

# Conversion from a Non-profit to For-profit Organization

Case: Couchsurfing

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ABSTRACT

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Sharing economy has changed the way we consume, encouraging us to redistribute unused assets. Development of the Internet allowed creating platforms, engaging the exchange of goods and networks. As consumers want to exchange not only for financial profit, such services as Couchsurfing started to appear, engaging developing networks with the common interests and spending quality time. The aim of this thesis is to research how non-profit and for-profit communities compare and how conversion from non-profit to for-profit organisation influences the community itself. The final goal is to acknowledge which challenges the case company came across during the conversion process, as well as to study how its virtual community operated before and after.

The author proceeds with inductive reasoning, using qualitative and quantitative methodology. Secondary data includes peer-reviewed literature and articles. Primary data is presented by the interviews and two questionnaires, conducted before and after the theoretical research. The researcher uses the case study as the main research method. The results are analysed together, highlighting the former and current issues of the community.

The thesis concludes that despite several issues, Couchsurfing community is developing under the management of self-proclaimed volunteers but the services lack organized management and cooperation between activists and the actual company management board. The conclusion states that focus on trust between the members and the company, as well as members themselves is essential in managing the virtual community.

Key words: sharing economy, conversion, case study, virtual community

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Helsinki, Finland, November 2016

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is to introduce the research background and topic. It guides to the main research question, objectives of the thesis and limitations. Later theoretical framework, research methodology and data collection are encountered. Thesis structure is described at the end of the chapter.

## 1.1 Research Background

As the world fights for efficiency, the sharing economy and recycling are trending concepts. Being extremely popular, the concept has become integrated into our everyday life. People can rent out for a period of time almost everything they have: accommodation, cars (carpooling), their pets and even their own time. Those could also be simply shared with no financial purpose but rather, non-material benefits. (The Economist 2013.) Companies like Airbnb, Blablacar, Uber or Couchsurfing have become part of modern society.



FIGURE 1. Snapshot of sharing economy (PwC 2015).

The thesis has a strong focus on the case company, Couchsurfing, which is an example of a sharing economy hospitality exchange community.

Couchsurfing allows its travelling member to stay with a local and experience culture from the inside out and for the residents to host travelers for free. Established in 2003, the company was a non-profit organization with the support of 3 million members and volunteers by August 2011 (Couchsurfing Statistics 2016). After that, the community was turned into a for-profit organization with support of investors which led to a massive change in management and in the whole concept. Although the community almost doubled in 1 year, the change led to a massive loss of active members and ambassadors of Couchsurfing (Shankman 2012).

The subject was brought up by the researcher because of her personal connection to Couchsurfing. Being an active member of Couchsurfing herself the research topic directly affects the author's user experience. The author has a desire to take a part in the improving Couchsurfing community and this thesis is the analysis of the current and former practices and is written to activate the community. Couchsurfing community is the number of members, using Couchsurfing and following the values of intercultural exchange and networking. Couchsurfing experience include hosting (accepting guests), surfing (going to be invited to the other's place) or attending the Couchsurfing events and meeting other members of the community.

The author decided to study the conversion process deeper as even though the process took place five years ago, the consequences are still visible and are widely discussed in the public (Baker 2011). In the study, the correlation between the conversion and the current company's image is examined. The author believes that the topic is important to acknowledge dealing with highly bonded non-profit communities which are facing the challenges of conversion.

## 1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

The thesis aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the change from a non-profit to for-profit organisation may influence a community that supports and develops the values of the company, using Couchsurfing as

an example. The case company changed the operating system from non-profit to for-profit, which led to the increase in the scale of operation (from 3,5 mln users to 12 mln in 2016) (Couchsurfing Statistics 2016). The final goal is to acknowledge the challenges appearing while conversion process and give the advice to eliminate their influence.

A research question centers a study and guides the reader into the topic. It is a clear question which presents a unique argument of the research. (Porush 1995, 92-93.) This thesis aims to answer the research question as following:

- How can the community be brought to the next level after the conversion from a non-profit to for-profit organisation and tackle the major challenges according to the example of the case company?

To achieve the answer to the main question, the following sub questions are composed:

- What is the difference between a non-for-profit and for-profit organization?
- How is trust created in virtual communities?
- How did the Couchsurfing community function before and after the conversion?
- What are the biggest challenges the case company came across during the conversion process according to ambassadors and active users?

The limitations should be considered when conveying research.

Limitations are the obstacles a researcher cannot overcome or predict (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest & Namey 2011).

In this thesis, there is a strong connection to the case company.

Geographical factor plays an important role, since the biggest Couchsurfing community is located in the so-called Western world (in this case Europe & Northern America), where it was firstly introduced to. The theoretical part strongly focuses on the United States, where the case

company has been located since its creation. At the same time, the author does not have any access to the private corporate information of the company as the thesis is an independent study.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework includes the further research on the topics of the sharing economy, non-profit organisation and the concept of trust. The mentioned concepts help to understand the research topic deeper and create background for the empirical part.

The concepts of sharing economy are encountered in the following chapter to understand the customer behaviour and economical framework. Non-for-profit and for-profit organisational terms are compared after that. Trust, which is the key concept in the hospitality exchange network and is essential to understand how to gain trust between its members to provide sufficient security, is mentioned in a separate chapter.

### 1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

Research could be done by several methods. Inductive and deductive reasoning are the concepts of making conclusion. Deductive reasoning goes from general theory to more specified hypothesis.

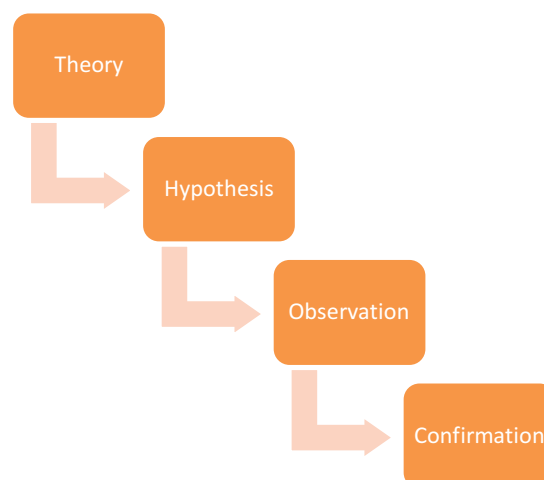


FIGURE 2. Deductive reasoning (Trochim 2006).

Inductive reasoning, vice versa, means that using specified observations the researcher comes to more generalised conclusions. Starting with the basic observations, a researcher comes to the summarising results and evicting theoretical concepts. (Trochim 2006.)

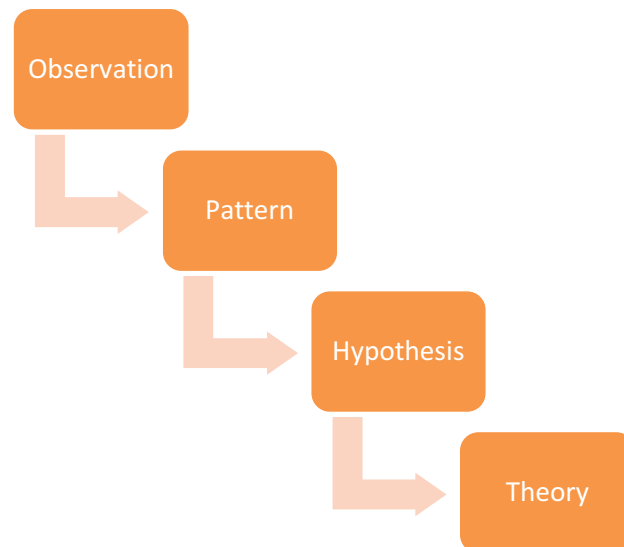


FIGURE 3. Inductive reasoning (Trochim 2006).

It is beneficial to combine both types of reasoning in the research. However, in this thesis, the conversion process is examined as a case study, which is approached by inductive reasoning since it is based firstly on the observation of the company and according to the observations the trends and the concepts are identifies.

Research methodology could be qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative methodology is exploratory research which allows to have open answers for open questions. Qualitative methods could define the ideas which may be are unseen if using the quantitative method. It also allows to more specified data to be collected but requires more time. This method is mostly used for the inductive reasoning as it goes from the specified details to general theories.

The quantitative approach allows the researcher to gather the information from a larger amount of participants and allows to generalise the statistics. It provides numeric information and is used for the research with the

deductive reasoning. (Rhodes 2014.) In this thesis, the research methodology is mixed, combining the personal interviews and two questionnaires.

Data could be defined as primary or secondary. Primary data includes all the new data that are gathered or observed from the “first-hand” experience by a researcher himself and secondary data are the data from published sources or collected from peer-reviewed sources. The advantage of primary data is that it follows a specific purpose, and the benefit of secondary data is that its collecting does not require as much time as for primary data. (Boeije & Hox 2005.)

In this thesis, both types of data are used. Secondary data, books and articles, are researched and e-sources are used for the theoretical part of the research and the company overview. The user study is done based on the primary data: the user interviews and the questionnaires.



FIGURE 4. Methods of research.

The figure above summarises the methods of the research implemented in the thesis. The research is conducted with inductive reasoning using both qualitative and quantitative methodology. The primary and secondary data are used to achieve the results.

## 1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into 8 chapters, each of them having its own separate topic. Chapters 1, 7 & 8 present the introduction and the conclusions of the research. Chapters 2, 3, 4 include the theoretical parts of the thesis. Chapter 5 is the case-company introduction and chapter 6 is presents the empirical research. The figure bellow gives a wider understanding of the structure.



FIGURE 5. Thesis structure.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic and research background and objectives of the study. It guides the reader into theoretical framework and research methodology of the thesis.

Chapter 2 opens up the concept of Sharing, or so-called Collaborative economy in everyday life. It goes through the definition and classification and introduces the environmental benefits.

Chapter 3 focuses on a non-profit organisation, its terminology and classification. It follows up the comparison of a non-profit and a for-profit organisation.

Chapter 4 introduces the concept of trust with the definitions and forms of it. Trust in virtual communities and sharing economy is researched.

Chapter 5 tells about the case company, its mission and history. Competitor's analysis and presentation of the services finish the chapter.

Chapter 6 represents the empirical research. It starts with the design and implementation of the research, goes through the analysis and finishes with the suggestions on the problem solving and tackling challenges during the conversion.

Chapter 7 gives answers on the research questions. Further research suggestions are discussed, validity and reliability is proven.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter of the thesis. It summarises the thesis with the key points.

## 2 THE GROWING TREND OF SHARING ECONOMY

The chapter is to introduce the concept of sharing economy, its definitions and classifications throughout the years. The theoretical part is supported with the examples of the modern companies.

### 2.1 Definition

Sharing economy is not a new concept, it has been around us for thousands of years. One of the simplest examples is a traditional public library. Nowadays with the increasing role of the Internet in our lives the massive sharing economy companies could finally find platforms to operate on large scale worldwide.

Sharing, or shared, economy, collaborative consumption, peer-to-peer sharing, access economy, the concept has a variety of names. To make things more complicated, there is no common-accepted definition of the concept of sharing economy and the researches identified it in different ways. According to Botsman (2010), sharing economy is “an economic system based on sharing underused assets or services, for free or for a fee, directly from individuals”

At the same time, the critics of sharing economy prefer the name of access economy. Once there is an intermediary between a consumer and customer, the consumption is not sharing anymore but “economic exchange with utilitarian, rather than social, value” (Eckhardt & Bardhi 2015).

Even though different companies operate under the umbrella of collaborative economy in different ways, they all share the same idea to increase the usage of one individual's asset or the consumers share one asset rather than obtain their personal one (Fox 2016).

## 2.2 Rise of Collaborative Consumption

Collaborative economy, whether the company is a DVD-rental shop or Airbnb, gave customers a platform and trust. This allowed individuals to switch from an “owning”-mindset to “sharing”.

A platform, physical or virtual, made goods accessible to everyone. The businesses operate on the local scale, and with the increasing number of customers, there is no need anymore to travel far or to use mail services in order to receive a product. By 2014, 7% of the US adult population were providers of the goods in sharing economy in some way and 18% participated as consumers (PwC 2015).

Trust is another aspect covered by the collaborative company. Every deal is based on the legal backup of the company which provides the platform. Review system allows self-regulation of the consumers' trust to the platform. (Botsman 2010, 135-141.)

## 2.3 Three Systems of Collaborative Economy

Collaborative economy forms could be divided by the purposes and methods used in consumption. Botsman (2010) defines three major systems of collaborative consumption: redistribution markets, collaborative lifestyles and product service systems. The three systems differ by the product and ownership type.

