world through the eyes of local people instead rather than the eyes of tour operators' package.

4. CONCLUSION

From the ancient world up to now the notion of exchange has an intriguing universal appeal and has been accepted as a universal human activity and a key aspect of enhancing welfare of people and their life. Although, most exchanges involve monetary transactions, this study has examined exchange of homes without the direct use of money that can be also referred to as a barter exchange. In fact, these types of social exchanges that do not comply with the rules of the capitalist market economy 'involve the principle that one person does another a favor' (Antal and Richebe, 2009; Cook and Rice, 2006; Molm, 1994).

Home swap, as a form of non-commercial hospitality has attracted, so far, a rather limited research interest. In an attempt to obtain a thorough picture of the main dimensions of home swap as an emerging global phenomenon, this study explored home swap as a de commodified vacation alternative. Taking into account the explorative nature of the current study and the complexity of the phenomenon of home swap, this study linked conceptual and theoretical ideas derived from the literature to stronger analytical themes (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 280).

In conjunction with prior writings on various subjects related to home swap, this study can be utilized in compiling a preliminary conceptualization of home swapping, as a form of non-commercial hospitality, with its own characteristics. In particular this study identifies six dimensions of home swap. First, the use of online hospitality exchange networks facilitates the online contact of home swappers and the swap of houses. Second, home swap is a cost effective approach in the recent years of international economic crisis. Unlike the commercial home encounter, the mutual exchange of private properties for vacation purposes allows vacationers to save a substantial amount of money by eliminating accommodation expenses. Third, home swap involves demand for exchange of vacation properties that are asymmetric in various features. Fourth, exchange partners offer much of their private space and therefore home swap depends on the trust involved between interested parties. Fifth, home swappers want to experience domesticity in a private property other than their home. Sixth, home swap gives the opportunity to home swappers to experience local authenticity by staying at a real home and becoming immersed in local culture and society.

Based on the above six-part dimensions framework, home swapping can be defined as a vacation alternative to market escape, which involves immobile, bilateral, unserviced and asymmetric exchange of accommodation, based on high level of trust, domesticity and authentic local experiences. Whilst certainly open to debate, this broad categorisation provides a useful starting point to the further exploration of the concept.

Home swap is practiced by members of a growing subculture who make themselves just as comfortable in one another's homes as in their own. It emerges from the persistence of authenticity derived from the day-to-day interaction between home

swappers and the local population, as well as, home swappers mutually constructed and shared impressions. In the words of Arente and Kiinski “home-exchange fraternity encloses ‘like-minded’ individuals who love to travel their own way and their motivations broaden from simply economical advantages of the traveling by temporarily exchanging homes, to acquire deep cultural experiences of an aesthetic and intellectual value” (2005, p. 77). Thus, home swap moves beyond the commercialization thesis which suggests that the market is encroaching every aspect of daily life. The lack of commercial pressures is what differentiates home swap from market exchanges and other forms of paid hospitality and make home swappers to differ greatly from mass tourists.

In the face of commercial pressures, home swap is different to most other forms of modern tourism in that it has not been developed with the intention of commercialisation. Instead, it is among the very few forms of hospitality which deliberately devalues the monetary values that generate capitalism. Thus, home swap represents a significant departure from dominant understandings of tourism and can be referred to as a minority product within a broad spectrum of hospitality offerings. Despite of its small scale, home swap contributes to local economic development and helps people to save money from travelling.

To conclude, home swap is complex and multifarious. A detailed scrutiny of the concept of home swap shows that it has been insufficiently developed in the tourism literature. In this study, an attempt was made to address this shortfall by exploring the main dimensions of home swap. The six dimensions explored in this study are expected to provide theoretical foundation for further research and practical guidance. Although due to its exploratory nature this study did not present any primary data, it is essential for future research to incorporate samples of home swappers, home swap agencies and local communities in order to empirically determine the relevance of the six dimensions of home swap in each group’s understanding of the concept. Certainly, there is more work to be done to replicate the findings of this study and extend them by identifying additional dimensions, which may provide the basis for a more comprehensive view for the understanding of the concept.

In particular, while the travel preferences of home swappers show that home exchanges follow general travel trends (Grit, 2011), intercultural research exploring the relationship between culture and trust may help home swap agencies to overcome obstacles related to risk and uncertainty and to identify how trust is cultivated in online communities. Home swap is extremely rich in cultural diversity. Therefore, future research should try to identify what allows home swappers from different countries to exchange houses. This study has found that swappers may exchange homes because of economic advantage, to establish personal connections and to experience local authenticity and domesticity. Further primary research on the reasons people swap their houses would provide interesting findings on whether the motivations vary significantly from country to country.

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