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Hospitableness and sustainable development: New responsibilities and demands in the host-guest relationship

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How does the current paradigm of the host-guest relationship cause the hospitality industry to lag behind in sustainable development? Hospitality is often defined as "a feeling of being welcome". It is about "welcoming the stranger: a person who comes today and stays tomorrow", or "a stranger who is treated like a god". In the current paradigm on the concept of "genuine hospitableness", the authors see a host indulging his guest. This hospitable host does not want to bother the guest with complex issues of climate change or scarce resources but rather wants to treat him or her as "a god": the host acts as "a servant". This view on genuine hospitableness might hinder sustainable practices in hospitality organisations, especially if the (perceived) wishes of the guest are not sustainable. The authors argue that genuine hospitableness needs to be redefined and the concept of the host needs to be expanded to "host as shepherd". The metaphor of a shepherd emphasises the extended responsibility of the host, in which the host not only takes care of the actual guest, but does so in a more comprehensive way. This includes the future guest, the local community and the environment. Additionally, the authors also see sustainable practices as being hindered by a disconnect between genuine hospitableness and the execution of this idea in hospitality service skills.

Keywords: organisational behaviour, sustainable practices, organisational change, hostmanship, servant vs shepherd, responsible business

Introduction

Within the hospitality industry, as in other industries, attention is given to environmental sustainability. Unfortunately, however, most hospitality companies are lagging behind in the process of becoming more sustainable (van Rheede & Blomme, 2012a). According to Myung, McClaren, and Li (2012) and van Rheede and Blomme (2013), it can be concluded that the hospitality industry is engaged in many sustainable initiatives, although the scope of these practices is limited and only considered when they lead to direct economic advantage. This means that the majority of sustainability initiatives are directly related to energy (CO$_2$ emissions), water and waste reduction.

In this paper, we discuss whether specific characteristics of the hospitality industry and hospitality itself, and in particular the host-guest relationship, are causing this particular industry to lag behind in sustainable development. Hospitality is often defined as "a feeling of being welcome" (Lynch, 2013). Researching its origins, we find that hospitality is concerned with hosts and guests, duties of care and protection and creation of a sense of well-being and trust (O'Gorman, 2010). We explore this thought in more detail and look at the historical roots of hospitality and the implications of it in the sustainability discussion. Before continuing the discussion on hospitableness, let us first define the concept of sustainability and related concepts such as sustainable development.

Defining sustainability

The concept of "sustainability" and "sustainable development"

emerged from an environmental perspective (Hediger, 2010), and has been defined in various ways. Today, the scope of the concept has broadened to include a focus not only on environmental issues, but also on social and economic problems.

Environmental sustainability refers back to themes such as pollution and limited resources (for example, energy, waste and water). Social sustainability has been defined as "how individuals, communities and societies live with each other and set out to achieve the objectives of development models, which they have chosen for themselves taking also into account the physical boundaries of their places and planet earth as a whole" (Colantonio, 2009, p. 8) and it is linked to themes such as "… equity, poverty reduction and livelihood, [which] are increasingly been complemented or replaced by more intangible and less measurable concepts such as identity, sense of place and the benefits of social networks …" (Colantonio, 2009, p. 8). Finally, economic sustainability refers to the way that companies combine the effects on the environmental and social aspects in day-to-day business decisions.

The concept of sustainable development adds the notion of limits to growth. This concept was adopted by the Brundtland Committee (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, chapter 1.3, 15), and emphasises the element of meeting "… *the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*" This definition clearly shows the broadness of the concept.

The fundamental principles of sustainable development are: holistic, futurity (long-term capacity of the global ecosystem)

and equity. More specific objectives are also formulated for development, concerning: quality of life for all people, satisfaction of basic needs, self-reliance (including political freedom) and local decision making for local need and endogenous development. The specific objectives formulated for sustainability are: sustainable population levels, minimal depletion of non-renewable resources, and pollution emission within the assimilative capacity of the environment (Sharpley, 2000).

It is important to realise that the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development also create confusion. Sharpley (2000) compared the concept of "sustainable tourism" with "sustainable development" and concluded:

> … *whilst it embraces the objectives of environmental sustainability, sustainable tourism does not appear to be consistent with the developmental aspects of sustainable development. This is, perhaps, not surprising. Neither the inherently imperialistic, dependent nature of tourism production on a global scale nor the characteristics of tourism consumption fit easily with the principle of endogenous, alternative development (Sharpley, 2000, p. 14).*

This means that the current nature of hospitality and tourism causes the industry to fall behind in terms of sustainable development.

