CouchSurfing:

Traveling Off the Beaten Track

To a Better World

This thesis was written to obtain a

Diploma in Tourism Management

at the Swiss Tourism School in Sierre, Switzerland

Sierre, June 12th 2009

_____

Written by:

Ms. Rafaela Huonder

Promenade de la Maladaire 14
1530 Payerne, Switzerland
0041 / 79 327 78 77

Thesis Advisor:

Mr. Leonard Adkins

Professor at the Swiss
Tourism School, Sierre

_____

ECOLE SUISSE
DE TOURISME

E S T

SCHWEIZERISCHE
TOURISMUSFACHSCHULE

S T F

When you travel with CouchSurfing,

You do not ask locals to take a picture of you, they are in it with you.

OVERVIEW

CouchSurfing is an online community within which CouchSurfers from all over the world can offer a place at their home, where members can stay for free. In March 2009, the hospitality network reached the symbolic milestone of one million members spread all over the globe. The non-profit organization's motto is to *Participate in Creating a Better World, One Couch at a Time*. This somewhat utopist philosophy is becoming a reality. The aim of this document is to analyze the travel behavior of CouchSurfers and to define the impact which is derived from the project.

For the purpose of this thesis, a survey was made within the Swiss and International CouchSurfing community. Thanks to the 377 participants, it was shown that CouchSurfers have very different travel behavior than traditional tourists. In addition, some traits common to CouchSurfers were highlighted. Notably, it was shown that 95% of them participate in this project primarily to meet other people and discover other cultures. Budgetary reasons are secondary.

CouchSurfing has economic and social benefits; however, the new travelers introduce significantly less money into the tourism industry. This is due, on the one hand, to the free accommodation and, on the other hand, to CouchSurfers going to less touristy sites and favoring local businesses. From the social point of view, this international community represents a great chance to bring people together. Because of the privileged relationship between hosts and travelers, real friendships are created.

In this project the social benefits largely outweigh the downsides for the economy. Like many other projects, it is a sign that people are looking for alternatives to the traditional consumer society. Through CouchSurfing many needs are fulfilled: travel, authenticity, discovery of new people and cultures. There will certainly be many other papers about this new trend, because the success of CouchSurfing will probably continue to grow in coming years.

RÉSUMÉ

CouchSurfing (surf de canapés) est une communauté en ligne à travers laquelle les CouchSurfers du monde entier peuvent offrir à leur domicile un lieu où d'autres membres peuvent loger gratuitement. En mars 2009, le réseau d'hospitalité a dépassé la barre symbolique de un million de membres aux quatre coins du globe. La devise de l'organisation à but non lucrative est de *Participer à la création d'un monde meilleur un canapé après l'autre*. Cette philosophie quelque peu utopique semble être en passe de devenir réalité. Le but de ce travail est de décrire le comportement touristique des CouchSufers et de définir quels impacts en découlent.

Pour la réalisation de ce travail, une enquête a été menée auprès de la communauté suisse et internationale de CouchSurfing. Grâce aux 377 participants, il a été démontré que les CouchSurfers ont un comportement en matière de voyage très différent des touristes traditionnels. De plus, des traits communs entre les CouchSurfers ont pu être mis en lumière. Il a été démontré notamment que 95% de tous les participants à ce projet le sont principalement pour rencontrer des nouvelles personnes et découvrir des nouvelles cultures. L'aspect pécuniaire est tout à fait secondaire.

CouchSurfing a des bénéfices économiques et sociaux, cependant ces nouveaux voyageurs introduisent significativement moins d'argent dans l'industrie touristique traditionnelle. Ceci est dû d'une part, au faite que le logement est gratuit et d'autre part au fait que les CouchSurfers visitent moins de sites touristiques, au profit de lieux locaux moins prisé . Du point de vue social, cette communauté internationale représente une grande opportunité de rencontrer des gens. Grâce à des relations privilégiées entre les hôtes et les voyageurs, de vraies amitiés se tissent.

Dans ce projet, les avantages sociaux dépassent largement les inconvénients pour l'économie. De plus, comme de nombreux autres projets, c'est un signe que les gens cherchent des alternatives à la traditionnelle société de consommation. A travers CouchSurfing de nombreux besoins sont satisfaits: le voyage, l'authenticité, la découverte de nouvelles personnes et cultures. En outre, il y aura certainement de nombreux autres rapports à propos de cette nouvelle tendance, car le succès grandissant de CouchSurfing ne va probablement pas diminuer dans les prochaines années.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

CouchSurfing ist eine online Gesellschaft durch welche CouchSurfers von der ganze Welt eine Schlafmöglichkeitplatz bei sich zuhause anbieten, wo andere Mitglieder gratis übernachten können. Im März 2009 hat das Bewirtungs-Sozialnetz der symbolische Markstein von einer Million Mitgliedern, die auf dem ganzen Globus leben, erreicht. Das Motto der gemeinnützige Organisation ist *Ein Couch nach dem Andere bis zur Bildung einer besseren Welt*. Diese etwas utopische Philosophie könnte bald der Realität entsprechen. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist das Reiseverhalten der CouchSurfers zu beschreiben und die Effekte davon zu analysieren.

Für diese Studie wurde eine Umfrage der schweizerische und internationale CouchSurfing Gesellschaft durchgeführt in. Dank der 377 Teilnehmern wurde es gezeigt, dass CouchSurfers einen sehr anderes Reiseverhalten als traditionelle Touristen haben. Zusätzlich, wurden gemeinsame Charakteristiken der CouchSurfers gezeigt. Es ist bemerkenswert, dass 95% allen Teilnehmern an diesem Projekt aussagt haben, dass der wichtigste Grund zu surfen, neue Leute und Kulturen kennen zu lernen war. Der finanziellen Aspekt kommt erst viel später.

CouchSurfing bringt ökonomische und soziale Vorteile, jedoch, bringen diese neuartige Reisenden deutlich weniger Geld in die traditionelle Tourismusindutrie hinein. Dies infolge, einerseits, der gratis Übernachtungen und, anderseits, weil CouchSurfers weniger touristische Orten besuchen und weil sie heimische Unternehmungen bevorzügen. Von der soziale Ansicht, repräsentiert diese internationale Gesellschaft eine hervorragende Möglichkeit Leute zusammenzubringen. Dank der privilegierten Beziehungen zwischen dem Gastgeber und den Reisenden können echte Freundschaften entstehen.

In diesem Projekt überwiegen die sozial Bezüge in hohem Masse die wirtschaftliche Nachteile. Wie zahlreiche andere Projekte, ist es ein Zeichen, dass die Leute Alternative zur traditionellen Wohlstandsgesellschaft suchen. Durch CouchSurfing sind viele Bedürfnisse gedeckt: das Reisen, die Authentizität, die Entdeckung von neuen Leuten und Kulturen. Ferner, werden sicher noch viele weitere Referate über diese neue Tendenz geschrieben werden, weil der wachsende Erfolg von CouchSurfing in den nächsten Jahren vermutlich nicht nachlassen wird.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REPERTORY OF GRAPHS

DEFINITIONS

- **Traditional tourism**: can be assimilated to "mass tourism" which is "large scale tourism, commonly, but loosely, used to refer to popular forms of leisure tourism"[1]. This form of tourism is based more on quantity than quality.

- **Traditional tourists**: people who travel within the traditional tourism industry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my mother, Monica, very warmly; she patiently helped me with the English grammar and spelling. In addition, I would like to show my gratitude to Mr. Leonard Adkins who followed me throughout the realization of this thesis and has evaluated it.

---

1 www.stile.coventry.ac.uk/cbs/staff/beech/BOTM/Glossary.htm

INTRODUCTION

When one plans a trip, one of the first things to organize is accommodation. In matter of lodging, there are very special opportunities such as sleeping in a Mongol Yurt, a haunted hotel, in a military bunker hotel or even in an ice hotel…. yet have you ever thought of sleeping in a stranger's home? This is exactly what CouchSurfing is all about; members of the hospitality network can stay at each other's homes for free. This somewhat surprising concept is a fast growing trend in the travel world. Most people who participate in this project have a common point: a keen interest in foreign culture and a desire for authenticity. Are there other common traits to CouchSurfers?

There have been many articles written about this phenomenon, and thousands of personal experiences shared, yet no official study about the travel behavior of this new international community has been made. As a convinced CouchSurfer, I wanted to get more insight through statistics, from a touristic and not sociologic point to view. To achieve this, a survey was lead within the Swiss and International CouchSurfing community. The initial idea was to find out what the Swiss tourism industry could get out of this new trend; however, after having collected all the information from members of this hospitality network, it became clear that CouchSurfing is a travel trend different from all the others, which does not lend itself to benefiting traditional tourism.

In this document you will first discover what CouchSurfing is all about, followed by the results of the survey. Is the only motivation to stay at people's homes to save money? Are there mostly students who participate in this network? Do CouchSurfers travel more or less than traditional tourists? These are just a few of the questions which will be answered in this paper. From this precious information a few conclusions will become crystal clear. In the last part of this paper, you will discover the economic and social impacts of CouchSurfing. An idea which might sound utopist at first, will reveal itself as a message from the population, which is searching for alternatives to the consumer society. Is CouchSurfing a sign of a paradigm shift in Western society? Will it be able to bring people together, which the traditional tourism industry has failed to do? You will find some surprising answers to these and other questions in the coming chapters.

The content of this thesis engages solely the author and in no case the liability of the Swiss School of Tourism.

1 PRESENTATION

In this section you will discover CouchSurfing, its history, mission and development. Furthermore, the entire process which a CouchSurfer goes through will be presented --- from the sign up to the return after a trip. Finally, you will find a listing of various projects which can be assimilated to CouchSurfing, because of their philosophy or way of functioning.

1.1 Overview of a worldwide success

Currently, CouchSurfing is the largest hospitality exchange network worldwide[1]. This project uses its website, www.couchsurfing.org, as the main platform to promote its activities. It is a "free-membership website helping travelers of the world connect with each other. Members post a profile displaying a brief introduction of themselves, some basic personal information, their geographical location, and whether they are willing to host others in their homes."[2] The mission statement of CouchSurfing is *Participate in Creating a Better World, One Couch at a Time*[3]. By opening their homes and lives to members from the other side of the country or globe, hosts and travelers create a meaningful connection between people and cultures. CouchSurfing is listed as a registered charity in New Hampshire (USA)[4].

Casey Fenton, the inventor and founder of this project, came to his idea in 2000 when he traveled to Island. "Rather than stay at a hostel, Fenton randomly emailed 1500 students from the University of Iceland asking if he could stay. Fenton ultimately received more than fifty offers of accommodation."[5] The website was launched in 2003, yet truly started to be successful in 2005. "In June 2006 the project experienced a number of computer-related problems resulting in much of the database being irrevocably lost. (…) A CouchSurfing collective was underway in Montreal at the time, and those in attendance committed to fully recreating the original site, with users to re-enter their profile data.

New logo release in March 09 for million member milestone

---

1 www.wikipedia.org: CouchSurfing
2 www.gonomad.com
3 www.couchsurfing.org
4 www.sos.nh.gov/corporate/soskb/Corp.asp?473515
5 www.wikipedia.org: CouchSurfing

"CouchSurfing 2.0" was announced early in July 2006"[1]. The success of the website has grown exponentially since then.

In 2004 the site had just over 6000 members. During the past few years, the coverage by the media has widened which has helped promote the project, along with word of mouth. Weekly sign ups went from around 100 in 2004 to an impressive 10'000-13'000 in 2009. With this vertiginous success, CouchSurfing reached the symbolic milestone of a million (!) members in March 2009. There are CouchSurfers all over the globe in 231 countries with a representation of over 1250 languages. Since the creation of the network, approximately 1.1 mio surfings have been reported and 1.3 mio friendships have been created[2]. These impressive numbers will undoubtedly continue to grow in the future. You will find the socio-demographical presentation of the CouchSurfers in the chapter 2.

