

Interview mit Linda, Aktivistin gegen illegale Kurzzeitvermietungen in einer Stadt in Kalifornien, persönlich, 05.05.2017

Interviewer: TF, Transkription: GS, Korrektur der Transkription: LS

Thomas: You can just put it close to you, that, I don't// #00:00:05-2#

Linda: Okay, sure. #00:00:07-7#

Thomas: Okay, so you approve, that I record? #00:00:12-6#

Linda: I approve that you record the conversation. #00:00:14-7#

Thomas: Thank you very much. I said something about the projects, I can tell you more afterwards, if your are interested. To start with I just ask you to introduce yourself.
#00:00:26-7#

Linda: I'm (*Linda*) and I'm the co-founder of (*name of activist group*). #00:00:38-0#

Thomas: Which is, yeah, could you please briefly describe what (*name of activist group*) is about, what is its primary objectives, what are the major activities and why, as you have been, or are one of the co-founders, why did you start it? #00:01:04-5#

Linda: Hm ... Okay. #00:01:05-5#

Thomas: (...) #00:01:07-9#

Linda: Hold on, one second. Okay. ... So (*name of activist group*) was started because we felt that our neighbourhoods were becoming commercialized and taken over by commercial operators and that our homes and our apartment buildings were being turned into de facto hotels. We saw our neighbors being evicted, we saw the takeover of affordable housing and we saw the laws of ... the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. And we were very concerned that what was supposed to be home sharing had become co-opted by something else. That's not home sharing. That's basically a commercialization of our apartment buildings and our homes. So we started an organization, we're grassroots, non-profit and we are made up from people all over the city of (*city in California*). We have 4.000 people who are actually members, but we are also part of a coalition of all of the affordable housing organizations in the city and the hotel workers' union – turns out they kind of joined us because they have been affected –, and the (*name of activist coalition 1*), we have another, the (*name of another activist coalition 2*), so we're quite a big and powerful coalition. But we started just as a group of neighbors from around the city who were concerned. And we wanted to see if, what we either wanted to see that the existing regulation that said that short-term rentals were illegal in residential zones, that either that be enforced or that new regulations be enacted that protect housing and the quality of life in our neighbourhoods and make a space for true home sharing. So that was our goal and ... we see that there's been a lot of damage to our neighbourhoods and I guess we are just a group of residents started out that way ... that grew into a much bigger coalition.
#00:03:43-9#

Thomas: When did you start it? #00:03:47-5#

Linda: We started four years ago. We were just sitting around my dining table, a group of us from all over the city, who had noticed that this was a problem and we found each other online, actually. Some of us through word of mouth, some of us. And we came up with a

name, (*name of activist group*) because (*explanation includes a reference to a slogan from a local politician*). #00:04:17-0#

Thomas: Okay. #00:04:18-1#

Linda: So we were telling (*name of activist group*). #00:04:20-7#

Thomas: That's the connection of// #00:04:22-3#

Linda: Yeah. And that's where we ((kick off with it)). And we've been, you know, we've slowly grown from a very small group to a, you know, a much bigger group. And we are, we've been meeting with city hall, we meet with, you know, we've actually helped to, had a lot of involvement in the drafting in the new regulations. And we'd like to protect true home sharing where somebody opens their door to a stranger and rents a bedroom or a couch. But we don't want to see the loss of our housing, we don't want to see our streets turn into party houses and de facto hotels. #00:05:09-0#

Thomas: Mhm. So the difference between true home sharing and this, I think, you named it short-term rental abuse on the website// #00:05:17-2#

Linda: Yeah. Short-term rental abuse is very different because it's a home that's not occupied by a long-term person, not by a tenant and not by the owner, it's – what we see is, true home sharing is when somebody's primary residence is rented out to somebody who is visiting. #00:05:42-6#

Thomas: Mhm. #00:05:44-0#

Linda: And the way the law is now, people are not allowed to rent out anything that is under 30 days, ((so it's rent stabilized)). So we want to see that these units were people – I mean literally hundred if not thousands of people have been evicted by commercial operators. And what they do is, now there are small commercial operators and there are big commercial operators, and what we discovered is, we kind of got into this, is that the commercial operators answer all the advertisements in the paper for when there is a place for rent. They call and they say, "I'd like to rent it and then let me, well, lease it", and then they furnish it and then they walk away and advertise it on Airbnb. So we have like just, like on the street alone, we had 11 unoccupied houses with nobody living in there. And at one point we even had somebody ringing our doorbell at five in the morning saying, "housekeeping", they were at the wrong house. So we've basically turned into a hotel strip. #00:06:54-8#

