

Hospitality research: legacies and futures

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A B S T R A C T

An account is provided of hospitality research developments over the last two decades. The author offers a personal reflection of voyage travelled, knowledge discovery, and the evolution of what is referred to as hospitality studies, supported by illustrative examples. Activities of scholars from within the field of hospitality management, and those located in the wider social sciences are discussed. As the voyage progresses, it is apparent that the endeavours of academic communities have resulted in some legacies. The opinion piece concludes that a future beckons hospitality research that celebrates intellectual diversity and plural ways of knowing.

1. Introduction

In this opinion paper I adopt an autobiographic approach, to tell the story of my personal voyage of discovery into ways of knowing hospitality over the last twenty years. Conclusions are offered relative to legacies and futures for hospitality research. As I present my version of a 'reality' I am also cognisant, and respectful, of the extent and richness of literature, concepts and theories that frame hospitality in its myriad of guises, metaphors, and cultures. Further, as Ryan (2015) reminds, as an industry, hospitality has a history almost, one suspects, as long as human society has existed and people have welcomed friends, family and strangers.

I commence with an insight into the latest stage in the development of hospitality research, followed by charting point of departure and voyage taken to arrive at this current staging post. I have travelled in search of hospitality, looked through a kaleidoscopic social lens of hospitality, paused to take on board the essence of critical hospitality management research, and celebrated hospitality's place in society. My companions were scholars from the field of hospitality, and the wider social sciences: 'facilitating reciprocal travel of research and knowledge, and bringing together suitably qualified multidisciplinary teams to collaborate in the research process.' (Morrison, 2002:161).

1.1. Latest stage

I consider that the publication of *The Routledge Handbook of Hospitality Studies* edited by Lashley (2017) to represent a significant staging post in the hospitality research voyage. The editor describes the volume as: '... the latest stage in the emerging academic field of hospitality studies. It encourages both the study of hospitality as a human

phenomenon, and the study for hospitality as an industrial activity embracing the service of food, drink and accommodation in commercial and non-commercial settings' (1). The organization of this publication, in itself, demonstrates knowledge advancements. It includes: disciplinary perspectives of authors who are mostly informed by social science views; experiencing hospitality as host and/or guest; hospitality through time and space explores the worldwide human practices and obligations to be hospitable; and sustainable hospitality looks at the impact of hospitality in the future. The compilation consists of thirty-six authors from ten different countries spanning six continents. Lashley (2017:9) states that: 'If nothing else, this profile demonstrates the international interest in hospitality and hospitableness, further reinforcing Derrida's point that the means and rituals associated with receiving of strangers into a community are a defining feature of all societies.' I note with interest that the date of this publication is exactly twenty years on from where my voyage of discovery began.

1.2. In search of hospitality

In 1997, a debate began to develop in the United Kingdom (UK) among members of the Council for Hospitality Management Education (CHME). At that time I represented The Scottish Hotel School, University of Strathclyde, which was subsequently subsumed into a business school environment, an apparent trend internationally. I recollect that CHME sought legitimacy for the hospitality discipline by reflecting on the composition of the hospitality management curriculum, as well as the theoretical framework that supports it. It resulted in the publication of *In Search of Hospitality* (2000) co-edited by Conrad Lashley and myself. As a consequence, I was confronted by the realisation of my literal ignorance relative to the very existence of the

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literature, theories and concepts that lived outside the boundaries of hospitality management and industry as a field of study. Indeed, the closest encounter I had had at that time was through a then University of Strathclyde colleague, Roy Wood's publication *The Sociology of the Meal* (1995).

The publication's overriding theme was the need to broaden the definition of hospitality to include perspectives from the humanities and the social sciences, alongside those more commonly associated with hospitality management education. All contributing authors were located in UK higher education institutes. Of significance was the translation into Portuguese [*Em Busca da Hospitalidade*] in 2004, allowing linguistic access among Brazilian academic communities. According to Spolon, Panosso Netto, and Baptista (2015:66), 'This laid the ground for research in the subject and became a reference – in English and translation – for countless studies on the subject all over the world.' Further, the same authors highlight the direct influence of a French community of scholars interested in the theme of hospitality with their theoretical conceptions drawn from sociology, anthropology, and philosophy of Marcel Mauss, Emmanuel Lévinas and Jacques Derrida. For me, this highlighted that publications in languages other than English remained largely invisible or ignored by the majority of the Anglophone hospitality research community.

Another contribution was Lashley's Three Domain Model (Fig. 1). Whilst some have criticised the simplicity of this depiction, it offered an accessible starting point from which deeper critical analysis may occur drawing in hospitality research community, and stimulating new entrants. An example of the latter is that of Camargo's engagement (2003 cited in Spolon, Panosso Netto, & Baptista, 2015), following his role as technical reviewer for *In Search of Hospitality* when it was being translated into Portuguese. He expands the three domains by adding that of virtual space (Table 1), The horizontal axis represents social 'spaces' for hospitality, while the vertical accounts for 'times' of hospitality.