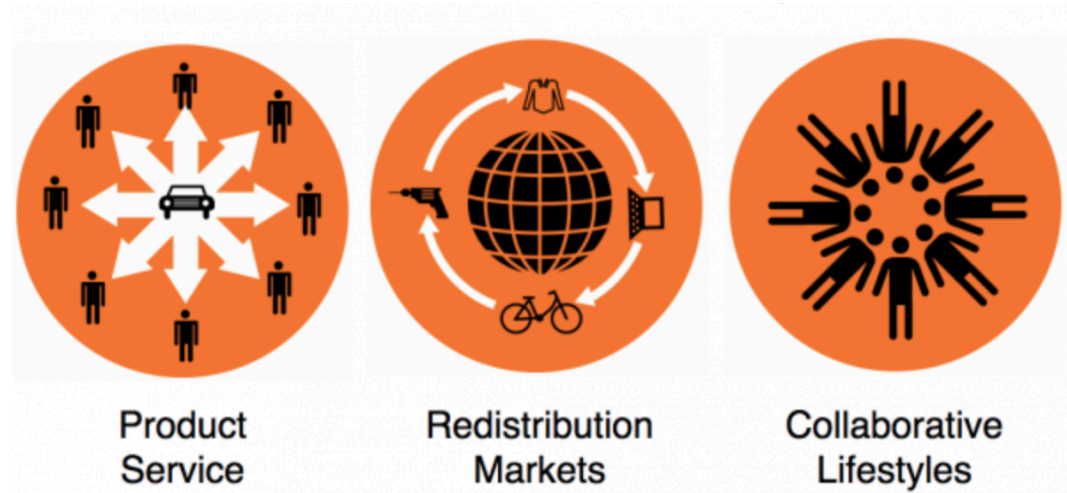


FIGURE 6. Three systems of collaborative consumptions (Botsman 2010).

### **Product-Service Systems**

Product service systems allow renting and benefiting from a product without owning it. With the development of the online systems that allows consumers to express themselves, the need in the ownership is fading. A person could define what he likes and what he does through the social media without necessarily buying the product. The added values include variety and convenience, there is no need to use the same product every time (with car sharing a consumer may try different brands of cars).

Therefore, the usage capacity of underused goods is redistributed and users can earn on the assets that were previously not used. (Botsman 2010, 95-101.)

HSL Kaupunginpyörät is one example of a product-service system, allowing to rent the Helsinki city bikes easily. A user is required to have an e-account and they may use a bike at any of the dock stations. Spotify is another example, giving access to music without purchasing it. Other examples are Netflix, iTunes, public laundries.

### **Redistribution Markets**

Redistribution markets system means trading pre-used items, basically second-hand good distribution. “Reduce, reuse, recycle, repair and redistribute” idea is attached. The circulation of someone’s unwanted

goods decreases production of new ones, and therefore decreases the environmental effect. (Botsman 2010, 122-127.)

A Finnish company, Tori.fi provides a market place for second-hand goods and exchange of the commodities. Other examples include eBay, Amazon, Facebook give away groups and traditional flea markets.

### **Collaborative Lifestyles**

Collaborative lifestyles system is sharing of non-product resources like money, space, skills and time. Collaborative communities could have the strongest bond between the members among the three collaborative consumption systems, as they include the most interaction, above to a usage of a product.

Cooperation becomes possible when the members of the community have common interests or a mission, which means a successful collaborative community encourages the users to communicate and exchange experiences. Commonality could be built by both a physical space, like co-working spaces, as well as by an online platform. (Botsman 2010, 151-159.)

The case company, Couchsurfing, is an example of collaborative lifestyles system, encouraging its members to interact with each other and form new social bonds while traveling. The other example is a new Finnish start-up Oupet, which offers a platform for pet-sitters and pet-owners to collaborate. Other examples are internet-based PayPal, Airbnb, Wikipedia, Blablacar, Uber and traditional hotels and hostels.

## **2.4 Environmental Benefits**

Sharing economy brought to the consumers the values of environmentalism and networking. The first one is achieved by increasing the use of the existing assets and the second – by communication between users.

The idea of recycling and reuse comes to a mind when thinking about collaborative economy. According to Nicolas Voisin, the founder of TheAsset.co: “Eighty percent of the things in our homes are used less than once a month, and self-storage has increased by 1,000% over the past three decades.” Some researchers are very positive about the current trend of collaborative consumption. (Rubicon 2015.)

Collaborative consumptions may help to solve the problem of hyper consumption. Private ownership, being on rise in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is stepping back to let sharing economy step forward. Modern consumers give the preference to the exact need and experience rather than the asset. In the other words, we need a movie not the DVD, a hole but not a drill. According to the researches in Europe and US, car sharing decrease CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by up to 50% and the car usage, in general, is decreased by 44%. Even though the consumer is not always driven by the environmental factor, the fact that they are using collaborative economy eliminates environmental impact. Nonetheless, cost per use is the determining indicator of the consumer decision. (Lecaros Aquise 2014.)

At the same time, a new value of human interaction is added to the product. Trust between complete strangers is created by sharing economy, which let us give strangers a lift (e.g. Uber) or let them sleep in our homes (e.g. Couchsurfing). Trust is taking a new step in the Internet-connected world. (Tanz 2014.)

### 3 NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

This chapter is to describe non-profits and compare them with for-profit organisations. It is as well as to introduce further classification and focus on the US specifically, where the case company operates. The chapter is explaining the benefits of both organisational statuses, which touched for the case company during the process of conversion.

#### 3.1 Non-Profit & Non-Governmental Organisation Terminology

The terms of a non-profit and non-governmental organisations often substitute one another, however, differences between them do exist. A non-profit organisation (NPO) is a general term of an organisation which uses the gained profit to its own benefit and development. According to the researchers, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) is NPO with added value, meaning that the organisation takes care of the subject, the government can not take care of. NGO has also more social value in its meaning. NPO could also have ties with the government, which NGO could not, for example a public university is a non-profit, but not NGO. (Gresham 2014.) Although, the term “NGO” spread in Europe, term “NPO” (which could be also referred as a public charity) is widely used in US. A non-profit (or non-business entity) in US legislation is the opposite to a business. (Clark 2011.)

The main characteristics of a non-profit include:

- Mission of a non-profit is not to gain profit, but to solve the social-valuable issue
- No individual may own the shares of a non-profit
- The profit and assets can never be gone to any individual but rather they stay inside of the company (Fritz 2016).

### 3.2 US Classification

Since the case-company was found in the US and is still operating there, it is beneficial to study deeper the federal types of non-profit organisations in the US, especially, taking into account, that the case company had been aiming for 501(c)(3) category during 2007-2011 and was denied the status (Arrington 2006).

501(c) is the general category for non-profit registered by IRS, which is Internal Revenue Sources of the federal US government. 501(c)(3) is the most common category among 29 different categories, differing by the purpose of the 501(c) non-profit organizations. The general information of any 501(c) organization is available to the public. The information, presented on the IRS website, includes location, of the company, fiscal year ending, total revenue, total functional expenses, total assets and total liabilities. (IRS 2016.)

Category 501(c)(3) is a tax-exempt organization, which means that individual donations are under deductible tax and the organization itself is an exempt from many federal, state and local taxes. The tax-exempt organization has to have the following purposes: “charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fosters amateur sports competition, prevents cruelty to children or animals”. The profit of the organization should go to its own development and it is restricted in political and lobbying activities. (IRS 2016.)

### 3.3 Revenue Sources for Non-profit

As mentioned above, any capital or asset can not leave a non-profit without a fair market compensation and both capital and assets should be transferred to another non-profit in case the company is dissolved.

It is commonly believed that a non-profit raises money from donations, however according to statistics, most of the income is generated by a non-profit itself. The table below represents the revenue sources of US non-profits in 2013.

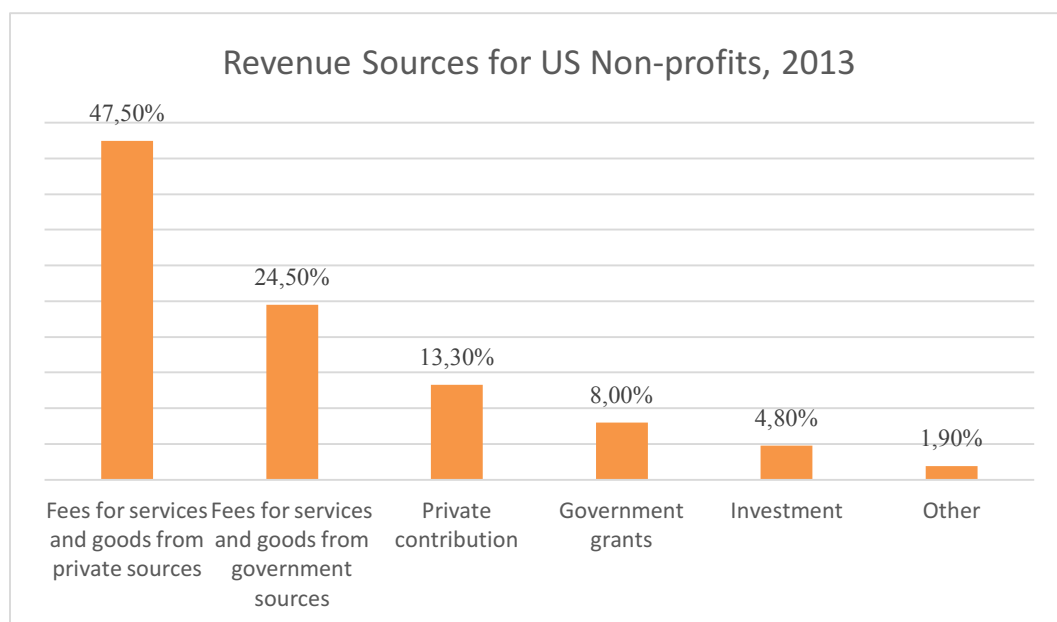


FIGURE 7. Revenue Sources for US Non-Profits, 2013 (McKeever 2015).

According to the statistics, 72% of income comes from the service fee, which means a non-profit earns most of its operational money itself.

### 3.4 Comparison of a Non-profit and a Business

A non-profit organisation, as stated previously, is the opposite of a for-profit business (referred later as a business). One of the principal differences between each is that even though both a NPO and a business are interested in getting profit to keep operating, the profit of NPO can not leave the organisation and goes to the development and operating of the company. (Fritz 2016.)

From a legal perspective, the difference is merely in the tax system measured by the IRS. Where a non-profit is exempt from tax, a business is obligatory to pay the taxes. (Chhabra 2015.) Even though instead of looking for profit, only NPO is a social enterprise has a public-benefit mission (Fritz 2016) social enterprises both for- and non-profit are interested in the welfare of the society which means that for-profit organisation could be still working for the common good (Chhabra 2015).

A non-profit is not owned by private sector, to the contrary of a business. The assets of a NPO can not go to the private sector without a market-price compensation. At the same time, if a non-profit operates no more, all the assets are transferred to another non-profit.

As mentioned, the founder of a NPO does not own the company and he or she does not have any privileged position. A NPO is controlled by the board of directors or trustees. The board is running voluntarily, meaning the members of the board are not getting paid for the work. A board of directors does not have any financial interest in a NPO, but only public benefit. (Fritz 2016.)

All the financial operations of a NPO are open to the public, a non-profit has to release reports and all the main information is kept both in the company and on the IRS website (Fritz 2016). While a business releases an income statement, a NPO focuses primarily on statement of activities (Green 2015).

TABLE 1. Comparison of a non-profit and a business.

	Non-profit organisation	For-profit business
Primary Mission	Public benefit	Profit
Ownership	Public	Private
Financial	Open to the public	A concern of the company
Accounting / Financial statements	Statement of activities	Income statement

The figure above represents the comparison of a NPO and a for-profit business shortly. The information used is described in the above chapter.

## 4 CONCEPT OF TRUST

This chapter is to present the concept of trust and describe the process of building trust in virtual communities. The concepts of trust and reciprocity in the sharing economy are presented at the end of the chapter.

### 4.1 Definition of Trust

Trust is the foundation of the human relationships. Oxford Dictionary (2016) gives the definition as “Firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something. Acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation.” Researchers are coming up with different definitions of the concept. According to Deutsch, trust is “a confidence that [one] will find what is desired [from another] rather than what is feared” (1973, 148). Another researcher stated “Trust involves the juxtaposition of people’s loftiest hopes and aspirations with their deepest worries and fears” (Simpson 2007, 264).

According to Luhmann (1979, 22-25) trust has three characteristics. Firstly, even though trust controls relationships, it can not be used as means of control. Trust usually shows dependency on each other. Secondly, the correctness of the action of giving trust could be judged only after the action of the other person after then trust was given. That means that it is impossible to know in advance if it is right to trust to the person. The third statement, summarising the second, names trust a bridge between now and future.

### 4.2 Forms of Trust

Luhmann came up with 4 forms of trust, different by the object of trust and expectations of the person:

- Intrapersonal trust - the problem of strangers and the trust problems between a caregiver and a patient (Jalava 2006, 9). Trust in one’s

own abilities; self-confidence trust basic (in others) (Luhmann 1979.)

