Hybrid organising in the sharing economy: A case study of Couchsurfing.com

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Abstract

In the past few years there has been an increase in hybrid organisations. Hybrid organisations are characterised by their tendency to combine opposing organisational elements, such as corporate elements with a societal mission. Their inherent complexity results in internal conflicts between hybrid identities, and these conflicts affect the extent to which the opposing organisational goal are sustained over time. Sharing Economy (SE) organisations engage in hybrid organising as they often operate within contradicting logics. The extant literature has investigated the hybridity of SE organisations from an institutional logics perspective, yet little attention has been given on how hybridity manifests at an internal level. This thesis fills this knowledge gap by examining the impact of the identity conflicts that result from the hybridisation process of Couchsurfing (CS), a mission-oriented free accommodation sharing platform. For this, a qualitative analysis of archival data that spans the period between 2006 and 2020 and interviews with former CS volunteers are conducted to identify the identities that shaped tensions in the organisation of the platform's hybridity. The main findings suggest that the identity at CS shifted over time from a uniform community identity, to three main identities. The identified identities: Community, Missionary and Corporate were found to conflict over time on three main dimensions these being a conflict over the source of authority of the platform, the role of growth of traffic on the platform, and the role of monetisation. The main resulting impacts of the conflicts on the platform were the abandonment of the platform by mission-oriented users and the increased traffic of non-mission-oriented users labelled as freeloaders, the misalignment between host and guest motivations to participate in the platform, and the failure to implement a sustainable revenue generating model that would keep CS profitable without harming the balance between host and guest relationship. The findings of this study contribute to the literature by conceptualising the impact of conflicting identities on the organisation of an SE platform. With this, the history and unique case of CS revealed the challenges of sustaining dual conflicting goals in the context of non-monetised host-guest interactions, and the research elaborates on the understanding of SE platform failures. This research comes out as illuminating for managers of mission-oriented SE organisations as it illustrates how internal tensions over the opposing goals at the organisational can affect platform's success.

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1. Introduction

Between the 1960 and 1970s an important number of non-profits were established to address societal challenges through charitable missions (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Haigh et al., 2015). Yet, following growing marketisation, rising costs, and competition over grants, several non-profits started adopting corporate-like practices or converted into for-profit organisations, thus combining charitable and business elements at their core and becoming hybrid organisations (Alexander and Weiner, 2003; Dart, 2004; Ebrahim et al., 2014; Haigh et al., 2015). Battilana et al. (2017) define hybrid organisations as organisations that mix *'core organisational elements that would not conventionally go together'* (p.129). For instance, social enterprises are considered ideal types of hybrid organisations because they aim to achieve a societal mission and generate profit simultaneously (Battilana & Lee, 2014). These two goals would conventionally not go together, as the profit goal has for long been associated with corporations while the societal goal with non-profit organisations.

Managers often face challenges when running hybrids. This is because the social and corporate goals might override each other, and hybrids risk drifting from their societal mission (Billies, 2010, Battilana & Lee, 2014, Johansen et al., 2015, Battilana et al., 2017). This can create internal challenges such as conflicts between multiple organisational identities (i.e. hybrid identities) (Battilana & Lee, 2014). In fact, organisational members can associate unevenly with the goals, resulting in internal conflicts, problems in allocating resources and paralysing decision-making (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to the internal conflicts stemming from hybrid identities as they determine the extent to which an organisation can maintain its hybridity and address the competing goals (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Chambers, 2014).

The phenomenon of hybrid organising has also touched upon sharing economy (SE) organisations. The SE refers to the system through which individuals share their underutilised assets in exchange for money or for free (Bostman and Roger, 2010). The sharing occurs through online SE platforms that serve as intermediaries to facilitate interactions between strangers through a trust system (Frenken and Schor, 2017). These SE organisations often operate within competing logics, that can support conflicting goals such as an economic, a sustainability, and a community goal (Martin et al., 2016; Grivenich et al., 2017; Vaskelainen & Münzel, 2018). For instance, Airbnb experiences tensions between a logic of commerce that motivates profit, self-interest maximisation and non-reciprocal contractual relationships and a logic of hospitality that motivates social bonds and reciprocity between host and guests (von Richthofen & Fischer, 2019)

Previous studies investigated how SE organisations manage their hybridity and sustain different conflicting organisational missions (e.g., Martin et al., 2015, Vaskelainen & Münzel, 2018; Grinevich et al., 2017). However, these studies have adopted an institutional logics perspective to depict how the organisations respond to meso level influences. As a result, little attention has been given to how hybridity generates tensions at the internal level in SE organisations and how these can subsequently affect platform organisations. This is surprising because SE organisations are uniquely characterised by their blurry boundaries as they are simply intermediaries between communities that can interact online and offline and that act as producers and consumers of an idle asset (Barrett et al., 2016; Reischauer & Mair, 2018B). As a result, because these communities hold significant power in organising the exchanges initiated by the platform, SE hybrid organisations might have less power in managing their hybridity than generic organisations and the hybrid identity conflicts in an SE organisation might manifest differently than in a traditional organisation. Research on hybrid identities has focused on non-profit organisations adopting corporate like practices (Pratt and Foreman, 2000; Glynn, 2000; Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011), and social enterprises (Ashforth and Reningen, 2014; Smith and Besharov, 2016). For this reason, the findings of these studies cannot be generalised to SE organisations. Therefore, both the literature on SE and hybrid identities fail to capture the unique ways in which opposing organisational goals manifest at the organisational level in a SE organisation. This thesis aims to address these knowledge gap by investigating the following research question:

How do hybrid identities affect SE organisations throughout the hybridisation process?

To address this question, this thesis uses a single case study based on the case of Couchsurfing (CS). CS was founded in 2004 as a non-profit online platform to connect travellers who share the belief of communal sharing, open-mindedness, cultural exchange, and not-for-profit travel (Molz, 2013, Mikołajewska-Zajac, 2017). For long, CS was managed by volunteers that would run the product development, the community operations, and the marketing and communication of the platform (O'Regan & Choe, 2019). In 2011, it converted to a B Corporation after receiving a venture capital fund totalling $7.6 million (Perlroth, 2011).

As the non-profit community aspect has been core to CS (Molz, 2013), the conversion resulted in the anger and resistance of a large part of the community (Molz, 2013; Adreoni, 2016; O'Regan & Choe, 2019). For instance, many community members left to other non-profit hospitality exchange platforms such as BeWelcome or Trustroots (Coca, 2015; Adreoni, 2016).

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With this, many forum discussions were initiated, whereby members would share their feelings of betrayal and anger resulting from the conversion (Molz, 2013). Despite that, the core values of intercultural exchanges, open-mindedness, and communal sharing remained a top priority for the management (Blog CS, 2011, Blog CS, 2012, O'Regan & Choe, 2019). As a result, throughout the years, CS has gone through a hybridisation process and officially became an ideal hybrid organisation that deals with a corporate and a societal goal in 2011. As a hybrid SE organisation that went through a hybridisation process these past seventeen years, CS comes out as a unique case study to understand and depict the particularity of the challenges of managing hybrid identities in a context of an SE organisation.

Nowadays, SE organisations constantly strive to come forward as actors for societal change (Curtis & Lehner, 2019), and for-profit SE organisations promise to the most impactful in the future (Yaraghi & Ravi, 2017). However, the pursuit of growth and profit maximisation has formerly pushed away certain for-profit SE organsiations away from their stipulated societal goals (Fietzmaurice & Schor, 2015). For this reason, it is important to understand how the tensions between the opposing goal manifest at different levels so that managers of mission-oriented SE organisations cope with these tensions successfully. This thesis thus enhances the understanding of how tensions arise at the internal level and affect platform success and derives practical recommendations for managers of mission oriented SE organisations.

This thesis is organised into five sections. Firstly, I discuss the theoretical constructs that I use: sharing economy, sharing economy organisations, hybrid organisations, and hybrid identities. Secondly, in the methodological section, I justify the single case research design and detail my data collection and analysis process, and I discuss the validity of this master thesis. Thirdly, I present a context chapter whereby I describe key events in CSs history that are important for the reader to be familiar with to make sense of the findings. Fourthly, I report my findings by presenting the theoretical core of the hybrid identities, and analysing their resulting impact on the platform organisation. Fourthly, I engage in a critical discussion of my findings whereby I highlight the theoretical and practical implications and reflect on their limitations. Finally, I conclude by summarising the research and the findings.

2.Theory

In this section, I present the theoretical concepts that are used to investigate the research question. Firstly, I provide a review of research on the sharing economy literature. Secondly, I review the literature on hybrid organising and motivate my choice for adopting an intra-

organisational approach using the concept of hybrid identities. Finally, I explain how the combination of SE and hybrid identities as theoretical concepts can help investigate the unique aspect that arise from the hybridisation process of a mission-oriented SE organisation.

2.1 The Sharing Economy

There are tensions in the literature with regards to what is the SE (Frenken & Schor, 2017; Vaskelainen, 2018; Schlagwein et al., 2020). For instance, both Frenken & Schor (2017) and Schalgwein et al. (2020) emphasise the temporary access to an under-utilised asset by an individual to another as core the definition of the SE. Yet, there are disagreements on what is considered to be a usage of an under-utilised asset. For example, Schalgwein et al., (2020) categorise Uber as part of the SE because the consumer pays for the access to a good that has an idle capacity. Frenken & Schor (2017) instead oppose this idea and categorise Uber as part of the on-demand economy as the capacity is not initially present, rather it is created when a person orders a car. It is challenging to reach an accurate consensual definition of the SE, yet there are aspects that remain core to the conceptualisation of the SE. The first is that the SE allows individuals to provide other individuals temporary access to an asset or a good without transfer of ownership (Schalgwein et al., 2020). This can be in exchange for money or for free. The second is that sharing occurs through an intermediary, an online platform that facilitates sharing between strangers through a trust system (e.g., ratings and reviews) (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Frenken & Schor, 2017).

Accommodation sharing platforms fall under these conceptualisations, and research from the SE field has paid particular attention to them. For instance, previous studies explored how they offer alternative consumption methods and how they fall under a sustainable development paradigm (Cheng 2016; Palgan, 2017). Particularly, attention has been paid to Airbnb, for its success and growth and to CS for its tendency to create a community through sharing (Cheng, 2016). It is unsurprising that as one of the earliest advents of the SE, CS has been subject to various studies in the field of the SE. Previous research on CS has conceptualised CS as an actor of the moral economy and investigated how it strives to create alternative mode of travelling and consuming as an SE platform that derives value from non-marketed interpersonal relationships (Molz, 2011; Molz 2013; Mikołajewska-Zając, 2017). Other studies analysed how the interplay between offline and online interaction affects the sense of community and belonging amongst CS users (Rosen et al, 2011). However, few studies have paid attention to the conversion of CS and studied the challenges of managing conflicting goals at CS at the exception of O'Regan & Choe (2019) that retraced the conversion of CS and analysed the resulting tensions using a relational model of communal sharing. Whilst the study

analysed the impact of the conversion on the relationships between management and community, it has not concretised its impact on the organisation of the platform and the fulfilment of the competing goals.

