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Hospitality and institutional Meals - from private hospitality to institutional hospitality

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Blurred Host-Guest Relations

Abstract: There is a growing interest in articulating institutional meal serving practices as a hospitality activity involving host and guest interactions. This study aims to qualify institutional hospitality and meal activities by exploring private hospitality events. The study is based on an experimental design, in which 10 bachelor students in Nutrition and Health organized and participated as both hosts and guests in four self-selected meal events. The events included a Housing Community event, a Children's Birthday party, an Art Exhibition event and a Family Easter lunch. Based on a semi-structured interview, students reflected on their hospitality experiences. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis method. The emerging themes on hospitality activities were identified. It was found that hospitality activities could be characterized as a process where the individual was transformed into a guest. Information on purpose of the event and other information given in the invitation were part of this process. Furthermore, hospitality activities could be characterized by blurred host-guest relations and by being able to embrace unexpected events as well. The activities were discussed as part of institutional hospitality activities. A nursing home was used as an institutional frame.

Introduction: Despite a growing academic knowledge and scientific work within the field of critical hospitality studies, academic knowledge on institutional hospitality and institutional meals in settings like hospitals and nursing homes have only been subject to scientific debate and inquiry to a limited extent⁽¹⁾. To date, the existing academic work has mainly been based upon personally determined hospitality practices or considered as a conceptual frame to be applied into an institutional setting⁽²⁾. These practices have merged from an operationalized expanding of thinking foodservice operations, originating from the hotel and restaurant area with a focus on attributes aiming to make people feel at ease. One of them is the study by Hepple et al. on the identification of hospitality factors as a means to evaluate satisfaction among patients. They found smooth hospital procedures, friendly staff to be among the most relevant hospitable experiences, whereas varied menu choice and plain cooking were found to be fifth, and sixth most important hospitality factors⁽³⁾. Neither meals nor food are mentioned by Patten as she argues that an increased market oriented and competitive environment for healthcare services in the United States has forced hospitals to develop hospitality business strategies that address patients' wellbeing and satisfaction by treating patients as customers in a service context⁽⁴⁾. She

brings forth a concept of hospitality in terms of three distinct levels: public, personal and therapeutic levels and she suggests that an understanding of these levels could be helpful in integrating various dimensions of guest relation programs. It has also been suggested by Severt that these three levels of hospitality should be adopted as part of a hospitality-centric philosophy in which 'hotel-like service' practices can be transferred into a hospital context in order to address patients' wellbeing and satisfaction⁽⁵⁾. Hospitality as a conceptual 'hotel-like' framework has also been introduced in a hospital setting aiming to improve meal experiences and food intake as part of a nutritional recovery strategy⁽⁶⁾.

It can be argued that the above-mentioned studies represent a static and linear causality way of thinking, ranking and categorizing hospitality factors as functional properties. For example, by varied menu plans or by categorizing hospitality transactions into stable hospitality exchanges such as personal or public hospitality levels. As a result, these studies represent an ontology based upon a stable and predictable homogeneous world, which considers host and guest relations as asymmetrical and articulated through cognitive factors. Such factors neglect the fact that improved institutional meal experiences could be gained from situational embodied and sensory experiences. Recent research within hospitals finds that a dynamic hospitality way of thinking is a useful method to create value into institutional meal experiences, and additionally, that a hospitality approach offers new perspectives on empowering people^(2,7). A hospitality way of thinking is inspired by Derrida's hospitality approach, in which hospitality can be considered as social exchanges and as being ethically constructed^(8,9). Derrida suggests that hospitality is an experience beyond objective knowledge, since we do not know how to meet a stranger with hospitality beforehand⁽⁸⁾. As a result, conventional and stable understanding of host-guest relations in which host has the sovereignty power causing asymmetrical host-guest relations, moves towards an open conceptualization in which hosts and guests are in a constant process of engagement and negotiation⁽¹⁰⁾. However, despite the growing academic, scientific work on institutional hospitality, there is still an urgent need for exploring the field of institutional hospitality practices in order to qualify a hospitality approach towards institutional meals⁽¹¹⁾.

In his introduction to hospitality activities, Lashely argues the need for exploring commercial hospitality, which also include institutional hospitality⁽¹²⁾. He suggests this to be done by exploring and considering private hospitality activities such as domestic settings. Lashley furthermore argues that hospitality in contemporary western societies has moved into the private spheres, contrary to previously where hospitality primarily was a societal matter^(12,13). By exploring, hospitality such as family events we might be able to draw some new knowledge on hospitality which subsequently can be transferred into an institutional context.

