

# CouchSurfers' Motivations to Host Travelers in Spain

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## CouchSurfers' Motivations to Host Travelers in Spain

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This Bachelor thesis examines the online community CouchSurfing, which is a hospitality exchange network that promotes cultural exchange, cultural diversity and tolerance. CouchSurfing members offer each other free accommodation when traveling and share their insight and knowledge of the place.

The primary objective of this thesis was to define the CouchSurfers' motivation factors behind hosting travelers in Spain, as well as produce findings to why alternative ways to travel, such as CouchSurfing are on the rise.

This thesis consists of theoretical part that deals with CouchSurfing, Online Communities and Motivation. The empirical part focuses on finding out CouchSurfers' motivations to host. The research is based on quantitative method; a survey was conducted among the Spanish CouchSurfers to determine the motivation factors they have for hosting. The research results base on the total number of answers (n.363) from the survey.

The results show that the most agreed upon motivation factors are cultural factors. They are followed by self development factors. Building a community was on a third place with community factors. Social motivation factors were also agreed on by more than half of the respondents. Reciprocity factors and Reward factors fell behind in importance as a motivator.

The research findings reveal that the majority of CouchSurfers in Spain are hosting because of social and cultural reasons; to make friendships, cultural exchange and to learn something from the interaction with the guest. There was some variation in the answers according to gender, age, hosting experience and membership duration.

These findings emphasize that CouchSurfing users are motivated by cultural- and self development factors. CouchSurfing should provide opportunities and to develop their product to serve this object better. Since the community building factors were also seen as an important motivator, it is crucial to further encourage building a more tight knit community.

Keywords: CouchSurfing, Online communities, Hospitality exchange, Motivation, Spain

Outi Pietilä

### Sohvasurffaajien motivaatio majoittaa matkailijoita Espanjassa

Vuosi 2011 Sivumäärä 68

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Tämä opinnäytetyö keskittyy tutkimaan CouchSurfing-verkkoyhteisöä, joka on vieraanvaraisuusvaihtoyhteisö, jonka tarkoituksena on edistää kulttuurivaihtoa, monikulttuurisuutta ja suvaitsevaisuutta. CouchSurfing-yhteisön jäsenet tarjoavat muille jäsenille ilmaista majoitusta kotonaan näiden matkustellessa, he auttavat ja jakavat kotipaikkatietouttaan.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoite oli määrittellä CouchSurfing-jäsenien motivaatiot majoittaa matkailijoita Espanjassa ja tuottaa tietoa, miksi vaihtoehtoiset matkustustavat, kuten CouchSurfing, ovat suosittumia kuin aikaisemmin.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen viitekehys käsittelee CouchSurfingia, verkkoyhteisöjä ja motivaatiota. Opinnäytetyön tutkimusosuus keskittyy löytämään syyn CouchSurfing jäsenien motivaation majoittaa toisiaan. Tutkimus perustuu kvantitatiiviseen metodiin ja se toteutettiin sähköisenä lomakekyselynä. Tutkimuksen tulokset pohjautuvat kyselyn vastauksiin, joita oli yhteensä 363 kappaletta.

Tutkimuksen mukaan tärkeimmät motivaatiotekijät ovat kulttuuritekijät ja itsensä kehittäminen. Yhteisön rakentaminen oli kolmanneksi tärkein motivaatiotekijä. Sosiaaliset motivaatiotekijät vaikuttivat myös yli puoleen vastanneista. Vastavuoroisuus sekä palkkiot jäivät muista motivaatiotekijöistä selvästi jälkeen.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että CouchSurfing-jäsenien majoittamisessa yleisimmät motivaatiotekijät ovat sosiaalisia ja kulttuurisia; he majoittavat saadakseen ystäviä, kulttuurivaihtoa ja oppiakseen vierailtaan jotain. Osassa vastauksista oli vaihtelua demografisten tekijöiden (sukupuolen, iän, majoituskokemuksen tai jäsenyyssajan pituuden) suhteen.

Nämä tutkimustulokset painottavat, että CouchSurfing-jäsenet motivoituvat kulttuuri- ja itsensä kehittämistekijöistä. CouchSurfingin tulisi ottaa tämä huomioon palvelua kehitettäessä. Koska myös yhteisön rakentaminen nähtiin merkittäväksi motivaatiotekijäksi, on suositeltavaa, että CouchSurfing rohkaisee ja mahdollistaa käyttäjiään rakentamaan tiiviimmän yhteisön.

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## 1 Introduction

Free hospitality is a growing sector in the tourism industry. Nowadays millions of people around the world make use of online networks that provide free hospitality for travelers around the world. The biggest online hospitality community today is CouchSurfing, which has over 3 million members worldwide who offer each other help accommodation in their homes for free. However CouchSurfing is not only about free accommodation; it is about cultural exchange between individuals, friendship and learning experiences. The CouchSurfing vision is a world where everyone can explore and create meaningful connections with people and places they encounter (CouchSurfing's Vision Statement 2011).

CouchSurfing is a part of the new wave of tourism. Many people think it is not enough to see the sights; they want experiences, and CouchSurfing is the way to get those experiences. It started as a small club of backpackers who accommodated each other while traveling, but in the recent years it has grown rapidly and now millions of members use CouchSurfing to find accommodation when traveling, to host travelers in their area and to meet new people.

This theme is important because nowadays alternative ways of tourism are on the rise. CouchSurfing is the way to experience the culture of the host country, not only eat and sightsee. CouchSurfing can be the key to understanding the country where visiting on a deeper level and learning significant things about the culture. CouchSurfing is also an environmentally friendly choice, living in locals' houses and sharing their everyday life uses much less energy and water than for example an average hotel accommodation. Since green tourism and reducing one's carbon footprint interest people globally, CouchSurfing is also a good alternative way of experiencing the world with less negative impact on environment.

This thesis' subject is CouchSurfers' motivations to host travelers in Spain. The theoretical part explains the concept of CouchSurfing as well as motivation theories and online community theories. The practical research was conducted as a quantitative research to Spanish CouchSurfing hosts and it aims to find out the motivation to host CouchSurfers in Spain. The main referenced works for this thesis are human resource management books dealing with motivation and previous studies about online communities. The main electronic sources used in this thesis are CouchSurfing webpage and other pages dealing with online communities.

The research was conducted in Spain as quantitative survey and in total 363 people answered the questionnaire. The results of this study base upon these questionnaire answers. The questionnaire answering was limited to CouchSurfers in the Spanish groups, so it works to limit the research only to Spain. This study presents the motivations to host CouchSurfers in Spain.

## 2 Research Background

### 2.1 Background, Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The researcher has a strong background on the CouchSurfing project, having participated actively as a host and guest for 6 years. She has travelled using CouchSurfing in more than 35 countries, and hosted CouchSurfing members from all around the world in her home. She has been an ambassador for CouchSurfing for two years to promote the community and its activities, and has seen the change from within; CouchSurfing has grown from a small and marginal backpacker's community into a network with millions of members originating from every country of the world, to many CouchSurfing members there is no other way to travel than by CouchSurfing, living with the locals and enhancing the cultural diversity.

This research aims to find out why people open their doors to strangers, giving them shelter and spending time with them; all this for free. To bring this subject to the light this research will focus on the CouchSurfers' motivations to host travelers in Spain. Spain is a country that lives out of tourism; tourism accounts for nearly 11% of the Spain's GDP as well as employment (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2008). So why are people going out of their way to help travelers and offer them accommodation for free? This research was conducted from the host's point of view, of what reasons motivate them to host travelers, but it will also give an idea why people are using CouchSurfing in general. This research will focus on finding out what motivates CouchSurfers to host travelers in Spain.

This research will benefit anyone who is interested in the alternative ways of travel and the motivations behind it. The growing free hospitality network will have an impact on traditional tourism as many people are no longer ready to pay for just a roof on top of their heads, but are expecting the accommodation industry to offer some extra value. The non-commercial side of travel is growing and people's interests and motivations are changing. Any tourism professional would benefit from having the knowledge of the new trends and the weak signals, that traditional forms of accommodation are not perhaps seen very appealing anymore. The concept of free accommodation is not marginal; it is rapidly growing and already millions of people around the world are doing it, by CouchSurfing.

The research project was started in January 2011 by coming up with the subject for the research; the main idea was to research something about CouchSurfing and the motivation interested me personally. The decision to limit the research to Spain happened because the researcher was going to Spain to study the language and culture and thought it was a good time to do the research for thesis as well. The empirical research was conducted in Spain between February and April 2011. The research answers were analyzed during May 2011. Thesis

process continued in August 2011 and from then on until October 2011 the researcher has written and drawn together the final version of the thesis.

## 2.2 Research Question and Limitations of the Study

The interesting question to answer is: Why would people in countries that live out of tourism host travelers in their homes free of charge and go out of their way to help them without any monetary gain? What other benefits could hosts have from CouchSurfing? In countries like Spain where tourists are an important source of income it is important to keep them coming back, but what is in it for the CouchSurfers? What would be the motivation to help and host travelers when there is no direct and visible gain for the host? The research problem is formulated to answer this question: "What are the CouchSurfers' motivations to host travelers in Spain?"

CouchSurfing is a greatly interesting phenomenon and so far very little research has been done about it, which makes it an interesting and original research subject. CouchSurfing is an interesting phenomenon in the hospitality business simply because it is free; in fact the whole system of CouchSurfing relies on its members' goodwill. The concept of free hospitality is especially interesting in countries and destinations where there is an abundance of tourists and tourism is a main employer, for example in Spain. Due to these factors the empirical limitations of this study have limited to research the subject of the motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers in Spain. Motivation is an interesting subject especially in the case of CouchSurfing, because it is not clear what drives people to host and the motivations of different individuals can vary significantly. There is much to research in this subject, mainly because not a lot of research has been done previously about the CouchSurfing community's motivation, this research will likely lead to interesting findings about the subject.

The theoretical framework of this research has been limited to present 1) CouchSurfing; its history, use and core functions will be introduced, 2) online communities as well as concepts of social networks, hospitality exchange, emotional tourism and reputation systems, and 3) motivation, along with motivation theories, reward systems as well as motivation to participate in online communities. Theoretical concepts will be presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

## 3 CouchSurfing - New Dimension of Tourism

In this chapter the world of CouchSurfing will be introduced. Beginning with user testimonials that explain the some of the reasons why CouchSurfing users are so dedicated to this project. In the next paragraph the basics of CouchSurfing are introduced, followed by a more detailed explanation of the hosting and surfing interactions. User safety deserves its own paragraph



since CouchSurfing can really only function as a community where the members can trust each other enough to let a stranger stay in their home. The last chapter of this paragraph deals with CouchSurfing in Spain, since this research is limited to Spain.

CouchSurfing mission, “Creating inspiring experiences” (CouchSurfing Mission Statement, 2011.) can only happen through its members’ activity and engagement to the community. Next there are some real life user testimonials about CouchSurfing.

“I'm brand new here. I feel as if a whole world of opportunities has opened itself to me! The idea of CouchSurfing is amazing - I like it!” Maciej Poliwka, Poland. “This website brings travelers and locals from all over the world together in an online community that supports people to meet other inspiring cultures, people and experiences. It's about giving back, meeting new friends and coming home to a warm place to stay for a good night sleep. But CouchSurfing is not only about the couch, it is also about culture, adventure and having a drink in a city or country not as familiar as your own. It's a worldwide community for people that are willing to share a ride, a cup of coffee, time, music and each other's company and culture.” Arko Hoonderdt, United States. “There is a life before and after CouchSurfing...I was always an open minded person, but with CS I discovered that the world and happiness is just around the corner...in every single country...you will never walk alone...Thanks CS!” Ricardo Soares, Belgium. “This is going to change your life!” Silvia Costa, Brazil. (CouchSurfing Testimonials, 2011.)

### 3.1 What is CouchSurfing?

CouchSurfing is a global network of users who want to travel to foreign places and stay with other members of the network (Bialski 2006). CouchSurfing is not, however, only about “surfing”, which means staying with another member, or “hosting”, that means having another member stay in your home, it is also about cultural exchange between the individuals. CouchSurfing has over 3 million members worldwide, from 249 countries and territories around the world (CouchSurfing Statistics 2011).

“When you join CouchSurfing, you tap into our network of welcoming people worldwide. You can share your hospitality and experience your city through new eyes by offering travelers a place to stay on their journey. You can bypass the typical hotel experience by staying at the home of a local and learning about their culture. You can meet open-minded people in your home city by attending events. And you can meet up with new people, whether at home or while traveling, for inspiring experiences and new friendships.” (CouchSurfing About 2011.)

CouchSurfing was founded in 1999 as a non-profit company by Casey Fenton, Daniel Hoffer, Sebastien Le Tuan and Leonardo Bassani da Silveira, who shared a vision to build a new type of local community (CouchSurfing Our People 2001). The internet site was launched in 2003 as beta that did not include many functions. The CouchSurfing site became fully functional in 2004. By year 2006 it had 100 000 members worldwide. (CouchSurfing Wiki 2011.) The rapid growth has been happening ever since and today CouchSurfing has over 3 million users. In August 2011 CouchSurfing gave up its non-profit status and became a certified B-Corporation (CouchSurfing Our People 2011). Certified B Corporations are a new type of corporation which uses the power of business to solve social and environmental problems (Certified B-Corporation 2011).

The CouchSurfing users are not a homogenous mass; the typical user might be a 28-year-old male from somewhere in Europe (CouchSurfing Statistics 2011.) but CouchSurfers are people from all ages and different backgrounds. 50% of CouchSurfers are male, and 43% female, the remaining 7% are established couples or families with joint profile. 85% of all CouchSurfers are over 18 years but less than 35 years old, however increasing number of older members are also joining CouchSurfing; there is nearly 30 000 CouchSurfers who are over 60 years old. 52% of CouchSurfers live in somewhere in Europe and 26% in North America, the remaining members live all around the world. (CouchSurfing Statistics 2011.)

The next illustration shows how the CouchSurfing members have spread across the different world regions. Each colored spot marks a city or town where CouchSurfers are residing. The map points out how most members reside in Europe and North America, but also that in almost every inhabitable area in this world there are at least some CouchSurfers as well.

