

CITY HOSPITALITY: IN SEARCH OF HOST-GUEST RELATIONSHIPS

Frans van den Broek Chávez
email: bcz@hdh.nl

Karoline Wiegerink
email: wgk@hdh.nl
and

Jean-Pierre van der Rest
email: rst@hdh.nl

Hotelschool The Hague
International University of Hospitality Management
The Hague, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This paper calls attention to the emergent concept of City Hospitality. It explores the theoretical premises of the phenomenon 'the hospitable city', building on the work commonly referred to as the dynamic model of hospitality (Lashley and Morrison, 2000; Lashley *et al.*, 2007; O'Gorman, 2010). The paper analyses the central feature of this model in the context of the city, namely the Host-Guest relationship in its different levels. The paper, though conceptual in nature, renders practical recommendations for the stakeholders of a city and suggests new lines of formal research.

Keywords: city, hospitality, dynamic model

INTRODUCTION

In the past years academic study and research in the field of hospitality has undergone what has been called a critical turn, a process of expansion, renewal and loosening of the boundaries of analysis and interpretation (Lugosi, 2009). This process has coalesced in a new provisional conceptual framework, known as the dynamic model of hospitality, advanced by the books *In Search of Hospitality* (Lashley and Morrison, 2000; Morrison 2002), *Hospitality: the social lens* (Lashley, Lynch and Morrison, 2007), *The origins of hospitality and tourism* (O'Gorman, 2010a,b) and many corresponding papers in specialized journals. The purpose of this paper is to call attention to the notion of 'City Hospitality', an emerging concept in the hospitality literature which fits in this development and to explore in which ways the core concept of the dynamic model of hospitality, namely the Host-Guest relationship or transaction, could be deployed to give a proper account of this phenomenon. Being a complex notion, the paper is limited to highlighting certain levels or dimensions of this relationship which can be perceived as most significant for further research.

CITY HOSPITALITY: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

At the beginning of the last century, the majority of the population lived in the countryside. Nowadays, more than 70% of the population of most countries in the world live in cities and the tendency is in the increase, with all attendant problems and promises. Simmel (2002) was one of the first to theorise that such a development will necessarily change the mental life of the city inhabitants, which had to adapt to another sensorial and cognitive experience. Accordingly, the notion of hospitality itself is subject to deep changes and redefinitions, something which theoretical analysis has to address. Hospitality as experienced in the cities has to accommodate the complex fabric of relationships which constitute the modern urban environment, with its variety of groups, work activities and laws, among many other aspects of modern life, like the anonymity, the individualism and the fluidity of transactions and categorisations fostered by the industrial society. The hospitality of a city is a consequence of all these elements and not only of the ones more commonly associated with hospitality, like the presence of the hospitality industry or the cultural background of its citizens.

Hospitality in general can be recognised as operating at different levels or dimensions, from the individual to the regional, national or civilization level. Persons, families, tribes or networks of relationships can

correspondingly be seen as possessing a higher or lower degree of hospitality, even though it can be challenging to establish clear criteria for this purpose. Besides, these levels are not always easy to disentangle and the concept can be stretched or narrowed according with the needs of the analysis, but in general hospitality is very widespread as a human phenomenon and can be safely considered a universal trait of humankind, albeit with considerable diversity. Important in this respect is not to confuse levels of analysis with levels of agency or operation of hospitality. The individual level of hospitality, which occurs mainly in a domestic sphere, can be analysed from different levels of analysis, from the biological to the social. Conversely, civic or commercial hospitality can be analysed from, for instance, a (socio-) psychological point of view focused on the individual as well as the group.

In simple terms, hospitality can be considered the provision of food, shelter and entertainment to somebody else, a stranger, a foreigner, a family member, but concepts as the wellbeing of the guest has been invoked, or the openness to the Other (Telfer, 2000; Derrida, 2000). One can think of hospitality also as the art exercised by a host of giving a guest the idea and feeling that he or she is welcome. In any case, cities can certainly be conceived of as being actors in the host-guest relationship, and as being more or less hospitable or welcoming, even though a certain amount of subjectivity is unavoidable and the use of the concept of hospitality in a metaphorical sense might create certain conceptual strains. In this sense the study of city hospitality partakes of all the epistemological strengths and weaknesses of the social sciences and the humanities (e.g. Lashley, 2007; Boterill, 2000; O’Gorman, 2010).

