

THE COLLABORATIVE PLATFORMS USED IN E-SOCIETY – A CASE STUDY ON THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract: *The collaborative technologies and the collaborative economics are terms that are in a closed relationship. It can be appreciated that collaborative technologies are the way of developing the collaborative economy. The tourism and travel industry has a strong impact on the global economy. It is one of the most important economic sectors, concentrating almost 10% of the global workforce, given the large number of suppliers and actors involved. The economy of P2P hosting services platforms carries the imprint of global socio-economic realities. In the paper is made an assembly image on the collaborative platforms existing in the tourism industry, focusing on the P2P hosting services platforms.*

Keywords: *collaborative platforms, social media, tourism, digital, e-society, P2P*

1. Introduction

The popularity and the add value brought by the collaborative economy are difficult to dispute, due to the fact that the gross revenues obtained at the European Union level from the use of platforms and collaborative providers reached the threshold of 28 billion Euro in 2015. Compared to 2014, this represents an increase of 200%. Moreover, studies carried out by the European Commission show that more than half of the citizens of the European Union know the collaborative economy and its means, one of six respondents of the study already having the quality of user of the collaborative platforms.[1]

The term of "collaborative economics" used for the first time in 2008 by Professor Lawrence Lessig of Harvard University, and in 2011 it had listed by Time magazine as one of the ideas that will change the world. This section aims to place the phenomenon of the collaborative economy in the context of the global economy after which the characteristics of this economic system will be analyzed and, as the next; some of the definitions offered over this term are analyzed over time. Shortly after the appearance of the term "collaborative economy" two of the most known examples of companies established on the principles of collaborative economy is launched respectively in 2008 Airbnb and Uber in 2009.

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Taking into account both the value of the global collaborative economy, which exploded from \$ 15 billion in 2014, to an estimated \$ 225 billion for 2025, and the impressive value of collaborative platforms (Airbnb platform is evaluated in 2019 at a totaling \$ 29 billion, and the Uber platform at \$ 72 billion, their cumulative value may be associated with the economy of a country ranked 38th in the global ranking), it can be appreciated that the estimation of Time magazine from 2011 did not was far from reality.

Thus, the term "collaborative economy" has increasingly found its place in the vocabulary of economists, investors and everyday reality, is considered the engine of the post-capitalist economy, or the product of the fourth Industrial Revolution or as the end of the traditional consumer era⁴.

The collaborative economics is considered to be an economic and social system based on the concept of shared use of physical and human resources (Lamberton and Rose, 2012). Heinrichs (2013) suggests that the role of the collaborative economy, its concept and the sharing of resources is to promote communication and support links within the society, creating a sustainable framework for the development of the economy. Moreover, the collaborative economy prioritizes the accessibility of services over the property, based on using the information technology to provide people with resources, helping to optimize them - where resources are in excess and transformed them into goods and services for the benefit of consumers (Fang, 2016). Similarly, Belk (2007) considers that the act of sharing, of working in an economic sense is the act and process of distributing a product, a good, owned by an individual, for use by other people, in their benefit. Most often, this act can take many forms, materializing in different contexts, with different results.

Several authors consider the social implications and dimensions of the collaborative economy. Thus, Molz (2013) points out that the morality of the collaborative economy is not given by the distribution of profits, but by highlighting features such as cooperation, generosity, mutual aid, which marks a clear change from the market economy (Molz, 2013). Moreover, these characteristics of the collaborative economy explored in the psychological plane, finding their behavioral equivalents in this plan. A significant number of authors consider that the basis of the collaborative economy is an attitude of people based on more responsibility towards consumption (Barbu, et al, 2018). In agreement with these statements are Sheth, et al, (2011) and Albinson et al (2012). The first author proposed the concept of conscious consumption, which based on conscious actions regarding the consequences of consumption on the environment, the natural environment or the available resources. Thus, he believes that those involved in the collaborative economy have a higher level of awareness about consumption, being

⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/the-dark-side-of-the-sharing-economy/>

more concerned about the repercussions that their actions have, they avoid wasting resources or destroying the environment in which they live. Albisson et al (2012) consider that in the collaborative economy people are motivated and have a state of gratitude if, in their turn, they can have a positive effect, in the society, being a result of their actions. Last, but not least, the act of sharing implies trust, a fact for which the collaborative economy gains much appreciation - those involved are collaborators and facilitate the creation of connections based on mutual agreement (Barbu et al, 2018). The social dimension complemented by the fact that the collaborative economy stimulates the association between individuals with common interests, with a lower consumption of resources (time, money, etc.) than usual (Botsman and Rogers, 2010).

