

# Exploring the concept of hostmanship through "50 cups of coffee"

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores how hospitality academics and students understand, interpret and experience hostmanship. Building on a literature review which outlines and discusses the development and definition of hospitality, this exploratory study is framed by an interpretivist approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 46 hospitality academics, staff and students (50 were initially invited). Each individual interview focused on uncovering the individual's understanding of and attitude towards hostmanship, and was transcribed before being analysed by both researchers in order to identify themes that could be used to investigate the concept of hostmanship. Findings show that a genuine connection, the pro-active behaviour of the host, and surprises led to a welcoming feeling for the guest. An unwelcome feeling was mostly created when protocols and systems were prioritised above the human being and, on occasion, specific, unpleasant behaviour of the host. When people were asked to define hostmanship, the following aspects were mentioned most: being and acting sincerely from the heart, and creating a true connection between people.

**KEYWORDS:** genuine connection, hospitality, host-guest interaction, hostmanship, qualitative research, touchpoints, welcoming feeling

## Introduction

This article explores how employees and students of the Department of Hospitality in a university of applied sciences in the Netherlands understand the concept of hostmanship. In doing this, the study draws upon the Yin (2009) guidelines to design a case study survey based on "guided conversations", although this study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach in posing the research question: "How do hospitality education staff and students interpret hostmanship?".

Primary data was collected based on personal experiences in the domain of hospitality, covering both private and commercial settings. The original purpose of having "50 cups of coffee" with employees and students at this university was to get an insight into what it is that makes people feel welcome. It was also an opportunity to ask people about experiences that do *not* make them feel welcome. The idea was to find common themes and characteristics of these (extraordinary) positive or negative feelings as a result of a "hostmanship" experience.

Despite the fact that Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008) identified "hostmanship" more than ten years ago, defining this concept as: "The art of making people feel welcome", there is still little academic research on this topic. Therefore, this article aims to fill this literature gap, developing a deeper understanding of the "hostmanship" concept through an exploratory investigation based on primary data. A theoretical reflection on the concept was published by Gelter (2013). To date, no publications have been found based on empirical data about this concept. It appears to be a rather new concept in academia and therefore

interesting to explore further and to contribute to the body of knowledge about hospitality, hospitableness and hostmanship. Recent work by Golubovskaya, Robinson and Solnet (2017) shows the importance of staff understanding not only *what* should be done in a hospitality operation, but also the value of understanding *how to connect*.

## Literature review

In preparation for a discussion of the concept of hostmanship, it is important to understand the earlier concepts that it builds on. Perhaps the best-known definition of hospitality management is that of Brotherton (1999), who wrote of a voluntary exchange involving food, drink and accommodation in a mutually beneficial way. While he received considerable criticism for focusing on the "management" of hospitality, Nailon (1982, p. 141) did the same some 15 years earlier when he wrote that "[i]ts purpose is to provide physiological and psychological comfort and security as a business activity at a defined standard of service through the provision of facilitating goods". King (1995) added to this but also warning that if a business was to be able to deliver hospitality to its paying customers, it should extend the same thinking to its own staff, providing them with an environment in which they in turn show hospitality to others. O'Gorman (2007, p. 201) moves away from this purely commercial perspective by arguing that

[h]ospitality is not a matter of objective knowledge. Hospitality exists within the lived experience; it is a gift given by the host to the guest which is shared between

them. The true gift of hospitality is an act of generosity experienced by the guest, which turns a stranger into a friend for a limited period of time.

