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International Journal of Hospitality Management, 2014; 41:88-96

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Final publication at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2014.05.005>

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24 October, 2017

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/96910>

The English Public House as a 21st Century Socially Responsible Community

Institution

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Abstract

The changing nature of the British public house (pub) attracts much attention in the academic and popular literature. This paper reports on an ethnographic study of the pubs located in a single suburban village. The concepts of community, hospitality, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and third place are utilised to develop a theoretical perspective from which to explore publican and customer views of the pub's role in the twenty first century. The relationship between Community and CSR is not always clear but the notion of the pub as a place to meet friends and acquaintances was expressed strongly by the customers of establishments that retain aspects of the 'traditional pub'. The hospitality of publicans was seen as a key element of the pub's philanthropic responsibility despite a tendency for organisational reporting to focus more on charitable activities in financial terms.

Keywords

Community, Corporate Social Responsibility, Hospitality, Public Houses, Third Place.

1.Introduction

The Economist ‘obituaries editor’ saw the English pub as ‘the beating heart of a community ... a sort of encapsulation of place’ (Economist,2010,p.40), linking pub closure with community erosion and even suggesting that protecting pubs is integral to ‘Saving England’ itself. This idea that pubs provide a ‘social centre for the Community’ (Clarke et al, 2000,p.693) is common in the literature. However, there has long been a perceptual tension between the pub as a socially valuable institution and threat to mainstream society, often associated with binge drinking and less than respectable patrons, employees and behaviour. For example, Wood (1992, p.179) drew attention to the idea that hotel and catering workers more generally are often perceived as ‘deviants and misfits’. This is still so, given academic, media and government ambivalence towards pubs today as demonstrated by licensing controls and vociferous reaction to regulation.

The English pub has adopted an iconic status over the years, with a history stretching back many centuries. Two aspects of this history are of particular significance to this paper. Firstly, as in other countries, British governments have long sought to regulate the sale and service of alcoholic beverages in publicly accessible settings such as the pub. Some such regulations are specifically targeted at pubs and similar premises, notably the licensing laws that govern the procedures and criteria for granting licenses to publicans and controlling pub opening hours, culminating in the Licensing Act (2003). Among other things, this legislation, sought to make the permitted hours of operation rather more flexible than previously. Other types of regulation are not wholly aimed at pubs, though they often have a particular impact on them. For example, the Health Act (2006) banned smoking from enclosed work spaces and, although not only targeted at pubs, indeed implementation in pubs was delayed until

2008, this was seen by many as having a particularly negative impact on the sector (e.g., Osborne 2014).

Secondly, the pub has shown a remarkable propensity to adapt and evolve to allow for changes in regulation and the evolving requirements of its market, whether coaching inns historically serving travellers, gin palaces frequented by the growing working class of industrialising cities, village pubs catering for the local community or large, modern (residential) estate pubs offering budget food and beer in a competitive urban marketplace. Part of the nature of such adaptation is a tendency for observers to often bemoan a decline in the ‘traditional’ pub, although it is not really clear whether such an idealised entity ever actually existed. However, it is clear that the English pub has been undergoing a dramatic revolution over the last few decades, not least as a result of the *Beer Orders*. Before 1989 a large proportion of the pubs in England had been owned by a small number of large breweries. This was seen as an anti competitive practice, leading to the Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order (1989) and The Supply of Beer (Loan Ties, Licensed Premises and Wholesale Prices) Order 1989 that were intended to reduce the power of these breweries and effectively forced them to dispose most of their pubs. However, rather than spreading or diluting ownership within the sector, this has arguably led to even greater concentration of power in a small number of large pub companies (Pubcos) that specialise in licensed premises, often leasing their properties to individual publicans or smaller chains (see, for example, Mutch, 2000; Preece, 2008).

The sort of changes outlined above, combined with broader social developments related to changes in leisure patterns and pub use, have inevitably influenced the sector. There has long been a trend towards fewer pubs at a national level, with the media pointing to

large numbers of pub closures, such as Economist's (2010) article (above) that drew attention to a reduction in the number of pubs in England, with pubs closing down completely and often either derelict or changing the nature of their operations, often being transformed into residential properties restaurants or other businesses, while also asserting that this is of more than economic significance if the pub is seen as a valuable social institution that is being eroded by such closures.

This ongoing ethnographic study of the pubs in a single English village explores their evolving actual and perceived contribution to the local community from pub worker and customer perspectives. It draws on a number of theoretical approaches including corporate social responsibility (CSR), hospitality and third place (Oldenburg, 1999), demonstrating the conceptual and contextual complexity of the notion of such a social and community role. This leads to a discussion of the nature of the pub's responsibility to the community it serves.

2.Theory

2.1. The nature of community

The concept of community is commonly used to illustrate an optimistic perspective of sociability and solidarity, whether referring to a residential neighbourhood, occupational-based community (Salaman, 1974; Sandiford and Seymour, 2007) or international alliances. Brint (2001,p.1-2) argues that community suggests 'a sense of familiarity and safety, mutual concern and support, continuous loyalties'. He explores its enduring relevance to social researchers, showing how sociologists such as Tönnies (2001) have long explored changes in social life at a community or neighbourhood level. However, such changes are often less clear than some commentators suggest. For example, Wellman (1979,p.1204) shows how one view bemoans the idea of 'community lost', asserting that industrialisation and urbanisation

weaken the sense of solidarity and community among people. Orford et al's (2009) study of pubs in Birmingham (United Kingdom), drawing from this concept, also found that some pub users felt that a decline in pubs was contributing to just such a loss of community. Although focussing on community in urban settings, their analysis is also relevant to village life where community is often seen as threatened by such phenomena as closing pubs or growing numbers of rural second homes, given the common assumption that 'users of second homes lack any connection with "host" communities' (Gallent, 2007,p.99). Researchers such as Van Wynsberghe and Ronaye (1999) caution against popular nostalgia for community lost, not least because 'that kind of community is not even relevant anymore and we need to evolve to another kind of community' and even question whether such idealised communities ever did really exist anyway.