As Bell (2007b) has pointed out, the study of hospitality has followed so far to an important extent two parallel tracks, the theoretical and the academic, the first being dominated by the philosophical reflection on unconditional hospitality and its implications for the reception of strangers as refugees or immigrants (e.g. O’Gorman, 2006b; Shyrock, 2008; Baker, 2010) and the second one by the study of the commercial practices of hospitality. Since the inception of the so called “critical turn” it has been customary however to rub these two tracks together in order to open the interpretation of hospitality and dispel certain misconceptions. Among the last ones the idea that commercial hospitality cannot be properly called hospitality, due to the ulterior motive involved. But as recent research has found, the commercial practice of hospitality opens up symbolic spaces and promotes conviviality practices in the city, to mention just two known aspects, which has deep influence in the notion and experience of hospitality itself and has a transformative power in the culture (Bell, 2007b).

As mentioned above, the notion of city hospitality can consequently be analysed and researched at different levels of agency and operation. In the typology of the dynamic model, city hospitality would be naturally ascribed to civic hospitality, but that would be if not a mistake, at least incomplete, because all kinds of hospitality (domestic, civic and commercial) are present in the city and need proper analysis. If one conceives of a scale that goes from the individual to the social or cultural, city hospitality could be said to occupy a sort of middle ground, but all levels overlap or influence one another in many ways, so it is always necessary to clarify the level of agency.

Taking the Host-Guest relationship or transaction as the core concept in the model, the first task any study of city hospitality has to undertake is, therefore, to identify the levels at which the concepts of host and guest are understood in a particular research design. What can be defined as a Host or a Guest in this context may be somewhat imprecise at times, given the diffuse nature of agency in certain cases, but in what follows the paper summarily analyses what can be considered as important areas of research at different levels of agency, without pretending to be exhaustive and granting the need for further clarification.

CITY HOSPITALITY: EXPLORING SOME LEVELS AND DIMENSIONS OF THE HOST-GUEST RELATIONSHIP

1.- The individual level

The first level of transaction is the individual, private one. How people treat each other in this respect is dependent on many factors, including the social and cultural ones, but this dimension needs to be distinguished from the hospitality of whole sectors of the population operating as groups. Thus, the individual and private level concerns the way a typified person of a city (which might belong to a group or class or sector of the population) is perceived to possess a certain degree of hospitableness towards the other inhabitants of a city and its visitors. A citizen plays the role of host and guest at certain times, among each other and with people not living in the city, the different kinds of foreigners. Cities differ in the characteristics of their hospitality and assume different degrees of

hospitalableness, in a spectrum ranging from what can be called closed cities to open ones, based on their levels of openness to strangers and the way the hosts impose duties on their guests.

For example, certain cities in Eastern Europe were closed to strangers in an absolute manner due to political and military reasons and the resulting personal relationships were affected by mistrust and fear (e.g. Figes, 2007). Conversely, cities where the political climate is more favourable to free transactions among individuals tend to display more open levels of hospitality on the private level as well (Schama, 2000). Cultural dimensions of course have a (causal) effect as well, which might account for the different experiences of hospitality among cities with equal levels of political or social freedom. Individualist societies for example tend to narrow the boundaries of hospitality, while collectivist ones – in a broad sense – to widen them (Hofstede, 2001). In short, individual transactions can be a theme of analysis, but are inextricably linked with the higher dimensions of organisation and should therefore include higher levels of analysis.

With respect to foreigners – business or leisure travellers especially – it is of great practical importance how the hospitality of cities can be improved at this individual, private level, considering the citizens, in all their variety, as ambassadors of the city itself. It goes without saying that no policy can be so drastic as to change the cultural ways of a community, but certain low key policies has been applied successfully in different cities, involving city government campaigns, educational policies, voluntary work and the like. Research on how these policies or campaigns have affected the private behaviour of citizens towards each other and foreigners is scarce and the effects can be difficult to measure, but this aspect of city hospitality is certainly worth further study.

2.- City government as a host with respect to its inhabitants:

Cities as a metaphorical concept can be construed as performing the role of a host with respect to its inhabitants and in this sense they can be conceived of as offering different levels of hospitalableness. Cities provide in different ways the basic tenets of hospitality, like shelter or food or entertainment (and they are the setting where social activities of any kind necessitating these tenets take place, including political, religious or cultural activities). The locus of agency and intentionality can be located at different levels, but the most defined level, being the representation of the will of its citizens in any democratic society –or the imposed will of its rulers in any dictatorship or autocracy-, is the city government.