The activities that characterize the collaborative economy are the following: the production, creation, distribution, trade and consumption of goods and services by individuals and organizations, in a common framework (Belk, 2014).

2. The main features and the position of the collaborative platforms in digital economy

The collective consumption, most often associated with the collaborative economy, takes place in organized systems or networks, where users take part in activities such as renting, lending, trading, exchanging products, services, solutions, transport or money (Mohlman, 2015).

It is clear that there is no consensus on the definition of the collaborative economy. In general, this refers to the forms of organization by which companies and individuals interact, changing, in the form of providing a service or collecting a fee, a surplus of resources.

In the following are shown the main features of the collaborative economy, derived from the specialized literature:

- ***The prevalence of accessibility and reliability of the service*** of the proposed good or resources, to the detriment of the ownership or provision of services intended for a single user. Emphasis is placed on how much the service / good can respond to the consumer's demands, bringing value to the buyer, the supplier / seller, as well as the environment in which they operate;
- ***Using the digital technology (information platforms) and the internet connection*** for the services provided or received, and respectively, for the sale of goods, as well as the social dimension, enhanced by behaviors that encourage greater care with regard to consumption, by the resources available and by the environment;
- ***The intersection of groups of individuals with each other or their intersection with organizations that need their capabilities***, the association of people with

capacities, complementary skills and needs is favored in the collaborative economy, considered as a means to reunite the passions with the money interests.

- ***Harnessing untapped capacity*** – the owners of the resources get to offer for exploitation the unqualified part of it, in exchange for a fee or another service. In the case of goods of greater value or with significant untapped capacity, their use made by having the common denominator time, thus benefiting from both parts. For example, in the case of ridesharing platforms, for users, the cost of the purchased service is lower than the cost associated with owning the respective car, but over time, the aggregate value of the revenue obtained by the service provider may exceed the cost mentioned above.

The growth rate of the global collaborative economy, according to a study by the consulting firm PwC, estimated to increase 20 times in the period 2016 - 2025, reaching a total value of 570 billion Euros, in five key sectors:

- Collaborative finance;
- Individual to individual accommodation
- Individual to individual transportation services;
- Services for the household on request;
- Professional services on request.

The platforms intended for p2p accommodation are among the categories that expected to increase significantly between 2016 and 2025. The popularity of such platforms (AirBnb gathers 100 million users and lists on the stock exchange) and the sustained growth rate of the global tourism and travel industry indicates the influence and popularity of individual-to-individual collaborative platforms in the global tourism industry.

Smith & McKeen (2011) emphasize that, in the business environment, the quality of collaborative technologies to provide employees with access to real-time information from anywhere generates numerous benefits at their level such as: efficient teams, cost reduction, access to information and access to communication with individuals located internationally.

In terms of team efficiency, this is given by encouraging interaction between employees, at the workplace and by increasing overall performance (Turel & Zhang, 2008). Moreover, Smith & McKeen (2011) point out that, at the level of some companies, the use of social media platforms by employees encourages the act of getting to know others, learning about new cultures. Thus, it is possible to successfully connect employees of the same company, located at great distances. As a result, the act of getting to know others encourages the creation of personal connections within groups, leading to an increased level of trust, thus facilitating the exchange of ideas and initiatives, and implicitly, in achieving a climate conducive to performance.

The reduction of costs at the level of organizations through the use of collaborative technologies can be achieved through concrete actions, carried out at specific levels (Smith et al, 2011), such as:

- Increase and improve communication
- Reducing misunderstandings
- Increased degree of coordination between teams
- Promoting links between suppliers and customers, which can speed up some processes of the job.

Table 1 presents the classification of collaborative technologies according to time and space. As can be seen, most types of collaborative technologies are found at the intersection between those that allow communication in different time and space coordinates.

Table 1 Types of collaborative technologies depending on the configuration of time / space⁵ (ZIGURS și MUNKVOLD)

Time / place	In the same time	In the different time
In the same place	Conference systems, electronic meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-mail • Electronic document management systems • Electronic systems for calendar and management of daily tasks / events • Task flow management systems (work) • Electronic bulletin systems • Suite of software products for collaboration
	Systems for supporting team / group work	
In a different place	Audio conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-mail • Electronic document management systems • Electronic systems for calendar and management of daily tasks / events • Task flow management systems (work) • Electronic bulletin systems • Suite of software products for collaboration • Integrated systems for teams • Systems for working on the web • E-learning systems
	Video conferencing	
	Instant messaging / Chat room	

⁵ Ilze Zigurs, B.E. Munkvold, *COLLABORATION TECHNOLOGIES, TASKS, AND CONTEXTS*, page 146, 2006

Time / place	In the same time	In the different time
	E-learning systems	
	Integrated systems for teams	

The classification of collaborative technologies according to their functionalities gives greater attention to the capabilities made available to users by the types of collaborative technologies, as detailed in the table below (table 2).

