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Employment Opportunities for NEETs in Short-Term Rentals Operated Through Sharing Platforms: A Case Study Across Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus*

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The paper at hand explores whether short-term rentals (STRs), operated through sharing platforms, can provide employment opportunities to young people that are Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEETs) and whether such opportunities can comprise a realistic and viable solution to their unemployment. The focus is on low-skilled native women and migrants between 25-29 that live in Spain, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus. Methodologically, the research is based on the analysis of questionnaires conducted with both NEETs and owners or managers of STRs. Our analysis reveals that only firms that own or manage a large number of properties are in position to offer solid employment opportunities. Owners with a limited number of properties are not in position to offer sustainable long-term employment, for two main reasons. First, the generated income is not significant enough to justify employing an individual through a full-time waged-contract or even on a part-time basis; Second, tasks that could potentially lead to employability of NEETs are either low skill positions therefore are outsourced to cheap service providers or require professionals with appropriate technical skills and certifications. In this context, the paper also discusses ways these obstacles to be surpassed.

Keywords: NEETs, sharing economy, employment, short-term rentals, sharing platforms, Airbnb, European Union, Mediterranean

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Introduction

The paper at hand explores whether short-term rentals (STRs) operated through sharing platforms can provide employment opportunities to young people that are Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEETs) and whether such opportunities can comprise a realistic and viable solution to their unemployment.

The special concern for NEETs emanates from a series of empirical evidence. First, they comprise a subgroup of the total young population that is more sensitive to business cycle oscillations. Additionally, they are more likely to work under temporary or atypical contracts or other “cheap” arrangements, which are easier to terminate under variable circumstances resulting on a more severe impact of a crisis than older people. Such combined factors, along with their lack of important work experience, result in thousands of young people who are discouraged from even searching for a job (O’Higgins, 2011; Bruno et al., 2016; Quintano et al., 2018; Maynou et al., 2020). Additionally, the generally accepted ethical obligation of our societies to prepare a better future for the younger generations, has linked NEETs to the concept of the *lost generation* and have rendered the NEET rate¹ as a societal indicator of the *youth-left-behind* phenomenon (Scarpetta et al., 2010; O’Higgins, 2011; Ruesga-Benito et al., 2018). From an economic point of view, increased NEET rates impact public finances in terms of both welfare schemes deficiencies and gaps in productivity (Quintano et al., 2018).

The accommodation sector comprises the most dominant subdivision of Sharing Economy (SE) and has attracted a lot of attention during the last decade, with STRs operated through sharing platforms being increasingly significant. In particular, SE entered common public discourse in 2011 with the huge successes of Airbnb (Martin, 2016). Pablo Muñoz and Boyd Cohen (2017, p. 21) define SE as “a socioeconomic system enabling an intermediated set of exchanges of goods and services between individuals and organizations which aim to increase efficiency and optimization of under-utilized resources in society”. Even though such socioeconomic systems of production and exchange have existed for many years and SE is, indeed, an old practice (relevant publications date back to 1978, see: Hossain, 2020), contemporary sharing of resources and goods is flourishing, driven by the World Wide Web and supporting platforms.

Interestingly, while the literature provides several insights on the employability of NEETs, as well as on the general employment opportunities offered in the SE (see: Görög, 2018; Agarwal & Steinmetz, 2019), research is lacking with regards to the analysis of the employment potential for NEETs vis-à-vis demand for labour in STRs operated through sharing platforms. The paper at hand focuses on this exact gap in literature.

The research presented emanated from the completion of a case study, focusing on specific target groups and geographical areas. With respect to the target groups, it focuses on low-skilled women and migrants between 25-29 years old, who are either unemployed or economically inactive, while, geographically, is bound to four countries of the Mediterranean European Economic Area (Med EEA), namely Spain, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus. The above selections were made for a number of reasons². First, the NEET rate is higher for the 25-29 age group (Eurofound, 2016; Emmanouil et al., 2020) and it is even higher among low-skilled women or

¹ NEET rate corresponds to the percentage of the population of a given age group and sex who is not employed and not involved in further education or training (OECD, 2018; Eurostat, 2019a).