- Interpersonal trust - a willingness to accept vulnerability or risk based on expectations regarding another person's behaviour, affecting our interactions both with adversaries and competitors as well as with allies and friends (Borum 2010, 5).
- System trust - confidence in the system of the welfare state and confidence in the system of care and caring organisations (Jalava 2006, 9).
- Object trust – trust in non-social objects; trust in its correct functioning (e.g. in an electronic device) (Luhmann 1979).

#### 4.3 Trust in Virtual Communities

Trust is the cornerstone of the healthy virtual community, as it enables communication and loyalty to the virtual platform. Virtual community, described by Rheingold (1993, 4) is “social aggregations emerged from the internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough and with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace”. Virtual communities could exist only in the Internet or could be mixed, including the physical meeting of the members.

##### **Trusting the community**

Trust is essential all the types of networked communities. When members trust each other the loyalty and commission to the communities is higher. Trust allows communities to focus on its values and missions. (Kadar & Monostori 2003, 38.)

The user trust to other members of the community often depends on interaction quality, seriousness in interactions, consistency over a long period, and common interest, and personal information of the other member, open to the public. The user with the highest scores and most similar experiences and interests is more likely to be trusted. (Nanyang Technological University 2010.)

## Trusting the platform

The first impression a user receives when he signs up for a virtual community is the platform. When building trust of a user to a virtual community two approaches are used: technological and human-centred.

Technological approach in trust means that the user can trust the system or the platform. The personal data has to be secure, the non-authorised access is to be minimised. Based on technological approach absolute trust can never be fully guaranteed because of the drawbacks of the systems.

Human-centred approach is focusing in user-friendly design and how easily the platform could be used. If a user feels he can control the platform himself, trust is granted. (Kisielnicki 2008, 38-42)

### 4.4 Reciprocity and Trust in Sharing Economy

Reciprocity is a principle of responding to a positive act with another positive act. Direct reciprocity is a well-known aspect of any relationships, which affect the relationship of two people by direct contact. Indirect reciprocity is rising with the sharing economy. We do not expect reciprocity from the person, with whom we had a contact, but from community. Indirect reciprocity could be also called "gift economy". Gifted items are given away without any agreement of the receiver to do something in return. (Botsman 2010, 132-134.)

Couchsurfing is an example of such a concept of indirect reciprocity. If user A staying at user B's place, user B does not expect user A to provide him accommodation on arrival, instead he may contact user C.

In fact, collaborative economy encourages users to make high-quality deals as their performance is evaluated. Positive feedback increases user's reputation and trustworthiness and as a result, leads to better deals for the user. (Botsman 2010, 91-93.)

## 5 CASE COMPANY: COUCHSURFING

Chapter 5 focuses on the case company and provides overview of the main activities and company history. The current status of the company is described, the business environment, and company's analysis are encountered.

### 5.1 Company Overview

Couchsurfing is, at the moment, the biggest hospitality exchange network offering its services for free. Hospitality exchange itself is a network that connects travellers to the local inhabitants and allows locals to host visitors for free (like Couchsurfing or BeWelcome) or with payment (like AirBnb).

The Couchsurfing company was established in 2003 by Casey Fenton as a non-profit organisation with a simple idea: "you have friends all over the world, you just haven't met yet". It changed the status to for-profit organisation in 2011.

At his moment, the network is growing fast. More than 12 million in 200.000 cities use the services of the company. 550.000 events were held. (Couchsurfing 2016.)

Couchsurfing mainly offers 3 types of activities: the user can join the events in his own town or in the city he or she is travelling to; the user can "surf the couch" meaning to stay with a local person for free in the city he or she is traveling to or finally the user can host travellers at his or her own home.

### 5.2 Company's Mission and Values

The company's mission is *"we envision a world where everyone can explore and create meaningful connections with the people and places they encounter. Building meaningful connections across cultures enables us to respond to diversity with curiosity, appreciation and respect. The*

*appreciation of diversity spreads tolerance and creates a global community”.*

The core values are

- Share Your Life – share your house, your habits, your meals with a stranger
- Create Connection – develop your networks
- Offer Kindness – respect, tolerance and appreciation
- Stay Curious – travel and meet differences
- Leave It Better than You Found It – applies to the whole world, to the host’s house, to the relationships. (Couchsurfing 2016.)

### 5.3 Company History

The Couchsurfing history is a story of rises and falls, bringing the community on top of the other hospitality exchange networks. As established in 2003, the market position of Couchsurfing is still strong.

#### 5.3.1 Origins of Couchsurfing

The story tells that in 1999 Casey Fenton as a 25-year old student found a cheap flight to Iceland, but he did not want to stay in a hotel. He found a database of students in the University of Iceland and e-mailed about 1500 of them. Surprisingly, he received more than 50 replies offering him free accommodation. After his return to Boston, Fenton understood that there was a demand for such service and decided to establish a company helping to find free accommodation while traveling. He registered the corporate name CouchSurfing Inc., the logo of which is presented below. in New Hampshire in 2003 and launched the website in 2004 with Daniel Hoffer, Sebastian Le Tuan and Leonardo Bassani da Silveira. (Couchsurfing 2016.)



FIGURE 8. CouchSurfing logo (2003-2012).

The logo represents CouchSurfing community with an image of an actual couch and the whole world. The logo and the actual name of CouchSurfing (with both “C” and “S” capital) was used since the creation of CouchSurfing till rebranding in 2012.

### 5.3.2 Growing the Strong Community

During the next 7 years, the company operated with the help of volunteers and donations of the members. In 2006 Couchsurfing deleted the whole database of 90.000 users due to a technical mistake. The creator Casey Fenton desperately suggested to shut down the service and sent a public message to the members of community stating: “In many respects it’s heartbreaking, but at the same time, what we’ve built together is not dead, it lives on in each of us. It lives in the connections we’ve fostered and the culture we’ve created. I want us all to take this CouchSurfing spirit and continue the mission out in the world”. However, at that moment the community was already strong enough to build the whole system from scratch once again with the help of dedicated volunteers, who put their efforts into CouchSurfing. (Arrington 2006.)

Nonetheless, CouchSurfing applied to prolong 501(c)3 charitable non-profit category and was denied it by IRS in 2011 (Arrington 2006). As mentioned earlier, receiving 501(c)3 category means worldwide recognition of non-profit social-responsible purpose, tax-deductible

donations in the US, and eligibility for legal protection and financial grants of the federal government. (IRS 2016.)

### 5.3.3 Volunteer System

Volunteers used to be the heart and veins of the Couchsurfing community. Now since Couchsurfing is a for-profit corporation, it does not have to provide the users public information and does not use volunteers anymore. This leads to the absence of the officially provided information on the organisational structure of non-profit CouchSurfing. Therefore, the information collected on the volunteer program is provided by former volunteers in a form of non-structured interview.

The former volunteers were divided into groups according to the tasks. The main groups are mentioned below:

- Ambassadors – official representatives of Couchsurfing community. The only volunteer group which is left after the reformation of the website. Earlier, ambassadors included City ambassadors, Country ambassadors and Global ambassadors. The system is simplified; all ambassadors have the same status now and are not bonded to any specific community. The ambassadors have the access to the close group of ambassadors and receive the news about the changes in operations.
- Collectives – Collectives were the official meetings for the developers and active members of CouchSurfing. Places where ideas were born.
- Contact us Questions Team- the CouchSurfing helpdesk, the team answered all questions, helped with reset passwords and other problems
- Member Dispute and Safety Team – the team was responsible for all safety-related issues (Personal fights between members, theft, harassment, rape, etc.).
- Group Management Team – the team took care of the CouchSurfing groups, restructured them, deleted reported groups.

- New Member Welcome Team – the team sent messages to new members. An example of welcoming letter could be found in Appendix 1. The letter was used to introduce a new member to CouchSurfing, its values and activities.
- Event Message Approval Team – the team approved the event invitation messages. The system allowed to send the messages to the specific search sample.
- Location Team - the team updated the location database (earlier it was not Google-Maps-based).
- Tech Team – the team involved programmers, developers, system administrators.

The teams organised and maintained the community. Volunteers have been the work force of Couchsurfing and could be easily reached by other members.

#### 5.3.4 B Corporation

As CouchSurfing was denied 501(c)3 status, the company decided to convert from the status of non-profit to for-profit organisation. The company's new status was C Corporation with B Corp certification. C Corporation, the most common type of for-profit corporation in US, are different to other types (S corporation and LLC) in a way of tax-paying. C Corporations are required to pay both state and federal tax. (Brooks 2013.) Certified B Corporations, or B Corps, "are a new type of corporation which uses the power of business to solve social and environmental problems" (B Corporation 2016). So even if the company was not considered to be non-profit anymore, it remained to a social enterprise.

CouchSurfing raised \$22,6 million in 2011-2012 in two rounds. CouchSurfing was bought up with the investment of \$7,6 million in 2011 by Benchmark Capital, Omidyar Network and Point Nine Capital. (Baker 2011). It followed an investment of \$15 million by General Catalyst Partners, Benchmark Capital, Omidyar Network, Menlo ventures and Lumia Capital in 2012. The investment is directed to the development of

the services of CouchSurfing. (Omidyar Network 2012.) The acquisition was followed by rebranding of CouchSurfing, which changed the website design, its own structure and even the name to Couchsurfing.

“We’d like to turn the word itself into the symbol that the couch has been. The designers brought this sense of human touch to life with the font they chose for the logo, which suggests handwriting. The more earthy shade of orange was chosen because it gives a sense of authenticity which reinforces the humanity of our brand.”– was mentioned about the logo change in the press release by M. Hutcheson (2012).



FIGURE 9. Couchsurfing logo (2012-present).

New logo highlighted the new name and era for Couchsurfing (with only “C” capital). The former logo is often used on the Facebook city groups as a symbol of the old times and the former non-profit nature of the concept.

### 5.3.5 Community Responce

After Couchsurfing was turned into a for-profit enterprise, the community received negative flashback, as the activists of Couchsurfing claimed that their work was sold without their acceptance. This issue led to a huge loss of volunteers and ambassadors, some of them left by themselves, some were banned from Couchsurfing. After that, the website community was growing so fast that the original ideas and values of the company could not be delivered to each single member with the same quality as before (Baker 2011).

Couchwiki, which is a free and open web-based encyclopedia of hospitality exchange networks, was started by Couchsurfing members. Couchwiki

received a huge anti-corporate feedback, the new articles questioned legitimacy of the decision to go for-profit. As it was the official part of Couchsurfing website, the encyclopedia was removed. Below there is a screenshot of the communication of wiki-authors to the readers about the conversion.

**7 July 2013** We removed anything that had to do with the unhappy wiki. Couchwiki is back up. Long live happy community wikis.

**05 July 2013** Unfortunately we had to make Couchwiki partly inaccessible, to deal with an unhappy company owning a once community driven travel related wiki. ([See details here](#))

FIGURE 10. News on the Couchwiki page (Couchwiki 2013).

Couchwiki, as many other features allowing different types of communication on the platform, was completely removed in 2014. Some services we reintroduced back later in 2016.

### 5.3.6 Increase of Community Members

As shown on the graph below the number of users increased more than 3 times since creating of commercial Couchsurfing and almost doubled after 1 year after the acquisition. (Couchsurfing Statistics 2016.)

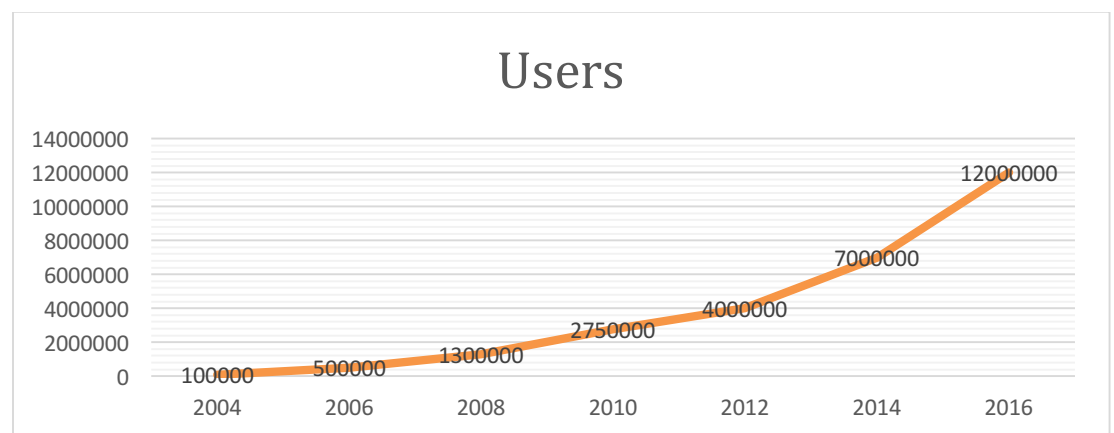


FIGURE 11. User Growth (Couchsurfing Statistics 2016).