Table 2 Types of collaborative technologies depending on the role they play⁶
(ZIGURS și MUNKVOLD)

The type of function offered	Exemple de tehnologii colaborative
Communication technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-mail • Instant messaging / Chat room • Video and audio conferences
Technologies to disseminate information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document management systems • Electronic bulletin systems
Process support technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support systems for groups / teamwork • Systems for meetings, virtual meetings
Technologies with a coordinating role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic systems for calendar and management of daily tasks / events • Task flow management systems
Technologies that integrates several functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suite of systems that integrate several products for collaboration • Systems for working on the web • E-learning systems • Integrated systems for teamwork.

⁶ Ilze Zigurs, B.E. Munkvold, *COLLABORATION TECHNOLOGIES, TASKS, AND CONTEXTS*, page 148

In today's business environment, in today's economy, there is a tendency to integrate and interconnect capacities technologies to a much greater degree, in order to obtain a competitive advantage and to face the challenges brought by such a competitive environment. , as shown by the opinion issued by the World Economic Forum at the beginning of 2019 (Nikolaus L.).

Thus, looking at the most popular collaborative technologies used in 2019 and the functions proposed by them, it is impossible not to notice that in their entirety, they are represented by platforms that integrate many of the functionalities mentioned above, which blurs the borders. between the terms collaborative technology and collaborative platform. The functionalities of the collaborative platforms are generally the following (Fearn, McCaskill and Turner):

- *They are accessible from a variety of devices, including mobile devices*
- *Provides the opportunity to run a constant, considerable and varied flow of information (photos, videos, text files, attachments, etc.) between users*
- *Supports communication between users.*

The five best platforms that use collaborative technologies (Fearn, McCaskill and Turner) are described below:

- 1) **Slack** – a collaborative platform with millions of users worldwide, allowing file transfer between users, sharing direct messages, organizing common conversations across different categories and is compatible with other platforms such as Google Drive or Box.
- 2) **Asana** – a platform that has the role of tracking and managing the tasks performed by the employees, creating lists of tasks, deadlines. It also facilitates the organization of projects in various categories, benefiting from search functions and updating the status of a project.
- 3) **Podio** – It is also a platform that integrates the use of other platforms such as Google Drive, DropBox, Evernote and also allows the use of mobile telephones. It has the role to organize the tasks delegated to the team and to communicate at the same time.
- 4) **Ryver** – this is a similar platform to Slack, but it has several integrated communication facilities. Therefore, it offers the opportunity to delegate and monitor tasks as well as to communicate about them.
- 5) **Trello** – a platform available in web and mobile format that facilitates the delegation, monitoring of tasks to the team, also benefiting from the possibility of giving feedback for each task.