2.2 SE organisations

SE organisations are different in the sense that they have unique boundaries compared to traditional organisations. Santos & Eisenhardt (2005) define organisational boundaries as *'The demarcation between the organisation and its environment'* (p.491). SE platforms have less well-defined boundaries than traditional organisations because of the nature of the communities they host. These communities are referred to as 'hybrid communities' (Reischauer & Mair, 2018A). The term 'hybrid' points out their ability to both act as a producer and consumer and their ability to interact online and offline. Vaskelainen and Piscicelli (2018) identify five types of online and offline communities. The online communities are the producer and consumer while the offline are the geographical (i.e. geographically proximate individuals), relational (i.e. individuals sharing common interest), and value-based communities (i.e. individuals sharing similar values).

The importance of sustaining a community or another also translates in the users' motivation to participate in the platform. Fietzmaurice & Schor (2015) find that four motivations shape users' participation in the SE: economic gains, the reduction of ecological impact, the increasing of social connection and building of social networks, and commitment to the concepts of sharing. Motivations to participate differ amongst the organisations. For instance, in Airbnb's case, economic gains motivate both hosts and guests to join the platform (Fietzmaurice & Schor, 2015) despite the platform's effort to associate to environmental and social framings (Palgan et al., 2017). As such, the producer and consumer community come out as critical here. Motivation to participate also varies according to whether the service is monetised or not. For instance, the usage of CS has stayed free even after its conversion. Jung et al., (2016) find that in the context of a non-monetised service, CS users were motivated primarily by increasing social connection. Hereby, value-based communities come out as very relevant. Finally, previous studies have also observed disparities in the motivation to participate amongst users. For instance, it was found that the producer side is usually more motivated to participate for prosocial reasons than the consumer side (Belotti et al., 2015; Böcker & Meelen's, 2017). This makes the management of the communities of SE platforms challenging.

Governing these communities is crucial for the platform's survival. Previous research found that the mismanagement of the communities leads to platform failure. For instance, Täuscher & Kietzmann (2017) find that the inaptitude to keep the users active on the platform and sustain a two-sided market of a producer and consumer community are reasons for SE platform failures. Similarly, Vaskelainen & Piscicelli (2018) find that the inability to sustain consumers active on the platform was a reason for the failure of Ecomodo, a goods borrowing platform. For this reason, platforms adopt governance strategies to control their communities and reduce dependence. For instance, Reischauer and Mair's (2018B) study on Berlin-based SE startups finds that SE organisations adopt specific governance strategies to manage their hybrid communities, such as the scoping of the community boundaries and the social nudging of the social relations and the steering of users.

Whilst, the challenges arising from the uniqueness of the communities of sharing economy platform have been explored by the literature, in both mission-oriented for profit (Vaskelainen & Piscicelli, 2018; Resichauer & Maier, 2018B) and non-profit SE organisations (Reischauer & Mair, 2018B), little attention has been paid on how these challenges arise in a context where the platform community has gone through a hybridisation process. For this reason, as CS is an SE organisation that has gone through a conversion process whereby it changed legal status and preserved its societal mission, it comes out as a unique case to study the challenges that might arise throughout the hybridisation of an SE platform.

2.3 Hybrid Organising and SE

The literature on hybrid organisations started rising in the 1990s in response to increasing convergence between for profit, non-profit and public sector organisational practices (Ménard, 2004; Jäger & Schröer, 2013; Battilana et al., 2017). Examples of hybrids include social enterprises pursuing the mission of enhancing a certain aspect of social sustainability while profiting from their activities, private-public alliances for mitigating climate change, and also non-profits adopting corporate-like practices, thus associating opposing elements (Battilana & Lee, 2014, Ometto et al., 2018, Maier et al., 2016).

Hybrids oppose the 'ideal type of sectors', meaning the sectors falling strictly in either profit, non-profit or public logic (Billies, 2010). For instance, a non-profit as an ideal type would exhibit a philanthropic governance model characterised by informal management, emphasis on a mission and a large board size. In contrast, a corporation as an ideal type would exhibit a

corporate model of governance characterised by a formal management, a focus on efficiency, strategy and small board size (Alexander and Weiner, 2003). For this reason, as hybrids combine such logics, their inherently heterogeneous nature makes them face considerable tensions and ambiguity in managing organisational elements (Battilana & Lee, 2014, Battilana, et al., 2017; Billies, 2010).

Battilana et al., (2017) identify three main approaches previously used to study hybrid organisations. The first is the organisational identity perspective, which understands hybridity as embedded in and defined by its organisational members. The second approach views hybridity as a mix of different organisational forms that govern exchange arrangements. The third approaches hybridity from an institutional logics perspective, whereby organisations use different and sometimes conflicting societal rationales to guide their behaviour.

Hybrid organising in the SE has mainly been approached from an institutional logics perspective (Martin et al., 2015; Grivenich et al., 2017; Vaskelainen & Münzel, 2018). For instance, Vaskelainen & Münzel, (2018) investigated the role of institutional logics in shaping business models of carsharing services. Grinevich et al., (2017) explored how entrepreneurs of SE organisation manage the complexity that emerges from multiple institutional logics. The institutional logics perspective provides a meso-level perspective, whereby the responses of organisations to logics is investigated. In this master thesis, the novelty and interest lie in the conversion of CS from a community-based non-profit project to a for-profit mission-oriented SE organisation. The core of it is thus to investigate the re-arrangements that occur at the organisational level rather than on the meso-level. For this reason, I adopt an intra-organisational perspective by investigating CSs hybridisation through the lens of the concept of hybrid identities.

2.4 Hybrid Identities

Organisational identities refer to the elements that define *'who'* the organisation is and *'what'* the organisation does (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Battilana et al., 2017). Albert & Whetten, (1985) identify three key criterion to scientifically define organisational identity. The first is the *criterion of claimed central character*, which refers to the essence and important elements that characterise the organisation. The second is the criterion of *claimed distinctiveness,* in other words, the elements that distinguish an organisation from other ones. The third is the criterion of *claimed temporal continuity*, which refers to the features exhibiting continuity of the identity over time. The criterions are respectively investigated by characterising how organisations answer to the three following questions: Who are we? What

are we doing? Where do we want to be? (Lin 2004). While the first and second criterion are widely acknowledged in the literature, the idea of temporal continuity of the identities stipulated by Albert and Whetten (1985) has been challenged (Denton et al., 2018; Gioia, 2000). For instance, Denton et al., (2018) find that over time, members and founders of community-based enterprises co-construct new and potentially conflicting identities as they make sense of surprising events. This suggests that over time, the organisational identity can hybridise.

An organisation has a hybrid identity when its *'identity is composed of two or more types'* (Albert & Whetten, 1985, P.95). Organisational identities are important because they shape the organisation's tensions and conflicts that relate to organisational values or goals (Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011). Nevertheless, multiple identities do not systematically create conflicts. Instead, when identities that are too unrelated are combined, the chances for tension and conflict increase (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). As a result, organisations' combination of a charitable and corporate identity has been closely examined by the organisational research. For instance, Albert & Whetten's (1985) conceptualised hybrid identities in organisations as a tension between a utilitarian identity motivated by profit maximisation and cost minimisation rationales and follows logics of centralised management and a normative identity that is ideologically or culturally driven.

An important challenge that hybrid organisations experience is to pursue a profit seeking goal or use corporate practices without impeding on the societal mission (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Ebrahim et al., 2014). Hybrid identities render the management of the two opposing goals complex. For instance, Battilana and Dorado's (2010) study on commercial microfinance organisations finds that the conflict between staff identifying the organisation as a banking entity and the staff identifying it as a developmental entity create challenges in managing the internal relations and in fulfilling the profit goal without impeding on the societal goal. Pratt and Foremann (2000) find that managers can even go through identity deletion whenever an identity is found to threaten the organisational mission. As a result, as I determine the hybrid identities that competed at CS over time, I also investigate the impact they have on the fulfilment of the profit and societal goals of CS.

Several researchers have studied hybrid organisational identities deductively using Albert & Whetten's (1985) typologies. For instance, Glynn (2000) analyses how utilitarian and normative identities create conflicts between musicians and administration members over the perception of the core capabilities of the Atlanta Symphonic Orchestra. Ashforth & Reingen (2014) study the tensions in a natural food cooperative's mission between idealism and pragmatism, analogous to utilitarian and normative identities. Other studies analysed tensions

arising from the organisational positions of the individuals. For instance, Kreutzer and Jäger (2011) characterise the conflict between volunteers and staff in voluntary organisations as a conflict over the source of authority, expectations of each party and motivation. In all these instances, the concept of organisational identity is studied deductively. In this master thesis, I do not start with pre-determined dimensions. Instead, I let the dimensions emerge from the data to identify the changes in CS's identity. This is important because there is no clear-cut demarcation between the platform and the communities it hosts in SE organizations as they have blurry organisational boundaries (Reischauer & Maier, 2018A). As a result, the identity conflicts might span beyond the management and communities of SE organisations might have power in defining the organisational identity. For this reason, using inductive codes allows me to stay proximate to the discourses of the different parties at CS and to account for the role of blurry organisational boundaries in shaping organisational identities at CS. By doing this, I stay close to the data, and I challenge the assumption of strictly dual conflicting identities.

2.5 Hybrid Identities and SE platforms

Research on hybrid identities has studied several organisational types including non-profit (Glynn, 2000, Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011), public organisations (Albert & Whetten, 1985), for profit-firms (Pratt and Foreman, 2000) and social enterprises (Ashforth and Reningen, 2014; Smith and Besharov, 2016). As a result, they investigate hybridity in the context of a traditional organisational structure where there is a clear demarcation between the roles of organisations and the users of the service or product it provides.

SE organisations have blurry organisational boundaries, and the users act both as producers and consumers and interact both online and offline (Reischauer and Mair, 2018A; 2018B). For this reason, users hold power over the organisation of the service or product. As a result, it is legitimate to question the extent to which SE organisations have control over their identities, since they are intermediaries rather than organisers of the product or service. Therefore, the findings of the previously mentioned studies cannot be generalised to SE organisations. In this study, I contribute to the literature on hybrid organisations by studying the case of CS that is at the same time a SE and a hybrid organisation. I thus take into account the blurry organisational boundaries and question the extent to which CSs identity is shaped by the management, and investigate how this affects the platform.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this Master's thesis, I use a single case study, hereby CS. Single case studies allow conducting in-depth analysis to understand a specific social setting and generate accurate theoretical constructs (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991, Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This Master's thesis aims at understanding the challenges arising from the hybridisation of identities that occur following a transition from one governance model to another (i.e. non-profit to profit) of an SE platform. By doing this, I aim to depict the challenges stemming from hybrid identities characterising hybrid SE platforms and which are unique to them. I thus enrich the literature on SE platform by bridging it with the hybrid organisation and hybrid identities literature. For this reason, I require a deep understanding of the context, and a case that is at the same time a hybrid and SE organisation. Therefore, CS combining both of these aspects, comes forward as a unique case study. Thus, the single case study is a suitable research design for this Master's thesis.