In Search of Hospitality provided a forum from which: healthy intellectual debate was stimulated; hospitality researchers in other arenas and continents were revealed; realisation of the existence of a broad literature emerged; and novel theoretical and conceptual ways of understanding hospitality evolved. It provides a good example of the enrichment that researchers can gain from involvement in such a project.

1.3. Hospitality: a social lens

The foregoing lent impetus to the publication of *Hospitality: a social lens* (2007). Paul Lynch joined Conrad Lashley and myself as co-editors on this project. Originally intended as a follow on text for *In Search of Hospitality*, we recognized that the world of hospitality had broadened in the intervening period. It had moved from being a topic simply for thematic investigation directly, or indirectly, for the study of

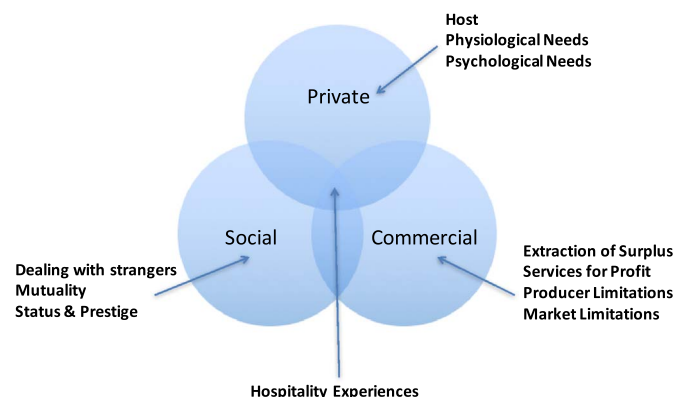


Fig. 1. Three Domains of Hospitality. (Lashley and Morrison, 2000).

management to one that also locates the study of hospitality as a significant means of exploring and understanding society.

Chapter contributors were leading academics drawn from hospitality management and education, human resource management, linguistics, modern languages, gastronomy, history, human geography, art, architecture, anthropology, and sociology. Of the thirteen chapters, five were authored by international academics. All aimed to lend their expertise to apply a social lens through which to view, critically analyse, and explore hospitality within a broad range of contexts. The final chapter presented our findings from content analysis of the chapters. It yielded nine robust themes (Fig. 2), the nexus being the human phenomenon of host/guest transaction. Of significance is the manner in which such a conceptual lens can potentially: 'challenge conventional wisdom and question accepted rhetoric by bringing to bear; 'multiple 'eyes' all focused on the same phenomenon that is hospitality but arriving from diverse intellectual starting points and ways of seeing the world' (Lashley, Lynch, & Morrison, 2007: 174). As a hospitality researcher this is what intellectually teased the brain, excited the intellect, and energised as the possibilities for new knowledge creation emerge and novel connections occur.

However, my viewpoint might not have been universally shared within the hospitality community. Various challenges were recognized including: a willingness by hospitality scholars to extend the conception of the hospitality subject boundaries; the promotion of multi-disciplinary perspectives accompanied by more inclusive literatures informing analysis; limited journal publishing outlets for more social scientific perspectives; and enticing researchers from within the hospitality management subject to engage with other disciplines to explore and deepen understanding of hospitality concepts and realities. Ryan (2015) reflects on the latter point viewing *Hospitality: a social lens* as an indication of willingness by at least some to examine wider sociological conceptualisations and understandings of hospitality, it is arguably ignored by many in academia and industry who are more concerned with functionality within the industry.

1.4. Critical hospitality

Involvement in *Hospitality: a social lens* continued the development of my profile as a researcher into the field of critical theory where we argued that: 'a critical understanding of hospitality is emancipating, enriching our collective understanding of the whole and thereby recognising a world of ideas that extend beyond mere pragmatism and functional mindsets' (Lashley et al., 2007:6). This line of thought was further stimulated by co-authors Peter Lugosi and Paul Lynch (Lugosi, Lynch and Morrison, 2009). We proposed that hospitality research may be represented as in (Fig. 3). It recognizes the three orientations of hospitality management and hospitality studies partially overlapping, creating the spaces for critically hospitality management, as well as their respective intellectually independent spaces.