Thomas: And this is a development of recent years, or? #00:06:58-0#

Linda: This is been gradually creeping up, quite pernicious. We've known about it probably for five years, maybe six years and our organization just kind of started gradually the group and we, I think now there are, I forget how many, there are two sorts of short-term rental in this city that we know about. One is the kind of I am talking "true home sharing" and the other is where there is not a permanent resident. #00:07:36-4#

Thomas: Do you have any idea what percentage// #00:07:39-7#

Linda: It's all on Murray's website [Murray Cox, initiator of Inside Airbnb]. #00:07:41-8#

Thomas: Okay, so you use// #00:07:42-9#

Linda: I was, I could, I just, what percentage of it is the greater – well, here is the problem: the greatest proportion of short-term rentals on Airbnb – and there are sixty other websites, but Airbnb is sort of biggest –, but I think, I think what we've learned is, I wanna say that 60% are commercial. So that's a problem. Because those are all, you know, I think we have, altogether, I think, we have 26,000 short-term rentals in this city. It changes, I mean you have to get the, the current statistics, it's – Murray keeps it very current. #00:08:29-4#

Thomas: How, what else do you do for research, we are getting back// #00:08:33-5#

Linda: Excuse me? #00:08:35-7#

Thomas: What do you do? What sort of research do you do to find out all these things because// #00:08:40-1#

Linda: We use, we have a number of different people who actually know there's something called "AirDNA", there's Murray Cox's research, the hotels have done research. I don't think the research disagrees, except Airbnb. And Airbnb, it's very clear that they are the greatest in pushing for their profit, [it] comes from their commercial brokers. The true home sharers are not a reliable source of revenue because people do it, you know, they do it for a while and then they don't do it again. And what the commercial brokers are able to do for Airbnb is pick up all the advertisements every time there's a rental. They grab it and then they furnish it and then they pick the low hanging fruit and bring in, they are the rain makers. They are the people who bring in the most steady customers because a commercial broker is full-time, well monitors this property, advertise it and, you know, do the whole thing. So basically, and they have lock boxes, you can walk up and down the streets here and you'll see these little lock boxes and you'll know it's an Airbnb house. #00:10:05-0#

Thomas: How would you generally describe your attitude towards Airbnb and its services and business practices? #00:10:12-2#

Linda: I think that there are unfair Airbnb practices. I think that they, they've taken an unfair advantage, I think they have not allowed an even playing field with other businesses. I think their goal has been to disrupt the hotel, you know, industry. And I'm not, I am not, I am not a representative and I don't support hotels per se over – I'm not saying they necessarily are perfect – but I think Airbnb has been dishonest in many ways. I think they've painted a picture of what they do and refuse to follow the rules that other businesses follow, and they say one thing and they do another. So, by the way, when I first heard about the idea of homestay, I was in Cuba, and I did homestays there. They had a wonderful system. Now, I understand, Airbnb has taken over a lot of that and that they are not even always paying people the way they're supposed to. So I think it's exploiting and I – but the concept of homestay or home sharing, or the concept of the sharing economy is very appealing to me. I love the idea. But, but I would like to see true cooperatives develop where people benefit directly from the revenue and – 'cause Airbnb is just another corporate entity, the corporate entity that has taken all over what used to be a word of mouth or smaller, whatever. Somebody didn't cream off the top ... take money off the top. And so when I say, now Cuba, what you see is in this economy where people are really struggling, Airbnb makes a profit from people who are sharing their homes. And ... what I wish to happen is somebody help them do their own technology so they could have taken the profits themselves. And not, because it's an incentive, they've incentivized people to take real homes off the market in places where there are terrible housing shortages. #00:12:34-4#

Thomas: And in general you not, you think the sharing economy is not something bad?
#00:12:39-7#

Linda: No, I think it's a great// #00:12:41-7#

Thomas: It depends on the way// #00:12:44-1#

Linda: I think it depends on the way – if it's a true sharing and not just, you know, it's a very catchy phrase, and if, you know, it's one of the best advertising phrases that has ever come along. But I alone, I've been part of cooperative, you know, the idea of cooperative sharing economy is, I think, wonderful. And the research that's being done, have you read the, there is a wonderful group of people who are researching the sharing economy who are really trying to, and there is a great website “Shareable”, do you know the website “Shareable”? #00:13:25-5#

Thomas: I think I do not// #00:13:26-1#

Linda: And did you know that there is a woman, I look up her article, but where they are really trying to look at ways to have true sharing and not exploitative, corporate sharing, which is a whole different thing. #00:13:46-7#