3.2 The Research Approach

The research approach used is an abductive reasoning approach through systematic combining (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Dubois & Gadde (2002) define systematic combining as '*a process where theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork, and case analysis evolve simultaneously*' (p.554). The abductive reasoning approach thus consists of starting the research with an initial theoretical framework with some *'articulated preconceptions'*, and then to adjust the framework according to the reality stipulated by the data. Initially as I started the research, the focus was on Battilana & Lee's (2014) theory of hybrid organising, whereby I looked at the hybridisation process of CS through the lens of five hybrid organising dimensions these being the core organisational activities, the workforce composition, the organisational design, the culture, and the inter-organisational relationships. The phenomenon would have been analysed from a hybrid identities perspective, whereby the change in organisational identities would be contrasted against the co-evolution of the hybrid organising dimensions, and the impact of the blurry organisational boundaries that characterise SE organisations. However, throughout the analysis process the data was not very revealing of the dimensions.

Instead, the data exhibited conflicting discourses between different parties within the organisation. For this reason, the concept of organisational identity became central and turned out to be better suited to conceptualise the conflicts stemming from CSs hybridity with the available data. As a result, the theoretical framework, data collection and analysis process evolved simultaneously throughout this research.

3.3 Data Collection

In this study, the primary data sources are archival data. Archival sources are reliable and efficient sources for conducting longitudinal studies. In fact, information is anchored in a specific date, and thus allows the researcher to create a narrative of unfolding events that is close to reality. This helps in avoiding what Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) refer to as the *'retrospective sensemaking of image conscious informant'* (P.28), meaning the biases occurring from the process by which the researcher uses its personal judgment to make sense of the data collected in the past, in order to explain a currently occurring phenomenon (Patvardhan et al., 2018). Moreover, it provides access to participants when the research has limited resources and time to access certain populations (Turiano, 2014). Furthermore, for the sake of data triangulation, the archival analysis was complemented by interviewees with key informants, which were former volunteers at CS. Below, I provide more detail on the sources and the data collection process.

3.3.1 Archival data

Table 1 below provides an overview of the sources used in this thesis. The archival sources that I initially consulted were OpenCouchSurfing.org (OpenCS), a blog created by former CS volunteers in 2007 and that was active until 2012, the official CS blog, and e-mail threads exchanged between former volunteers during the non-profit era. However, in online discourse analysis, it is often necessary to look for data outside of the discourse itself to better understand the context (Levina and Vaast, 2015). Therefore, the data collection process was iterative, meaning that as I analysed the data and needed further information or clarifications, new sources were added to the analysis. For instance, between 2011 and 2014, comments on blogposts were disabled on the CS blog. Therefore, some critical user voices were concealed, and little insight could be gathered on the identity conflicts between the management and users following the conversion of CS. As a result, I added posts from a Facebook Protest page called *'PROTEST against Couchsurfing: Give us back our local communities and stop censorship. NOW!'* whereby CS members shared their views on the changes at CS.

Moreover, some newspaper articles and blog posts were added to the analysis whenever they were referred in the initial archival sources. These articles contain interviews with the CS management done by reputable online magazines or posts written by former volunteers. The sources cover the periods between 2006 and 2020. Overall, the sources provided perspectives from the management and the community which allowed to picture the conflicts.

__Table 1 - Data sources__

Data source	Description	Purpose	Count
Blog posts			
OpenCouchsurfing	Blog created by former volunteers to campaign for an open organisation	Provide the community perspective	106
CS blog	Official blog of CS implemented after its conversion in 2011	Provide the management perspective	74
Medium	Blogpost by a former community manager that was laid off after protests from the community.	Provide the management and community perspective	1
Nithin Coca blog	Blog held by a former couch surfer from the pre-conversion era.	Provide the community perspective	2
E-mail threads			
CS-archive	e-mails exchanged between former volunteers	Provide the community and management perspective	8
CS collective New Zealand	e-mails exchanged between former volunteers	Provide the community and management perspective	1
OpenCouchsurfing	e-mails exchanged between former volunteers	Provide the community and management perspective	49
Facebook posts	Facebook event initiated by two couchsurfers in 2012 after CS platform features that were created and nurtured	Provide the community perspective.	55

	by users since the pre-conversion era were removed by the management		
Newspapers			
Shareable	Interview of founder Casey Fenton	Provide the management perspective	1
TechCrunch	Archived e-mail by Casey Fenton	Provide the management perspective	1
Investors' webpages			
Omidyar Network	News article from one of CSs investors	Provide the management perspective	1
Web site			
Old CS wiki	A backup of the CS wiki created by volunteers in the pre-conversion era	Provide the community perspective	1
Total			300

Below I provide a more detailed description of the sources I used:

OpenCouchsurfing

A major part of the official online archival data on CS before the conversion in 2011 was deleted on the basis that CS has become another different legal entity (O'Regan & Choe, 2019). For example, the URL https://Couchsurfing.org has been removed from Wayback Machine, an online archive of website pages. Nevertheless, many press releases and emails from the management to the community dating back from as early as 2006 were archived on OpenCouchsurfing.org, an independent organisation created by CS volunteers.

The website was moderated by three former CS volunteers from the Tech Development team and was initially created to campaign for an open organisation. Later on, as there was little progress in making CS an open organisation, the website transformed into a platform where volunteers and members can share thoughts on CS. OpenCS thus was a key platform that gathered critical voices from the community. The website contains blog posts by the community from May 2007 to January 2012. A total of 106 blogpots including comments from OpenCS were collected. The posts that were excluded were those mentioning website updates relating

to OpenCS, and off topic posts that were present notably because anyone could post on OpenCS.

E-mail threads

Three sources of e-mail threads were consulted. Table 1 provides detail on the e-mail sources consulted. The e-mail sources were all archived on google groups. The e-mails contained notable and essential announcements from the founders to the community, as well as exchanges between volunteers, and they were valuable in depicting changes in governance model and in identity claim-making. The e-mails that were excluded from the analysis related to website updates (e.g., information on server change).

The Facebook protest page

The page was created by two former CS ambassadors in 2012 to protest against platform changes that followed the conversion of CS to a BCorporation. The page contains posts from community members spanning from 2012 to 2015. By contrasting the claims of the users on the page with the content of the CS blogpost, I could estimate the extent to which the users held power over the identity definition at CS during the post-conversion period.

Other sources

Two newspaper articles from TechCrunch and Shareable were also coded. These were added to the analysis because they were mentioned in blogposts from OpenCouchsurfing.org. The first article contained an archived e-mail sent by Casey Fenton to the community in 2006, the second contained an interview of Casey Fenton conducted in February 2010. Additionally, an announcement from an organisation that invested in CS was also added to the data to investigate the investors' perspective. Moreover, two personal blogposts from a former volunteer and a blog post from a former member of staff were also added as they recounted the reaction of users to the conversion of CS and the hiring of new staff members after the conversion. Additionally, a backup of the CS wiki that was built by volunteers in the pre-conversion era was also consulted.

3.3.2 Interviews

The archival data was complemented by interviews with key informants. These were identified throughout the initial archival data search, and were either mentioned as participating in the change or coordination of organisational activities at CS, or people repeatedly mentioned in different sources. Two interview guides were designed in total, one for actors that were

involved in each era (i.e. pre-conversion and post conversion). The interview guides were designed according to the initial theoretical framework that was selected (c.f. Section 3.2).

Moreover, important events that influenced the way CS became organised were identified through the archival analysis. To understand their role and significance, further questions on these events were added to the interview guides. The interview guides contained on average 16 questions that were categorised under the following themes: organisational identity, hybrid organising, and organisational boundaries. The interview guides can be found in Appendix I.

In total, 12 interview invitations were sent. Out these, 3 respondents accepted to participate in the interview, and 3 refused the invitation. Out of those that refused, one gave brief written insight through e-mail. I assigned pseudonyms to the interviewees that responded to preserve their anonymity. Appendix II, lists the pseudonyms, and roles of the interviewees. Furthermore, I also indicate the roles of the individuals that were invited and either did not respond or refused to participate in the study.

3.4 Data analysis

As explained in section 3.2, a systematic combining approach through abductive reasoning was used in this research. Abductive reasoning is a type of 'backward reasoning', whereby the researcher starts with some preconceptions and goes backward to reach an explanation (Walton, 2001). The research was thus first guided by Battilana and Lee (2014) domains of hybrid organising, and the concept of hybrid identity. Therefore, the initial coding process revolved around the hybrid organising domains. In total 3 main rounds of analysis were done.

In the first round, the domains by Battilana and Lee (2014) were used as deductive codes to code the archival data and interviews. On the other hand, the concept of identity and organisational boundaries were explored inductively. Following the first round, a chronological narrative was written under each concept to identify the change throughout time in identity and the hybrid organising domains. Through this narrative, I identified the dominant concepts that illustrated the challenges that emerged from CSs hybridisation process.

The hybrid identities concept came out as the most adequate concept to theorise the available data. As a result, a second round of data coding was conducted on the archival data first and then on the interviews. In this round, I sought to conceptualise the conflict between the three identities that were identified: *community, missionary* and *corporate,* by developing descriptive codes on the domains that opposed the identities. From the coding process, three domains of

conflict were identified: conflict over authority, purpose of growth, and monetisation. Finally, after the conflicts on the domains between the different identities were characterised, their impact was determined through a final coding round. The characterisation of the conflicting dimensions was refined as I wrote several versions of the findings section. Therefore, the second data analysis and final round consisted of a back and forth between data analysis and writing. Table 2 below summarises the data analysis stages.

Table 2- Data analysis stages

Stage	Outcome
Coding using a mix of deductive (Battilana & Lee 2014 hybrid organising domain) and inductive codes (Organisational identity, Organisational boundaries)	Chronological narrative, identification of the core concepts and re-direction of the theoretical framework
Coding for the conflicts between hybrid identities, writing the findings	Identification of three domains of conflicts and narrative over identity conflicts
Coding for the impact of the hybrid identities, writing the findings	Identification of the impact of conflicts on the platform organisation.

3.5 Research Quality Indicators

This research investigates concepts that are highly linked to social actors, and uses a qualitative research strategy. It thus adopts a constructivist ontological approach. Constructivism implies that social reality is accomplished by social actors, and that this reality is constantly under revision (Bryman, 2012). The approach also suggests that the researcher participates in 'constructing reality' (Bryman, 2012). Hereby, I use interpretivism as an epistemological approach, meaning that I focus on the social actors' interpretations of the social setting. As such, the careful consideration of research quality criteria is crucial. To assess the quality of my research, I use Maxwell's (1992) research quality criteria for qualitative research. These are: the descriptive validity, the interpretative validity, the theoretical validity, the generalisability, and the evaluative validity.

The descriptive validity refers to the extent to which distortion of the facts occurs. This criterion points out to the risk of the interference of the researcher's bias or omissions during the interview analysis. To mitigate this, I proceeded to a recording and full transcription of the

interviews after getting the interviewee's consent. The interpretative validity refers to the extent to which the analysis of the research is proximate to the social actors' perspective on and interpretation of social events, and to the influence of the researcher's interpretative bias. To ensure this, I used archival data as primary data, and I triangulated interviews with archival data.

The theoretical validity refers to the extent to which the theoretical accounts generated throughout the study reflect the data. Here the validity touches upon the theoretical concepts and the relationship between them. The abductive approach allowed me to control for the theoretical validity, as throughout the data collection and analysis process, I remained open to looking for appropriate theoretical concepts to make sense of my data.

