

Hospitality

Peter Lugosi

Oxford Brookes University, UK

plugosi@brookes.ac.uk

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Definition

Hospitality refers to practices and perceived experiences of welcoming, inclusion, and sheltering (Lynch 2017). It can take place within commercial and noncommercial contexts, and consequently, it can involve both market- and nonmarket-based consumption (Lashley 2017). Hospitality often involves food, drink, and other stimulants, alongside entertaining or engaging interaction as people create shared social spaces. However, these elements are not always part of the hospitality offering. Food, drink, or accommodation, supplied to meet basic human needs, may require minimal or no interaction between staff and customers. Therefore, provision may not involve embodied performances of hospitality or hospitableness (Lugosi 2014).

Hospitality should not be thought of purely in terms of openness or unconditional inclusivity. It is rarely accessible to everyone or free from constraints. All acts of inclusion involve exclusion of some groups or individuals for various reasons, for instance unresolvable differences in values, norms, expectations, or lack of access to social, cultural, or economic capital. Moreover, hospitality, in its ideal form, requires welcoming and inclusion on the part of the host without any assertion of power over the guest or expectation of reciprocity (Lynch, Germann-Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi and Lashley 2011). Such unconditional hospitality is impossible because host-guest relations are always accompanied by tensions concerning power, position, status, role, expectations, and reciprocity between those involved in the giving and taking of hospitality (Derrida 2001).

Disciplinary perspectives

The diverse forms and dimensions of hospitality, and the multiple social and commercial contexts in which it emerges, have resulted in it being studied from different perspectives, all of which are relevant to tourism. These can be summarized into three broad groups: applied business and management; the social sciences, particularly from the disciplines of anthropology, geography, and sociology; and humanities, including philosophy, politics and history (Lugosi 2014).

Business and management academics have focused primarily on the effective organization of hospitality in commercial contexts (Ryan 2015). They have explored a variety of strategic and operational aspects of its provision, including the efficient organization of production processes, the development and deployment of technologies, experience management, service routines, staffing, marketing, and finance. Management academics have also considered the consumers of hospitality, including their motivations, expectations, experiences, perceptions, behaviors, satisfaction, and future intentions. The majority of business and management research is practice or practitioner focused. Historically, there has

been limited engagement with critical social science or philosophical debates concerning the broader dimensions of hospitality.

Anthropologists, geographers, sociologists and historians have also examined commercial hospitality but they have adopted a wider perspective, and have studied it in noncommercial social and private contexts (Lashley 2017). Eating and drinking are universal features of all societies, and these domains of practice often involve acts of hospitality. Although not all people travel or are equally accustomed to encountering tourists, embedded practices and norms regarding the reception, entertainment, or exclusion of strangers and unwanted familiars are evident in most if not all cultures. Social scientists have examined different forms and dimensions of hospitality in and across societies and cultures, questioning its processes, normative aspects, and social functions. These include delineating spaces, (re)constructing identities, boundaries or hierarchies, and power relations.

Philosophical and political examination of hospitality has most prominently concentrated on its broad principles and discourses, particularly as they operate at the level of the state or nation (Bulley 2015). Philosophers have explored the abstract laws and principles of hospitality, including the problematic notions of host and guest, the complexities associated with their roles, and power relationships (Derrida 2001; Lynch et al. 2011). These studies have tended to ignore or dismiss commercial hospitality, often highlighting the contradictions between the ideals of altruistic, universal hospitality, and the instrumental nature of hospitality in its commercial manifestations (Lashley 2017; Lynch et al. 2011).

There continue to exist some fundamental differences between (sub)disciplinary conceptions of and thus approaches to studying hospitality. These stem from diverging epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies, and the drive to further commercial interests or challenge them. However, contemporary studies of hospitality in their social and commercial manifestations have sought to understand links between different perspectives (Lynch et al. 2011).

Application to tourism studies

Hospitality can be considered as a part of the tourism system, consisting of people and organizations providing accommodation, food and drink-related services, and experiences to tourists at destinations, attractions, and as they move between them and their places of origin (Lugosi 2021; Page 2019). Framed this way, hospitality can be thought of as a series of mundane functional supporting activities in tourism. The provision of shelter and sustenance enables people to engage in various touristic activities. However, hospitality can also be a peak experience in tourism; for example, as tourists encounter “hospitable” landscapes and people, stay in distinctive accommodation, and consume in novel eating, drinking or entertainment venues.

The perceived role or function of hospitality in tourism depends partly on the disciplinary approach being adopted, alongside the scale at which it is considered in a destination. For example, at the level of destination development and management, the availability and quality of commercial hospitality provision (in terms of accommodation and foodservice) directly influences the levels and/or types of tourism that can operate in a place (Page 2019). Destination marketing may also consider how specific hospitality venues, which may include hotels, restaurants, bars, cafes, clubs, or other leisure/entertainment venues, can be used to position and differentiate destinations or generally be used in place promotion. Marketing communications in tourism may also “represent” host populations and landscapes as being welcoming and hospitable, thus creating certain preconceptions and expectations for tourists (Lugosi 2021).