Thomas: And you ... I mean you are, with (*name of activist group*) you are particularly engaged with Airbnb and other short-time rental platforms on the housing situation in (*city in California*)// #00:14:06-5#

Linda: Do you, you mean are there others I don't like? #00:14:09-7#

Thomas: No, I mean, it's not only Airbnb. #00:14:11-3#

Linda: No, it's not just Airbnb. I, well, for example, “HomeAway” doesn't even pretend to do home sharing. They just, and, yeah, // #00:14:22-2#

Thomas: Commercial. #00:14:22-9#

Linda: Yeah. It's just plain commercial. #00:14:24-9#

Thomas: But// #00:14:25-4#

Linda: And in places where there is not a housing shortage and where the infrastructure is set up to deal with mass tourism, but then in places like in Barcelona, where they are having terrible problems or the place, at the end I think that they even ban short-term rentals in is it Berlin? Or is it// #00:14:44-5#

Thomas: I think Berlin. #00:14:46-1#

Linda: Because the infrastructure, you can't turn a little neighbourhood into a tourist destination spot, it becomes Disneyland. It becomes, you know, there's, there are no more people left, which is ((not a good sign)). #00:15:02-9#

Thomas: Yeah, this is a// #00:15:03-5#

Linda: Potemkin village. #00:15:07-3#

Thomas: It connects with a question I was, wanted to ask, what the current situation is here? And maybe what were recent, you said it a little bit earlier that, also that initiative was started because you were witnessing all these changes around here, but how did, is the current situation now in (*city in California*)? Where are the major focal points, where is it the most, where has the short-term rental business the most impact? In which area of the city? Or just generally what the situation is in (*city in California*) now. #00:15:51-2#

Linda: Any area of the city that, it seems that the areas of the city that are, I mean again, I can give you a whole breakdown, but (*neighbourhood 1*) here is seriously impacted, (*neighbourhood 2*), (*neighbourhood 3*) – you know the city a little? #00:16:14-2#

Thomas: From the map. #00:16:15-4#

Linda: Oh, okay. #00:16:18-3#

Thomas: (*Neighbourhood 2*) and (*neighbourhood 4*). #00:16:18-4#

Linda: (*Neighbourhood 4*), all of the in (*neighbourhood 3*) are seriously// #00:16:21-8#

Thomas: All the hipster places. #00:16:24-0#

Linda: They are hipster, they are tourist destination places and then some of the hill properties in the canyons, they have these very high-end party houses where you can rent them for 10.000 [dollars] a night. And the neighbors are very upset because it's a lot, in the [drive]ways and a lot of traffic. And then there are a lot of houses where there are illegal things that are happening. #00:16:53-6#

Thomas: And, I mean, there has been this draft of the city of (*city in California*), I think you have it on your website as well? #00:17:00-3#

Linda: Yes. #00:17:01-5#

Thomas: This is from last year? #00:17:06-2#

Linda: It's been going on now// #00:17:07-7#

Thomas: There have been regulations// #00:17:09-5#

Linda: It's gone through a whole, it went through various committees of the city council and now it's, the next is called the (*name of a special committee*), (*explanation of the name of the special committee*). And they have to appeal it and perhaps modify it a bit and then it's gonna go to the full city council for a vote. #00:17:28-9#

Thomas: Okay. But it's not a regulation that is, I mean, it might be illegal to rent it out for 30 days, less than 30 days// #00:17:40-4#

Linda: Well, if this regulation goes into place then it will legalize short-term rentals and puts some rules in place. It will hopefully put a cap on the number of days that people can rent and insure that people will register, have a registration number, and also make the websites accountable. Like what just happened in San Francisco. They just actually ended that lawsuit. #00:18:07-3#

Thomas: Yeah. In which way is it different than the situation in San Francisco? #00:18:12-6#

Linda: Well, San Francisco already has a regulation// #00:18:15-5#

Thomas: (...) regulation law, but it's having problems of enforcing the law. #00:18:21-2#

Linda: They have had problems because the website, because this is a big problem with Airbnb. They will not participate in the enforcement. They just made an agreement with San Francisco and now they are going to begin to take everybody off of the website who isn't registered with the city. And that's what we hoping will happen here and they're also, so they make a distinction in San Francisco between hosted and unhosted rentals. And the ... hosted rentals have unlimited days and the unhosted have 90 [days] – wait, the hosted have 90 and the unhosted – and what they're, I think they're gonna try to do there is to get rid of that distinction, 'cause they don't have a way to regulate unhosted, to know the difference. So what they are gonna try to do is to lower the cap to somewhere between 60 and 65 is what – they probably told you that. And that's what we would like. We would like a cap of 60 [days], we would like registration, and we wanna make sure that the websites participate in, 'cause we, the city will never have enough staff to enforce this, it has to be enforced online. #00:19:33-7#