The place of pubs in the community has been raised in the literature, indeed writers have gone so far as to differentiate community pubs as a specific type (Muir, 2009). Community pubs tend to be defined as 'concentrating on the wet [alcohol] trade and generally located in high density residential areas' (Jones et al., 2006,p.333). In addition, ideas of community entrepreneurship have led to a very specific type of community pub, operated by local resident groups who actually purchase their local pub through community cooperatives or 'Industrial and Provident Societies' (Cabras, 2011,p.2420) rather than seeing their pub closed down.

2.1.Organisation roles and responsibilities: CSR

One way of analysing an organisation's community role is through the lens of CSR. Certainly this concept has been accepted into mainstream academic and practitioner discourse, including the Hospitality field (e.g., Martínez and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013; Singal, 2014). However, there is considerable uncertainty and disagreement regarding the nature of

the *responsibilities* implied and specified. Carroll's (1991) four-part CSR 'pyramid' has been influential in helping researchers and managers frame CSR programmes and reporting, although there is a danger of over focusing on specific categories or levels of responsibility, especially if reporting or measuring CSR performance or 'corporate social performance' (Giacalone et al., 2008,p.487) can detract from the organisations broader social role in a community. For example, the summit of Carroll's, 1991,p.42) pyramid is given as 'philanthropic responsibilities', which include the contribution of resources to communities and more generally improving 'the quality of life'. This is more vague and broad-based than the other levels, if not more controversial (as ethical, legal and economic responsibilities are hardly universally agreed). For example, it could be inferred that 'ethics and responsibility are most often 'unreflexively presented as atomised problems for individual decision-makers in the firm' (Haigh and Jones, 2006,p.1). Certainly, philanthropic reporting tends to focus on 'atomised' giving by wealthy corporations and individuals rather non-financial quality of life involvement. In the case of pubs such atomisation is apparent in the way that pub operators define and report their community role. Jones et al. (2006,.p.336) show how the pub companies that they researched drew attention to their perceived community 'commitments and responsibilities' in relation to charitable activities and acting responsibly towards customers and communities in concert with authorities such as the police, the former as atomised philanthropy, the latter more linked to regulatory responsibility.

A number of writers such as Frederick (1998) question how relations between community and business organisations can be defined. Drawing on complexity theory and ecology metaphor, he argues that, if communities are seen as complex ecological environments, organisations are akin to organisms that necessarily adapt to exist within them. This suggests that 'business has no single societal role' (Frederick, 1998,p.379), rather a symbiotic relationship. This moves beyond a simple definition of an organisation's

responsibility to its community and questions whether the relationship could realistically be defined in terms of a specific responsibility at all. Similarly, Cornelius et al's (2008,p.355) work on social enterprise suggests that the 'relationship between social enterprises, social awareness and action is more complex than whether or not these organisations engage in corporate social responsibility' as an explicitly defined management programme.

2.2.The Social Pub

Assuming that the responsibility or role of pubs extends beyond the CSR field, further conceptualisation seems necessary. The Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR) (2006,p.2-3) highlight a number of community benefits of public houses, suggesting that they are

social spaces and play a vital and positive role in maintaining a social centre within local communities. They are often used as alternative community centres, hosting informal meetings, drawing together local sports teams and encouraging charitable events ... They are an important source of employment, providing flexible and part-time jobs in all regions – city, suburban and rural areas. They offer the first taste of work for many people, equipping them with basic transferable skills... they are a provider of leisure and tourist facilities for residents and visitors alike.

It has also been suggested that pubs often serve as hospitable places that welcome all people, including strangers and marginalised outsiders (Sandiford and Divers, 2011). Burton (1987,p.7) pointed out that the English pub is one of the few places where someone can 'appear as a complete stranger and at once be able to join in a conversation'. Of course, this image of pubs does not always sit comfortably with other perceptions of pubs; notably the cliché of a stranger entering a pub being greeted by uncomfortable silence and unpleasant stares from the local patrons. This idea is often emphasised in relation to community (or

working class) pubs where the pub can be seen as reflecting the idea that ‘the community as a whole is, moreover, closed to outsiders’ (Clarke, 2012,p.52).

Perhaps this ambiguity of pubs as welcoming outsiders or reinforcing insider relations by rejecting outsiders can be explored in relation to the paradox of hospitality-hostility relations, or *Hostipitality* that suggests that ‘acts of hospitality framed as welcoming to some often exclude others’ (Lynch et al., 2011,p.15). This problematic nature of hospitality has long attracted cross-disciplinary interest, such as Derrida and Dufourmantelle’s (2000) analysis of hospitality through an ethical and legal lens, notably in relation to international asylum while Kerr (2007) explored the historic-religious framing of the hospitality of medieval monasteries. Cultural and archaeological anthropologists have also long investigated the role of hospitality in human relations, often seeking evidence from primitive cultures about the treatment of strangers. For example, Bolchazy (1977) proposes a multi-stage model by which humans deal with others, especially those seen as outsiders or different, exploring the uncertainty associated with initial contact. This sort of uncertainty of social encounters applies potentially to all human interaction to some extent, although it tends to be more visible in host-guest encounters involving strangers. As Baker (2012,p.1) asks ‘at the door of the home, both host and guest as yet have no assurances of the other’s intentions – will they be hospitable?’ This emphasises the dual aspect of the pub as offering a more neutral place for potentially tense encounters and the pub-worker as the supervisor of such interaction.