Saarinen (2013) expands on this notion and concludes that "limits to growth" are studied with tourism studies in three research traditions: a resource-based view, an activity-based approach and a community based view. All these approaches strive to access the balance between people, planet and profit (or formulated in negative terms, limits to grow) from another perspective. The resource-based view tries to assess the limits to growth objectively and looks at the carry capacity of the earth. The activity-based approach defines the limits to growth from the perspective of tourism as essentially an (economic) activity and the limits to growth are discussed in relation to the available resources. Lastly, a community-based sustainability approach pictures the limits to growth as socially constructed between (local) stakeholders (Saarinen, 2006, 2013).

Following the contributions of Saarinen (2013) and Sharpley (2000), we can argue that coming to formulate limits to growth for tourism or and hospitality operations is a complex matter. What is needed is a view on sustainable development (at a global, regional and local level) as described above, in which holistic, futurity and equity are central concepts. Governmental organisations try to regulate some of these issues by legislation, but companies also take their own responsibility by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). As argued by van Rheede and Blomme (2012a, p. 259):

> … *the main difference between sustainability and CSR is that the latter refers to voluntary activities. The European Union defines this as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis (Commission of the European Communities, 2006).*

The confusion about these concepts can also be seen in the way hoteliers are discussing and responding to this issue. Studies show (van Rheede & Blomme, 2012a) that many hoteliers reflect mainly on only a single aspect of sustainability, namely the environmental aspect. Moreover, this is also done in a reactive way: to prevent negative consequences and not so much to create a positive effect.

In other words, we argue that the hospitality industry should become more sustainable in a pro-active way, while focusing on more than merely the environmental aspect of sustainability. We continue to explore the concept of hospitality seeking to clarify why the industry consistently lags behind regarding sustainable development

Exploring the concept of hospitality

Hospitality has often been defined as "providing a warm welcome to a guest or a stranger" (Lynch, 2013). When we look at the history of providing hospitality, or a warm welcome, we find that this was an honourable and worthy thing to do (O'Gorman, 2010). As an example, let us look at the symbolic meaning of a pineapple.

A pineapple has been a symbol to display welcome and hospitality for centuries. Especially in the Caribbean, a picture or a sculpture of a pineapple can often be found next to the entrance of a house or carved on the board of a bed in the guestroom. In 1493 Columbus brought the first pineapple to Europe. Due to its sweetness and exotic nature, it soon became a popular fruit that symbolised the warmest welcome a host could provide. Because the fruit was so expensive and rare, grocers of colonial goods in Europe would sometimes rent pineapples out, so hosts could truly impress their guests. Guests would feel honoured that the host had provided them with this expensive sign of hospitableness. This history provides an insight into where our sense of hospitality originated. Many other examples can be found in various religions and cultures.

Shryrock (2008), for example, writes about the traditions of the Belga tribes in Jordan. Generally throughout the centuries, Arab traditions prescribe that when hosting strangers, one should wait three days before asking the name of the guest. In other words, guests should be indulged and offered everything they need, without asking anything from them. Shryrock recalls the account of a man, Ibn Khatlan, who even gave away his own children as a gift to strangers that were staying in his house. Lashley (2015) has provided a good overview of hospitality from the background of various religions. All religions describe hospitality as something that should be offered without the expectation to receive something in return. Hospitable behaviour is generally seen as a "good" thing to do. All religions propose that guests should be honoured and treated as gods: we have to indulge our guests.

Our current vision on hospitableness is similar to these visions from the past; looking at the work of Lashley (2015), O'Gorman (2010) and Shryock (2008), we see that a true and genuinely hospitable host is a person who offers, gives and does everything in their power to make the guest feel happy and welcome. In this sense we would refer to the "host as servant", a servant who does everything in his or her power to make his boss (the guest) feel indulged by providing the best.

This notion of providing the best and treating guests as gods, seems hard to align with environmentally friendly solutions such as asking guests to reuse a towel. From the hospitable point of view, one would like to provide a fresh towel on at least a daily basis.

Hospitable behaviour
According to Telfer (2000), Dekker (2014) and O'Connor (2005), we should distinguish between "genuine hospitableness" and "hospitable service skills" as two different aspects of hospitable behaviour when talking about behaviour in the hospitality industry. Genuine hospitableness includes behaviours of the host towards the guest that are truly welcoming and friendly and intended to make the guest feel happy. Hospitable service skills, on the other hand, are behaviours that are in line with the rules of the hotel and that are in accordance with standard operating procedures: for example, the procedures that should be followed while checking in a guest, or using a guests' last name when he or she checks out. These are behaviours that can be trained, whereas genuinely hospitable behaviours are linked to someone's personality (Dekker, 2014). Telfer argues that a truly genuine host is motivated by really caring about the other person. She calls this the *other regarding motive*. Hosts with other motives (self-regarding motives and reciprocal motives) are not considered to be genuinely hospitable. This is similar to Derrida's concept of *unconditional hospitality* (Derrida, 2000). He refers to a type of hospitality that is absolute and without conditions. This extreme form of hospitality is considered impossible.

