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20 years of Nordic hospitality research: a review and future research agenda

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ABSTRACT

Communicating hospitality and tourism research has been at the core of the journal aim since the early start in 2001. The aim of the current paper is to provide an overview of the first 20 years of hospitality research in *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, to draw some lines to international hospitality research, and to propose a future research agenda. The review provides a brief account of the main themes addressed in Nordic hospitality research including (1) hospitality as a concept and practice, (2) business strategy, (3) hospitality operations, (4) service encounters as performative work, (5) human resource management, and (6) labour market perspectives. Potential research avenues are outlined.

KEYWORDS

review paper; hospitality management; hotel management; Nordic; work environment

Introduction

In March 2020, the world's economy was almost shut down overnight (UNWTO, 2020), and the hospitality industry faced unprecedented challenges. Governments in the Nordic countries used different strategies when facing the pandemic. In Norway, Denmark and Finland, a lockdown of the society included both public (schools) and private sectors (restaurants, bars, hotels, events). To get the pandemic under control, the approach included a rapid but not total shut down, followed by a reopening after a few months. Sweden seemed to take an approach with a higher tolerance for risk, with less restrictions on the hospitality industry. Iceland kept its borders open to EU and Schengen states, but continued to implement travel restrictions imposed for the Schengen Area, and imposed quarantine on travellers from abroad. At the time this paper was written, the Nordic summer season 2020 has come to an end, and winter destinations are fearing how the pandemic will affect a second season. Many summer destinations are already looking into new markets as the current situation indicates that the pandemic will continue into the new year and beyond.

From a guest viewpoint, restrictions on mobility due to the pandemic implied that “the right to travel and to enjoy the services of hospitality and tourism operators” was “curtailed in a way unprecedented” (Baum & Hai, 2020, p. 2397). This means that temporary

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mobility and travel restrictions heavily impacted our right to participate in hospitality. From a hospitality management viewpoint, lockdown and following restrictions implied forced closedown of operations followed by a significant decrease in demand. Consequently, there has been huge layoffs of employees, massively affecting hospitality business as we have known it in the past.

COVID-19 thus has immediate and long-term impacts on the hospitality workforce (Baum et al., 2020), at three levels, affecting (1) policy, global and local labour markets (macro), (2) organizations (mezo), and (3) employees (micro). In a recent paper, Baum et al. (2020) ask whether the pandemic will change hospitality employees' lives completely, or whether the crisis will only enhance the uncertainty that is already there, amplifying the precarious nature of hospitality work, and now realizing that the changes due to the pandemic will be more long-term than first anticipated. The hospitality industry has long-standing experience with managing stochastic demand (see e.g. Alemayehu & Tveiteraas, 2020; Xie & Tveterås, 2020), "exploiting low entry barriers to work and precarious contracts" (Baum et al., 2020, p. 2822). The likely consequences of the pandemic are that the disadvantages of hospitality work (i.e. precarity, workplace exploitation, harassment) will be amplified. From a competence perspective, there is a risk of losing future talents as laid off employees are less likely to return to their sector of origin (Baum et al., 2020).

Given the disparate magnitude and timing of COVID-19's effects across the globe, there does not appear to be a universally appropriate resolution for recovery. Until a functional immunization is developed, distributed, and administered, the hospitality and leisure sectors will likely not return to the level of success they appreciated before COVID-19 (Huang et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic will therefore also affect future research in the field of hospitality. While hospitality businesses prepare to alter previously accepted standards and practices, there is a growing need for empirical research on how these alterations affect hospitality employees, managers, and guests. Hospitality sector requires a high level of in-person interaction, rendering the adoption of remote work challenging. How will hospitality businesses absorb technology into their operations in a way that positively contribute to their operational efficiency? Managers may need to sacrifice the aesthetic appeal of their business environments to recommence operations safely, and new hospitality experiences are in the making in the wake of the pandemic. All these issues will be on the future research agenda for Nordic and international hospitality researchers.

Although potential challenges related to a pandemic were previously discussed in academic circles (e.g. Hall, 2006, 2011) and global fora (e.g. WHO report "A world at risk from deadly pandemics" Brundtland, 2019), neither governments, the hospitality industry nor individual travellers have been prepared for something alike. A few papers in SJHT have discussed disasters (Larsen, 2011) and uncertainty (Hallin & Marnburg, 2007; Ritchie et al., 2011).

