

Hospitality in wild places.

Abstract

We contribute to the hospitality work research agenda by reconsidering the role of outdoor adventure guides as agents of hospitality, set against a conceptual backdrop of deepening ontological insecurity in industrialised societies. We argue that the concepts of dwelling, *communitas* and *hygge* have much to offer in the delivery of outdoor hospitality in general, and in outdoor adventure tourism scenarios in particular. Although originating from the Danes and their ideas of ‘cosy indoor life’, the concept of *hygge* has recently gained global attention in the debates around creating comfortable atmospheres at home, and in fostering people’s emotional well-being on holiday. Moving the concept along, we suggest the stimulation of *hygge* in the outdoors, along with provision of the space to dwell and the stage management of the communal effervescence of *communitas* as part of the crucial skill set for the outdoor guide. We opine that such conceptualisation can greatly inform our understanding of both the role of the outdoor guide and of the dynamics of deliverable hospitable experience more generally.

Keywords: hospitality, outdoor guiding, comfort, *hygge*, dwelling, *communitas*

1. Introduction

Hospitality research has thus far paid scant attention to adventure tourism and outdoor leisure in the last twenty years. Whilst terms such as adventure tourism, outdoor activities and outdoor experiences have been used to discuss the commercial and non-commercial engagement of human beings with the natural environment through physical activities, the dynamics of their hospitable delivery have remained underexplored. More recently, the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA hereafter) takes a wide view in defining adventure travel as ‘any trip that has two out of the following three aspects: physical activity, interaction with nature, and cultural learning or exchange’ (ATTA 2009). This broad definition seeks to encompass both dynamic and ever changing consumer needs and experiential aspects of adventure. The ‘new adventure consumers’, as illustrated in the UNWTO (2014) report on global adventure tourism, and the tourism trends reports from the ATTA, both point to a market that seeks deep, meaningful, ‘slow’ experiences, authentic in their engagement with culture, the arts, regional foods and local concerns.

Outdoor experiences are often categorised as one of a range of ‘adventurous’ activities where tourists behave proactively, co-creating the ‘product’ whilst negotiating alien environments, risk and uncertainty, often in the company of an expert guide. The notion of risk has attracted most attention in research on ‘fast’ adventure tourism, as tourists are viewed as seeking thrill and paradoxically at the same time its reasonable, consistent and safe management (Buckley 2012; Cater 2006; Varley 2006). However, although the adventure tourism product has traditionally been characterised specifically by high-risk, adrenaline-fueled adventure sport activities, it is important to acknowledge that the touristic appeal of being outdoors in nature is far broader than this. The term (adventure) relates to the experiences that extend beyond excitement, technical skills and flow experiences in outdoor sport and recreation. Until the relatively recent ‘slow turn’ in tourist studies, the wider experiential aspect of outdoor adventure activities has been somewhat overlooked in the discourses of commodified, packaged fast adventure and the apparent risks and thrills.

Likewise, the emergence of a group of Nordic and Northern scholars writing about outdoor experience, leisure and tourism in a deeply phenomenological way has shifted focus and therefore contributed to an increased awareness that there is more to the adventure tourist experience than simply seeking thrill, spectacular ‘scream-n-go’ experiences in the outdoors (Rantala, Valtonen and Markuksela 2011; Rokenes, Schumann and Rose, 2015; Valkonen, 2009; Varley and Semple 2015). It was thus as a response to the search for rush, speed and leisure activities with commodified thrill that Varley and Semple (2015) introduced the concept of ‘slow adventure’ with the focus on extension of time, comfort and convenience while pursuing journeys in the outdoors. The idea of ‘slow’ adventure is rooted in the Nordic philosophy of *friluftsliv* as the basic and simple activity of just being, or dwelling, in nature for extended periods of time, which allows for the generation of rich experiences, deep appreciation of and spiritual immersion in the natural environment and engagement in simple outdoor activities. Varley and Semple’s (2015) conceptual article suggests four critical elements of slow adventure: time, nature, passage and comfort. *Time* is manifested in a natural awareness of its passing during outdoor journeys; *nature* refers to the natural setting and our effortful access to it; *passage*, both physical and spiritual, is the navigation through time, space and the self; and *comfort* implies being at ease with the unusual challenges throughout the journey, and might include reconnection with the place, and even with ourselves and with others. In this analysis, however, we focus on one of these crucial critical dimension: comfort. We argue that the sense of existential comfort stems from Being, which

Heidegger (1993) called *Dasein*. He claimed it further extends to *Mitdesein*, the concept with which he explained humans' existential need for being-with others, in order to render their lives purposeful and meaningful. Therefore, we argue that the concept of 'hygge' and its antecedent 'communitas' is one way of conceptualising comfort as a mental, emotional and potentially *deliverable* construct and part of the soft-skills hospitality repertoire of the adventure guide.