Thomas: Mhm. So ... what will ... what do you think how should Airbnb react to all of this problems of (...)? #00:19:49-6#

Linda: I think they should cooperate with enforcement and they have all the tools to do it. And I think they should, you know, support what cities ask them to do and stop playing games. #00:20:06-2#

Thomas: Mhm. ... and have you ever been contacted by Airbnb, or did you ever meet anybody? #00:20:17-5#

Linda: Have I ever met anybody? Yes, I have. #00:20:19-6#

Thomas: And – yeah? How did this turn out? #00:20:24-3#

Linda: We ... #00:20:27-5#

Thomas: What do they think about your// #00:20:29-5#

Linda: What they told, well, they've tried to hire, they tried to hire some of the people who've been involved in our organization. #00:20:39-2#

Thomas: Mhm. #00:20:38-5#

Linda: And they said that we're their biggest threat in (*city in California*). #00:20:42-2#

Thomas: Okay. #00:20:44-7#

Linda: They, we've met them, we go to this, to a different neighbourhood – you know what a neighbourhood council is? ... Here we have, every neighbourhood has like a neighbourhood council having. So we, when we first started trying to educate people, the first thing I do// #00:21:01-7#

Thomas: (...) would be here events, or? #00:21:03-5#

Linda: Well, we have them all over// #00:21:04-9#

Thomas: ((or some smaller?)) #00:21:05-3#

Linda: Everywhere or, yeah, (*neighbourhood 1*) or (*neighbourhood 2*). If you go online and put “neighbourhood council”, you'll see one for every neighbourhood in (*city in California*) and they all have their own structure. And so I was// #00:21:17-8#

Thomas: Is it compared to, they have in San Francisco, they have like these districts and they have like the// #00:21:23-4#

Linda: Yeah. But it's, we don't have any power except to recommend things but it is an official part of the city and they have guidelines and rules. #00:21:35-4#

Thomas: (...) supervisors they call to// #00:21:37-6#

Linda: Well, we have supervisors here and those districts are different. The neighbourhood councils are smaller, like we have in (*neighbourhood 1*), we have (*neighbourhood 2*), we have (*neighbourhood 4*), every neighbourhood. If you look online under the city, it's called “empowerment”, neighbourhood councils, you'll see that every neighbourhood council, so we, each council makes recommendations on different things. And it has a land use committee that looks at all those proposals to change the land use. It has, you know, it's a whole, it's a very complex structure but the (*neighbourhood 1*) neighbourhood council has ... you know, made very strong statements to the city about regulation as have other neighbourhood councils. Mostly saying, “We want more regulation”. But there are a few places where they've said, “We don't want regulations”. So you can look on the web and see what – I wondered if there's an article, I just wanna look here for something for you, if I can find it. [few mouse clicks] But I, so, I am sorry, what was the question? #00:22:52-7#

Thomas: If you have ever met somebody from Airbnb? #00:22:54-5#

Linda: Oh yeah, so when we go to this neighbourhood council// #00:22:56-8#

Thomas: ((Met)) together with your initiative or// #00:22:58-7#

Linda: So a team of us, like (*name*) and I, (*other name*) and I, // #00:23:02-6#

Thomas: He's also part of the// #00:23:03-7#

Linda: Yeah, he is part of this group. So we went and met with (*name of a council member*), neighbourhood council, it's another neighbourhood. And Airbnb was there. And it turned out that they, that the president of that neighbourhood council, his wife worked for Airbnb and they didn't tell us ahead of time. And they were voting on whether or not to make a proposal to the city and they, what they did is, they have, they brought – we didn't know, we thought we were just doing a presentation to try –, they brought, like// #00:23:38-6#

Thomas: They didn't know that there were, was somebody there? #00:23:42-8#

Linda: We didn't know that they were gonna bring, we had to sit while listening to 30 people talk about how much they loved home sharing. And ... then they had a vote// #00:23:54-1#

Thomas: Like hosts? Airbnb hosts? #00:23:56-4#

Linda: They bring the, they bring what we call the “sob stories”, you know, “If I didn't do home sharing, I couldn't stay home with my dying” – whatever. And we came//
#00:24:08-8#