Figure 1: Location of registered CouchSurfers[3]
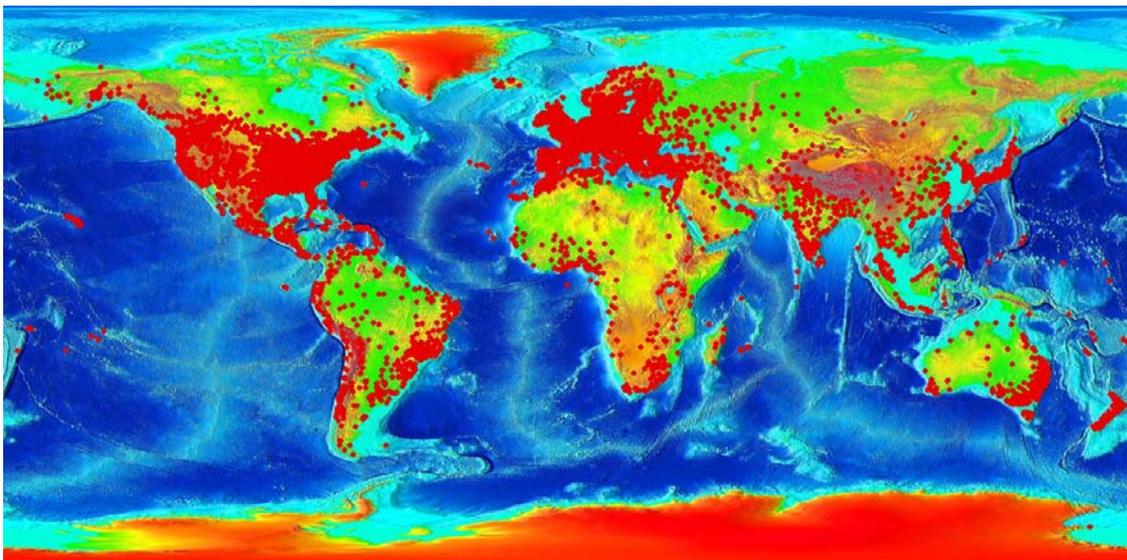
The first reaction most non-CouchSurfers have when they hear or read about the concept, is a big worry about security. The creators of the website have imagined many precautionary measures. Firstly, the system of references and friend links which create a solid network with testimonials which members can leave on the profile page of CouchSurfers they have met. Secondly, there is a verification system which consists of three levels through which names and addresses are checked (via a credit card payment). Nonetheless, these verification levels are not mandatory, both surfers and hosts are free to

---

1 www.wikipedia.org: CouchSurfing
2 www.couchsurfing.org: Statistics in May 2009
3 www.couchsurfing.org

decide how much importance they put on this verification. Thirdly, there is a vouching system; "members can only become vouched for by an already vouched for CouchSurfing.org member. Essentially, it's a trust circle."[1]

In the "cultural exchange" concept of CouchSurfing, there are various other services offered through the website. On the virtual side, members have the possibility to meet each other on the Live Chat or through many groups of common interest. In addition, on the real-life side, numerous activities are organized via these groups. Depending on the size of the CouchSurfing community in the region, there are weekly, monthly or annual meetings, which are open to local members, or surfers who are in the area. Mainly, these encounters are organized by "Ambassadors" who are in charge of regional/national development of CouchSurfing and integration of new members. However, spontaneous activities, events and gatherings are often suggested by other members of the groups. For keen CouchSurfers there are even CouchSurfing camps such as the "Berlin beach camp".

To sum up, CouchSurfing is far way more than a way to save money on accommodation while traveling; "it is a way of life and the best way for meeting positive people who are interested in traveling, helping travelers and exchange experiences"[2]. CouchSurfers feel that they travel off the beaten track and that they gain a much greater experience than they could ever have gotten if they traveled in the traditional way.

1.2 Thorough preparation for a spontaneous trip

Anyone who wants to start a "CouchSurfing career" has to first sign up on the website, which is very user-friendly. When creating a profile it is important to fill it out as completely as possible, including a picture. At this stage, after 30 minutes, the entire world is yours! If you cannot travel, you can host people and let the world come to you or you could also meet the CouchSurfing community in your area during meetings and activities. On the other hand, if you decide to go on a journey you should first decide on an itinerary and start looking for possible hosts within a few kilometers of your destination.

Once you have found a few potential hosts, contact them in a personal way mentioning a few words about yourself, your journey, the date and length you would like to stay at his/her home. When you get some positive answers (which is not always the case

---

1 www.couchsurfing.org/help.html#safe
2 Anonymous reply to the survey led for this theses

depending on the place and the dates) you can decide whose couch you would like to surf. Confirm all the details with your host, adjust your travel plans and you are all set to go. It is always appropriate to bring a little gift from your home country for your host (if you cannot, do not hesitate to give a hand in the house, for example with the dishes).

When you arrive on site, depending on your arrangement with your host, he/she might come and pick you up or you will meet them at their place. It does happen that you do not find your host as you had agreed. It is not a hotel, your hosts have jobs and setbacks might happen. Therefore, it is good to have his/her phone number before you arrive there. When you meet your host, the fun starts and you can dive into a new culture. All the experiences are different, yet if you are open-minded and reach out, you will have friends everywhere you travel. When you stay at someone's place, you will probably have very spontaneous activities with your host and if your host agrees to it, you may end up staying longer than planned.

When the time has come to leave, you probably will have new friends and numerous good memories. Back home, you can write about your experience with your host on his/her profile. After a first CouchSurfing experience, most people want to host people at their place or help the CouchSurfing community advance the mission of the project. This is the way CouchSurfing *Participates in Creating a Better World, On Couch at a Time.*

"I have just hosted my first CouchSurfer and it was a wonderful experience! The world is made smaller by meeting and hosting travelers and it certainly inspires you to travel more and meet more people..."

Evelise Vaoga, Philippines, 9th May 09, testimonial on www.couchsurfing.org

1.3 Similar concepts: social projects based on volunteering

Nowadays people like to travel more, they fancy new experiences and discovering new cultures. Internet is the perfect tool to meet new people and organize trips. The tourism sector involves billions of dollars of profit; however, there are people who do not want to travel with the traditional tourism industry. Below you will find some examples of other organizations or websites which allow people to travel in a different way. Among others, humanitarian tourism is a trend which is growing very fast. There also are people who would like to find an alternative to the traditional consumer society in their everyday lives. In the

second part of this chapter you will find a list of non-touristic examples of how people can get in contact directly, without using regular companies, and ways people can volunteer to help others.

1.3.1   In the tourism sector

There are several programs or websites which have been created with a similar purpose to CouchSurfing.org. Here is a non-exhaustive list of similar websites and projects:

- **Servas**: "Servas is an international, non-governmental, multicultural peace association run by volunteers in over 100 countries. Founded in 1949 by Bob Luitweiler as a peace movement, Servas International is a non-profit organization working to build understanding, tolerance and world peace"[1]. To join this program there is a personal interview as well as an annual fee to pay and it is still mainly operated with a paper-based system.

- **www.Hospitalityclub.org**: this is the second largest hospitality network with an identical concept to CouchSurfing. It was created by a German man in 2000 and now has approximately 448,000 members in 221 countries[2]. The website with which the Hospitality Club functions is less user-friendly and appealing than CouchSurfing. There are other new-comers, such as **www.Bewelcome.org** and **www.Globalfreeloader.com.** These online communities, bring people together by offering free accommodation all over the world. The aim of these projects is to save money and to make new friends whilst seeing the world from a local's perspective. In both cases it is not possible to have access to the data base without signing up, unlike CouchSurfing.

- **www.Travbuddy.com**: the idea of this site is to give a platform for people from all over the world who travel alone to arrange common itineraries or to meet up in a destination. Many other websites exist for people to find travel partners.

- **www.Houseswap.com**: on this website homes are exchanged as well as hospitality. "Home exchangers trade their homes, condominiums or apartments at a time that is convenient to both parties. (…) Hospitality exchangers, on the other hand, host each

---

1 www.servas.org
2 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality club

other in their homes at designated times. Your home exchange partners stay with you as guests and then you go and stay with them as their guests. There is a social aspect to this kind of exchange that some exchangers particularly enjoy"[1].

- **www.Housecarers.com**: a fast growing trend - House Sitting. The service is free for home owners, the costs are covered by house sitter fees. Thanks to this service home owners can leave their home and pets for a few weeks/months and these will be taken care of by house sitters who have the chance to live for free in these houses.

- **www.Wwoof.org**: this program started in the UK in 1971 and has since become an international movement that is helping people share more sustainable ways of living. In return for volunteer help, WWOOF hosts offer food, accommodation and opportunities to learn about organic lifestyles. This concept combines both social and environmental aspects which people are looking for nowadays.

1.3.2   In areas other than tourism

- **www.Easyswap.org**: this Swiss website offers a system of exchange of goods and services to its members with an "internal currency" which is called "swaps". When one gets swaps, he/she can trade within the network. The aim of this website is to promote exchange between people with different social backgrounds and at the same time to offer a complement to the free market. The founders of this website would like to allay two supposedly contradictory principals: growth and sustainability.

- **www.Homeshare.org**: this organization is active in eight countries. "Homeshare is the exchange of housing for help. It recognizes that two people have needs and something to give"[2]. These exchanges can be between people from different parts of the world, but also among people in the same area. Another new trend is for students to live with older people; accommodation is free, but the students have to help their hosts and be their company.

---

1 www.houseswap.com
2 www.homeshare.org

- **www.Carpoolworld.com**: this portal is conceived to enable people worldwide to find somebody with whom they can share a regular commuter ride or an occasional trip. In most cases, the gas expenses are split.

- **www.Admr.org**: the "Association du Service à Domicile" is a French association which counts over 110'000 volunteers. The aim of this group is to offer help at home in various sectors, such as healthcare, housework or family help. The price of all services depends on the income and the possibilities of the person who needs it.

2 TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR OF THE COUCHSURFING COMMUNITY

Most touristic activities have been quantified and surveyed. In Switzerland, yearly studies are conducted to measure the impact of tourism on the country's economy. In addition, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office carries out a study every two years about the travel behavior of Swiss residents. It is partly based on these observations that a comparison can be made between the behavior of "traditional tourists" and CouchSurfers in regards to travel. Despite the fact that the CouchSurfing community is a very heterogeneous population, this section of the thesis will try to assess some traits common to these travelers. The analysis permits a clearer insight into this budding trend.

First, here are a few details about the total CouchSurfing community[1]. In June 2009, it counts over 1.1 million members. The top 5 countries are: the United States (23.6%), Germany (9.2%), France (8.4%), Canada (5.3%), and the United Kingdom (4.9%). Furthermore, Europeans represent the largest group with 49.6%, followed by North Americans with 30%. The gender representation is relatively close: male 50.7% and female 41.3%, the remaining 6.8% are registered as "several people": couples, families or housemates (1.2% are unknown). The age division is as follows: 18 to 24 years old: 44.2%; 25 to 34 years old: 41.4%; 35 to 49 years old: 10.6%; and over 50 years old: 2.9%. And a curiosity: there are 254 CouchSufers in the world who are over 80 years old! There are many other statistics about the CouchSurfing community which can be found on the official website.

2.1 On methods and application of the survey

While sociologists have studied the CouchSurfing phenomena, no official survey has been published about the behavior and attitude of CouchSurfers, apart from the official statistics provided on the website. The aim of this survey[2], therefore, is to reveal as scrupulously as possible an accurate picture of the attitude and travel behavior the CouchSurfing community. Before going into the analysis of the figures which came out of the

1 www.couchsurfing.org: Statistics
2 See appendix 1

survey, let us first present the methodology as well as some important information concerning the assessment of the responses.

2.1.1   Methodology and surveyed community

For the purpose of this thesis, two surveys were led simultaneously. Firstly, a questionnaire designated for the Swiss CouchSurfing community; secondly, a similar set of questions for the worldwide CouchSurfing community. These surveys were launched on the World Wide Web on March 9th 2009 and were filled in by CouchSurfers over a 2-month period. The links to the surveys were posted in 44 groups/forums from the 5 continents on the official website www.couchsurfing.org. A high response rate was reached for both surveys, since one person out of two who clicked on the link answered the entire set of questions. Most spontaneous replies from people were positive; furthermore, the results of this study will be shared online with the Couchurfing community. However, it is important to underline that a few skeptical people voiced their fears of having the survey handed over to companies with economic interests.

The objective with the survey of the Swiss CouchSurfing population is to enable comparison with national statistics, while for the international CouchSurfing community, the aim is exploratory research about the travel behavior. For practical reasons of time, no sampling was made; anyone who wanted to take the survey could do it. Therefore, there is a greater margin of error due to the randomness of the selection. This will be discussed in the next section.