2.3.Pubs as hospitable third places

Such ideas of pub-style hospitality resonate with Oldenburg’s (1999,p.42) idea of *third place*, associated with informal meeting places that offer a ‘neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality’ for social interaction. Hence, the third place is

effectively seen as a haven between and away from home (first place) and work (second place), fitting well with the pub's hospitable role.

Despite the apparent relevance of third place to pubs, there is some need for caution in its application. There certainly is evidence that pubs do act as such havens, for example one of Watson and Watson's (2012,p.692) study participants described how he felt when work colleagues, family and friends all interacted with him at the same time in his local pub:

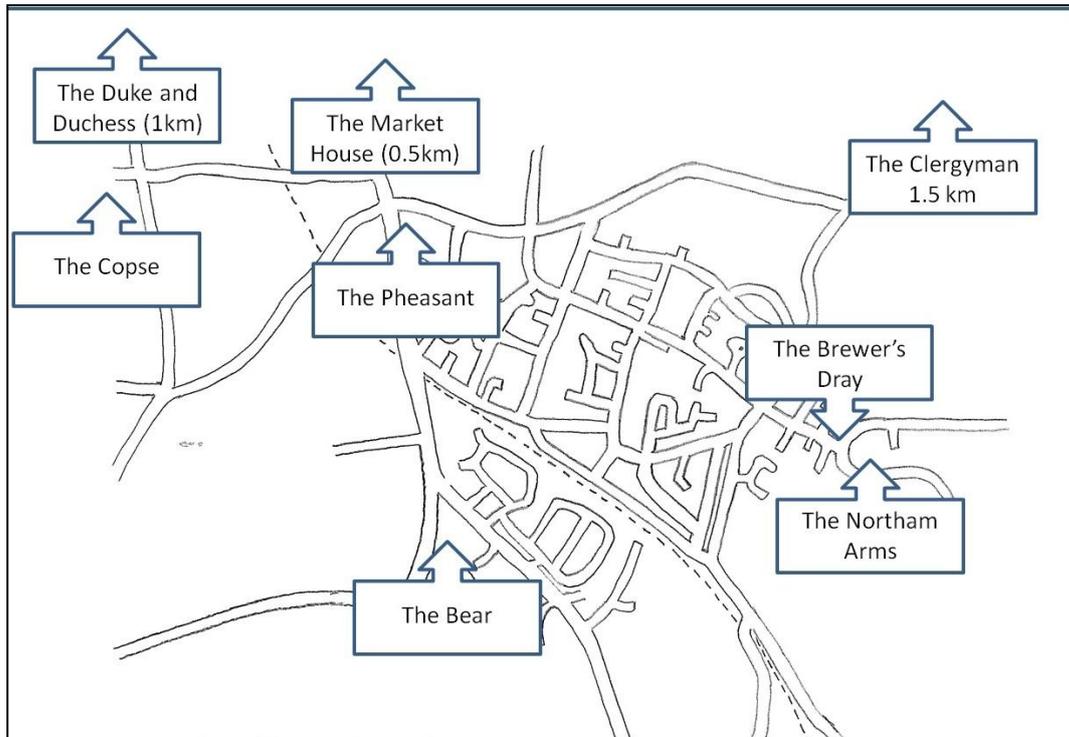
I felt a collision of worlds that I didn't want to happen ... I had, first, to drink myself silly to calm myself down, because I found it very, very disjointed in my life [because] the pub is a "different place" from others in his life – including his family setting and his work setting.

However, although this user recognises the pub as 'different place', the third placeness of the pub is somewhat obscured on further analysis; this individual actually did invite his work colleagues along to the pub, so perhaps the problem was more a clash of these other worlds (colleagues, family and friends) rather than a simple incursion of them into the pub. Spending time in pubs with colleagues or family outside of work hours is hardly aberrant, although it could be seen to somewhat complicate the idea of third place, as it is seen as an alternative to work or home. For example, this was strikingly apparent in the complex occupational circumstances of detectives frequenting pubs as a central part of their work-life (Hobbs (1988), illustrating the danger of over simplifying the role of pubs, as third places.

3.Materials and Methods

This study took an ethnographic approach, focusing on a single village, anonymised as Northam, in the North of England, with five pubs within the village and a number of others nearby (see figure 1).

Participant observation was conducted over approximately two years, supported by semi-structured interviews with publicans, staff and customers. This sample includes a



variety of different types of pub within a clearly delimited location presenting at least some of the contexts and challenges of a definable community; for example, the village includes pubs operated in different ways (managed, leased and tenanted premises; operated by large and small chains, focusing on different service styles, types and delivery of food). Thus, a broader picture of pub life was uncovered than research into a single chain or homogeneous pub type might achieve.

Figure 1. Northam Pubs

In addition to direct observation and informal interviews in the field, all the publicans/managers, except for one who declined, (seven in total) were interviewed formally, as were three other employees of different levels. A number of customers were also interviewed in two drop-in group interviews in two of the busier pubs. This involved the

fieldworkers occupying a part of the pub for an evening, with the publican's cooperation, and recording a series of interviews with customers, either individually or in small groups. The interview data were subjected to line-by-line analysis of textual transcriptions. Themes emerged from this process and the ethnographic analysis of the fieldworkers' reflective research notes.

3.1. The Research Context

The village of Northam has a population of approximately 5,000 and is undergoing considerable residential development, with plans for several hundred new homes. Despite rapid population increase over the last ten years, the local pubs face major economic challenges relating to rising rents and alcohol cost. Five pubs (the Northam Arms, the Brewer's Dray, the Pheasant, the Bear and the Copse) are situated within the village's boundaries, with an additional three within approximately one mile (the Clergyman, the Market house and the Duke and Duchess). The village is close to a major city, offering a quasi-rural lifestyle for commuters.