Using only the volunteer support the website was slowly growing during the first years of operation. Conversion of the case company helped to increase marketing funding and hire professionals full-time. New management strategy attracted almost 10 million of new users during the last 6 years. (Baker 2011.) However, the number was reached because the signing up for the website became easier because the Facebook sign-up feature was added, which made the process quicker. Since New Member Welcome volunteer team was dismissed, the users did not receive any guidance on how to integrate the existing Couchsurfing community.

### 5.3.7 Monetisation of Couchsurfing

Couchsurfing revenue comes firstly from the verification services and secondly, from the Google target advertising on the website. Couchsurfing follows a freemium business model. Freemium is comes from a combination of the words “free” and “premium”, it is a business model for a company which provides most of its services for free and the special services for a smaller user fraction with a fee (Freemium.org 2016). At the base, all the services are free.

The verification of your address and phone costs 18 euros/year and allows a member to receive a confirmation of the user’s address and phone number. The verification is identified on the user’s profile at the top by a green sign. The privileged features of verifying include (Billock 2015):

- Verified members are shown at the top of the search.
- Access to the backup host network in case of last-minute cancellation.
- No advertising seen, which was recently added to Couchsurfing.
- Access to new beta features (for example “local favourites”, the featured places added voluntarily by other members).
- Status of the verified member shows that the user supports the development of the website.

## 5.4 Competitors' Analysis

The competition is very strong in the hospitality exchange industry because of the enormous amount of substitutes and direct competitors. The community values lie on trust and cultural and experience exchange. The principal players in the market are listed below:

- Airbnb

Airbnb is an absolute leader in the industry, as well as a well known for-profit brand. The community has more than 100 mln users (Fox 2016). Airbnb listings are not free, it allows a user to rent the space. Airbnb is not a direct competitor since the accommodation is not free.

- Hospitality Club

Hospitality Club is the second largest hospitality exchange network with more than 328.000 members after Couchsurfing. Hospitality Club is a non-profit project founded in 2000. As the development of the website stopped in 2006, nowadays it looks out-of-date. Previously having up to 500.000 members, Hospitality Club had lost a most part of its users. (Hospitality Club 2016.)

- BeWelcome

BeWelcome is founded in 2007 and it was not popular until Couchsurfing became a for-profit business. BeWelcome keeps non-profit status and has more than 93.000 users in its community. It has become the first non-profit on an open source software and is managed by a volunteer group BeVolunteer. The active part of the community is located in Europe. (BeWelcome 2016.)

- Warm Showers

Warm Showers is a hospitality exchange community for cyclers. At the moment it has more than 98.000 members, 47% of whom signed up as hosts. The community dates back to 1993 and is a US 501(c)(3) non-profit

organisation. Most of the members (82%) come from the Western world. (Warm Showers 2016.)

- Trustroots

Trustroots was created as hitchhiking community in late 2014 but shortly after was introduced to other travellers. The team under Trustroots created other popular travel databases such as Hitchwiki, Nomadwiki and Trashwiki. UK-based non-profit Trustroots has more than 20.000 members. (Trustroots 2016.)

## 5.5 Design of Services

Design of Couchsurfing, in a meaning, the way of functioning is described in the subchapter. To use Couchsurfing services a user has to sign up at the website and create a personal profile. Here and below the author uses her personal Couchsurfing profile as an example.

### **Personal Profile**

The user can sign in using the existing Facebook profile or the e-mail. After signing in he is asked to fulfil the personal information to be available for hosting/surfing. The questions have multiplied answers, short answer and long answer.

The basic information starts with the hosting status which could be chosen as and it influences the profile appearance in the search Accepting Guests (top of the search of hosts), Maybe Accepting Guests (still in the hosting list), Not Accepting Guests (not in the list), Wants to Meet Up (in the list of active members in the city). The information is shown on the very top of the profile with the profile picture, response rate, last login time, location of the user and the verification status.

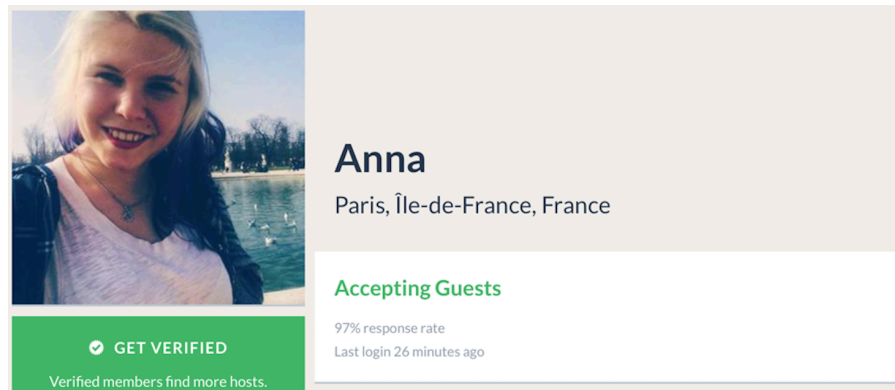


FIGURE 12. Profile intro.

The basic information includes the languages speaking and learning, hometown, occupation, education, age, gender. The information is automatically transferred from Facebook (if signing in with Facebook), unless the user wishes different.

Where I Grew Up	<input type="text" value="e.g.: Paris"/>
Occupation	<input type="text"/>
Education	<input type="text" value="Studying Business in Finland"/>
Languages I'm Fluent In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> English</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> French</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Russian</li> </ul>
	Add Language <input type="text" value="e.g.: German"/>
Languages I'm Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Finnish</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> German</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spanish</li> </ul>
	Add Language <input type="text" value="e.g.: Swahili"/>

FIGURE 13. Basic information.

This is shown on the top of the profile as OVERVIEW section. The overview gives a first impression of the user activity, in addition to that it automatically shows the amount and summary of the references, joining date and if the profile is complete.

OVERVIEW i

---

🗨️ 35 References ★ 22 Confirmed & Positive
🌍 Traveling the world

🗨️ Fluent in English, French, Russian; learning Finnish, German, Spanish
📖 Studying Business in Finland

👤 19, Female
📍 No hometown listed

🕒 Member since 2014
📄 Profile 100% complete

FIGURE 14. Profile overview.

After the basic information the user is fulfilling the huge main page section ABOUT ME, which includes subsections About Me, Why I'm on Couchsurfing, Interests (tag system used further in the member search engine), More about my interests, My Favourite Music, Movies & Books, One Amazing Thing I've Done, Teach, Learn, Share, What I Can Share with My Hosts, Countries I've Visited, Countries I've Lived In.

The second section MY HOME consists of the hosting preferences and home description. The hosting preferences include the preferences by day of the week, maximum number of guest, request preferences, preferred gender to host, attitude to children, pets, smoking. These aspects could be used in the search system.

**MY PREFERENCES**

Available Nights to Host

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Maximum Number of Guests

Request Preferences

Last-Minute Requests Okay

Multiple Groups per Night Okay

Once I've confirmed a guest, it's okay to send me additional requests for that night.

Preferred Gender to Host

Children, Pets, Smoking

Kid Friendly

Pet Friendly

Smoking is Allowed

FIGURE 15. Request preferences.

The further house description includes the sleeping arrangements, description of the sleeping arrangements, roommate situation,

miscellaneous (Wi-Fi, kids, pets at home, wheelchair accessibility), public transportation access, what I can share with guests, additional information. (Couchsurfing 2016.)

## Reference System

Reference is a review of the Couchsurfing member by the other Couchsurfing member. References are the main source of building trust in the community. References are divided into three types: host, guest and personal references.

The new reference system for host/guest references was implemented into use in 2015. After hosting/surfing, the users have 14 days to submit the references for their guest/host. The open reply reference is followed by a choice of the positive or negative characteristics depending on your general experience.

FEEDBACK

---

We're glad you had a positive experience. What makes Ninja In Pyjamas special?

Clean home
  Wanted to hang out
  Okay with not hanging out

Accurately described home
  Punctual
  Friendly
  Good location
  Thoughtful

Flexible
  Knowledgeable
  Fun

FIGURE 16. Positive features on the feedback.

Positive features are displayed on the profile of a member in the mobile application. At the moment it is impossible to see the features on the main website as well as the negative features are not mentioned anywhere and are not shown to the feedback receiver.

FEEDBACK

Why wouldn't you stay with Ninja In Pyjamas again? *Ninja In Pyjamas won't see your selections.*

FIGURE 17. Negative features on the feedback.

The characteristics are submitted anonymously after each stay, they are not seen on the main website but only on the mobile application. Except the reference part, mobile application has less features than the full website and mobile applications for IOS and Android systems are designed differently.



FIGURE 18. Mobile application version of the profile reference part.

The references are submitted by an author. They can not be edited nor deleted. The user can see the stay-based references are hidden until both

parties submit the references, or they become automatically public after 14-day period. (Couchsurfing Support 2016.)

The personal references could be submitted any time. They are located in the different reference window and usually present the personal (non-Couchsurfing, event or personal meet up) experience with the member.

### 5.5.1 Additional Features

Couchsurfing offers online communication through groups and forums. All together, the services include:

- Groups – is a forum dedicated to a special topic. Any member of Couchsurfing can create a group or join any existing group (except the operational closed groups, as Ambassador discussions).
- Events – a service of events. Any member of Couchsurfing can create an event page, organise an event or join the existing event.
- Local Advice – question and answer service, connected to geographical location. The most popular questions and answers are “upvoted” to go up on the news feed. A member has direct access to Local Advice on his Dashboard, connected to the place (city/region) he indicated himself (through surfing or hosting). A member has access to any of the Local Advice by looking for special location.
- Local Discussions – service partly matching with Local Advice. A forum feature depending on location of the user. It allows to start topic relevant for the place.
- Favourite Places – member-submitted recommendations on the activities and places in the city/region. Any member is encouraged submit recommendations, which are visible only to verified members.

## 6 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

The chapter is to introduce the empirical research of the thesis, followed up by the analysis of the research. The empirical part of the thesis includes two questionnaire and interview series. The questionnaires are launched among Couchsurfing members and interviews are conducted with the former volunteers and former and current ambassadors of the case company. The chapter sums up with the community analysis and the development ideas for the case company and possible issues during the conversion.

### 6.1 Design and Formulation the Empirical Research

Empirical research is a research by observation and it creates knowledge out of experiences (Robergs 2010). Qualitative and quantitative methodology are two data-acquiring methodologies used while empirical research. As mentioned above, both of them are used in the research.

Qualitative methodology was used while conducting the first questionnaire and finding out the challenges and problematic issues of the case company. The ten questions for the first questionnaire could be found in the Appendix 2. The first part of the empirical includes the first research pre-questionnaire which is not presented in the empirical part of the thesis. The results of the first questionnaire were used to create the second questionnaire. The first questionnaire examined the current trends of Couchsurfing and touched the vulnerable issues, as well as investigated the dismissed features and activities. The sample included 196 members answering the questions.

The second part is presented by the main questionnaire with quantitative data, measuring the impact of the user satisfaction within the issues to the issues that the case company came across with, found in the first questionnaire. The survey was spread out in the Facebook city groups dedicated to Couchsurfing as well as in the city Couchsurfing groups on the official website. After all, 294 members participated in the survey.

It is important to understand, that qualitative data is used as the main research source and the main questionnaire sums up the data gathered from the interviews and open up questions with numbers. The third part helps to analyse and explain the results of the second part of the empirical research. The interviews are used to receive the data about the former services and system of operation of the case company and the current trends of Couchsurfing. The interviews are semi-structured, non-standardised (the main interview questions are presented in Appendix 3). The amount of the interviews reached 6 and the interviewees included former or current ambassadors and volunteers. The second source supporting the findings of the main questionnaire is the data gathered by the author summarising the website statistics. The quantitative data presents the usage of Couchsurfing, presenting the percentage of new users and active users.

## 6.2 Data Acquisition

Thesis was started in July 2016. The figure below represents the data acquisition process as a whole.

TABLE 2. Data acquisition process.

	July	August	September	October	November
Pre-questionnaire					
Collecting of the theoretical data					
Main questionnaire					
Conducting Interviews					
Analysing the results & Summarising					

The first step was to launch a pre-questionnaire during the weeks 30-32 and conduct first two personal interviews to find out the current trends of

the Couchsurfing community. The theoretical data collection process followed the launch of the questionnaire. Theoretical data includes information about sharing economy, non-profit organisations and trust building. Case study takes a massive part in the research.

The main questionnaire was launched on the week 40 and was open for two weeks. After gathering the major results, the other 4 interviews were conducted. Interviewee search was done within the participants of the main questionnaire contact form and members of the Ambassador group on Couchsurfing. As a result, thesis writing process took 5 months.

### 6.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis subchapter include the results and analysis of the main questionnaire. The problematic issues of the case company are raised with a back up of the interviews and self-gathered data.