Thomas: I know this. #00:24:09-3#

Linda: Yes, so you know the sob stories. So, but they, but the commercial operators never show up. We never, we never see a commercial operator. But they came in so, we've had a few run ins with them in that way, but they also tried to hire me ... Somebody approached me and asked me if I would work with them ... which I said no to. And they've done that with some of our other people, we've got some, you know, strong organizers, people who do our website, and they've approached a number of different people, saying, “Hey, you know, work for us, we pay you a lot of money”. #00:24:49-8#

Thomas: Okay. #00:24:50-9#

Linda: So far it has not happened. I was gonna try to look for something for you that I, if you haven't seen ... [clicking on mouse] #00:25:01-4#

Thomas: Is there anything distinctive about this situation here, in (*city in California*) if you compare it to San Francisco or to European cities? #00:25:12-5#

Linda: Well I think// #00:25:13-3#

Thomas: Is there similar problems or is it basically the same thing? I mean the housing situation is// #00:25:20-1#

Linda: You know, it's interesting. I think ... [mouse clicking]. I don't know if this is right. I think, it's interesting to me, when I talk to people from different places like Australia for example. In Sydney they're having terrible problems. We have it, 'cause we, they've found us online. So, basically, what we share in common with other cities is a destruction of the neighbourhood and the converting of a residential neighbourhood that was like, this is a very economically diverse and racially, ethnically diverse neighbourhood and suddenly wherever Airbnb goes, there is a form of, there is a couple different forms of gentrification that happen. So we're seeing that certainly in other cities. We have, I think, some of the technical issues are different and the laws are different, but I think we all, what we have in common is the loss of affordable housing, being overrun with tourists in a way that can't, they haven't been able to regulate and turning neighbor against neighbor. You know, ((wherever)) they are – people who are truly home sharing are very angry that regulations are coming in and they all say, “It's not fair, but we are not commercial operators, we are not doing that”, so there's, I think, you know, whenever it's Barcelona or in Paris or in Sydney, Australia or New York or San Francisco or Austin, Texas// #00:26:56-6#

Thomas: Mhm. There are a lot of places. #00:26:59-3#

Linda: We all have in common the same concern and that is the loss of the quality of life in our neighbourhoods and the loss of affordable housing and the loss of, with that, the loss of the kind of diversity that we've had. You know, these, the neighbourhoods that are protected against this, that are not suffering, often are neighbourhoods that don't have this wonderful mix that we, you know, treasure so much. Now suddenly, we don't have what we had. So, and I think that's, we have that in common. ... [mouse clicking] Trying to find an article for you, which I am not finding, I don't know why. It'll take a minute. #00:27:51-4#

Thomas: You can also send me this? #00:27:53-1#

Linda: Yeah. [mouse clicking] #00:27:56-6#

Thomas: You mentioned that you hear about all people writing from various different places of ((the world)), from Australia and other places. So are you involved in any other groups? Like it's not here in (*city in California*) but internationally or connected with people working on similar projects? And do you have other means to ... persuade your// #00:28:27-7#

Linda: I don't understand the question. #00:28:28-9#

Thomas: If you are connected with other people working on similar projects around the world, in the States in other places, not only here in (*city in California*), or you said, you receive, like people found you online from Australia// #00:28:44-5#

Linda: Word of mouth, yah. #00:28:45-9#

Thomas: But is there any exchange happening? #00:28:48-6#

Linda: Yeah, we're// #00:28:49-3#

Thomas: Is there some?// #00:28:51-9#

Linda: We're // #00:28:52-2#

Thomas: Is it just like you get an email from somebody asking for// #00:28:57-8#

Linda: We've gotten e-mails from like, like, there was a little village in Colorado in the mountains where somebody wrote to us and said, "We're having a civil war here between the people who want short-term rentals and the people who don't. Can you help us?" And part of, and then in Australia, you know, they wanna know how did we get organized, how do we pull together a strong group? I try to share whatever information I can. They're interested in our regulations, I have a sheet that I send around that shows what we've proposed to the city, people like to see that. And a lot of, you know, people, they wanna know, you know, what are other people asking for. "Can we ask the websites to be compliant?", "What kind of, you know, what kinds of things do you think are important to regulate this?", so that's mainly that. And people ... telling us, you know, when there, when there is city councils, their version of their city council has a vote and there's a, they realize that half the people on the council are running short-term rentals (laughter). We get, you know, we get this e-mails all the time. And we get a lot of things from around the city, people write to us and tell us what's happening in their neighbourhoods and then we post it. #00:30:24-4#