The objective of this paper is to analyze and reflect upon what has been the last 20 years of Nordic hospitality research and what the next 20 years will entail. Here follows an overview of the hospitality research published in SJHT up till 2020; 53 peer-reviewed research articles were identified using "hospitality" OR "hotel" OR "hospitality management" in their title or keywords. In a content analysis, these studies were classified into six categories: (1) hospitality as a concept and practice (five articles), (2) business strategy (eight articles), (3) hospitality operations (nine articles), (4) service encounters and

performative work (nine articles), (5) human resource management (eight articles), and (6) industry and labour market perspectives (14 articles). Studies cover manager, employee and guest perspectives, and most studies are applying qualitative methodology.

Current state of hospitality research in a Nordic context

Hospitality as a concept and practice has been an area of discussion across several conceptual (Lashley, 2008; Uysal, 2004) and review papers (Gjerald & Øgaard, 2008; Heide & Grønhaug, 2006; Mehmetoglu, 2004) addressing important managerial issues. *Being a host* is the focus of Lashley's (2008) paper, discussing hospitality as a concept, practice, and business, whereas Heide and Grønhaug (2006) provided a conceptual review of the atmosphere concept, including antecedents and consequences. Gjerald and Øgaard (2008) argued the importance of getting more insight into hospitality employees' basic assumptions as these may have an influence on the quality of the hospitality product delivered by the employees. Uysal (2004) advocated for the use of artificial networks and knowledge discovery in databases as valuable processes of extracting knowledge from data in hospitality and tourism research; and Mehmetoglu (2004) conducted a content analysis of Nordic hospitality and tourism research, also reviewing the methodology used in the studies.

The second content area is business strategy, focusing on the overall situation and development of companies and industries in a changing environment (Marnburg, 2008). A Special issue devoted to strategic hospitality included four papers and an editorial. Two papers were conceptual and normative, providing researchers and practitioners with new ideas and illustrating how these ideas would work: using storytelling (Mossberg, 2008) and listening (Brownell, 2008) as strategic tools. Two empirical papers investigated the consequences of pricing strategies for hospitality companies (Enz et al., 2008; Heide et al., 2008). The contributions in this special issue raised a question of current importance of strategic elements and functions, that is, what is important to emphasize in the hospitality market of the time? In addition to the special issue on strategy, there are studies that address internationalization processes for small and medium-sized tourism firms (Agndal & Elbe, 2007), and hotels as learning arenas and development of dynamic capabilities from a knowledge-based perspective (Gjelsvik, 2002). Further, there is a study of hotel managers' decision making in times of uncertainty, suggesting that instead of overcoming changes in the environment by changing their business, they rather employ traditional strategic approaches (planning, procedures & routines) to reduce uncertainty (Hallin & Marnburg, 2007). The latter study is relevant to the challenging situation hotel managers face during the pandemic.

One of the largest areas identified is hospitality operations, containing research on quality and safety systems, work practices, crisis planning, CSR, and sustainability across nine papers. Different aspects of operating a hospitality business have been highlighted in the journal over the last 20 years, including managerial practices of family-owned enterprises (Engeset, 2020), factors that influence hotel owners' decision to affiliate (Carlbäck, 2012), daily work practices in small restaurants (Wellton et al., 2017), implementation of quality systems and health and safety systems (Lindøe & Lie, 2002; Lindøe & Olsen, 2004), the rationale and effects of various CSR initiatives (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008), the decision-making processes of managers in small- and medium-sized hospitality

enterprises toward CSR (Sandve & Øgaard, 2013), sustainability and perceptions of green meetings in hotels (Mykletun et al., 2014), and crisis management (Ritchie et al., 2011). A common feature discussed in this area of research seems to be how small and medium enterprises function, and how vulnerable they may be to global competition. Articles in this category also raised the issue of responsible leadership in studies of CSR-choices and sustainable operations.

The fourth area identified is service encounters and performative work, with studies looking into the nature of performative work (Bærenholdt & Jensen, 2009), service encounter practices (Svingstedt, 2013), critical encounters (Lundberg, 2011), verbalized hospitality (Ivkov et al., 2019), service failure and recovery (Nikbin et al., 2012), service dimensions as drivers of overall satisfaction (Matzler et al., 2006), meal experiences (Hansen et al., 2005), and development of a measurement tool for meal experiences (Hansen, 2014), in addition to research on hotel sleep experiences (Pallesen et al., 2016). This area of research has strong roots in the Nordic service theory and research tradition (e.g. Edvardsson et al., 2011; Grönroos, 2008).

The fifth area is Human resource management (HRM). The topics covered in this area are related to attracting, managing and retaining hospitality work force. Nordic researchers explored recruitment (Valkonen et al., 2013), socialization and training (Dagsland et al., 2011; Furunes, 2005), retention (Furunes & Mykletun, 2005), work environment and working conditions (Onsøyen et al., 2009), work-family conflict (Lövhöiden et al., 2011), and the role of emotions in hospitality management (Haver et al., 2014; Xu & Wang, 2019).