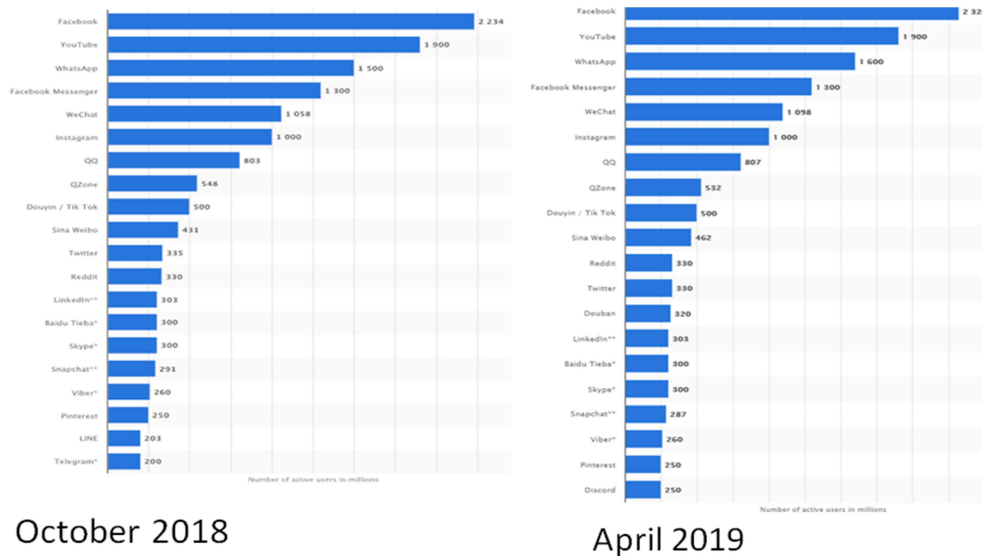


Figure 1. Social media platforms

In the graphs above (figures 1) are presented the most popular social media platforms, according to the number of active users, in two moments: October 2018 and April 2019. Thus, it can be observed that in October 2018 Facebook was approaching about 2.3 billions of active users, and the platforms Youtube and Whatsapp completed the second and third places, with 1.9 billion active users, respectively 1.5 billion. In April 2019, the situation of social media platforms was as follows: Facebook exceeded the threshold of 2.3 billion active users, Youtube remained at the same value, and WhatsApp exceeded the threshold of 1.6 billion users.

The year 2019 brought a lot of news of the future in the field of social media, after the management of the social network Facebook announced in January that they will integrate the online messaging services of the network, with the other two well known platforms, Whatsapp and Instagram. Although the movement aims to be one that will help users, in order to provide premium messaging services, it will bring together, on a single platform, no less than 2.6 billion users.

The collaborative platforms existing at the moment are the following:

- Social networking sites– Facebook, Google Plus, CafeMom, Gather, Fitsugar
- Micro-blogging sites– Twitter, Tumblr, Posterous
- Publishing tools– WordPress, Blogger, Squarespace
- Collaboration tools– Wikipedia, WikiTravel, WikiBooks
- Rating/Review sites– Amazon ratings, Angie’s List
- Photo sharing sites– Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest
- Video sharing sites– YouTube, Vimeo, Viddler
- Personal broadcasting tools– Blog Talk radio, Ustream, Livestream

- Virtual worlds– Second Life, World of Warcraft, Farmville
- Location based services– Check-ins, Facebook Places, Foursquare, Yelp
- Widgets– Profile badges, Like buttons
- Social bookmarking and news aggregation– Digg, Delicious
- Group buying– Groupon, Living Social, Crowdsavings

3. Using collaborative platforms in tourism

For the period 2013 - 2025 the growth rate of the accommodation services offered by using the online environment and, in particular, the collaborative platforms such as P2P is estimated to increase by 31%.

It is also worth mentioning that measuring the value of the accommodation sector carried out through P2P platforms is difficult to achieve, this being given by the small number of data in the field. An independent study, conducted by MasterCard in 2017, estimated that the total value of transactions carried out in the P2P platform hosting services industry was \$ 75 billion. However, the common point of the studies carried out is represented by the upward trend estimated for the future period regarding the use of P2P platforms.

P2P platforms act as intermediaries between service providers and beneficiaries and they charge a commission for using the platform of both parties or one of them, representing the most common category of P2P accommodation services.

The service provider charges a sum for the services offered, which the tourist can pay either directly (homestay.com) or through a platform (Airbnb.com).

The most used collaborative platforms in the tourism industry are:

- The Airbnb platform charges a 3% commission from the service providers and a fee of between 6 and 12% from the tourists, who have the obligation to pay on the spot, both amounts to the platform. Then, the owners of the accommodation spaces collect the corresponding amounts from the platform, after the arrival of the tourists
- The Homestay.com platform charges a commission of 15% at the time of booking and this amount is used to guarantee the reservation. Payment for the purchased services can be made by bank transfer, cash or PayPal directly by tourists to the accommodation provider.
- The Homeaway platform charges tourists between 5 and 12%, and the service provider can choose to pay for each reservation (8%) or an annual subscription ranging from 349 to 499 USD. Payment can be made directly or through the HomeAway system.
- Booking platform - charges a commission between 12 and 17% only to the providers. Tourists do not pay commissions. At check-in, they pay the providers the fee for the accommodation services. In case the provider applies a cancellation policy, credit card amounts can be withheld.

In addition to the P2P platforms for accommodation services, there are two models encountered in this regard:

- Mutual exchange of housing - in this model the houses are temporarily exchanged between users, this exchange is facilitated through a platform, there is no fee for renting the house. The platform charges a fee to both users, which can be for each transaction or a fixed fee. The largest online home exchange platform is HomeExchange and has a fee of \$ 150 for a 12-month period.
- Free accommodation - represents a model of accommodation without the obligation to pay for any of the parties. Visits do not imply a fee or without a direct interest. Well-known platforms such as CouchSurfing or WarmShowers do not have a fee for use, however, their cumulative accommodation capacity is 500,000 beds.