A key finding at the core of critical hospitality management research was proposed as a redefinition of the notion of 'relevance': involving various degrees of separation from, in this case, management practice... to develop the ability to reflect differently on one's work, employing organization, industry or commercial product; separation may also facilitate a willingness to question normative assumptions and to challenge the status quo' (Lugosi et al., 2009: 1475). Thus, relevant critical hospitality management research may refer to outputs that help to develop moral and intellectual capabilities, as well as, applicable business techniques and practical competencies. Tangible indicators of the emergence of a critical approach to hospitality are, for example, CAUTHE Special Interest Group in Critical Approaches; CHME Research Conference main stream of Critical and Cultural Studies of Hospitality, Critical Tourism Studies Conference stream of Critical Hospitality Studies, Journal Special Issues, and appointment of a Professor of Critical Hospitality and Tourism at Edinburgh Napier University.

Table 1
Matrix of Times and Spaces of Hospitality.
(Camargo, 2003 cited in Spolon et al., 2015).

	Receive	Host	Feed	Entertain
Domestic	Receive at home	Host at home	Receive at home for meals	Receive for parties
Public	Receive in public spaces	Hospitality of places – cities, countries	Local gastronomy	Public spaces designated to leisure and events
Commercial	Receive in professional environment	Professional hospitality – in hotels, hospitals, prisons	Professional restaurants	Events in private spaces
Virtual	Receive in virtual environment: so-called net-etiquette	Hosting sites	Virtual gastronomy	Virtual games and entertaining

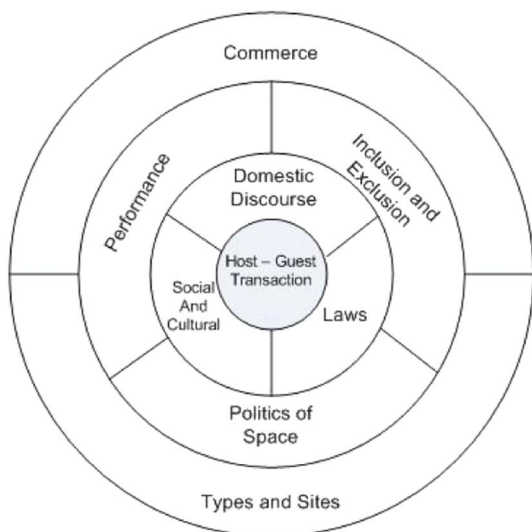


Fig. 2. Hospitality a Conceptual Lens.
(Lashley et al., 2007).

1.5. Hospitality and society

As identified earlier, there were limited journal publishing outlets for more social scientific perspectives informed hospitality research. Also, Ryan (2015) noted that those existing have tended to still see a professional industry audience as a major part of their target readership. In this respect, a breakthrough was achieved in 2011. Following a significant period of tenacious persistence, led by Paul Lynch, hospitality studies secured its first dedicated journal: *Hospitality and Society* published by Intellect within the category of ‘cultural studies’. I am a member of the Editorial Board. Lynch, Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi and Lashley (2011) introduced the journal with a seminal paper titled ‘Theorizing Hospitality’ proposing that:

‘In some cases, hospitality itself is the object of study, as in historical accounts of hospitality or studies of hospitality labour; in others, it serves as an analytic framework through which to make sense of other social phenomena, such as migration, imprisonment or urban regeneration. In either case, hospitality serves as a means of understanding society...As a social lens (Lashley, Lynch & Morrison, 2007), hospitality reveals both the large-scale organisation of welcoming (and excluding) others at the institutional or state level and the ever day experiences of living with difference.’