A total of 377 people took part in the survey; 117 Swiss CouchSurfers and 260 international surfers. The surveyed population[1] has an almost equal representation of men and women, with a few more women represented in the international community. This does not exactly match the global CouchSurfing community which has more men than women. Most people who answered are between 18 and 35 years old. The large representation of people between 26 and 35 years old shows, that not only students are interested in this new way of travelling. This is also confirmed with the global community. The occupation of the surveyed CouchSurfers further confirms this theory, since the proportion of workers compared to students or unemployed people, is significantly higher. In addition, among the Swiss community which was interviewed, the most represented income range is 4001-8000.-

---

1 See appendix 2, T1

CHF per month, followed by <2000.- CHF per month and 2000-4000.- CHF per month. The last range mentioned can indicate a social class of people who might not be able to go on holiday as much as wealthier people or students, who have more free time.

The place of origin within the international community is mainly European; the American continent represents the second largest population (largely composed of North Americans). The three remaining continents represent a smaller proportion of the people who answered. The representation is similar to the representation in the global community.

Regarding the involvement in CouchSurfing of the surveyed people, about a quarter of the people take part and organize local CouchSurfing events. This number is especially high in comparison with the global community, considering that there are only about 0.1% Ambassadors. However, more than half of the people said that they participate rarely or sometimes, which represents less involved people. Finally, the surveyed CouchSurfers noted the proportion of their trips which are with CouchSurfing. In both surveys the biggest group of people state that few of their travels were with the social network. However, the groups who stated that half or most of the trips are with CouchSurfing are not far behind.

2.1.2   More indicative than representative survey

As mentioned earlier, the surveyed population does not have identical proportions to the global community. There are many reasons for this. First of all, because the link was public and not sent directly to people to create a representative sampling. Furthermore, the survey was constituted primarily of questions with an outgoing perspective. Few questions had to do with the behavior of hosts; most were aimed at travel behavior. Hence, CouchSurfers who mainly host and rarely travel could not answer these questionnaires. Because of the non-representativeness of the persons who answered, it is not possible to calculate margins of error.

Despite the fact that the surveyed group does not perfectly reflect the makeup of the global population, the answers that will be analyzed are still valuable indicators. People who were not convinced by CouchSurfing did not take part to this survey, yet this is not a problem because the questions were not aimed to judge satisfaction rates, but more about the utilization of CouchSurfing. In other words, if you interviewed tourists about their behavior in a ski resort, only people who spend their holidays in this particular resort would answer. The opinion of the people who decided not to go there on holiday would not enter

into the survey. For this reason, the answers of very involved CouchSurfers bring precious insights. The proof that there are experienced CouchSurfers in the surveyed group is that more than half signed up in 2007 or before that date. Again this is not reflective of the entire hospitality network, but it gives a more accurate picture than if people who have travelled just once with CouchSurfing, described their travel behavior.

2.2 Results

Now that the profile of the participants has been defined, we will delve right into the answers of the CouchSurfers. The first step will be a comparison of the travel behavior of the Swiss CouchSurfing community and Swiss residents. The figures representing the Swiss residents were found in a survey released by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office in 2005[1] (a few numbers could only be found in the 2003 version). The second step will include all surveyed people and we will look at some traits common to all CouchSurfers. One can have many ideas about CouchSurfing some of which were confirmed, and in some cases surprising tendencies were shown.

On the technical side, for certain questions CouchSurfers could give more than one answer. This means that the sum of the percentages is higher than 100%. In many cases there will not be any specific numbers mentioned because the Swiss statistics and this survey were not conducted the same way; therefore, the figures cannot be compared. Instead, the ranking position will be used primarily. In addition, not all the answers will be interpreted; thus all the results are in charts T2 and T3. Once again, let us point out that these numbers are indicative and do not represent the global CouchSurfing community.

2.2.1   Comparison between Swiss residents and Swiss Couchsurfers[2]

In June 2009, Switzerland is the 17th most represented country on CouchSurfing with about 17'500 CouchSurfers. This number has considerably increased since January of this year, when there were 13'500. This means a growth of 30% within half a year, as astonishing as the expansion of this global community. Switzerland has also reached a peak in its population; this year our country counts over 7.7 million inhabitants[3]. For the purpose of balancing the comparison, one should keep in mind, that the surveyed Swiss residents

1 Comportement en Matière de Voyages de la Population Résidante Suisse, en 2005, 2007
2 See appendix 3, T2
3 24 Heures, 26.02.2009

represent all social classes. Naturally, in the national survey there are people who do not travel, which pulled the average down. On the contrary, it is obvious that people who do not travel did not take part to the CouchSurfing survey. This can explain the relatively big discrepancies between national and CouchSurfing numbers.

Frequency and length of travel

The first striking difference is the frequency of travel. The Swiss residents travelled an average of 2,7 times in a year (3.2 for people between 24 and 44); whereas CouchSurfers reach the frequency of 5.8. This is twice as high and if compared to the breakdown of the Swiss average it shows that the difference is even bigger with Swiss students or people who earn less than 8000.- CHF. If the CouchSurfers' figures are surprisingly high, which is certainly due to the fact that the amount of money saved on accommodation can be invested in future trips. In addition, this high number of departures can also be explained with the 49.6% of the CouchSurfing trips which are taken over a long weekend. This actually is extremely close to the average length of trips of the Swiss resident: 49.1% of their journeys include 1 to 3 nights. The only important difference is that CouchSurfers take more long trips. 17.1% of polled persons spend an average of more than 1 month when travelling with CouchSurfing. In the Swiss community 8.2% stay more than 14 nights (for this point the proportion of people who traveled more than a month is probably a lot smaller).

Departure period and destination

As shown on the graph below, the departure period is quite similar between Swiss residents and CouchSurfers. This can be explained by the fact that CouchSurfers are a heterogeneous group and probably have the same constraints as the rest of the population. However, there are two months during which the members of the hospitality network travel more: August and September. The reason for this might be the fact that the proportion of students is higher in the CouchSurfing community, hence a departure after the high season when university has not started. It is also interesting to note that all the departures are not concentrated during the summer period, but more spread out over the year. CouchSurfing is not so much like holidays at the beach, but would be more assimilated to city tourism, because hosts often live in residential areas and less along beaches like hotels would be.

Figure 2: Months of departures
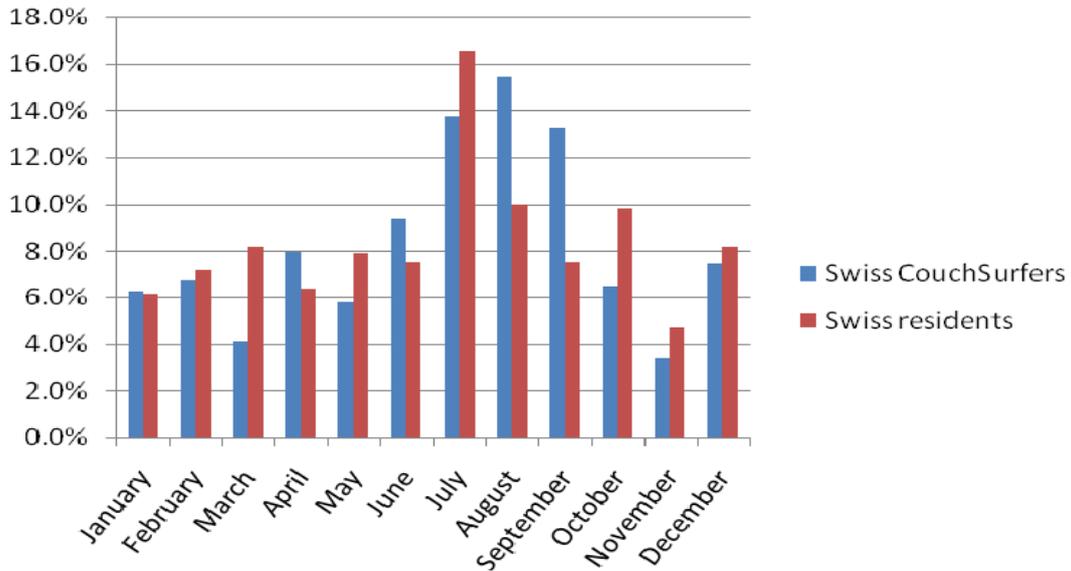
If the departure periods of CouchSurfing follow a parallel pattern to traditional tourists, the destinations are very similar as well. Switzerland is the #1 destination in both rankings. This observation is optimistic for inbound tourism. It is very well conceivable, that some people who might have taken a day trip before, delay their return trip and stay one or two nights more. Considering that the hospitality network fosters intercultural communication, it will be interesting to see if it can shatter the Röstigaben…

There are a total of seven identical destinations in the top 10. Most of them are in neighboring countries, which is logical since the travel time is relatively short, but also because there are thousands of members spread all over the European continent. France, Germany, Italy and the UK are part of the nations with the most members in the entire website. Swiss members have, therefore, a very

Figure 3: Destination ranking

	Swiss CouchSurfers		Swiss Residents
# 1	Switzerland	# 1	Switzerland
# 2	France	# 2	Italy
# 3	German	# 3	France
# 4	United States of America	# 4	Germany
# 5	Spain	# 5	Spain
# 6	Italy	# 6	Austria
# 7	Austria	# 7	United Kingdom of Great Britain
# 8	Portugal	# 8	Greece
# 9	China	# 9	United States of America
# 10	United Kingdom of Great Britain	# 10	Canada

vast choice of hosts in neighboring countries. When Swiss CouchSurfers travel to the United States of America (answer #4), it surely is for longer stays. Hence, we see another reason to travel within the network, since there are over 250'000 members all over the country.

An astonishing country to find in this classification is China with its restrictive politics. The acceptation of CouchSurfing in this communist country could probably be another theme for research in itself. Yet, let's point out that there are only 15'000 in this large country, which is 2'000 less than in Switzerland. Thus, it could be questioned whether there is an over-representation of people who traveled to China, in comparison with the rest of the Swiss members. There were 62 countries cited and in the bottom of the ranking, there were countries such as Bolivia, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and even Iran and Israel. When people travel to these countries one can truly hope that CouchSurfing can improve intercultural understanding.

Transportation to and at the destination

The top three forms of transportation to the destination for CouchSurfers are: train, plane and bus. Private and rental cars are used very seldom by this category of people. On the contrary, Swiss residents favor individual motorized transportation far more than public transportation and plane. The probable explanation for CouchSurfers not using cars is that one has less personal contact than with public transportation. In addition, the high proportion of people who travel by train is logical because everybody knows that Swiss people are used to travelling by train and with Switzerland's central location, it is perfect for travel throughout Europe, the main destination of Swiss CouchSurfers. However, the plane also covers a fair share of all the transportation. Low-cost companies certainly are the cause of this success. CouchSurfers might take advantage of mini prices for weekend trips. The founder of CouchSurfing had actually bought a cheap flight to Iceland and stayed at students' homes, which gave him the idea for this project.

Once at the destination, traditional Swiss tourists get around primarily on foot, followed by car, train and public transportation. This is not exactly the same for CouchSurfers who use public transportation first; secondly travel on foot and thirdly (and far behind) by car. The reason why members of the online community travel more with public transportation is to experience their destination the same way local people do. In addition, since most of them use public transportation to reach their destination, they have no other

means of transportation once there. But in actual fact, when the type of holiday is the same for traditional tourists as for CouchSurfers (city trips), they probably use the same means of transportation on site.

Interests

The interests of CouchSurfers in their travels brought no major surprises. The #1 answer was culture, which follows the line of what was said previously and this will be mentioned again later. CouchSurfing is all about meeting new people and living with them, so it is logical that travelers want to discover this first. This goes along with the answer #4 and #5, language and food, which are integral parts of the site and of people's lives. It is astonishing that Swiss residents judge culture as the last point of interest. No explanation seems to come spontaneously for this fact, apart maybe, that the word culture was coupled with religion, and thus did not correspond to peoples' expectations.

Figure 4: Interest ranking

CouchSufers	
# 1	Culture
# 2	Nature
# 3	Backpacking experience
# 4	Language
# 5	Food
# 6	Mountain
# 7	History
# 8	Sea/Beach
# 9	Nightlife
# 10	Sport
# 11	Shopping
# 12	Business

Swiss residents	
# 1	Holidays
# 2	Business
# 3	Visits
# 4	Sport
# 5	Culture/Religion

The #1 answer of Swiss residents regarding their reason to travel was holidays. This means, time to relax and recover from the stressful life they have at home. And this brings us directly to the comment of a CouchSurfer, who said that travelling with CouchSurfing was not a "holiday", but a "trip". CouchSurfing means getting involved and making the effort to socialize and not simply relax. This idea will be mentioned again in a further chapter.

