

Tour guides developing urban ecotourism destinations

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Title: THE SHAREABLE COUNTRYSIDE: RESCALING HOST-GUEST RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY

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This paper aims at substantiating and problematizing the promises of the sharing (collaborative) economy in a rural tourism context. Collaborative phenomena point at new, communitarian business models that are hypothesized to reallocate wealth across the value chain, and carry the seeds of a more fair, just and equal society. It is claimed that the collaborative economy yields resilient communities, revitalizes neighbourhoods and reconfigures the beaten track (addressing the new tourist preferences for authentic local experiences and being citizen-consumers) (Stokes et al. 2014). However, there is a certain romanticisation about 'village-building' and unmediated encounters between locals and tourists, and the dispersion of sharing economy businesses is spatially uneven. The density of shared accommodation offerings is concentrated in major metropolitan areas or popular resorts, suggesting a potential consequence of aggravating rather than levelling out demographic, societal and economic inequalities (Dredge & Gyimóthy 2015). Policy makers and business protagonists discuss Shareable Cities (Rinne, 2013), exemplified through global concepts like AirBnB, Dinnersharing and Vayable, but there is not one single mention of the Shareable Countryside. In order to understand the mechanisms behind the spreading and uptake of the collaborative economy, this paper will map its driving and deterring forces in a Danish rural context. As such, we address the question: What are the preconditions, network effects and scalability potential of global, market mediated collaborative business models for Danish rural communities? We also ask how does the collaborative business model contribute, supplement or conflict with the professional tourism industry, and which kind of community practices and economic rationales does it promote? (Meged & Christensen, forthcoming). The empirical data collection will be based on a qualitative, explorative case study of a Danish island destination. Local collaboration dynamics (preferences and practices) will be assessed through relational/evolutionary geography tools and social network analysis.

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