² Our research planning took place during 2018 and early 2019, while its application was conducted during the summer and the fall of 2019, that is well before the COVID-19 pandemic that erupted in early 2020. In this respect, the literature review, the hypotheses, the research questions, and the conclusions derive from, depict, or are associated with a whole different situation in the STRs industry than the one that is currently faced. Despite of how long the expected recovery and bounce back to a new normality will take, the results of the work in hand are important underpinnings for societies and policies aiming at lower NEET rates.

migrants of that age, indicating that the selected target group is the most vulnerable one within the already very vulnerable (socially and economically) group of NEETs. Second, tourism-oriented services comprise a major employer in all four countries under study and may be in position to provide a viable solution to the employability of NEETs. Specifically, in 2018, Greece recorded the highest share of people employed in tourism among all EU-28 Member State (23.9%, nearly one in four people), followed by Cyprus (20.0%). The relevant rates for Spain (12.3%) and Italy (10.3%) are lower but still above the EU-28 average (9.4%) (Eurostat 2020b). Third, STRs operating through sharing platforms are driven by the huge success of Airbnb and other well-known accommodation platforms (e.g. HomeAway, HouseTrip, Flipkey, VRBO). A sharp increase of listings is recorded in all four countries (Gourzis et al., 2019; Semi & Tonetta, 2020; Amore et al., 2020; Airbnb Newsroom, 2020), irrespectively of the different national regulatory frameworks that are in place³. Fourth, the internet-based nature of SE can be a comparative advantage for young people who face certain socio-spatial limitations when trying to access the labour market. Women that raise children and have heavy family responsibilities or others that are culturally pre-disposed to stay at home along with migrants having limited social capital are among the ones that might be better integrated through online sharing practices.

Because of the above dimensions and peculiarities, the paper includes an extensive literature review on the relevance of the set objective. In particular, we study basic key socio-spatial characteristics of the NEET population in the study countries, as identified in previous works, and make a contradistinction between such characteristics and the demographic profile of people who already offer services to the SE. We highlight that the above target group of NEETs comprises, on paper at least, a perfect match for employment in the SE, as *high vulnerability* pairs with *high attractiveness*. The latter is especially so when this pairing is meant to be implemented within the Med EEA, a macro-region characterized by persistently high NEET rates.

Methodologically, the paper proceeds with primary research on both parts of the equation, i.e. NEETs and STRs, due to the lack of evidence-based literature or recent case studies on the potentiality of the specific pairing. Specifically, a total of 40 questionnaires were filled out by owners and managers of STRs in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Cyprus and 45 questionnaires were filled out by NEETs. The process followed for the sampling of the participants was that of “random transition” from one NEET (or owner or manager) to another, following personal networks and mutual referrals (a technique known as “snowball method”, see: Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Our analysis reveals that most young NEETs of the target-group under scrutiny showed significant interest for providing low-skilled services in STRs, despite their lack of familiarity with employment opportunities and practices of that industry. However, only firms that own or manage a large number of properties are in position to actually employ these NEETs. Owners with a limited number of properties are not in a position to offer

³ Currently, there are different provisions that regulate STRs in the study area, reflecting the divergent policy priorities of each country (Amore et al. 2020). Spain and Italy have relatively stricter legal frameworks in place—at least on paper—to safeguard against illegal income, improve tax collection, as well as protect historical areas, at least when compared to the other two countries. Greece, on the other hand, has recently implemented restrictions on short-term leased properties when it comes to investment, number of days and annual revenue, aiming to protect long-term housing and responding to relevant calls of big-hotel owners for intervention in the market. Finally, in Cyprus, the first legal framework for STRs has been recently, in 2019, launched. The policy provisions included therein focus almost exclusively on preventing the undeclared income that many of the STRs firms tend to generate (Financial Mirror, 2019). The registration of all STRs facilities in a national government database and the obligation of the owner/manager to share the national registration number in all sharing platforms through which his/her property is rented, will soon be implemented. The latter obligation, has been recently institutionalized for Greek STRs.

sustainable long-term employment because the generated income is not significant enough to justify employing an individual through a full-time waged-contract or even on a part-time basis and, tasks that could potentially lead to employability of NEETs are usually outsourced to cheap service providers or require professionals with appropriate technical skills and certifications. In this context, the paper also discusses ways these obstacles to be surpassed.