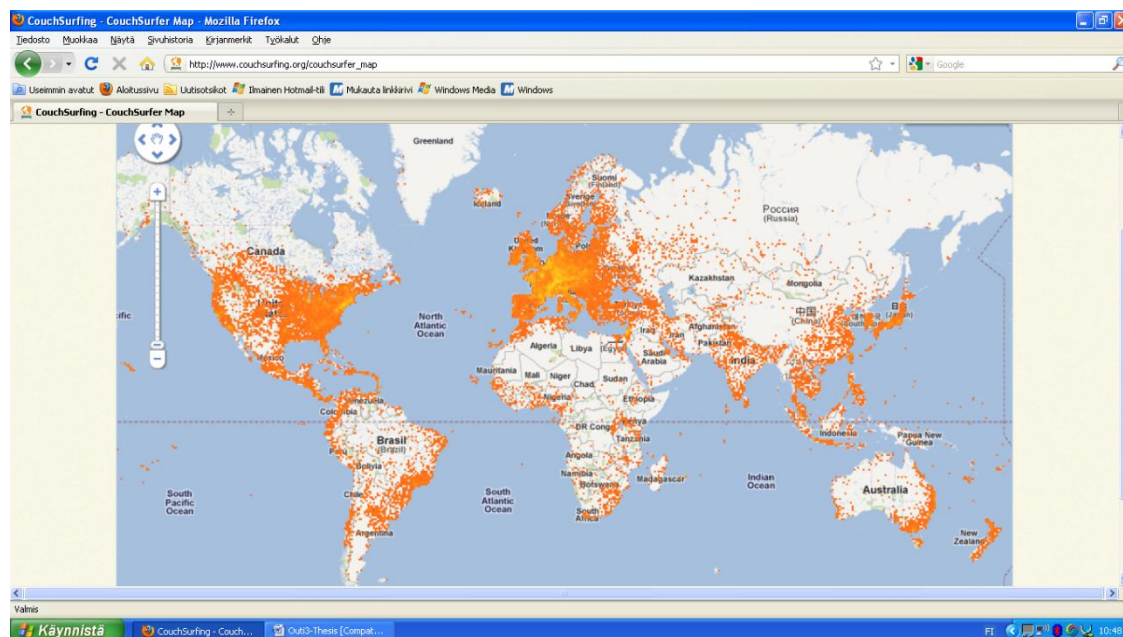


Illustration 1: CouchSurfer map.  
(CouchSurfing CouchSurfer Map 2011.)

It is free to join CouchSurfing and to use it, no membership payment is required. Hosts are not allowed to charge their CouchSurfers for accommodation, however most CouchSurfers voluntarily like to thank their hosts with a small gift or an act of kindness. (CouchSurfing CS Basics 2011.) The CouchSurfing operating expenses are financed primarily with donations, over 1.1 million USD in 2009, with the biggest expenses being 250 000 USD for rent/storage/office, 116 000 USD to wages and salaries and 102 000 USD for travel reimbursements. (CouchSurfing Income and Expense Statement 2009.)

### 3.2 Hosting and Surfing - Interactions

Many people first join CouchSurfing to “surf”, which means staying at another member’s house while traveling. The first step to becoming a CouchSurfer is to create personal a profile; it is possible to share information about yourself that the potential host might be interested in, and to add pictures. The second step is to learn to read other members profiles; when choosing a person to surf with it is important to gather information about the other person before hand, to keep safe and enable a positive experience for both. If still a CouchSurfing beginner, it’s a good time to go to a local meeting or meet some travelers in the area, in order to get a more comprehensive idea what CouchSurfing involves and what to expect. After that it is time to find the potential host and this is done by CouchSearching. (CouchSurfing Getting Started: How to travel with CouchSurfing 2011.)

The screenshot shows the CouchSurfing search results for Paris, Ile-de-France, France. The search results are sorted by relevance. Two profiles are visible:

- SASá**: Lives in Paris, Ile-de-France, France. Last In: Paris, Ile-de-France, France - 16 hrs ago. Friends: 109, References: 54, Photos: 62, Reply Rate: 100%. About: Curious person with 100% capacity to be amazed, i enjoy every single detail, i like to understand and connect concepts so i like learning almost everything from quantum physics, ... (more). Basics: Female, 32, Working, listening, traveling, getting scratches. Sound Design - Music Production - Designer - Painter. Mission: Cantarle a la vida mi mejor canción!!!. Languages: Spanish (Argentina)<sup>SP</sup>, English<sup>ENG</sup>, French<sup>FR</sup>, Portuguese<sup>PT</sup>, German<sup>DE</sup>, Italian<sup>IT</sup>.
- on the moon**: Lives in Paris, Ile-de-France, France. Last In: Paris, Ile-de-France, France - 11 hrs ago. Friends: 214, References: 182, Photos: 157, Reply Rate: 100%. About: friendly/open-minded/laidback person - the 3 magic words :-)- from Normandie living in Paris and loving it! Genuinely interested in others - with various levels of "exoticism" ... (more). Basics: Male, 30, formerly as an engineer, just changed major to become a life enjoyer!. Mission: moving forward, one step at a time :-D - having as much fun as possible on the way!

Illustration 2: CouchSearch example from Paris, France.  
(CouchSurfing CouchSearch 2011.)

CouchSearch is a tool that enables to search for potential hosts using different search parameters, most common and useful parameters being the country, area or city, and the availability to host. In the figure above, a CouchSearch has been done to the city of Paris for people whose CouchStatus is Yes, Maybe or, Coffee or a Drink; these parameters match with 9975 members in the network. After the search a list of hosts profiles come up and the surfer can start to look for an interesting person to stay with. Once this interesting host has been found it is time to ask for their availability by sending a CouchRequest. An official CouchRequest is a message sent through the CouchSurfing messaging system asking for accommodation from a potential host. Things that should be included in a CouchRequest are; arrival time, date and the duration of stay, introduction of one self and any other people traveling with. It is good to make a request personal and to discuss any common ground, for example to tell a reason why you picked to contact this person over all the others. It is always good to be precise and polite, and should there be any changes to the travel plan, contact the host immediately.  
(CouchSurfing Finding and Requesting a Couch 2011.)

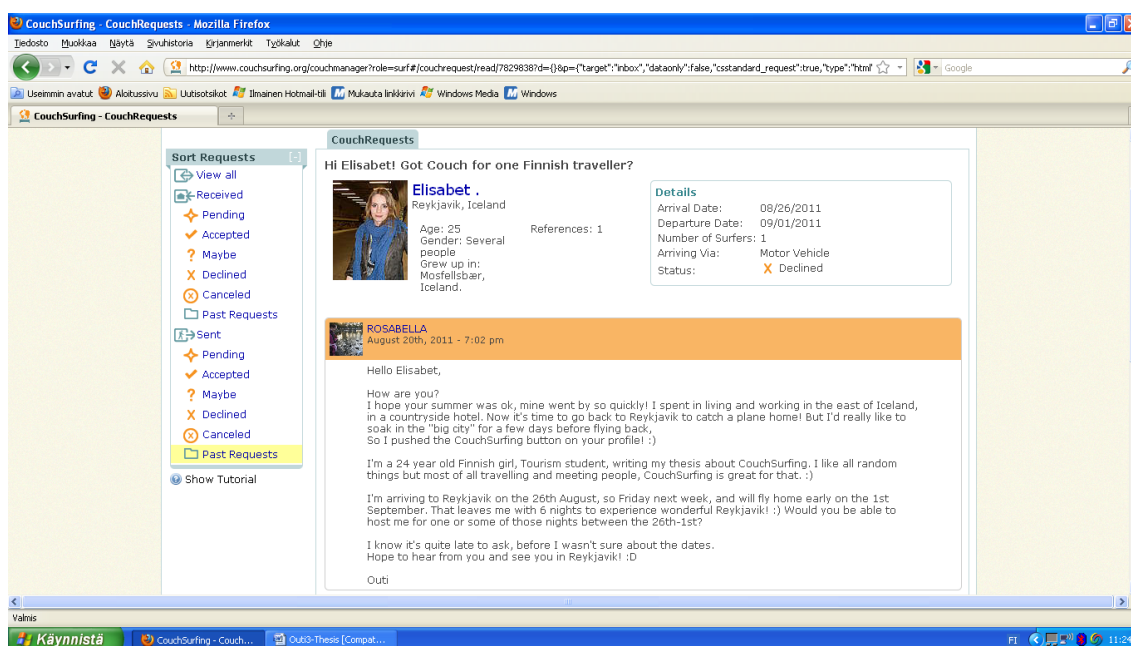


Illustration 3: CouchRequest example - Looking for a host in Reykjavik.  
(CouchSurfing CouchRequests 2011.)

In the figure above there is an example CouchRequest; the potential host's details on the top of the page as well as details of the arrival time and date, number of surfers and the current status of the CouchSearch, the surfer's CouchRequest is on the bottom.

Nobody in the CouchSurfing system is forced to host other members, and hosts can choose their guests freely. Also many active hosts might already be busy hosting other members during the same time, so it is usually good to send out a few CouchRequests. After getting a “yes” answer from a host get ready to surf by setting up a meeting with the host. Once you have arrived to other member’s house, you are their CouchSurfer. During your stay behave as a good guest would: respect your host’s guidelines, make your schedule compatible with the host’s timing, do not invite other people without permission to your host’s home, leave things as they were before you used them and clean up your own mess, and when in doubt ask for clarification; clear communication between the host and the surfer will lead to a more positive experience. (CouchSurfing Tips for CouchSurfing 2011.)

After the stay it is important to write a reference to the host’s profile. A reference is feedback describing the interaction that happened between the members. It is a good idea to describe the overall experience with the member, for example what you did together and how did you feel during your stay, describe the host’s personality, and conclude whether you would recommend them as a host. The reference status can be Positive, Neutral or Negative, however most interactions between CouchSurfers are positive. References are visible to all the CouchSurfing members and they are an important safety feature within the CouchSurfing system. (CouchSurfing References FAQ 2011.)

After already having some experience in CouchSurfing the idea of hosting other members in your home can become more appealing. After all CouchSurfing is about cultural exchange, and there is no need to leave your home to do that, when there are travelers who are anxious to travel to your part of the world. Before starting hosting it is good to revise own expectations and think about general guidelines, sit down with the people you live with and decide boundaries; how often do you want to host, for how many days at a time, which is the maximum number of people hosted at the same time, when are the quiet hours etc. The next step is to update the Couch section on your profile; fill it with all relevant information concerning your couch and the decided general guidelines. After this it’s time to wait for your first CouchRequest. (CouchSurfing Tips for Hosting 2011.)

When you receive the first CouchRequest do not agree to host blindly, the CouchSurfing safety features are in place for you to decide if the member is the kind of person you would want to host. Go and read their profile, you will get a good overview about what kind of person is asking for your hospitality, read the references to see what kind of experiences this member has had with other members and take any negative references seriously since they are never given lightly. Check through their pictures to find out about their life and personality, and

read their whole profile before making a decision to host them. When you have decided, go back to reply to the CouchRequest. (CouchSurfing: The CouchSurfing Safety Philosophy 2011.)

When your CouchSurfer arrives, be welcoming; offer a glass of water and a tour to the house. Inform your CouchSurfer how to use the place, show them their sleeping place and how to get in and out of the house. Tell them clearly what they can use in the house, for example kitchen, washing machine or computer. Let the CouchSurfers know about your schedule, and if you have planned any activities. If you have time it is nice to show them around or cook a meal together to give a chance to cultural exchange. Share your local knowledge and give travel tips. Be helpful with your surfer's questions and concerns; things that are obvious to you are not clear to a person from another culture that has just arrived to the country. If at any time there are conflicts try to talk with your surfer, in most cases the problem is unintentional. Afterwards write a reference in their profile to inform other members about the interaction with the member. (CouchSurfing Tips for Hosting 2011.)

### 3.3 Stay Safe

To build safety and trust within CouchSurfing there are reputation systems that are discussed further in chapter 4.4 Reputation systems. The three reputation systems within CouchSurfing are; vouching, verification and references, which all give important information that can be used to decide whether to trust another member. The CouchSurfing Safety Philosophy (2011) states, that CouchSurfing empowers its users to make informed decisions by sharing information through the systems, that reputation is the foundation of a safe community and that disputes are resolved using policy of neutrality.

Safety is an important factor to all the CouchSurfing users, but especially when traveling alone or with a family and children it would be good to take more time and precautions when planning to surf with someone. It is good to follow your instincts and never stay with members you do not feel comfortable and safe with. CouchSurfing Abuse Team is to be contacted when there is inappropriate messaging or behavior from another member. It is good to always have some kind of a back-up plan and possibly some other CouchSurfing contacts in town. (CouchSurfing Tips for Solo CouchSurfers 2011.)

CouchSurfing with a family can be a wonderful way to learn about the world together, it can be an experience of a lifetime to children and lead to life-long friendship between the families. Family Welcome Group is a good place to start looking for hosts who welcome families. Preparing children for CouchSurfing can be done by taking them into the preparations; discussing the experience before hand and exchanging a few emails with the host family to get to know better. Good planning is the key to successful experience, give the host plenty of

notice, communicate clearly about your family's needs and take into consideration the host family's needs as well. (CouchSurfing Family CouchSurfing 2011.)

Because functioning reputation systems are in place for the safe use of CouchSurfing, there is no need to be overly concerned about safety, if the above mentioned safety measures have been taken. The vast majority of CouchSurfing experiences are positive (CouchSurfing References FAQ 2011) and the probability of having a negative experience can be minimized by reading other member's profiles carefully and using common sense when interacting with other members.

### 3.4 CouchSurfing in Spain

Spain is a country in Southwestern Europe, the total area of Spain is 504 782 km<sup>2</sup> that consists of 17 autonomous communities as well as two autonomous cities. Spain's border countries are Andorra, France, Portugal, Morocco and Gibraltar, which is an overseas territory of United Kingdom. The population of Spain is 46,7 million (July 2011 estimate), of which 77% live urbanely, Spain's biggest cities are Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. The Kingdom of Spain's government type is parliamentary monarchy, the chief of state is King Juan Carlos and the president of the government is Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. 94% of Spanish are Roman Catholics. The Castilian Spanish is the official language of Spain, along with regional languages Catalan, Galician and Basque. (CIA 2009.)