Participants described considerable changes to the village's pubs over recent years. Three pubs within the village have increased their emphasis on food sales, branding themselves as pub restaurants of different kinds, while the other two remain as traditional village pubs, with one offering some food. The three nearby pubs have also developed their food offerings considerably, although all retain some elements of a pub setting. Ownership patterns also influence operations, with five being managed houses within pub chains, one large national, one regional, one medium sized and one small, and three leased from pubcos by individual publicans. None are independently owned freehouses. The attitudes of publicans towards the pub business varied considerably from an angry desperation at perceived sectoral challenges and financial pressures, through resigned acceptance, to great

enthusiasm for the future. Changes in the local pub sector continue to be both fast moving and dramatic. During the fieldwork one pub actually closed down and is seeking a new tenant, another has redeveloped its approach to food and a third has reopened under new management, changing its emphasis to pub restaurant.

4.Results

4.1.The publicans

Participants were unanimous in claiming that pubs have an important role in local communities, although there were some apparent differences in emphasis. Publicans tended to stress tangible factors, while the customers were concerned with more abstract ideas. For example, when asked about the her pub's role Sharon, co-owner and manager, of the Copse, explained

we would like to be more involved with the local community. Given the position of the pub, though, that's quite hard because we're not at the centre of the village and there isn't a school nearby or a village hall or any of those kind of things. But we are quite open... you know, the mums from the local school have done a fund raising walk and we provided a lunch for them at the end of that, and all those kind of things; so we are involved as and when required really. It isn't something that we've actively pursued, I would say, over the last couple of years but it's definitely an avenue we will be going down in the future.

When asked about their role and contribution to the community, most of the other publicans would also focus on charitable activities, whether through financial donations, offering pub facilities for charitable or sporting organisations and organising teams for local events, such as an inter-pub tug-of-war competition.

Some publicans did move beyond the charitable aspect of pubs, they discussed some of the less tangible community functions. However, like Sharon, tended to assert that, although they would ideally like more involvement, it was not really feasible. This partly linked to a rather downbeat perception of pubs in general. Dave (Duke and Duchess) exemplified this when he claimed

Well if you're talking about the pub trade, as it was for the older man, I think it's well and truly finished and gone... the dynamics of the pub is changing. It's not so much the heart of the community any more, I don't know what is at the heart of the community any more, but it's certainly not the pub.

His view of this very much linked the drinking side of the pub business with community involvement, suggesting that a common shift towards pub dining is instrumental in diminishing this role as community 'heart', though he was not really clear about why. He did point out that the Duke and Duchess does still operate a 'tap room' which still has the appearance of a traditional drinking room with rustic furniture that was rarely set for dining. He seemed rather pleased that 'we still have a drinking culture in that side of the business'. Karl, Sharon's partner and group director, did explain that they 'try' to reserve a small area with a single table as a sort of pub-zone in the Copse, although this often became subsumed in the dining enterprise. Indeed, during field trips to the Copse, the table was rarely occupied by drinkers, normally being set for food service. Beyond the idea of such basic provision of public pub drinking space and charitable activities, community involvement was rarely easy to elucidate. For example, when asked whether community involvement is part of his job, Martin (Brewer's Dray) explained

I suppose it is really. I've never thought of it that way... I've always thought of it [pub work/management] as something I like doing, you know? I don't think I could ever do it by myself. You need the involvement of people in the area to make it work,

but it's something... I like being involved with. I suppose it makes me feel better... I think this industry's peaked out now and with a bashing by successive Governments and bits and pieces, I don't think... a lot of communities will survive really as pub community.

In a number of ways Sue was the most visible publican in the local community. Situated by a cross-road just outside the village, her 'Market House' was the busiest pub (with a thriving food business and local drinking clientele). She embodies a popular image of the local publican, often seen frequenting her competitor pubs. However, she was quick to point out at least one relevant change in the local pub business when she explained that

we're not landlords and landladies any more. We're actually managers. We're very rarely seen out front now really, you know, that's one of my bug bears for the job at the minute, is there's a hell of a lot more paperwork involved which keeps us... in the office a lot more than what we used to be.

It seemed striking that she could describe this situation so clearly, given her relatively high visibility in the community. The idea that pub managers spend more time occupied with paperwork does add another perspective to Smith's (1985,p.295) observations of a publican who was 'behind the bar less often than in front of it', socialising with his customers.

Similarly, Malcolm (Brewer's Dray) pointed out that pub jargon has changed and that, rather than landlord, landlady or publican, 'everybody nowadays is called DPSs, which is Designated Premises Supervisor. But I regard myself as a leaseholder or a landlord'.

Although seeming a rather minor, even pedantic, issue, such terminology could reinforce a key change in emphasis at organisational, sectoral and regulatory levels, suggesting an apparent shift in legal responsibility at employee level with the introduction of personal licenses (Licensing Act 2003) and larger pubs, such as the Pheasant, employ a number of

DPSs (licensed individuals). Employees such as Paul (the Pheasant) saw this as potentially advantageous personally as it qualifies them to move easily in management positions between pubs, while Malcolm was more concerned with another raft of regulation interfering with his job as a publican.

4.2. The customers

During one visit to the Bear, the researchers sat close to an older woman eating her lunch and were told later that she was a lunch-time regular; the staff knew that she lived alone and saw these visits as a means of escaping her house and spending an hour or so in company. This says more about the nature of pubs than most CSR and management reporting could.

Participating customers did demonstrate a rather different perspective to the publicans' when asked about the pub's community contribution, though they were not always very articulate in defining this. A recurring theme revolved around the general idea that 'it is important isn't it, in a village, to have a local [pub].' Within this theme, there was nostalgia for the past. A customer born-and-bred in Northham explained his view of the Brewer's Dray as

It's... centre of village. It really is. It's a community where people meet up and they'll take Mickey out of each other; or, if they've got a gripe, they'll sort their gripe out over it and you come out and meet people for a socialising drink. I just love the village. I am Northam born and bred, but they're [the pubs] all so quiet now.