This perspective mirrors the earlier writings of Nouwen (1975) who argued that Christians should "offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings" (p. 46) and that "hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy" (p. 51). Hemmington (2007) supports this approach, suggesting that merely "meeting expectations" (or even slightly exceeding them) will not result in loyal customers who will become ambassadors for the organisation in person (or now on social media). Instead, he proposes that hospitality organisations should try to create "sparkling moments" which will live in people's memories in a way that Carlzon (1987) would call a "moment of truth". Twenty years ago, Pine and Gilmore (1999) argued that there has been a shift from traditional consumption of goods and services towards consuming experiences or even a step further where people are demanding personal transformations and personal growth through experiences. They suggested this development was a new "economic offering". According to Ottenbacher, Harrington and Parsa (2009), there is no single definition or unified framework of hospitality. But what different approaches have in common is that hospitality implies two key actors — the host and the guest — and their social relationship. This is confirmed by Grönroos (2011) stating that hospitality is embodied in a customer-employee interaction. Risdon (2013) studied the concept of these interactions as a "touchpoint". He defined this as a point of interaction involving a (1) specific human need in a (2) specific time and place. It is about an interaction, be it a conversation or an interface control. A specific human need refers to knowing what is driving these interactions. But which need of the guest is the host supporting? A specific time and place refer to the fact that the host needs to understand the context that is surrounding that need. An interesting and widely acknowledged framework, proposed by Lashley (2000), identifies three domains of hospitality — private, social and commercial — and displays various modes of hospitality with their overlaps and convergences. Private hospitality refers to private homes where hosts welcome guests generously without financial motives (King, 1995). This relationship is based on mutual obligation and reciprocity and is characterised as the most selfless and pure form of hospitality, according to Telfer (2000). Social hospitality refers to the broader social norms and codes of civility and trust that can potentially be endorsed in commercial and private spaces (Bell, 2007). Generally, in this domain the host deals with strangers. Commercial hospitality, in contrast, aims to provide pleasure and to satisfy guests to facilitate their repeat visits. The paradox is where the essence of the generosity of hospitality meets the commercial economic relationships focused on profit. Lashley's (2000) three domains illustrate the complexity and diversity of the hospitality concept and also show its occurrence in a wide variety of contexts. This is perfectly in line with the approach of this article, since the interviews were taken from a broad range of settings — private, social and commercial — in which hospitality experiences were shared.

According to Schmitt (2003), today's consumers are not function-driven, but rather value-, experience- and emotion-driven, and more interested in how an offering transforms, entertains and contributes to personal branding

and self-fulfilment. It is in this context that the concept of "hostmanship" as defined by Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008) is now described and investigated.

### *The concept of hostmanship*

In alignment with this gradual but global development of hospitable experiences, Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008) created the philosophy of *hostmanship*, or as they note in the sub-title of their book, "the art of making people feel welcome". Their concept is illustrated through a series of stories or parables of people demonstrating "hostmanship": a bar tender in a pub in Disney's Epcot Centre in Florida who shares the secret of a magic trick; a Persian airport bus driver in Sweden who insists on driving people to where they want to go rather than staying on his bus route; a McDonald's manager asking everyone to wait for their fast food meals so he can fulfil a large order for people trying to catch a train, etc. They refer to six choices that together define hostmanship. At first, these were called the six "pillars" or "values" of hostmanship. Recently, they were changed into "choices", and one more was added — 'joy', where the host has the choice to act according to these or not. The seven choices are therefore now:

- Serving others. A sincere serving attitude based on mutual respect and equality. There is a genuine interest in someone else's well-being.
- Taking responsibility. Being aware of your personal role and responsibility, which is about being on the other person's side and helping them. Having the courage and taking responsibility to act on the personal wishes of your guests.
- Perceiving wholeness. The Big Picture which refers to your actions that reflect the entire business the host is working for.
- Being caring. Acting considerately and being compassionate to others — humanity is key.
- Practising dialogue. Listening to and understanding the guest is key, instead of sticking to our own habits and preconceptions.
- Seeking knowledge. Seeking and being curious about the guest's wishes and habits to be able to respond to their needs. Being knowledgeable and knowing the ins and outs of your workplace and using your ability to use your knowledge in the context of another person's needs.
- Joy. Doing what you love and loving what you do.