Thomas: Mhm. I've seen that you have like a map of eviction? #00:30:27-9#

Linda: Yeah, those are just people who've sent us// #00:30:30-5#

Thomas: How does this work? #00:30:31-4#

Linda: So they send us what's called a conversion report. We have a place where they can fill it out and they tell us, they fill out the whole thing and we turn that over to the city, we report it and then we post the address. #00:30:45-6#

Thomas: Yeah, I have seen this. And this are neighbors who do this? #00:30:51-2#

Linda: These are people just writing to us, saying, "We are having a problem", and// #00:30:55-3#

Thomas: Or is it the people who have been evicted? #00:30:58-0#

Linda: We have, yes, we've had people who've been evicted. We have, I'm supposed to meet with somebody this afternoon from an apartment building down the street, where people are being brought out and harassed. And half their building now is turned to a hotel and they're extremely upset. What typically happens is the landlord starts, as soon as they can get somebody out, they fix up the apartment and then they start doing short-term rentals and people in the building are really suffering. I mean, they// #00:31:29-2#

Thomas: What can you do to// #00:31:30-9#

Linda: What do we do// #00:31:31-9#

Thomas: Prevent this? Or to help these people? #00:31:34-0#

Linda: Well, like, there's a building down the street where we reported it to the city and now the city attorney is, has investigated and they have a lawsuit going. #00:31:43-7#

Thomas: Mhm. So if this lawsuit is successful this might be helpful to prevent, or to make it harder to do, to raise the rents// #00:31:54-3#

Linda: Right, well, it makes it harder. If he wants to convert his building to a hotel, he's got to do what everybody else does which is to apply for conditional use permit and not just kick people out and start doing it. I mean, a hotel has to go through a whole process before it gets – a building, you can't just turn housing into, you can't turn residentially zoned building that has a certificate of occupancy as an apartment and it's under rent stabilization, legally you are not allowed to just start turning it into a hotel. #00:32:29-9#

Thomas: And how do you get to these commercial providers, they're sort of invisible. #00:32:37-5#

Linda: They are pretty invisible, they are pretty hard to – I have a list of them. I know what their names are, if you look at our video – do you have seen our video? #00:32:46-4#

Thomas: No. #00:32:48-0#

Linda: Let me quick do this. This is a home made video. It's not on YouTube and it's not in any way fancy. #00:32:59-0#

Thomas: That's not important. (laughter) #00:33:01-5#

Linda: Hm? #00:33:03-1#

Thomas: That's not so important. #00:33:07-7#

Linda: [mouse clicking] I haven't looked at it for a long time. Okay, here you go. It's not very long. #00:33:17-0#

[Recording stops during the watching of the video]

Thomas: So you mentioned that you also have like partners in, like the hotel workers' union? #00:33:33-3#

Linda: You should really talk to them about that. I don't know all the statistics, but they've joined our coalition because the// #00:33:44-4#

Thomas: The question would be how the coalition get together because it's quite different actors – neighbors and hotel workers and// #00:33:52-5#

Linda: It's a really unprecedented coalition because, you know, when like for example when we did, did you know that we raised a minimum wage here in (*city in California*)? That they passed a law and it was a big fight when it happened and the unions were on one side and the hotels were on another, but they came together under, I mean, when we started our organization (*name of activist group*), it was just us and then the housing people joined and then we realized that the hotels were, this is before the hotel really saw a problem, but the hotel workers were really concerned because it's their jobs. And then we could see that the people who were doing the cleaning of these commercial places were not being treated right, they weren't given benefits, they were all largely a very exploited community of people who came in the dark and// #00:34:56-9#

Thomas: All the side// #00:34:57-5#

Linda: Were frightened// #00:34:58-3#

Thomas: Economies// #00:34:59-4#

Linda: Yeah, they were going, and they would push their little carts down the street, and there was – I have pictures, photos, I documented this, I talked to some of these workers. And it's, you know, they are very poor people who really needed work and they are getting paid way below the minimum wage and they don't have any benefits and they also don't have any predictable work hours. #00:35:24-2#