#### 6.3.1 Data Analysis of the Main Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes 14 questions. The questions are to help the author to organise the interviews, find the interview participants and create an image about Couchsurfing now and then. The questionnaire results are presented in the chapter.

Firstly, the participants' sample is examined. First examined questions include gender information, country of origin and country of residence, age, Couchsurfing habits. are questioned, trust issues and personal activity on Couchsurfing. The issues found in the results of the pre-questionnaire (low response rate, impersonalised requests, inappropriate messages, sexual harassment, free loaders) are examined. The connection and the attitude of the participant to the events of 2011 is measured and the questionnaire sums up with an open feedback form. The questions do not require obligatory answer.

The figures below represent the gathered information. The first question is asked about the gender of the questionnaire participant. According to the results, most of the participants of the survey are female (55%) and 45% are male.

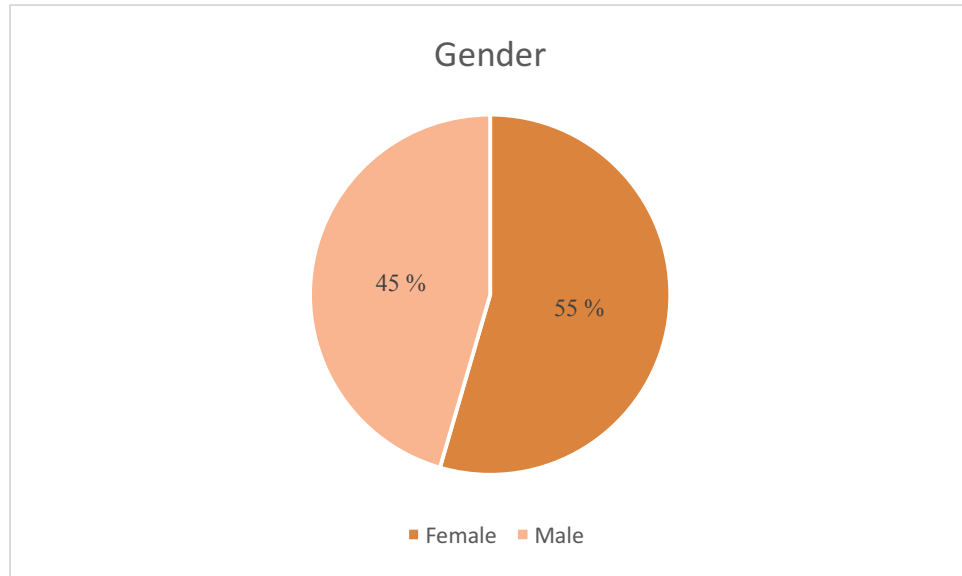


FIGURE 19. Distribution of genders of the survey participants.

The next indicator is country of residency. All together, the participants are from 71 countries. The countries are grouped to the continental area.

The majority of the participants are living in Europe, however a large proportion of the participants are in North America, followed by Asia, Africa and South America. Australia has not been reached. As mentioned earlier, the examined sample are members, living mostly in the Western world as 84% of the survey participants are North American and European residents.

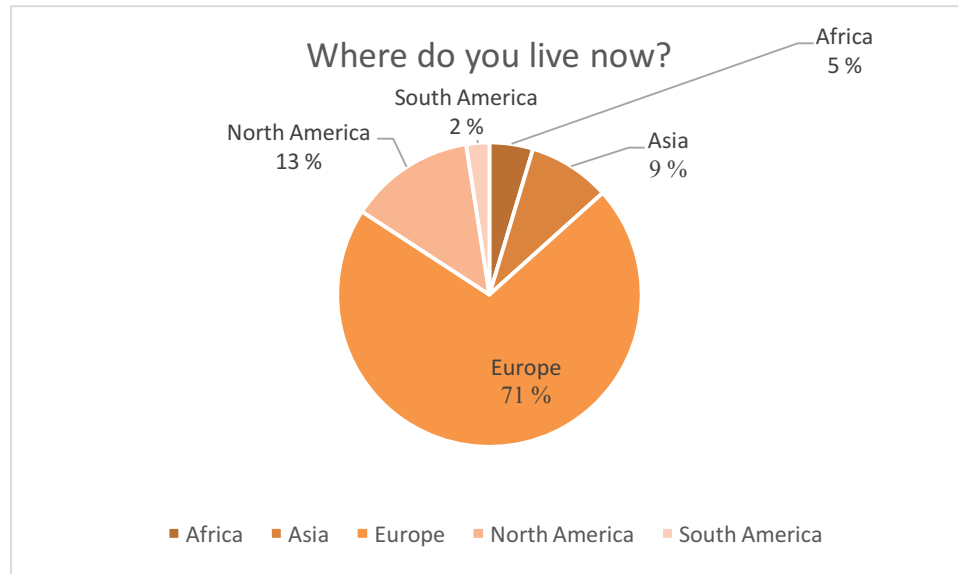


FIGURE 20. The geolocation of the survey participants.

The important question identified if the Couchsurfing survey participants are immigrants. Almost half of the participants (46%) immigrated to another country, the rest stayed within their motherland country.

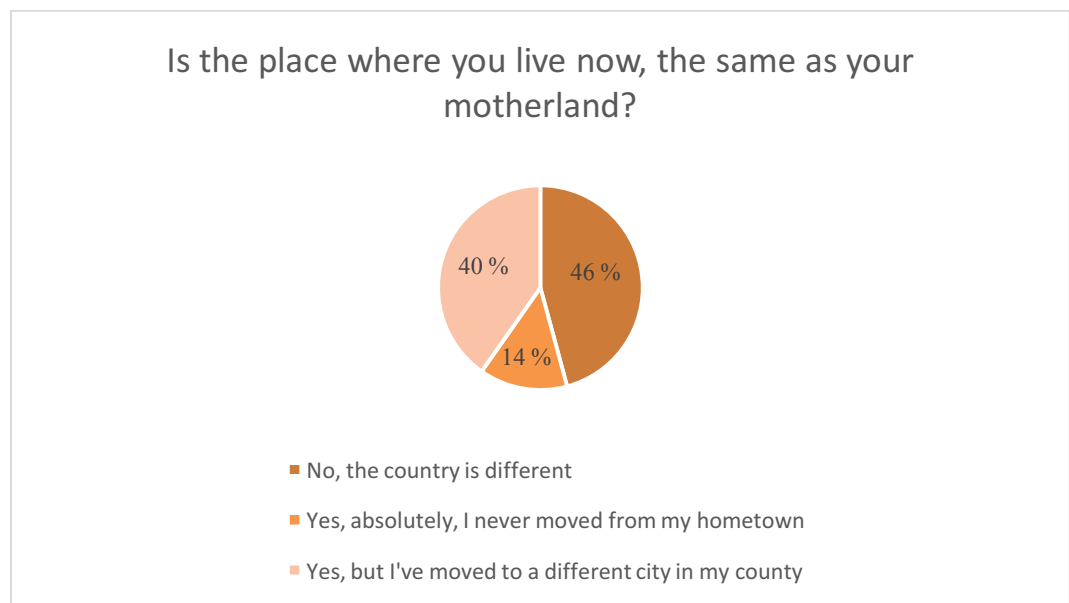


FIGURE 21. Immigration status of the survey participants.

Next question was asked about the year when the participant signed up for Couchsurfing. 22% of answering are relatively new on Couchsurfing, joining last year or this year. The vast majority (60%) joined later than Couchsurfing had become for-profit business. 40% of the participants

joined earlier or during the time of the conversion. The survey touched a couple of members who joined more than 10 years ago. 16 answers were received from the members joined 2006 or earlier.

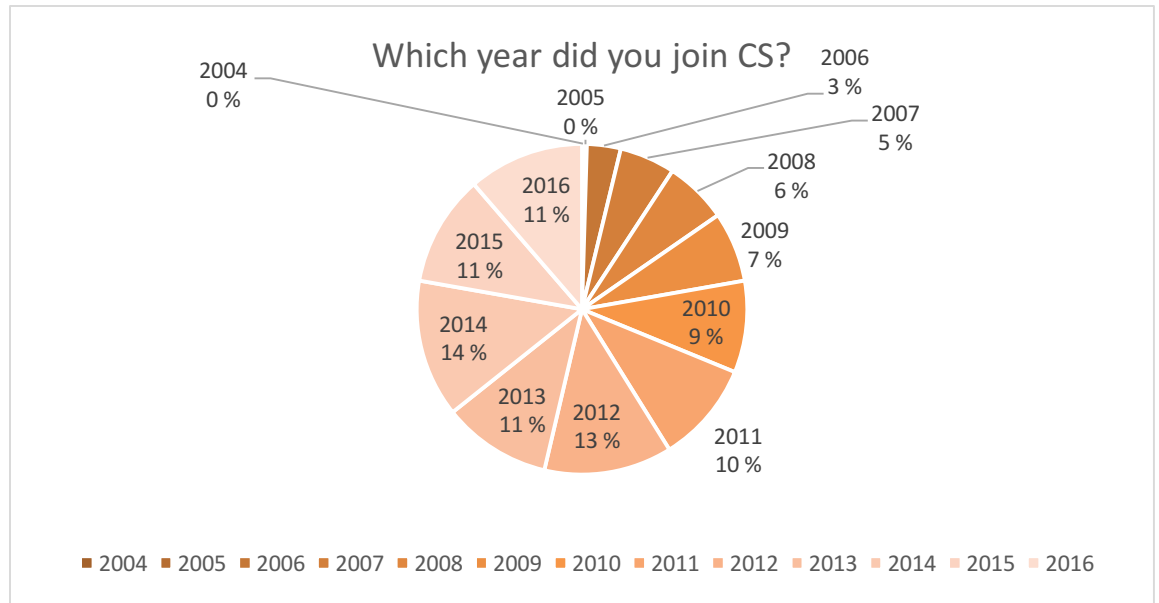


FIGURE 22. Year of signing up on Couchsurfing.

The following pie chart answers the question “How many references do you have?” of the questionnaire, where the reference is a review left by the other member. 30% of participants have 1 to 5 references, and 36% of the participants have more than 16 references. 34% have from 6 to 15 references. The reference segmentation is used later in the charts as references are one of the indicators of the activity of the user.

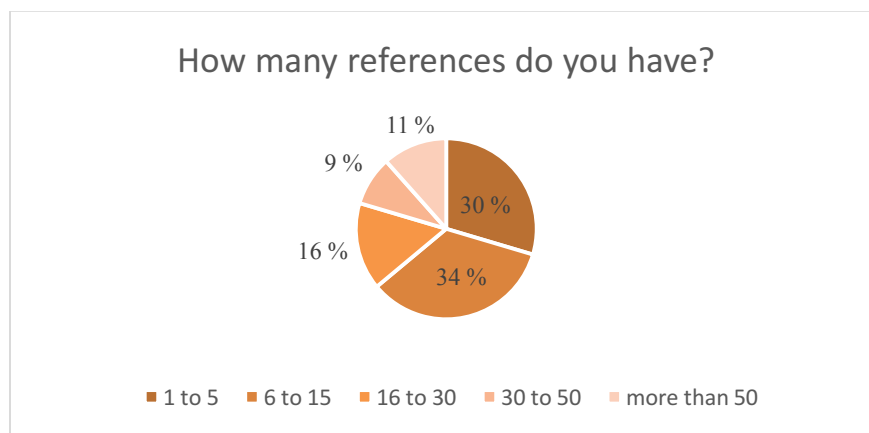


FIGURE 23. Number of references.

In general, the questionnaire participants included both the new members and the members, experienced the conversion, the very active members and the ones who use Couchsurfing from time to time.

### 6.3.2 Couchsurfing Issues

The Couchsurfing community was very close at the beginning and the issues were not highly noticeable. All the main problems were discussed with the volunteers and brought up to the point on the collectives. The conversion hugely influenced the community as a whole.

The question of the user satisfaction is raised among the participants who joined earlier Couchsurfing was turned into a corporation. 21% equally ignore the change and other 21% see the acquisition as a positive change. In fact, the acquisition stabilized the work of the website and developed new design and features. 58% of the participants are not happy with the conversion, a large proportion of whom state that a part of community had left.