The council or government of the city can be conceived of as a host, inasmuch as it promotes laws and policies which are welcoming to actual or prospective citizens or not. If the city government discourages habitation of the city by neglecting duties as housing, sanitation or energy supply, the city cannot be said to be hospitable towards its own citizens. A city devoted to the improvement of its public facilities and services, to processes of urban regeneration, to mention just some possibilities, can be called hospitable and to be promoting the emergence of hospitable practices (Bell, 2007).

Policies can have different effects on different communities living in the city and the analysis has to be able to distinguish these effects. For example, sometimes processes of urban regeneration or gentrification are hospitable to some citizens (mainly the affluent ones), but inhospitable to others (the unemployed or the poor or people belonging to a certain ethnic community). The organisation of the urban space itself and all the accompanying services can have a political dimension which can be linked to ideological perspectives, as extensively demonstrated by theoreticians as Harvey (2009). At any rate, some policies can be seen as directly or indirectly promoting the liveability of a city, thereby creating a better atmosphere for the flourishing of the quality of hospitalableness. The scope for research in this respect is vast and includes analytical perspectives that go from law and juridical studies to sociological or humanistic approaches. As a general rule, any policy which directly or indirectly affects the liveability of a city has an effect on hospitality, taking as a premise that the quality of life of the citizens –where all needs are considered, from the physical to the developmental ones- is a component of its hospitalableness.

3.- City government as a host towards foreigners: tourists, migrants and expats

3.1 Tourists: One of the most obvious targets of the hospitality of a city is naturally the tourists. The city government can take the initiative to promote the welcoming of tourists, by means of improving the services of a city or general policies towards the industry (see below) or special projects which involve different organisations, public and private, including the participation of volunteers and educative projects directed towards the inhabitants of the city. Any endeavour which increases the appeal of a city will have an effect on the hospitality of a city, especially its industry, like the creation of a beautiful landmark or a museum. Many cities, as Amsterdam or London

or Beijing, have launched programs to make the visits of tourists more agreeable. The results of these policies need still to be researched and analysed.

It is important to distinguish different kinds of tourists when analysing the relationship between cities and tourists in general. One example is the pilgrimage tourists, which can form a substantial source of income to the city and the industry itself. Mecca, as is well known, receives every year millions of visitors from all around the world and the city and national governments are deeply involved in the organisation of their welcoming and safety. Lourdes in France or The Vatican in Rome can be other suitable examples. Conversely, other kinds of tourism can be discouraged by the city government, like sex or drug tourism, in accordance with ethical guidelines, even though they can be a good source of income. The theoretical analysis, therefore, must also include at this level a political and moral dimension, since tourism at any rate is one of the main areas of policy debate in any important city.

3.2 Migrants: This category has become increasingly important in the make-up of any modern city and could be properly included in the former section, as migrants, however recently, are formerly citizens or inhabitants of a city and partake of the same policies which apply to the native inhabitants. But, city governments themselves classify these groups in important respects as deserving special attention and a particular set of policies. The mutual relationship between native and migrant communities, though evolving towards better intermingling and integration, still depends on patterns of behaviour belonging to different cultures. In other words, it would be sociologically naive and irresponsible to the facts to just consider this category a mere subdivision of the general category of the inhabitants of a city. The government of a city can be seen as more or less hospitable towards these citizens, based on the kind of policies that improves their integration or not and the kind of political climate it promotes.

It can be observed that at today's particular historical and political junction there is a growing restlessness among the native inhabitants of Europe with respect to the presence of these ethnic or religious communities. Even though Europe has been generally welcoming of foreigners after the Second World War, there is a definitive change in the political atmosphere which reflects perhaps this restlessness and preoccupations. The social harmony or stability of a city cannot but affect also the quality of hospitality offered. No traveller wants to visit a city which is burning with riots and swamped in religious, political or racial bigotry. Policies promoting more integration and understanding will have therefore a positive effect on the hospitableness of any city. The hospitality industry would do well also integrating these migrant communities as guests or as employees, to mention just two possibilities. And the research and study of hospitality can benefit greatly from the well developed field of migration studies and ethnic relations.