Sharing Economy as an Employment Outlet for NEETs: A Literature Review

Expansion and Main Socio-Spatial Characteristics of Young NEETs

The term NEET emerged in the UK in the late 1980s, when sociologists in South Wales tried to trace young people who according to their Careers Service records were unemployed or, more enigmatically, were following a “destination unknown” (Coles et al., 2002). While originally the term was not intrinsically associated with a specific age group, most relative studies focus on *young* NEETs, i.e. those belonging to the 15-29 age group (OECD, 2018). Throughout the years the two terms were combined and Eurostat (2019a) now defines NEETs as “the young people neither in employment nor in education and training”.

NEET rates vary considerably within EU countries. In our study countries, Cyprus with 15.7% was close to the EU average (16.4%), Spain climbed up to 18.7%, while Italy and Greece recorded by far the highest EU rates, in 2019 (27.8% and 25.1% respectively) (Eurostat, 2019b). The latter two countries persistently record high rates, as, during the 2005-2015 decade, the share of NEETs in Italy increased from 21.0% to 26.8%, the second highest in the EU, surpassed only by Greece by 0.2% (Quintano et al., 2018; see also: Quintini et al., 2007). Additionally, a geographical analysis at the NUTS-2 regions level⁴ reveals that almost all coastal regions of the Mediterranean EU countries are facing high NEET rates, some being the highest in the Eurozone (Quintini et al., 2007; Bruno et al. 2016; Maynou et al., 2020).

Research within the EU countries reveals that high NEET rates are positively associated with certain demographic groups and negative socio-spatial characteristics. First, the possibility of becoming a NEET increases for people with low levels of education (Eurostat, 2019b). Furthermore, existing data for the connections between youth disengagement and ethnicity or migration, reveal that in 2013 11% of EU NEETs aged 15-24 were non-national citizens (Eurofound, 2016). Additionally, the NEET rate of women immigrants is much higher than that of native females (Eurofound, 2016). Also, Eurofound (2012) concluded that young people with a migration background are 70% more likely to end up NEET than young people from the country in question. Additionally, it is more likely for young females to become NEETs than it is for males. The latter is attributed to obstacles that women face in terms of social structure barriers and negative beliefs, as well as to family responsibilities and the biased perception of the man’s breadwinner role. Inequalities in the workplace are dialectically interwoven with the above realities (Eurostat, 2019b), leading to a wide segment of female employees that have importantly lower raw re-employment opportunities than males (Mussida & Sciulli, 2016). Notably, the NEET rate is higher for the age group of 25-29 (Eurofound, 2016, p. 15; Emmanouil et al., 2020). We indicatively note that the latter rate has surpassed 40% in Greece in 2018.

Employment, Employees and Service Providers in the Sharing Economy: A Brief Account

European and international studies provide some evidence on the demographic profile of employees or

⁴ NUTS (*Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques*) is a coherent system for dividing up the EU’s territory in order to produce regional statistics for the Community (Eurostat, 2016).

other individuals who offer services via SE, although in-depth studies on this issue are generally lacking. The latter is especially so for the Southern EU countries. The 2015 US survey by Burston-Marsteller, Aspen Institute and TIME (De Groen & Maselli, 2016) and a European (UK, Sweden, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands) study by Huws et al. (2016) identified that one-half of employees are under 35 years old. A study on Uber drivers in Cairo (Rizk et al., 2017), along with a comparative study of Uber versus traditional taxi drivers in the US (Hall & Krueger, 2018), found that the percentage of “platform” drivers under 30 years old is higher than the one found among conventional ones. In addition, a study for the US (Mao et al., 2019) concluded that young and senior individuals are more likely to be in Airbnb-related service industries because executing tasks in the SE requires less hard skills or stamina.

