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Excellence in Professionalism: Humanistic Perspectives

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1 Introduction

Understanding the humanistic perspectives in hospitality and tourism is important since the very concept of hospitality refers to human persons. People are at the centre of the tourism and hospitality sector, and it is therefore important for all those involved in the profession and its practices to have a robust understanding of the nature and characteristics of humans. A philosophical perspective of the human person draws out the deeper meaning of the industry itself as it enriches our knowledge of human needs and desires and thus enhances the capacity to provide the resources and attention as required by clients. Humans are not only their external appearances. The interiority of the person, which is often not directly and physically available for the scrutiny of others, is an essential dimension. The philosophical understanding of a human person contributes to a better realization of the importance of hospitality in the life of man. This form of reflection leads us to understand that every person has an intrinsic dignity, a notion that is at the base of the humanistic perspectives of work. Such knowledge of human aspirations enables one to describe guidelines for engagement at work which can foster a professional's drive for personal excellence often requiring the practice of virtues.

There is something absolute about the human person which is not found in other beings. Each human person is unique and unrepeatable. Humanism has consequences for workplace interactions. It is therefore unsurprising that humanistic perspectives are important for hospitality, a field that is marked by human relationships and interactions. It is important to understand and respect the dignity of each person especially in the hospitality and tourism industry where human persons are the source and end of all the activities carried out in the industry. Humanistic management is understood as a management that emphasizes the human condition and is oriented to the development of human virtue, in all its

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forms, to its fullest extent (Melé, 2003). Hospitality professionals also need that holistic development built on humanistic perspectives.

Throughout history and across cultures, there has been a wide variety of guidelines for human relationships in homes and outside of homes. It is also common to find people visiting other places and being received by other humans. Ancient documents and scrolls often cite instances in which patriarchs and wise people travelled and met with kindness on their journeys. Many humans are often on the move and these conditions of movements and tourism open up a channel for human interactions in the form of hospitality. Hospitality as a field shows how intertwined the activities of people in different contexts can be. Its meaning and implications for actions can however vary from person to person and place to place in as much as human creativity expresses itself in different customs.

In a broad sense of the word, to be hospitable means to be kind, welcoming, and attentive to the needs of others especially those who live away from one's home, whether they are strangers or known guests. Hospitality is a word that brings to mind a variety of images welcoming guests, friendly gestures to people who arrive at a destination whether they be friends, visitors from far and near, strangers. It often involves a generous reception and entertainment of guests whether one knows them personally or not. In many cultures, hospitality refers to a show of generosity, of comradeship in humanity, qualities found in homes. It is not surprising, therefore, that hospitality and the human qualities needed for the exquisite care that the profession demands are first practiced at home within families.

2 Facets of Hospitality

Hospitality is so important that in the ancient world it was used as a tool to maintain peaceful co-existence and harmony in the society. For instance, in Greece, a stranger must be welcomed and the host is forbidden to ask initial questions to the guest. Rather, the host was expected to offer the stranger refreshment, a bath, and clean clothes. As if these kind gestures were not enough, he was also expected to give the stranger a gift, to acknowledge the honour of hosting him. In return,

the stranger was expected to be respectful and courteous. Indeed, the development of hospitality has been continuous and enormous due to its importance. What we see in the industry today can be traced back even to ancient periods. For instance, the modern day spa can be traced to around 40 B.C. when hospitality developed for social and religious gatherings. During this time the Greeks built thermal baths for recuperation and relaxation. While the Greeks built spas, the Romans provided accommodation for travellers on government premises, where comfort and entertainment were key. The roman baths may also be considered a context in which hospitality was practiced. In addition to its etymological origins, the topic has been explored by scholars under different headings including hospitality and mythology, hospitality and the household public hospitality, commercial hospitality, and hospitality in the contemporaneous religious writings (O’Gorman, 2006).

Hospitality has to do with welcoming people and helping them have a memorable time. This can take place in a familial setting or in a more formal and institutionalized way. The familial dimension of hospitality is so commonly observed that it is easy to take it for granted as a natural occurrence in homes and to think of hospitality more in an institutionalized sense. An observation from the trend is that the robust significance of the term hospitality, often connected to tourism, gives room for its exploration on different levels and from different perspectives. For example, one can explore the topic from its role in the homes and also explore its roles in firms dedicated to care. Care is a human need which hospitality supplies. Tourism for leisure, for vulnerable situations such as health challenges, or forced displacements are just a few examples of events that provide opportunities for care.