Closely related to HRM is the sixth area, industry and labour market perspectives. Papers investigated industry structure, internationalization of SMEs, wage determinants (Brandt, 2018; García-Pozo et al., 2012), mobility, and migrant workforce (Carson et al., 2014; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Lundmark, 2006; Lundmark et al., 2014; Möller et al., 2014; Sollund, 2006; Thulemark et al., 2014), the use of hostels as housing solutions for migrant populations (Butler & Hannam, 2013), and risk of unemployment (Thrane, 2007). Labour mobility and migration have been on the agenda in SJHT for more than a decade. In a Special Issue dedicated to mobility and migration, Carson et al. (2014) presented a framework for understanding the mobility experiences of communities in sparsely populated areas. Other papers addressed in-migrant self-employment in tourism (Lundmark et al., 2014), the characteristics of mobile tourism labour and their relationships and attachments to seasonal workplaces (Tuulentie & Heimtun, 2014), and the importance of tourism employment for rural migration (Möller et al., 2014; Thulemark et al., 2014). Changing market conditions and new technology is changing the industry. The rise of new forms of collaborative consumption have transformed the production and consumption of hospitality and tourism (Gyimóthy et al., 2020). Recent papers on peer-to-peer accommodation in SJHT contribute with knowledge about relationship between stages of the destination life cycles and differences in the quantity of peer-to-peer accommodation (Adamiak, 2020) and economic, social-psychological and spatial factors for “home exchange” (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020).

Nordic and international research

In order to better illuminate the position of Nordic hospitality research published in SJHT in relation to international hospitality research, we have distilled four trends in the

hospitality literature based on a review of review papers by Kim et al. (2018). Looking at the topics that have been on the agenda for the international community of hospitality researchers, we can clearly see that there has been a growing number of papers on consumer behaviour (Johns & Pine, 2002; Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014) and hospitality marketing (Line & Runyan, 2012; Oh et al., 2004; Yoo et al., 2011). There has been even stronger attention directed towards the application of information technology in hospitality (Ip et al., 2011; Law et al., 2014; O'Connor & Murphy, 2004). Economic drivers of hospitality and hospitality finance research (Jang & Park, 2011; Lee & Back, 2005) have been another popular study area in hospitality. Finally, there has been an increase in regional hospitality research, publications related to a specific areas or nation, such as Chinese hospitality research (Sun et al., 2017). Besides these four streams, several papers cover recent developments in e.g. trends in hospitality (McKercher & Tung, 2015) or methodology and analysis techniques (Fong et al., 2016; Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020).

What clearly distinguishes hospitality topics of the SJHT papers from the international hospitality research is their interest in *the hospitality provider*, rather than the hospitality consumer. The research published in SJHT mostly seeks to understand the managerial (strategic as well as operational) side of the hospitality exchange rather than the consumer side. This resonates somewhat, however, with the Nordic management traditions and working life regulations, and a strong Nordic discipline of service theory and service research.

Although the hospitality studies published in SJHT do not follow one particular stream of research (e.g. hospitality marketing or hospitality finance) or develop one specific area (e.g. "co-creation in hospitality"), they give a broad glimpse into the managerial challenges of hospitality. One of the main paradoxes of tourism and hospitality employment is that many of the conditions that underpinned work in hospitality since long – precarity, low pay, poor working conditions, and jobs of low quality for women and migrants – remain identifiable in today's industry environment in several parts of the world, and the situations they face as a result of the pandemic might just be experienced as an amplification of the normal (Baum et al., 2020). Although one may claim that the working conditions may be better regulated in the Nordic countries, research suggests that the industry suffers relative to other industries. The quality and conditions of service work and hospitality employment in the Nordic countries remains therefore an important research topic, and the strong representation of articles on hospitality work force and labour mobility in SJHT supports that.

The future of Nordic hospitality management research

In an early Editorial, "Nordic Hospitality and Tourism Research in Progress", Haukeland and Mykletun (2001) pointed out how dispersed and scattered the Nordic research clusters are. The number of academics researching Nordic hospitality issues have been limited in numbers. SJHT has been an important outlet for linking the Nordic scientific community more closely to the international research activities within the vast field of hospitality research going on throughout the world. A recent book "Tourism Employment in Nordic Countries Trends, Practices, and Opportunities" edited by Andreas Wamsley, Kajsa Åberg, Petra Blinnikka, and Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson, including 19 articles from 44 researchers, is an example of cooperation between Nordic and international

researchers based on common interest in tourism employment in the Nordic countries. The fact that several contributions are co-authored with researchers residing outside the Nordic region may be promising for future hospitality and calls for comparative studies.