The relevance of other socio-demographic parameters, such as gender, are not that clear. Huws et al. (2016) found that in the UK, women are somewhat more likely to join SE (at 52%), but in other countries (Sweden, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands) men dominate, constituting between 56% and 62% of the relevant crowd work force. The study of Hall and Krueger (2018) on Uber drivers in the US found that women make up 14% of Uber drivers, which exceeds the percentage of taxi drivers in the same markets (8%). However, no definite conclusion can be reached, as the deviation between the two values is rather small.

Belonging to a racial or ethnic minority was speculated as one of the characteristics of the profile of people who offer SE services (2015 survey by Burston-Marsteller, Aspen Institute and TIME; see: De Groen & Maselli, 2016). However, a later study found that the ethnic/racial composition of traditional taxi drivers and chauffeurs in the US as a whole, closely matches that of Uber’s driver-partners (Hall & Krueger, 2018).

Sector variability influences the education level of people employed in SE. For example, the study of Mao et al. (2019) in the US found that Airbnb benefited low-skilled individuals. This observation is consistent with the fact that Airbnb-related jobs are relatively low-tech and do not require high levels of education. However, the exact opposite situation is recorded in other sectors of SE. For example, the study of Hall and Krueger (2018) found that nearly half of Uber’s driver-partners (48%) have a college degree or higher, considerably greater than the corresponding percentage for taxi drivers and chauffeurs (18%), and above that for the workforce as a whole as well (41%).

In terms of employment opportunities, it is yet unclear whether SE has a positive net impact on the overall employment, or not, due to inherent difficulties in answering this particular question. One difficulty is that workers in SE are not counted as ordinary employees, thus are not usually or explicitly recorded by official statistics (see: De Groen & Maselli, 2016). Additionally, even in cases where available official statistics show a net increase in total employed population, this should be approached with skepticism as could be due to the transition of workers from informal to formal employment (Avagiannou et al., 2020). Furthermore, relevant case studies have reached contradictory conclusions. Some researchers support that SE promotes entrepreneurship, economic growth, and job creation (Fang et al., 2016; Varma et al., 2016; Mao et al., 2019), while others support that any increase may be balanced out by counter effects on the existing traditional (non-sharing) sectors of employment (i.e. Airbnb “cannibalises” hotels, Uber “cannibalises” taxi drivers and so on), with the net effect on employment and economy remaining unclear (Aznar et al., 2017; Zervas et al., 2017; Plenter, 2017). The above difficulties are mostly prevalent in places or sectors, where traditional (non-sharing) and new (sharing) services are offered in parallel. However, in sectors that SE activities do not challenge or replicate existing services (see, for example, *HelloTractor*, a tractor sharing platform for smallholder farmers) its positive effect on employment may be more evident (Avagianou et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the main motives for employment in the SE are: earning income, flexible working conditions, helping others and staying productive, enjoying social belongingness, enjoying life, having fun and meeting new people, and contributing to sustainability (Plenter, 2017; Hossain, 2020).⁵ These advantages may outweigh the important negative aspects that participants are faced upon, which include joining a job with no social security coverage or union protection, and with revenues that are, usually, too small to substitute a full-time job (Malhotra & van Alstyne, 2014; Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015; Cheng, 2016).

Linking Sharing Economy to Increasing Employment Opportunities for NEETs

Contemplating on the above literature review and reflecting on the possible contribution of SE to the employment on the NEETs, we underline the following. First, the net impact of SE on employment is debatable. However, there is wide acceptance on the positive role of SE to the transition from traditional to new forms of work, as well as from unemployment to employment. It is exactly due to the latter feature of SE that we explore the employment opportunities that the short-term rentals (STRs) industry creates for young people NEETs, especially for the economically inactive low-skilled women and migrants between 25-29 years old. Second, literature suggests that this target group is included among the most vulnerable groups of NEETs. Specifically, NEET rates in the EU are higher for people with low levels of education, migrants, females, and people in the 25-29 years age group. Third, literature suggests that SE attracts young people and low-skilled workers, with a significant share of women and ethnic/racial minorities included among them. It is also important to stress that earning of additional income and work-time/place flexibility are the two main motives for finding a job in the SE. These motives, in turn, go hand-in-hand with the needs of our target group.

