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Airbnb – how and where it affects our homes and neighbourhoods

Do you remember when Airbnb and other “homestay” websites seemed like an uncomplicatedly great idea? And it’s still a great idea when they function as intended; a chance to let your home for some days, or for a couple of weeks, when you are out of town yourself. But, in major cities, those days now feel like a long time ago.

Flats are now being bought up by investors who let these flats on a regular basis. Lately, in

cities such as Paris, Berlin, Barcelona and San Francisco, vacation flats and the agencies that market them are now being closely monitored by city councils and legislators.

Airbnb and other for-profit home-sharing platforms in many cities deprive locals of flats for permanent rent, and often push up rents, as well as prices, for homes that do remain on the market. And we well know what the result is.

And in areas with too many of such apartments, locals can feel harassed by the endless stream of rolling suitcases banging up communal staircases,

and by unknown people in the house. This also causes whole neighbourhoods to change character. Small shop owners close down because their rents go up, in accordance with the general gentrification of the area, and are being replaced by fancy bars and restaurants that attract the short term lodgers.

But many cities are now putting up a fight, and have started to take legal action against Airbnb and other short-term rental platforms.

Here are some of them, and what is being done about the problem. ➔



England, London

The Guardian reports that a quarter of London homes listed on Airbnb by the end of 2016 were rented for more than 90 days last year, many illegally and in breach of an act intended to stop landlords turning badly needed housing into unofficial hotels.

Airbnb admitted that almost 5,000 of its “entire home” London listings – 23% of the total – were let out for three months or more, despite a law requiring anyone doing so to apply for planning permission.

In December 2016, Airbnb moved to limit hosts from renting properties for more than the stipulated 90 days. But in February 2017, in a survey by the BBC, nearly a third of all boroughs told the BBC that the time limit would not slow the growth of short-term letting.

Last year, a study by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) showed that 11% (2,444 properties) of Airbnb’s entire home rentals were let for more than six months of the year.

Sources: BBC and the Guardian

Spain, Barcelona

Barcelona has ordered hundreds of homes illegally rented out to tourists, via home websites such as Airbnb, to be removed from listings and hitting firms with a fine. A team of 20 inspectors, set up by the

city, is tasked with rooting out those who fail to jump through the legal hoops.

Barcelona’s town hall has said that the city would fine home sharing websites €60,000 each, if they do not comply with the laws.

Already in July 2014, the Catalan regional government fined Airbnb €30,000 (\$32,000) for breaking rules on people letting individual rooms in their homes and threatened to block access to its website from Catalonia if Airbnb did not change its ways.

Source: Reuters

Denmark, Copenhagen

In February, Copenhagen city politicians began talks with Airbnb to impose a cap on the number of days’ residents can rent out their rooms or apartments. Mayor Frank Jensen called for a 60-day



limit, arguing that this was needed prevent room and apartment rentals made through the app degenerating into “illegal hotel operations”.

Copenhagen residents have complained that Airbnb’s activities contribute to a rental shortage, because it is so much more profitable to rent rooms out on a daily basis on Airbnb.

Source: The Local

South Africa, Cape Town

Rents in Cape Town have increased by double-digit percentages. As in other major and attractive tourist cities, owners prefer to rent out their properties for shorter stays, by using mainly Airbnb.

PayProp CEO L. Liebenberg, in February said that “The growth of Airbnb and the promise of higher returns has motivated owners to remove their properties from the long-term rental market.”

Source: Sunday Times

France

A group of French hoteliers and real estate agents has launched a lawsuit targeting short term platforms like Airbnb, arguing that their practices amount to unfair competition. The group, which targets vaca-

What the laws say:

Spain, Barcelona: Owners must apply for a licence from the city and display it on any online advertisement. Heavy fines of up to €60,000. If the companies, like Airbnb, continue to refuse to regulate their own users, the fine would jump to €600,000 each.

Paris, France: Properties can only be rented for a maximum of 120 days a year. Those who offer more nights face fines of up to €25,000, but officials are looking into hiking this fourfold to €100,000.

On January 30, 2017, Paris tripled its surtax on second homes, raising the extra charge paid by owners from 20% of the standard property tax up to 60%.

Berlin, Germany: A law, *Zweckentfremdungsverbot*, effective from May 2016 says that owners are limited to renting only rooms, not entire flats or houses. Offenders can face fines of up to €100,000. But in August 2016, a court issued a blow to the capital’s attempts to curb Airbnb activities. The court said that people with second homes in Berlin may rent out their flats to tourists.

Copenhagen, Denmark: The city, in January 2017, called for a 60-day limit, arguing that this was needed to prevent room and apartment rentals made through the app degenerating into “illegal hotel operations”.