Spain is one of Europe's leading tourism destinations, and 11% of the country's GDP comes from Tourism (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica 2008). Spain is also one of CouchSurfing's leading countries on the number of members; currently ranking 7<sup>th</sup> with over 95 000 members, the Spanish city of Barcelona ranks 9<sup>th</sup> in the list of top CouchSurfing cities with its 21 000 members. Spanish is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most spoken language within the CouchSurfers. (CouchSurfing Statistics 2011.) This shows that there are many CouchSurfing hosts in Spain, but the demand is even bigger. In my own opinion during the high tourism season it is very difficult to find a host in any of the major tourism destinations in Spain. In the next figure can be seen how CouchSurfers are situated on the map of Spain, the majority are in and around the big cities; Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, but there are members in CouchSurfing from all around Spain.

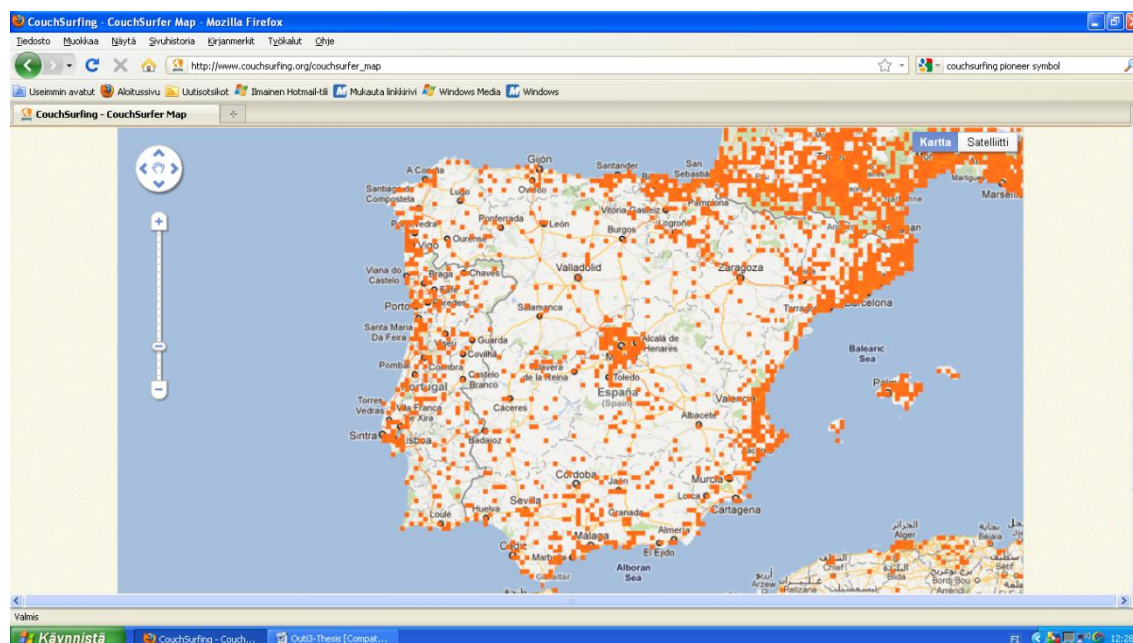


Illustration 4: CouchSurfer Map of Spain.  
(CouchSurfing CouchSurfer Map 2011.)

#### 4 Online Communities in Shaping Tourism

The development of the internet has made it possible to reach all the information needed regardless of time and space. Social web has been shaping tourism since user-generated content and peer-based evaluation has been available from any tourism destination. According to Macleod (2001), globalization and the internet have created new ways of social existence where social dynamic of integration vs. cultural identity reshape the tourist experience. For a tourist, the internet facilitates and extends the opportunities, knowledge and experience and as digital tourism increases the cultural integration increases as well, reshaping cultural identities.

Online communities are defined as groups whose members communicate and interact primarily through web-based environment (Scott & Johnson, 2005, 10). Online communities first started in 1979 with Usenet news - sharing programs. Over the last 30 years the growth in computer networking has enabled its users to share information, pictures, discussion and social support in various online communities. (Beenen, et al. 2004, 212-221.)

The globalizing internet development and the breakthrough of time and space limitations have resulted in many changes in the way people think. By joining an online community, people benefit from the presence of others, and from the content and services provided in a virtual world (Beenen et al. 2004, 212-221). Another reason for joining an online community is



the ease of use (Brandtzaeg & Heim 2008) for one can interact with people from all over the world simply by using a computer.

Online communities consist of people, a shared purpose, policies and computer systems. Therefore understanding people's behavior and motivation to participate in online communities is essential in developing online communities (Preece 2000, 80-82). Online communities are widely utilized for a number of purposes in personal life as well as in business and education; there are for instance game communities, dating communities and interest communities. Also companies use online communities for marketing, as well as recruiting. (Heinonen 2008, 5; Holappa 2007.)

#### 4.1 Social Networks

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public profile within the system, (2) connect with other users with whom they share a connection (3) view and interact with their list of connections. Social network sites enable users to make their social networks visible and this can result in connections between individuals that would not have been made otherwise. Often social network sites are not primarily used for meeting up with new people, but instead to communicate with people who are already part of one's social network. (Boyd & Ellison 2007.)

The public display of connections is an important component of social network sites; this enables anyone to see all the person's connections, unless the person has chosen to have the connections hidden. In most of the social network sites there is some kind of messaging system available; comments or private message system that is similar to webmail. Many social network sites target people from specific linguistic groups or geographical regions and some sites are designed with identity-driven categories in mind, for example; ethnic, religious, political or sexual orientation. (Boyd & Ellison 2007.)

The popularity of social network sites is phenomenal. Salmenkivi & Nyman (2007), state that people have a need to be recognized as a part of a society, which can explain the popularity of social media communities, also at the same time as people want to belong to something, they have a need to differentiate within the group and to stand out from the crowd.

#### 4.2 Hospitality Exchange

Hospitality exchange networks connect travelers looking for a place to stay with those who reside in the local area and are willing to serve as temporary hosts. The stays are conducted with the broad goal of promoting cultural experiences and understanding between people of

different backgrounds. (Lauterbach, Truong, Shah & Adamic 2009.) Hospitality exchange networks bring travelers together with the locals who can, for example; help with travel plans, show their city or let the travelers stay over. These networks bring together people from different cultures and social backgrounds and fight prejudice and intolerance by enhancing cultural understanding. (Hospitalityguide 2011.)

The oldest hospitality exchange network is Servas, founded 1949. Year 1971 WWOOF came along with organic movement and a chance for travelers to stay and work on organic farms. The first internet based hospitality network was Hospex in 1992. In 2000 Hospitality Club started and quickly became the largest hospitality exchange network until mid 2007. Global-Freeloaders started in 2001. CouchSurfing; which the biggest hospitality exchange network nowadays started in 2003. In the recent years more hospitality exchange networks have sprung up; BeWelcome in 2007, Nomadbase in 2008 and Tripping in 2009 have all been part of the movement. (Cruisesurfingz 2010.)

CouchSurfing is the biggest online hospitality network with over 3 million members worldwide. In CouchSurfing one can share hospitality and experience by showing their city or hosting other members, while travelling one can stay at a local's home to learn about their culture and way of life, also there is a chance to go to any of the CouchSurfing meetings that are organized within your area. (CouchSurfing - How does CouchSurfing work? 2011.)

### 4.3 Reputation Systems

Social online communities who serve an offline purpose and provide hospitality exchange, such as CouchSurfing, benefit from using reputation systems. Reputation mechanism is essential when online transactions lead to offline interaction. Reputation systems are especially important with CouchSurfing, since few situations require more trust than letting a stranger stay in your home, or conversed, staying on a stranger's home. (Lauterbach et al 2009.)

Reputation systems function by collecting data about user's interactions on site and make it visible to other users. Reputation systems benefit the user in two ways, it allows the user to judge other users' trustworthiness based on their previous behavior and feedback from others, and it also provides an incentive for the users to be honest, since having a poor reputation likely prevent positive interaction in the future. (Resnick, Kuwabara, Zeckhauser & Friedman 2000, 45-48.)

CouchSurfing offers its users a multi-faceted reputation system that consists of three components: verification, references and vouching (Lauterbach et al 2009). Verification means that CouchSurfing checks the details of the user match with the ones in their credit card; this

proves the person's identity is truthful. The second reputation system within CouchSurfing is references, they are comments that other members have written in a user's profile. A reference is written when two CouchSurfing users have met each other offline; the reference is first rated into Positive, Neutral or Negative, and then an empty text field is given to write with own words about the interaction with the other user. The third component, vouching, can only occur within already active CouchSurfing members, since a user can only vouch for another user when they already have at least 3 vouches themselves. A vouch means that a person declares their trust for another member; a vouch cannot be removed so they are not to give away lightly. (CouchSurfing Vouching 2011.)

This symbol in a member's profile shows that they have been vouched for, and are therefore trusted members of the community:



Illustration 5: Vouching Symbol  
(CouchSurfing Vouching 2011.)

This symbol in a member's profile shows that they have donated money to CouchSurfing; the most common way to get this symbol is by completing the verification process:



Illustration 6: CouchSurfing Pioneer Verification Symbol  
(CouchSurfing How to read a profile 2011.)

The next illustration explains the method of verification; the first step is to save the name and address so that they can not be changed until the verification process is complete, the second step is to pay an amount of money to CouchSurfing using own credit card after which they check the payment details match the name and address of the user, the third step is receiving a pass code by mail that needs to be entered to the CouchSurfing website, after which the verification is complete.



Illustration 7: CouchSurfing Verification Process  
(CouchSurfing Verification 2011.)

The next illustration is an example of references on CouchSurfing. References describe the interaction between the host and guest and basically communicate to other members what kind of experience to expect with this member. In this example one can already find out many things about Stefan, just by reading some of his references; that he has two children, he's an active member in the Single's group because he organized a meeting in his home, he has previously shown friendly and welcoming attitude towards his guests and organized activities such as hiking, cooking and board games, and he shows his guests around in places near his home. By uniting this reference tool with the other CouchSurfing reputation systems; verification and vouching, members can judge other members trustworthiness based on their offline interactions with the other members.

**From Eclise**  
Saint Columb Major, United Kingdom  
Oct 7, 2009 



**Positive**  
Stefan is very laid back and welcoming. He's interesting to chat to and I'm glad he only lives around the corner!

---

**From Stuart Toomey**  
Genova, Italy  
Sep 14, 2009 



**Positive**  
Stefan's daughter Janice gave us the most estatic CS welcome ever. His whole family are super friendly. Stefan showed us some really beautiful places and we had a brilliant time walking, exploring, playing board games (and guitar hero), cooking (even on the beach), and playing with a mega trainset in the back garden. Thanks for all.

---

**From FOUNGLI**  
London, United Kingdom  
Sep 7, 2009 



**Positive**  
A crowd of us from the singles group descended on Stefan's house and had a great weekend. Stefan is a hospitable, relaxed and accommodating host, empathic to his guests' needs and a quiet observer. His daughter Janice was my shadow and a delight to be around. Yes, I'll definitely be back! I'm sure you will not say no to another night of gluttony!

---

**From STIAB3**  
Swindon, United Kingdom  
Sep 7, 2009 



**Positive**  
Stefan is a great host. He did a fantastic job of hosting us (singles group members). He made sure we were well entertained and showed us some of the spectacular sites that Cornwall has to offer.

---

**From Anna Hütte**  
Cologne, Germany  
Aug 23, 2009 



**Positive**  
I stayed with Stefan and his lovely children for 2 nights and he really helped me out spontaneously as the couchsurfer i was to stay with would not respond again in the end. i felt a bit sorry as the waves were just too amazing during the days i stayed at his place so i came home rather late. But at least on the second night me had some time for a chat, which i really

Illustration 8: Example References on CouchSurfing  
(FrenchSansFrontieres 2010.)

## 5 Motivation

### 5.1 Definition of Motivation

“Motivation is the desire to achieve beyond expectations, being driven by internal rather than external factors, and to be involved in a continuous striving for improvement”. (Torrington,

Hall, Taylor & Atkinson 2009, 276). The word motivation derives from the Latin word *movere* that means moving. Later on the term has established a wider meaning of the factors that affect our behavior. Motives are usually understood as needs, wants, drives, intrinsic motivation as well as rewards and sanctions. (Ruohotie 1998, 36-37.)

In time the definition of motives has expanded beyond physiological needs, Harlow tested this theory on monkeys and proved that social stimulation often motivates more than simply satisfying a physiological need. Maslow came up with a theory of the hierarchy of needs, where the most basic needs emerge first, and the most sophisticated last. Nutt defined motives as the correlation between a person's intrinsic need and extrinsic subject. (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi 2002, 11-12.) Armstrong (1977), explained the motivation process as a cycle of having a need, establishing the goal to fill the need, take action and then attaining the goal. If the goal is achieved the behavior will often be repeated when similar needs occur.

Motivation can be divided into intrinsic motivation, which refers to the motivation that comes from the individual and extrinsic motivation that is done to or for the individual to motivate them. Intrinsic motivations are for example work satisfaction, developing skills, personal interest and opportunities for advancement; these motivations tend to have a long term effect on persons motivation since they come from within and are not imposed from outside. Extrinsic motivations come from outside the individual in form of some kind of reward or punishment, for example money, grade or criticism; this type of motivation usually has a strong but short-lasting effect on individual's motivation. (Armstrong 1977, 109-110.)

Motivation is a result of a process, and it can vary significantly in different situations for motivation is not stable. The present circumstances can have an effect on the future motivation, for example if an individual feels that hard work now will be rewarded in the future, it has a positive effect on present and future motivation. The result of the motivation process is determined by different factors that are: the strength of intrinsic motives, the faith in oneself and of having an influence, the psychological time perspective and emotional intelligence. (Niermeyer & Seyffert 2004, 12-14.)

## 5.2 Motivation Theories

Motivation theory aims to explain why people behave the way they do in terms of efforts and strive for achievement. Money can be a motivator but for many people the feeling of being recognized and valued appears to be a much more important motivation factor. (Laurie 2007, 255.) This chapter introduces shortly three major motivation theories: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's Motivation-hygiene theory and Vroom's Expectancy theory.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs identifies five basic need categories: Physiological needs include the basic human need vital for survival, for example air, water and food. Safety needs stand for human's desire for security and stability, for example health, safety and income. Social needs stress human's desire for affiliation, for example needs for belonging, affection and intimacy. Esteem needs reflect a desire for personal worth, self respect and recognition from others. Self-Actualization needs are the individual's needs for self-fulfillment and realizing their own potential. (Beardwell & Claydon 1994, 493.)



Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid.  
(Federal Aviation Administration 2009.)

The needs are arranged in a hierarchy pyramid in which the most basic needs emerge in the lower levels and the most sophisticated on the higher levels of the pyramid. The higher order needs, such as esteem or self-actualization, are not important until the lower order needs, such as nutrition and safety, are satisfied. (Beardwell & Claydon 1994, 493.)

Herzberg noticed in his Motivation-hygiene theory that the factors that cause job satisfaction are opposite to those that cause dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg, employers are influenced by motivators and hygiene factors. The intrinsic motivators create job satisfaction when they are fulfilled; these factors could be interest, responsibility and growth. On the other hand hygiene factors create dissatisfaction when not fulfilled; they are a base of a suitable work environment though they do not increase satisfaction. Typical hygiene factors are for example; salary, working conditions and company policy. (Saiyadain 2009, 158.)

Vroom's expectancy theory perceived probability that person's goals would be accomplished as a product of the anticipated value of an action, therefore the Vroom's model is built

around the concepts of value, expectancy and force. Force is equivalent to motivation and can be shown as a sum of valence and the expectancy:  $\text{Motivation (force)} = \text{Valence} \times \text{Expectancy}$ . Valence means the strength of an individual's preference for an outcome. Expectancy is the probability that an action will lead to desired outcome. According to Vroom, employee's motivation can be boosted by lifting the expectancy level through better communication. (Van Eerde & Thierry 1996.)

### 5.3 Reward Systems

“Reward is the benefits that arise from performing a task, rendering a service or discharging a responsibility.” (Pitts 1995, 11.) The reward system consists of financial rewards such as fixed and variable pay, as well as employee benefits that can include e.g. bonuses, pension scheme and health insurance. The reward system also includes non-financial rewards such as recognition, praise, achievement and personal growth. (Armstrong 2002, 4.)

The purpose of the reward system is a way to encourage certain behavior. According to the expectancy theory, employees will work harder and prioritize their actions if they know they will be rewarded with something of value. When the incentives are paid in return for behavior it will enhance employee effectiveness and productivity. (Torrington et al 2009, 162.) Reward system helps to find out performance in relation to goals it can also influence people to join and to remain in an organization as well as it also shapes the person's effort directed in the organization future capacity. (Flamholtz 1996, 99.)

Total reward is a reward strategy that brings aspects of development and learning together with the benefit package in the work environment. In the total reward system both tangible and intangible rewards are considered valuable. Tangible rewards include rewards such as pay, bonuses and other benefits. Intangible rewards are for example; learning, personal development, recognition in the work community, social life and work experience. When the different types of rewards are combined, they have a deep and long-lasting effect on the motivation of an employee. The aim of total reward is to maximize the positive impact that rewards have on motivation. (Armstrong & Brown 2006, 22.)

In many organizations it is common to give both financial and non-financial rewards to motivate employees. In case of CouchSurfing, when there are no monetary rewards for the users, the essential factor is non-financial reward. According to Herzberg's Motivation-hygiene theory, managers do not motivate employees by higher wages or other benefits; rather that employees are motivated by their own need to accomplish at a challenging task. Then the manager's job is not to motivate people to get their tasks achieved, but rather to provide opportunities for people to achieve their tasks, so that they would become self motivated.



Non financial reward can be used to achieve higher levels of motivation by providing opportunities for learning and development. Still the company management plays a key role in making individuals give their best performance by making use of the motivation systems and processes provided by the company. (Armstrong 2008, 221.)

#### 5.4 Motivation to Participate in Online Communities

The online communities are a fairly new phenomenon and there is still much to research in the subject of motivation to participate in online communities. Duque & Lado (2009), imply that there is still very little academic literature available from the subject of online communities' participation motivations. The results from study by Gaston-Breton et al. (2009, 4, 21), suggest that the motivations to participate in online communities have hedonic, functional and social roots, and that the main motivations to participate in an online community are support, identity, attachment, relationship and obligation.

Wang and Fesenmaier (2003) identified four motivation factors that affect the individual's participation in virtual communities; they are efficacy, status, instrumental and expectancy. The study's conclusions are that the easiness of communication and the user's personality are important factors concerning their activity in participating in virtual communities. Wang and Fesenmaier also concluded in their study that individual's different needs; such as functional, social, psychological and hedonic needs are the basis of motivation when participating in virtual communities.

Dholakia, Bagozzia & Pearob (2004), examined the social identification in virtual communities. Their research focused on people's motivations and needs to join online social networks; these motivators are emotional support, finding new friends, meeting similar people, socializing, networking and discussing similar interests.

The previous studies of the subject of motivation in online communities show that the main motives to participate in online communities are related to informational and functional objectives and secondarily to social-oriented needs and hedonic objectives and finally to psychological needs. (Gaston-Breton et al 2009, 6.)

The encouragement of users in online communities is important to their motivation, especially in the beginning. The concept of the online community should be clear and visible; this creates consensus and builds trust in the community (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar 2003, 21, 26). Functionality and usability are in the key role in an online community, because they support people's creativity and productivity. New ideas and constantly updated content make the online community interesting. (Preece 2000, 82-133.)

## 6 Research Approach

This part of the study explains how the empirical study was conducted. In chapter 6.1 the choice of research methods is discussed, in 6.2 the data collection methods are explained and in 6.3 we dig deeper into questionnaire method chosen for conducting the research. In this Chapter the main referenced works about research methods, data collection and questionnaire methods are from books by Walliman (2004) and Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2004) that cover the entire research process and are also reliable and often referred resources in other theses/dissertations.

### 6.1 Choice of Research Method

According to Walliman (2004), asking questions is the obvious method for collecting data. For this research it was chosen to use quantitative research method, in order to collect data from larger group. Quantitative data has features that can be measured and mathematical models can be applied to analyze the data. Measurements imply some form of magnitude that is usually expressed in numbers. (Walliman 2004, 138.)

Quantitative methods apply when researching a large group of people, usually several hundred. Quantitative research means researching individuals with the help of some sort of structured questionnaire or questions. This questionnaire can be arranged face-to-face, by mail, by email, telephone or as an online research. Quantitative research method is valuable in situations when required to find out about responder's certain behavior or behavioral intentions, or of attitude and knowledge. Quantitative method is often used in a research to test pre-specified concepts or hypotheses. It can be reliable and valid when conducted with care and for a large enough group. The findings of a quantitative method research can be more generalized to the larger public than the results of a qualitative research, because the sample group is so big. (Oak Ridge Institute 2007.)

The aim of this research is to find out people's motivation factors to host CouchSurfers in Spain. People's opinions might be difficult to quantify, but if in a questionnaire there are choices of answers then it is possible to count the various responses and treat the data as quantitative (Walliman 2004, 138). In this research quantitative research has been conducted to get a wide spectrum of answers in order to statistically analyze the motivation factors.

## 6.2 Data Collection

Data are the raw materials of research; analytical methods are used to analyze the data. Collecting primary information is very subject specific, and the decision of the analytical methods should be in relation with the research project and its aims. (Walliman 2004, 157-158)

In this research the chosen data collection method was a questionnaire, because responses can be given anonymously which can encourage honesty and truthful replies. Also because there are no geographical limitations as people all over Spain can answer the questionnaire simply using their own computers and because questionnaire is a cost and time economic method to collect information from a large number of participants. (Walliman 2005, 166.)

Questionnaires can be delivered personally; the advantage of which is usually higher response rate due to its personality, or by post; the advantage being that the questionnaire can be spread to a larger area but the disadvantage being that the response rate is difficult to control. (Walliman 2004, 166-167.)

For this research the chosen method for spreading the questionnaire was on the CouchSurfing network with the help of the Group -features on their webpage. The groups are online discussion walls for posting and reading messages. Groups can be evolved around a certain place, or interest, ideas, sports, music, politics etc. With this research in mind I posted a link of the research to the groups that were relevant to catch the targeted people for the research: the Spanish groups. The message was posted all together in 31 targeted groups that were chosen by selecting the different regions of Spain as well as some very active city groups, such as Barcelona and Madrid. The researcher posted a message in the groups (Appendix 1) with a link to the questionnaire. During one week that the questionnaire was open for responses, from March 31<sup>st</sup> 2011 until April 6<sup>th</sup> 2011, 363 people answered the survey through the links posted on the Spanish groups.

## 6.3 The Questionnaire Method

When using the questionnaire method for data collection it is important establish the exact data to gather in order to list the necessary questions to gather it. The language should be clear and questions simple. Clear and professional presentation also encourages good response. (Walliman 2004, 167.)

The questions for this questionnaire were considered with personal insight and experience in CouchSurfing, starting by listing any possible motivators that I have ever heard people having for using CouchSurfing. After that the possible motivation factors were divided into groups

that best characterize the larger picture and the overall motivation to host, the groups were; social factors, cultural factors, self development factors, community factors, reward factors and reciprocity factors. Some of the questions were merged together or dropped out completely; the remaining questions that formed the final questionnaire were formed simple and easy to understand. In the beginning of the questionnaire certain demographical questions were asked, to be able to differentiate whether the motivations to host vary according to gender, age, duration of membership or experience in hosting.

For the questions a standardized scale was used to determine whether the pointed motivation factors are agreed upon; for making the data accessible and easier to analyze a five-point Likert scale was used Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The Likert scale was chosen for this research because attitudes, values and opinions are often surveyed using Lickert Scale (Heikkilä 2001). In the end of the questionnaire an open text field was given for the respondent to name any other motivations they have for hosting. In total 363 people answered this survey and the total number of responses is used as data in the research.

The survey tool used for carrying the questionnaire through was kwiksurveys.com; a free online survey tool to create questionnaires. The benefits of this tool are that it calculates the number of each answer as well as percentages, therefore minimizing the human error, so it is more accurate when handling large quantities of data and it also saves time.

Before giving out the survey it was tested on some friends and relatives from beginner to intermediate English level, and it was considered interesting as well as easy to understand, it was also sent to thesis tutor for approval before posting it to the groups.

## 7 Research Findings and Analysis

The research was conducted as a questionnaire that was posted to several groups in CouchSurfing to target especially the Spanish members. The questionnaire was divided into 8 pages, each of which dealing with different motivation factors. The first page included demographical questions to gather some background information. The next pages are social factors, cultural factors, self development factors, community factors, reward factors and reciprocity factors; each of these pages had 3 - 5 statements and given a five point Likert scale to answer each statement. The eighth page consisted of two open questions; to mention any other motivators for hosting, and space where the surveyed can leave his/her CouchSurfing username if they wish to be contacted for future research. In the following chapters each of these motivation factors mentioned above will be discussed including the research findings and analysis.

The questionnaire with the results can be seen in appendix 2. For this reason this chapter includes only some graphs illustrating the case when responses from people with certain demographic characteristic differ from the consensus of all the responses.

## 7.1 Demographical Questions

Demographical questions were chosen in order to find out background information that can have an impact on the research variables (Heikkilä 2001). These demographical questions were decided upon: gender, age, how long the member has participated in CouchSurfing and how many times they have hosted CouchSurfers. This background information is relevant when analyzing the collected data; it can be used to find out whether the motivations for hosting vary by gender, age or CouchSurfing experience.

Of all the 363 respondents 60% were male and 40% female. Majority of the respondents (56%) were 20-30 years old, 35% of the respondents were 31-40 year old, 41-50 year-olds counted for 6%, while over 50 years old only 2% and under 20 years old just 1% of the respondents.

When asked about the duration of membership in CouchSurfing the most common membership duration was 1-2 years that counted for 38% of the answers, 35% said they have been members for 3-5 years, 23% of the respondents had been a member of CouchSurfing for less than a year, and the remaining 4% said they have been members for longer than 5 years.

The activity to host within the respondents varied greatly, when respondents were asked how many times they have hosted people through CouchSurfing the most common answer that accounted for 35% of the total was that they have hosted 1-5 times. 21% of the respondents were very active hosts who have hosted for more than 20 times. Members who have hosted 6-10 times made for 18% of the responses, and members with 11-20 hosting experiences counted for 13% of the answers. 15% of the respondents had yet to have an experience hosting CouchSurfers as they answered that they have hosted 0 times.

## 7.2 Social Factors

In social factors, there were four statements: I host in order to have company, I host in order to meet new people, I host in order to make new friends and I host in order to have meaningful conversations. Each statement was answered on a five point scale, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These statements were selected because they reflect our needs for social behavior, and it was interesting to find out how important the social part of CouchSurfing is to its members.

Social factors are important because social behavior is so important to all of us. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the social needs are on the third step of the pyramid, right after satisfying the necessary physical and safety needs. Social needs stress human's desire for affiliation, for example needs for belonging, affection and intimacy. (Beardwell & Claydon 1994, 493.)

The most agreed upon social motivation factor to host was "to meet new people", 93% of all respondents agreed, 48% of the respondents strongly agreed and 45% agreed that it is one of their motivators to host CouchSurfers. Neutral answers accounted for 5% and Disagree as well as Strongly Disagree for only 1% each.

When asked whether "making new friends" was a motivator to host CouchSurfers 71% of the respondents agreed of which 20% strongly agreed to the statement. 25% answered neutral, while 3% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. The smallest percentage of agreeing the statement came from members who are over 50 years old of which 25% strongly agreed and further 37,5% agreed that making new friends is a motivation factor when hosting CouchSurfers.

The statement "I host in order to have company" divided the answers a lot. While only 5% strongly agreed and 26% agreed to it, 22% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed to the statement. 38% of the respondents answered neutral. The least interested in hosting to have company were those respondents who hadn't yet have their first hosting experience, only 4,5% strongly agreed and further 13,6 % agreed that it is their motivation factor to host.

"Meaningful conversations" were an important motivation factor for 77% of the respondents, with 24% strongly agreeing and 53% agreeing. 20% answered neutrally, while only 2% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed.