The above findings justify our selection to investigate the employment opportunities of one of the most vulnerable sub-group of people within the already very vulnerable (socially and economically) group of NEETs. In sum, one may infer that STRs can provide important employment opportunities to the specific target group of NEETs and that such opportunities can comprise a realistic and viable solution to their unemployment. In other words, *high vulnerability pairs with high attractiveness*, especially when this pairing is meant to be implemented within the Med EEA countries of persistently high NEET rates.

Research Methodology and Implementation

In order to scrutinize this very promising pairing and in order to include the perceptions and experiences of NEETs and owners or managers of STRs, we carried out a number of interviews with them. The interviews were based on questionnaires, which mostly included close-ended questions.

As far as the sampling process is concerned, ensuring a random sample was rather difficult as there is no complete record of our interviewees' population in any of the study countries. The process followed was that of "random transition" from one NEET (or owner or manager) to another, following personal networks and mutual referrals. This sampling pattern is also known as "snowball method", a non-probability tool used when unregistered or hard-to-reach populations are studied (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Our team implemented it in a way that reduced possible bias in selection as, for example, NEETs questioned in the first stage of the research were asked to exclude their relatives or close friends when suggesting other interviewees. In parallel, the four interviewers (one in each country) were trained in order to reduce respondents' reluctance towards participating,

⁵ It should be noted, however, that the importance of each motive varies significantly from platform to platform. For example, for Airbnb hosts the main motivation is to earn money, while hosts on the Couchsurfing platform are more driven by intrinsic motivations (see: Hossain, 2020).

while some test interviews were initially executed. Moreover, all interviewers were fully aware of the local STRs and NEETs reality as they were themselves inhabitants of the regions/countries under study. More specific details for the primary research per group of respondents are provided below:

Interviews with STRs owners and managers: A total of forty questionnaires were filled out by owners and managers of STRs in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Cyprus. We acknowledge that this restricted sample size does not allow, either for comprehensive conclusions regarding all matters that relate to the potential of employability of NEETs in the area of short-term rentals, or for generalized conclusions for all regions of the Med EEA, rather it offers an indication of whether employment opportunities exist or not. Technically, the questionnaire included 40 questions, mainly closed ones that ease their categorization and quantification during analysis,⁶ on topics relating to general profile of the owners and their listings, to short-term rentals as business activity, to the provided services of the rentals, as well as to their contribution to employment.

Interviews with NEETs: Forty five questionnaires were filled out by NEETs (low-skilled females between 25-29 years old and migrants between 25-29 years) in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Cyprus. It should be stressed that one third of the NEETs that took part in the survey are economically inactive for more than 2 years. The questionnaire⁷ tried to assess their awareness on SE and sharing platforms and, most importantly, their willingness to participate in or undertake typical services provided by the short-term rentals (i.e. cleaning, ordering supplies, preparation/serving of meals, basic administrative tasks etc.).

Analysis

Results for the Owners/Managers of STRs

General profile. In relation to their demographic profile, 61% percent of them are males, with a mean age of 41.7 years old. Despite our original preconceptions regarding age and technology use, there appears to be little association between age and the proprietors' ability to maintain and utilize a sharing platform in the promotion of rentals. This is further verified by the fact that owners in the age group 50-72 declared that not only they were able to undertake the part of promoting their rentals on a sharing platform, but also they "enjoy doing it" or this is their "favorite task". It should also be noted that only one respondent uses traditional media (newspapers, magazines, etc.) for the promotion of rentals, while all others use sharing platforms. Out of these the most popular are Airbnb (58%) and Booking.com (34%) and most of the interviewees have been using these platforms for a significant amount of time (30% more than 5 years, 47% between 2-5 years, 23% less than 2 years). Interviews with key-informants provided further insight on the perception of the most important stakeholders regarding sharing platforms, who see them almost exclusively as "advertising sites".