Thomas: That is not pretty official work// #00:35:25-7#

Linda: Yeah, no it's not. They have no worker protection. So, the unions, and I would say they – you should probably talk to (*name of a woman*) down at (*name of a place*). (*Name of the woman*), and she's the person who's working on this with the unions. They, they joined us and then pretty soon the hotels, somebody from one of the small hotels contacted me and said, “We are really worried, we are having a problem”, you know, “We pay our workers, we do all this, we do that”. And I met with them and I said, “We were working with the unions”. And they had been, I guess, at ((wars)) with each other over this last ordinance, but we've got everything together at the table. And we, now we work together as a really – I mean, we were like 100% a team and it's amazing to me because we've, we've had very little friction, we have very common goals, the hotels are very concerned about housing and they're also very concerned about their business, you know, being taken away unfairly. And so when we go into the, you know, to our meetings with the city council and all the, you know, they are always really surprised to see the unions. So it's businesses, unions, neighbors ... (...) affordable housing// #00:36:53-5#

Thomas: Yeah, also actors who usually are opposed to// #00:36:56-9#

Linda: Yeah, politically. But we, so we, I don't know, I don't know what the, what is the – how did they get to be a part? It just ha// #00:37:06-7#

Thomas: Yeah and how// #00:37:05-5#

Linda: It was very, it was very organic. #00:37:09-2#

Thomas: How this might have been, might be a different approach as different opinions on the thing that// #00:37:16-4#

Linda: You know, we were worried about that in the beginning. We didn't know how it would be, we didn't know – because when we first talked to a couple of the hotel people, they've said, “We're not really concerned about housing, we're more concerned about a leveled playing field”. So we didn't, I said, “Okay, then what do you wanna, you know, we have a different approach here”. But as we've gotten into this together, I think everybody has seen a common theme which is: there are global problems. There are problems with housing, there are problems with business models, there are problems with safety, I mean it's global and I think, we or all, really – how can I say this? I mean, surprisingly, 'cause I've been on boards of directors, I've been, you know, I've been part of many, many different groups and we're a very harmonious group. We have a very common goal which is to get fair, a really fair ordinance that allows home sharing, that puts some, you know, some limits on it and will enforce them, the platforms, to be accountable. And I don't think that we had any disagreement about that. #00:38:32-5#

Thomas: Hm ... You mentioned earlier on that you get data from Murray and then from, from the research done at this// #00:38:41-5#

Linda: At lane? #00:38:42-7#

Thomas: At lane, yeah. In which way is data useful and important? #00:38:51-0#

Linda: The data// #00:38:51-7#

Thomas: For the debate and// #00:38:51-9#

Linda: Well, the data is important because the city is making rules without any. They didn't do any of their own data or research, you know, they didn't, they were just flying by the seat of their pants. They were making up rules, like, “We'll do this cap, or do that cap”. We were able to run the numbers to see where the financial benefit would, the incentive would be so great that somebody would not wanna rent something long-term, that they'll take it off the housing market. And we did that kind of meta analysis of the numbers to show. So now, when we now go to a meeting – and I can give you one, one of our handouts to show you –, so that what we are doing is really dated, we were gonna – we went to the city council members, they said, “Well”, you know, “well, why are you proposing this?” We could say, “This is why. This is what will happen, if, this is what will happen to housing, this will happen to our neighbourhoods”. And they wanted to see the numbers, because the city never did their own research at all. #00:39:55-6#

Thomas: And Airbnb has it's own numbers as well. #00:39:58-3#

Linda: They do have their own numbers and they just dispute our numbers. But our numbers, you know, what's interesting, our numbers are the same as AirDNA and AirDNA – you know what they are? #00:40:09-5#

Thomas: Mhm. #00:40:10-7#

Linda: Our numbers are not any different than theirs. So they are supporting this business model and I think where we, or even Airbnb, some of our numbers match up. But like this new report, that just came out – let me read it to you and give you a copy of, or I will sent it to ... [mouse clicking] Sorry. ... [mouse clicking] You can, while I'm waiting for this thing to work, you can ask me a question, I don't know why it's// #00:41:03-5#

Thomas: You said you're not opposing (...) home sharing, but how can people who really want to use Airbnb in this way and make sure that they don't participate in illegal short-time rental? 'Cause it's hard to find out. #00:41:19-9#

Linda: Well, that's why we need the website, the Airbnb and the other websites to properly monitor and kick somebody off the website when they go over a certain amount of days or when they violate the rules. #00:41:35-7#

Thomas: Because now it's sometimes not so distinguishable, for example. #00:41:42-2#

Linda: You can't. #00:41:47-1#

Thomas: And did you ever use Airbnb yourself? #00:41:53-3#

Linda: Actually I haven't. I've done other ways of homestays, like in Cuba. But I didn't do it with Airbnb. #00:42:04-6#

