

THE CITY HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE MODEL – SHAPING A HOSPITABLE CITY

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of The City Hospitality Experience Model. A model to gain insight on the relationships within City Hospitality. A model stakeholders can use while elaborating a City Hospitality policy within the City Marketing.

Key words: City Hospitality, Experiences, Target groups, Guests, Hosts, Stakeholders.

BODY

Introduction

Aim of the short paper is to introduce the City Hospitality Experience Model developed within the research chair of The Hotelschool The Hague. First, to show how this model relates to the concepts of hospitality and experience. Second, how the model works as a tool within the City Marketing domain to gain insights in the relationships between the City and its target groups focusing on the experienced quality of hospitality within a city.

City Marketing

Cities are making use of concepts and tools of the marketing philosophy in order to distinguish themselves in the broad market of cities and to gain sustainable advantages (Braun, 2008). A definition of city marketing is provided by Hospers (2008) who states that 'city marketing is a long term process and/or policy, containing different consistent activities aiming to retain and attract certain target groups connected to the city'. In their urge to distinguish from competition, cities add City Hospitality to their Marketing. They want their visitors, but also inhabitants and companies to feel welcome in the city.

Focus of City Hospitality

In order to get a better understanding of the concept of City Hospitality we distinct several dimensions for Hospitality can be explored (Lasley et al, 2007).

- The private dimension: hospitality within your house with your own guests. Making your guests feeling comfortable without exchange of money.
- The social dimension: hospitable behavior within a culture. How welcoming is a community towards strangers?

- The commercial dimension: hospitality within the hospitality industry where people are hospitable, making people feel comfortable in exchange for money. A value-adding activity.

City Hospitality fits within the last two dimensions. The social dimension is how hospitable the community is within the city. Some cities show more hospitable behavior than others by nature. The commercial dimension is on building/shaping a city into a more hospitable environment for all working, living and visiting a city. They feel more at ease which at the end will bring more money to the city. The city as such is not part of the hospitality industry.

Within all these dimensions there are certain rules between the host and the guest. There is no such thing as unlimited hospitality (Derrida, 2000). Gunnarson and Blohm (2002) define hospitality as “hostmanship”, the art of making people feel welcome. The art of creating meaningful encounters of hospitality. Encounters between people becoming moments of truth.

City Hospitality is, like hospitality, about a relationship between a host and a guest. A way of relating. The city, as the master of the house, needs to build a policy on how to develop city hospitality, for whom, which goals, strategies and which stakeholders to co-create with.

Hospitality has developed from simply delivering a service or selling a product (Cassie 1983) to the way in which it is delivered. The way we experience a specific service or product impacts the value we attach to it. It even influences the amount of money we are willing to spend on it. Experience has become a key concept within today's society and economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999), and the hospitality industry is no exception to that rule.

In translating hospitality experience into a definition for city hospitality we define **City Hospitality** as a long-term process focused on the creation, strengthening and retaining of the hospitality experience for the several target groups within a city; based on a professional, commercial vision of hospitality adding value for the city, backed up by a policy plan and use of the appropriate tools. The three distinguished target groups are: the inhabitants, the businesses and the visitors (Hospers 2009). Each target group demands a different welcome, a different form of hospitality, from the city they visit.

The city hospitality experience, the feeling of being welcome in a city is not only within the commercial places but also on the street while meeting, seeing other visitors, inhabitants, people in public transport and taxi drivers also. Feeling welcome/at ease because you can read and understand the information provided about the city and can find your way around. Examples of friendliness, interest, flexibility and helpfulness can be found in the city of The Hague's “Be my guest” program and in the “Welcome to Amsterdam” program.

The city as a host is complex because there is not one host, there are many, and on the other hand there are many different guests. To gain a better insight into the complex relationships between the host and the guest in City Hospitality, the Research chair City Hospitality & City Marketing of The Hotelschool The Hague has developed the City Hospitality Experience Model.