Hospitality enhances our dignity and makes us more human. We have embodied minds and so we cannot ignore the fact that our bodies need to be taken care of. We are very fragile beings, and we understand that we have bodily needs. The way these needs are met is also important. These needs could be emotional and professional. If emotional, then it involves a subjective bond in the agent that relates his or her action to the recipient of care. If professional, then it goes beyond this attitude of concern and represents different actions that foster the flourishing or well-being of the cared for. The professional care is called care for.

Care for clients or guests can include expressing appropriate emotional responses but entails more than feelings. In addition to emotional intelligence, the professionals will use their skills to provide amenities for guests, to meet standards of excellence, experience, for practical learning, etc.

Good professionals in hospitality and tourism need to continually develop their character, acquire relevant virtues, in addition to necessary industry skills. If a person has a set of appropriate professional skills, s/he is able to act effectively in specific ways with regard to the technicalities of their work. If a person has developed virtues, s/he becomes a virtuous person and can act in a virtuous manner. In other words, there is a difference between professional development and character development and both areas of growth are important for a successful life. While character development and character education are sometimes used as synonyms, there is a difference. Character education focuses on frameworks, programmes, strategies, etc. for educating people in ways that help them to grow in virtues. Character development is broader. It is something that anyone at any time can freely choose to undertake in order to grow themselves as persons. In this sense, character development should be the fruit of a free and personal decision to grow in virtues, and so become a person of virtuous character. A hospitality and tourism professional who is interested in developing the virtues which are most relevant for the industry needs to freely choose to engage in the process. A person can only develop their character by fostering virtues if they understand the role and power of their own freedom. S/he needs to follow certain steps to develop a game plan for personal development. The hospitality and tourism industry is a good space for the development of virtues of character and the opportunities it offers to professionals for personal growth are numerous.

3 Untapped Depths

Much as hospitality and tourism are commonly used terms, the depth of meaning and significance of the professionalism in the fields for the well-being of the citizens and the homes within societies, are yet to be

fully explored. In fact, jobs in the industry are often negatively perceived as poorly paid and of low status. There is need for an increased awareness of the indispensable work done by those working in the hospitality industry (Gebbels et al., 2019). This work opens horizons of its readers to appreciate the richness of the profession. Indeed, the task of caregivers, with the humane core, is important for building healthy societies.

Though the term hospitality refers to the various sectors that deal with the relationship between a host and the guest, we can consider four main sectors. These sectors include food and beverage, travel and tourism, accommodation, and entertainment. The sectors may overlap, and each sector is made of many branches. For instance, accommodation services refer to bed and breakfast, motels, resorts, hostels, serviced apartments, etc. Food and beverage services refer to bars and cafes, catering, teas and coffee, nightclubs restaurants, etc. Travel and tourism professionals ensure the booking and finding of the most appropriate accommodations while on a trip. The sector comprises travel agents, tour operators, cruises, car rentals, online travel agencies, etc. Finally, the entertainment sector includes cinemas, theatres, zoos, museums, attraction parks, spectator sports, and participatory sports. Each of these sectors and sub-sectors has a huge economic impact and they contribute enormously to creating jobs and boosting the economy. Within those sectors listed earlier, one can find possibilities of contributing to human flourishing in creative ways. Such ways make life more pleasant for others. When humanism is at the core of services provided in the different types of hospitality, there is a high chance of facilitating human flourishing.

There is a need for a holistic paradigm for understanding hospitality and tourism. For example, hospitality and tourism is thriving source of income for any country. In the world of business, it is easy to discover an economic value in the monetary sense of the word in the human sojourns. An initial humane tendency to compassion and care for travellers, partly deriving from our awareness of a common heritage as humans often on journeys, or who often find ourselves in contexts different from our home, can easily be converted into a drive for profit or excellence or for popularity and recognition at any cost. However, hospitality and tourism transcend financial negotiations as the industry is one that offers a direct service to humanity.