London, England: Owners cannot let property for more than 90 days in a given year on a short-term let. If an owner wants to let for longer, they must seek planning permission for a “change of use” from their local council.

Amsterdam, the NL: From January 2017, it is ok to rent out homes for up to 60 nights a year and to

tion rental portals, accuses the platforms of offering a string of tourism services, including tour operator and insurance services, without proper authorization. They want French authorities to impose the same rules on Airbnb and other platforms, as those regulating the traditional rental market. France is the world's second biggest Airbnb market after the United States. Paris has added a new section to its Open Data Portal, which lists all the Airbnb users who have officially registered their homes as long-term rentals.

Source: Financial Times

The Netherlands

"A home should remain a home," says Amsterdam alderman Laurens Ivens.

The city of Amsterdam and Airbnb said, in December 2016, that they will work together to ensure that home owners can only rent out their properties for a maximum of 60 days per year.

Amsterdam has introduced its limit earlier, but Airbnb said that from 1 January 2017 its site will introduce automated tools to ensure homes are not listed for more than 60 days a year unless the owners have a license. in a statement.

Source: The Guardian

Germany, Berlin

The Mayor of the central borough of Mitte von Dassel has taken on the fight against vacation flats and Airbnb, and says: "Dealing with the problem of existing vacation flats is much less important than making sure people realize that the time for buying apartments to rent out to tourists is over. We used to have listings on real estate websites saying 'ideal

no more than four people, provided you own the property or do not live in social housing. Airbnb has agreed to remove properties after 60 days. But so far there are no fines attached.

Dublin, Ireland: In June 2016 the city council ruled that the owners must apply for planning permission for commercial use if they rent out a flat on a short-term basis. But this only applies to Temple Bar district, so very limited.

Sweden: In principal there are no legal limitations. But, if you own a flat with a so called tenant owned cooperative, you need a per-



vacation rental.' That is now a thing of the past."

It is not easy for the city to be sure of who is listing what on Airbnb. A September 2015 survey found that 90% of Airbnb offerings were for entire apartments, rather than individual rooms.

A recent inquiry by the borough of Mitte found that in one Wilhelmstrasse building of 300 flats, 280 were for short-stay tenants.

Source: www.citylab.com

USA, New York

A report by the New York state attorney general's office back in October 2014 said that about 72% of Airbnb's listings potentially violated local laws, which mandate that short-term rentals have to be rented out for more than 30 days.

In February 2016 Airbnb was accused of removing more than 1,000 listings from its site in order to rig a survey of its New York City hosts. New York attorney general Schneiderman said that "Airbnb continues to show a blatant disregard for New York laws designed to protect the rights of tenants and prevent the proliferation of illegal hotels."

Source: The Guardian

mission from the board of the cooperative.

For regular tenants who rent out a flat via Airbnb they run the risk of losing their lease.

New York, USA: Residential property located in a multiple residential dwelling unit, such as an apartment building, must be used for "permanent resident purposes." Short-term rentals have to be rented out for more than 30 days. So, it is illegal to have paying guests for less than 30 days.

San-Francisco, USA: The law limits rentals where the host is not present in the unit to a maximum of 90 days per year.

Japan, Tokyo

More than 3 million visitors to Japan found lodging via Airbnb in the January–October 2016 period, even as the country continues to struggle regarding its legal stance on paid stays at private residences. Such home-sharing arrangements, like Airbnb, which are known as minpaku in Japan, exist in a legal grey zone. But user numbers have surged nonetheless. Roughly 10% of visitors to Japan are thought to use the service.

Source: Nikkei Housing Review

Canada, Vancouver

"We're going through an enormous amount of trouble to try to produce rental housing. We're not doing it for tourist accommodation. We're doing it for people who otherwise could not afford to live and work in the city of Vancouver," said Councillor Geoff Meggs in an interview in April 2016. Vancouver bylaws prohibit rentals of less than 30 days outside of designated hotel and bed and breakfast zones and without a business license.

Source: Vancouver Sun

There are other ways

If you want to avoid Airbnb and other money making methods of home sharing, check out sites which offer home swaps, where no money is involved. And where you can also get to know neighbours, use bicycles and even swap cars! And also where you can make new friends and stay in touch! See e.g. HomeLink, HomeExchange and Intervac.

From June 2016, Airbnb and other similar platforms can only post rental listings by residents registered with the City, or face daily fines of up to \$1,000.

Quebec, Canada: The Quebec law requires, from April 2016, owners who for more than 31 days on a 'regular basis' rent out their properties to obtain a \$250-permit, have at least \$2-million of insurance and pay a nightly hotel tax of up to 3.5 per cent. Violators face fines between \$500 and \$50,000.