The #2 answer of CouchSurfers was less foreseeable; it seems that CouchSurfing members not only have a social, but also environmental sensitivity. In parallel to this answer, we can see answer #6, mountain, also in the first half of the ranking. Answer #3 is a backpacking experience. This allows us to mention the fact that all CouchSurfers do not have the same mentality as backpackers. A few surveyed people said that backpacking has became so common that backpackers are now part of traditional tourists, who meet other

tourists in youth hostels. This naturally is not the opinion of all the CouchSurfers, yet it is interesting to mention.

The bottom of the table groups nightlife, sports and shopping; activities "opposed" to the cultural side, which probably explains the rankings. The final observation is regarding business; most interviewed CouchSurfers expressed very low interest for professional trips, whereas for Swiss residents, business represents an important reason to travel (especially for self-employed people and those with a revenues of over 12'000.- CHF per month). It would be worth finding out if some CouchSurfing members travel because of their work, but do not use the social network on these occasions.

2.2.2   More insight into the motivation for travelling with CouchSurfing[1]

There were 44 nationalities represented in the international community who replied to the survey. The questionnaire was posted in groups from the five continents; nonetheless, it showed that in many groups from countries with less CouchSurfers, most people in the group were people travelling to the destination rather than less locals. When one compares the answers given by the Swiss group and the international group, they are fairly close which shows that real tendencies have come out in this survey.

When one travels with CouchSurfing it is all about emotions. When asked if they have the feeling of traveling off the beaten track, 76.8% of CouchSurfers agreed. This impression probably increases the feeling of authenticity. If you are not part of a large group of tourists, but rather the only person who is not a local, one feels truly integrated at the host's place. The positive impression which one gets when travelling within the social network along with the ease of using the system, can explain why people travel more since they are part of the CouchSurfing network. This is the case for 77.9% of surveyed people. If this is only the case for 51.3% of Swiss CouchSurfers, it probably is because they already used to travel a lot.

Heard about CouchSurfing the first time and reason for participating

Since the hospitality network does not make any profit, it is natural that they do not invest much for the promotion of their web-based platform. Not one dollar of the $783,910 2008 budget was invested for marketing[2]! It is obvious that people did not hear about

---

1 See appendix 4, T3
2 www.couchsurfing.org: Finances

CouchSurfing through ads. 55.4% of the polled heard about this phenomenon by word of mouth. And who else than experienced members would be the best ambassadors of this social project? Internet also plays a role in spreading the word, as 26.2% found CouchSurfing through that media. Lately, there has also been a lot of information in the press and on television, yet these media releases only presented the trend, without advertising for it.

For most people who hear about it and feel they could travel that way, the first reaction is usually to think that it is a free accommodation. Yet after the fist convincing experience, people usually see the other positive aspects of CouchSurfing, primarily the fact that they can meet people.

Figure 5: Reasons to travel with CouchSurfing
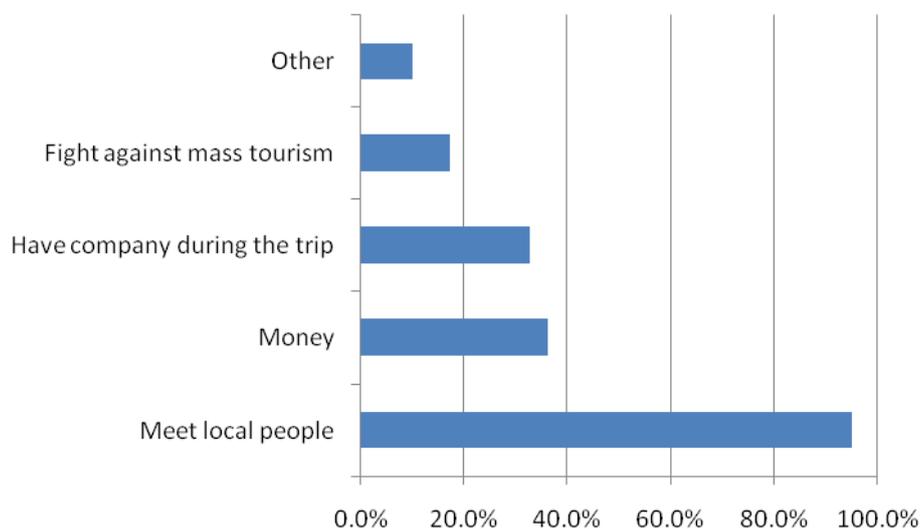
As high as 95.0% of surveyed people see the human aspect as a reason to stay at other peoples' homes. Less than 40% judge money as a reason and about the same proportion enjoys company during their trip. As mentioned in the previous chapter, people tend to voyage alone more often. Further, 48.1% of members of the community do not offer a place to sleep, but say that they were available to have a drink or meet people who are in their region. It also occurs that CouchSurfers book a hotel and meet up with other people in the area to discover the place.

Inland-outland & information sources

If the aim is to discover other mentalities and cultures, this explains that 77.9% of the trips are abroad. Yet this might vary widely depending on the country of residency. North American or Canadians probably do not go abroad as much as Europeans. Once the travel destination is chosen, some people plan a program ahead of time, while others go with the

flow. Yet, at some point, everyone looks for some information about sightseeing or other activities.

Most travelers follow the indications of their hosts, who know the place and can give insider tips or even accompany. The second source of information is internet. As an online community, it is most natural to take a look on the net, it is also possible to ask for advise on forums on www.couchsurfing.org. 60.0% of CouchSurfers leave some space for improvisation, but more interesting, 49.6% say they also use guidebooks. These travel aids, have had wide success since many years and apparently the tips given in these books also help CouchSurfers.

Figure 6: Source of information
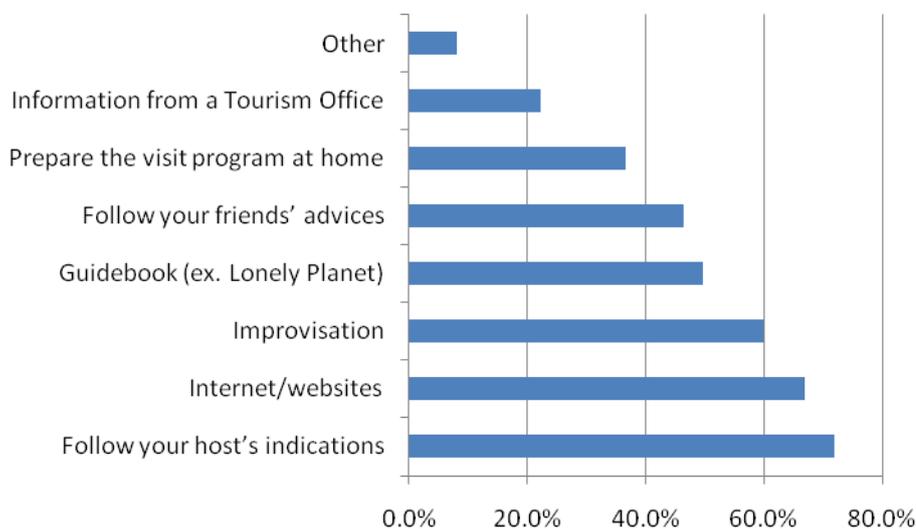
The majority of stays do not exceed 2 nights; 63.1% of questioned CouchSurfers spend between one or two nights at their host's place, 33.5% stay between 3 and 5 nights and 3.5% stay an average of more than 5 nights. This depends on both parties. If one has an itinerary organized, and if there are many other destinations planned afterwards. For hosts, there are two sides to the issue: on the one hand, having someone too long in your, home takes up too much time and privacy, and on the other hand, if guests do not stay long enough there is not time to get to know the person well.

3   WHY SHOULD THE ECONOMY ALWAYS BENEFIT FROM AN INGENIOUS IDEA?

The initial idea of this thesis was to identify the travel behavior of CouchSurfers, as well as the impact of this type of travel on the tourism sector, and finally, to think about how the economy could take advantage of this new target group. However, after having analyzed the reasons why people travel with CouchSurfing and put in perspective their genuine will to discover new cultures and people, a question arises: Why should the economy always benefit from an ingenious idea? CouchSurfers are looking for authenticity; they want to travel off the beaten track and probably do not want to be part of traditional mass tourism.

In this section, we will discuss the economical and social impacts of CouchSurfing. There are benefits and downsides to both sectors, now we will see if one sector tips the scale. The world is going through a financial crisis on a global scale, which has incited many people to consider that the consumer society in which we live, is not the only way to live. They are starting to consider non-traditional alternatives to accomplishing tasks. CouchSurfing is part of these alternatives which will probably seduce more and more people as the crisis continues. In the last part of this thesis we will see if the fantasy that tourism is a key to intercultural understanding might be fulfilled by CouchSurfing, since this rarely is the case with mass tourism. In this section the figures will always come from the survey of the international community. All the details about the numbers can be found in the chart T4.

It is important to mention that the ecological impact of CouchSurfing will not be discussed. Nonetheless, let us simply mention that the impact of mobility is similar to traditional tourism. Yet "every night stayed at a local's home means that much less demand for hotel rooms"[1].

3.1   Economic benefits: the old vision

"The wildfire advance of the consumer lifestyle around the globe marks the most rapid and fundamental change in day-to-day existence the human species has ever experienced. Over a few short generations, we in the affluent fifth of humanity have become

---

1 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality service

car drivers, television watchers, mall shoppers, throwaway buyers"[1] and greedy tourists. In 2008 the total number of international tourist arrivals was as high as 924 million[2] and this number will continue to increase during the coming years. In 2007, international tourism revenue added up to 846 billion USD[3]. The tourism industry is an important part of many countries' economy and a financial boon for some developing countries. Therefore, this sector should not be neglected.

In this traditional vision of the economy with consumption being the most important aspect of a society, it is difficult to imagine that a target market of one million people can go on holiday without bringing anything to the economy. It is true that in many ways CouchSurfing avoids the traditional tourism industry. However, in other aspects, CouchSurfers do benefit the economy where they travel. In the following section we will discuss the positive and negative sides.

3.1.1　Benefits: more profit for the local economy

At first glance, one might think that CouchSurfing does not have any economic benefits. Yet, there are numerous ways in which this project has a positive impact on the economy. First of all, it is important to mention that the amount of money spent during a trip depends immensely on the country. The phenomenon is the same as with traditional tourism. On the average, half of interrogated CouchSurfers spend more than 39.40 CHF[4] per day during a CouchSurfing trip and the other half spends less than that. Depending on the destination, some spend no more than 5-10.- CHF per day and some spend up to 200.- CHF. This shows that there is a wide range of budgets to travel with CouchSurfing. Even if the figure is not as high as what traditional tourists would spend, it does mean a benefit for the economy.

"Many tourist vacations today are sold in package form, often including flights, hotels, rental cars, sightseeing tours, and coupons for chain restaurants and bars. While this makes purchasing more convenient, it also puts more money in the hands of large multinational corporations (...). This comes at the expense of locally-owned independent businesses. Accommodation sharing helps to break apart this monopoly and hopefully

---

1 www.worldwatch.org/node/1070 about DURNING Alan, 1992
2 UNWTO Tourism Barometer
3 Data as collected by UNWTO 2008
4 See appendix 5, T4. Same for the rest of this chapter

redirects some of the tourist revenue back to the local or national economy"[1]. Like other forms of tourism where people do not buy packages, the money will be redistributed in a more equitable way within the local economy. "We believe that CouchSurfing tends to benefit in a challenged economy", said CouchSurfing co-founder Daniel Hoffer.

Where do CouchSurfers spend money in the tourism sector? First of all for transportation, which represents the largest expense for 62.7% of the surveyed CouchSurfers. Almost 2/3 of the surveyed community travels more since they are in this network, which means they all spend more money on transportation than they would have previously. Airplanes and trains represent the two most used means of transportation. Furthermore, 85.8% assert that they visit "some touristy places (the musts), but the rest, unknown places", which also is a way money flows in the tourism industry. Touristy activities represent the third cost item in a CouchSurfer's budget, before souvenirs and shopping. However, receipts from CouchSurfers probably are not as large as from regular tourists.