The vast majority of late-modern tourists do not usually 'do' adventure on their own (Varley 2006). In fact, Varley (2006) argues that individuals in 'risk society' increasingly turn to experts in situations of uncertainty (including the apparently less predictable conditions of the great outdoors) in order, in part, to bolster ontological security (see Giddens 1990; Beck 1992). The work of Beck, Giddens and Lash, the 'risk society authors', extend dystopic Weberian visions of irrational rationality to the realm of uncontrollable and unknowable risks lurking in everyday life, framing them as a lowering cloud of concern leading to existential anxiety in late modern life, where such phenomena result in an obsession with predictability and its conceptual 'other'; danger. For this reason, the companies providing adventure activities often focus on the rational reduction of perceived risk by employing highly accredited guides with a bunch of 'tickets' – the colloquial term for outdoor qualifications at various levels (Varley 2006). Any move toward more immersive outdoor experiences in adventure tourism, however, suggests a need to move beyond the delivery of simply a physical activity involving stage-managed risk and excitement with quality-assured safety standards in place. Thus, the outdoor guides are central to the product, increasingly providing confidence, narrative, comfort and hospitality whilst leading groups of tourists in the outdoors. In this sense, an aspect of hospitality work in essence involves the temporary assuaging of existential anxiety (Giddens 1991) via the orchestration of ecstatic moments in which self mastery appears in conjunction with a merging of self and body in and part of nature. Being comfortable, confident and practically competent is therefore part of a process of becoming, rendered possible by the skills of service personnel. It is thus important that the professional hospitality of outdoor guides is considered in relation to the assertion that 'witness or togetherness should be taken as the ontological starting point of life in general and tourism in particular' (Veijola et al. 2014: 4).

This article therefore confronts the gap in tourism literature around adventure tourism work in suggesting that guides on multi-day tours perform highly complex hosting roles. We critically appraise applications of the concept of communitas and dwelling in tourism and

leisure, which usefully enable our understandings of humans' belonging to a place, and offer a conceptual extension, via the Danish cultural concept of *hygge*, as a social and environmental cultural phenomenon. The article asks the broad question of how the sense of temporary belonging and comfort might be achieved on guided adventure tours. In our suggesting that the guided outdoor adventures are in fact hospitality scenarios, we argue that the concept of hospitality is an appropriate point of departure for scholarly explorations of guiding practices as it ultimately prioritises the experiences and comfort of guests in any environment, built or natural; be it an outdoor home (a tent, a snow-hole, a ski lodge, a boat) or during any extended journey in the outdoors.

2. The concept of Hospitality

Hospitality is most often defined as a relationship between hosts and guests. In its broadest sense, the notion of hospitality creates an impression of openness, hosting and hospitableness, which prioritises the experiences of guests. Being a good host implies more than the simple provision of shelter, accommodation or food; it requires a genuine desire to make guests happy, compassion to please their needs and entertain them (Kearney and Semonovitch 2011). The host provides hospitality and accommodation and entertains the 'other' in their place, whatever that place might be: hotel, mountainside, Bedouin tent, ski hut, kayak or house; hosting is about sharing one's 'home-space'.

In order to be a good host, one must be unconditionally available to the guest. Commodified hosting, including adventure guiding, creates a similar imperative. This involves making one's resources, whether material, emotional, intellectual or spiritual, available for the other – up to 24 hours per day. In a similar vein, Telfer (2000) augments the emotional tone of home and draws on the special benefits which sharing can bring. This indicates that place is an 'inseparable element of hospitableness' (Telfer 2000: 40) and a 'space in which the reciprocal processes of exchange of generosity, kindness, bountifulness and friendliness occur' (Davidson and Geddie 1947: 442). Historically, the host had an obligation not only to provide a place for and assure the safety of their guests, but also to assure their comfort (King 1995). As Treanor (2011) suggests, the place where guests are admitted is comfortable, well worn, familiar, predictable and secure, and as such a space that is no longer alien. But it *is* alien. The guests are alienated, and sit on one side of an imaginary shop counter, paying for services. The alienating conditions of advanced capitalism, however, subtly mask the more

obvious inequalities in the relationship. Existential anxiety is therefore perhaps the nagging feeling of expert dependence, uncertainty and social discomfort hovering over the scene.