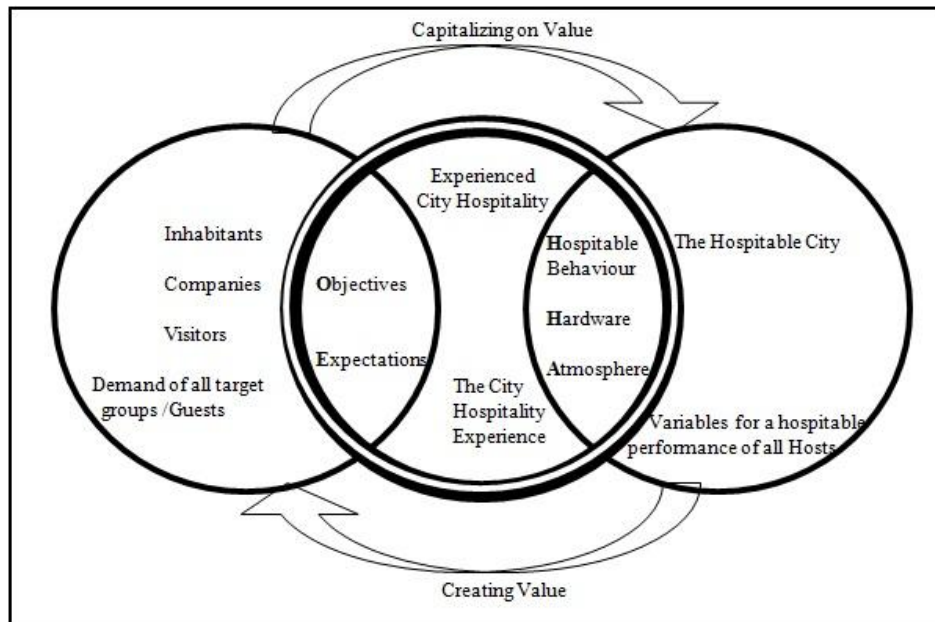
The City Hospitality Experience Model

In 1985 Hotelschool The Hague presented their Model of Hospitality (Reuland e.o 1985). This model fits the traditional definition of hospitality for companies within the hospitality industry with guests and hosts. Lewis and Chambers definition of Hospitality experience (2000) introduces building blocks for an experience. Here an experience is the outcome of a) the tangible goods, the physical factors, b) environment, items over management may have some indirect control, and is something the customer feels, c) services, includes nonphysical, intangible attributes that management should control.

Both inputs lead us to the development of the ‘City Hospitality Experience Model’ as a base for gaining analytical insights into city hospitality experiences. It visualizes the co-creation of the City Hospitality Experience. It helps us understand how certain target groups might react to building blocks of the Hospitable City. These insights help us understand the relationship between guest and host in a city hospitality context and add information for writing a policy on City Hospitality. For instance the policy makers need to know to which extent the building blocks of the hospitable city is part of the nature and to which extent parts needs to be shaped. By developing City Marketing policy choices need to be made concerning the goals to set the strategy and actions to be taken. A profound analysis of the building blocks of City Hospitality is necessary to make

these choices transparent. The City Hospitality Experience Model delivers an analytical framework for that analysis. It will be explained for one target group within The Hague as an example.

Figure 1
Title: The City Hospitality Experience Model



The City Hospitality Experience is co-created by guest and host, as visualized in the centre circle of figure 1. On the left, three target groups (guests) are given; Inhabitants, Companies and Visitors. Information about motives/objectives and expectations on WHY and HOW these groups live, work and visit a city needs research. Our focus goes beyond the visitors group alone.

On the right, is the hospitable city (the host). The hospitable city is offered by a group of stakeholders; all hosts by themselves and together co-create the hospitable city. Within the city hospitality offer, three building blocks are given. The first is hospitable behaviour; being service-minded, friendly, quick, an open attitude by everyone who works, lives in the city. Shown by all people who get in contact with the city guest: f.e. employees in stores and F&B facilities, taxi-drivers but inhabitants also. Inhabitants therefore are both guest and host.. The second building block of city hospitality is the hardware; such as the presence of (special) buildings, infrastructure (roads, parking facilities), places to meet and relax in a natural environment or in a more commercial area. For instance shops, F&B facilities, museums, a park. The third building block of city hospitality is Atmosphere; the exterior and interior of a city. Such as the architecture, the colors, smell, ambiance, sound, other people. It is about a feeling, something intangible, difficult to copy and a way to distinguish the city from others.