The aim of this study is to explore and analyze private hospitality activities, and to identify hospitality elements based on experiences of being host and guest. Secondary

this study aims to transfer and discuss how these hospitality elements can help qualifying institutional hospitality and institutional meals.

Methods: Metropolitan University College has a methodological strategy for working experimentally and involving students in research. The idea for this study was to include students, firstly to explore and analyze their interactions and their conceptualization of private hospitality activities, and secondly to transfer this knowledge into an institutional hospitality frame. Ten fourth-year students in the program for Nutrition and Health were divided into four groups and each group was asked to organize and host a hospitality event, which included food and an activity. Students were as such hosting one event and participating as guests in three other events. They were encouraged to arrange the hospitality event outside Campus area in order to support innovative thinking and reflections on hospitality practices. Students were asked to make invitations and to consider; the intention of the event, host and guest relations, food and drink and physical surroundings. Each group received 15 Euros to cover their expenses. The students were encouraged to document the event through visual images, but the photographing act was not to disturb the event.

After participating in the event, each group were interviewed about their experiences of performing host and participating as guests in three other events. The interviews were based upon a semi-structured interview. In the interviews, the students were asked to reflect on: (1) The character of the event, (2) their host and guest roles, (3) the organization of the event and (4) the social activities and social interactions in their performances. Students were encouraged to include their produced images, as visual images help recalling contextual and emotional experiences beyond words⁽¹⁴⁾. Student's discussions and reflections were tape-recorded and transcribed and their produced images and invitations were collected.

Two researchers analyzed the images and interviews. Firstly, the data set was organized within the following themes; The organization of the event, this include the identification of the charter of the events, food and drink offered, the degree of preparations and cultural structure of the events, setting of the event and host-guest relations and activity. Then similarities and differences between each event and each theme were identified and discussed, through a hermeneutical interpretation of meaning. Four characteristic hospitality themes emerges from the interpretation of meaning, and these themes were transferred into an institutional frame such as a nursing home meal setting and discussed adjacent to existent hospitality literature.

All students were informed about the project and signed a written consent form before participating. In addition, they were informed that their invitations, images and interviews would be subject to analysis.

Results: Four hospitality events were arranged and performed by the students. This included a Housing Community event, a Children's Birthday party, an Art Exhibition Opening

event and the fourth event was a traditional Family Easter lunch. All four events had different purposes, different settings, and different cultural and social structures. Images from each event are presented in figure 1 below, and a description of each event is presented in table 1 below.



Figure 1. Images representing four hospitality events organized by students in nutrition and health. 1a: Housing Community event, 1b: Children's Birthday party, 1c: Art Exhibition Opening event, 1d: Family Easter lunch.

Table 1. Description of the four hospitality events planned and performed by students in nutrition and health.

	Character of the event	Food and drink	Purpose	Activity	Setting	Degree of preparations and structure	Host and guest relations
Housing Community event	Invited neighbors	Breadsticks and marshmallows and hot cacao	Sociability	Producing food on fireplace	Community yard - outside (semi-public)	Not high: guest helped to prepare the event in the event	Least asymmetrical
Children's Birthday party	Specific invited friends	Cakes, pizza and hot chocolate	Entertainment	Physical activities Balloon-games and sack race	Local park where a bench was transformed into a table	Partly high: Food and activities	Asymmetrical and structured
Art Exhibition Opening event	Invited colleagues, customers and friends	Sandwiches and sparkling wines	Cultural	Presentation of a specific art work	Gallery	Partly high: Physical environment and food	Less asymmetrical and structured
Family Easter lunch	Invited family members	Herrings eggs	Sociability and cultural	Painting Easter eggs	Decorated table with Easter symbols like eggs and spring flowers	High: tidiness, table food activity and knowledge	Asymmetrical and structured

During the analysis, it became clear, that it was not the content of the hospitality event as such which became the subject of analysis. Instead, it was the students' reflections on the staged events and their performances. It was students' articulation of what did not meet their expectations towards the staged hospitality events, student's uncertainty of how to perform their roles in combination with unexpected events that became a core element of the analysis. These experiences were based upon lack of information, uncertainty of the purpose of the staged hospitality events. As result of the analysis, four hospitality activities emerged which includes; how to transform invited persons into guest, the purpose of the event, blurred host-guest relations and unexpected events described through the metaphor of the untidy guests.