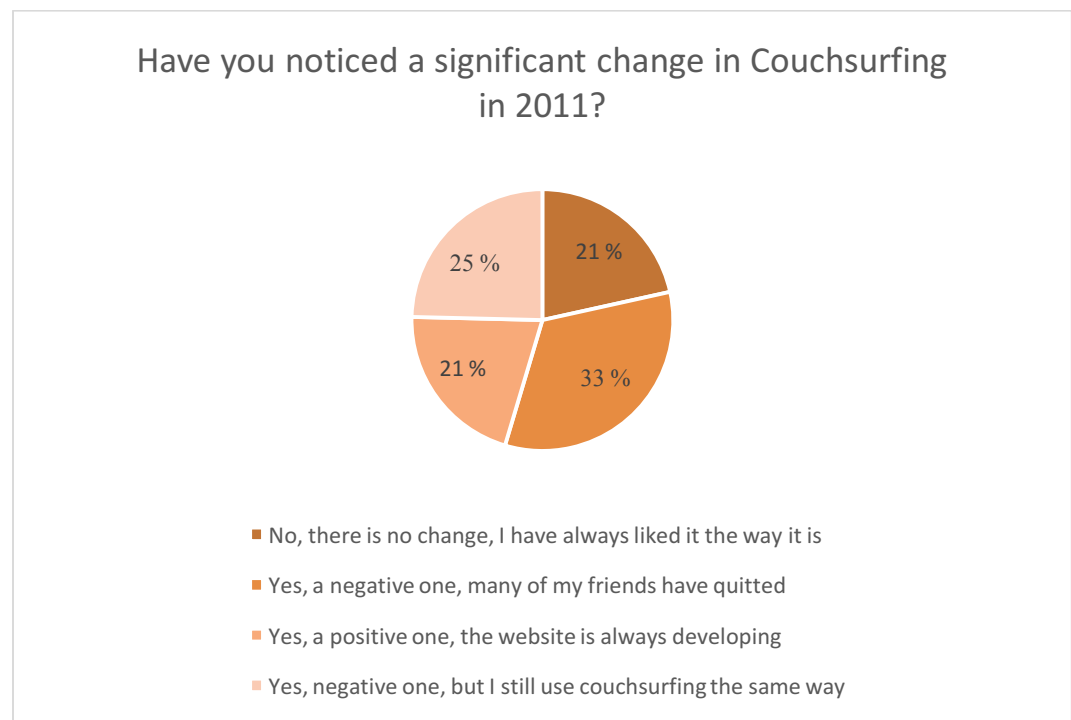


FIGURE 24. Attitude to the conversion of Couchsurfing.

As mentioned before the main issues were identified through the articles, interviews and pre-questionnaire open answers. The main issues analyzed below include low response rate, unpersonalized requests, treating Couchsurfing like free accommodation and sexual harassment.

### **Low response rate**

Low response rate in general means that a person looking for a host would have send more application, have a better looking couch request and a better-looking profile. Couch request is a message a Couchsurfing member sends to a host/guest. Good looking Couch request is often the main criteria of acceptance on Couchsurfing according to the questionnaire results and interview answers. Good looking profile is the one with all the areas filled in with authentic text and positive references of other members of the community.

Low response rate is a problem partly as one of the consequences of conversion. According to the interview responses of the members, experiencing the conversion, the process led to a rapid increase in the members with no sufficient knowledge of Couchsurfing background and community rules. Since the goal of the experience is to find a host/guest, the members are sending numerous requests of low quality. The other party, getting more requests than usual or without knowing what to do (as a lot of members are new) leaves the requests with no reply. The figure below represents attitude to the frequentness of the low response rate according to the questionnaire results.

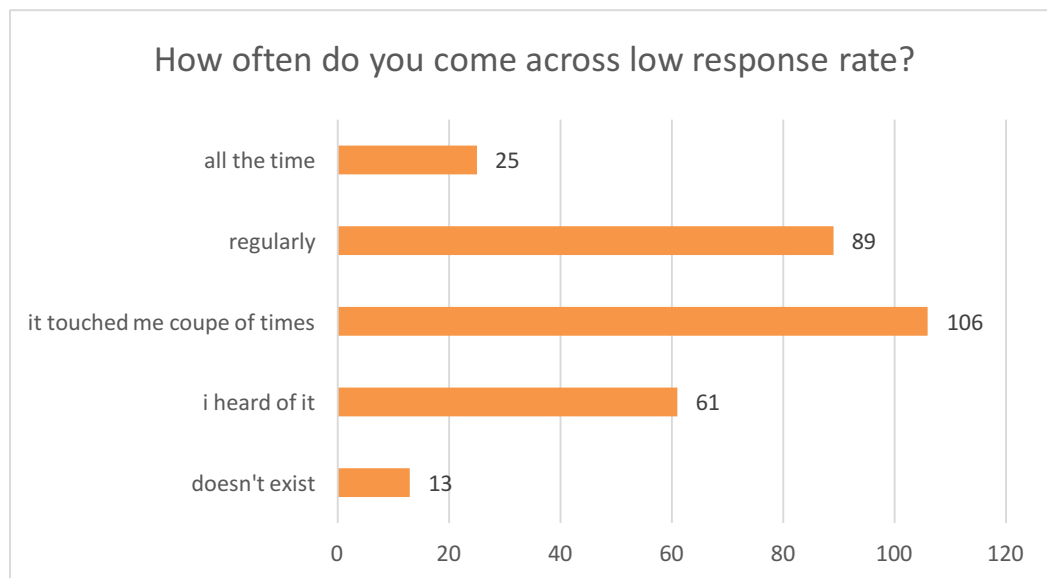


FIGURE 25. Problem analysis of low response rate.

The figures above and further below are organized similarly. A participant of the questionnaire had to measure the level of frequency of the presented issue answering: “I see it all the time”, “I see it regularly”, “The issue touched me couple of times”, “I’ve heard of the issue” and “The issue doesn’t exist”.

Low response rate is considered a problem by 114 of 294 participants, and 220 have been affected by it in general. The worst cases include new members, in attempts to find a host in huge Couchsurfing communities (e.g. Paris), having sent about 200 requests to get a positive answer. Very often, the low response rate is a result of the problem of unpersonalized requests.

### Unpersonalized requests

Unpersonalized request means couch request of poor quality. It could be copy-paste request or request lacking information. As mentioned, members are encouraged to send individual requests (first messages) to every host (guest) as the later are considered to be individuals not a free-accommodation-provider. Couchsurfing encourages quality time and cultural exchange. A request of high quality includes personal introduction, travel purpose, explanation of the host choice (evidence that the user read

the profile of the host). A couch request is often compared to a cover letter, which an applicant sends to the company that provides the job.

The importance of the couch request can not be underestimated, as it is one of the mostly highly appreciated way of connection in the Couchsurfing community. References (for 39,1% of the participants), couch request (25.9%) and personal description (23,5%) are the most important factors according to the other question in the questionnaire “What is the most important factor if choosing a guest/host”. Couch request is the main factor that determines the decision of a Couchsurfing member to host/surf with a person without references.

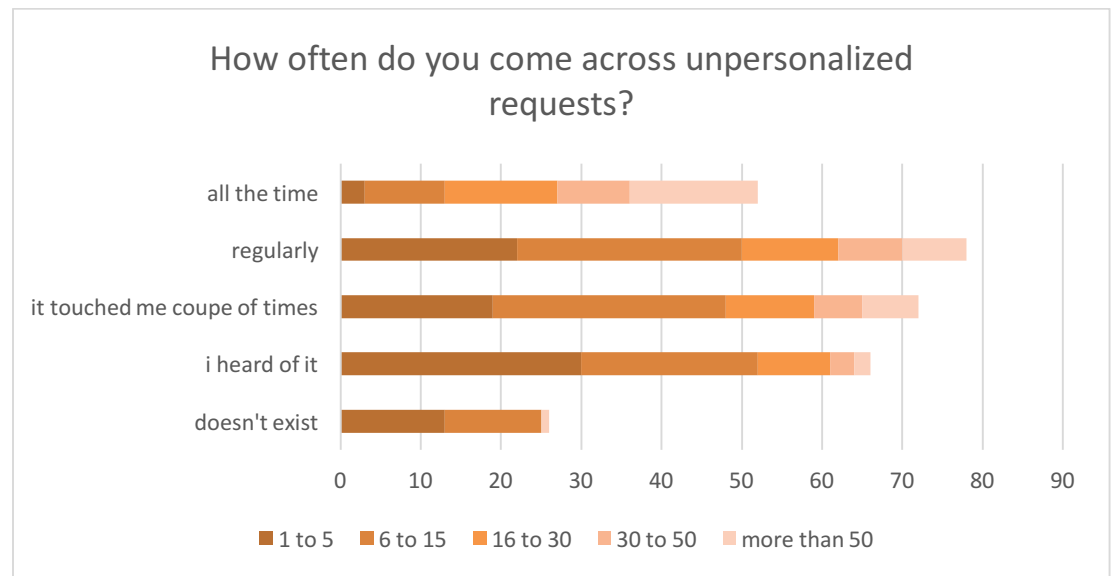


FIGURE 26. Problem analysis of unpersonalized requests.

The sections of the graph above include segregation by references a participant has on the Couchsurfing profile (the “beginning” members having 1 to 5 references or 6 to 15 references, and the “advanced” members with 16 to 30 references, 30 to 50 references or more than 50).

According to the graph, the advanced members are very much annoyed by the unpersonalized requests and all of them (except for 1 vote) agree that the problem does exist. The unexperienced members are as a

majority also familiar with the issue. 26 participants of 294 answering have not heard of the issue and 202 came across it personally. As the “request culture” is not mentioned on Couchsurfing website, it is usually the other members who teach new ones. To scan if the person read the host’s profile, members often put the secret codes in the description of the profile.

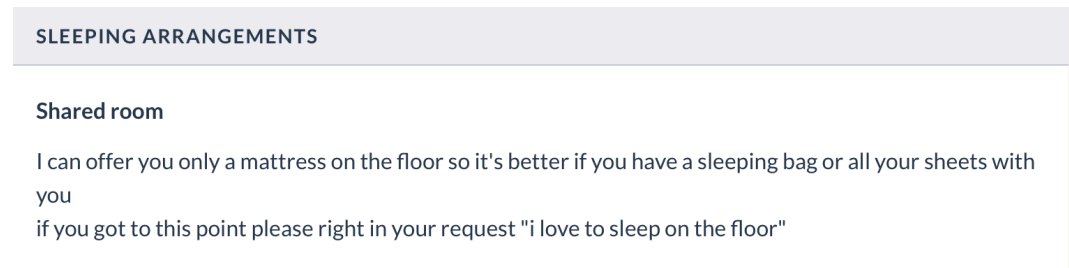


FIGURE 27. Use of the secret codes.

However, as the couch request process is never mentioned to be time-consuming, the Couchsurfing experience is sometimes treated as free accommodation.

### **Treating Couchsurfing like free accommodation.**

Even though the using of Couchsurfing is free of charge, this is not in any case free accommodation. Couchsurfing is a cultural exchange, allowing meeting new people and cultures. Hosts spend their time and personal resources (food, living costs) and in return they expect to have quality-time, positive attitude and travel stories. Free riders are members of Couchsurfing who do not know or appreciate the values of the community and use the service primarily as a source of free accommodation.

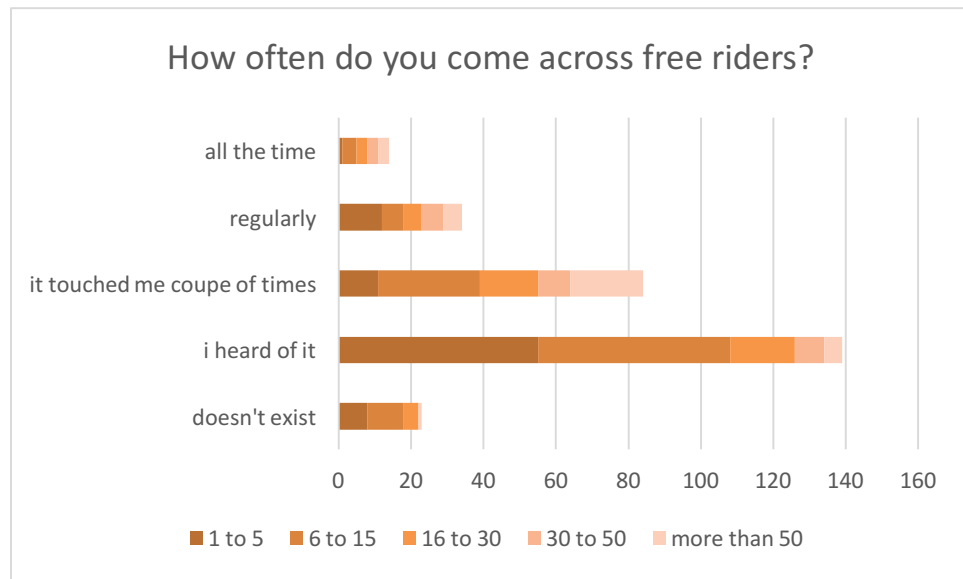


FIGURE 28. Problem analysis of freeriding.

The graph is done with the same principle as the previous one. The answers are segregated by the amount of references. Less than 10% of participants never heard of free riders on Couchsurfing. The issue has become well known because of the numerous articles and media featuring. According to the interviews, some members started to be only “emergency host” (who approve guests in emergency situations, usually the same day of arrival, emergency situation may appear simply because of low response rate or any negative accident), to be able to chose the guests themselves.