The hosts within the city should find a way to work together. The municipality can be of importance by having a vision, a plan where a path is shown and all hosts are more aware what is expected from them and where their benefits lie. The better the match between the objectives/motives and expectations of a target group and the building blocks of a hospitable city, the more these expectations will be met, perhaps even exceeded. This influences the quality of the city hospitality experience. The higher the quality of the experience, the more people will come to the city to live, work and visit. This will add to the liveliness of the city and attract even more inhabitants, businesses and visitors to the city.

A hospitable city is always searching for options to create value to their target groups, the more they succeed to do so the more they become a friendly and lively city a nice place to live, work, meet and shop. The economical benefits will follow.

Case: City Hospitality Experience Model applied to The City The Hague

The vision of The Hague on their City Marketing by the Municipality of The Hague, (2010) is: “In 2020, The Hague will be internationally renowned as: The global International Headquarters of Peace and Justice, and a dynamic city with five-star quality facilities for living, working, studying and enjoying leisure time. The city will be inviting, welcoming to the world and international, versatile and inspiring”. City Hospitality is seen as an important part in the achievement of their ambitions.

In order to achieve the ‘city hospitality’ objectives a research, commissioned by the Municipality of The Hague has been conducted by students of the RSM/Hotelschool The Hague Master in Hospitality Management Program (2011) wherein the model and different variables have been used. The City Hospitality Experience model has been used as research framework. We show as an example of how the model was used in the following part of the research which is addressed to the target group inhabitants of The Hague. This target group is special because they can be seen as a guest of The Hague, but as a host also. Their Residents colour the city! They are the ambassadors of the city.

The envisioned 5-star quality experience of The Hague can be positioned in the centre circle. There where guest and host meet. As a guest the inhabitants of The Hague have expectations for instance on cultural activities, restaurants, shops and life style. The research on the building block Hospitable Behavior shows that the inhabitants experience the professional attitude of shop employees at a low level. Other inhabitants though are friendly, helpful and speak English. As an important group of inhabitants this helps the many expats living in The Hague feeling at ease.

Looking within the building block hardware for places to relax and entertain, The Hague has the beach and many green areas where they can relax and play. A lack is mentioned for entertainment as for youngsters and students there are not enough clubs and discos open late. Places to take children to are limited. The inhabitants state that there is a good selection of shops in The Hague. On the other hand, there is a demand for more international restaurants and extended opening times of shops. Bars and restaurants are perceived to close relatively early, especially for theatre and cinema visitors and there are not enough terraces in the summer. Prices are high and tend to cater for Expats rather than local people. Also, there are insufficient “hangout” places for youths.

In the evening and nights the inhabitants feel more unsafe due to criminality. This is part of the atmosphere building block. The response by the city was to work together with the police to make sure people will feel safer. On the whole the atmosphere and ambiance score high.

Returning to the centre circle of the Model the research shows that the vast majority of inhabitants in The Hague are happy to live in the city. Only a small percentage of inhabitants rated their overall happiness in The Hague negatively and stated in the qualitative part of the survey that they would leave the city. Generally, the inhabitants are proud to live in The Hague. The City Hospitality Experience as such scores high. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the public that The Hague has a long way ahead in order to fulfill the vision of becoming one of the most hospitable cities by 2020.

Though the study is limited to the inhabitants, it already shows the wide variety of hosts on the city side to co-create the city hospitality experience for the inhabitants. All parties involved should be aware they shape the city together; it is the co-creation within the hosts in the city and then the co-creation between the city and the inhabitants. The inhabitants should also become more aware of their role in the hospitable city.

Conclusion

In the process towards an analytical approach of City Hospitality within the City Marketing domain the City Hospitality Experience Models visualizes the relationships between guest (target markets) and host (stakeholders of the city). More research needs to be done per target group to get the full picture of their motives/objectives and expectations in relation to the three building blocks and their importance. Being aware of the complexity of all the relationships further research is needed amongst the different hosts also. To improve the City Hospitality Experience the relevance of the hosts per target group needs to be identified and with which hosts cooperation is necessary within the different projects to improve the city hospitality experience.

The example in the presented case of The Hague confirms the use of the model as a tool to gain further insights on City Hospitality as a base for the municipality to develop a policy on the topic.

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