Transforming invited persons to guests: A general theme was the host groups organizing ability to 'set the scene'. This was achieved in terms of providing the guest with the right amount of information in order to enable the invited person to transform themselves into guests. Practical information such as time, place, and expected roles was considered. In the invitation to the Housing Community's event it was written; 'but anyway remember warm clothes!' and in the Children's Birthday party's invitation; 'remember to check the weather forecast, as we must be outside all afternoon' it was advised to dress themselves according to the weather conditions. On the contrary, the students lacked information that could help them perform their roles as guests. The Housing Community event was as such subject for discussion. One of the students who was guest at the Housing Community event articulated: I did not feel as part of a Housing Community – it was like a canoe tour – I needed some more information in the invitation'. Students were as such uncertain as to how they should perform their roles and were calling for more information.

Purpose of the event – why do we meet: Another aspect of transforming the invited person into being the guest is considering the purpose of the event. Even though it would be difficult, to identify one single purpose for each event, the purpose of the performed events was based on socially, culturally or entertainment elements. The Children's Birthday party became as such a space for laughter and joy through the balloon game, 'It was fun – the games made it funny - it was such a simple arrangement'. Furthermore, it became a space for a discussion on meaningfulness and experienced time contrary to the exact time. A student commented on the time aspect at the Art Exhibition: 'The 45 minutes went fast (children's birthday), I really do not think they did here (Art Exhibition), - not the in same way'. The purpose of the Housing community event was also discussed and articulated by one student as; 'It was a nice treat, if it had been a meeting for the food culture group, then it would have been perfect, but here, the headline was; residents meeting so the concept did not fit'. So, for the students, the purpose of the meeting did not fit the stage. They were transformed into another event.

Blurred host-guest relations: Another theme was blurred host-guest relations. A student at the Easter lunch, reflects on her challenges of performing host in another fellow student's home. 'So I got a little confused and did not really know what to do (as host), it was like, it was Anne's job to receive (the guest), but it was also her apartment'. She carried out the challenge of performing a host in physical setting and organization where that was not her own and where she in principle was guest. In the Housing Community event, another student articulated; 'There is a little confusion - maybe about the roles - yes, confusion - there is one pouring cocoa, but it's still hard to figure out'. Here, the student articulate doubt about how is actually performing hosts and the described episodes underlines that host and guest are constituted by each other.

The "untidy guests": At the Easter Lunch, everything was planned by the performing hosts in advance; 'There was control over things ... yes ... the host and guest's role was the same because the hosts had made things clear beforehand so there was nothing "we have to do something" in between'. However, in performing the event three guests arrived too late. A student from the Easter Lunch group articulated 'There were three guests who arrived late, we did not care, we just went one eating ... We focused on the guests rather than those who did not arrived in time'. One of the students articulated: Nice just to get started even though someone was missing, because sometimes I think that in my family someone gets mad when someone is late - and then those who are late takes the focus from those who are actually there. This episode and the story from one of the student reflected that hospitality events can be well planned but still something unexpected might appear. In this case, three guests were 'untidy'. The untidy guest is a metaphor for persons who somehow change or give an unexpected twist to the situation, however also in accordance to Veijola make life worth living⁽¹⁵⁾. At the Ester lunch, the hosts decided to ignore the late arrivals as a strategy but subsequently it did also made them reflect on how to embrace unexpected events.

Discussion: The question is whether these hospitality elements can inform and qualify our knowledge on hospitality in connection to institutional meals in settings, such as nursing homes⁽¹⁶⁾? Nursing homes represent a home for elderly citizens. However, Kofod describes the process of moving from a home to a nursing home as a way of decomposing a home⁽¹⁷⁾. With a reference to Douglas's definition of home as connected to a place and to control, he describes the nursing homes as a place where elderly residents lack control, this also includes everyday meals⁽¹⁸⁾. Institutional meal settings have also been characterized as places where meals are eaten for necessity and as rational nutritional events rather than for pleasure⁽¹⁹⁾. However, in Denmark, there are currently a growing awareness of letting these everyday institutional meals become more pleasurable and bound upon emotions, identity, culture and social relations^(20,21). Therefore, in the process of transforming a resident into a guest, it could be relevant to emphasize and specify meals as a social and cultural event alike the Housing Community event.

Furthermore, it could be relevant to reflect on the information given as part of the transforming process. This includes menu plans and other practical information about where to eat and at what time. This information could also be articulated through cultural, political or historical themes. Themes that could frame the event and make the meal more than just eating a traditional dish, or to socialize around a meal⁽²²⁾. Furthermore, rituals, like everyday rituals such as 'I welcome you' or 'Please take a seat' could be considered. Reflecting on hospitality as dynamical constructed, the residence would furthermore, be invited to negotiate and co-create their meal experiences and value of eating. The question to be asked would be; 'how could we transform the individual into a guest today?'