### Sexual harassment

The main issue while couchsurfing is the safety of the members. The guests are very vulnerable and often influenced by the hosts, which makes safety and sexual harassment top-discussed topics about Couchsurfing (Gurubacharya 2015.) Couchsurfing is often mistreated as a dating website, and there is a huge community of members who use Couchsurfing only in this purpose, which does follow neither the mission nor the values of the company. The problem is the misunderstanding which takes place while couchsurfing.

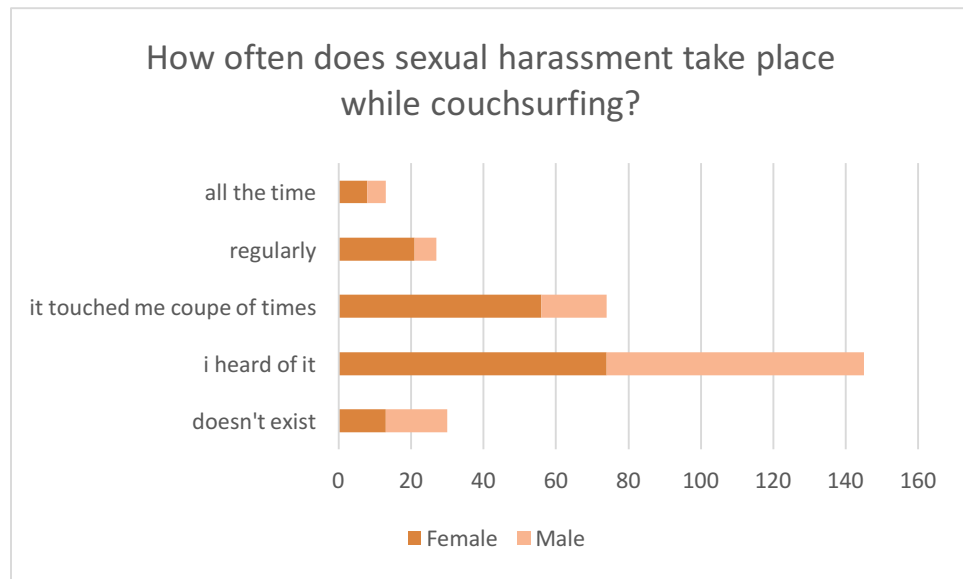


FIGURE 29. Problem analysis of sexual harassment.

The graph meets the common template as was described earlier, but the segregation is made according to gender of the participant. According to the results, 16,8% of the female participants come across sexual harassment often and in addition almost a third (32%) have had the experience at least once. 25% of male travelers were also affected by the issue. The results might be influenced by that the participant counts not only his own personal experience but also his fellow Couchsurfers, nonetheless, the statistics show that almost a half of female travelers and a quarter of male travelers had problems connected with sexual issues. Throughout the history of the company, few cases actually lead to rape and murder while Couchsurfing experience. (Kirchgaessner 2015).

### Other issues

Apart from the main issues, the other comments included:

- website functionality (message search, member search)
- inactive profiles (which are about 90% of the database)
- the old useful features removed (Couchwiki, new member welcome)
- inactivity of the local groups (which may depend largely on the location)
- commercialization (advertisements were introduced in 2014)

- top-down management attitude (inability to receive a fair answer for questions, inaction in response to the problematic issues concerning life and safety)

### 6.3.3 User Statistics

As mentioned, the statistics are open to the public no longer, thus the statistics discovered by the author are provided below. The closing of the statistics was processes while the conversion, which, according to the members' opinions, decreased trust to the company and created a gap between the company and the community. The facts presented below show that the company orientates largely on the quantity of the users.

The table below represents the comparison of the number of the active and new members to the total number of users. 25 cities are chosen as primarily top Couchsurfing cities in 2014 (Infogram 2014), largest cities in Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Helsinki and Lahti as a comparison. The list of the cities includes Barcelona (Spain), Berlin (Germany), Bogota (Colombia), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Cairo (Egypt), Helsinki (Finland), Istanbul (Turkey), Jakarta (Indonesia), Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Lagos (Nigeria), Lahti (Finland), Lima (Peru), London (UK), Los Angeles (US), Melbourne (Australia), Mexico City (Mexico), Moscow (Russia), New Delhi (India), New York (US), Paris (France), Saint-Petersburg (Russia), São Paulo (Brazil), Tokyo (Japan), Tehran (Iran), Vienna (Austria).

Participants are identified by city Couch search. A member, identified in the research, is a person, whose status is Accepting Guests, Maybe Accepting Guest or Wants to Meet Up and is located within 25 km from the main destination city according to the couch search limitations. An active member is member, who has at least 1 reference and was online during the last 6 months. New member is a member, who joined in the last six months. The search is conducted on 20 October 2016.

TABLE 3. User statistics.

City	Total number of participants	Number of active participants	Percentage active/total	Number of new users	Percentage of new users to total
Barcelona	69 489	4 686	6,74 %	6 979	10,04 %
Berlin	99 542	9 330	9,37 %	8 184	8,22 %
Bogota	57 652	3 846	6,67 %	6 106	10,59 %
Buenos Aires	90 417	7 786	8,61 %	5 026	5,56 %
Cairo	25 683	1 324	5,16 %	1 996	7,77 %
Helsinki	20 426	1 892	9,26 %	1 532	7,50 %
Istanbul	134 943	8 956	6,64 %	12 024	8,91 %
Jakarta	37 983	2 101	5,53 %	4 347	11,44 %
Kinshasa	282	25	8,87 %	14	4,96 %
Lagos	2 312	74	3,20 %	254	10,99 %
Lahti	1 046	82	7,84 %	91	8,70 %
Lima	29 507	2 222	7,53 %	2 375	8,05 %
London	152 782	6 286	4,11 %	13 065	8,55 %
Los Angeles	65 787	2 161	3,28 %	5 438	8,27 %
Melbourne	51 899	2 589	4,99 %	4 764	9,18 %
Mexico City	61 374	4 757	7,75 %	6 702	10,92 %
Moscow	138 041	6 187	4,48 %	14 220	10,30 %
New Delhi	38 309	1 459	3,81 %	4 557	11,90 %
New York	173 741	3 859	2,22 %	7 714	4,44 %
Paris	215 941	11 631	5,39 %	18 462	8,55 %
Saint-Petersburg	66 438	4 595	6,92 %	7 762	11,68 %
São Paulo	76 051	4 006	5,27 %	6 908	9,08 %
Tehran	40 769	3 027	7,42 %	8 943	21,94 %
Tokyo	31 396	1 734	5,52 %	3 138	9,99 %
Vienna	45 935	4 019	8,75 %	3 688	8,03 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>1727745</b>	<b>98634</b>	<b>6,21 %</b>		<b>9,42 %</b>

The table is presented at the end of the text. The total amount of users examined is 1,72 mln users, which accounts approximately for 14,3% of all

12 mln users. According to the statistics, the part of the active users among all the members accounts for from 2,22% (New York) to 9,37% (Berlin), with the average of 6,21%. This raises the issue of the more than 90% inactive profiles on the website, however the amount of hosts is often advertised on Couchsurfing, which technically is true statement, but could not be used in real-time attempt to find a host.

 HIT THE WORLD'S BEST BEACHES WITH COUCHSURFERS...



FIGURE 30. Offer on the Couchsurfing.

In addition to that, the amount of new users is measured. The amount of users, who joint Couchsurfing during the last 6 months, accounts for from 4,44% (New York) to 21,94% (Tehran). The average of new users is 9,42% in the chosen locations. The amount of new users shows that Couchsurfing is a popular concept, which attracts new members to join.

The other interesting phenomena is the relatively low amount of members in Asia and Africa compared to the population in the regions, and that signs that though the community is smaller, it could be also stronger.

#### 6.3.4 Interviews

Interviews are used in the thesis as an important data collection method are used. Interviews allow collecting data on personal experience and ideas. During the interview it is essential to adapt to the person interviewed and encourage him to discuss the topic freely. (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest & Namey 2011.)

Six semi-structured non-standardised interviews were conducted to support the thesis. Interviewees were found with the result of the questionnaire and personal connections of the author. Interviewees included highly experienced Couchsurfers with various background: former and current ambassadors, former volunteer, local event organisers, a person who hosted Couchsurfing founders in 2006, old and new members. The members are living in Stockholm (Sweden), New York (US), Munich (Germany), Marrakesh (Morocco), Paris (France) and Utrecht (the Netherlands). Interview questions were adapted for every interview according to the personal experience of the member.

The information provided helped the author to gather the information about the company and to understand Couchsurfing deeper. The findings are supporting the analysis and presented as facts throughout the text of the thesis.

#### 6.3.5 Couchsurfing City Communities

According to the interviewees and personal experience, the author came up with the own classification of Couchsurfing communities operating after the conversion and dismissing the volunteer groups.

Couchsurfing city community is the sum of all the local members in one city. Community, with the help of local ambassadors organises the events and moderates the city page, checks the members of the community. With the volunteer teams the system was established and the members responsible for moderating were chosen.

Two types could be identified as: Organised community & Disorganised community. The classification is blurred since there is no up-to-date open corporate information to the public and all the indicators of the communities are qualitative.

Organised community – moderated active community on Couchsurfing, it aims to the highest standards of Couchsurfing and follows to the

Couchsurfing values. According to the members, the ideal Couchsurfing community would have to have:

- Strong active leaders
- Regular events
- Active online and offline participation
- Education of Couchsurfing-minded members
- Couchsurfing values and missions supported
- Quick reaction rate on emergency cases
- Moderation and control of the content appearing on Couchsurfing

The table below represents how the aspects were organised before and after the conversion.

First of all, the volunteer teams were the core of the Couchsurfing community. They have been constantly recruited and had the official status and system of operation. The volunteers performed as the leaders of the activities and helped the community to function. The volunteers existed in all the Couchsurfing communities. Conversion led to the dismissing of the volunteers and creating jobs. The amount of the employees is significantly lower than the amount of the former volunteers. Now, without a centralised system for city management, the community happen to be unregulated.

Regular events have been always possible to organise and personal initiatives are encouraged by Couchsurfing idea. With the current lower quality moderation, response level of the content on Couchsurfing has changed so that commercial events, or the events which do not support Couchsurfing missions take place.

The online platform is believed to be better before conversion, as the former features allowed more actions (CouchWiki, City groups, e-mail invite). The groups enabled approval of group members by the admin. Most of the features were deleted, e.g. the groups became open, not allowing entry moderation. This led to the creation of the Couchsurfing City

Facebook groups, which have become the substitution of the groups of the old website.

Education of the members, as mentioned, was done throughout the welcome messages and now is narrowed to the blog posts. However, Couchsurfing values and missions have been supported and protected since the creation of the organisation. Emergency Couchsurfing requests (asking to be hosted less than 48h up on arrival) have been sent in the special-purposed groups.

Control of the content decreased significantly as the amount of the employees and volunteers responsible for it is smaller. The events and member activities were used to be under control of the Member Dispute and Safety volunteer team. All the issues could be solved faster, because the community was smaller and the amount of volunteers larger.

The organised communities do exist on Couchsurfing, but they have mostly been rebuilt after the conversion. The communities, which volunteers have abandoned, have lost the connection between the members.

TABLE 4. Couchsurfing city communities.

	Non-profit CS	For-profit CS
Active leaders		
Regular events		
Online & Offline Participation		
Education of members		
Couchsurfing values and Missions		
Quick reaction on emergency		
Control of the content		

The table above represents the aspects of the Couchsurfing city communities before the conversion and after. Green colour represents the well-functioning aspects and red one states there is a problem. Red and green crossed area means the aspect functions but needs improvement.

To see, how the city communities function on Couchsurfing now, two examples are analysed below. The information used to create the analysis are the city pages on both Facebook and Couchsurfing and the interviews held earlier.

### **Marrakech CS Community vs. Stockholm CS Community**

In this case Marrakech represents so-called organised Couchsurfing community and Stockholm community is disorganised at the moment. The review of the community is conducted using the information from the interview of the members of the community, the open-up questionnaire and the review of the city page on Couchsurfing main website and of the Facebook group, which was conducted on 25 October 2016.

TABLE 5. Marrakesh vs. Stockholm community.

	Marrakech CS	Stockholm CS
Active leaders		
Regular events		
Online & Offline Participation		/
Education of members	/	
Couchsurfing values and Missions		/
Quick reaction on emergency	/	
Control of the content	/	

It is important to understand that even though both communities operate in the current reality, the organised communities are rare in the Couchsurfing world. They are self-managed because of the self-proclaimed volunteers, who do not receive any support from the company. The existence of the organised communities means that the Couchsurfing community is still alive and fights for its values.