In the *art of hostmanship*, three dimensions can be distinguished: welcoming yourself; welcoming others; and welcoming the guest (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2008). Where in previous literature about providing hospitality, the focus lay mainly on treating the guest properly, in the philosophy of hostmanship, taking care of yourself in terms of work-life balance and a healthy and happy life and joy in your work is as important as "welcoming the other". Welcoming others refers to good co-operation with your colleagues or other people around you. After all, it is about treating yourself and others in a welcoming way that will contribute to your willingness to welcome guests.

According to Gelter (2013), the difference in the hostmanship approach with concepts like service and hospitality lies mainly in the fact that hostmanship is more individual and focused, thereby creating a personalised experience. It could be argued that this is more in line with the discussion by Derrida (2005), who proposed that real hospitality is unconditional, but that such unconditional hospitality is impossible, leading him to

coin the phrase "hostipitality" by which he meant that every act of hospitality has its limits and is therefore is not actually "unconditional", despite how it may appear.

Looking more specifically at the behaviour or characteristics of the host, De la Mar (2019) describes aspects of being an excellent host. The list of the following nine items is interesting, since these align with some of the literature and findings of this research:

- Being and acting authentically;
- Being motivated and passionate;
- Representative;
- Attentive from the heart;
- Service attitude;
- Proactive, attentive and helpful;
- Friendly and clear communication, with appropriate manners;
- Being knowledgeable, having expertise; and
- Taking responsibility for the guest and team performance.

There appears to be an overlap with the seven choices of Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008) here as well. The authors seem to agree on what an excellent host should be. Perhaps the differences are a matter of the interpretation of the different concepts.

Nevertheless, to provide a deeper understanding of the characteristics of a good host, it is helpful, by contrast, to look also at the characteristics and situations providing guests with a bad experience. De la Mar (2019) identified seven of them: indifferent employees; dirt and mess; uncomfortable environment; waiting; having to make an effort; procedures and rules come first; and finally, negative communication with the guest. De la Mar (2019) calls them *experience killers*.

This section has identified, summarised and compared the rather limited literature on hospitality and hostmanship. The next section will outline the research methods employed for this study.

## Research methods

From the start of this research, the aim was to have open conversations with the research participants about the concept of hostmanship and to explore their understanding of the idea of making people feel welcome. This exploratory and qualitative approach is in line with much research in hospitality (Gummeson, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Lugosi, Lynch & Morrison, 2009; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). The context was not specifically given, meaning that people could choose any context for their experience. The purpose was to identify stories which express this concept of hostmanship and that were memorable experiences (either positive or negative).

"50 cups of coffee" was conceived as an approach in which 50 people were invited to have a cup of coffee with the researchers in an informal setting. The intention of the "guided conversations" (Yin, 2009, p. 106) was to have short conversations of approximately ten minutes. While Yin (2009) set a positivist approach to the construction of a research case study and to the structure of a guided conversation, his critical thinking was nonetheless useful in informing the methodological approach of this study. In practice, 10 minutes was found to be far too short once people started enthusiastically describing their experiences, and the interviews lasted at least thirty minutes and sometimes longer. We decided to expand the time slot in order to welcome and respect the interviewees' stories. Once

people started sharing their experiences around the concept of hostmanship, it was hard to contain them. The interviewees were very open and shared personal and sensitive stories that related extremely well to the subject under investigation.

The instrument that was created for the conversations was interviewing based on only a couple of questions. Since the approach was mainly exploratory, the questions asked were very basic. The first set of questions were more general, the second set of questions applied to the specific organisational setting, but these are not the focus of this article. The first question was: "Could you describe a situation that you have experienced in which you felt extremely welcome?" Supplementary questions included: "What was the context of this experience and which behaviour created this feeling of being welcome?"; and "What did the person say to you or how did the person act?".

The second question was: "Could you describe a situation that you have experienced in which you felt extremely unwelcome?" Again, the supplementary questions sought to dig deeper: "What was the context of this experience and which behaviour created this feeling of being unwelcome?"; and "What did the person say to you or how did the person act?". The third question that was asked was: "How would you define or formulate 'hostmanship'?".