The findings revealed that a traditional hospitality event such as the Easter lunch event, was largely organized, defined and controlled by the host, however, blurred host-guest relations were also identified. The degree of blurred host-and guest relations can be transferred to institutional meal settings⁽²⁾. With inspiration from Robinson and Lynch's introduction to the concept of macro- and micro hosts, the nursing home and the foodservice organizations, which sometimes are detached from the nursing home organization, could be considered as macro hosts⁽²³⁾. This include the physical surroundings, which in an institutional setting like a nursing home not always are designed for meal activities. Similar the micro-hosts (staff) takes part in the actual hospitality exchanges carrying forward rules, beliefs and expectations set by the macro-hosts^(2,23). The introduction to macro- and micro hosts in an institutional settings is also supported by E. Goffman's presentation of the notion of institutionalization described in *Asylums*⁽²⁴⁾. Here institutional residents perform predictable and regular behavior that are set by the institution to ensure that they know their social role. This makes the power relations between residents and micro-macro-hosts asymmetrical. Despite, these static descriptions of power relations in institutional settings like nursing homes, the host-guest relations are blurred, as residents in a nursing home are in principle at home, however, when they are invited to the sitting area they tend to be treated as temporary guests. On the contrary, when residents in a nursing home invite guests, they suddenly take on the role of host in the same place where they are also deemed guests. If these blurred host-guest relations should be supported and if the asymmetrical power relations should change allowing residents to become temporary and more powerful hosts, it calls for the organizations to reconsider and articulate their role as macro-hosts. Furthermore, it calls for rethinking and regulating the traditional asymmetrical power relation that is characterized an institution like a nursing home.

Finally, the above findings supports the idea of embracing the 'untidy guest'. The untidy guest embraces Derrida's 'absolutely hospitality' to welcome the other regardless of who the other might be and challenges the traditional structure and rules of how to perform host and guest⁽⁸⁾. Furthermore, it presupposes a preparedness to interact with 'the untidy guest' and to co-create new and unpredictable value into the meal experiences. From an educational perspective the 'untidy guest' incidence created a space for discussing hospitality exchanges which enhanced students' reflections on their own personal approach towards hospitality and enables them to understand the situational character of hospitality as well. With inspiration from Telfer's description of hospitality competencies, it calls for skills and knowledge from the micro hosts on how to organize institutional meal events⁽²⁵⁾. This includes an ability to transform the residents into a guest and simultaneously also to enable the guest to become temporary

host in the different events and in accordance to Douglas to be in control of their home as well. Moreover, it calls for the macro-host to create a strategical and organizational frame in which the micro-host can act as such¹⁸.

It can be argued whether students' reflections on private hospitality can contribute to new knowledge on hospitality beyond students own preunderstanding of hospitality. Furthermore, it can be discussed if this knowledge can be transformed into an institutional frame? As long as the extent of an institutional hospitality thinking are emerging the idea of considering private hospitality in accordance to Lashley it helps us to enhance an institutional hospitality thinking¹². The above findings are far from exhaustive and a similar study might bring new issues forward. However, this can only expand our knowledge of how to consider institutional meal hospitality activities in the future. Another viewpoint is that the students' process of organizing and participation in different hospitality events was a learning environment that both enhance students' capability to consider and organize institutional hospitality, whilst simultaneously creating new knowledge on institutional hospitality. It was our experiences that this dual purpose motivated our students and helped them to discuss and reflect critically on existent hospitality literature and their own personal approach towards hospitality.

Conclusion: A hospitality thinking can be a valuable guiding principle to enable staff and management involved in institutional food service to work more systematically in relation to hospitable meal experiences in the future. This study provided an example of how students reflected on hospitality activities and from the findings of these hospitality activities, institutional hospitality meal activities were considered. Findings suggest organizations involved in institutional meals should consider the blur between host-guest relations manifested in both the organizational and the professionals' hospitality approach, and to acknowledge that host-guest relations are constituted by each other. Finally, it was suggested that the transformation of the individual into a guest should be considered. This includes the purpose of the meal event, the invitation and the information given. In addition, it includes embracing the 'untidy guest', which calls for preparedness among professionals to embrace unexpected situations, and transforming it to added value. However, there are still subject for further explorations. This include a focus on hospitality as material constructed and how artefacts can interact into meal events and qualify our knowledge on institutional hospitality. Furthermore, there is a need for considering guest-guest relations in an institutional setting where the guests not necessarily have chosen one another. Finally, there is an urgent need for institutional organizations to consider hospitality strategies along with meal policies and to consider a hospitality aspect within the social-healthcare education programs.

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