Hospitality should not be a “cold” service delivery, achieved without a connection with the guest or customer. Even the very word hospitality implies love, care, and attention. It is a real service that affects the person directly, it must be person-centred. Even as technology is increasingly employed as a tool to enhance customer experience, it is important to keep in mind the person-centred approach to service. Technology is a welcome help to enhance the actions of humans in caregiving but does not replace the human touch.

Hospitality sectors should innovate processes and improve customer experience with the use of technology. Nowadays guests are more demanding; they want to send messages to their host, control the heating in their room from their mobile phones, etc. Even as the debate continues on how much technology should be adopted in the industry, the ethical issues must not be overlooked, and person-centred care must be considered in delivering hospitality. What is important is to conserve the human touch in hospitality.

Service creates an emotional connection which means that how the customer feels about a service delivered is important. Hospitality means giving selflessly to create a special experience for the guest. A machine may deliver a service, but you need a person to make a guest feel loved, understood, and appreciated.

This book proposes that the understanding and practices of person-centred care would enable us to enrich ourselves within the practice of the profession or as recipients of the services it renders. In such a framework that follows humanistic perspectives, human dignity inherent within both the professional and their clients or customers becomes a foundation on which to build and evaluate the expectations of the fields. In other words, at the centre of the book’s robust paradigm of hospitality and tourism is a humanistic perspective which emphasizes the dignity of persons. It is with such a perspective that we see the centrality of hospitality to a humane existence and glimpse the invaluable role that all forms of humanistic care play in promoting well-being.

A huge proportion of the chores proper to hospitality are carried out in homes and are often unpaid generous acts of self-giving and dedication to the growth of other humans. Indeed, the tasks involved in hospitality whether paid or unpaid are of an immense value to the well-being of the

members of the society. In order for any professional to be engaged in any other job outside their home, some level of domestic care is needed. If there was no service to launder clothes (paid or unpaid), or no one to share domestic chores with, one would have more chores to do, in addition to whatever occupation they have outside the home. Hospitality services contribute to our being human such that they cannot be neglected completely by anyone.

The average housekeeper, however, is often unaware of the centrality of the service they render to the community through their work well done. Such services are much needed for the personal and professional development of the people to whom they are delivered. Another aspect that often goes unnoticed is the capacity of the professional to undergo change and personal development through their work. Some authors affirm that work makes us more human in a certain sense as it is an area in which we can express our rationality and creativity in order to adapt to the world around us to suit our needs. In that process of adaptation and through the results of our intelligent action, we exhibit our dominion over the world. When that intelligent dominion of the world is rightly applied, we are able to responsibly use the resources available to us and future generations. In the process, the professional acquires virtues which are essential for human fulfilment and flourishing.

The prestige associated with being a world-class chef may seem out of reach for many professionals in small establishments. However, in addition to opportunities for the growth in virtues and character development, practitioners in the field enrich their technical skills with the creativity of genuine interest in solving human challenges. Excellence then is not just perfection of technical skills but implies the growth of the professional involved in the practices proper to the profession whose activities enrich the lives of those who experience them. Hospitality professionals with a humanistic concern, founded on the recognition and respect for human dignity, can flourish and help the people they work with and work for to create an ambience that promotes their flourishing.

4 This Project

This book project is divided into two volumes. The aim of this first volume is to explore in detail different anthropological foundations in hospitality and tourism which help us to understand the professionals engaged in it. It therefore investigates humanistic perspectives of the hospitality professional in a personal dimension. By examining fundamental aspects of human beings and human development as they are lived by the hospitality professional, a guide for flourishing professionals is created. The focus of the volume is therefore the integral development and well-being of the hospitality professional. The second volume will look at the contributions of hospitality and tourism professionals to the people they attend to, those who use their services and to others in society.

This volume starts by making a historical and contextual exploration of hospitality sharing insights about different types of environments and settings for the practice of the profession. It then presents the philosophical foundations necessary for understanding the work of the hospitality professional. Such philosophical and anthropological themes include the role of work for human development and fulfilment as it plays out in the field, and the historical development of the field including a presentation of the different ways in which the profession is exercised.