A considerable number of the participants also explained that they had worked in a pub before, often one of those in the village itself. In addition to a useful form of employment and source of learning transferable skills (ALMR, 2006), this seemed to almost represent a rite of passage, often serving as an introduction to the norms and values of pubs in general. They told stories about early experiences working in or drinking in (often when legally under-age) pubs to illustrate perceived changes in pub culture, particularly those developments that they

disapproved of as illustrative of community lost (Wellman, 1979). Participants described what they perceived as a more flexible attitude to regulation enforcement in the past, especially regarding underage drinking in pubs, seeing this as an important part of the socialisation of young people. One customer explained that the

Landlord knew you weren't [of age]... I mean, Jesus, 14 year old, you were 14, and police used to drink in there as well, no problem. That's how you were sort of introduced into it if you like. Don't get me wrong, some lads used to go out other places and get wrecked, but in there, you would behave. The landlord were ex-RAF [Royal Air Force]; a big moustache. He wasn't after your money. He knew it were a social club. All the adults of the club went there which I suppose in them days were a lot of money... so it were just... as long as we were in that pub and the kids didn't go out wrecked, you know what I mean;?

His point was that such an attitude to young people drinking could encourage more responsible drinking as they were closely supervised and aware of their status. Although such accounts are likely to be coloured by nostalgia of questionable accuracy and a community lost ideology, they did highlight that participants perceived current regulation enforcement as overly rigid and encouraging young people to drink less responsibly when not being supervised by a paternalistic and strict publican. This frequently led to accounts of how community overlapped into the pub setting. There was still a fairly strong feeling of supportive and communal interaction within the pub that was hard to find elsewhere in the village. This also hinted at an informal economy, exemplified by two of the regulars.

Fred: We tend to know someone down the pub who can do something, you know, if someone's got a flat tyre or needs a plumber, I think you tend to know someone down the pub.

Karl: My mate Dave [a plumber] can, you know what I mean...

Fred: Our nephew is a mechanic...

In the same conversation, another saw this sort of interaction as reinforcing community thus: a 'village pub like this one, it's like community, why it's such a sort of close community, a sense of belonging and people come here talk shit for a few hours and go home'.

This line of thought reinforces the idea of the pub itself as a sort of community, not simply a social institution serving the village community. A number of participants did point out that they knew most of the customers they were likely to see in the pub. It did seem that the above plumber or mechanic would not be *learned about* in the pub so much as contacted there, reinforced by an existing mutual customer relationship and shared consumption experience. Such a pub community (as opposed to a community pub) is reinforced by a feeling of spontaneity and security. Whereas there is an expectation of security in the presence and behaviour of regular clientele, spontaneity in the form of unexpected customers and events is also the norm. This was especially helpful during the 'drop-in' interviews where a rich selection of participants, some regular some not, contributed to the research. For example, during the first group interview (Market House), a customer arrived and joined the conversation. The participants clearly knew each other quite well and when asked if they had arranged to meet they explained

John: No, we are not the sort of blokes who go out together. We go to the pub and whoever's there, we make a meal of. D'you know what I mean?

Peter: If they're there, certain people... I mean I come here of a Wednesday and met somebody who I hadn't seen for a long time and you get the full story of what's gone on with his life, you know? And he used to work for William Hill's [betting shops]; he's been made redundant, you know? He's going through a court case and all that. That's life in't it? You just listen to what they say it's, you know, that's what fuckin' life's about in' it?

There were many such examples of customers keeping in touch with people – some of whom they may not see outside of the pub environment.

This sort of informal sense of community seems closely linked to what John referred to as the ‘craic’ (roughly equating to informal conversation or patter) – he explained that ‘I’m not addicted to booze but I am addicted to craic you know?’ One of the rather revealing outcomes of the participant observation and the more ‘formal’ group interviews being held in the pubs during opening hours was a record of some such pub ‘craic’. Encouraging group-interviewee direction could lead to interviews diverging somewhat from the initial focus, often resulting in gossipy conversations between the customers illustrating this craic. Conversations meandered naturally and presented a certain convivial authenticity that perhaps illustrates pub life more than any formal interview could hope to achieve.

The informality of communication and what at least two participants referred to explicitly as ‘friends with a little *f*’ or ‘I say a mate, very little *m*’, did seem to be at least partly facilitated by publicans and/or capable barstaff. Echoing Sue’s earlier concern, the publican’s role and visibility was discussed. Joanne (Market Cross customer) complained about the management couple of another pub she frequented:

I think the landlord and landlady should be working behind the bar, I know they can't work all hours, but I think they should – because they are the landlord and landlady – certainly in my local pub, [they] come down at 9 o'clock and then wonder why the pub's empty, but I always thought that if you're running a pub, that the landlord or landlady should be, one or the other... behind the bar, to greet and meet and serve, it didn't happen any more, like it used to.

So, although recognising the increasing demands on publicans’ time for office work, she argued for their presence to act as host. She actually went on to claim that this particular

‘landlord and landlady are not behind that bar enough to know how to bloody serve. They can’t even serve a bloody drink’.

Flo (Horse and Dray customer), echoed this idea, although suggesting that such facilitation is often done in front of the bar explaining that a good publican she knew ‘used to go round the pub, talk to people, used to go to the tables, you know? “How you doing?”’ She also pointed out that it is challenging for new landlords to start working in a pub ‘landlords come into a new pub... cold turkey, so they were totally new behind the bar. They might know the job, but they didn't know the clientele, so they had to get used to that.’ She explained that certain groups of customers can become close to a new publican, because it is in their interest ‘to be good pals, if you like, get on the inside, with the landlord and landlady, because it was kudos, and I think that'll always go on’.