3.3.- Expats: There is another kind of stranger to which the city functions as a host, the so called expats. The difference in category is worth maintaining, due to the different circumstances of these foreigners. Mostly, ex-pats belong to countries with similar cultural outlooks than the host city, or are foreigners from varied cultures, but imbued in the values of the Western culture and their integration in the social network of a Western city tends to be smoother than the integration of the migrants. City policies play an important role in their experience of hospitality, however, as in cities where importance is attached to the attraction of well qualified professionals from other countries (ex-pats tend to have high education). Many city policies will have an effect on their settlement, naturally. One has only to think about the housing facilities, transportation, the presence of industries or the cultural life of the city: all these aspects will impinge on the hospitality experience of their habitation of the city.

4.- The city as host to the hospitality industry

One of the most studied and more evident aspects of the hospitality of a city is the hospitality industry in all its different expressions. In this sense, the government can play the role of a host to the industry itself, creating a favourable business environment or an obstructive one. The city can also set in motion processes of urban regeneration (Bell, 2007a,b; Lugosi, 2009, 2010), for example, with the hospitality venues as an integral part of the project. The guests of the industry are consequently deferred guests of the city itself as policy maker. This entails a metaphorical use of the host-guest relationship, but its practical implications are clear to be seen and acted upon. In this field, private business investors play the main role, within the context of a city governed by particular laws of investment and development. The city can promote the opening of more hospitality venues like hotels, restaurants or bars, but also other service providers as transportation, retail, leisure and event industry, as a means of improving the life quality of the city and making it more profitable and attractive to investors and entrepreneurs. Many other city policies will have an indirect effect as well, as the ones concerning social cohesion and harmony, to mention just two areas of research.

5.- The hospitality industry as host to inhabitants and visitors

The hospitality industry plays a naturally important role in the perception of the hospitality of a city. It has been thought, mainly by philosophically inclined theoreticians, that the hospitableness of the industry was controversial, due to the profit motive. This misconception can be challenged by a more careful analysis of the complex interrelationships which the commercial venues have with the population of a city and its ethical stance. The industry will ultimately contribute to create spaces and practices of hospitality which will have an effect on the culture at large, if directed properly towards a more democratic accessibility of its offer. Furthermore, the industry hasn't been impervious to the concerns of the modern urban inhabitant with corporate social responsibility issues and economic solidarity. If profit is a precondition of operation, is not the only motivation for an industry that is also reinventing itself in the current political and economic climate. The hospitality industry establishes, therefore, a complex network of relations with the city government, the guests and the society at large.

6.- The city as host to culture and knowledge

It has long been recognised that one of the main factors upon which the attractiveness of a city depends, and hence its hospitality, is its cultural life, in all its different dimensions. People come to cities not only for the direct opportunities it affords in terms of living standards, jobs, education, tourism or commerce, but also for the enjoyment of its cultural life. Lately, the phenomenon referred to as “knowledge spill over” has been stressed as an important aspect of the economic and cultural standing of a city. Cities concentrate creative people of all kinds and co-habitation in the same living space influences the communication of knowledge and creativity, thereby enhancing the economic and cultural life of the city in general (Florida, 2005, Glaeser, 2011). The process has an organic quality, insofar as the concentration of creativity and knowledge has an effect on the city's policies concerning the cultural life of the city, which attracts more creative people in an spiral feedback from which the city benefits. Cities with more cultural activities will attract more creative people and also potential guests for the hospitality industry. Some of these activities are directly influenced by the city's policies, like the presence of musea, theaters, cinema's, cultural festivals and the like. Others will be in the hands of private individuals and the entrepreneurial class. Cities have also an intimate relationship with their artists and writers. Paris is a common example, nurturing and promoting the memory and celebration of its most famous artists. Modern examples have taken unexpected turns, like the current touristic routes based on the novels of the best-selling author Sieg Larsson and his Millenium Trilogy. The causal pathways by which culture and hospitality influence one another are not always easy to decipher, but are definitely worth researching.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

City hospitality is a complex phenomenon that requires analysis at different levels and from different perspectives, in an inter- and multidisciplinary research paradigm. City hospitality includes all typologies of hospitality identified by the dynamic model of hospitality, domestic, civic and commercial, and all themes of inquiry, including some not covered specifically by the model. The host-guest relationship can consequently be construed in different forms, from the individual level of agency to the city government level, allowing for overlaps and multiple causal pathways, some of which have been highlighted in this paper. Below opportunities for research are identified:

City marketing: The concept of city hospitality is relevant to the practice of city marketing, which purports to retain and attract a number of city target groups: inhabitants, businesses, tourists, and students (Hospers, 2009), making use of marketing tools, supported by a shared customer-oriented philosophy aiming to create value to city's stakeholders (Braun, 2009). Naturally, a positive brand of a city is not achieved by only promoting the industry of hospitality, as a city brand is dependent on the many host-guest relationships at levels and dimensions other than commercial enterprises, but the hospitableness of a city influences her branding. The city government and other actors, whether commercial or private, can make use of city marketing devices and strategies to enhance the hospitality experience of a city and thereby attract more visitors and ultimately influence the quality of hospitality offered. The visitor journey can be researched in the same or analogous fashion as the experience of a customer in any field of marketing, investigating its components and causal factors from the sensorial to the cultural.

Urban studies: The academic study of hospitality have not made much use of this field, even though it has consequences for the reflection about hospitality in itself, given the prominence of urban living nowadays in a globalised world. But, as Bell (2007a, 2007b) or Lugosi (2010) observe, the field of urban studies offers fruitful avenues of research. The perspectives of analyses are manifold, from the relationship between the architecture or urban planning of a city and the hospitality experience, to the juridical aspects related with the different forms of

habitation within the city. The hospitality industry has a decisive role in shaping the hospitality experience of a city as a whole, for inhabitants and visitors, creating spaces of hospitality and new hospitality habits and interpretations. A holistic approach within this field may yield interesting options of research.

Humanistic studies: Philosophy is being already used as an analytical tool to help clarify the concept of hospitality (Telfer, 2002, O’Gorman 2006b). Given the nature and scope of the concept it is also very useful, however, to include other disciplines in this area. O’Gorman (2005, 2006a,b,c, 2007a,b, 2010a,b) has analysed, for instance, the religious background of hospitality in its monastic settings, or the ideas about hospitality from well-known writers, from the Classic era to our age. The same can be done with respect to city hospitality. Other fruitful and still rather undeveloped avenue of research is the use of literature as source of data (e.g. Marais, 2009). Literature contains plenty of reflections on the nature of cities and can be used to capture in poignant images the spirit of hospitableness, using qualitative research tools as narrative research, but also analytical tools belonging to literature studies proper. On the other hand, the humanities have always been linked to the appeal of a city. Since times immemorial people have travelled to the cities where a famous writer or religious personality lived and died. A good understanding of the relationship of a culture, or a city, to its most beloved inhabitants should be of use to the commercial hospitality and to the policy makers of the city. Studies in this area are not yet abundant and yet they could prove to be of immense value.

Social and political sciences: More can be done to investigate the complex relationships that agents of hospitality establish at all levels, from the individual to the cultural or social level. The city government, acting as an agency of hospitality, is responsible for laws and policies which affect the hospitality of a city. But on its turn the developments at individual or community level will affect the decisions of the city government and the situation of the society at large and all these multiple causal pathways need investigation. There are moral and political issues which are intertwined and need further research. Social harmony and cohesion have multiple effects on hospitality, and research can identify the particularity of specific communities, like native citizens, migrants or ex-pats. In this respect qualitative as well as quantitative research agenda’s are demanded, given the epistemological fluidity of the subject at hand.

In this respect, social psychology can also provide significant insights. The behaviour of groups, even though multifarious in nature, can be seen as displaying regularities which, within certain limits, can permit predictions to be made. The last decades have seen an impressive development of this discipline, but there is still little work that addresses its implications for other areas of enquiry and practice. City hospitality can benefit in many ways from research into group behaviour. The beliefs and values, which sustain the virtues of hospitality are subjected to processes of transmission and contagion, sometimes in the form of groupthink or by means of imitation, competition or reinforcement, processes which can be then steered in the desired direction. Cities change in character and spirit and they do so following certain patterns, which can be of a psychological nature. The industry of hospitality can profit greatly from a better understanding of these processes.

Culture and knowledge: an essential ingredient of the hospitability of a city is her cultural life. But little research has been carried out in this area. Making use of the body of knowledge in fields such as cultural studies or cultural management may yield interesting insights. For example, previous research examined the importance of a knowledge economy and the role of the cities in attracting and dispersing knowledge (Florida, 2005). But as to how the findings relate to the influence of the perceived hospitality of a city and the hospitality industry, much is still to be done.

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