As the context of the research was a school of hospitality in the Netherlands, it was the aim to have a broadly representative group of people who work for the institute, rather than a strictly "representative sample". The study included all types of staff. The staff were invited based on different job categories: support staff; management; lecturers; industry support staff; thesis supervisors; and students and staff from the student-run hotel. They were personally approached by one of the researchers, informed about the study and invited to participate. The interviews took place in a specially created, relaxed area in a room with two comfortable seats, 60s-style decoration with a plant, table, carpet and old-style radio. Refreshments and snacks were served. This cosy, homey atmosphere was supposed to make people feel welcome, relaxed and comfortable. During the interview, one of the researchers would lead the interview, while the other made notes about the conversation and asked for additional information when relevant. The notes of the interviews and recordings were transcribed after the interview and checked by both researchers. Most of the interviews were conducted in Dutch and coding was done in Dutch too in order not to lose the sense of the conversations in translation. Using thematic coding, initial and axial coding was conducted, and themes identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The obvious limitation of this study is that it was conducted among a carefully selected group of people involved in hospitality education, so could not be considered "representative" either of the institution or the wider population. Nor did the researchers attempt to distance themselves from the research as would be required in a positivist approach. However, as the aim of this study was to develop an insight into people's memorable moments of hostmanship, not to test a conceptual model, this approach was felt to add the most value in identifying new insights and understanding.

## Findings and discussion

This section presents the results of the interviews and addresses the main question: "How do hospitality education staff and students interpret hostmanship?". In total, 47 interviews were conducted, even though the aim was to have conversations with 50 people. The final three people cancelled the interview and, under time-pressure, the data collection needed to be completed. It was therefore decided that 47 cases would be sufficient, even if it does not literally cover the "50 cups of coffee" approach. The results in this article are based on 46 interviewees, since one respondent withdrew permission to use the data of that interview. From these 46 interviews, notes were turned into 24 pages of text. In total, the transcripts consisted of 11 998 words for analysis.

Demographics show that the division of male to female respondents show a majority of females (60.9%), while males represent 39.1% of the interviewees. Educational staff is the largest group (lecturer, placement/thesis supervisor) and is in line with the population of the hospitality school. Other positions included support staff, staff from the learning company/student hotel and school management. Students represent 17% of the total sample, but the main purpose of the conversation was focused on staff, so this was not a concern for the researchers. The nationality of the staff is mainly Dutch (76%) and 24% were international. The average age is 44 years. Table 1 shows an overview of these data.

The next section discusses the main themes to emerge from the research — feeling extremely welcome, not feeling welcome at all, and hostmanship defined.

### Feeling extremely welcome

The first question in the interview was: "Could you describe a situation that you have experienced in which you felt extremely welcome?" Supplementary questions included: "What was the context of this experience and which behaviour created this feeling of being welcome?"; and "What did the person say to you or how did the person act?".

Before going into detail, it is important to mention the context of the examples. Most stories are based on experiences in the hospitality industry, thus in the commercial domain.

TABLE 1: Overview of demographic data

Characteristics		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	18	39.1
	Female	28	60.9
Position	Student	8	17.4
	Management	4	8.7
	Support staff	6	13
	Lecturer	11	23.9
	Placement/thesis supervisor	11	23.9
	Staff learning hotel company	6	13
Nationality	Dutch	35	76.1
	European other	6	13
	Asian	3	6.6
	African	2	3.3
Age	Average	44.3	
	Standard deviation	12.9	

Also, examples from the private and partly social domains are mentioned, but less frequently.

From the interviews, three main categories of answers could be identified: genuine connection; pro-active and re-active behaviour of the host; and the surprise effect.

### Genuine connection (host-guest interaction)

This true authentic connection between host and guest is mentioned most frequently. The interaction between two people, the touchpoint, is where most of the extraordinary experiences take place. It could clearly be related to the host's behaviour or "way of being" that make guests feel welcome. The host shows true understanding for the guest, and guests feel at ease and comfortable. The host gives attention to the guest, has eye contact, and is friendly and caring. The host is able to create a warm atmosphere, having all the time and is therefore able to give the guest a feeling that they are appreciated. It is a sincere attitude that is felt by the guest. One of the respondents captured this attitude as "a smile from within".