Based on the content analysis of Nordic hospitality research published in SJHT presented above, an overview of issues related to tourism employment in the Nordic countries (Wamsley et al., 2020), and summary of trends in international hospitality research we did for this paper, we suggest several areas for future research in hospitality.

(1) Hospitality as concept and practice: Hospitality experiencescapes, real and virtual

Already in 2001, the founding editors of the journal called for studies looking into new technologies (Haukeland & Mykletun, 2001), and with recent developments the need has increased. The development of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and social service robots will influence work in the hospitality and tourism sector, both at the individual level of the worker and at the policy-making level (the macro-level), and thus is an important field for future research. Gursoy and Chi (2020) indicate that the pandemic may precipitate the use of this technology for security reasons and underlines the need for research on how these AI devices will impact operations, employees and customers; and further to identify factors influencing the acceptance of the use of AI devices in the service delivery. The concept and practice of hospitality is extending into new areas with the rise of different forms of peer-to-peer accommodation and transforming healthcare servicescapes with hotel-like attributes. More research is required to explore the hospitality experience in new areas of life and work – in nursing homes, day care facilities, and gaming venues.

(2) Business strategy: Digital marketplace, innovation and hospitality consumer behaviour

An area of further research is employees' contribution to innovation and development within the organization, exemplified by the case of the seasonal worker, who often in addition is a mobile worker, getting knowledge and insight in different businesses and ways of working. Research on factors important for driving the customers back to the business is further called attention to by Gursoy and Chi (2020). We would include the *employees* in this – what factors are important to make the laid off employees choose to come back to the industry. In a post COVID-19 world, the online marketplace will become a necessity; thus, more research is needed on how hospitality providers can exploit the opportunities of the digital marketplace and influence hospitality consumers' online behaviour.

(3) Hospitality operations: Economic drivers of hospitality in a post-pandemic world

The hospitality business is vulnerable, and the safety issues/precautions caused by COVID-19 are important but have, at the same time, great consequences. There is a need for research on the importance of the different safety precautions, and to determine the influence, the effects, of these precautions and operational strategies on the attitudes

and behaviours of customers (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Customers expect the industry to implement even stronger safety and cleaning procedures, and more research on customers' willingness to pay for these measurements – and how much they are willing to pay – is needed. Further, knowledge that provides the industry with insights in how they can successfully transform their operations to not just meet customers' needs and wants but run a successful operation during and after the pandemic needs to be generated. More research is required to expand our understanding of how hospitality businesses adapt and rebrand themselves. A recent segment is workation and remote work, where businesses market their services towards individuals with flexible work or working from home.

(4) Service encounters and performative work: New forms of interaction

The "service encounter" is the core of the hospitality industry. When the restrictions during the recent pandemic require employees to keep social distance and wear masks in their encounter with the customer, research is needed on how this influences the experience of the encounter – for the customer and the employee, and on what measurements that can be taken to reduce negative effects of this. Thus, there is need for research on service encounters through digital interactions and intermediaries.

(5) Human resource management: Changing role of hospitality employee

In fields that have been exposed to considerable research, for example, labour turnover, working conditions, and job quality, there is still a need for more research catching the actual voices of the tourism workers themselves, both the seasonal workers and permanent employees. The seasonal workers represent a different and unique workforce with different needs and leadership challenges (Arasli et al., 2020; Arasli & Arici, 2019). An interesting area of future research is the role of hospitality employees during crises. The traditional hospitality work during major catastrophic events is evolving into adjoined spheres of hospitableness bridging health care, for instance providing hospitality to vulnerable groups.

(6) Labour market perspectives: Power dynamics and the meaning of hospitality work

One of the UN 2030 sustainability goals is decent work. In this vein it can be argued that employment relations and conditions in the Nordic countries are decent compared to many other countries. However, power dynamics between worker and employer is an important perspective for future research, and within this the experience and meaning of the work to the individual. There is a growing pressure for precarious employment and thus pressure to drive inequality, contradicting the Nordic egalitarianism (Wamsley et al., 2020). The hospitality work is already characterized by precarity and other disadvantages (Baum et al., 2020), and the pandemic situation is likely to amplify this with possible consequences for the competitiveness of the hospitality industry in keeping competent and talented employees.

The pandemic has forced the industry to adapt and improvise in order to survive. The number of bankruptcies has increased, but also businesses are diversifying their concepts and testing new ideas and markets. Studies of short term and long-term consequences of

the pandemic may provide knowledge that may prepare the industry for future challenges.

Implications of the climate crisis – on employment, as a result of an anticipated increased migration pressure; – and on the different locations, many of which in the Nordic region are reliant on international arrivals. The influence of the growth of flight shaming is a perspective here but also the consequences of the pandemic, COVID-19.

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