Short-term rentals as a business activity. Business activity in the field of short-term rentals is either achieved through large management companies, or through individual owners who rent a small number of properties that may be either complete dwellings or individual rooms. The number of short-term rentals that are currently offered in sharing platforms and not supported by a management company is difficult to estimate.

In relation to the management of the short-term rentals, all questionnaire respondents agree that this is conducted: (a) either by owners that own and manage a small number of properties on a part-time basis, either

⁶ The questionnaire is available at the following address: http://www.youthshare-project.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ANNE_X_A.pdf.

⁷ The questionnaire is available at the following address: http://www.youthshare-project.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ANNE_X_C.pdf.

(b) by owners that own and manage a large number of properties and declare this as their main occupation, or (c) by management companies that offer professional management services to individual owners. There are only few exceptions to this operation formula, which can be explained by the personal or occupational situation of each individual. For example, a bar owner in Cyprus manages 14 rooms on a part-time basis, which is only feasible due to the close proximity of the rooms to his bar, the high relevance of these two activities, and the different working hours of each. Also, apart from four questionnaire respondents (three in Cyprus and one in Italy), which declare the management of short-term rentals as their main occupation, all others are engaged in this activity on a part-time basis, in addition to their regular professions. Another finding, strongly correlated with the above observation, points to clear limit in the number of rooms, apartments, and houses one can potentially manage on a part-time basis, which in most cases is a maximum of three properties. In contrast, all respondents who declared the management of short-term rentals as their main occupation, own a significant number of properties (11 flats in one case, 20 rooms and 21 flats in another case, and 15 flats and 2 houses in a third case).

With respect to income, the proprietors of small, individually owned properties, report substantial revenues, based on their replies to a number of different questions. 42% of the respondents replied that they have had their property promoted for short-term renting for more than ten consecutive years or that the property was bought or built specifically for this purpose, while an additional 8% replied that the property was restored specifically for being rented out. The overall annual income amounts of individual owners is usually up to 10,000 euros, with two Cypriot exceptions, one with 20-50,000 euros annual income and the second with 50-100,000 euros. In contrast, companies that manage a larger number of units have significantly larger income that reaches or exceeds 100,000 euros per year. It is important to note that the above stated revenues, both for owners and management companies, is achieved in far less than a full year with some properties being available for booking for as few as 30 days in total. Most properties are available for more than 180 days per year (60%), some between 30 and 90 days (22%) and the remaining for fewer than 30 days (18%). The average occupancy rate of the properties during the previous economic year (i.e. during 2018) was around 65%, with 30% of the owners/managers declaring an occupancy rate of over 80%, when the property was made available. Also, despite the increasing popularity of the activity and the increasing number of listings per area, the majority of interviewees (76%) stated that the booking rate of their rentals did not slow down (the surveys were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic). The ones that reported a decrease indicated that this was on average less than 20%.

Last, the drive behind the engagement of owners in the specific activity became quite evident when were asked to talk on the plans they have regarding their profits. Specifically, 58% of the respondents replied that their profit will be re-invested in the short-terms rentals industry, either via upgrading of the existing or via buying new properties, while 30% replied that the profit will not be reinvested, but will be used for increasing their savings. The remaining 12% replied that that they will invest the profit for hiring new personnel. As expected, these replies came from proprietors who own a relative large number of properties (10 flats in one case, 5 rooms 2 flats and 2 houses in another, 21 rooms and 21 flats in another, 15 flats and 2 houses in the last case). In this context, the above percentage, even though is numerically a small one, it is actually very encouraging with regards to the employment opportunities for NEETs, since most of the owners that participated the survey hold a small number of properties.