The next question is an interesting one because romance is somewhat of a taboo in CouchSurfing. It is regularly reminded that CouchSurfing is not a dating site, so when the respondents were asked whether they host to find romance it is not very surprising to find that the majority of the respondents disagree 32% or strongly disagree 29%. Neutrals accounted for 27% of the total. The ones who answered that they host in order to find romance accounted for just 12% together, with 10% agreeing and 2% strongly agreeing. The least interested in hosting CouchSurfers in order to find romance were women, only 1,5% strongly agreed and another 4,4% agreed that it is one of their motivation factors to host, the same percentages for men were 3% strongly agreeing and 13,7% agreeing to the statement. Also a bigger percentage of female respondents disagreed (37%) or strongly disagreed (40%) to the statement when compared to the men's percentages; 31% disagreed and 28% strongly disagreed. The

next figure illustrates the different percentages among men and women as well as the average of all the responses:

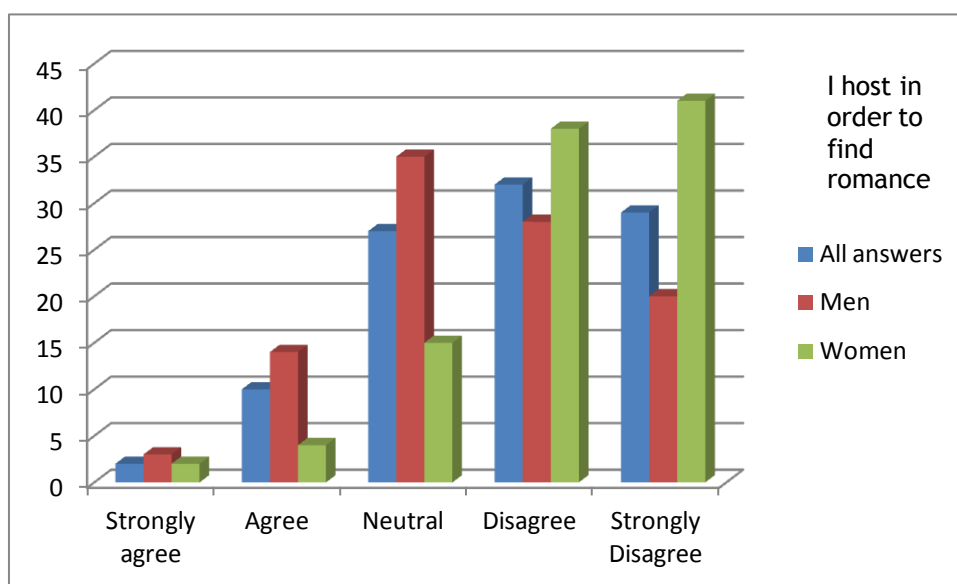


Figure 1: I host in order to find romance

The social motivation factors were in general considered as motivators to hosting CouchSurfers, however the percentages varied by each statement. The most agreed upon social factor that motivated to host was "I host in order to meet new people" and the least agreed upon was "I host in order to find romance".

### 7.3 Cultural Factors

In cultural factors, there were three statements: I host to have cultural exchange with the guest, I host to share my own culture and I host in order to share the guest's culture. Each statement was answered on a five point scale, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These statements were selected because CouchSurfing encourages its members to cultural exchange and it is interesting to find out if the cultural exchange is a motivator to host for CouchSurfing member, and also whether it is more important to share one's own culture or to learn from the guest's culture.

The cultural factors are important because we live in a globalized world and come across different cultures every day; it is interesting whether we choose to learn from different cultures or ignore them. My hypothesis is that CouchSurfers are keen on cultural exchange, both to share their own culture and to learn from their guest's culture.

The statement “I host to have cultural exchange with the guest” was the most popular cultural motivation factor, 60% strongly agreed and another 34% agreed, totaling to 94% of the respondents found the cultural exchange with the guest to be their motivation to host. 5% answered neutrally while just 1% disagreed.

The next two questions “I host in order to share my own culture” and “I host in order to share the guest’s culture” were both mostly agreed to be the motivators for hosting. In the end it counted a little bit more important for the respondents to share the guest’s culture, with 41% strongly agreeing and 48% agreeing, than sharing their own culture 43% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing. For sharing the guest’s culture the neutral answer counted for 9%, disagree for 2% and strongly disagree for 1% of the total. For sharing their own culture the neutral answers were 15% of the total and only 2% of respondents were disagreeing.

Over all the cultural factors were seen as a motivator to host in over 90% of all the cases. In the next figure the agreeing percentages are illustrated from all the cultural statements. The figure shows very high agreeing percentage and very low disagreeing percentage for all the different cultural motivation factors to host.

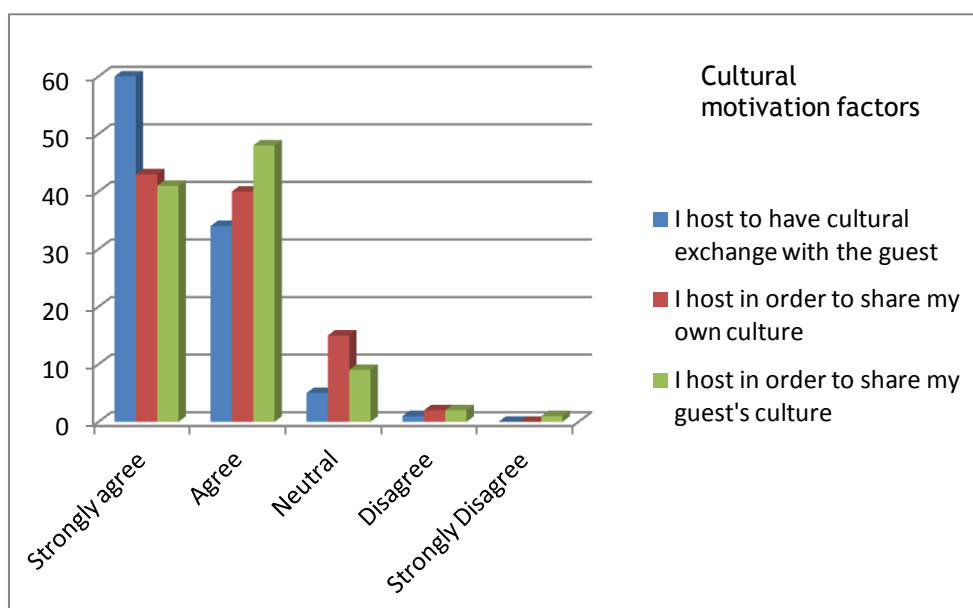


Figure 2: Cultural motivation factors

The cultural motivation factors were in general considered as motivators to hosting CouchSurfers; however the percentages varied some by each statement. The most agreed upon cultural factor that motivated to host was “I host to have cultural exchange with the guest” and the least agreed upon was “I host in order to share my own culture”, however the agreeing percentages for the cultural factors were high in all the statements.



#### 7.4 Self Development Factors

In self development factors, there were four statements: I host in order to become more open minded, I host in order to develop my personality, I host in order to learn to know myself better and I host in order to practice and learn languages. Each statement was answered on a five point scale, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These questions were selected because the self development factor is very interesting; behind all the fun socializing and a little culture sharing there is always the possibility to learn. Also many people have told for example in their profiles or in the CouchSurfing Testimonials (2011) about CouchSurfing changing their lives due to becoming more open minded, knowledgeable and tolerant, and these statements are a great way to find out whether it applies to the Spanish CouchSurfers.

The self development is important because as we are all individuals living in this fast moving society; it is crucial to remain competitive and knowledgeable, it is good to “invest” in oneself, to constantly upgrade and learn new skills as well as personally improve (Yau 2005). According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, the self actualization needs only occur when all the more basic needs are fulfilled; however this doesn’t make the self development needs any less important.

The theme that often repeats in CouchSurfing members’ personal profiles is that they are open-minded. But is it a motivation factor to host? Over all 73% of the respondents agreed that they “host in order to become open-minded” (29% strongly agreed and 44% agreed). 20% of the responses were neutral, 4% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed to the statement.

Answers to the statement “I host in order to develop my personality” had more variation, but still most respondents agreed that it is one of their motivators, 18% strongly agreed and 41% agreed. 25% of the answers were neutral, while 13% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed of it. The members with no hosting experience were more into developing their personality by hosting as 27,9% strongly agreed and further 44,2% agreed it to be their motivation factor. The next figure illustrates the difference in percentages between all the answers and the answers from members with no hosting experience; the agreeing percentages are higher and the disagreeing percentages are lower among the members with no hosting experience.

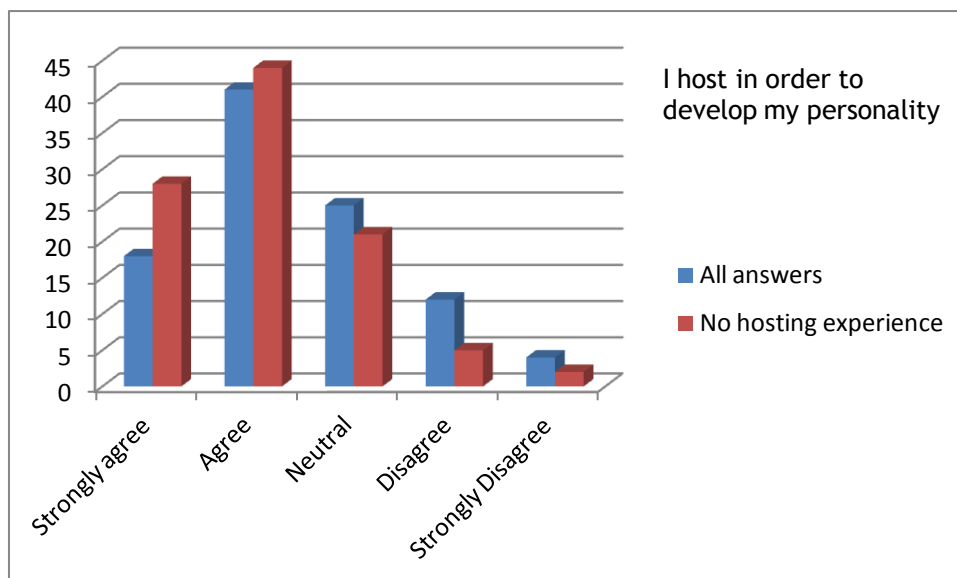


Figure 3: I host in order to develop my personality

A few people less found the statement “I host in order to learn to know myself better” to be a motivation factor when hosting CouchSurfers, 12% strongly agreed and 35% agreed. A big portion of answers to this question were neutral 34%, while also 20% of the respondents disagreed to the statement (5% of the total strongly disagreed and 15% disagreed).

Many people seemed to have an interest in language learning and practicing, all together 77% of all the respondents said they “host to practice and learn languages” (34% strongly agree and 43% agree). Neutral answers counted for 17% of the total, disagree to 5% and strongly disagree to only 2%.

The self development motivation factors were in general considered as motivators to hosting CouchSurfers, however the percentages varied by each statement. The most agreed upon self development factor that motivated to host was “I host in order to practice and learn languages” and the least agreed upon was “I host in order to learn to know myself better”. However most the statements were agreed upon by the majority of respondents as motivations to host.

## 7.5 Community Factors

In community factors, there were four statements: I host to build a global community of CouchSurfers, I host to make the world better, I host to make the world safer and I host because I have a will to help. Each statement was answered on a five point scale, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These questions were selected because they reflect the CouchSurfing Vision Statement (2011): “We envision a world where

everyone can explore and create meaningful connections with the people and places we encounter. Building meaningful connections across cultures enables us to respond to diversity with curiosity, appreciation and respect. The appreciation of diversity spreads tolerance and creates a global community.” Also it is interesting to find out whether the members are following the CouchSurfing vision.

The community factors are interesting because CouchSurfing wishes to actively build a global community of CouchSurfers; “We are a community and we are a movement --- in fact, our goal is nothing less than changing the world.” (CouchSurfing About 2011.) It is interesting to see if the members are as dedicated to the community building to see whether they think it a motivation factor to host other members.

“I host in order to build a global community of CouchSurfers” was also a motivation factor to host for many of its members, 20% strongly agreed and 36% agreed to the statement. Big percentage (31) of the responses was neutral, while 10% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed.

Many of the respondents were also on the quest of making the world better, 29% strongly agreed and 37% agreed to the statement “I host in order to make the world better”. 9% of the respondents disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed that it is their motivation to host. 20% of the answers were neutral. Women were more inclined into hosting to make the world better with 38% strongly agreeing and another 37% agreeing to the statement, the men’s figures were 23% strongly agreeing and 37% agreeing the statement. The next figure illustrates the differences in agreeing percentages among men and women, the women were more likely than men to strongly agree to the statement, and also less likely to disagree or strongly disagree to the statement than men.

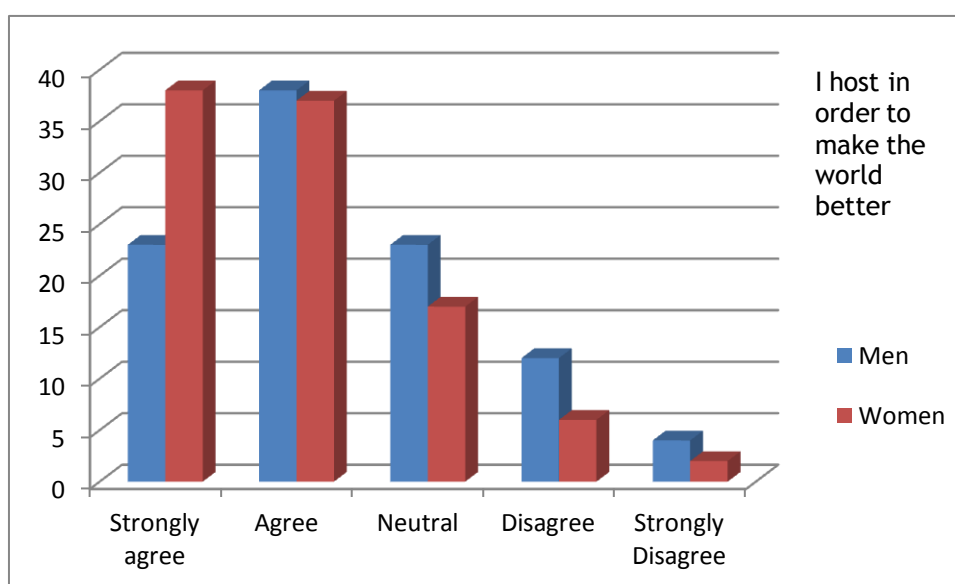


Figure 4: I host in order to make the world better

Many also hosted in hope of “making the world safer”, 19% strongly agreed and 26% agreed to this statement. A whopping 39% of respondents answered neutrally while 11% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. Women were also more interested in safety with 26% of the woman respondents strongly agreeing and another 28% agreeing that they host to make the world safer, with men the same percentages were 15% strongly agreeing and 25% agreeing.