The humanistic perspective of work is based on the recognition of human dignity and it is therefore unsurprising that the volume touches on the significance and relevance of human dignity to the professional's quest for flourishing. The integral growth of the professional is important, and the volume explores what this integral growth implies in different chapters. In one chapter, it explores the unity of the human person engaged in work and how the different aspects constitutive of being human can be addressed in order for each aspect to reflect in, or contribute to fulfilment at work.

As with other professions, in line with classical and psychological explorations of the process of self-development while at work, the acquisition of virtues is central to the development of the hospitality professionals too. The book therefore dedicates chapters to detailed

exploration of the concepts of virtues in both the philosophical dimensions and the practical dimensions. It discusses the four cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, which are the hinges on which other virtues hang. However, the discussion is not only on the theoretical plane. A chapter explores the practical implications of the acquisition of virtues for the hospitality professional using a SWOT model.

At the base of the search for development is a quest for happiness and one cannot overemphasize the significance of good work as an aspect of the processes that lead to authentic well-being. The book therefore contains a chapter which explores the relationship between hospitality and the quest for happiness. In addition, the concept of human flourishing is one that is explored from different perspectives and within different professions and this volume also explores this theme.

5 The Value-Add

This book series on the humanistic perspectives in hospitality contributes to the ongoing discussion on the various challenges facing the industry. For example, a humanistic approach to hospitality could accelerate the recovery of the industry from the impact of the pandemic. The hospitality industry was one of the sectors that were worst hit by the pandemic. As the COVID-19 pandemic is gradually winding down and businesses are struggling to return to the pre-pandemic buoyancy, humanism will be key in attracting guests and clients. The assurance that people are valued and cared for can encourage them to patronize hospitality centres where they can relax with family and friends as part of the activities that promote recovery from the stressful crisis of the pandemic.

There is also the challenge of management in hospitality. Management and leadership decisions must be person-centred for human flourishing. Human resource policies must include fair pay and good work conditions. With many unemployed and many immigrants desperate to earn a living, hospitality managers should not exploit the situation of such persons or other persons who may be undergoing a similar ordeal. The

hospitality industry is known to have a high staff turnover, an over-worked workforce, and underpaid employees. These are some of the challenges that hospitality managers need to resolve in order to achieve a humanistic work environment that enables growth and flourishing in the industry. Elements of humanistic management (Melé, 2003) are important for progress in the sector.

In all, the book aims to provide a solid philosophical anthropological framework that is useful for facilitating a deep understanding of the importance and invaluable work of hospitality professionals and their role in societal development. The first volume, by focussing on the professional, draws our attention to a personal dimension of that work from within the framework of the flourishing and excellence of the persons involved in the tasks. The second volume will focus on the people who are served and the contributions of the profession to their happiness. It is also our hope that the readers will have a robust view of hospitality and that the knowledge gained from the contents of the book will increase the appreciation for and respect accorded to those who work in the field. We hope that the book will arouse the interest of readers in collaborating with the work carried out in that field whenever they find themselves interacting with the professionals or using their services.

Chapter Summary

Hospitality, often seen as a welcoming attitude to strangers, may be misconstrued as a collection of simple tasks that do not have much to offer. The positive aspects of the profession; its provision of the much-needed respite from gruelling work schedules and its creation of a comfortable space where one can recover from the hustle and bustle of each day are often taken for granted. Additionally, many individuals are unaware of the possibilities for personal development available to professionals working in the hospitality sector. A lack of understanding and appreciation of the worth of the contributions that the industry makes to societal development and human flourishing can often be traced to ignorance and misconceptions about the dignity of the workers. This book proposes that humanistic perspectives, grounded in a sound philosophical anthropology, promote a better understanding of the value, work

dynamics, personal development, and the excellence in technical skills and virtues that are within the reach of hospitality professionals. A robust view of the industry helps professionals, the recipients of their services, and other stakeholders to not only see the economic benefits of the profession but also to understand its influence on societal advancements. The chapter introduces the reader to some concepts and provides a glimpse of topics that are central to the discourse of humanistic perspectives for excellence in professionalism and that will be discussed in other chapters.

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