How are genuine hospitableness and hospitality service skills related? Telfer (2000) argues that a person can have excellent hospitality skills, but without the right motives might not be a good host. So this means that there needs to be an alignment between the two concepts for a host to be an authentically hospitable employee. The concepts are related to the organisational culture of a hotel. Schein defines organisational culture as:

> … the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems ... (Schein, 1984, p. 4).

This concept is often explained by talking about different levels of the culture – starting on the surface with visible behaviour and artefacts, next considering values that govern this behaviour and finally moving to the core of the organisational culture by delving into its underlying assumptions (Schein, 1984). This concept of genuine hospitableness is at the level of the underlying assumptions and values, while the concept of hospitality service skills is related to the actual behaviour and the artefacts. We find this a useful analogy to better understand the relation between motives and actual hospitable behaviour.

Helping or hindering sustainable practices in the hospitality industry

In this paper, we discuss whether specific characteristics of hospitality and therefore the hospitality industry are causing this industry to stay behind in the sustainable development.

Host as servant
When stereotyping this idea of "genuine hospitableness" in the host-guest relationship, the host works hard to indulge the guest and does not want to bother him or her with complex issues of climate change or scarce resources. Hospitality companies and hosts truly want guests to be as happy as they can be and the host will do her best to make this happen. Telfer (2000) argues that a true genuine host is motivated by a heartfelt caring for the other person. This is in line with the historical and religious roots or hospitality as discussed earlier. This view of "host as servant" in hospitality might be hindering active and progressive actions in the field of sustainability, especially if the (perceived) wishes of the guest are not sustainable. Below we give some examples based on the dimension of helping or hindering sustainable practices and on the dimension of genuine hospitality or hospitality as a service skill. As explained above, we argue that these two concepts should be seen as related, one more at the level of values, and the other more at a visible level of behaviour and artefacts.

However, how do we solve the dilemma of the host as servant? We believe that an expansion of the definition of guest is the first step, but we also see tremendous potential in moving from a perspective of "host as servant" to that of "host as shepherd".

Host as shepherd
In this paper we would like to move away from the "host as servant" towards the "host as shepherd". We think this new alternative interpretation will be beneficial for sustainable development and moreover, expand the host's scope of responsibility.

The shepherd metaphor emphasises an additional responsibility of the host, one that takes care of "the other" in a broader perspective. It is a perspective that takes into consideration not only the actual guest, but the guest in a broader sense, as previously discussed. Selwyn (2000) portrays hospitality as an act that will turn strangers into friends. Looking at the history of hospitality, hosting guests was an honourable and worthy deed (O'Gorman, 2010). This metaphor of the shepherd could also be applied when widening or extending Telfer's (2000) concept of "the other person". Following Derrida (2000), this view purports that providing hospitality is not unconditional. In line with the host as a shepherd, a host should take care not only of the current guest, but should see the guest in light of a broader perspective. In order to do this, certain rules need to be complied with to safeguard the safety of the (future) guest. By redefining the guest, and the relation of this guest to the host, the authors see a more sustainable future – one in which future guests, future generations, but also the local community and the surrounding environment are taken into consideration (WCED, 1987). Hence, similar to sustainable development, as discussed above, the concept of the host-guest relation also needs a more holistic, futurity- and equity-based approach.

The metaphor of the shepherd is well know from old texts such as the biblical stories, but is currently also linked to leadership principles (e.g. Pick, 2015) in claiming that the host makes decisions based on his or her better understanding of the guest and the context. It is like a parent who makes decisions for his children. The parent makes a decision – against the will of his children, because he feels that they

cannot foresee the consequences. So instead of focusing only on the needs and wants of the actual guest, like the "host as servant" does, the "host as shepherd" takes into account not only the needs of the current guest, but also of the "guest" from a holistic perspective.

Explaining the host-guest interaction
In the example of the "host as servant", guests are given an option to participate in a sustainable practice. The two accounts below can be seen as responses in which the guest is given an option to participate, thus making it voluntary and the "host as servant" hopes that the guest is not bothered by these practices. In the first example, by way of compensation the guest is also is rewarded for positive conduct.