- Marrakesh Community

Marrakesh community was restored in April 2016 once a Couchsurfing activist Talha Rifaai created a Facebook group “Couchsurfing Marrakesh”. He believes to improve the image of Morocco among travellers showing the local life through Couchsurfing. Talha filters the Facebook group in order to create trustworthy community of travellers and locals. He organises and promoted non-profit language exchange events and local meet-ups. He sends welcome messages to the travellers who are coming to Marrakesh both on Couchsurfing website (to travellers on the public trips) and on Facebook. The Couchsurfing page of Marrakesh, as it is moderated by the official Safety team, has one commercial event by a travel agency. At the same time, the Marrakesh emergency hosting group does not exist, and all the emergency requests are sent to the Discussion area or the Facebook group.

- Stockholm Community

The Stockholm Couchsurfing community is split on several platforms. There are 2 Facebook groups, both are accepting non-related Couchsurfing posts and commercial advertising. The community is not united. The city page offers the variety of Couchsurfing events (going outs, coffee breaks, picnics and sauna parties). 7 out of 9 events for the week 44 this year included drinking and partying. The city page also includes non-couchsurfing events with the strongly marked sexual context. The events were reported to the Safety team, but they remain on the city page for more than a week (18-25 October). As the reported members and

events remain on the city page and in the local community, the supported values are questioned. Stockholm Emergency Couch Requests group (1765 members, 7466 posts) is active and has the recommendations what to do in case of emergency. In general, the content of Facebook groups and city page is not censored, which damages the picture of the community.

#### 6.4 Suggestions on Problem Solving for the Case Company

In general, safety aspects of Couchsurfing have been criticised and the empirical part of the research encountered the existing issues. As the trust is questioned, the community is not as strong and bonded as it could be.

Dismissing the volunteer teams, thus breaking the trust inside of the community, and decreasing entry limits, opened new problems which the community have never experienced before. Without systematic moderation and guidance, it has been a victim of non-couchsurfing-minded users and the platform is sometimes used in commercial or other non-appropriate purposes. The main goal is to restore or create the city community groups with the loyal and trustworthy members, as now there are numerous examples of functioning communities (e.g. Marrakech, New York). However, there are cities without organised community or activities, which Couchsurfing has to research and develop further.

As the analysis showed, the problems could be partly solved by:

- Partly restored volunteer groups could help increase the Couchsurfing-minded activities in the city groups. The permanent city ambassador program that actually gives the ambassadors the inspiration might change the image and quality of the events, as well as give inspiration and motivation to the existing volunteers.
- Focusing not on the amount of users but the quality and safety of the community will allow the members to have positive Couchsurfing experience. Careful education of the values and

traditions of the community has to be implemented in the signing-up process.

- Decreasing the reaction time of the official Safety team will help to clear Couchsurfing pages from the commercial/non-couchsurfing-minded events and profiles.
- Closing the accounts that are not used will give a fair image of the Couchsurfing community in the location.

#### 6.5 Suggestions on Tackling Challenges during Conversion

Conversion from a non-profit to a for-profit organisation is a complex issue in a company lifecycle. The challenges include the basic questions: “How to keep the community trust the company after conversion?” A company should keep in mind volunteers, employees, supporters and customer input. The author’s suggestions to smooth the conversion process include:

- Communication with all the parties, sharing the further plans. Trust between parties is the essential way to keep the parties loyal to the new company.
- Keeping to the originally-appreciated by the community missions and values. Going away from the values could lead to the loss of the loyal activists.
- Keep on track with the amount of volunteers and new employees. The working capacity of the former force should be equal to the future.
- If aimed on the rapid increase of the community, increase the emphasis on the community education and strict moderation. This way the values of the community could be maintained.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The conclusion answers the research questions. It examines validity and reliability of the research and gives suggestions on further research.

### 7.1 Answers for Research Questions

The thesis has provided insights into the process of conversion from a non-profit organisation to a for-profit business on the example of the case company Couchsurfing. The research introduced the concepts of sharing economy, non-profit organisation and trust, which helped to research deeper the processes in the case-company. Couchsurfing is the most popular developing hospitality exchange network offering accommodation for free. The company operated during 2003-2011 as a non-profit, and later changed the legal status to a for-profit business in August 2011 and remained so. The main question of the research: "How to bring community to the next level after the conversion from a non-profit to for-profit organisation and tackle the major challenges according to the example of the case company?" was supported with 4 sub-questions.

TABLE 6. Summary of answers on the research questions.

Research question	Answer
<i>Sub-question 1: What is the difference between a non-profit and for-profit organization?</i>	A non-profit differs from a for-profit business by several aspects: ownership, directing, tax-paying, use of profit and recording and openness of the financial information. No asset of a non-profit belongs to an individual. All the legal aspects depend on the legislation of the country of operation.

<p><i>Sub-question 2: How is trust created in virtual communities?</i></p>	<p>Trust in virtual communities is created by, firstly, the design of the community (functionality, privacy and safety are taken into account). The other factor is the presence of the other users and trustworthiness of the profiles. Often virtual communities implement review/rating systems to support trust and long-term reputation of the services and users.</p>
<p><i>Sub-question 3: How did the Couchsurfing community function before and after the conversion?</i></p>	<p>Couchsurfing was operating as a non-profit company during 2003-2011. The company supported initiative and the community was self-governed. The services were maintained by the volunteers on members' donations. After the conversion, the company increased significantly the number of users (by 6 times, up to 12 mil users) and closed some of the former services of Couchsurfing. The volunteer system was dismissed leaving along the ambassadors. Some of the city communities fell apart and former active members joined other non-profit hospitality exchange networks. Couchsurfing was rebranded and moved to the new stable Internet platform, which</p>

	<p>allowed to have a larger database. At the moment, the community partly suffers from disorganisation and disrespect towards values.</p>
<p><i>Sub-question 4: What are the biggest challenges the case company came across during the conversion process according to ambassadors and active users?</i></p>	<p>The ambassadors and active users of Couchsurfing were displeased by the broken trust. Broken trust and lack of communication led to the generally negative response of the community. Other issues include lack of employees, lack of moderation, large safety issues and refocusing on profit-earning rather than supporting the values of Couchsurfing.</p>
<p><b><i>Main research question: How to bring community to the next level after the conversion from a non-profit to for-profit organisation and tackle the major challenges according to the example of the case company?</i></b></p>	<p>Example of converting Couchsurfing to a for-profit business helps to understand which challenges a company might face. Customer trust and wishes can not be underestimated. The input and support of the donors and volunteers has to be appreciated in order to keep them. Legal aspects have to be covered. Basic introduction into the community, its rules and traditions, if any, is appreciated to maintain the positive experience of the loyal and former customers and at the same time to attract new ones.</p>

## 7.2 Validity and Reliability

Reliability and validity show whether the conclusions driven from the research are valid. To prove reliability and validity a researcher should involve peer-reviewed secondary data to the research, as well as conduct his own research in different times and locations and combine qualitative and quantitative approaches with different data collection methods. Validity measures whether the research goal was accomplished by the used means. Reliability shows whether the research results are stable and could be generalised over time. (Golafshani 2003.)

In this research, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used. The final results were similar for both of the methodologies. For the qualitative research, the interviews had similar questions with slight variations depending on the personal experience of the interviewee. The status of the interviewee was additionally checked through his own Couchsurfing profile. As for the quantitative research, the trial questionnaire was launched to measure the market trends and community response. Both questionnaires had 427 participants altogether, all members of Couchsurfing. The questionnaires shared the same trends and results.

Furthermore, the secondary data, used in the study, included various online and published sources. The literature review is considered up-to-date, objective and peer-reviewed. The sources are chosen to thoroughly embrace different opinions on the subject. The research questions were answered at the end of the study. Based on both criteria the study can be considered as valid.

## 7.3 Suggestions on Further Research

Due to the variety of aspects and trends which influenced the Couchsurfing community as a whole, it is impossible to cover it in one study. As a result, suggestions on further research are proposed.

The values of the Couchsurfing community could be examined, as well as the criteria of choosing. Trust, as a complex subject, is covered partly in the study. The exact correlation between trust and the community, especially, on breaking and keeping trust could be studied further, as it influences the consumer behaviour directly.

The research of the differences between the market values, brand attachments and phenomena of social media will open up the rapid increase in the Couchsurfing users. Other reasoning of the increase is not defined in the study and could be discovered further. Finally, the other conversion process could be examined and compared to the case of Couchsurfing in order to prove the generalised suggestions on development, proposed at the end of the empirical part.

## 8 SUMMARY

The objective of the thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the conversion from a non-profit to for-profit organisation and the reaction of the community. The thesis strongly focuses on the case company, Couchsurfing, which went through conversion in August 2011. After five years, both positive and negative results of the conversion could be seen in the community of Couchsurfing.

Theoretically, the thesis opens up the concepts of sharing economy, non-profit organisation and trust. Some theoretical part focuses especially on the US, since Couchsurfing headquarters are located in there.

Empirically, the study includes both qualitative and quantitative research in order to receive valuable information. The case company study is done partly based on both the articles in the peer-reviewed sources and the personal experience together with the interviews conducted by the author.

As a consequence, the thesis provides the recommendations for further development of Couchsurfing and tackling the conversion challenges in general. Customer trust is emphasised in both cases, as the non-profit customers are involved in a bonded community, sharing the same values. The suggestions on further research include further research of the correlation between trust and community and researching another conversion process to be able to generalize the results.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Example of a welcoming letter sent by a volunteer from New Member Welcome Team.

SUBJECT: Welcome to Couchsurfing !

Hello Sara,

as a dedicated CS volunteer in the New Member Welcome team, I would like to welcome you to the global CouchSurfing project. Lovely to have you amongst us :o)

I had a lot of nice experiences and made many new friends since i joined CouchSurfing.

Once my host in Brunei took me to the "open house" of the sultan, so we had the chance to eat there and shake hands with the sultan and his relatives. I would never have found out about this event on my own !!

It's a good idea to join your local city group so you can make some initial contacts & get involved in local events. All the local groups have regular meetings & this is a great way to network with others, build your contacts & learn more.

This should be the links to these important groups:

- Your City: <http://www.couchsurfing.org/groups/Edmonton>

- Regional: <http://www.couchsurfing.org/groups/Alberta>

- Country: <http://www.couchsurfing.org/groups/Canada>

ALL groups: <http://www.couchsurfing.org/groups.html>

Now you have some hints, how to make your first contacts to other CS people. As you are new, everybody you contact wants to know about you.

Your profile is the key to letting everybody know who you are. Try to provide as much information as you can in each of the fields & upload some pictures so people have an idea of you & your world. Particularly make sure you have a profile picture & a couch picture.

Also, make sure you take care to set your own privacy settings when you configure your profile. Check other profiles to get an idea of what is the norm.

Always keep in mind the CouchSurfing mission & try to follow it as a good guide in all that you do here:

"Create Inspiring Experiences"

CS is 'not' Facebook.

CS is 'not' MySpace.

CS is 'not' a "free bed" for freeloaders !

And CS is most definitely 'not' a dating site !!

However, if you learn how to use the system & you use it wisely, it will not only change the way you travel, but also how you relate to the world. And it will most definitely change your life for the better :o)

We hope you enjoy your time & experiences amongst us & maybe see you around someday.

Best regards & happy travelling,

Tobi

## APPENDIX 2. Pre-questionnaire questions.

1. Gender of the participant
2. Nationality of the participant
3. Country of residence of the participant
4. Age of participant
5. How often do you travel?
6. Which year did you join Couchsurfing?
7. How do you use Couchsurfing? (multiple choice)
8. Which problems do you see on Couchsurfing? (open-up question)
9. Describe your negative experience (if any)? (open-up question)
10. If you joined earlier 2011, have you noticed any changes in the Couchsurfing community? (open-up question)

### APPENDIX 3. Interview questions.

1. Tell me freely about your Couchsurfing experience? (when you joined, how it worked, when you became an active participant, locations)
2. Are you satisfied with the services in general now? Why?
3. How did you feel when the company was rebuilt in 2011?
4. What is that we don't have now but we had before? Why do you think it happened? What are both positive/negative changes since 2011?
5. Do you use CS as before? Did you try other websites, like BeWelcome or so?
6. How was the community educated before 2011?
7. Do you see any possibilities how to make community is strong again, decrease the amount of non-educated-couchsurfers?

### APPENDIX 3. Main questionnaire.

1. Gender of the participant
2. Nationality of the participant
3. Country of residence of the participant
4. Age of participant
5. Which year did you join Couchsurfing?
6. How do you use Couchsurfing? (multiple choice)
7. In which city have you been using Couchsurfing the most?
8. How many references do you have? (multiple choice)
9. What is the most important factor while accepting the request?  
(multiple choice)
10. What will make you stay with a member without references?  
(multiple choice)
11. How relevant are the following problems?
  - a. Low response rate
  - b. Unpersonalized requests
  - c. Treating Couchsurfing as free accommodation
  - d. Sexual harassment
12. Have you ever had negative/interrupted experience? (open up question)
13. Have you noticed a significant change in couchsurfing [since 2011]?  
(multiple choice)
14. If you noticed a significant negative/positive change could you describe it? (open up question)