Thomas: Would you ever do this? #00:42:05-2#

Linda: Probably not. #00:42:05-8#

Thomas: Okay. #00:42:07-2#

Linda: I couldn't. It's, you know, I did never eat grapes during the grape strike either, 'cause I supported the farm workers. You know we had the grape strike for many years because to get, to make sure farm workers were treated fairly. And we did a boycott of grapes and it was very powerful and it worked. So I didn't think I could do something that would further Airbnb, at least not until they start playing by the rules. I have my personal boycott of them. They don't care. #00:42:46-1#

Thomas: (laughter) And leaving out the housing question, do you think Airbnb and the other companies running these platforms, does it change the way people travel or relate to their home? Leaving out this housing question. #00:43:09-0#

Linda: Does it change the way? I think for some people it does, but unfortunately, because so many of the people who use those services want privacy and they don't want to stay in somebody's home, they use the commercial buildings. So I'm not sure that they are getting more connected to the people. That'd be interesting at some point to find out if there's any reality to that or if it's just a myth. But I do know a lot of people who've used Airbnb and I don't know a single person who has stayed with somebody. They just get some great properties somewhere and it's instead of, you know, other form of renting. I know people who, like, if they paint their house, they get an Airbnb, so they can sleep some place else. But there is never anybody home. They just go. So it's not about a human connection, it's about a piece of real estate. So I think it's convenience. I think some people would say, that they can't afford travel, but I think generally the less expensive places are the true home sharing places and I don't know too many people myself who've done that. I mean, I did, I've stayed with people in Cuba and got to know them. But I don't know if that's

necessarily what the, the way that the websites make money. It's certainly not the way HomeAway makes money, 'cause they don't have any shared housing. But I think the biggest profits on Airbnb come from, you know, total properties being sold out, or apartments or whatever. I'm sure if somebody gets a room in somebody's house, also the people that I know who are doing it, they have like a separate entrance and a separate bathroom and they have privacy. So I don't know how much real interaction there is. That'll be interesting to find out from the research. #00:45:12-3#

Thomas: That's one part of the research. I mentioned that my focus of research is actually reviews, people write reviews on Airbnb to say, "Everything was so great" and// #00:45:30-5#

Linda: Some of them are fake. #00:45:32-4#

Thomas: Yeah, did you include any of this data about reviews in your work? Are they in some way important? #00:45:40-0#

Linda: We do sometimes if we see something negative. We get a lot of the bad stories – and the good stories? I've exchanged e-mails with people who'd tell me how wonderful it was to have a family to come and stay. But mostly what we get, what people bring to our attention are what we call the "horror stories". And we've collected many of those. And they all are, they take, take those reviews down, they don't stay up. But we get, and sometimes if we get one, we will do a screenshot, but then it goes away. #00:46:18-2#

Thomas: Okay. This would be interesting if you have something// #00:46:22-3#

Linda: Of the negatives? #00:46:24-2#

Thomas: No, if you could share this with me some// #00:46:28-1#

Linda: What we call "horror stories"? Just a minute, let me see if I can get those. [*talks to her dog*] #00:46:37-8#

Thomas: And then I think it's basically, I mean// #00:46:41-7#

Linda: Let me find the horror stories. #00:46:42-0#

Thomas: Particular thing of reviews, Airbnb, I don't know, that might// #00:46:47-9#

Linda: Our web person who does run our website, would know where the horror stories are. It's in a GoogleDoc. I'm not sure I have it right here. #00:47:06-8#

Thomas: Yeah, apart from it I think// #00:47:07-5#

Linda: Here we go, more, oh, this is from online. We collected them here, but we also have many of our own. #00:47:19-0#

Thomas: So this is a collection of// #00:47:20-6#

Linda: Oh yah, there are tons of them. I'm trying to think where// #00:47:24-1#

Thomas: News articles, basically, or? #00:47:26-1#

Linda: Yeah, no. We, we have our own, people had sent to us. Let me see if I can find that.
#00:47:32-0#

Thomas: But if they are related to reviews, I was pronouncing it wrongly (laughter).
#00:47:39-4#

Linda: You are doing pretty well. A lot better than mine. Horror stories, sharing (mumbling) ... (sighing) I'm trying to figure out where we put the GoogleDoc of our own, this is more horror stories. #00:48:06-6#

Thomas: I will just stop this. #00:48:08-0#

Linda: Sure. #00:48:09-0#

Thomas: Do you have anything else to add// #00:48:10-8#

Linda: No, no. #00:48:11-8#

Thomas: That you think is important? #00:48:15-1#

Linda: I cannot think of anything. #00:48:16-9#