Figure 7: Budget, cost items

	# 1	# 2	# 3	# 4	# 5
Transportation	62.7%	23.8%	8.1%	4.6%	0.8%
Food	22.3%	53.1%	20.4%	3.5%	0.8%
Touristy activities	13.1%	16.9%	49.2%	13.1%	7.7%
Souvenirs	1.2%	2.7%	12.3%	53.8%	30.0%
Shopping	0.8%	3.5%	10.0%	25.0%	60.8%

Another area where for which CouchSurfers spend money is food, listed as second most important expense and an unavoidable cost item. Nonetheless, CouchSurfers do not always eat in touristy areas. They might be in local restaurants or cook at their hosts' place. The surveyed people mentioned "cook at my host's place" as being the place where they normally eat, followed by "restaurant", "fast-food" and "pick-nicks". This means that local grocery stores get some customers they would not have had with traditional tourists. For instance, when a CouchSurfers visits Zuerich with a host, he/she might not visit "Niederdorf", but go and have a drink at "Letten" where the young Zuerich community goes after work. In addition, it is common for travelers to pay a round of drinks for their host

---

1 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality service

when they go to a bar or restaurant. For hosts who like to give a tour to their guests they might go out for dinner, which they might not have done without a guest.

The fact that CouchSurfers spend money in local areas and less touristy places is the most important economic benefit. Even if they do not spend money on accommodation, most other expenses stay the same. Furthermore, the money they save by not paying for the accommodation is probably spent on staying longer or travelling more frequently. Thus they will contribute to a higher receipt for the tourism sector and local economy than they would have if they had not traveled with CouchSurfing.

3.1.2   Downsides: less customers for the youth hostels

"Staying in private homes means that travelers can save lots of money on accommodation that they would usually be spending on hotels or hostels"[1]. This is the major downside for Swiss and International tourism. There are indeed fewer customers for the hospitality industry. "Couchsurfing seems to take a disproportionate number of people away from the Bed and Breakfast Inns, and small independently owned hostels"[2] claims someone who supports these institutions. Furthermore, Swiss Television (TSR) has also mentioned competition for youth hostels and B&B[3]. Yet the survey shows that CouchSurfing mainly drains customers from youth hostels. 65.0% of surveyed people would consider booking a youth hostel if they do not find a host where they want to go and 21.9% would consider going to a B&B, which is considerably less. It would be pertinent to calculate how much impact it would have on the hospitality industry if this phenomenon grew in popularity.

"My first thought of CouchSurfing was "yeah I can save some money while travelling", then as I navigated through the web site reading profiles I saw there was something... I didn't know what, but something more. After having my first experience surfing I realized "I would much rather pay to stay with a host from CouchSurfing than pay for a hotel." Though, it's not about the money, it's about people you meet, the friendship created, the places you see.

Joey Latin
USA, 10th March 09,
testimonial on
www.couchsurfing.org

---

1 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality service
2 www.communitycolor.com
3 TSR, 2008

Figure 8: Accommodation if no host available
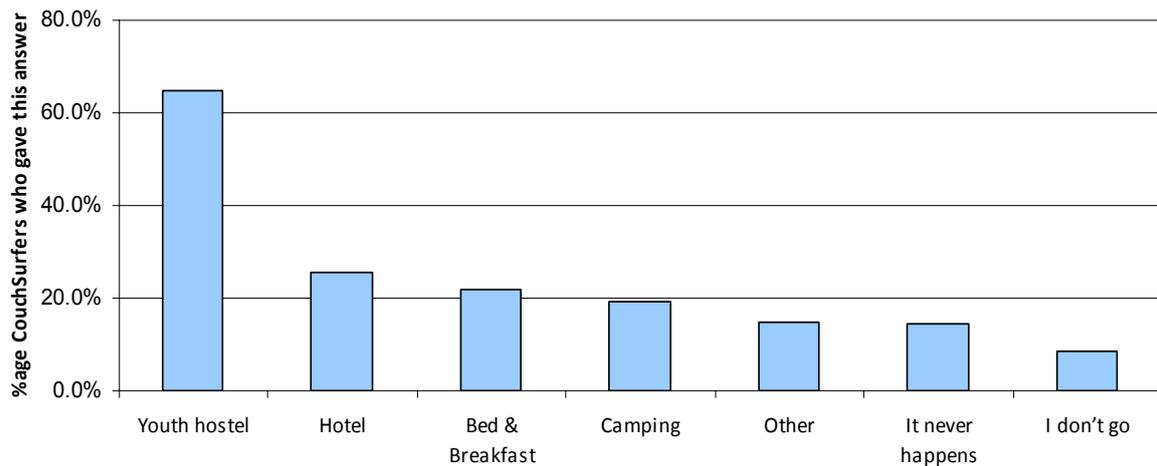
An additional negative aspect for the economy, is that CouchSurfers are not liable for the taxes. Each country has its own taxation system on accommodations and these systems do not apply to CouchSurfers. However, this is understandable since these special travelers are hosted by their "local family". There is no monetary exchange, thus it could not be taxed.

In the survey, CouchSurfers were asked if they would be interested if big cities organized activities for CouchSurfers, which could be booked through tourist offices. The positive answers came up to 31.9%. This means that there is a certain interest for something new which does not yet exist. The packages or single activities should correspond to CouchSurfers' expectations: authenticity, culture, activities which contrast with the normal tourist activities in a city. An interesting example of a suitable product, is the so called "Fox Trail", which is available in five cities in Switzerland (www.foxtrail.ch). The idea of this product is a treasure hunt which leads to unknown places throughout the city. The complication would be to reach the CouchSurfers, who communicate directly with the hosts.

A significant figure to consider is the 68.1% of surveyed people who said that they were not interested in any service which a tourism office could offer. This certainly shows the philosophy of CouchSurfing, a non-profit organization which is completely based on volunteering. A CouchSurfer shared his opinion about having tourism office selling products for CouchSurfers: "I strongly feel that mixing CouchSurfing with tourism offices is a bad idea. There is a huge sense of trust built between the parties involved and too non-economic to involve any business."[1] Hence, it seems unethical for an economical institution to profit from this target group. If a company were to aim their marketing directly towards CouchSurfers,

1 Anonymous reply to the survey led for this theses

their philosophy should be similar to that of CouchSurfing, for instance a company which uses all benefits towards a humanitarian cause.

In summary, there are undeniably some economic losses for the hospitality sector when people travel with CouchSurfing; however, this project does not correspond to the mentality of all tourists, so it will probably continue to coexist with the traditional hospitality industry.

3.2 Social benefits: the new vision

As mentioned earlier, mentalities in our society are rapidly evolving. In the last ten to fifteen years, there has been an essential realization about our harmful behavior towards the environment. Now, after eight months of economic crisis, a new awareness of social consciousness is arising. "In the United States and in other parts of the world, we are now moving in the other direction. I see signs of people becoming more community-minded as people are getting poorer. For example, former executives who are out of work are doing much more volunteering for nonprofit organizations, moving toward a focus on the common good. Lawyers and bankers are becoming teachers."[1] explains UCLA professor of psychology Patricia Greenfield.

This new value system shared by an increasing number of people is one of the explanations for the massive success of this hospitality network. In addition, a desire to travel more influences CouchSurfing as well as the entire hospitality industry. Of course, not all tourists look for the same thing when they travel. "I travel *for* CouchSurfing, I don't use it to find a free place to stay. If I want to have holidays where I really rest (like going to the beach everyday), I would not choose CouchSurfing, to be independent and do whatever I want" says a Swiss member of the community through the survey. CouchSurfers look for authenticity and social interaction. In the following section, you will discover the social benefits and inconveniencies of this non-profit organization.

---

1 WOLPERT Stuart, 2009

3.2.1   Benefits: travel the world or let the world come to you

In the survey, many CouchSurfers mentioned that they do not consider themselves as "tourists", but rather as "travelers". They also made a distinction between "holidays/vacation" and "journey/trip". When they travel, they do not simply take time out of their regular activities to rest and relax. They use CouchSurfing as a mean of discovering the world and cultural diversity, like explorers did erstwhile. Contact with the local community and integration is a major benefit compared to traditional tourism. 85.4% of CouchSurfers who answered the survey travel alone or with one other person. Being hosted means having a friend waiting in every location, which is a lot more exciting than being alone during the entire journey.

"Making interpersonal connections and fostering understanding of different cultures may in the long run also be important to international relations. (…) During hospitality exchanges, hosts want to show off their local knowledge and exciting "off the map" venues. Not only may travelers get a distinctly different experience, but they will also get a feel for the everyday lives of local residents"[1]. 8.5% of surveyed CouchSurfers stated that if they could not find a host somewhere, they wound up not going. This shows that for some people going to a place without meeting the locals is of no particular interest. 14.6% of people who took the survey said that it never happened that they could not find a host, which shows the keen interest of CouchSurfers in hosting visiting guests.

"It directly appealed to me, but I did not have the time or the money to travel myself. Therefore I became a host, which is the next best thing to traveling yourself. Let the world come to you (…). Hosting has enriched my life in many ways and oftentimes stirred my curiosity to find out for myself where those people come from (…). I will generally not host people if I do not have at least some time to spend with them, and vice versa. If people only use my home as free lodging, I consider that an unsatisfying visit. (…) When people ask: "You let strangers in your house? You give them the key?", my response is: "There are no strangers. There are only friends we have not met yet." I truly believe that every person is a potential friend. That is the way of building trust and goodwill as well as tolerance."

Helga Smith, USA
Member of Servas and CouchSurfing. Has hosted hundreds of guests, 21th May 09, direct contact with her.

---

1 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality service

For hosts (who often are travelers at times too), the main benefit to having CouchSurfers at their place, is to have an international experience without leaving home. For instance, one might cook some Singaporean food with his/her guest on Thursday and talk about Brazilian integration politics on Friday. "Other people may have a different lifestyle and environment, but by learning about them and experiencing the way they live, I also become more tolerant" says Helga Smith a long-time host in New York. Many hosts are also very proud of their home town or country and enjoy showing a hidden side of it to their guests, who would not have had that chance if they stayed in a hotel. It is a great pleasure to show your home to friendly and interested guests. Furthermore, CouchSurfing only works thanks to reciprocity; it is implicit that if you host people, you could ask anytime to be hosted by others and that your past guest will also give back to the community later on, not that one is obliged to see the same people if one goes to that country later on.

Among the surveyed group, most people have hosted at least once during the year (85.8%). Furthermore, almost 50% have a guest as regularly as every month, which is an excellent sign that they get pleasure out of the visit of CouchSurfers. The remaining 36.9% sporadically host during the year. Considering that around 30% of the surveyed CouchSurfers travelled less than three times the previous year, which corresponds to the number of people who have hosted less than 3 times. The comparison of these two questions, additionally shows that on average people host more than they visit, which is very positive information.

Figure 9: Frequency of hosting
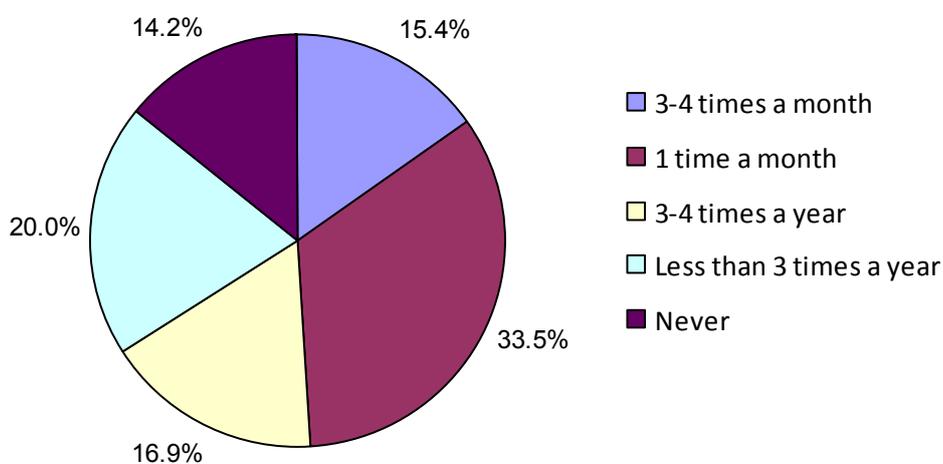
Human beings need to be part of a group or a community. Although CouchSurfing uses internet as a base for its members, it is way more than a virtual community. Most of the time, there is a personal encounter after an online meeting. "CouchSurfing is a way to ease isolation and build social networks. Research consistently shows that those with larger social networks are healthier, happier, and live longer"[1]. Most CouchSurfers have a similar mindset: open-minded, interested in meeting new people and finding out about other cultures. This is why members are enthusiastic about local CouchSurfing meetings, which are generally attended by people from the same area. At these meetings, people can suggest original ideas, which one could hardly do in another context, for example, a spontaneous pillow fight or a meeting in a New York subway to eat pizza from a folding table while a musician strums a guitar, as reported in the New York Times on April 12th 2009.

