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Research note

The evolution of Airbnb regulation - An international longitudinal investigation 2008–2020



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Peer-to-peer accommodation has been extensively studied over the past decade. The area that has most fascinated researchers – and most challenged policy-makers – is how to regulate peer-to-peer accommodation to avoid negative side effects, without restricting economic benefits (Dolnicar, 2019). Regulations are typically reported as individual case studies at one point in time (Hajibaba & Dolnicar, 2017), yet they continuously evolve, sometimes radically, as in the case of Tasmania (Grimmer et al., 2019).

This is the first longitudinal investigation of Airbnb regulations. It develops a typology of destinations based on their regulatory reaction to Airbnb, and identifies key regulatory aims, and specific measures for policy makers to achieve those aims.

Our study focuses on popular tourist destinations affected by the normalisation of peer-to-peer accommodation: San Francisco, New York, Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Paris, Barcelona, Reykjavik, Vienna, Tokyo and Hobart. These destinations experienced reduced quality of life for residents (Sheppard & Udell, 2016), reduced housing availability (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018) and affordability (Zale, 2018), a change in the character of neighbourhoods (Zale, 2018), additional competition for hospitality businesses (Davidson & Infranca, 2018), and potential safety risks for guests (Guttentag, 2015). Residents, commercial accommodation providers and local governments reacted by lobbying against Airbnb. Anyone benefitting from Airbnb (hosts, entrepreneurs and councils earning revenue) supported Airbnb's global lobbying campaign. This tension led destinations to introduce formal regulations.

Based on academic publications, media reports and policy documents, we create a chronological summary of regulatory responses and identify generalisable patterns. Four types of responses emerge: regulation and taxation, introduction of a registration system, refinement and modification of regulations, and collaborative initiatives of governments and platform facilitators. We use these responses to track the evolution of Airbnb regulation.

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