Provided services and employment in STRs. The services provided to STRs vary slightly from country to country. Cleaning the properties prior to an arrival is universally recorded and in most cases (93%), is included in the quoted price for the rental. In Italy, all properties offer breakfast to visitors, though such practice is not followed in other countries (with the exception of one property in Greece and one in Cyprus). Interestingly, almost all of the owners and managers who offer breakfast in their rentals offer traditional and/or local agri-food products to their guests. This finding may indicate that elements of each region's intangible cultural heritage, especially with relation to food, are considered an added value to the services provided by short-term rentals. In addition, it should be noted that even in rentals that offer breakfast (about one third out of the total interviewed) the variety of the breakfast options is evaluated by the owners as moderate to good. None of the rentals offered what could be considered as luxury breakfast or lunch or dinner. Other services, such as checking the clients in and out of the property, giving direction to the property prior to the arrival, direction and information to various local sights, and in general interacting with the visitors during their stay, are also usually provided. In most cases all work relating to the promotion, running and often maintenance of a short-term rental is done by a single person: the owner of the property. Fewer than 30% amongst the respondents have employees and fewer than 10% employ anyone full-time.

In relation to the day-to-day tasks, most owners (74%) enjoy setting up a profile for their property in a sharing platform, managing the property and the bookings, and exchanging emails with clients. Almost all owners consider the buying of supplies and other maintenance items an easy task (97%) and coordinating and often performing any repairs and upgrades that the property may need as a necessity that has to get done without any resentment (60%). Even bureaucratic procedures i.e. licensing and taxation that are usually sources of bitterness amongst business owners result in only 15% reporting it as difficult. Any regular cleaning prior to the arrival of new guests is in most cases done by others than the owner as most employ cleaning staff when needed.

Results for NEETs and Their Employment Opportunities

Regarding the relation of the interviewed NEETs to the SE, 63% stated that they had never heard of the term sharing economy, although the large majority (75%) is aware of the existence of platforms for the acquisition of short-term rentals and about half of them have used them for planning a trip. However, the majority of NEETs have not thought of these platforms as potential employability opportunities. In relation to the possibility and the areas in which these NEETs could find employment in the field of short-term rentals, almost two thirds stated that they would be interested in assisting the ordering of supplies (63%), more than half stated that they would be interested in providing cleaning services for the properties (58%), or managing the day-to-day needs of the rental (55%) (handing out keys, giving directions to the property etc), while almost half of them (48%) would be interested in preparing breakfast or other meals. In addition, lower percentages of the interviewees stated that they would be interested in more white-collar duties, such as setting up and managing websites (35%) or organizing and delivering excursions to local sites (22%).

Synthesis and Discussion of Findings

Our study brings to front several important trends and results. To start with, most young NEETs of the target-group under scrutiny are willing to accept a job offer in the STRs, despite of that they are not familiar with employment opportunities and practices of that industry. Interestingly, when such a suggestion was put

into their perspective, the NEETs interviewed showed interest in accepting the job or providing services. In particular, they showed significant interest for providing low-skilled services and duties, such as cleaning, ordering of supplies, handing out keys, giving directions to the property etc. This is in line with relevant findings (see: Mao et al., 2019) that reveal how Airbnb benefits low-skilled individuals that search for manual or routine jobs. On the other hand, accepting white-collar duties, such as setting up and managing websites, or providing information on sites and attractions of the area, is not NEETs first priority. The latter duties are usually undertaken by small to middle-sized STRs owners, thus is unlikely for these tasks to generate employment opportunities for NEETs. It should be noted, however, that this might not be the case for large STR firms which might be willing to employ or use the services of properly educated NEETs.

Furthermore, we found that owners with a limited or small number of properties are not in a position to offer sustainable long-term employment, due to obstacles related to their current mode of operation. First, it seems that the income such owners generate is small and is mainly used as a personal income or for small-scale investments that improve their properties. In other words, it appears that, while rentals are indeed profitable businesses, the income that is achieved is not significant enough to justify employing an individual through a full-time waged-contract or even on a part-time basis. Second, typical cleaning and property maintenance—tasks that cause high discomfort to the owners and could potentially lead to increased employability of NEETs—are usually outsourced to cheap service providers or require professionals with appropriate technical skills and certifications. Moreover, such services, especially cleaning, are usually handled informally and their marketing is supported by a strong social network and word-of-mouth. Albeit, not all NEETs have or can maintain an extended social network; usually the quite opposite is true, especially for the studied target group which includes individuals being out of work for a considerable amount of time and migrants that lack any social capital.