Figure 10: Participation in other CouchSurfing activities
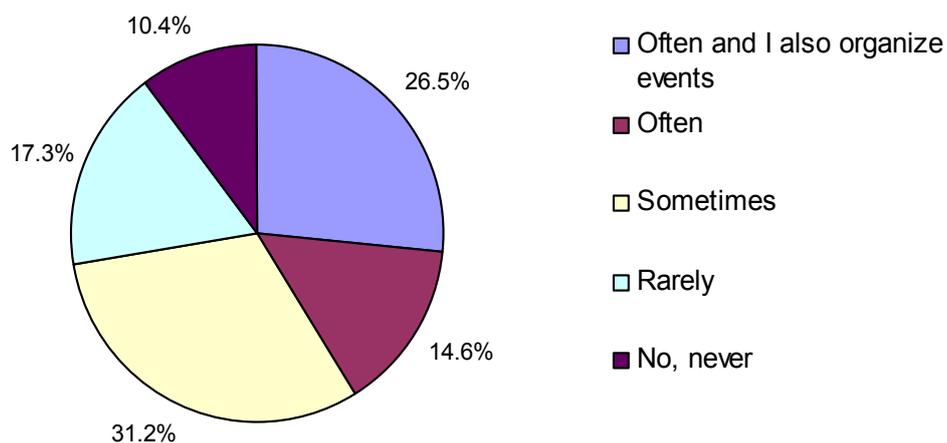
As we discovered in the previous chapter, there are many projects which include volunteerism and intercultural exchange. It is a trend which will certainly last and grow. Since increasing numbers of people do not have travel partners, meeting other people is a need which has to be fulfilled. Through CouchSurfing members have company, they feel that they are part of a group and they get to have an inside-view wherever they go in the world. Along with the economic benefit of not having to pay for accommodation, CouchSurfing mainly seduces with the social aspects satisfying human needs and curiosity.

---

1 www.blogs.psychologytoday.com

3.2.2   Downsides: trust as main security system

In hospitality networks, trust is a major element. There has to be trust on both sides, host and guest. "There is no contractual agreement between users in these systems. (...) For those who feel insecure unless their travel arrangements are written in stone before departure, this system will not be comforting"[1]. For this reason, CouchSurfers have their profiles online, which allows them to know whether they correspond to the expectations of a host. According to the survey, other CouchSurfers' feedback is the number one characteristic to choose a host; which shows that members have trust in each other. The network works like a safety net: if other CouchSurfers had a positive experience with someone, this should be the case with other people, too. The profile description plays the second most important role, giving a clue about personality and about whether two people have similar interests.

Figure 11: Importance of characteristics for the choice of hosts
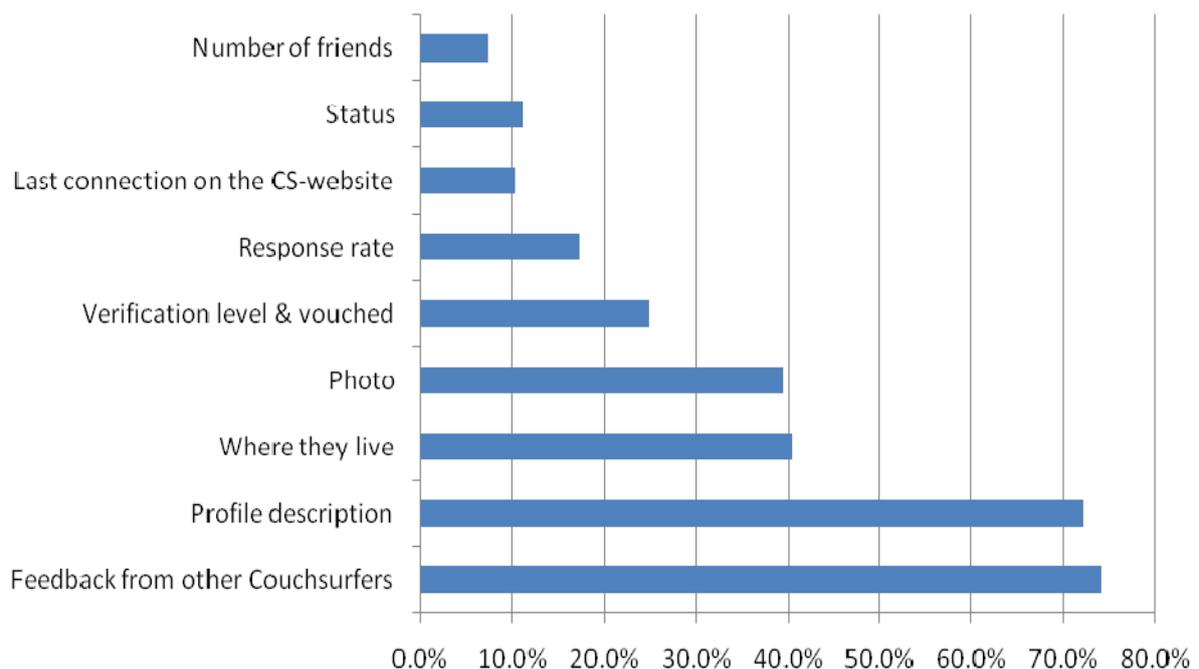
In third and forth positions, are the photo and the location of their potential hosts. These criteria have less to do with trust; they are personal preferences. Moreover, it should be underlined that a host has just as much selection criteria as the guest, as they can decide whom they will welcome into their home. Some incidences of theft have indeed occurred in the CouchSurfing movement. It is unfortunate; there is not much that can be done about it,

---

1 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality service

apart from reporting the person to the website. These cases are exceptional, yet it is important to keep tabs on these people, who could spoil the reputation of CouchSurfing. Trust plays a key role; feedback should therefore be honest to ensure the security of all other CouchSurfers.

As presented in a previous chapter, the founders have invented a security system with several levels. The surveyed CouchSurfers generally have a positive impression of this system, even if the "verification level and vouching" are not primary criteria in choosing a host/guest. In response to the affirmation: "The security system on CouchSurfing is very secure", men and women are a little skeptical. If they do not totally agree, it is because of the inerrant risk; "there is a distinct possibility that someone will abuse the system and that innocent users will get hurt"[1]. Men and women strongly disagree when they are asked if they ever felt they were in a dangerous situation because of CouchSurfing. Also, women tend to pay more attention to the sex of their host, whereas men do not pay attention to this aspect.

"Once arrived in Lisbon around 6am, I tried to contact the CouchSurfer with whom I had arranged my stay… impossible to reach him, my plan was shattered! At 4pm, I posted an emergency message on the website to which I very quick answers which allowed me to find another host. The rest of my stay went smoothly, but now I know that CouchSurfing isn't an infallible system and you might want to have an alternative."

Anne Marie Browne
Switzerland, 6 June 09, direct contact with her

Figure 12: Security rating

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Agree somewhat	Disagree	Strongly disagree
-- The security system on CS is very secure			♀ ♂		
-- I felt that I was in a dangerous situation at least once because of CS					♀ ♂
-- I try to go to a host of the same sex as me			♀	♂	
-- Most people around me try to discourage me from traveling with CS because of the security				♀ ♂	
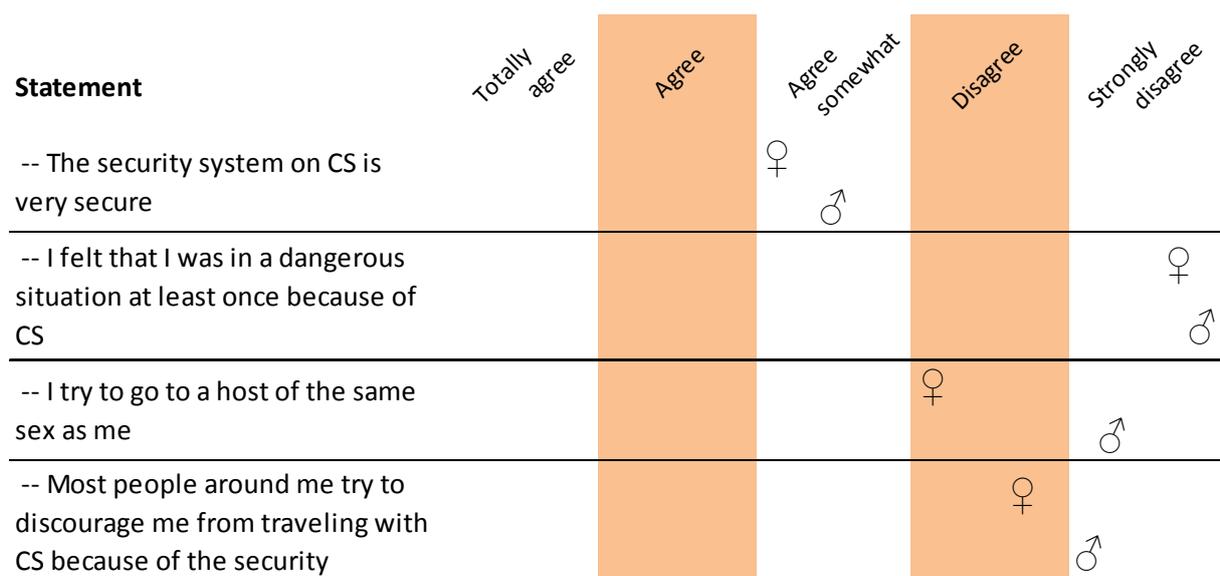
1 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality service

When considering the downsides of CouchSurfing, one must look at interpersonal conflicts. As in any community, some people might not get along; nonetheless, this risk is minimized by the fact that guests usually do not stay for a long period. Yet courtesy on both sides is necessary, for example with schedules. It was noted in the previous section how central the cultural and personal exchange is; hence, it could be a major disappointment for hosts and guests if their expectations are not fulfilled.

A further weakness of CouchSurfing, is that this system is mainly used by Westerners and is hardly attainable for people in developing countries. This question will be discussed in the next section. To sum up: trust within the network is essential to allow for intercultural exchange; however, it is clear that it is not possible to have a "no risk" situation, and CouchSurfers should be aware of that. In addition, for people to really enjoy a CouchSurfing experience, having the right mind set is essential. This project does not suit everybody's mentality and life style. It is a personal and philosophical choice to sign up for this social project.

3.3 Impact of tourism: will CouchSurfing create intercultural exchange and comprehension in the end?

In the two previous chapters, it can clearly be seen that CouchSurfing has more social than economic benefits. In most other cases of tourism, it is the opposite, especially when compared to the most widely spread form of tourism, mass tourism. There are indeed many other types of tourism which are now appearing and developing, for instance, cultural tourism, eco-tourism or adventure tourism. However, for most of these activities the authenticity of the sites is totally illusory. Furthermore, many tourists have the impression of having a deep intercultural exchange, feeling which is not shared by the locals.

This difference of perception was addressed in the movie called "Heading South" by Laurent Cantet, with Charlotte Rampling in the lead role. Ellen is a 50-something American tourist who has been spending her holidays in Port-Au-Prince for many years. While there, she has a relationship with a young local man. Throughout the film one sees how she thinks that she makes this young man's life better and that she brings "civilization" to his island. On his end, this relationship is just a job and he goes back to his real life as soon as he goes back home away from the resort.

In this section, we will discuss the true impact of tourism on intercultural understanding as well as the relationship to the authenticity of a site.

3.3.1   Old fantasies not fulfilled by mass tourism

Since the second half of the 20th century, the number of tourists has increased exponentially. This has lead to the mass tourism that we currently know. There has been an "industrialization" of tourism: charter planes and vacation resorts are a good example. "In many popular travel destinations, we find tourists milling around "tourist enclaves", where the companies they patronize back home have set up shop to cater to their desires while they are abroad. (…) The location of hotels near these centers only fosters more convenient envelopment of tourist money"[1]. Some tourists travel to the other side of the globe to spend their entire holiday in a resort and do not give out one single cent directly in the local economy. For the courageous ones who venture out of the resort, they all look for authenticity. But is this really possible?

Guided tours in markets or visits of famous monuments are products which are sold to tourists and often times the authenticity of the excursion is gleefully promoted. "Touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in that direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic. It is always possible that what is taken to be entry into a back region [a place where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and to prepare] is really entry into a front region [meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service personnel], that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation"[2]. This is a reality to which there are not many solutions; the more tourists, the more staging.