On generalisability, Maxwell (1992) distinguishes two types: The internal and external generalisability. The internal generalisability means that the findings are extendable within the organisation to the entities or members that were not directly observed or interviewed. Controlling for the interviews with archival data allowed me to evaluate instances where internal generalisability is legitimate. The external generalisability means that the findings are generalisable to other organisations that were not studied. The nature of my research design being a single case study, the external generalisability here does not come out as a valid research quality criterion to use.

Finally, the evaluative validity touches upon the researcher's aptitude to ensure that his/her own moral judgments are well grounded in the data and well justified. In this research, I touch upon sensitive topics such as the resistance of the CS's community and the struggle of sustaining conflicting organisational missions. This requires me to be as neutral as possible when making judgments upon statements from interviews and archival data. To account for this, I provided evidence through proof quotes every time I make an interpretative statement in the findings section, so that my evaluation remains as transparent and close to the data as possible.

3.6 Ethical considerations

This research is done according to GDPR Regulations and the four principles stipulated by the Singapore Statement on Research integrity, that is honesty, accountability, professionalism and stewardship (Resnik & Shamoo, 2014). To ensure this, I provided a consent form to the participants of the study before the start of the interview and provided an informative paragraph

explaining the purpose of the research in the invitation. I then invited the interviewee to ask for clarifications if necessary. Moreover, the data collected from the interviewees is used solely for the purpose of this study, and is thus kept private.

4. Research Context: A Timeline of key events in Couchsurfing's history

In this section, I present a narrative of Couchsurfing's history that I constructed throughout the archival data analysis and the interviews. Based on this narrative, I present a timeline of the key events (Figure 1) that shaped the dynamics between the hybrid identities that are analysed later in Section 5.
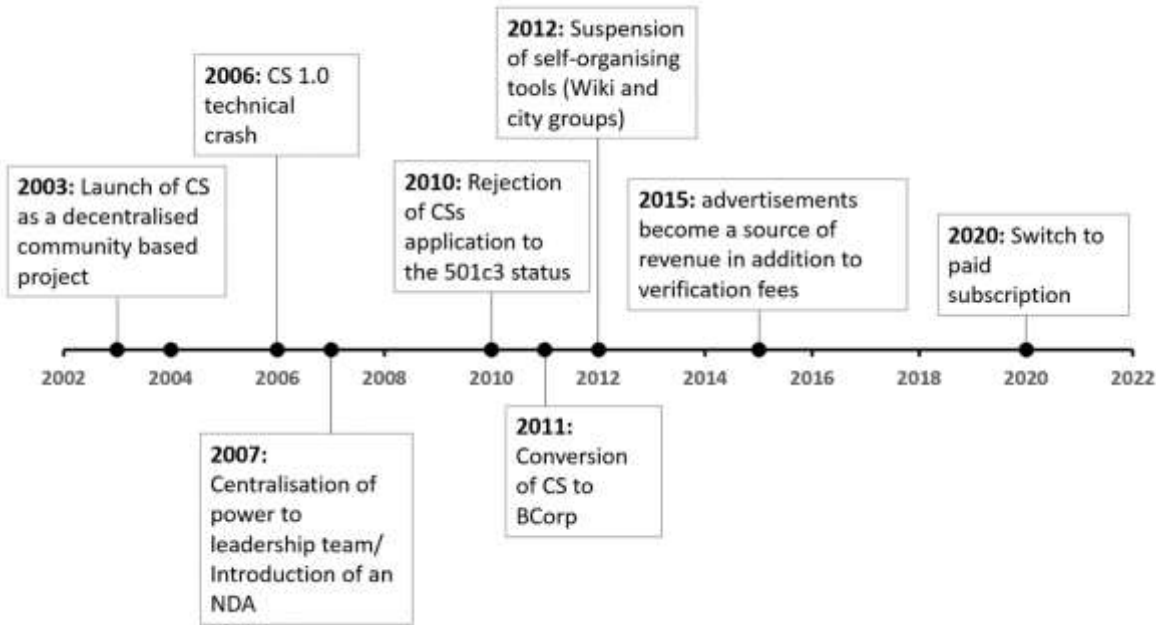

2006: CS 1.0 technical crash

2012: Suspension of self-organising tools (Wiki and city groups)

2003: Launch of CS as a decentralised community based project

2010: Rejection of CSs application to the 501c3 status

2015: advertisements become a source of revenue in addition to verification fees

2020: Switch to paid subscription

2007: Centralisation of power to leadership team/ Introduction of an NDA

2011: Conversion of CS to BCorp

__Figure 1- Timeline of important events at CS__

The idea of CS came to Casey Fenton, an American web developer, when he was on a trip to Iceland in 1999. Instead of booking a place, Fenton sent online requests for free accommodation to thousands of students from the University of Iceland, and ended up staying at their place (Molz, 2011). Following this experience, Fenton launched CS in 2003 as a community-based social network platform that connects travellers offering each other free accommodation to create '*educational exchanges, raise collective consciousness, spread tolerance and facilitate cultural understanding*' notably through hosting and travelling but also gatherings (Old CS wiki,

2006). At the time, the private group had 100 members (Chan, 2016). In 2004, it officially became a public non-profit organisation and had already over 3,500 members in 84 countries (Shriver, 2004, Chan, 2016). By 2020, CS became a network of 14 million users in 200,000 cities (Couchsurfing, 2020). During the non-profit era, CS was funded by member donations and a 'Verification fee' that members would pay to have their profile certified as 'safe'.

Between 2003 and 2007, CS was fully run by a decentralised network of volunteers that were also actively hosting and surfing for the majority. Namely, volunteers were majorly developers responsible for coding the website, translation volunteers that would translate the website content in foreign languages, and ambassadors that would be representatives of CS based in a specific city, responsible for organising gatherings and meetings between travellers. In the absence of an organisational form and a physical office, these volunteers would gather in a city during events called Base Camps, whereby a house would be rented somewhere in the world, and the volunteers would physically meet to work on the platform.

The decentralised organisation aspect was very important for CS as it gave freedom to the volunteers to decide on platform features and content. For instance, up until 2007, volunteers actively self-organised through a CS wiki, which included content on community values, and brainstorming on how to generate revenue. Until 2012, there were also online city groups managed by the volunteers, whereby locals can share knowledge on their cities, or post an event, and where travellers can ask questions or seek recommendations, or also look for a potential host (Paoletta, 2010).

In 2006, the CS website crashed and Fenton sent an e-mail to the volunteers announcing the end of CS (Arrigton, 2006). However, many volunteers and users gathered their effort and rebuilt the website back in a few days. Following the event, in May 2007, a small group composed of the founders and a few volunteers centralised into a 'Leadership Team' that became responsible for coordinating the volunteers and for decision-making. The nature of volunteerism was restricted, for instance, an NDA restricting tech volunteers to work with other hospitality organisation was introduced, and there was more control and moderation over the self-organising online tools. This led volunteers to launch a campaign for making CS an open-source project, in order to

re-gain the decentralised mode of governance and to increase transparency over decision making in CS. The campaign was shut down in 2012 after CS officially converted into a for-profit organisation in 2011.

The conversion of CS to for-profit was pressured upon the failure to acquire a tax-exempted non-profit status known in the US as a 501c3 status. In fact, between 2004 and 2010 CS sought and operated according to the status, yet in 2010 the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which is the entity responsible for tax enforcements laws, rejected the application because the activities of CS were not viewed as 'charitable' activities (Couchsurfing Knowledge Base, 2011). As such, a few months later, CS received its first $7.6M in investments from investment companies Omidyar Network and Benchmark capital and converted into a BCorp (Lacy, 2011). In 2012, a second $15M investment was received from led investor General Catalyst Partners (Omidyar Network, 2012). As CS converted, the preservation of its mission remained a priority for Fenton as he emphasised in a letter to the community in August 2011, and for this reason hosting and surfing were kept free of charge (Blog CS, 2011).

Following the conversion, the volunteer roles were limited to the ambassadorship. The rest of the roles were replaced by paid staff position, and a new CEO, Tony Espinoza was hired in 2012. As such, the control of the platform was transferred from volunteers to staff, of which many were not part of the initial CS community. This engendered a series of protests from the member base against the management at CS. In 2012, the city groups were officially removed, which marked a series of anger amongst the users because it took away the self-organised community aspect of CS (Avaaz, 2012). This resulted in further anger at the staff that were not CS members. For instance, after being resisted by the users, the community manager was laid off in 2013 because of his lack of experience with CS.

Following CSs conversion to a for-profit, the search for a sustainable and profitable revenue model was not immediate for CS. In fact, between 2011 and 2015, CS relied on the influx of investments to maintain the operations of the platform (Blog CS, 2015). Meanwhile, additional sources of revenue came from optional verification fees that users can pay to have their identity verified and receive a 'verified' badge on their profile. In 2015, Jennifer Billock the CEO at that time, started experimenting with other

sources of revenue such as paid advertisements (2015), selling merchandise (e.g. personalised gifts) (2016), and even for a short time of period allowing hosts to charge a fee (Blog CS, 2020). Verification fees and advertisements ended up being CSs sources of revenue up until May 2020 where, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, CS switched suddenly to a yearly and monthly paid subscription plan, without consulting the members (Blog CS, 2020). Over time, as verification fees were sources of revenue, only 4% of the members paid for it, rendering the revenue generating stream and CS fragile and relying on growth of the network (Blog CS, 2020).

5. Findings

The longitudinal analysis revealed that over time three organisational identities competed. I identified these identities as *Community*, *Missionary,* and *Corporate.* I find that the identities compete over three main dimensions these being 1/ The authority over the platform, which relates to the member's perception on who is in a legitimate position to control the platform features 2/ The purpose of growth, which relates to the perception members have on the role of a growing membership in the platform 3/ The role of monetisation, which relates to the way CS should acquire revenue to fund its activities. As each identity conceptualises the dimensions differently, conflicts arise between the identities, which then lead to challenges relating to the platform organisation and the fulfilment of the profit and societal goals. Table 3 provides a summary of how the different identities conceptualise each dimension and the resulting challenges from the conflicts.

Table 3- Hybrid identities and their resulting impact on CS

Identity	Community	Missionary	Corporate	Resulting challenges	Organisational goal impacted
Conflict dimension					
Authority	The user is a co-owner of CS and has a right to decision making and platform design.	Top-down management is responsible for decision making	People with demonstrated web management and technical skills are in a position to manage the platform.	Quitting of early members that were mission oriented Conflict between staff and ambassadors	Societal goal
Ambition for growth	Growth should be limited because it destroys the community values of CS	Growth allows to spread benefits across the society and pursue the mission of CS	Growth allows to generate more revenue	Increase in freeloaders Misalignment between hosts' and travellers' motivation Inactive host profiles	Societal goal Societal goal Profit goal
Monetisation	Any form of profit made out of the community is against the mission of CS	There should be no market transaction between host and surfer to align with the mission of CS and avoid excluding anyone from the benefits of the service.	Revenue maximisation is a corporate goal, it is necessary to increase revenue streams.	Failure to be financially sustainable Unfairness towards host	Profit goal Societal goal Profit goal

In Section 5.1, I detail the analysis process that led to the characterisation of each identity dimension by each identity ideal. In Section 5.2 I highlight the conflicts that emerge from the ideals and identify how these conflicts affect the pursuit of CSs societal and profit maximising goal.