A summary of the characteristics of the main digital platforms used for hosting services are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Digital platforms used in tourism

Platform / category	Year of establishment	Number of ads	Geographic area	Number of tourists
P2P platform hosting				
Booking.com	1996	5 millions	226 countries	n/a
Airbnb	2008	4,85 millions	191 countries	200 millions of tourists
HomeAway	2005	2 millions	190 countries	n/a
TripAdvisor Rental	2009	830.000	200 countries	n/a
Tujia	2011	300.000	China	n/a
9flats.com	2011	250.000	140 countries	n/a
Homestay.com	2013	50.000	160 countries	750.000
OYO Rooms	2013	8.500	India	40 millions
Onefinestay	2009	2.500	SUA, Europe, Australia	n/a
Xiaozhu	2012	250.000	China	n/a
Mutual exchange of housing				
GuestToGuest	2011	280.000	197 countries	n/a

Platform / category	Year of establishment	Number of ads	Geographic area	Number of tourists
LoveHomeSwap	2009	100.000	140 countries	n/a
HomeExchange	1992	67.000	150 countries	135.000 of housing exchanges
Free accommodation services				
Couchsurfing	2004	400.000 of hosts	200.000 towns	4 millions of guests annually
Trustroots	2014	6.000 of hosts	n/a	n/a
WarmShowers	1993	61.000 hosts	161 countries	n/a
BeWelcome	2007	35.000 members	n/a	n/a

5. The global trends of accommodation services run through P2P platforms

Further will be presented the main trends in the development of the tourism accommodation sector, as well as the main features of service providers and buyers.

Usually, the growth rate in mature markets slows down, after a period of 5 years of growth. Initially, the platforms for accommodation services were the most popular in the mature markets, where they were favored by the high degree of digitalization and the popularity of travel, but starting with 2017, the demand and supply stabilized. In the mature markets, the research revealed an awareness level of 80% of the platforms for accommodation, which influenced the demand in a negative sense. The regulatory acts as well as the negative image projected in the press contributed to this trend. The mature destinations such as Berlin or Santa Monica, California in 2017 suffered a decrease of 49%, respectively, 37% in terms of platform accommodation services, after imposing legislation and fines.

The emerging markets are potential for these types of platforms. For example, the Airbnb platform noted that in 2017 it brought an increase of 1,160%, compared to 2014, in the number of tourists in low and middle income countries. Indonesia, the Philippines and India are the countries from which the growth came. The number of Airbnb guests in China was 3,290,000, compared to 2016, these figures

increased by 268%. The Homestay.com platform confirms the trend - the pace of revenue growth is sustained in countries such as Cuba, Japan, Iran, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, India, Mexico, Singapore, China. Market consolidation and the emergence of super-platforms have led to the emergence of a network effect (that of interconnection) given by the use of digital platforms. This can lead to market integration and concentration in several super-platforms. Similar to the trend underlined for social media platforms, the integration and operation of several adjacent services through multiple platforms, using a common technological architecture, leads to network effects, including Big Data.

The emerging markets continue the trend of consolidation through the emergence of platforms similar to those known, but also their quick purchase by the big players.. În plus, pe lângă serviciile de cazare, platformele își adaugă în portofoliu noi și noi facilități, de multe ori, rezultate prin fuziuni, achiziții, parteneriate (de exemplu platformele GuestToGuest și HomeExchange).

New entrants to the platform face a low level of support. Although there are modules to accommodate the platform, most of the time, its use by individuals with limited digital skills may prove difficult. In the case of Airbnb, the assistance offered to the hosts is mostly in the online environment, through communities or special question sections. The possibility of constant and appropriate training for each category of individual is limited.

The existing data suggests that the United States and Europe are the largest markets in terms of number of hosting providers. Thus, analyzing the ads on the TripAdvisor Rentals platform in 2017, it is obvious that most of the ads are located in Europe (58% of the total), followed by the USA (28% of the total).

Most hosts on the Airbnb platform are women (55% of the total), respectively one million accommodation providers. The trend is also confirmed on the Homestay.com platform, where women have a 64% share of the total providers on the platform. In Africa and Asia, however, the trend is reversed, with female providers being 47% and 37% respectively. Regarding the predominant age group, the Airbnb platform emphasizes that those around the age of 60 have the highest rate of presence on the platform (13% of all US providers).