Along with this false impression of authenticity, "one of the hardier myths of tourism [is] that travel encourages peace, good will, and international understanding"[3]. This is now questioned more and more; hence the success of other types of tourism; for instance, humanitarian tourism, cultural tourism or rural tourism and many more. All these new trends are indeed much more respectful of the local communities. However, a differentiation should be made between a journey to a developed country or to a developing

1 www.wikipedia.org: hospitality service
2 MACCANNELL Dean, 1976, p. 101
3 RICHTER Linda K., 1989, p. 11

country. For the former, the new tourism trends represent a real potential for harmonious development; however, for the latter, the cultural and socio-economic disparities are so big between hosts and guests, that the reaction of locals might not be much more open than before.

As we can see, traditional tourism does not fulfill the idea that prevailed a few years ago. Could CouchSurfing be the solution? In what way are people travelling with a tour operator different from people travelling with the new hospitality project?

3.3.2   True intercultural communication one couch at the time

The CouchSurfing motto is *Creating a Better World, One Couch at a Time*. Intercultural understanding is a goal the community wants to reach one person at the time. Unlike the mass tourism mentioned earlier, with CouchSurfing the traveler is not the only actor in the journey. With traditional tourism the person who wants to travel just has to pay and can go wherever he/she wants. With the social network, one might decide to go somewhere, yet it is totally dependent on a positive answer from a fellow CouchSurfer. Guest and host gain from meeting each other and no one side has to serve the other. When a traditional tourist goes somewhere, he/she might meet the maid, but the guest will not know more about the culture and the worker only sees what the tourist leaves

"In a world of war and prejudice, Couchsurfing encourages tolerance and understanding. In a world of greed and avarice, Couchsurfing stands for sharing. In a world of selfishness and individualism, Couchsurfing advocates generosity."

Abilio M Godoy
Brazil, 8 June 09, testimonial
on www.couchsurfing.org

behind. With CouchSurfing, the host offers a couch and in exchange the guest will share a different vision of the world. He or she might bring a little present and talk about his/her life with the host. So to the question: does CouchSurfing foster a better intercultural communication than traditional tourism? The answer is definitely "yes"!

From the view point of a local, it also is nice to have someone come stay at your place. When a host has a guest there is a chance that he/she will show the traditional side of the culture, like a Swiss might cook a fondue, but other hosts might just take them to their favorite bar and have a drink with some friends. It is really up to the host to know what they would like to share and present to their guests. Furthermore, the general model is even

more flattering. People actually ask a local if they can come visit his city/town, as opposed to people going there because millions of dollars have been invested in marketing to convince them to go. However, it would be interesting to know how much CouchSurfers are influence by "traditional tourism marketing" for the choice of their destination.

Even if the social and cultural benefit of CouchSurfing is undeniable, there still are two major questions: is CouchSurfing truly accessible to all? And will the original spirit stay intact when there are even more members? To the first question, there are three main obstacles: language, money, and the accessibility to technology. Even if people don't speak the same language, if it is not for too long, it is possible to communicate with signs. This has its charm. Regarding the monetary issue, it is true that it is an impassable hurdle to travelling, but having someone from somewhere else in your home can also offer a change of scene for people who cannot leave. In addition, if some hosts do not have a lot of money, they could buy groceries to show gratitude. Finally, there is no other way to access the online community if one does not have an internet connection. A solution was suggested in a previous thesis[1] by another student of the Swiss Tourism School.

The idea was to have a paper based exchange. Although this solution is technically possible, it requires a heavy infrastructure, which CouchSurfing does not have. It would be possible that someone signs up once and mentions in the profile that only snail-mail communication is possible. And if someone wishes to visit this host, he/she would have to start the search for a host long before their trip. The fact that there are some hurdles to entering the network is shown by the socio-demographical composition of the group which is composed primarily of English speaking Europeans and North Americans.

Regarding the second question, it is tricky to give a definite answer. "With mainstreaming comes the danger that newcomers may see it simply as a way to get a free room and ignore the site's more important goal: "meeting new people and discovering new cultures from the inside""[2]. CouchSurfing is what people make out of it, when people sign up just for free accommodation, the spirit will be lost. The only way to avoid this scenario, is that every already registered and experienced CouchSurfer embodies the appropriate attitude of the social network. In such a network there is a very important snowball effect. A

---

[1] PAYOT Virginie, 2005, p.41
[2] New York Times, 12.04.09

successful CouchSurfing experience for a new member will certainly engender many more positive experiences which will keep the original philosophy alive.

To recapitulate, despite some accessibility difficulties for certain people in the world, and the risk of losing the initial spirit with the rapid growth of the community, CouchSurfing does create true intercultural communication and understanding. A philosopher might say that something which brings people together in the world, even if it has little economic benefit, will have a benefit to all in the long run.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the most precious information revealed, which carries the most hope for the future of our planet, is that people travel with CouchSurfing to meet local people and not simply to save money. We are in the middle of an ecological and social awakening; the consumer society is going through hard times. The publication of this thesis happens exactly at the moment when the liquidation of General Motors, a symbol of the consumer society in the United States, is in full swing. This might be a precursor of a shift in social consciousness. If there is indeed a change in people's perception of the world, CouchSurfing may be an indication of this trend. People's tourism behavior and interests are changing, and hopefully this will change their day to day lives also.

To continue this study, I would encourage analyzing further the details about the touristic behavior of CouchSurfers, while keeping in mind that this information should not be used to get economic benefits out of the CouchSurfers community, which would transgress its ethics. It would also be interesting to find out if this budding phenomenon is a temporary trend or if it will last in the long term. Time will tell if the original spirit will survive and whether it affects the tourism industry in too large a measure. Nonetheless, the present vision of this upstart community, a desire for social enlightenment, far outweighs the economic downside of lost receipts from lodging.

Originally, I started this paper with the idea of finding some benefits for the Swiss tourism industry, but I now know that such a gain would be totally opposed to the aim of this network. The humanist vision that people can get along wherever they come from, is shared by hundreds of thousands of people of all ages and all social backgrounds. At a time when non-governmental organizations are trying to achieve this, people sign up voluntarily on CouchSurfing and this is an extremely positive omen for the future… even if the tourism industry is not be biggest winner.

If after reading this thesis, you feel that this kind of tourism and social exchange corresponds to your mentality, do not hesitate one second before trying it out for yourself. As a host, you will encounter many people who will be thankful to have a place to stay. As a traveler, you will have the opportunity to see the inside of a culture and be an actor rather than a spectator in the play of life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- MACCANNELL Dean, 1976. *The Tourist*, New York: Schocken Books Inc..
- RICHTER Linda K., 1989. *The Politics of Tourism in Asia*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.

Broadcast, Film

- *Heading South*, 2005. Film. Directed by CAUNTET Laurent, FR: Editions Montparnasse Production.
- Le Journal (News), 2008. TSR (Swiss national TV), Aug 29th, 1930 hrs.

Internet

- Blog, 2009. *CouchSurfing*, Available from: http://communitycolor.com/kewl.html?dt=2009-01-12 [Accessed 16 February 2009]
- DEGRAZIER Dominic, *CouchSurfing.com: Finding Friendship and Hospitality Around the World*, Available from: http://www.gonomad.com/traveldesk/0805/couch-surfing.html, [Accessed 16 February 2009]
- ZAK Paul J., *CouchSurfing 101*, 2008. Available from: http://blogs.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-moral-molecule/200810/couchsurfing-101, [Accessed 16 February 2009]
- www.bewelcome.org
- www.couchsurfing.org
- www.globalfreeloader.com
- www.hospitalityclub.org
- www.houseswap.com
- www.servas.org
- www.sos.nh.gov
- www.stile.coventry.ac.uk/cbs/staff/beech/BOTM/Glossary.htm
- www.travelbuddy.com
- www.wikipedia.org, various articles accessed between April and June 2009

- http://www.worldwatch.org/node/1070 [Accessed 01 June 2009], about DURNING Alan, 1992. *How much is enough ? The Consumer Society and the Future of the Earth*, New York: Norton.

Newspapers, Magazines

- ATS information, 2009. 7,7 millions d'habitants en Suisse, *24 Heures*, 26 February.

- GREEN Penelope, 2007. Surfing the World Wide Couch, *New York Times*, 20 September.

- GREENFIELD Patricia. *In*: WOLPERT Stuart, 2009. Will the economic crisis lead to major societal changes?, *Psychology & Sociology*, 8 May.

- GROSS Matt, 2009. 3 Cushions, a million Guests, *New York Times*, 12 April.

Publications

- Swiss Federal Statistics Office, 2005, *Comportement en Matière de Voyages de la Population Résidante Suisse, en 2003*, Neuchâtel : Swiss Federal Statistics Office.

- Swiss Federal Statistics Office, 2007, *Comportement en Matière de Voyages de la Population Résidante Suisse, en 2005*, Neuchâtel : Swiss Federal Statistics Office.

- UNWTO, 2009. *UNWTO Tourism Barometer*, Madrid: WTO, Volume 7, Issue 1.

Thesis

PAYOT Virginie, 2005. *L'hospitalité : une alternative au tourisme de masse*, Thesis, Swiss School of Tourism.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Survey

1. How often did you go on holiday last year? (including long weekends)

_____

2. Out of these holidays, how many were with CouchSurfing?
   ( ) None
   ( ) Few
   ( ) Half
   ( ) Most
   ( ) All

3. Have you traveled at least once during the last 4 months?
   ( ) Yes
   ( ) No

4. Which are the months during which you travel the most? (max. 4)
   ( ) January
   ( ) February
   ( ) March
   ( ) April
   ( ) May
   ( ) June
   ( ) July
   ( ) August
   ( ) September
   ( ) October
   ( ) November
   ( ) December

5. How long do your CouchSurfing-holidays usually last?
   ( ) 1 weekend
   ( ) 1 week
   ( ) 2-3 weeks
   ( ) 1 month or longer

6. On average, how long do you stay with each host?
   ( ) 1 - 2 nights
   ( ) 3 - 4 nights
   ( ) 5 nights and more

7. With how many people do you usually travel?

_____

8. How would you rate your interest for the following criteria for your CouchSurfing-holidays? (Low interest / Medium interest / high interest)

        Mountain

        Sea/Beach

        Nature

        Sport

        Culture

        History

        Language

        Food

        Business

        Nightlife

        Shopping

        Backpacking experience

9. How do you usually travel to the destination?

        ( ) Train

        ( ) Bus

        ( ) Plane

        ( ) Bike

        ( ) Rental car

        ( ) Private car

        ( ) Hitch hiking

10. How do you usually travel once you have arrived?

        ( ) Car

        ( ) Taxi

        ( ) Public transportation

        ( ) Bike

        ( ) On foot

11. What do you visit when you are in a CouchSurfing-holiday?

        ( ) Almost only unknown places and very few touristy sites

        ( ) Only touristy sites

        ( ) Some touristy places (the musts), but the rest unknown places

12. How do you decide which places you will visit during your CouchSurfing-holidays?

        ( ) Guidebook (ex. Lonely Planet)

        ( ) Improvisation

        ( ) Follow your host's indications

        ( ) Follow your friends' advice

        ( ) Prepare our itinerary at home

        ( ) Internet/websites

        ( ) Information from a Tourism Office

13. Which were the 3 last countries you visited with CouchSurfing?
Country #1 _____
Country #2 _____
Country #3 _____

14. Which percentage of you CouchSurfing-holidays are in your own country?
    [ ] of my CS-holidays are in my own country
    [ ] of my CS-holidays are abroad

15. Where do you normally eat during your CouchSurfing-holidays? (max. 2)
    ( ) Restaurant
    ( ) Fast-food
    ( ) Pick nick
    ( ) Cook at your host's place
    ( ) Other

16. Classify these expenses from the most important to the least important
    _____ Transportation
    _____ Food
    _____ Souvenirs
    _____ Shopping
    _____ Touristy activities

17. On average, how much do you spend per day including transportation? (fill in the currency of your choice)
    CHF _____
    EUR _____
    USD _____

18. When you cannot find a host with CouchSurfing, where do you sleep?
    ( ) Youth hostel
    ( ) Hotel
    ( ) Bed & breakfast
    ( ) Camp ground
    ( ) I don't go
    ( ) It never happens
    ( ) Other