5.1 The characteristics of the identity ideals

5.1.2 Community

The group illustrating this identity is composed of the volunteers from pre-conversion era and users and ambassadors that remained active after CSs conversion to a for-profit. The group identified CS as a community and shaped CS's early identity when it emerged as a community-based project.

Authority

The community identity saw CS first and foremost as a volunteer organisation. This is because the platform was initially run by volunteers. Added to this, the core of the service, that is hosting, was also perceived as volunteer work:

> *'Couchsurfing doesn't work without volunteers. The basic voluntary work is sign up and start hosting and surfing.'* (Former member, e-mail thread, 13 May 2007)

As a result, because CS was viewed as a volunteer organisation, inclusiveness, user participation in the platform's management were core principles. For instance, the principle of adhocracy was valued by many users. Adhocracy per definition opposes bureaucracy, and favours self-organisation and individual initiative over hierarchy and structure (Kenton, 2021). When asked about the organisational identity, the interviewee Cameron mentioned adhocracy as being characterising the organisational identity of CS in the pre-conversion era:

> '*a lot of volunteers, talk about something called Adhocracy. This was like the organisational model that we're trying to run like Wikipedia, it's like, you know if somebody wants to do something, you know, wants to help. They're allowed to help, you know it's ad hoc, and the idea is also that the people doing it get to decide'*

Interestingly, the self-organisation decentralised mode of governance was perceived as undiscernible from the societal mission of CS. In other words, it was seen that to facilitate intercultural understanding it was necessary to have an organisational model that reflects the principles of cultural exchange such as freedom of choice, expression, and equal participation. Such aspect was emphasised for instance in the old wiki page of CS:

> *'The stated mission of CouchSurfing 2.0 is to internationally network people and places, create educational exchanges, raise collective consciousness, spread tolerance and facilitate*

cultural understanding. A wiki is a perfect tool for this purpose. A wiki is a collectively authored website that you define and create!' (Old CS Wiki, 2006)

As a result, any organisational entitlement, or formal contracts were seen as a threat to the community's authority and were opposed. For instance, the implementation of the NDA in May 2007 which restricted volunteers' freedom initiated the campaign for an OpenCouchsurfing and led several volunteers notably from the tech team to abandon the organisation. Moreover, the restrictions were perceived as being at odds with the community logic:

'I recommend you think of CS in terms of the Western culture notion of "corporate entity" and all the concepts of ownership and entitlement that go with that, rather than a diverse community of equals with shared values.' (Former member, OpenCS blogpost, 17 July 2007)

The resulting effect of volunteerism and self-organisation is that members of CS did not see themselves as users of the platform rather they thought they held a sense of ownership and identified first and foremost as a *'community'* of like-minded people that had right to the organisation of the platform and the service:

'The community feeling that this Website belongs to the members and every one of us is a part of Couchsurfing' (Former member, Comment to OpenCS Blog, 27 September, 2009)

The sense of ownership notably reinforced following the 2006 crash, as volunteers and users mobilised and put their valuable time and work to re-build the website:

'I think that (the crash) gave people the idea, Ah we are helping as volunteers so it's a volunteer organisation and so we're co owners' (Cameron).

Next to this, as the interviewee Jimmy highlighted, the crash further increased the sense of community and the right to community participation in the organisation of CS:

'What changed from CS 1.0 to CS 2.0? I think a stronger community sense that you can see and it was in the community afterwards as well, and a bit more of a sort of a willingness or openness to try to get people from within the community to come and participate.' (Jimmy)

For this reason, the *community identity* legitimises the authority to CS's community as a whole and holds the community accountable to itself. In other words, the community is responsible for protecting its own interest and pursuing the mission of CS.

Growth

For the community identity growth is not the essence of CS. While growth was not necessarily opposed, it was thought that it shouldn't be a target or a goal that should be planned for as highlighted by a former Couchsurfer:

'I'm not against large numbers, per se, but rather against them as an end in themselves (…) "Build the field and they will come." That's my motto.' (Former member, Comment to OpenCS blogpost, 22 September, 2007)

The reason for this is that exponential targeted growth was perceived as against the mission of CS as it brought members that were 'mainstream' and thus not illustrative of the community values:

'I think there's only that many people that can make hosting or being hosted a pleasant experience. If you want to grow more than that you have to go mainstream, and that would spoil the whole thing.' (Former member, Comment to OpenCS blogpost, 22 September 2007).

As result, the community identity thought that restricting somehow growth was necessary to achieve the societal mission of CS, so that it is kept unique:

'if something is mass-marketed by default by all possible means, you'll probably miss out on those holding niche views and participating into counter-cultural activities who are likely to turn away from anything too mainstream, who I'd personally much rather see around while exploring the world.' (Former member, Comment to OpenCS blogpost, 22 September 2007)

Monetisation

As previously mentioned, the community identity perceived the essence of hosting and surfing as volunteer work. For this reason, the community identity opposes completely market transactions between hosts and surfers. In fact, any form of commodification of the activities was seen as threatening to the community values. For instance, it strictly sees the for-profit status as incompatible with the community values. Following the conversion of CS a member expressed:

'It concerns me that this organization is for profit, as the motive for being for profit seems to be out of line with the no cost aspect of CS travel.' (Former member, Facebook post, 2012)

This is notably emerging from a fear of being exploited by having one's data sold, notably through advertisements. Especially, members were against this because the online content from the pre-conversion era was built by them as volunteers, and because it would share the content beyond the niche community:

'Casey Fenton attempts to sell all your old Groups posts for profit! And if not for cash, then surely for the added marketing value to allow Google and every other web site and search engine to add what you thought you were sharing with only fellow CS-members, to their fully public, permanent record that is the global internet.' (Former member, OpenCS Blogpost, 31 January 2012).

5.1.3 Missionary

I refer to this identity as *'missionary'* because it emerged from a group of volunteers and co-founders that centralised the management of CS in the aim of becoming the guardians of CSs mission. The group formed the Leadership Team (LT) a group of 11 members with assigned managerial responsibilities. Following the conversion, the discourses around identity prevailed amongst the founders and the CEOs that followed.

The group viewed beyond benefits at the community level, affiliated CS as a *'structured charitable enterprise with a clear focus on the mission of facilitating intercultural understanding'* (Casey Fenton, e-mail thread 27 November 2007) and had an ambition to grow to benefit the society as a whole. I find that the identity statements reflect Fauchart and Gruber's (2011) typology of the *Missionary* identity that suggests *'that firms can be powerful agents of change in society and engage in new firm creation to establish a platform from which they can pursue their political visions and advance particular causes, generally of a social or environmental nature.' (p.994).* I thus refer to this identity as *Missionary.*

Authority

For the missionary identity, CSs was first viewed as an organisation with structure before being a volunteer organisation. As indicated by Jimmy, following the 2006 crash, CS was

becoming *'more than just the group of volunteers that were trying to run the ship.'* and that it *'was recognised that it was an organisational entity'* (Jimmy)*.*

For this reason, for the missionary identity authority to lead the organisation comes to a top-down management that becomes the 'missionary' responsible for protecting the interest of CSs users. As highlight in an e-mail written by Fenton:

'Leadership is dedication to the mission, the members and the project, and is inclusive in nature. We strive to bring people together. We are representatives from the community and are open to voices from within the community' (e-mail thread, 10 May 2007)

The group perceived that having a top management enabled to prioritise decision making for the benefit of the CS community and its mission. For this reason, efficient decision making was seen as more important than community participation as highlighted by a former member of the LT:

'CS is not about doing whatever you like. It's about a team effort to make CS a better place for all of us. (…) This means that we need a structure to do things, to focus on what needs to be done and what not. Just doing 'whatever YOU like' will not benefit the community, it will benefit the person that likes it.' (Former LT member, e-mail thread, 5 Dec 2006).

This suggests that the *missionary* identity sees CS as a platform responsible for coordinating the fulfilment of the societal mission of CS, and that it has authority over managing and protecting the interest of the community.

Growth

For the *missionary* identity, achieving the mission of CS meant reaching as many people as possible, to 'create a better world'. For instance, in an e-mail addressed to the community, Casey Fenton applauded growth for allowing CS to fulfil its mission:

'Our CS community has recently passed its 200,000 members mark. Congratulations to everyone one of you for helping CS make a difference in the lives of people all over the world! More couches in more places and more people exploring the world, yet feeling at home wherever they go, making friendships that bridge cultures and continents.' (e-mail thread, 10 May 2007).

Moreover, as could be deduced from the quote below by a former community manager, it was seen that it was contrary to the mission to limit the usage of CS to small community because growing meant spreading more '*positive experiences'* around the world and thus enhancing more *'powerful change'.*

'When CS reached 10,000 members, there was a movement to close membership. None of us would have made that cut. But CS chose not to limit membership, only to continue to let word of mouth spread about CS. (…) This community can facilitate a much more powerful change with more people having positive, profound experiences with each other.' (Former community manager, Blogpost Nithin Coca, 27 March 2013)

Monetisation

Similarly to the *community* identity, the *missionary* identity opposes the idea of charging for hosting and surfing. For instance, following the conversion of CS to a Bcorp the founder Fenton kept on assimilating CS to a non-profit organisation, thus challenging the idea of being a corporation whose aim is to maximise profit:

'Just because we're not a non-profit doesn't mean we're actually **"for"** *profit. CouchSurfing is not for sale, and money is no tour goal. We recognize that the community is what makes this movement real and supporting it is what our organization is here for.* (Casey Fenton, CS blogpost, 27 August 2011)

With this, as the missionary identity's aim is to spread the benefits amongst the society, the exclusion of members from the platform due to financial reasons was seen as contradictory to the mission. For this reason, the missionary identity supported the idea of keeping the service free of charge:

*'The CouchSurfing features that you use today will continue to be free***.** *If you're worried that we are going to start charging you to be a part of the CouchSurfing community, don't. We want a world where everyone can explore and connect, regardless of their financial situation'* (Casey Fenton, Blogpost, 27 August 2011)

5.1.4 Corporate

Throughout the analysis the claims depicting the corporate identity were shaped by the CEOs during the for-profit era but also were defined by the external expectations of the investors that expect a return on investment from CS. It is thus driven by profit maximisation logics.

Authority

The corporate identity focuses on efficiency and the improvement of the platform. This is mainly to allow for more convenient usage of the platform and enable growth. As a result, CS was perceived as a business requiring 'technical expertise'. For instance, the 2nd CEO of CS that joined in 2013 referred to the post conversion CS as a *'Mission driven technology'* as opposed to the pre-conversion CS that was a '*Community organized-global movement'* (CS Blogpost, 2014). Moreover, it was noted several times that the platform needed to be re-built so that it becomes convenient and fast to use:

'The CouchSurfing website, as it currently exists, needs a lot of help. It's unstable and not very easy to use (…) we're focusing all our energy on making a website that's a more sustainable home for our community: one that works reliably, and easily' (CS Blogpost, 22 August 2012)

As a result, it was perceived that authority would go to people with adequate technical skills to cater to the requirements of a technological platform. For this reason, following the conversion of CS, as investors from the technology sphere joined, the focus became on directing investments for acquiring adequate expertise for a technological platform.