The statement “I host because I have a will to help” was mostly agreed upon, 30% of the respondents strongly agreed and 43% agreed. Neutral answers counted for 19% of the total, while disagree 6% and strongly disagree only 2% of the total. The will to help was strongest among those over 50 year old with 50% strongly agreeing and 17% agreeing to the statement, however the number of over 50 year old people in this research was so small that no generalized conclusions can be drawn from this.

The community motivation factors were in general considered as motivators to hosting CouchSurfers, however the percentages varied by each statement. The most agreed upon community factor that motivated to host was; “I host because I have a will to help” and the least agreed upon was; “I host to make the world safer”, however the agreeing percentages were quite high to all the statements.

## 7.6 Reward Factors

In reward factors, there were five statements: I host to get gifts from the guest, I host to save money, I host to get experience in CouchSurfing, I host to get friends and references in CouchSurfing, and I host in order to get vouched for in CouchSurfing. Each statement was answered on a five point scale, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These questions were selected because the rewards are the actual tangible results of what hosts can benefit from hosting a CouchSurfer. The first two questions are monetary questions of either getting gifts or saving money and the last three are ways to develop oneself a good reputation in CouchSurfing community. It is interesting to find out whether these rewards are considered an important motivator for hosting.

Tangible rewards include pay, bonuses and other benefits (Armstrong & Brown 2006, 22.), there are very little tangible rewards used in CouchSurfing, some guests bring small gifts to their hosts and this can be seen as tangible reward from hosting, as well as sharing the food bill from the supermarket. According to Armstrong & Brown (2006) intangible rewards are for example; learning, personal development, recognition in the work community, social life and

work experience. The intangible rewards are much more common in CouchSurfing but much more difficult to calculate, in this case it has been researched whether gaining more experience and recognition within the community is a motivation factor to host.

Monetary gain was measured by all accounts as an unimportant motivation to host. 55% strongly disagreed and another 35% disagreed when asked whether they “host to get gifts from the guests”, totaling to 90% of all the responses. 7% answered neutrally, while only 2% strongly agreed and 1% agreed that gifts from the guests are one of their motivators to host. Out of those respondents who had not yet hosted anyone, 0% agreed that they would host to get gifts, also within all the other demographical variables the agreeing percentages were very small and close to the general opinion.

“Hosting to save money” wasn’t much more common, only 35 strongly agreed and 9% agreed to the statement. Nearly half (47%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and another 27% disagreed that they host to save money. 13% of the answers were neutral.

Building the trust and personal reputation in CouchSurfing by number of experiences, friends, references and vouches proved to be more important reward factor than monetary gain. 49% agreed that they “host in order to get experience in CouchSurfing” (9% strongly agreed and 40% agreed). 18% disagreed to the statement and 6% strongly disagreed. Neutrals accounted for 26% of the total. The importance of gaining experience in CouchSurfing was more important to those who had been members of CouchSurfing for maximum one year 15% strongly agreed and another 41% agreed to the statement, when compared to the members who had been on CouchSurfing for longer than three years the figures were 7% strongly agreed and 35% agreed. Also the hosting experience had an effect; those with no hosting experience were more interested in getting experience 17% strongly agreed and more than 38% agreed to the statement when compared to those members with more than 10 hosting experiences, their percentages were 6% strongly agreed and 32% agreed they host to gain more experience in CouchSurfing. The figure above illustrates how both the membership duration and the hosting experience effect the interest in gaining experience; the longer the membership duration and the more hosting experience the respondents had, the less likely they were to respond that gaining experience is one of their motivation factors to host, and also they were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree to the statement than members with shorter membership duration or less hosting experience.

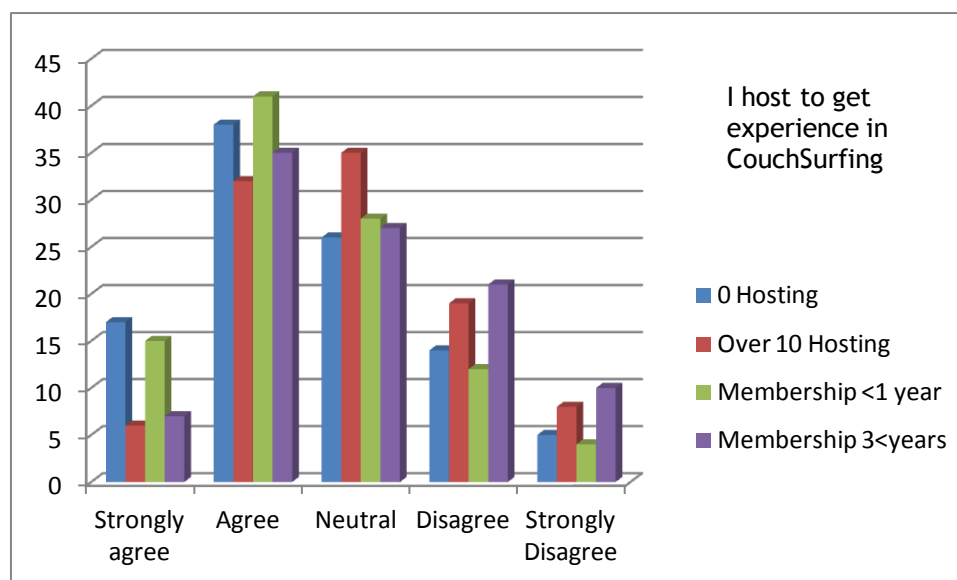


Figure 5: I host to get experience in CouchSurfing

Fewer respondents hosted “to get friends and references in CouchSurfing” 5% strongly agreed and 17% agreed that it is one of their motivation factors. The disagreeing numbers were larger 32% disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed. The neutral answers were also plenty 31% of the total. The new members with membership duration less than a year were also more interested in getting friends and references 9% strongly agreed and 19% agreed, than those who had been on CouchSurfing longer than three years who counted as 5% strongly agreeing and further 12% agreeing to the statement.

Most respondents (62% of the total) disagreed when they were asked whether they “host to get vouched for in CouchSurfing”, with 37% disagreeing and 25% strongly disagreeing. Only 3% strongly agreed and another 6% agreed to the statement. Neutrals accounted for 29%. The highest percentage (50%) of people who strongly agree to host in order to get vouched for were from the group of over 50 year old members, also surprisingly the members who had been in CouchSurfing for the over 5 years seemed to be keen on getting vouched for (17% strongly agree, 8% agree), however the number of over 50 year old people as well as people who had been in CouchSurfing for longer than 5 years were so small in this survey that no generalized conclusions can be drawn from this. The figure below illustrates how the motivation to host in order to get vouched for is generally stronger amongst those who are older or have been members of CouchSurfing for a long time, then the average of all the responses.

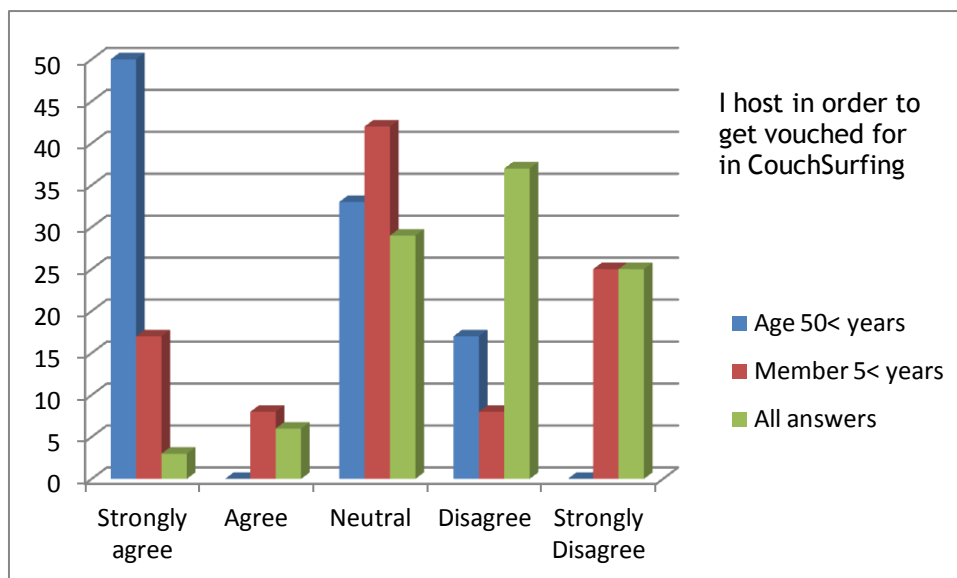


Figure 6: I host in order to get vouched for in CouchSurfing

The reward motivation factors were in general not considered as motivators to hosting CouchSurfers; however there was great variation in the percentages in different statements. The most agreed upon reward factor that motivated to host was “I host to get experience in CouchSurfing” and the least agreed upon was “I host to get gifts from the guests”. Even though most statements in the reward factors were not considered as a motivator by the majority, there was always small percentage who answered that they get motivated by these factors.

### 7.7 Reciprocity Factors

In reciprocity factors, there were three statements: I host in hope of being hosted by my guest in the future, I host in hope of having a better chance of being hosted by someone in the future and I host because of paying back for previous hospitality. Each statement was answered on a five point scale, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These questions were selected because CouchSurfing relies on reciprocity; its members giving to the community in hope of getting back. It is interesting to find out whether these reciprocity factors are considered to be a motivator for hosting.

CouchSurfing relies on its members to keep hosting; there is little direct reciprocity (between 12% - 18%) which means being hosted by somebody you have hosted before, but the generalized reciprocity; which happens because other’s within the community have hosted them in the past and they expect others will help them again in the future, keeps the community running. (Lauterbach et al 2006.)

When asked about the reciprocity as a motivator the answers had great variation. The direct reciprocity “I host in hope of being hosted by my guest in the future” was agreed by 27% of the total (5% strongly agreed and 22% agreed). The disagreeing was a bit more common 7% strongly disagreeing and 29% disagreeing. Neutral answers were 36% of the total. Direct reciprocity was more important to members who didn’t have hosting experience yet out of those 10% strongly agreed and another 26% agreed to the statement, the percentages got a little lower with those members who had hosted from 1 to 10 times with 5% strongly agreeing and 22% agreeing, those members who had hosted over 10 times had even smaller percentage 5% strongly agreeing and 20% agreeing, this shows a trend that according to this research; the more hosting experience a member has the less likely they host in hope of being hosted by their guest in the future.

The next question was of general reciprocity “I host in hope of being hosted by someone in the future” and more people found it to be a motivation factor rather than the direct reciprocity, this reflects their trust on the CouchSurfing community and its general reciprocity. 9% strongly agreed and 33% agreed that they host of being hosted by another CouchSurfing member in the future. 25% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed to the statement, while neutral answers accounted for 26% of the total. General reciprocity got much higher agreeing percentages in all the groups, especially within the people who had been members for over 5 years, of which 33% strongly agreed and 42% agreed to the statement.

Those who hosted because of paying back for previous hospitality accounted for the total of 32%, 9% strongly agreeing and 23% agreeing. Neutral answers were 24% of the total. 29% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed to the statement. Both membership duration and the hosting experience seemed to have an impact when asking whether people host to pay back for previous hospitality, the longer the membership duration and the more hosting experience they have, the more likely they agreed to the statement, highest agreement rate was with those who had been in CouchSurfing more than 5 years, 25% strongly agreed and further 58% agreed to the statement. The figure below illustrates the effect of hosting experience and membership duration into motivation to host because of paying back for previous hospitality; both the experience and duration lead to bigger agreeing percentages.



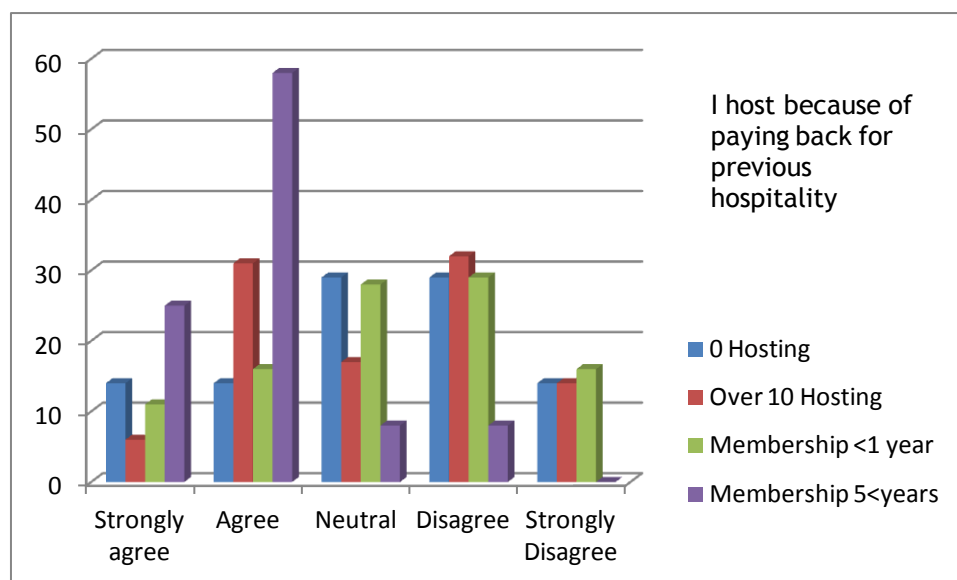


Figure 7: I host because of paying back for previous hospitality

The reciprocity motivation factors were in general considered as motivators to hosting CouchSurfers, however the percentages were substantially lower than on the other factors, except for the reward factors. The most agreed upon reciprocity factor that motivated to host was “I host in hope of having a better chance at being hosted by someone in the future” and the least agreed upon was “I host in hope of being hosted by my guest in the future”.