19. Do you travel more since you have been on CouchSurfing?
    ( ) Yes
    ( ) No

20. When you travel with CouchSurfing, do you feel that you travel off the beaten track?
    ( ) Yes
    ( ) No

21. Would you be interested if big cities organized special activities for CouchSurfers, which could be booked through the tourism office (packages or single activities)?
 ( ) Yes
 ( ) No

22. Feel free to add any other comments concerning your travel habits with CouchSurfing. (Differences or similarities with the "hotel-holidays" / Particularities: destination, length, frequency, experiences, …)

23. Since when have you been a member of CS?
 _____

24. How did you first hear about CouchSurfing?
 ( ) Internet
 ( ) Friends
 ( ) Newspaper
 ( ) TV
 ( ) Other

25. What are the 2 most important reasons for you to travel with CouchSurfing?
 ( ) Money
 ( ) Meet local people
 ( ) Have company during your holidays
 ( ) Fight against mass tourism
 ( ) Other

26. What do you think of the security system on CouchSurfing:
(Totally agree / Agree / Agree somewhat / Disagree / Strongly disagree / Not Applicable)
 The security system on CouchSurfing is very secure
 I try to go to a host of the same sex as me
 I felt that I was in a dangerous situation at least once because of CouchSurfing
 Most people around me try to discourage me from traveling with CouchSurfing because of the security

27. What are the 3 most important characteristics for the choice of your hosts?
 ( ) Status
 ( ) Photo
 ( ) Number of friends
 ( ) Response rate
 ( ) Where they live
 ( ) Profile description
 ( ) Feedback from other CouchSurfers
 ( ) Last connection on the CouchSurfing-website
 ( ) Verification level & vouched

28. How often do you host CouchSurfers?
    ( ) 3-4 times a month
    ( ) 1 time a month
    ( ) 3-4 times a year
    ( ) Less than 3 times a year
    ( ) Never

29. Do you participate in the CouchSurfing activities organized within groups?
    ( ) No, never
    ( ) Rarely
    ( ) Sometimes
    ( ) Often
    ( ) Often and I also organize events

30. Gender
    ( ) Male
    ( ) Female

31. How old are you?
    ( ) 18-25 years
    ( ) 26-35 years
    ( ) 36-45 years
    ( ) More than 46 years

32. In which country do you live?
    _____

33. What is your occupation?
    ( ) Studies
    ( ) Work
    ( ) Unemployed

34. What is your sector of activity?
    _____

35. If you live in Switzerland, what is your monthly income? (For Swiss CouchSurfers only
    ( ) Less than 2000.- CHF
    ( ) 2000-4000.- CHF
    ( ) 4001-8000.- CHF
    ( ) 8001-12000.- CHF
    ( ) Over 12000.- CHF

Appendix 2: Socio-demographic information

T1: Socio-demographic information for surveyed population				
	Swiss Community		**International Community**	
Total	117		260	
Sex				
Male	59	50.4%	118	45.4%
Female	58	49.6%	142	54.6%
Age				
18-25 yrs old	41	35.0%	117	45.0%
26-35 yrs old	66	56.4%	106	40.8%
36-45 yrs old	6	5.1%	24	9.2%
Over 46 yrs old	4	3.4%	13	5.0%
Country of residency				
Switzerland	117	100.0%	0	0.0%
Europe	-	-	148	56.9%
America	-	-	70	26.9%
Asia	-	-	14	5.4%
Africa	-	-	9	3.5%
Oceania	-	-	19	7.3%
Occupation				
Work	80	68.4%	155	59.6%
Unemployed	6	5.1%	21	8.1%
Studies	31	26.5%	84	32.3%
Income (CHF)				
Less than 2000	34	29.1%	-	-
2000-4000	25	21.4%	-	-
4001-8000	49	41.9%	-	-
8001-12000	8	6.8%	-	-
Over 12000	1	0.9%	-	-
Member of Couch surfing since				
before 2007	30	25.6%	59	22.7%
2007	46	39.3%	81	31.2%
2008	40	34.2%	108	41.5%
2009	1	0.9%	12	4.6%
Proportion of travels with Couchsurfing				
All	6	5.1%	30	11.5%
Most	21	17.9%	67	25.8%
Half	24	20.5%	58	22.3%
Few	51	43.6%	84	32.3%
None	15	12.8%	21	8.1%
Participation in other Couchsurfing activities				
Often and I also organize events	28	23.9%	69	26.5%
Often	19	16.2%	38	14.6%
Sometimes	33	28.2%	81	31.2%
Rarely	28	23.9%	45	17.3%
No, never	9	7.7%	27	10.4%

Appendix 3: Information for Chapter 2.2.1

T2: Information for Chapter 2.2.1				
	Swiss Community		**International Community**	
Number of trips previous year (incl. long weekends)				
average	5.83		6.14	
0 - 3	34	29.1%	62	23.8%
4 - 6	50	42.7%	112	43.1%
7 - 9	12	10.3%	29	11.2%
10 and more	21	17.9%	57	21.9%
Average length of CouchSurfing trips				
1 weekend	58	49.6%	90	34.6%
1 week	25	21.4%	89	34.2%
2-3 weeks	14	12.0%	49	18.8%
1 month or longer	20	17.1%	32	12.3%
Months during which CouchSurfers travel**				
January	26	6.3%	68	7.5%
February	28	6.7%	61	6.7%
March	17	4.1%	60	6.6%
April	33	8.0%	63	7.0%
May	24	5.8%	71	7.8%
June	39	9.4%	80	8.8%
July	57	13.7%	120	13.3%
August	64	15.4%	114	12.6%
September	55	13.3%	87	9.6%
October	27	6.5%	61	6.7%
November	14	3.4%	38	4.2%
December	31	7.5%	82	9.1%
Top 10 destinations				
	# 1	Switzerland	# 1	Germany
	# 2	France	# 2	USA
	# 3	Germany	# 3	France
	# 4	USA	# 4	Italy
	# 5	Spain	# 5	Spain
	# 6	Italy	# 6	UK
	# 7	Austria	# 7	Belgium
	# 8	Portugal	# 8	Sweden
	# 9	China	# 9	Austria
	# 10	UK	# 10	Canada
Transportation to destination**				
Train	92	*78.6%*	149	*57.3%*
Plane	89	*76.1%*	193	*74.2%*
Bus	43	*36.8%*	103	*39.6%*
Hitch hiking	17	*14.5%*	37	*14.2%*
Private car	15	*12.8%*	42	*16.2%*
Rental car	4	*3.4%*	9	*3.5%*
Bike	2	*1.7%*	15	*5.8%*
Transportation at destination**				
Public transportation	111	*94.9%*	234	*90.0%*
On foot	73	*62.4%*	156	*60.0%*
Car	18	*15.4%*	39	*15.0%*
Bike	10	*8.5%*	24	*9.2%*
Taxi	9	*7.7%*	20	*7.7%*
	1=low interest / 2=medium interest /			
Interest for domain during CouchSurfing trips	3=high interest			
Culture	# 1	2.68	# 1	2.75
Nature	# 2	2.59	# 2	2.48
Backpacking experience	# 3	2.49	# 3	2.21
Language	# 4	2.45	# 5	2.35
Food	# 5	2.27	# 4	2.35
Mountain	# 6	2.25	# 8	2.16
History	# 7	2.22	# 3	2.38
Sea/Beach	# 8	2.20	# 6	2.28
Nightlife	# 9	2.09	# 9	1.90
Sport	# 10	1.68	# 10	1.50
Shopping	# 11	1.45	# 11	1.40
Business	# 12	1.24	# 12	1.27
Minimum one trip during the last 4 months				
Yes	44	75.9%	176	87.6%
No	14	24.1%	25	12.4%

**:many answers possible

Appendix 4: Information for Chapter 2.2.2

T3: Information for Chapter 2.2.2				
	Swiss Community		**International Community**	
Feeling to travelling of the beaten track				
Yes	91	77.8%	200	76.9%
No	26	22.2%	60	23.1%
Travel frequency				
More since CouchSurfing	60	51.3%	192	73.8%
Same as before CouchSurfing	57	48.7%	68	26.2%
Heard about CouchSurfing the first time				
Friends	69	59.0%	144	55.4%
Internet	19	16.2%	68	26.2%
TV	11	9.4%	8	3.1%
Newspaper	9	7.7%	29	11.2%
other	9	7.7%	11	4.2%
Reason for travelling with CouchSurfing*				
Meet local people	111	*94.9%*	247	*95.0%*
Money	34	*29.1%*	94	*36.2%*
Have company during the trip	30	*25.6%*	85	*32.7%*
Fight against mass tourism	29	*24.8%*	45	*17.3%*
Other	14	*12.0%*	26	*10.0%*
CouchSurfing travel: Inland-Outland proportion				
Out of the country		78.2%		77.9%
In the country		21.8%		22.1%
Information source*				
Follow your host's indications	95	*81.2%*	187	*71.9%*
Improvisation	73	*62.4%*	156	*60.0%*
Follow your friends' advices	66	*56.4%*	121	*46.5%*
Guidebook (ex. Lonely Planet)	65	*55.6%*	129	*49.6%*
Internet/websites	62	*53.0%*	174	*66.9%*
Information from a Tourism Office	30	*25.6%*	58	*22.3%*
Prepare the visit program at home	25	*21.4%*	95	*36.5%*
Other	7	*6.0%*	21	*8.1%*
Average length of stay at host's place				
1 - 2 nights	88	75.2%	164	63.1%
3 - 4 nights	28	23.9%	87	33.5%
5 nights and more	1	0.9%	9	3.5%

**:many answers possible

Appendix 5: Information for Chapter 3

T4: Information for Chapter 3				
	Swiss Community		**International Community**	
Average expense				
Average	CHF 62.75		CHF 47.92	
Standard deviation	CHF 41.73		CHF 33.11	
Median	CHF 50.00		CHF 39.40	
Budget cost items				
Transportation	# 1		# 1	
Food	# 2		# 2	
Touristy activities	# 3		# 3	
Shopping	# 4		# 5	
Souvenirs	# 5		# 4	
Restoration**				
Cook at your host's place	84	*71.8%*	172	*66.2%*
Restaurant	57	*48.7%*	126	*48.5%*
Fast-food	17	*14.5%*	81	*31.2%*
Pick nick	50	*42.7%*	62	*23.8%*
Other	8	*6.8%*	32	*12.3%*
Sightseeing goals				
Almost only unknown places and very few touristy sites	20	17.1%	30	11.5%
Some touristy places (the musts), but the rest unknown places	95	81.2%	223	85.8%
Only touristy sites	2	1.7%	7	2.7%
Accommodation if not with CouchSurfing**				
Youth hostel	91	*77.8%*	169	*65.0%*
Bed & Breakfast	42	*35.9%*	57	*21.9%*
Hotel	30	*25.6%*	66	*25.4%*
Camping	26	*22.2%*	50	*19.2%*
Other	24	*20.5%*	39	*15.0%*
It never happens	11	*9.4%*	38	*14.6%*
I don't go	5	*4.3%*	22	*8.5%*
Interested in offers from tourism offices				
Yes	30	25.6%	83	31.9%
No	87	74.4%	177	68.1%
Number of travel parteners				
0	56	47.9%	127	48.8%
1	49	41.9%	95	36.5%
2	10	8.5%	23	8.8%
3	1	0.9%	6	2.3%
More than 3	1	0.9%	9	3.5%
Frequency of hosting				
3-4 times a month	16	13.7%	40	15.4%
1 time a month	32	27.4%	87	33.5%
3-4 times a year	33	28.2%	44	16.9%
Less than 3 times a year	24	20.5%	52	20.0%
Never	12	10.3%	37	14.2%
Importance caracteristic for choice**				
Feedback from other Couchsurfers	90	*76.9%*	193	*74.2%*
Profile description	89	*76.1%*	188	*72.3%*
Where they live	53	*45.3%*	105	*40.4%*
Photo	47	*40.2%*	103	*39.6%*
Verification level & vouched	21	*17.9%*	65	*25.0%*
Response rate	18	*15.4%*	45	*17.3%*
Last connection on the CS-website	15	*12.8%*	27	*10.4%*
Status	8	*6.8%*	29	*11.2%*
Number of friends	6	*5.1%*	19	*7.3%*

	1=Strongly disagree / 2=Disagree / 3=agree / 4=Agree somewhat / 5=Totally Agree			
Security System				
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	3.92	3.76	3.64	3.73
	1.56	2.66	1.88	2.56
	1.12	1.26	1.18	1.38
	1.81	2.17	1.95	2.15

**:many answers possible