*On my first working day in a new department, I was expected. First, I received a kind welcoming mail that a working place was already arranged for me and there was some info about the first day. Colleagues gave me a feeling of being welcome, because they were looking forward to seeing me and working with me. When meeting them, they were so friendly, enthusiastic, friendly and happy that I had arrived.*

When the host is acting on behalf of a group of people or when invited or welcomed by a group, this feeling of being welcome is even stronger. Examples from stories are found in the social and private domain: the whole team was present when I started my new job; the whole team welcomed me as an intern on my first day; I was invited to Christmas with the family of a colleague as I was far away from home. Another person said that she was welcomed by the neighbours after moving there. The message of these groups was "It is so wonderful to have you here with us". This refers to the feeling of belonging and being part of a group or community. This can be seen to touch the hearts of the respondents deeply.

*During my internship I was very impressed by the fact that during the induction period of my introduction, the whole management staff was there to welcome me. I know that I am not that important but that was not what I felt. I had the feeling that I was taken seriously. It was an overwhelming feeling. I felt that I was taken care of. It was formal and systematic, but they hosted me very well and that gave me an informal feeling.*

One could say that this dimension would cover several dimensions of Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008). In the description of the respondent's stories, serving others, being caring and practising dialogue show strong similarities, although the description of the dimensions of Gunnarsson and Blohm give room for interpretation. See the dimensions described under (1), (4) and (5) above. In addition, these findings seem to confirm the pivotal role that service attitude, being attentive from the heart, being friendly, having clear communication and being and acting authentically have in defining a good host, according to De la Mar (2019).

### Pro-active and re-active behaviour of the host

This refers to a category into which many stories and experiences

fit. It has to do with the pro-activity of the host, meaning serving without asking and meeting the guest's needs. In many of the stories, the willingness to serve the guest based on the initiative of the host is mentioned. It is clear that people appreciate the initiative of the host and consider this as a feeling of being welcomed. There were many situations where the guest did not have to take care of anything and they were completely guided and taken care of by the host. There was no need to ask for anything (else) and that gives a pleasant feeling.

Another aspect that surfaced from the stories is that the actions are mostly multiple actions in a row during a visit and not only one action. This shows consistency of the host and shows that the host is focused on the guest constantly.

*Upon arrival at the hotel, the receptionist asked whether I would like to enjoy a relaxing neck-massage. That was a nice gesture and I said "Yes" immediately. When I was on a placement visit, I felt really bad and ill. My biggest wish was to get into bed as soon as possible. A young host noticed my discomfort and asked if I was alright. She straight away took care of parking the car, arranged the check-in and passed the room key to me. A moment later, she brought a cup of tea to the room, which was highly appreciated.*

Re-active behaviour is also mentioned as a possible extraordinary experience. When the guest asked for something, immediate action was taken, and things were arranged far beyond what was requested. And this "far beyond" mostly referred to the speed of response and the willingness to serve the guest. To create a "wow" experience in this situation needs much more effort, because the request comes from the guest and they already have expectations of the host. But when the host goes the extra mile for the guest and with a lot of pleasure, a great experience can still be achieved. Another aspect that is of great importance here is that the internal (communications) structure works well.

*It almost seems that there are little gnomes everywhere, running around to take care of everything that the guest needs, without necessarily having to ask for it.*

Although this aspect leaves room for a wide interpretation, it is specifically about the behaviour of the host. Referring to Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008), the dimensions of taking responsibility, and searching for knowledge would be mostly in line here. See points (2) and (6) above. De la Mar (2019) also discusses being knowledgeable and taking responsibility as important aspects of hosting. Also, here the empirical findings show a confirmation of literature results.