4.3. But is it a pub?

Although the purpose this paper was not to attempt to define and categorise the pub, it soon became clear that participants did attach some importance to such a definition, indeed there was considerable disagreement about what a pub actually is. Although most of the customer participants were dismissive of the more food oriented units as not being ‘proper’ pubs and the publicans themselves tended to agree that outlets such as the Pheasant were not really like, or trying to be like, traditional pubs, less focused discussion did highlight some enlightening perspectives. For example, Paul, (Pheasant assistant manager) described his experience of working there before and after a major change from large pub to buffet style pub-restaurant. Despite derogatory comments from pub interviewees, seeing it as a sort of impersonal fast-food restaurant, he described a working environment where he ‘noticed since May [when it changed] that the staff get to know the people a lot more’. He explained how he would now

go out shopping and I see, like, customers in Morrison's [supermarket] and things like that, and I stop and have a chat with them for about 20 minutes. Yeah, it can happen quite regularly, and it's like, as I say, it is a bit more of the older clientele as well for this place, so it is nice for them as well as us to have a chat and that sort of interaction and get to know them.

He explained this as the new style of service actually facilitated more interaction between staff and customers. Originally, customers had ordered food and drink at the main bar and spent most of their time at tables spread in a large seating area. Since the change, customers would choose their food in the buffet area interacting with kitchen staff and bar/waiting staff would serve drinks at the customers' table, maintaining a much higher and more supportive presence throughout the building. For this to encourage interaction requires an element of service informality, especially given the size of the building (the biggest pub in the village) that seemed to discourage informal chats at the bar between staff and customers – not least because no bar stools were provided either before or after this change (stools were often occupied by regular customers in the villages more informal public bars). Paul clearly valued his perceived enhanced relationship with the customers, commenting that 'well you just felt like robots a bit before, you know? You were only there for one purpose... and they'd just be waiting for you to finish, no talking, no coming over, anything like that'. It is probably important to point out that even before the most recent change, the customers saw it as restaurant like, though there were specific dining and non-dining areas in the established tradition of English pubs.

4.4. Political regulation

Participants, publicans and customers, had strong views on the regulation of pubs and often drew attention to apparently unintended consequences. For example, Jon (the Clergyman)

and Martin were both particularly outspoken about the Beer Orders of 1989, when, as discussed earlier, the Government limited the total number of pubs that a brewery could operate. Martin explained that this encouraged breweries to

sell beer to supermarkets at whatever price they wanted to, because they weren't responsible for the pubs any more, which they always were before. So they were very reluctant to sell beer to other people very, very quick because they knew they'd hit their own markets which doesn't come into it any more. Then of course, after the Mergers Committee have done this, they ended up with two major players, instead of six major players.

He asserted that, when attempting to prevent a 'monopoly' of six biggest breweries, the Government unintentionally facilitated an even less competitive (from pub tenants' perspective) 'monopoly' of two even bigger and more powerful organisations. Jon was particularly bitter about this situation. He saw these new Pubcos as unclear about the nature of their business, explaining 'as I say, they don't know whether to be landlords or publicans'; so, are they property managers (focusing on ground rents from tenants) or pub companies (focusing on pub customers). Neither of these publicans saw the old breweries as committed to a CSR ideal, but did assume they were more interested in a broader view of their pubs (and the pubs' tenants) as outlets for their primary product – beer. They perceive the pubco's sole focus on pubs' financial performance has led to greater challenges for individual publicans than the more beer-focused breweries.

Both publican and customer participants were also concerned with more visible examples of government interference, notably relating to liberalised opening hours and a ban on smoking in pubs. Certainly, these can both be linked to a socially responsible approach to health and safety (exemplifying Carroll's, 1991, legal responsibilities), in the former case, rather focused on customers, in the latter, more explicitly linked to employees.

Most participants discussed the smoking ban imposed by the Health Act (2006). Many stressed problems, suggesting that smokers are less likely to drink in pubs to avoid smoking outside in inclement weather. However, some interviewees did identify alternative viewpoints. For example, it was suggested that non-smokers may be encouraged to use pubs more – at least one participant was a non-smoker and she welcomed the smoke-free ambiance and lack of morning-after smell of stale smoke in her clothes and hair. She did also point out that she could feel isolated when her smoker acquaintances left her inside the bar, suggesting that the smoker ban ‘has divided community’ clearly dividing her friends into smokers and non-smokers. All the Northam pubs had improved their outside facilities providing some shelter, seating and even heating, something relatively unusual before, for smokers. This additional and/or improved space was seen by some as increasing the interaction opportunities to customers. A Brewer’s Dray customer pointed out that ‘there was different community [outside among the smokers]. There was a whole lot going on outside’.

This idea was also raised in the Market Cross. Two old friends, Joanne and John, were discussing the smoking ban (while using the smoking area themselves) and one asserted that ‘Smoking at the bar... when they stopped that, it killed the craic’, suggesting that people spent less time standing or sitting at the bar and talking. However, his friend Claire, argued the opposite, complaining that

you are wittering on about something and nothing. Now then, the people I have met through smoking right, now these people would sit in the pub every week and they wouldn't speak to you, never say hello, no nothing, because they'd sit there smoking in the pub. Once that stopped and they had to go on the smoking veranda, which is a lot more pleasant than this – you got talking to them and you just... I've become friends with so many – friends with a little 'f', if you understand what I mean – but it were just

unbelievable, I'd never think of going and sitting and talking to them when I was smoking in the pub.