Make a Green Choice
> *… Make a Green Choice (MAGC) is Starwood's guest-facing sustainability program in which our guests can choose to help reduce our environmental footprint. Any guest at a participating Starwood property can Make a Green Choice by foregoing full housekeeping for up to three days in a row (excluding their check-out day). For each night a guest opts into MAGC, they receive 250–500 Starpoints or a $5/5€ Food and Beverage voucher, while they save up to 49.2 gallons of water, 0.19 kWh of electricity, 25 000 BTU of natural gas, and 7oz. of cleaning product chemicals per night (may vary by brand and region) (Starwood Hotels, 2015).*

Leave your towel: linens and towels reuse programme
A very well known sustainability initiative is the "linens and towels reuse programme" as an example of an environmental conservation programme. The towel programme demonstrates the concept of host as servant and his or her perception of genuine hospitableness. It is a request to the hotelier to not change towels as a standard daily practice. Evidently, however, such towel programmes can also lead to problems, and can cause irritation among guests. This example brings us to the hospitable service skills. The execution of these standard operating procedures (SOPs) can lead to the following two examples of an incorrect and unexpected translation of a practice from a genuine hospitableness to a hospitality service skill:

Guest disappointment due to failure to deliver on sustainability promises
Guests often complain that, despite having indicated they wanted to re-use their towel, Housekeeping replaced the item anyway. We found in an exploratory survey (van Rheede & Blomme, 2012b) that 37% of hotel guests have unwillingly experienced replacement of towels. The reason why Housekeeping does this has not been investigated, but suggestions include perceptions ingrained in their training or assumptions regarding service/hospitableness and a hygiene perspective.

Unintentional sabotage of sustainability programmes
Providing the hotel room with an additional keycard to prevent power outage as the guest leaves the room is another example of sustainable practices being hindered by good intentions to provide high service levels – and yet some hotels have implemented this as an SOP.

The notion that a host's concern for indulging his guests requires that he does not bother them with sustainability issues is summarised in Table 1. The table distinguishes two dimensions. The horizontal axis conveys whether a certain action helps or hinders sustainable practices in a hotel; whereas the vertical axis depicts whether these practices can be seen as "genuine hospitality", or as "hospitality service skills". In the cells a distinction is made between the host as servant (limited sustainability) and the host as shepherd (full sustainability).

When comparing the two perspectives on the host-guest relation, the data seems to oversimplify the issues by contrasting the two positions; nonetheless, the authors still see this as reinforcing the main thesis.

Conclusion and discussion

We have investigated how current paradigms of the host-guest relationship may be causing the hospitality industry to lag behind regarding sustainable development.

We started by discussing the host-guest relationship from a historical viewpoint, in which a host is deemed servant to the guest. However, embracing a more comprehensive definition of guest, we proposed an alternative perception of host as shepherd, not only taking care and indulging current guests, but also future guests and future generations. This is achieved by expanding or redefining the concept of genuine hospitableness and hospitality service skills. The authors see a strong analogy between the relationship of genuine hospitableness and hospitality service skills relating to the concept of organisation culture. Realising that one is the underlying principle of the other should help an organisation in the process of redefining and implementing a host concept that is more based on the shepherd as host principle, whilst

Table 1: The result on sustainable practices for a "host as servant" and a "host as shepherd" based on their genuine hospitableness and hospitality service skills

	Helping sustainable operation	Hindering sustainable operation
"Genuine hospitableness"	Host as shepherd: Increase positive and decrease negative impact of sustainable practices in hospitality organisations	Host as servant: Give sustainability as an option
	E.g. Energy neutral hotel linked to eco-tourism	E.g. towels and linen saving programme
Hospitality service skills	Host as shepherd: Increase positive and decrease negative impact of sustainable practices in hospitality organisations	Host as servant: skills and SOP are (un)intentionally "unsustainably implemented" or wrongly executed
	E.g. Energy neutral hotel linked to eco-tourism	E.g. "sabotage" sustainable practice: providing additional key card or unwilling replacement of towels

ensuring that both the underlying assumptions and values, but also the actual behaviour in the organisation are aligned.

Arnold (2010) states that the implementation of CSR and sustainability is not only a technical innovation, but also a cultural change. Van Rheede and Blomme (2013) stress that the implementation of CSR is only successful if organisational behaviour actually changes. What does this mean in the context where an organisation is changing from the paradigm of a host as servant to a host as shepherd? In this context it will be crucial to make sure that the view on genuine hospitableness will be translated to the right set of hospitality service skills. The authors feel that accommodating a broader definition of genuine hospitality and the translation and implementation of this into hospitality service skills will provide the hospitality industry with a new impulse to further explore their contribution to sustainable development, in terms not only of impact and claims but also actual behaviour.

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