### Surprises

A positive surprise is mentioned in most of the cases. Moreover, the level of this surprise is not just *exceeding expectations* – it is far beyond that. Respondents were surprised in a way that they would never even think of and strong positive emotions were encountered. At the core of this is the personal touch towards the guest. The host shows that they have a sharp eye for the guest by seeing possibilities as soon as a personalised surprise can be arranged. Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008) refer to this as *the art* of making people feel welcome. Art refers to the personal interpretation of the host when creating surprises for the guest. Generally, this is a very strong intervention, since it appears in the moment – spontaneously – based on what is happening or what specific information or observation comes

across to the host. The act that follows can create a significant and unforgettable experience. It was noticed that in these cases the host dares to take responsibility and act in the best interest of the guest. The host is empowered to do so (even though the protocols may say something else).

*I had an amazing example in a restaurant where simplicity was key. As a guest, I was taken to the kitchen and could choose and point out what we would like to eat. It was nice to be invited backstage. It was a pure and spontaneous act from the chef. He welcomed me in his kitchen and when he knew that I used to be a chef too, he treated me accordingly. When we had chosen our dishes, he said "this is too much for today, so you have to come back again". It was such a nice experience and surprise.*

Another aspect that was mentioned frequently in terms of the "personal" is when mentioning the name of the guest. This refers mostly to commercial settings and was appreciated (regardless of the fact that there might be a system behind this). In general, respondents appreciate when their name is used.

Linking this surprise aspect to the literature is a bit more challenging. One could say that the "joy" dimension of Gunnarsson and Blohm comes close. "Joy" being the joy that is created for a guest (surprise effect) or also the joy that is created by the initiator. De la Mar (2019) refers to being motivated and passionate as a host. It is not exactly the same as "joy" as such, but the assumption that motivation and passion would lead to joy could be made here.

Generally, for this first section of what makes people feel welcome, our research findings confirm the conceptualisation of hostmanship provided by Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008) and the description of the host by De la Mar (2019). Also, referring to the notion of touchpoints, (the customer-employee interaction) it could be said that touchpoints are crucially embodied in hostmanship as well as in hospitality, as Grönroos (2011) states.

### Not feeling welcome at all

The second part of the interview was: "Could you describe a situation that you have experienced in which you felt extremely unwelcome?" Again, the supplementary questions sought to dig deeper: "What was the context of this experience and which behaviour created this feeling of being unwelcome?"; and "What did the person say to you or how did the person act?". It is interesting to analyse the answers to these questions, because these are not necessarily the other side of the same coin as the abovementioned aspects of feeling welcome.

Some of the experience "killers" mentioned by De la Mar (2019) are perfectly in line with the findings of the interviews. First, the stories show that systems and protocols are in control (instead of the guest). Second, the negative behaviour of the host creates strong negative feelings, and thirdly — and this is not as such mentioned by De la Mar — is "a big no". The aspect that comes close to the last aspect is having to make the effort as a guest to get attention or to be served. But the experience here is beyond that: the response to the request is: "No".

### System and protocols are in control

The foremost complaint has to do with the fact that the guest is not seen as a fellow human being. Especially in commercial transactions, hosts tend to hold on to their systems and protocols. In hospitality, these are the so-called SOPs (standard

operating procedures). In situations where employees as hosts are busy, they tend to focus on "work" instead of the person or guest standing in front of them. There is a lack of connection and as a result people do not feel very welcome. Even worse, people have a very negative emotional experience. Most of the examples refer to governmental bureaucratic organisations, so are in the social/civic domain.

*Not so long ago, I was at the parcel service company to pick up a parcel. Two parcels were on their way and one had already arrived, which I wanted to pick up. I was at the desk anyway and thought "let me ask if the second parcel has maybe arrived already". The response was: this is not how we work, lady. You have not received a message yet, so the parcel is not here. The person was not even willing to check anyway. I will never go there again, and felt so mistreated.*

*When I was in the hospital, I had to come back four times before I received a diagnosis. I was sent to different departments and desks all the time. There was no co-operation between them and I as the patient/guest was the one that had to "shop around". Especially in a medical situation, this makes you feel very bad.*

*In a school canteen, I wanted to order a sandwich just after closure. The girl mentioned that the kitchen had closed six minutes ago. Mentioning these six minutes made me feel even worse, even though I knew I was late. So, there was no sandwich for me.*

This particular aspect of a bad guest experience could be considered more as the "absence" of some connection-related dimensions of Gunnarsson and Blohm (2008). De la Mar (2019) actually refers explicitly to the negative side of guest experiences. The aspect of "procedures and rules come first" shows a clear reflection of the experience killers.