The editors assert that the study of hospitality is fragmented,

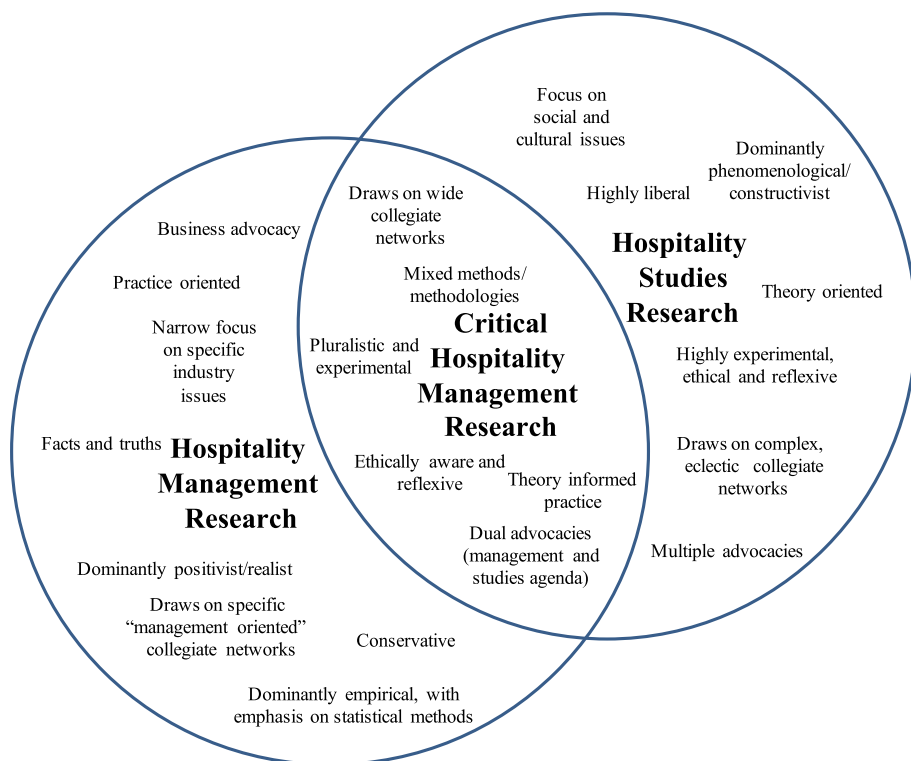


Fig. 3. Positioning Critical Hospitality Management Research.
(Lugosi et al., 2009).

composed of distinctive communities of hospitality scholars with their own institutional forms, and interactions tend to be *ad hoc*. Thus, the aim is to provide a unique ‘meeting point’, using hospitality as a lens of analysis and/or focus of investigation. Six years on from its inception, one of the founding co-editors gives an informed opinion on the current state of hospitality research:

‘There is some wonderful research in hospitality and appropriating concepts of hospitality (largely emanating from a multidisciplinary social scientific perspective) which really helps to both raise the status of hospitality research and provides excellent conceptual tools for its exploration. In this respect the intellectual depth as well as breadth that hospitality offers is beginning to become more widely recognized.’

(Paul Lynch, Co-Editor, Hospitality in Society, personal communication, 14.10.2017).

2. Legacies and futures

In reading the foregoing, I hope that the legacies are self-evident. They are not in the physicality of texts, journals and conferences albeit their significant catalytic and ‘meeting point’ function. The real legacies are in the: manner in which: distinct communities of hospitality scholars have coalesced around hospitality concepts and practices; reciprocal travel of research and knowledge between hospitality and social science communities internationally; knowledge creation and co-creation as existing and novel schools of thought critically confront; and evolution of the study *of*, and the study *for*, hospitality as complementary companions, and not polar positions.

In terms of my advice for younger hospitality researchers I offer the following. In 2002 I reviewed the current state of hospitality research proposing that the core role of research was: academic freedom; knowledge pursuit and creation; and scientific enquiry, integrity, rigor, critique and autonomy. Secondary were aspects, such as: inform practice, policy and education; research assessment/funding formula; means of academic career progression. That is to say, provided researchers focused their energies on the core, the secondary outputs would take care of themselves. Today I am struck by just how ‘romantic’ this notion presents, where academic freedom tends to be bounded by institutionally dictated research strategies, priority themes, and research assessment metrics, with career advancement guided to deliver within this framework. My career stage renders me immune to these institutional forces, free to indulge my passion for hospitality as a social phenomenon. This is not the case for the majority of younger hospitality scholars, and particularly those located within a business school type of environment. For you I would advocate a dual, but not disconnected approach. Play a strategic ‘game’ in terms of alignment with, and active contribution to, your host institute’s research strategy, and national research assessment metrics. Alongside explore the ‘other’ knowledge, in ‘stranger’ disciplines and fields of study, and be bold in constructing inventive, multi-disciplinary collaborations. In your research methodology design be ever curious to seek out the differences, novel, and illuminating that can enrich and stimulate our never-ending quest for knowledge of hospitality.

To conclude, I leave you with two quotations as illustrative of future directions for hospitality research that will, hopefully, celebrate

intellectual diversity, and embrace plural ways of knowing.

‘...hospitality exists within a social framework that generates a range of institutions and meanings. At one level, the catering to fellow humans exists not only in the hotels, cafes and bars of what is often defined as the hospitality industry, but also in hospitals, residential homes, monasteries, schools, prisons and other locations where people stay (or are detained) for nights away from home. The degrees of commercialisation, as defined by a need to satisfy guests to make a profit, thus vary across these institutions, as do the components of care, nurturing and greetings of guests that constitute a sense of hospitality.... Hence, to write of the development of research in the hospitality industry is to write of many things that each co-exist with varying degrees of comparability.’

(Ryan, 2015: 340:341).

The second is offered from the Brazilian perspective by Camargo (2003: 19–20) providing rich insight into the domains of hospitality within primarily urban environments of the modern day:

‘The domains of hospitality happen in reality in the interstices of daily life, a story marked by inhospitality, when not by hostility. Hence, hospitality analyses interpersonal relationships as a rescue, an exchange of human warmth in an increasingly inhospitable, when not hostile, social environment, emphasising the possibilities that remain in the contemporary world for manifesting or recreating social ties.’

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