So, her point is that they were more likely to talk to people, whether strangers or not, when smoking together in their designated area; he did agree that 'to be honest, you speak to more people [smokers] now because of this than you ever did before because anybody that comes out thinks they're lepers... it's a little phalanx that you form'. As if to reinforce this, a little later we were joined by some more smokers and actually spent most of the evening outside despite it being a rather cold night. On another occasion, a non-smoker explained that

sometimes they all go out and I'm sat by myself in the pub, and everyone's outside smoking. It has divided community. We've got two groups of friends really, and one group is smokers and they're quite funny because when we're out sometimes everyone goes out and I'm the only one left in, and then we're out like with your Mum and Dad, John's the only one who goes out to smoke and the rest of us stay in.

Another regulatory change mentioned by a number of participants was the move towards liberalisation of opening hours. In England this started in the 1980s when pubs were allowed to open all day (initially excepting Sunday afternoons) and was more recently taken further by the Licensing Act (2003), making 24 hour licenses possible. Although this might be expected to be welcomed by pub users and workers, there a number of concerns were raised during the study. A regular customer of the Copse claimed that

it's wrecked pubs. Pubs are open now all day long. They don't need... when I were 17, 18, 19 – when I was going into pubs – you'd be queuing up at 12 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, to get into the pub... You don't now, because they wrecked it just by opening pubs all day long. Can't afford to keep them open all day, can't afford to keep lighting them, heating them, when there's only half a dozen people in the pub... it's not viable. You can't do it, especially local pubs like this.

John also suggested another linked issue, claiming, in relation to the smoking ban, that the government has been ‘very clever how they've done it with pubs; they make the landlord the policeman. Liable. Policeman.’ Although on this occasion, this seems to relate more to an annoyance with this particular regulation, along the lines of ‘and *another* thing...’, it does raise a long debated issue associated with regulation and policing of licensed premises. For example, Kneale (1999,p.345) explored how the moral and regulatory supervision of pub customers influenced the design of internal pub spaces, especially during the nineteenth century, showing how police and publicans had a tentatively, though rarely synergistic, shared role in supervising customers, where the publican’s ‘casual conversation with the customers was also used to establish codes of behaviour and admonish transgressors’. Our data suggest that this is often perceived as an additional demand on publicans that can distract them from the core role of hospitable host.

5.Discussion

This paper raises the question whether institutionally objectified CSR could perhaps distract organisational members from potentially deep-seated and important functions of organisations as social institutions. In this particular case, the participant publicans did tend to focus initially on charitable activities when asked about their pubs’ community role, rather than the broader view of social benefits identified by customers. This perspective tends to relate to explicit, or objectified quantifiable contributions perhaps seen as public-relations worthy. However, customers rarely mentioned charity as a key part of community activities, being more likely to discuss broader ideas of sociability, exemplified by their accounts of pub life, keeping in touch and making new acquaintances.

Of course, this view may well seem unreasonable in potentially condemning management for attempting to objectify the organisation’s social responsibility, or indeed,

government for introducing legislation and regulation that has a similar impact. This is not our intention, rather, it is to point out that conceptualising, assessing, measuring and reporting organisationally responsible practice is challenging and can potentially distract from an organisation's wider social and community role. This is where the idea of the pub as a hospitable third place (Oldenburg 1999) can be useful. Paul's pleasure at interacting with his customers both inside and outside the workplace and his pride in seeing his pub become more hospitable, gives a strong message. This contrasts with the more instrumental CSR-oriented discourse of some of the other publicans. It is not particularly surprising to see a certain rehearsed view of organisational role and/or responsibility. However, it does seem to suggest a danger of over emphasising a 'company line' when exploring the nature of social role and responsibility if the result is to ignore less tangible contributions. It is unlikely that the local, old woman eating a special-offer lunch in the Bear and finding a measure of sociability that might be difficult to find in many other places in the village, is likely to be reported in the annual CSR report of the parent pubco.

A critical perspective of CSR could see this as potentially shifting attention away from the less tangible, yet potentially more significant, elements of community involvement, participation and contribution. Jones et al. (2006) clearly show the significance of organisational reporting when discussing pub companies' CSR reporting. Almost inevitably, if reporting an aspect of organisational performance, management is likely to seek something observable and measurable, such as donations to local charities or use of the premises for a cricket club meeting. So, it is not surprising that, when asked about their pubs and the community, most publicans, at least initially, responded in terms of charitable work, while their customers were more concerned with broader aspects of the pub's contribution and responsibility towards their community. Both perspectives can be conceptualised as philanthropic (Carroll, 1991) though with rather different emphasis. The former view

demonstrates a narrow view of philanthropy as a form of giving, popularised by wealthy philanthropists distributing their fortune to good causes, while the latter is rather broader. In Carroll's (1991,p.42) words, the former corporate philanthropists 'contribute resources to the community' while the latter, more vaguely, 'improve quality of [community] life'. It is not surprising that this is less easy to measure and report.

A Hospitality, or *hostipitality* lens (Lynch et al., 2001) seems helpful in exploring this idea further, especially in relation to Bolchazy's (1977) conceptualisation of hospitality, notably, the idea that offering *managed* hospitality could address the social challenges of stranger interaction and related avoidance, mistrust, fear and hostile reception. So, when such social intercourse becomes necessary, whether historically for inter-community dealings with traders, ambassadors etc (Bolchazy, 1977,p.4) or today between neighbours within a community like Northam, a relatively safe and predictable setting, such as offered by pubs, can facilitate meeting others whether complete strangers or partial strangers ('friends with a little *f*'). In this way, although Bolchazy's work was mainly focused on interactions with foreign strangers, his analysis is relevant to modern pub interactions. Customers often referred to meeting new people (strangers) in a relatively comfortable environment (or at least a safely convivial one in the case of smokers suffering uncomfortable weather conditions). If fellow customers are seen as partial strangers, the pub and publican can help foster a mutual understanding, acting as a psychologically comfortable and safe third place and socially responsible facilitator/ maintainer of the peace respectively. This adds a deeper level of importance to Sue's and Joanne's desire for publicans to spend more time with their customers. It also relates somewhat to John's irritation with the regulations requiring publicans to police what he saw as unnecessary and distracting matters such as controlling customer smoking, rather than hosting their customers and supervising social interaction. If customers increasingly perceive publicans as policing their behaviour on behalf of the

government, this seems likely to adversely impact on their other roles, especially of social facilitator and host. This additional socio-political dimension of the publican's role is only likely to add to the 'tensions and contradictions' (Lashley, 2000,p.15) of the commercialisation of hospitality that has been further exacerbated by ever increasing financialisation (Preece, 2008).

