Bias and Bigotry in Hospitality Management Education

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INTRODUCTION

Hospitality management emerged as field and program titles for academic courses preparing managers for delivering accommodation, food and drink services away from home settings in the UK in the 1980's. The title acted as both a useful collective noun for an array of different industry sectors and as a subject of academic enquiry about the nature of hospitality and hospitableness. Academics were able to engage in the study for hospitality operations and the study of hospitableness involving the relations between hosts and guest, in cultural and domestic as well as commercial domains [1].

DESCRIPTION

The study of hospitality involved a breadth of social sciences including anthropology, history, geography, women's studies, social psychology and philosophy, for example, that enriched understanding and provided a theoretical underpinning for industrial provision. The latest of several edited texts, The Routledge Handbook of Hospitality Studies includes thirty three chapters with contributions by thirty two authors from twelve countries across five continents. Apart from the insights from social science disciplines it confirms the ubiquitous obligations for hosts to welcome guests without exception and for guests to behave in a respectful manner to their hosts. The front-piece of the text quotes a Japanese poet 'In the shade of the cherry blossom tree there is no such thing as a stranger'. Indeed, several cultures use the tree as a metaphor for hospitality because the tree gives shade and shelter to all, without restriction or barriers to entry [2].

Despites this and other books, journals, refereed papers and research conference presentations hospitality management education and research remains stubbornly fixated with the industry and a study for agenda. For example, analysis of the council for hospitality management education research conference in 2018 revealed that just one paper was concerned with a study of topic whilst the remaining sixty seven papers concerned study for themes.

A tyranny of relevance dominates course content and research priorities. In part this is a by-product of formal and informal industry inputs. It is also a feature of much vocational education that aims for successful students to be job ready and competent in the pragmatic skills needed in the sector-how to do takes priority over the how to think in many cases. Yet the study of hospitality has the potential to develop the critical thinking skills needed in dynamic circumstances. Recent experiences of lockdowns and restrictions generated by the recent COVID pandemic confirm the need for hospitality managers to be able to respond creatively to unexpected circumstances. The how-to-do agenda will not suffice and the sector's educational provision needs to develop reflective practitioners and the inclusion of more study of content is essential [3].

If the dominance of the tyranny of relevance is one criticism of hospitality education bias, the narrow operational focus tends to prioritise luxury hotel and restaurant provision as the focus of the industry content. Work commissioned by the higher education funding council. Doherty, Guerrier, Jamieson, Lashley and Lockwood explored management careers involving the provision of accommodation, food and drink services suggested that there are six sectors organised in two clusters. Direct services include hotels, restaurants, bars/pubs and contract catering where some combination of accommodation, food and drink provision is the core activity. The indirect service sectors-leisure and entertainment includes cruise liners and theme parks, for example. The welfare sector embraces hospitals, colleges and schools where hospitality services are provided in support of the core activity. In all these sectors management posts support the delivery of hospitality services yet they are rarely included in hospitality management education or presented to students as career options [4].

In the UK hotels and restaurants employ 2.2 million people with direct sales of £ 87 billion and represents 69 percent of direst services. The luxury element of hotels and restaurants is estimated to be 2-5 percent of the provision accounting for between 44,000 and 110,000 jobs with annual revenue in the region of £ 1.7- £ 4.3 billion or just 1-3 percent of direct services in the sector. Yet this luxury hotel and restaurant sector dominates the industry focus presented on most hospitality programmes.

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A research project conducted for the Hospitality Institute examined the provision in schools in the USA, UK, the Netherlands, Dubai, Hong Kong and Switzerland. Five of the six operate a training hotel; the UK only operates a training restaurant. Quasi-commercial ventures provide pre-employment operational skills training in the facility. Kitchen and restaurant skills tend to be a ubiquitous theme though hotel contexts enable some work simulations in the housekeeping, reception and wider hotel operation. Luxury provision dominates the focus on most of these programmes, there was limited coverage of wider direct or indirect sectors, thereby limiting student exposure to the full range of their career options.

Finally, hospitality management education tends to be focused on the vocational aspect of education and the students as future management employees or self-employed entrepreneurs. Whilst these should not be dismissed, the purpose of education is to empower students as citizens, reflective practitioners are without doubt more effective managers, but an important role of educators is to develop the critical thinking skills needed by men and women better able to look critically at the world in which they live.

Three recent publications suggest some avenues for critical studies in the field. Slavery and Liberation in hotels, restaurants and bars explores a group of organisational management issues ranging from modern slavery and human trafficking to employee empowerment and workers cooperatives. Hotels are increasingly being used a venue for prostitution and many of these victims of sexual exploitation are trafficked from their home location for that purpose. More directly many hotels, restaurants and bars could be accused of engaging in a form of neo-slavery. Employers oppress the powerless through low pay, and employment practices that predominantly serve the interests of the employer [5].

Discrimination and prejudice in hotels, restaurants and bars studies in social sciences provides systematic insights into the causes and manifestations of prejudice and discrimination that lead to misogyny, anti-semitism, religious intolerance, gay-bashing and inter-departmental strife. Content explores a number of biases and prejudices practiced with hotels, restaurants and bars. Despite legislation designed to outlaw discrimination actual employment activities reveal many rigidities in employment practices. Chapters such as 'Why women don't become chefs' and 'Five-star racism' explores some of the prejudices that are 'hidden in plain sight'.

Conflict and hostility in hotels, restaurants and bars the text is to study conflict as it applies to the hotel, restaurant and bar sector. Conflict within these organisations involves all stakeholders including employers, employees, customers, suppliers, host populations and regulators. Harmony is the ideal setting for the service of food, drink and accommodation, yet the potential for conflict exists in transaction between each of the parties. Employers and employees have conflicting interest over pay and working conditions as well as the way managers treat staff and the way staff treats managers and their official duties. Content embraces conflict between stakeholders, including dysfunctional leadership and between residents and visitors in destination experiencing 'over-tourism'.

CONCLUSION

Whilst these latter three texts are not intended as blueprint for future research, they do hint at potential pathways to program content and research activities that encourage critical thinking and thereby assist in both the development of managers who are reflective practitioners and graduates who are empowered with life-skills to better understand the world in which they live.

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