

The expanding reach of hospitality studies: Embracing relational futures

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The field of hospitality studies has blossomed into an exciting intellectual arena. What we once understood hospitality to be – mainly through business, managerial, and operational lenses – has been expanded by academics and industry pioneers, who now view it as a much more significant phenomenon than previously acknowledged. Ritzer [1] commented some time ago on the changing relational patterns within the hospitality industry, forewarning that the sole focus on commercial advantage by businesses can lead to increasingly dehumanised interactions. Four years later, the journal *Hospitality & Society* was launched, with the aim of re-imagining and broadening the scope of inquiry, with hospitality articulated by the editors “as a means of understanding society” [2, p. 14]. In their words:

Rather than assuming that hospitality entails a particular context (such as the home or hotel) or particular objects (such as food or beds) or particular actors (such as hosts and guests), we see hospitality as both a condition and an effect of social relations, spatial configurations and power structures. Hospitality is constructed by, but also productive of, certain contexts, spaces, politics, objects, social roles and relations. [2, p. 14]

It is worth noting that *Hospitality & Society* became the abode for daring provocations, such as Bell’s [3] article titled “Hospitality is society,” in which, while addressing fellow researchers, he maintained that to get “at the ‘stuff’ of hospitality” (p. 149), relational approaches were needed. For him, hospitality was to be understood as “doing”: “an affective doing, an interactional doing and a relational doing, whether in the space of the restaurant or the space of the city streets” (p. 149). The importance of these ideas, along with sympathetic publishing outlets, ought not to be underestimated, as they have created opportunities for nurturing new intelligences and understandings of hospitality.

In this regard, it is useful to point out that an analysis of the first decade of *Hospitality & Society* revealed that important research foci have emerged, including those of migration and labour, social hospitality, violence and exploitation, global citizenship and ethics, identity, and critical inquiries into

hospitality management and neoliberalism [4]. Furthermore, there are also signs that additional noteworthy themes are continuing to develop as part of the overarching goal of creating hospitable societies. These include global hospitable citizenship, the design and planning of hospitable cities, alternative economic and non-Western political systems, and the intersection of sustainable development goals and hospitality (especially SDG #2, “zero hunger,” and SDG #12, “responsible consumption and production” [5]).

Why is this important? What these developments underline, is a shift towards relational comprehensions and extensions of hospitality. Indeed, all of the themes noted above are either examinations of the relational structures and arrangements that can be studied in various hospitality contexts, or visions of new relationalities identified under the umbrella term “hospitable societies.” Moreover, to advance achievement of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., social justice, democracy, equality, climate action, and the reduction of poverty) is to think in terms of relationships: our relationship to food, to the planet, to other human beings, and to nonhumans. This has significant implications for the changing hospitality landscape. Put plainly, when we think relationally, we need to consider the ways in which we *are with* and *in* the world vis-à-vis hospitality. A good example of relational hospitality from Aotearoa is the Merge Café (<https://www.lifewise.org.nz/our-services/enterprises/merge-cafe/>), which has been supporting Auckland street whānau since 2010. The reimagination of what hospitality could be – i.e., in terms of just/ethical/caring/opportunity-building relations – is what makes the study of hospitality not only exciting but societally important. The fact that these changes are currently taking place in education and research promises more relationally aware and inspired champions of hospitality. The opportunities for hospitality practitioners lie in considering questions such as: how would what we do look like, when approached through the lens of relating and relationship building (as opposed to the notion of making goods and delivering services)? Would this not be an advantage and a long-term win-win prospect reverberating beyond the metaphorical walls of our business?

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