In addition to this, customers often referred to the narrow line between hostility and hospitality, with examples of hostility and avoidance on the part of both publicans (e.g., in banning customers for seemingly innocuous transgressions – 'taking the piss') and customers. Thus, the third place hospitableness of the pub is perhaps not just an escape from home and the alienation of work, but a place, if not neutral, at least where people expect the publican to supervise the informal norms of hospitality and an arena for meeting and learning about potentially hostile strangers or 'partial' friends. Although, an empowered workforce of capable and hospitable bar staff could provide a possible alternative for the informal host-facilitation-policing role of the publican, the introduction of further regulation, notably the use of personal licenses in the UK, can seem to be an attempt to further formalise and externalise employee responsibility regarding regulatory enforcement.

Taking Bolchazy's (1977) analysis a little further, understanding the hostility-hospitality relationship can be further enhanced by exploring the role of alcohol in pubs. It would be easy to focus on the intoxicant properties of alcohol as facilitating social interaction or indeed its potential contribution to the hostile tensions and even violence often associated with pubs to some extent. The idea that pubs and associated alcohol are to blame for such problems could be seen as rather simplistic; perhaps the convivial alcohol consumed in a pub with *hostipitality* (Lynch et al., 2011) facilitated and overseen by socially responsible publicans, could actually be interpreted more as a relatively secure community space than would be possible without the institution of the alcohol providing pub. The idea that

customers can drink themselves ‘silly’ (Watson and Watson, 2012,p.692) to deal with social discomfort and psychological tension certainly presents additional potential for conflict and hostility. Thus the duty of hospitality of human encounters and the sharing of intoxicants are potentially more challenging to manage (and also more important) than enforcement of politically defined ‘responsible drinking’ and/or operation of charitable activities. This also relates to the symbolic significance of alcohol and rituals associated with its shared consumption. Indeed, pub service of alcohol and rituals such as round buying could relate to a sort of ‘purification rite’ such as outlined by Bolchazy (1977,p.21) as being a defence mechanism against the stranger’s ‘magico-religious’ pollution or, more mundanely, fear of difference or misunderstood aspects of unsettling strangeness. Such a focus on alcohol does seem to be culturally constraining to a certain extent, although it would be useful to explore how far similar ideas of the hospitable third place could be transferred to other contexts. Certainly there often seems to be an intoxicant emphasis, such as coffee shops, hookah houses, Japanese tea drinking ceremonies, ritual smoking or more socially marginal crack houses, although how far this could be interpreted as a symbolic purification is not really clear and is worthy of further investigation. Similarly, although beyond the scope of this paper, the hospitality-hostility context of pubs could be explored further in the conflict often associated with the broader night-time economy, especially in more urban settings.

6.Conclusion

This paper engages with the complexity of organisational responsibility, highlighting some limitations of established ideas of CSR not least in relation to its measurement. The idea of hospitality and the socially constructed duties of the publican as host seem to offer an additional conceptualisation of responsibility, albeit a less explicit and reportable aspect of the phenomenon. Such a perspective could encourage a broader view of Carroll’s (1991,p.42)

‘philanthropic responsibilities’, combining the publican’s role/service related duties with a greater focus on the specific need to ‘improve quality of life’ within the community. For example, older customers’ accounts of working and drinking in pubs as a rite of passage suggest a social learning opportunity for young people, with the hospitable and paternalistic, but strict, publican and regular customers introducing them to responsible drinking and social interaction that could be lost if the ‘local’ pub closes in a particular community or neighbourhood, or indeed if pubs are segregated by age, social class or income level into cleverly targeted commercial operations. This idea was further reinforced by the perceptions of customers recalling relatively flexible enforcement of licensing laws (especially in relation to customer age) which could be seen as empowering the publican and facilitating this social learning through greater awareness of informal social responsibilities at a personal rather than an organisational, corporate or regulatory level. It is not clear how far such thinking is clouded with impressionistic and nostalgic yearning by these customers for an idealised ‘community lost’ (Wellman, 1979), or even an exaggeratedly romanticised notion of third-places of the past. However, this sort of analysis could help enrich the popular, if rather limited current view of philanthropy as rich individuals and corporations giving some of their fortune to good causes towards a wider philanthropic role or function of organisations such as pubs and individuals such as publicans.

Hospitality has long been associated with ethics and formal regulation (e.g., Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000). However, there is rather less discussion of the concept in relation to CSR. This does seem to link to differing conceptualisations of hospitality encouraged by its commercialisation (Lashley, 2000), commoditisation and increasing financialisation (Preece, 2008). Commercial organisations are somewhat, if understandably, distracted by the idea that hospitality and third place provision is part of a financial transaction rather than mutual reciprocation or principles of a mutually recognised law or duty of hospitality

(Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000,p.75). Thus, the hospitable function or responsibility of pubs, publicans and other hospitality providers seems somewhat obscured by less socially or communally significant factors, such as charitable activities. This is not to see charity as unimportant, rather to suggest that as an easily reportable activity with clear financial outcomes (for the charity supported), it could distract publicans and Pubcos from broader aspects of their potential and actual contributions as part of a socially responsible community institution.

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