'$15 million gives us enough money to maintain our current staff and add new employees without needing to worry about our finances.' (CS Blogpost, 22 August, 2012).

The staff mix showed that authority was transferred to technically skilled people. In fact, when hiring the first CS CEO, emphasis was put on finding someone with technical expertise:

'It was crucial to us to find someone who really understood CouchSurfing, our mission, and our community. We also needed someone with the technical knowledge and experience to bring the CouchSurfing website to a whole new level of quality and functionality.' (CS Blogpost, 25th April 2012).

Similarly, investors motivated the hiring of technical expertise to improve the reliability and speed of the platform. For instance, when announcing its $15 million dollar investment in CS in 2012 Omidyar Network noted that:

'Over the coming months, the company will continue to hire top-tier engineers and product managers and finalize new iOS, Android and website features, set to begin rolling out later this year. These include a completely new code base for the site, which will increase speed and reliability, provide a more intuitive browsing experience and deliver more customized and optimized search results.' (Omidyar Network, 2012).

Growth

A major reason why technical skills were sought was also notably to accommodate for sustaining growth, as portrayed through this statement by a former community manager:

'Since we cannot, and don't want to stop people from joining CS, we have to build the system that can facilitate them having the same awesome experiences that Couchsurfing have always given each other. We are in the process of improve the site to deal with the issues arising out of the larger membership' (Former community manager, Comment to Blogpost, Nithin Coca, 27 March 2013)

Similarly, growth is motivated by investors, as Matt Cohler board member at the led investor Benchmark capital praised the potential of the multiplier effect of CS:

'From our early days and investment in eBay, to my personal experience at both LinkedIn and Facebook, we've become strong believers in the multiplier effect of networks like CouchSurfing.' (Omidyar Network, 2012)

With this, given the revenue models that CS has chosen over time, profit maximisation would rely on growth of the traffic in the platform rather than repeated interactions. In fact, CSs revenue would come from an optional one-time identity verification fee that a user would pay to have their identity 'verified' and have access to a premium service. As explained in the FAQ page of CS '*Becoming verified is a simple way of saying "Hello! I am who I say I am.'* *(Couchsurfing FAQ, 2021).* The verification would supposedly motivate users to opt for it because it *'demonstrate trust',* it *'highlights the profile'* by displaying a green validation badge, and making verified members appear in the top searches (Couchsurfing FAQ, 2021). Yet

clearly before supporting any form of trust enhancement the fee is mainly for generating revenue, as mentioned on the FAQ*: 'We are a small but mighty team here at Couchsurfing, and verification is one of the ways we earn revenue.'* (Couchsurfing FAQ, 2021). Later on in 2015, advertisements on the platform also became a source of revenue. Advertisements and verification fees both require growth to maximise profit. Therefore, growth is a core domain of the corporate identity.

Monetisation

For the *corporate* identity, the interest is in maximising revenue. The priority for the corporate identity is to keep revenue streams, including to enable growth. For example, advertisements were not out of the question contrarily to the *missionary* and *community* identity. As a result, in 2015 the CEO Jen Billock introduced advertisement (CS blogpost, 19 January, 2015), despite the fact that there were initially clearly stipulated to '*damage the community'* (Blog CS, 2012). As Billock indicated:

'We've previously said we wouldn't focus on an advertising model – but it's a sensible way for us to learn and begin creating additional revenue to fund the ongoing development of this service.' (CS Blogpost, 19 January, 2015)

5.2 Conflicts and the resulting impact on the management of CSs hybridity.

5.2.1 Conflicts over authority

Both the *community* and *missionary identity* come out as prosocial identities that shared the belief in the societal mission of CS of increasing intercultural understanding. It was found that the users and volunteers that joined CS in its early days represented the *community identity*, while the *missionary identity* became embedded in what later became the leadership team in the non-profit era, and management in the for-profit era. Yet while both parties believed in the mission, they had divergent beliefs on how the mission should be fulfilled. This translated firstly in a conflict over the source of authority in the organisation. For *the community identity*, the volunteering aspect and the mission of CS are undiscernible. For this reason, the input of each user of CS for managing the organisation and the service was seen as important, and collaborative tools whereby users can co-organise the service and the platform such as city

groups and wikis were seen as core to the platform. For the *missionary identity*, the top management was seen as the guardian of the mission and thus decision making had to come to CS as an organisation rather than users.

The resulting challenges from these conflicts are the quitting of the early members who were motivated to participate in the platform for its mission. In fact, several members felt that top-down management constrained the role of the users in managing the platform, which was thought as contrary to the mission as expressed by a former member:

'As one example of how easy it is for a self-reinforcing group with no accountability to the people they claim to serve, consider the mission of intercultural understanding that they purport to promote and protect. The very essence of intercultural understanding is respect for diversity. Yet, the structure of the leadership team requires unanimous agreement among themselves to make important changes. (...) This is perhaps the worst possible environment for promoting diversity of values, opinions and ideas, cultural or otherwise. Yet it seems they consider themselves to have a special insight and virtue which entitles them to be the guardians of the CS mission' (Former member, OpenCS blogpost, 17 July 2007).

Moreover, following the conversion, in reaction to the deletion of the wiki, and modification of other collaborative tools like city group, the community felt that CS lost the core of what it was as it hindered the power to managing the platform and service that the community had:

'many of us feel OUR COMMUNITY has been taken away like our info and wiki and all the tools we built as a community and stripped away what feels like the soul of what CS was' (Former member, Facebook post, 2012)

Conflicts over authority also arose between the *corporate* and *community identity.* CS was perceived as a platform that needs technical skills for the *corporate* identity, while for the *community* identity CS was perceived as a unique community that needs people with demonstrated commitment to the societal mission. This translated into a conflict between 2012 and 2013 between paid staff and ambassadors of CS: As staff were hired because of their demonstrated experience in the platform and online business field, the ambassadors resisted the idea, suggesting that only those belonging to the community should be in right to be hired. For instance, in 2012, the ambassadors protested against the community manager that wasn't previously a community member:

'Hiring someone with no CouchSurfing experience to manage the CouchSurfing community seems like madness to me (…) that highlights how poorly run CS has become: that of all the people capable, who'd jump at the chance to manage the CS community user experience and make it better, they chose to hire someone that is not even a member of that community.' (Former member, Facebook post, 2012)

As the protest from the users became heard, the CEO Tony Espinoza acknowledged that CS would take a direction whereby more power to decision making would be transferred to the hybrid community, and whereby the staff composition would be more representative of the community identity:

'*The biggest lessons are clear: We need to work as closely with the community as possible in building and migrating the site. (…) We also must admit that we are missing key team members with greater Couchsurfing experience. I am moving to address these issues immediately.'* (CS Blogpost, 2 July 2013).

The conflict not only shows how identity clash over the legitimacy of authority over the organisation platform, but it also shows that users of a platform have considerable power in resisting opposing identity and they have power in influencing decisions in favour of the identity they promote. The identity conflicts resulted in some mission-oriented members that joined CS in its early days to quit the platform, which subsequently affects the achievement of CSs societal goal of increasing intercultural understanding.

5.2.2 Conflicts over growth

The conflict over growth opposed the three identities. On the one hand, the *community* identity perceived growth as threatening to the community values, and there was a strong belief that there was a limit to the number of people that can reflect and express the spirituality of CS. On the other hand the *missionary* identity and the *corporate* identity favoured growth, yet for distinct reasons. While for the *corporate* identity the priority is revenue growth, for the *missionary* identity, it is to reach as many people as possible in order to spread the benefits that the platform provides by connecting people and allowing them to have meaningful cultural encounters.

Yet on this aspect, growth engendered challenges to the fulfilment of the mission of CS as the service kept on being free, people started joining simply for the free accommodation. These

users were labeled as freeloaders, and the resulting problem is a misalignment between hosts' and travellers' motivation. In fact, in the absence of monetary incentives, hosts joined the platform specifically because they are appealed by the platform mission, while for travellers the motivation was not always the same. With the increased traffic on the platform, more and more freeloaders joined, and complaints by hosts increased:

'I'm sad. What has become of our community? I remember when every surfer really was a friend I just hadn't met yet. I joined in 2005, and CS has been a big, big part of my life. But now I'm just sad about where it's all headed. You nailed it re: the freeloaders. I'd say that 9/10th of my requests are from people who haven't read my profile, have zero references, haven't filled out their profiles, & are sending cut-n-paste requests. It gets exhausting.' (Former member, Facebook post, 2013)

'I have been a CS member or almost 10 years now. I've been hosted one time and I have hosted a lot of people. Lately I started being a bit more picky about who I was hosting because I felt tired of being basically used as a free hostel.' (Member, Comment to CS blogpost, 27 May 2020)

As a result, there was an increase of inactive host profile, notably starting from 2016 as testimonies a CS member:

'*Somehow thousands of dead profiles appeared in 2016. No idea if someone has hacked the website or the administration wanted to get more sponsors by increasing the members number by thousands of not existing people. As a result, finding a host is difficult, because all those people do not exist and of course they do not reply to couchrequests'* (Member, Comment to CS blogpost, 27 May 2016)

For this reason, CS has attempted to fulfil this gap by controlling the requests that travellers can send to hosts. For instance, a profile completion percentage was put in place to give access only to travellers that have 50% of their profile complete with information on their personal interests and themselves (Blog CS, 2016). In 2017, a limit was put on the number of requests that travellers can send to hosts so that they incentivise them to take time to write personalised requests to the hosts (Blog CS, 2017). Despite that, freeloaders still joined which caused hosts to become less active on the platform. For instance, as hosts became less active, CS incentivised their participation by making the verification fees free of charge whenever they hosted someone (Blog CS, 2017)

The conflict over growth thus affects the achievement of the societal goal as the freeloaders go against the values stipulated by CS's societal mission and the profit goal as the misalignment between host and traveller motivation results in a lower number of hosts being active on the platform.

5.2.3 Conflict over monetisation

Overall, the conflict over monetisation resulted in an incapacity of CS to be financially sustainable. This eventually became apparent following the COVID-19 pandemic after which it unexpectedly switched to a subscription fee. As both the community and missionary identity rejected making hosting and surfing payable, and as the management was aware that payment would appear as against the mission of CS and would result in more mission-oriented community members quitting the service, CS committed to making payments by users optional.

In fact, the verification fees that constituted for long CSs main source of revenue was not mandatory. Rather, throughout time CS implemented reward mechanisms for verified users and restriction to non-verified users so they are incentivised to pay for being verified. For instance, in the profile completion system, verified members would get 25% increase in scores than non-verified members, which is a bigger reward than for instance getting a reference (15%) or providing a description of one-self (15%) (Blog CS, 2016). Despite these incentives, not enough revenue could be gathered from verifications fee, and in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, CS revealed that a very small share of users paid the fees.

'The reality is that over 96% of the community provides no financial support to Couchsurfing because we have not asked for it. Couchsurfing also generates only a few thousand dollars per month from advertising.' (CSBlogpost, 14 May 2020).