From a management perspective, concern for hospitality at the level of the resort or organization focuses on issues such as different models of ownership and operation, financial

investment, risk management, branding, marketing, alongside revenue management, human resources, facilities management, and customer satisfaction (Ryan 2015). The significant role of hospitality in the tourism system and destination experiences, including its social, economic, and environmental impacts, requires the effective organization of these and related strategic and operational issues.

At the micro level of people and their interactions, hospitality management is concerned with employee behaviors, service provider relationships, and the overall customer experience within commercial transactions (Page 2019). In part, managerial concern with hospitality at this level focuses on the mechanistic aspects of experience, for instance, the design and control of the products, technologies, material environments, and the service processes to ensure satisfaction. However, the human aspects of hospitality provision, particularly service-based interactions, are also important.

Social scientists similarly consider the emergence and implications of hospitality at different scales. However, as already noted, rather than concentrating on the extraction of surplus value from the effective management of hospitality, they have considered its different forms, dimensions, and impacts from critical perspectives. For example, studies question how discourses of hospitality/hostility, from politicians, state agencies, media and social commentators, shape people's perceptions of destinations and experiences of places. During large-scale public events that drive tourism and are often vehicles for regional (re)development (sporting events, cultural festivals, and carnivals), locals are mobilized to create a welcoming environment for tourists. This discourse of hospitableness is not limited to frontline employees in hotels or foodservice outlets. Workers in supporting sectors of transportation and retail, and members of the public are also compelled to be helpful, patient, and friendly toward tourists, which often causes tensions (Lugosi 2014, 2021).

Social scientists have questioned how hospitality emerges and operates in destinations, organizations, and micro-spaces of social interaction, in commercial and noncommercial contexts (Lashley 2017; Lynch et al. 2011). The production and consumption of hospitality may result in positive cultural exchanges and transform power relations as women and those from marginalized ethnic groups are empowered to generate capital and create alternative representations of themselves (Lashley 2017). However, in contrast, it may reinforce social exclusion and disempowerment (Lynch et al. 2011). The provision and consumption of hospitality can have a number of negative impacts. It can lead to the transgression of social norms and values, cultural conflicts, environmental degradation, and other forms of disadvantage, because of competition for resources such as water and foodstuffs. Engaging in hospitality labor may also reinforce gender and ethnic inequalities (Robinson, Martins, Solnet and Baum 2019).

Future research

Future research will undoubtedly respond to and build on a number of contemporary and emerging challenges. The first of these concerns the rapidly evolving nature of technology. In part this refers to the increased use of technology in managing hospitality operations and the delivery of hospitality services. Sophisticated systems are being deployed to predict demand, increase revenue and manage facilities. This has expanded the scope and scale of surveillance and datafication (i.e. pervasive data capture, coupled with purposeful quantification and anticipatory analysis). The increasing use of technology has also driven the de-skilling of the workforce and the reduced need for human labour. Management focused research can seek to develop increasingly sophisticated ways to exploit technology to anticipate consumer behaviour, improve efficiency in production and logistics, and reduce operational costs. However, it is also important to examine the impacts of these innovations on human resource practices, human rights and on consumer experiences. This may consider issues such as the

benefits for service personalisation as well as the challenges concerning ethics, privacy and the disempowerment of hospitality workers.

Technology has also radically transformed the range of hospitality experiences available to consumers, made possible through new product distribution infrastructures and marketing practices. This includes the rapid growth of market actors such as AirBnB and Uber, and the evolving technological platforms that are used to access information about hospitality services, facilitate financial transactions, and communicate experiences. Such pervasive technologies have brought a wide range of people into the provision of hospitality; it has also transposed hospitality new geographical spaces and communities. These socio-technical innovations have also marketized a wider range of places, people and objects, constantly subjecting them to mediation and valuation as they are shared, rated and commoditised. Research can thus assess the positive and negative impacts of these developments, for example, on culture, the environment and community relations, and on the providers of “traditional” hospitality services.

New forms of mobility are also emerging, which are transforming practices and experiences of hospitality. This refers in part to the expansion of nationalities who travel from Asia, Latin America and Africa. Their movement drives increasingly complex intercultural encounters, and organisations have to anticipate their needs and respond to evolving demands. However, mobility also refers to migrant labour workers who often make up a large part of the workforce. New bordering regimes are emerging to facilitate the movement of “desirable” travellers, while the politicisation of migration restricts mobility for “undesirable” ones deemed to threaten destination labour markets and cultures. Moreover, global health crises such as COVID-19 and political shifts, for example, the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union, will create new tensions and radically change the movement of people and the hospitality they can expect to receive. A challenge for future research is to understand how legal, political and social systems are transforming, including their impacts on those experiencing hospitality and those involved in its provision.

Finally, it is important to recognise the consequences that hospitality has for the environment, for example through energy use, waste and the degradation of natural resources in the desire to create unique, extraordinary experiences. Future research, whether it is driven by management or social science principles, must account for the damage that is being caused by the sector and endeavour to reduce its impacts.

See also: Culinary tourism, host and guest, hostility, restaurant, service, wine tourism

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