The announcements published on the P2P platforms have evolved considerably. If in the initial phase of these platforms the service providers had usually published only one ad, now the ads have evolved, with the category of super-ads. These belong to individuals or companies that manage several properties at the same time, which are available for short-term rental throughout the year. Such practices can be encountered in the case of people who do not have the time or expertise to manage the rental of properties on the platform. Last but not least, the percentage of people who offer their basic home for rent is noted. In the initial phase of platform development, most of the present offers were aimed at the presence of the host in the respective dwelling. Although this particularity may vary depending on

the geographical area, out of the total number of ads, only 30% refer to the rental of basic housing. This decreasing trend can be explained by the regulation of the sector, strict rules being imposed regarding the short-term rental of primary housing.

Regarding the age of the guests, the most present generation of the consumers of accommodation services on the platforms is the one born between 1981 and 1996 (the Millennials generation). For Airbnb, 60% of all guests are between 18 and 35 years old. For Airbnb in China, 83% of bookers are from the Millennials generation. In the case of the Homestay.com platform, again, the age group 18 - 25 years old dominates, being present in a proportion of 52%. The data varies from platform to platform and from region to region, being clear that more data is needed to determine if the preponderance of the Millennial generation is the fact that this type of accommodation is simply more attractive to them or because there is a significantly higher degree of literacy and digital skills than in other age groups.

Regarding the duration of the trip and the composition of the tourist groups, the market analysis in the United States of America and Europe found that the users of the P2P hosting platforms spend more nights of accommodation than those who opt for the usual modes of accommodation. On the other hand, research for the Norwegian market has found a contradictory trend. In addition, according to studies conducted for the United States market, guests of P2P platforms have an above average level of education and income. However, the main criterion according to which the available properties are searched is the price - a trend signaled by the analysis of the US and Finland market. Other important decision-making factors are the number of beds available, the desire to prepare meals on their own, the distance to the city, the host's response time. Moreover, the desire to have an authentic experience and the presence of the kitchens are things that considerably influence the choices of the guests.

The spending patterns of the guests in this sub-sector are different, depending on the tourist destination and many other variables for which the data identification is not yet sufficient. On average, Airbnb guests in Australia spend 1.6 times more per day than other regular guests. On the other hand, Airbnb guests in Norway spend 40% less than those who prefer hotel accommodation.

Business travel is an important growing segment for P2P platforms. In 2017, approximately 15% of the bookings made on the Airbnb platform were made for business purposes, and the company estimates that by 2020 this share will be 30%.

4. Conclusion

Collaborative economics designates an economic system in which the actions of sharing and sharing the resources owned by people are emphasized to generate added value. Collaborative technologies complement this description, designating

precisely the information medium (IT platforms, social media platforms) through which, in the information age, in the collaborative economy, demand and supply meet.

The value chain of tourism can be extremely diverse, involving local farmers, rural workers, craftsmen, artisans. Although hosting services represent the largest sub-sector of tourism, advances in technology, accessibility of the online environment and popularization of social networks, have led to the establishment of the new socio-economic paradigm of the collaborative economy in a significant way in tourism.

Hosting in private homes has always existed so the appearance of the characteristic platforms of the individual to individual economy (P2P platforms) has led to the emergence of new business models in the tourism industry, focused on providing accommodation services, these adding an additional level of complexity but also of controversy.

The economy of P2P hosting services platforms carries the imprint of global socio-economic realities. Already past the initial phase of development in mature markets, P2P hosting platforms pay attention to emerging economies, the business tourism segment, as well as the Millenials generation. With seemingly higher incomes and level of education, P2P users tend to spend more than other types of tourists, being generally influenced by the desire to enjoy authentic tourism experiences and accommodation facilities.

Among the determining factors of the development of the collaborative economy, the intensive use of the collaborative technologies and social media platforms in tourism are: the number of tourists increases annually, the low-cost airlines are accessible to several classes, the online travel agencies are gaining popularity, the advanced mobile technology and digital banking services facilitate bookings and payments, digital technologies have reduced the costs associated with search and planning, traditional providers of accommodation services are beginning to be present within P2P platforms, with the evolution of this subsector, it is becoming increasingly difficult differentiation of P2P hosting services platforms and online travel agencies.

Given the less and less differences in the platforms used in this subsector of tourism, the hosts present on the P2P platforms should be separated according to the type of accommodation offered, and not the platform used to enter a market.

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