For this reason, until 2015, CS has been solely running on the investment funds and has postponed plan for monetising sustainably the service, in the fear of harming the community and acting against the mission. But for this reason, as CS failed to find a sustainable way to be profitable, it lost support from investors in 2015:

'By 2015 Couchsurfing was no longer an attractive investment for Silicon Valley venture capitalists, mostly because the community had remained the priority instead of making money.' (CSBlogpost, 20 May 2020).

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The conflict over monetisation thus resulted in an incapacity to stay financial sustainable but also in the abandonment of the platform by users after CS switched to a subscription revenue model. This is notably because payments were perceived by some as against the principle of hospitality exchange:

'going forward I imagine people will search for other free options. (…) CS was a digital representation of the free-spirited travelling community and I am extremely sceptical this is the right way to go.' (Member, Comment to CSblogpost, 6 June 2020)

'By imposing a fee there is a very real chance that this will change the nature of the community in unexpected and negative ways – what are the processes for monitoring this, receiving feedback and altering course?' (Member, Comment to CSblogpost, 6 June 2020*)*

But also because the subscription was seen as a burden and unfair for the host that would host the travellers for free but would also pay a fee:

'I feel like this move will lose CS a lot of active hosts. I won't be paying a fee to have people staying with me for free. That's insane. I think a lot of people will stop hosting and only pay the fee when they are about to travel. But then there are less hosts and you might not find anyone to stay with…it's just a downward spiral from there.' (Member, Comment to CS blogpost, 1st June 2020).

The conflict over monetisation resulted in an incapacity to generate sustainable sources of revenue and thus to touch upon the profit goal. Moreover, as CS switched to the subscription model, it has further created unbalanced relationships between hosts and guests as hosts would have an additional financial burden compared to the guest, thus touching upon the societal goal.

6. Discussion

This Master's thesis has investigated the impact of conflicting organisational identities stemming from a hybridisation process of an SE actors using the unique case study of CS. Over time, it was found that three distinct identities competed at CS, these being the community, missionary and corporate identities. The hybrid identities resulted in conflicts over authority, growth and monetisation. As a result of these conflicts, CS encountered a difficulty in finding balance between maximising profit and fulfilling its societal goal. The conflicts lead to an abandonment of the platform by users motivated by the societal mission of CS, an increase of freeloaders traffic on the platform, unbalances between host and guests in terms of their motivation to participate and their financial burdens, and an incapacity to implement a revenue model that aligns with the community and missionary identity without impeding on CSs capacity to maximise profit. Below, I discuss the theoretical contribution of my findings to two streams of literature: the SE literature, and the literature on hybrid identities. I simultaneously identify areas for future research that could further elaborate on my findings. I then highlight the practical implications of my findings (Section 6.3) and discuss the limitations of my research (Section 6.4).

6.1 Sharing economy

The case of CS demonstrated the unique challenges related to SE and shows the complexity of sustaining a societal mission as a sharing economy accommodation platform. Particularly, it illustrates the challenges of sustaining dual conflicting goals when facing growth as a mission-oriented SE organisation. Due to the fact that CS derives value from the encounters between hosts and guest, CS comes out as unique compared to other traditional for-profit accommodation sharing platforms such as Airbnb, as the primary motivation encouraged by the non-monetised exchange is on increasing social connections, rather than on increasing economic gains. For this reason, the case of CS is a case study of an accommodation sharing platform that aims to sustain a value-based community that is a platform community that shares a common interested in the values advanced by the societal mission of CS (i.e. intercultural understanding, and openness) (Vaskelainen & Pisicelli, 2018).

The findings highlight the difficulties of sustaining such community in the context of competing identities, and questions the viability of a for-profit sharing accommodation platform where value is derived from social bonds and non-monetary motivations to participate. In fact, as the prosocial identities (i.e. community and missionary) rejected the commodification of hosting and surfing, the service of CS remained free over time. On the other hand, both corporate and missionary identity aimed for the growth of the network. As the conflict over growth highlighted, in the absence of an economic transaction between host and guest, it was guaranteed that CS would attract value-based hosts that reflect its mission. However, on the traveller side, more members joined because they wanted the free accommodation and not to meet and interact with the host. Such pattern has been observed in other mission-oriented organisations. However, in SE organisations the impact is different. For instance, Bauwens (2016) finds that in cooperative energy initiatives, the early adopters are usually driven to participate by prosocial motives whilst late adopters seem to be motivated by self-interest making members motivations heterogenous. The growth at CS exhibits similar patterns with the increase in freeloaders in later years. This evolution had harsh consequence as it caused hosts to become less active on the platform and thus resulted in a decrease in host supply. A decrease in the host supply affects both the achievement of the societal mission but also of the corporate goals of profit maximisation as traffic is reduced. Whilst in Bauwens' (2016) study shows that in mission-oriented cooperatives growth impedes on the prosocial identity of the cooperative and created heterogenous motivation amongst members, it does not create unbalances between supply and demand side that threaten the survival of the organisation as they are not dependent on voluntary work. The findings thus conceptualise the challenges that stem from the boundary blurring aspect in SE organisations where the participation of a producer and consumer does not involve monetary exchange. The findings thus add to Reischauer & Mair (2018A; 2018B) understanding of how SE platforms are dependent on their hybrid communities for survival, and depicted the specific challenges resulting from this dependence in the context where the exchanges between producer and consumer are not monetised and rely on intrinsic motivations.

The findings further highlight similarly to other studies that the incapacity to sustain a two-sided market is a common reason for failing in sharing economy organisations (Vaskelainen & Pisicelli, 2018; Täuscher & Kietzmann, 2017) and particularly in accommodation sharing economy organisations (Täuscher & Kietzmann, 2017). For instance, Stazilla an Indian accommodation sharing platform charging similarly to Airbnb a commission on booking failed to survive because too much money was spent on creating homestays and guests, with the incapacity to recoup the investments with growth (Täuscher & Kietzmann, 2017). The case of CS shows similar yet even more complex patterns. CS is an accommodation platform, yet it

derives its value from the interaction between mission-oriented hosts and travellers. For this reason, the challenge lies in creating a market but also in controlling the motivations to participate in the platform, notably in the absence of monetary incentive. As such, CS invested heavily throughout time in platform features to control the motivation of hosts and travellers (e.g. profile completeness score, limit on requests that can be sent to hosts). At the same time, the struggle over monetisation prevented CS from generating sustainable profits, and as the COVID incident showed, the sudden monetisation of the platform through a subscription fee harmed the prosocial identities of CS and lead to a further abandonment of the platform by the users that illustrated the ideals of CSs mission. This aspect highlights the dilemma that CS and SE organisation experience between growing to remain profitable and governing a two-sided market. Hereby, balancing between the motivation of the producer and consumer side came out as a crucial challenge for the survival of the platform that was impeded by the 'costs' growth.

It was previously observed that in SE organisations there are discrepancies between the consumer and producer side. Belotti et al., (2015) and Böcker & Meelen (2017) find that users from the producer side are usually more motivated by prosocial factors than users from the consumer side. The findings of this master thesis align with Belotti et al., (2015) and Böcker & Meelen's (2017) findings as similarly it was found that hosts were more mission-oriented than guests, and highlight the necessity to sustain balanced relationships between consumers and producers in SE organisations. Moreover, the misalignment between motivations exacerbated and became impeding as CS grew beyond its niche throughout its hybridisation process and attracted free loaders. Further research could explore more in depth how the dilemma between growth and fulfilling a societal mission is successfully dealt amongst mission-oriented SE organisations. This could be addressed for instance by comparing the case of CS with a similar platform. For example, many former CS users that represented the community identity switched to a competing non-profit platform called BeWelcome that was founded in 2007. Until today, beWelcome does not charge for hosting, and it reflects the ideals of the community identity and is an open-source voluntary organisation. Moreover, the platform has not grown exponentially as CS, rather eighteen years after it was founded, it has 157,045 members only (BeWelcome, 2021). BeWelcome comes thus as an interesting case to understand why CS was not able to sustain the community identity and why it has shifted to a corporate identity and understand how the conflicts between growth and mission were dealt with in each organisation. This could enhance the understanding on the success factors of mission-oriented SE platforms.

Besides, the study contributes to the sharing economy literature by conceptualising the characteristics of the community identity. The notion of community has been emphasised by several SE organisations including accommodation sharing organisations such as Airbnb, and for this reason research on the conceptualisation of the sense of community has been motivated (Vaskelainen & Piscicelli, 2018). The sense of community in the SE was conceptualised as echoing a feeling of membership to a group (Möhlmann, 2015), yet through this study, inclusiveness and member participation to the platform organisation were also found to be characterising the community identity. It was also found that while CS curiously emphasised being a community, the way CS organised its service and restricted the participation of users in the management of the service was perceived as against the core of what a community should be, and actually led many members to feel that their community has been taken away. This illustrates misalignments between the way CSs conceptualises as a community and the way users identify as a community.

However, the reason why inclusiveness and user participation were perceived as core to what characterises a community is because there was a firm belief that the societal mission of fostering intercultural understanding should reflect democratic values of equal participation and inclusiveness, and because CS started historically as a decentralised online community-based project. It might be that in non-mission-oriented organisations or mission-oriented platforms that initiated their activities as a for-profit organisation, the conceptualisation of a community identity differs. Further research could pay attention to how mission-oriented and non-mission-oriented SE organisations differ in the way they define a communitarian identity.

6.2 Hybrid identities

Studies on hybrid organising have majorly focused on conflicts arising from dual identities namely through the study of tensions occurring in non-profit organisations and social enterprises between the paid staff and the philanthropic actors that respectively portray tensions between utilitarian and normative like identities (Glynn 2000, Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011). This study finds some typical similarities, notably in the pre-conversion era between such type of conflicts when CS was a non-profit. For instance, I find similar domains of conflicts between the community and the missionary identity than those found by Kreutzer and Jäger (2011) between managers and volunteers in non-profit organisations, this being the conflict over the authority to lead the organisation between two parties, one favouring decentralisation

and creativity and the other structure and order. However, such conflicts find their roots from the fact that CS started as a volunteer organisation managed in a decentralised manner. For this reason, the conflicts might manifest differently in an SE organisation that was not initiated as a non-profit organisation at first. Further research could investigate how identity conflicts between a normative and utilitarian identities manifest in a for-profit mission-oriented SE without a historical account as a non-profit organisation.

Secondly, the findings give account of the role of the communities of SE organisations in shaping and interpreting prosocial organisational identities. In fact, it was found through this study that both the missionary and community identity were prosocial identities that promote the same mission. Yet both identities were defended by two groups respectively the management, and the users of CS. Each identity saw opposing organisational models as adequate for fulfilling the mission with on the one hand the community identity promoting the decentralised governance, and the missionary identity the centralised top-down model. This aspect illustrates the role of users as actors shaping organisational identities in SE organisations, and challenges the assumption that all social enterprises have respectively a single prosocial identity and a corporate identity. Furthermore, it highlights the complexity that arises from more than two identities which is a research gap motivated by Battilana et al., (2017).