#### *Behaviour of the host*

Many real "ouch" moments were described that were related to the inappropriate behaviour of the host. Again, here it seems to happen in situations where the host is extremely busy or under pressure. In those moments, the host can easily lose their temper and hostmanship. Also, impersonal and disrespectful behaviour is mentioned. This leads to the fact that guests are not "seen" or there is a lack of attention to serving the guest in an appropriate way. This can be connected with De la Mar's (2019) experience killers, referring to an indifferent attitude and also negative communication with the guest.

*During an art festival on the islands it is always extremely busy on the terraces. Every year again, it seems that the hosts are surprised with the number of people waiting to be served. Everywhere it is a big "ouch" on the island: you almost have to apologise that you are a guest and are disturbing the host by asking them to bring you a drink or some food. We had to wait for 1.5 hours for an omelette. It felt as if they do not care about having you as a guest, very unwelcome.*

*If I have an appointment with someone, and the person is ten minutes late without any reason, it gives me a very unwelcoming feeling. It doesn't matter if this is in a private or corporate setting.*

*Once, I went to a restaurant in a village and it was pretty busy. I asked if there was still a table available for us. The host responded: "Can't you see that*

*yourself? We are full". That response was so negative and unpleasant to start a nice dinner.*

#### *Big "no"*

This category has to do with a situation where a guest has a specific request for something. This can be a service, drink, food or anything else. It could be expected that the host will look for possibilities to satisfy the guest and make their wishes come true. In this category, the opposite happens. After a request, the host clearly says no and refuses to provide what is asked for. It could also be situations where no follow-up is provided (repeatedly) after a request.

*In summer we saw a nice terrace where we wanted to have come coffee and cake. Part of the terrace was full, and another part seemed empty behind a small fence. I asked if it would be possible to have seat there. The host had to ask her boss first if that would be fine, but the response was a clear NO. No alternative was offered, and we could leave again... and never come back.*

*In a hotel in London we celebrated the 25th anniversary of my parents' marriage. Everything was so disappointing. The hosts said that we have to leave the bar without offering an alternative. We felt as if we were in their way and disturbing them. The next night, we wanted to sit in the bar again, but we were not allowed to stay any longer than opening time. We also requested a nice surprise for my parents, which was never taken on board. Anything we were asking was a "no". It was such a disappointing experience for such a special occasion.*

This particular finding of "big no" cannot be found explicitly in the literature. Again, from the perspective of "the absence of...", it is included in the literature review above. It refers to the non-willingness to serve a guest and satisfy their needs.

We believe this "big no" is an interesting result, because it is a very powerful one. It leads to an extremely bad experience and negative emotions. On reflection, there are opportunities to transform a "no" into a "yes". This phenomenon could be interesting to research, making the impossible possible by seeing opportunities.

#### *Hostmanship defined*

The third question that was asked was: "How would you define or formulate 'hostmanship'?" Although the respondents might not have been particularly familiar with the word, they were all familiar with the hospitality industry context and had an idea of what it could mean. Also, after asking the first two questions of "feelings of being (un)welcome", they could consider their stories as ingredients for defining hostmanship. Most respondents came up with a number of keywords rather than a full definition or sentence.

Based on the keywords that were mentioned, a word cloud was created to see which words occur most frequently (Figure 1). These were that hostmanship should be *sincere from the heart* and based on a *true connection between people*. Also, receiving *genuine attention* from the host is key. The *surprise effect* is another aspect, as well as *listening and being available*. These all relate to the earlier first question in which positive experiences of being welcomed were identified.



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