When calculating the agreeing percentages between different motivation segments the most agreed motivation factor was the cultural factor with an average of 88,7%, followed by self development factors with an average of 64%, community factors with an average of 59,3%, social factors with an average of 56,6%, reciprocity factors with an average of 33,7% and the reward factors with an average of 19,2%.

## 7.8 Other Motivation Factors

The eighth page consists of only two questions. The first one is an open question to mention any other motivators for hosting that were not asked about in the survey previously. The second question is an open box where the surveyed can leave his/her CouchSurfing username if they wish to be contacted for future research. The first question was designed to collect any other possible motivation factors for hosting, and see if some of them are mentioned more than once, in order to see if the members had some other motivation factors not surveyed in this questionnaire behind their action to host other members. The second question was designed to get contact with those members who were willing to do a qualitative interview for this survey; however the systematic collection and analyzing the quantitative data

took so much time that there simply were no resources for the qualitative interviews. However there is now a list of contacts for any future research concerning this subject.

Out of the 363 people who answered this survey, 119 answered for the open question to “name any other motivation factors you have for hosting CouchSurfers”. Below are some of the reasons that kept popping up in the answers regularly, as well as some quotations of the answers from the survey. Some of the answers mentioned more than one reason so the numbers of different answers add up to more than the number of the respondents. All the answers to the open question can be seen in appendix 3.

I host to discuss, share and learn (27 answers); many people wanted to host in order to learn something, to discuss points of view and to share their knowledge; “To learn, share and discover new people and new points of life. To take all the chances that life offers”. I host because it is fun was answered in total 17 times, “It’s so much fun! :P”. 14 people mentioned that hosting is like experiencing another country without leaving home; “To live other lives in other countries without leaving home.” and “to host is another way of travelling.” Some people’s motivation was simply to help other people; “help others to do their trip easier” and “help people” were answers among those 14 that replied they want to help. 13 people mentioned the good experiences being a reason to host; “great experiences shared while hosting people”.

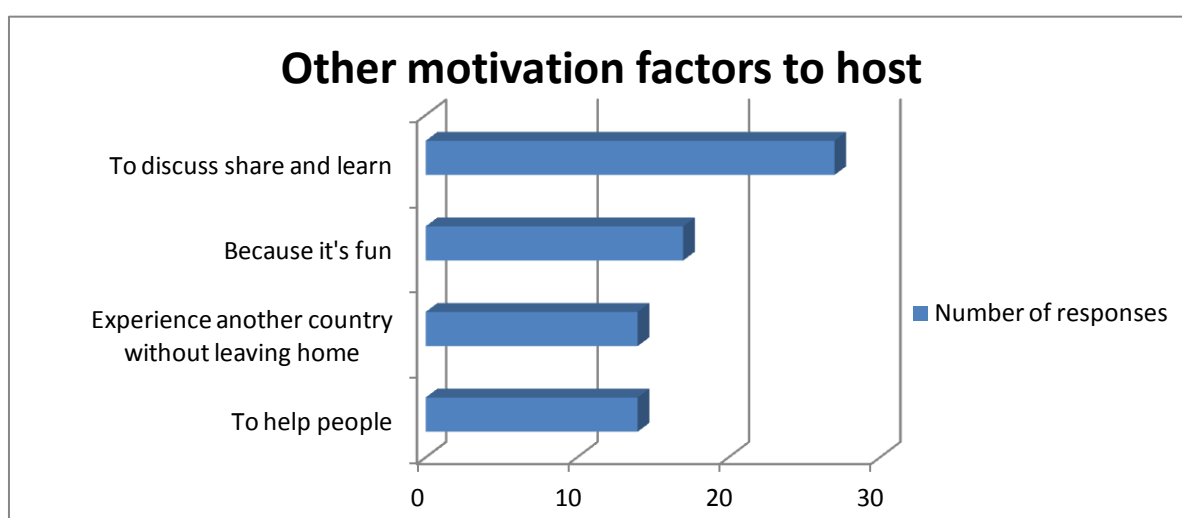


Figure 8: Other motivation factors to host.

Some wanted to offer guests help and a good experience (8 answers) “I host them in order to help them appreciate the city I live in” and “I would like to make my visit(or) see the place as local person sees it, not like a tourist”. 8 people concluded in their answer that they host to change the world or to make it better; “Contributing to a better world and understanding”

and “Creating a different world - one of trust.” 7 answers concluded that they host people because of their karma and because they try to treat others like they themselves would like to be treated; “What goes around comes around” and “The number one reason is a sort of do unto others and you wish they'd do unto you -philosophy”.

## 8 Conclusions

The research subject is CouchSurfing which is a global hospitality network of users who want to travel to foreign places and stay with other members of the network. CouchSurfing enables cultural exchange between the individuals. CouchSurfing has over 3 million members worldwide, from 249 countries and territories around the world.

The purpose of this study was to find out the motivation factors that lie behind hosting CouchSurfers in Spain. Spain is a country that lives out of tourism, yet CouchSurfers are ready to give each other accommodation for free, so why is that? This research was limited to Spain and Spanish host's motivations.

The quantitative research was conducted in Spain where in total 363 people answered the questionnaire about motivations to host. The results of this study base upon these questionnaire answers. The questionnaire answering was limited to CouchSurfers in the Spanish groups, so it works to limit the research only to Spain. This study presents the motivations to host CouchSurfers in Spain.

The findings of this research can be useful when developing new products and services for tourism; what people would really like to experience on their holidays. This research was conducted from the host's point of view, of what reasons motivate them to host travelers, but it will also give an idea why people are using CouchSurfing in general.

To find out the answer to the question; “What are CouchSurfers motivations to host travelers in Spain?” a quantitative research was conducted using an online survey tool kwiksurveys. The questionnaire was answered by 363 individuals within the CouchSurfing community. The findings of this research base on the answers from this questionnaire.

People's motivations were researched on by grouping the motivation statements into segments; social factors, cultural factors, self development factors, community factors, reward factors and reciprocity factors.

Those statements to define the motivation that were the best agreed upon were; “I host to have cultural exchange with the guest” with 94%, “I host in order to meet new people” with

93%, “I host in order to share the guest’s culture” with 89% and “I host in order to share my own culture” with 83%. Some other motivation factors, not far behind in popularity were; “I host in order to have meaningful conversations” with 77%, “I host in order to practice and learn languages” with 77%, “I host in order to become more open minded” with 73%, “I host because I have a will to help” 73% and “I host in order to make new friends” 71%.

Those statements that were least agreed upon were; “I host in order to get gifts from the guests” with 3%, “I host in order to get vouched for in CouchSurfing” with 9%, “I host in order to find romance” with 11% and “I host in order to save money” with 12%.

When calculating the agreeing percentages between different motivation segments the most agreed motivation factor was the cultural factor with an average of 88,7%, followed by self development factors with an average of 64%, community factors with an average of 59,3%, social factors with an average of 56,6%, reciprocity factors with an average of 33,7% and the reward factors with an average of 19,2%

The research findings show that the majority of CouchSurfers are hosting because of social and cultural reasons, to make friendships, cultural exchange and to learn something from the interaction with the guest. The findings also show that few CouchSurfers host because of getting gifts, saving money or finding romance.

Some of the agreeing percentages varied by gender, age, membership duration or by hosting experience. The biggest variation in percentages was from; over 50 year-olds who were not as keen to make new friends as younger members, women who were much less interested than men to host to find romance, the members with no hosting experience were more likely to host because of trying to develop their personality than the average, women were much more inclined than men into hosting to make the world better, women also agreed at a higher percentage than men to the statement of hosting to make the world safer, the importance of gaining experience in CouchSurfing was more important to new members of CouchSurfing as well as to those who didn’t have any hosting experience yet, those with long membership duration or more hosting experience were more likely to host because of paying back for previous hospitality than new members or members with no hosting experience,

As a result to the open question to find out any additional motivations to host, the most common replies were: I host to discuss, share and learn (27 answers), I host because it is fun (17 answers), Hosting is like experiencing another country without leaving home (14 answers), I host to help other people (14 answers) and I host for the good experiences (13 answers).

The reliability of a research measures its repeatability which means its ability to give non-random results. The results are considered reliable if the data is collected from reliable sources. Validity refers to the research method's ability to measure exactly what it is set out to measure. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004, 231.)

The theoretical part of this research can be considered reliable, because the secondary data is collected from reliable sources such as textbooks and carefully selected internet articles. Most of the theory for Chapter 4 concerning CouchSurfing is retrieved from one source only; the CouchSurfing website, which is the primary source of reliable information about CouchSurfing online. The reliability of the empirical research about motivation can be considered reliable because it is based on the questionnaire answers given by CouchSurfing members; the number of individual respondents is quite high (n. 363) and no multiple answers were allowed since the IP addresses were checked and the spam prevention tool was used to block any unwanted spamming of the survey. These limitations were important for ensuring the validity of the research results. All the data was stored online to Kwiksurveys.

The validity of this research is based on all the responses from the questionnaire; the members who answered are likely active users of the CouchSurfing community, since they are engaged in the various groups. The surveyed group is big enough to possibly reflect the overall opinion of the Spanish CouchSurfing community. Having being directly involved in CouchSurfing online community has given more insight to the research, but could also have biased the study.

This research opens new ideas for discussion, for example, what kind of experiences could traditional tourism providers offer for today's conscious and independent travelers? The research can also give an insight to why these alternative ways of traveling, such as CouchSurfing, are on the rise. This research concentrated on Spanish motivations to host, but it would be interesting to find out what other reasons people have to host globally and a wider scale research about the motivation factors would provide interesting findings. Also it is still not researched on whether the motivations vary significantly from country to country or between different continents.

For future research it would also be interesting to know whether the motivations of the CouchSurfing members were different now than at the time they joined, and if their motivations to host have changed due to the time and experience in CouchSurfing. Another interesting possibility to research is whether the motivation factors that drive people to host CouchSurfers are the same or similar to why they use CouchSurfing, in the first place.

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Motivations - Why do you host CouchSurfers? :) -survey

Hi,

I'm a student of tourism currently working on my thesis about CouchSurfing! The subject is "What are the CouchSurfers Motivations to host travelers in Spain?"

I'm hoping you will have time to answer this survey about your motivations. It will be a great help to the research, and it takes only about 10-15 minutes to complete.

You can take the survey here:

<http://kwiksurveys.com?u=CouchsurfingMotivations>

Thank you for your contribution!

Kind regards,

Outi Pietilä

**Results for survey: What are the CouchSurfers' motivations to host travellers in Spain?**

Page: 1/8

**What are your motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers?**

This survey researches the CouchSurfers' motivations to host travellers in Spain. It will be used as quantitative research for a thesis/dissertation with the same subject.

This survey has eight pages, each of which contain from 3 to 5 questions about the motivation to host CouchSurfers.

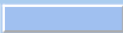

The survey takes about 15 minutes to complete.

Please answer each question truthfully.

All the survey answers will be handled anonymously.

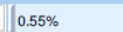


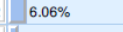
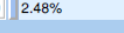
**Question 1\***

What is your gender?

Male	218		60.06%
Female	145		39.94%




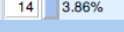
**Question 2\***

What is your age?

Under 20	2		0.55%
20-30	202		55.65%
31-40	128		35.26%
41-50	22		6.06%
over 50	9		2.48%

**Question 3\***

For how long have you been a member in CouchSurfing?

Less than 1 year	84		23.14%
1-2 years	138		38.02%
3-5 years	127		34.99%
Longer than 5 years	14		3.86%

**Question 4\***

How many times have you hosted people through CouchSurfing?

0	53	14.60%
1-5	123	33.88%
6-10	64	17.63%
11-20	46	12.67%
Over 20	77	21.21%

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**The Social Factors:**

Please answer the following questions.

These questions are designed to map the motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers. Choose your answer from multiple choices, stating how important you find the motivation factor.

**Question 5\***

I host in order to have company

Strongly Agree	18	5.25%
Agree	89	25.95%
Neutral	130	37.90%
Disagree	77	22.45%
Strongly Disagree	29	8.45%

**Question 6\***

I host in order to meet new people

Strongly Agree	166	48.40%
Agree	154	44.90%
Neutral	18	5.25%
Disagree	2	0.58%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.87%

**Question 7\***

I host in order to make new friends

Strongly Agree	68	19.83%
Agree	175	51.02%
Neutral	86	25.07%
Disagree	11	3.21%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.87%

### Question 8\*

I host in order to have meaningful conversations

Strongly Agree	84	24.49%
Agree	182	53.06%
Neutral	67	19.53%
Disagree	7	2.04%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.87%

### Question 9\*

I host in order to find romance

Strongly Agree	8	2.33%
Agree	34	9.91%
Neutral	92	26.82%
Disagree	110	32.07%
Strongly Disagree	99	28.86%

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### The Cultural Factors:

Please answer the following questions.

These questions are designed to map the motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers. Choose your answer from multiple choices, stating how important you find the motivation factor.

### Question 10\*

I host to have cultural exchange with the guest

Strongly Agree	202	59.59%
Agree	115	33.92%
Neutral	18	5.31%
Disagree	3	0.88%
Strongly Disagree	1	0.29%

### Question 11\*

I host in order to share my own culture

Strongly Agree	145	42.77%
Agree	136	40.12%
Neutral	51	15.04%
Disagree	6	1.77%
Strongly Disagree	1	0.29%



### Question 12\*

I host in order to share the guest's culture

Strongly Agree	138	40.71%
Agree	162	47.79%
Neutral	30	8.85%
Disagree	6	1.77%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.88%

Page: 4/8

### The Self Development Factors:

Please answer the following questions.

These questions are designed to map the motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers.  
Choose your answer from multiple choices, stating how important you find the motivation factor.

### Question 13\*

I host in order to become more open minded

Strongly Agree	97	28.87%
Agree	149	44.35%
Neutral	67	19.94%
Disagree	14	4.17%
Strongly Disagree	9	2.68%

### Question 14\*

I host in order to develop my personality

Strongly Agree	59	17.56%
Agree	138	41.07%
Neutral	84	25.00%
Disagree	42	12.50%
Strongly Disagree	13	3.87%

### Question 15\*

I host in order to learn to know myself better

Strongly Agree	40	11.90%
Agree	116	34.52%
Neutral	114	33.93%
Disagree	49	14.58%
Strongly Disagree	17	5.06%

### Question 16\*

I host in order to practise and learn languages

Strongly Agree	113	33.63%
Agree	143	42.56%
Neutral	58	17.26%
Disagree	16	4.76%
Strongly Disagree	6	1.79%

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### The Community Factors:

Please answer the following questions.