Moreover, the findings echo Denton et al., (2018) argument that both founders and members of community-based enterprises can both co-construct prosocial identities by responding to surprising events. As through the abductive reasoning process, whenever key events were identified through archival analysis, further clarification on their role was sought through the interviews. As a result, the 2006 crash, the failure to acquire the 501c3 status and the protest against the removal of city groups were found to critical event in generating resistance of or shifts to hybrid identities. For instance, the crash reinforced the community identity amongst volunteers and users. Similarly, the removal of city groups led users to defend the community identity and resist the missionary and corporate identity. These aspects thus accounts for the role of the user in shaping and interpreting the identity of an SE organisation. Therefore, the findings call for paying closer attention to the multiplicity of organisational identities in SE organisation and the role of the communities in reacting to platform's stipulated organisational identity

6.3 Practical implications

On the practical implication, this paper is of use to managers of mission-oriented SE organisation. Firstly, it concretises through the example of CS the potential tensions that can arise from competing organisational identities and highlights the importance of managing the conflicts arising from these identities to ensure a platform's success. Secondly, it further informs on the challenges that arise from deriving value from a value-based community in an accommodation sharing platform and adds to the understanding of the reasons for platform failures. This is particularly important because managers of for-profit SE platform tend to over focus on the network effect and scalability as factors for platform success (Täuscher & Kietzman, 2017), which as seen in the context of CS was not compatible with the community values stipulated by users, nor helpful in keeping CS financially sustainable.

6.4 Limitations

This research has been fruitful in highlighting the conflicts and challenges arising from the hybridisation of an SE platform organisation using the concept of hybrid identities. However, it has its limitations.

A first and important limitation is the small number of interviewees gathered in the study. The archival analysis was fruitful in tracking the evolution of CSs hybrid identities during the hybridisation process, and the three interviews helped not only triangulate the data, but also gather a deeper understanding of the role of key trigger events. However, the individuals that were interviewed in this research were active with CS between 2006 and 2012. Therefore, this might suggest that some challenges of the post-conversion era might have been missed. Archival data, especially when held by corporates can be subjected to 'biased selectivity', meaning that the disclosed information might be selective and might reflect *the agenda of the organisation's principals.'* (Bowen, 2009; p.33). The archival data collected for the post conversion era came from the CS blogpost. Whilst I limited the biased selectivity by gathering insight from the community perspective through the Facebook posts, interviews with former staff members involved in the post conversion era would have provided a more accurate picture of the tensions arising in the post conversion era that I could have triangulated with the available archival data.

Secondly, the single case study methodological approach allowed to pay attention to the context, and provide a detailed narrative of the key events, their role in shaping conflict identities, and the challenges that arise from the conflicting identities in an SE sharing economy platform that went through a hybridisation process. As a result, they provided insight on how identity conflicts manifest in a SE accommodation platform that derives value from social bonds, and non-monetised exchanges. The findings are thus not relevant to all SE organisations. Instead, they come forward as more relevant for SE platforms that seek to create value from social bonds rather than from economic gains.

7. Conclusions

This master thesis investigated how different hybrid identities emerging from the hybridisation process of CS, a mission-oriented accommodation sharing platform that converted from a non-profit to a for-profit organisation, impacted the management of the hybridity of the platform. Through this single case study, the master thesis enhanced the understanding of how the concepts of hybrid identities manifest in SE platform. Using a mix of archival analysis covering the period between 2006-2020, and interviews with former CS volunteers, the study explored the following research question: **How do hybrid identities affect SE organisations throughout the hybridisation process?**

In total three identity ideals were identified. These are the *community*, *missionary* and *corporate* identity. As the *community* identity was the core identity to CS in its early days, the 2006 crash as well as the conversion of CS to a for-profit organisation caused the identity patterns to shift. The *community* identity became representative of the users that joined CS in its early days, which some of them still remained active after the conversion. The *missionary* identity characterised the founders and management of CS, and the *corporate* identity was embedded in the post-conversion staff and was particularly shaped by the expectations of the investors. These identities were found to compete over three domains: The authority over the platform, the purpose of growth and the role of monetisation.

On the conflict over authority, the identities opposed their perception of who is in a legitimate position to control the platform organisation. As the *community* identity defended the role of the user in managing the platform, and as the *missionary* and *corporate* respectively favoured the legitimacy of a top-down management and technically skilled people, the divergent

perceptions resulted in a conflict between staff and ambassadors and the quitting of mission-oriented members which affected the fulfillment of the societal goal. Besides, the growth-seeking objectives sought by the *missionary* and *corporate* identity impacted the pursuit of the societal goal as it brought an increased number of freeloaders on the platform, which were not representative of the mission of CS. This has further affected the profit goal as the increase in freeloader travellers caused a misalignment between hosts' and travellers' motivation, and thus increased the number of inactive host profiles. Finally, the conflict over monetisation caused CS to be financially unsustainable. In fact, as the *community* and *missionary* identity opposed the idea of respectively profiting from the community and charging for hosting, CS sought revenue models that would not commodify the host-guest interactions and that would make payments optional. The sudden switch to a subscription payment model following the COVID-19, testimonies of CSs incapacity to remain sustainable over time and the difficulty in finding a revenue model that would not harm the community identity that characterises the users reflecting CSs mission.

This master thesis informs the literature on the sharing economy and hybrid identities by characterising how competing organisational identities can affect the management of two conflicting organisational goals in an SE organisation. With this, the study has emphasised the challenges that arise from the fact that CS is a unique platform that emerged as an online community-based project as an accommodation sharing platform that derives value from social encounters between its users rather than from the asset. It has informed the difficulties of sustaining a value-based community in the context of a for-profit SE accommodation where value is derived from social bonds and non-monetary motivation to participate as the maintenance of a two-sided market has been found to be challenging for CS. On the practical side, the research informs managers of mission-oriented SE organisations on how hybrid identities can affect their platform, and on the challenges surrounding value-based communities in an accommodation sharing platform.

Finally, the paper provides suggestions for further research on how mission-oriented SE organisations deal successfully with the dilemma between growth and fulfilment of a societal goal, on the divergence of the conceptualisation the sense of community between mission oriented and non-mission-oriented SE organisations, on the effect of hybrid identities in for-profit mission-oriented SE organisations, and on the role of the users in shaping identities in SE organisations.

8. Acknowledgments

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Appendix I: Interview Guides

Interview guide pre-conversion

Warm up questions

1. When and for how long were you involved with Couchsurfing?
2. What were your major responsibilities at CS?
3. Do you believe Couchsurfing held a mission at the time you were involved?
   3.1. If yes, what was the mission?
   3.2 Do you believe it held any other competing mission(s)? If so, can you tell me more about them.

Organisational Identity

4. How would you define Couchsurfing's organisational identity at the time you were involved?

   4.1 How did the organisation identity evolve over time? Did it change?
   4.2 If so, what do you believe triggered this change?

5. To what extent do you believe that identity supported the mission(s) of Couchsurfing?

Hybrid organising

6. Can you tell me more about the CS 1.0 crash? How did it affect Couchsurfing?
   6.1 Are there any other key events that affected the way CS was run?

7. How would you define the distribution of power at CS at the time you were involved? Who took the major decisions?
   7.1 To what extend do you believe the community could challenge or influence decision making?

8. Can you describe the organisational structure of Couchsurfing at the time you were involved?

   8.1 *To what extent do you believe this structure supported the mission or mission(s) of Couchsurfing?*

9. Tell me about the volunteer and the staff recruitment strategy at CS at the time you were involved?

9.1 To what extent do you believe the hiring strategy supported the mission or mission(s) of Couchsurfing?

10. Could you tell me more about the NDA? In your opinion, why was it introduced and how did it affect the operations at CS?

11. Can you tell me about the relationships that Couchsurfing had with external actors? (e.g. Donors and other partners).

    12.1 To what extent did these relationships support the mission or mission(s) of Couchsurfing?

Organisational boundaries

12. Tell me more about members at Couchsurfing at the time you were involved. What were their key characteristics?
13. How were these members governed?
14. To what extent do you believe these members reflected the mission or mission(s) of Couchsurfing?
15. To what extend do you believe CS member governance strategies advanced its mission?
16. Is there anything you would like to add?
17. Do you have any contact that would be interested in participating in the study?

Interview guide post conversion

Warm up questions:

1. When and for how long were you involved with Couchsurfing?
2. What role and responsibility did you hold at Couchsurfing?
3. What mission(s) do you believe Couchsurfing held at the time you were involved?
   3.1 Do you believe it held any other competing mission(s)? If so, can you tell me more about them.

Organisational Identity

4. How would you define Couchsurfing's organisational identity at the time you were involved?
   4.1 How did the organisation identity evolve over time? Did it change?
   4.2 If so, what do you believe triggered this change?
   4.3 To what extent do you believe that identity supported the mission of CS?

Hybrid organising

5. Can you describe the organisational structure of Couchsurfing at the time you were involved?

5.1 *To what extent do you believe this structure supported the mission or mission(s) of Couchsurfing?*

6. Tell me about the workforce at the time you were involved? What was the main perceived organisational goal amongst the workforce?

7. Why has Couchsurfing decided to hire a workforce directly from the community?

8.1 *To what extent do you believe the hiring strategy is in line with the mission at Couchsurfing ?*

8. Can you tell me about the relationships that Couchsurfing had with external actors (e.g. Investors or other partners)?

8.1 *To what extent did these relationships support the mission or mission(s) of Couchsurfing ?*

9. Overall, how would CS organise its organisational activities to meet on one hand the profit maximising goal and on the other its societal goal?

Organisational boundaries

10. Tell me about members of the Couchsurfing community at the time you were involved? What were their key characteristics?
11. To what extent do you believe these members reflected the mission or mission(s) of of Couchsurfing?
12. How did Couchsurfing govern each one of them?
13. To what extend do you believe CS governance strategies advanced its mission?
14. To what extent do you believe the community was in power to influence decision making at CS?
15. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix II: Details on the interviewees invited to participate and their answers to the invitation

Participant	Position	Period	Outcome	Contact through
Cameron	Former tech volunteer	Pre-conversion (2007-2009)	Interviewed (50mins)	e-mail
Jimmy	Former volunteer and	Pre-conversion (2003-2009)	Interviewed (50mins)	LinkedIn

	member of the Leadership team			
Daniel	Former volunteer and member of the Leadership team	Pre-conversion & Post conversion (2007-2012)	Refused interview provided short written insights	LinkedIn
Anna	Former community manager at CS	Pre and post-conversion (2009-2012)	Interviewed (26 minutes)	LinkedIn
Invited person A	Former volunteer tech team	Pre-conversion	Refused to participate	e-mail
Invited person B	Former volunteer Safety team	Pre-conversion	Refused to participate	e-mail and LinkedIn
Invited person D	Former volunteer tech team	Pre-conversion (2006-2007)	No answer	e-mail
Invited person E	Former volunteer tech team	Pre-conversion	No answer	e-mail
Invited person F	Former tech team lead	Pre-conversion (2007-2008)	No answer	e-mail
Invited person G	Former CTO Lead	Pre-conversion and post-conversion (2007-2012)	No answer	LinkedIn
Invited person H	Former community manager at CS	Post conversion (2012-2013)	No answer	LinkedIn
Invited person I	Former community manager at CS	Post conversion (2013-2015)	No answer	LinkedIn

All participants and invited people to participate are kept anonymous to avoid any conflict of interest.