Elaborating further on the above and connecting to general futures of the STRs, we underline that rentals are usually offered for short periods of time, much shorter than a full calendar year, especially during the summer months. Thus, in some cases it would be possible for a number of short-term rentals to collectively support, either a part-time job for a considerable period, or a full-time job for as long as the high tourist visitation period holds. Main obstacle in such a perspective is the lack of a mediator, which would be able to perform the matching between the demand for services by the employers and the offer of services by the NEETs. A possible mediator could be beneficiary for both sides, as, on the one hand, it may enhance the employability of the NEETs and, on the other hand, it may enhance the quality of provided services by the short-term rentals, leading to increased revenues for the owners. Its existence could also compensate the absence of social capital in the case of migrants, or support flexible working conditions in the case of women that raise kids or experience heavy family responsibilities.

This mediator can be substantiated in the form of a sharing platform and can include a wide array of services, from cleaning to provision of meals in the form of breakfast, lunch, or dinner. The suggestion on the latter service is specifically proposed on the basis of the following remarks: (a) properties in Greece, Spain, and Cyprus don't offer breakfast in contrast to the ones in Italy that do, (b) none of the properties in any of the four countries offer other meals, such as lunch or dinner, (c) local cuisine and traditional food stocks result in added-value appeal of a short-term rental and (d) almost half of the interviewed NEETs were interested in preparing breakfasts and other meals. Depending on the localities (for example, Greece taxes establishments that serve food differently from ones that offer only accommodation), the possibility of meals as part of the

short-term rental package could potentially involve NEETs and their employment could evolve into micro-entrepreneurship.

Certainly, the above suggested perspective presupposes the presence of certain skills (among these, IT skills are essential), as well as their evolution from employees into (micro-) entrepreneurs, which, from its part, presupposes their willingness to join and handle a very competitive environment and their ability to design and provide or produce innovative services and products (Avital et al. 2015; Cannon and Summers 2014; Martin 2016; Sundararajan 2014; Plenter, 2017). Taking also into account the incubation period for the design and production of such innovative services and products, as well as an adaptation period for fitting into their new role as entrepreneurs, we assume that this transition may not be an easy or an immediate one. Such a transition will require great strength and devotion on behalf of the NEETs, as well as external support regarding training and mentorship.

In the case of owners that own and manage a large number of properties, the employment opportunities are solid, as all of the owners that participated the survey are considering investing their profit for hiring new personnel. Solid employment opportunities exist in the case of property management companies too, which already have full and/or part-time employees. In particular, the study indicated that there is much room for further development, leading to new employment opportunities, due to a number of reasons. First, the number of such companies is still limited in some countries, which is very interesting if one considers that at the same time there are many owners who possess a significant number of properties and still manage their rentals as a part-time activity, thus their properties may not receive appropriate (professional level) management and may remain underutilized. Second, the demand for short-term rentals operated through sharing platforms in all four countries increases rapidly. Third, the percentage of people who are currently arranging accommodation from another private individual via a website or an app fluctuates from 24% in Spain to as low as 3% in Cyprus, suggesting that the number of rentals that are listed in the sharing platforms will grow in the future, together with the number of people that use such websites and apps.

Based on the finding presented above, we conclude that owners with a limited number of properties are not in a position to offer sustainable long-term employment, due to obstacles related to their current mode of operation. Such obstacles may not be surpassed, we argue, unless: (a) a mediator is set in place, to perform a spatially-sensitive matching between demand for services by the STRs firms and supply of labour from NEETs, (b) the NEETs receive external support, mostly training and mentorship, so as to become employable in the industry, and (c) policies that tackle widespread practices towards cheap precarious labour are implemented. In the case of owners that own and manage a large number of properties, as well as in the case of property management companies, there are solid employment opportunities for the NEETs. However, these positions would require skills, the kind and spectrum of which needs to be further investigated.

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