These questions are designed to map the motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers. Choose your answer from multiple choices, stating how important you find the motivation factor.

### Question 17\*

I host to build a global community of CouchSurfers

Strongly Agree	66	19.88%
Agree	121	36.45%
Neutral	103	31.02%
Disagree	33	9.94%
Strongly Disagree	9	2.71%

### Question 18\*

I host to make the world better

Strongly Agree	97	29.22%
Agree	124	37.35%
Neutral	68	20.48%
Disagree	31	9.34%
Strongly Disagree	12	3.61%

### Question 19\*

I host to make the world safer

Strongly Agree	64	19.28%
Agree	86	25.90%
Neutral	130	39.16%
Disagree	37	11.14%
Strongly Disagree	15	4.52%

**Question 20\***

**I host because I have a will to help**

Strongly Agree	101	30.42%
Agree	142	42.77%
Neutral	63	18.98%
Disagree	21	6.33%
Strongly Disagree	5	1.51%

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**The Reward Factors:**

**Please answer the following questions.**

**These questions are designed to map the motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers.  
Choose your answer from multiple choices, stating how important you find the motivation factor.**

**Question 21\***

**I host to get gifts from the guest**

Strongly Agree	5	1.51%
Agree	4	1.21%
Neutral	23	6.95%
Disagree	116	35.05%
Strongly Disagree	183	55.29%

**Question 22\***

**I host to save money**

Strongly Agree	11	3.32%
Agree	31	9.37%
Neutral	44	13.29%
Disagree	89	26.89%
Strongly Disagree	156	47.13%

**Question 23\***

**I host to get experience in CouchSurfing**

Strongly Agree	31	9.37%
Agree	133	40.18%
Neutral	87	26.28%
Disagree	61	18.43%
Strongly Disagree	19	5.74%

**Question 24\***

**I host to get friends and references in CouchSurfing**

Strongly Agree	16	4.83%
Agree	55	16.62%
Neutral	102	30.82%
Disagree	105	31.72%
Strongly Disagree	53	16.01%

**Question 25\***

**I host in order to get vouched for in CouchSurfing**

Strongly Agree	9	2.72%
Agree	20	6.04%
Neutral	96	29.00%
Disagree	124	37.46%
Strongly Disagree	82	24.77%

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**The Reciprocity Factors:**

Please answer the following questions.

These questions are designed to map the motivations behind hosting CouchSurfers. Choose your answer from multiple choices, stating how important you find the motivation factor.

**Question 26\***

**I host in hope of being hosted by my guest in the future**

Strongly Agree	18	5.47%
Agree	72	21.88%
Neutral	120	36.47%
Disagree	95	28.88%
Strongly Disagree	24	7.29%

**Question 27\***

**I host in hope of having a better chance at being hosted by someone in the future**

Strongly Agree	29	8.81%
Agree	109	33.13%
Neutral	86	26.14%
Disagree	82	24.92%
Strongly Disagree	23	6.99%

### Question 28\*

I host because of paying back for previous hospitality

Strongly Agree	31	9.42%
Agree	76	23.10%
Neutral	79	24.01%
Disagree	97	29.48%
Strongly Disagree	46	13.98%

**Name any other motivations you have for hosting CouchSurfers**

ID	Text Answers (119)
5142499	Because I know what it's like to travel alone and visiting a place with another person is often more interesting. I also like to get local knowledge of the places I visit and like to share that when I can.
5142571	You hev already told everything. Also may be it help me to find a better and cheaper way to travel and even to find a job or occupation, because Csers usually know a lot about everyting.
5142671	curiosity your questionnaire sucks
5142699	Great experiences shared while hosting new people
5142741	To live other lifes in other countries without going out from home.
5142873	zsuzsanna eva szabo because this is fun
5142874	Although everything has been said... I would just add that is to discover that there is life around my own corner
5142906	Find common interest with people from other countries. Learn other cultures and traditions by knowing a little bit of a foreigner. Respect humanity in all its forms. Share happiness with travelers
5142907	JUAN (lo unico que tengo que decir es que tengo una dificultad importante en entender el inglés )
5142992	keep the world simpe and have fun with new people
5142995	• Learn any lenguaje. • Learn cuisine from your country.
5143073	I host to let people know better the country they're visiting (to talk about politics, about facts that remain hided in the eyes of most of tourists, etc.)
5143453	To learn, share, discover new people and new points of view. To take all the chances that life offers.
5143907	Yasna
5144120	I host to share experiences and anecdotes and to achieve funny and worthy moments all together.
5146611	Just because its fun meet new people and share my point of view about life :) Life is too boring if is always the same :P
5146994	I have had really good experiences being hosted, and I strongly believe in this way of travel, where you have a "friend" in every city, people to share your time with and help you to get the best out of the city. I haven't host yet but I'll do that as soon as I come back to my country.
5147890	I think you already exposed the most important motivations, but my main motivation is to feel like Im travelling even when Im my own city, and this is because two

things, in one hand your hosts, as a travellers, want to visit places that you as a local, maybe had never been. And in the other hand they usually share they culture with you, cooking typical dishes, doing things in their way, and that makes me feel like Im travelling as well.

5148511 For fun.

5148876 If we want we can change the world. This is one small step, but usefull.

5148945 cause another world is possible! without money, with exchange, friendliness

5149231 All my motivations have been related in the survey

5149392 Karma

5149743 I think is the better way to get really involved in to the place and people who lives there and gives to you the oportunity to experience the normal and day to day life.

5149787 It's so much fun! :P

Just help people. To "reward" open-minded people, that we need more in the world.

5150067 To help my overrequested city to absorb all the surfers coming as a kind of "work" of our community.

5150116 When I can host again, I'd like to host people with their pets too. My motivation: to help and motivate people to travel with their pet(s). Nowadays it's difficult to move with one's pets because they aren't admitted many times. Couchsurfing could help to move with pets. :)

5150294 Help a cs friend

5150400 orgy, S & M, bondage, golden showers, making plans of terrorist attacks, creating a network of secret drug trade and so on.

5150437 I host because when I traveled I learnt that the most important thing is the help of somebody able to trust you. I host because many people travel for long time and this is a way you lean better of the culture and because sometimes they/we have little money.

5150444 vaihtotalous:)

5150514 will of help and to give what people gave me before

5150736 Cooking exchange! As i don't have money to travel... i bring the foreign countries to me

5150834 Person you have common interes

5150884 To help and To share and

5151080 By hosting I give a chance to guests of getting to know the city/distination with local company, enjoy our life-style and maybe building a long-lasting friendship. Hosting is a way of opening up to all new types of social opportunities. Hosting helps to break down invisible cultural barriers. Hosting allows you and the guest to meet up

with people you may ever not be interested in at first sight but that once you get together you find out first impressions are not always correct.

5151240 Jus having fun, partying. I have also heard about an older lady in Barcelona, who uses couchsurfers to clean her house...

5151468 Pelin Son Once I stayed with cser and he said I host to see my city differently. He was right. You pass one place everyday but with a cser, he or she sees something different..

5151866 i like

5152441 I host because, we are like minded and we love to travel....

5152646 Name - Yogesh I host people so I can understand how different minds work. And how other culture think about our culture. What are those things what makes us different.

5152708 hosting is a nice habit

5152888 being a better person!

5152892 all as described above

5152965 SHARE

5153824 Alberto

5154499 help in the life

5154522 To learn in generally! Every person is an open door for a new world!

5154642 better world

5154789 Give opportunity to discover my own city with my guests

5154968 because i want! because is fun! and also to recruit people to conquer the world hahaha!!

5156046 Italo Para conocer toda esa gente maravillosa que esta alla afuera

5156719 having good time and good sex with interesting girls at my home, romance, relationship

5156864 Know new colture!

5157032 I need to fill my free time, i am boring

5158132 To make possible for many people to travel around. Get the money apart from the experience equation.

5158184 Treat others like you would like to be treated. Thank the world for my luck (having a house, a family, being happy,...) Share my good fortune and happiness

5159926 Learn to trust with knowlege Learn to trust with knowledge Develop empathy, congruency and assertiveness

5160449 Knowing someone from an exotic destination that I am considering for holidays.



5161085 it is the same question as to ask "Why to you receive guests?"

5164753 I would like to make my visit see the town as a local person sees it, not like a tourist. CS are travellers, not tourists.

5164864 To share good moments

For me it's like to bring travelling at home! When you don't have time for travelling it's great, you can meet people in similar conditions as you were travelling around and meeting so interesting people!

5165363 \_\_

5166005 really interested in a person's life

5166375 DEPENDING of the request, and my time!

5167523 creating a different world, one of trust

5169248 I host in order to help them appreciate the city I'm staying/living in

If I help some one when this person need it I strongly believe one day in one place if I need a help (to sleep, to eat, to ask) there will be a person on my way ( may be not from CS) who will have a will to help me with my needs. I guess you had this question in : to make world better - it's similar.

5173345 Contributing to a better world and understanding with less material resources, sharing what we have

5173855 Have a good time. Do special things. Meet fantastic people.

5174055 All the motivations I have towards Couchsurfing have already been specified throughout previous questions in this survey!

5175532 People moving to a new place or country, can be very scary. So If I can help them well why not. I also do it for the company that I get usually with one.

5176122 I host people depending on their own hosting experience: If they have been hosts many times, I like to be their host. So, I host for fairness.

5176840 sex sex sex sex

5179084 I want my children to be open-minded about other cultures and be comfortable about meeting people of all ages, races and nationalities.

The number one reason is a sort of "do unto others and you wish they'd do unto you" philosophy. I guess you could call that reciprocating for the previous hospitality of others. But I might do it even if I'd never been a surfer before :)

5183435 "What goes around, comes around."

Get insider tips to discover new places. Not pretending to go to exclusively local spots. Let's be serious, when you are tourist, you are a tourist. There is no point in no visiting the hidden places, but the known ones. But then, in the evening, your

host will make the real difference.

5187388 Vanesa

5187856 For fun, to show your town to new people, to share food, talk, nice experiences.

5187865 tu fuck for free

5187946 FREE SEX i LOVE HOSTING YOUNG PEOPLE

5188621 I host couchsurfers to tell them about BeWelcome, which is totally better than CouchSurfing except the fact it has only 10 000 members. Couchsurfing is ruled without any democracy, the website looks like crap and many members think it has invented the concept of hospitality. Which is not the case. Hospitality doesn't need couchsurfing.com to exist. Couchsurfing should only help hospitality, not try to make it its own domain and develop a kind of monopoly on it.

5189210 some people help in the household, clean, buy food, cook, give gifts or donate money. this helps.

5189246 help people

5191854 Help others to do their trip easier

5192243 Even if it is an inconvenience (as I now have my life set up in Spain, I work, have friends etc) I still like to think of the traveller and of how much of a difference travelling with couchsurfing made to me. I think we have a responsibility toward every other human, and couchsurfing is a way that we exercise that.

5192263 I live in a small town. Hosting CouchSurfers is a way of meeting new people and cultures and a way of breakig the monotony in a small town.

5192316 I host to start international and intercultural friendships around the world enduring.

5193000 learn what make people ask to be hosted..I always host but I never will hosted

5193194 I can't host, wrote my motivations if I could. I just go as a guest. A better world is easy: you can fight racism and ignorance and distrust just being aware that people are FRIENDLY and honest and willing to help. That makes you a better person, so I firmly believe that CS is nt only the best way to travel but also has a social role.

5194804 Just for the fun of it! It's always good to refresh your pool of friends and people you deal with. As a matter of fact, I haven't host anyone yet because I dont have a place of my own. I try to keep travelling as much as I can. But still I try to go to many CS meetings to socialize and learn new things. ^\_^

5197922 Romance, ho ho. literally SLEEP with girls like most of guys secretely WISH!! Bunch of CS hypocrits!!!

5203034 I like to host people cause i know the feeling of a traveler who only needs somebody to talk or have a coffee or a drink.. i passed by the same situation several times :)

5209251 leva

5210332 I just like it!

5211764 it restores my faith in humanity.

creo en el turismo solidario, no solo por cuestiones económicas sino tambien por  
5211913 cultura, intercambio y afectividad. I believe in fair tourism, not only economic is-  
sues but also by culture, and emotional exchange

5211945 It is fun!

5212100 Open my home to someone and sharing.

5212376 it's fun!

5212578 For the fun of it

to help to the ppl who love to travel but who r not that rich. I understand because i  
5217382 m not rich either

5219644 Plan future travels more efficiently by learning about their experiences

5222854 Cultural exchange

5233706 Meet people in your own city

5234365 It helps me out of my comfort zone, something I need in a certain way...

5234790 Cause sometimes you meet incredible people and it is fun.

5236006 share & play music

I think that everything has been already told. Perhaps just to remark that in Couch-  
5252150 Surfing like in real world we grow better with cooperation.

Help people to develop a more inter-cultural way of practicing tourism, far from the  
5258461 sheepish way.

I love to share my life with other people. I think it's a wonderful way to know a  
5268501 place in a real deeply way. It always means a new experience. To host is another  
way of travelling.

5269144 I host because it's fun. I host to show the world there are good people everywhere.

5269755 practise massage

5271061 To help people travelling without money

5277681 I love to show people around the area which has now become my home.

I haven't hosted but I'm very active and I have helped others in my hometown many  
times, organising meetings, going to have a coffe or drink with visitors, going hiking,  
to the beach, etc. I do this because I like meeting interesting people, open minded,  
5289931 generous, positive, different. But just for the sake of that experience and not ex-  
pecting anything else in that moment or in the future, except -of course- respect. I  
think CS is becoming too popular between people that don't go in that direction, but  
instead try to: - Have a free place to sleep - Party around with the advantage of

knowing someone who knows the places and the people. - Have sex in foreign countries or with foreign people. - Take advantage of generous people. I have seen some "not humble" attitudes that are not aligned with the principles of the CS community. So, this is not a "free friends just because you ask for help" or a "free accommodation" or anything like that.

5290066 It's fun, interesting and always full of amazing experiences!!!