Much theoretical consideration of hospitality derives, not from tourism literature, but from the perspectives of the disciplines of theology (Nouwen 1975), philosophy (Derrida 2002; Telfer 2000, 1996), anthropology (Cole 2007; Selwyn 2000), social history (Walton 2000) and sociology (Ritzer 2007, 2004). For example, Nouwen (1975) discusses the spiritual aspects of hospitality defining it as a space in which strangers can enter freely and become friends. Similarly, Telfer (2000) suggests hopefully the spiritual essence transcending material provision, and points to the emotional importance of home and issues of reciprocity. From the anthropological perspective, Selwyn (2000) sees the significance of hospitality in the creation of political structures. However, in its inescapable, traditional sense, commercial hospitality implies a provision of services in order to make guests welcome and comfortable, which is aimed at extracting surplus monetary value for the service provider (Ashness and Lashley 1995). Thus, a host's hospitality, their welcome, attention and emotional involvement can be regarded as an inherent part of their paid work (Duncan et al. 2013).

Lashley's (2000) work distinguishes between three apparently independent domains in which hospitality activities occur: social, private and commercial. He illustrates how these domains overlap in what he terms 'hospitality experience' and argues that 'the ones in contact with guests need to be motivated and trained to deliver the guest experiences that create memorable moments which result in repeat visits and from which to build on customer loyalty' (Lashley 2000: 10). He goes on to refer to the technical term 'hospitality', and describes it as 'a cluster of service sector activities associated with the provision of food, drink and accommodation'. Early service providers adapted elements of domestic settings and created them in commercial venues (or offered their homes as commercial spaces) to provide guests with the sense of 'being at home' and facilitate their comfort. This commercially driven relationship with guests, (now 'customers'), is what falls under the broad category of both hospitality and adventure tourism industry. In this context, hospitality is a business practice where service providers seek to deliver high quality services to guests and thus gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Lynch 2005a, 2005b; Lynch and MacWhannell 2000; Sweeney and Lynch 2007; Teng 2011).

Ultimately, therefore, the aim of hospitality and, following the objectivist ontological logic of hospitality-as-product is thus to achieve the feel-good state of guests *as if* they were at home.

In recent years, the emotional dimensions of hospitality, and notions of ‘being at home’, the mundane welcome and communitarian encounters, have gained prominence in the hospitality research agenda (Lynch 2005a; Lynch 2017; Lugosi 2008) as concepts of home and away blur into the marginal categories of the hospitable homes of the bed and breakfast and Airbnb sectors. Moving away from the purely economic dimensions of commercial hospitality, McIntosh, Lynch and Sweeney (2010) and Lynch (2005a) have argued for a refocus on the emotional and social aspects of small commercial settings.

To summarise, in both its private and managed, commercial domains, tourism and hospitality experiences involve temporary sharing of space, time and often food while attempting to create intimacy, fellowship and comfort, nudging toward that elusive (and compromised) sense of belonging often associated with the home (Still 2011). So far, the focus of much academic research in the sphere of hospitality has been predominantly in the more obvious realm of hotels, bars, restaurants and resorts – and more recently ‘homes’. It is somewhat surprising, however, that the phenomenon has not attracted academic attention in adventure tourism contexts. In the latter, adventure guiding hospitality must be delivered against a backdrop of ever-changing weather, land- and sea-scapes as a dynamic, mobile skill performed in unpredictable natural settings.

3. Guides and the creation of hospitality in the outdoors

Decades ago, Cohen (1985) argued that guiding as a profession is constantly evolving and has shifted from the logistical aspect to the facilitation of experiences, with the communicative, interpretive component being the core of the professional role. More recently, Weiler and Black (2014) advocated that guides are undertaking a more-than-instrumental role (managing tour logistics), shifting towards playing multiple roles relating to the destinations, sustainability, mediation and experiential quality, being the key actors in the process of exoticising a destination, crafting and transcending positive emotions and augmenting visitors’ experiences through their interpretation. A guide’s role is thus arguably to encapsulate the essence of place (Pond 1993), to be the mediators between nature and its consumers, and to construct or make sense of their experience (Jennings and Weiler 2006). In addition, we argue for the recognition of another set of skills that goes beyond the objective standards of technical expertise; skills essential for the effective delivery of high value outdoor experiences. These skills amount to the host’s roles in creating the pleasant

atmosphere, *communitas* and dwelling possibilities at the heart of memorable outdoor experiences. A context-dependent understanding of hospitality in adventure scenarios thus recognises the requirements of guides to possess skills to facilitate tourists' emotional attachment to a place.

Adventure guides are the crux of the adventure travel experience, being enablers, trainers, interpreters, safe-guarders, but they are also increasingly performing as hosts and entertainers delivering care for tourists. For example, Carnicelli-Filho (2013: 193) suggests that adventure guides should be 'ambassadors of hospitality; hosts creating a comfortable environment for guests'. Similarly, Rantala (2010) argues that guides have developed new skills of hostessing to meet tourists' needs, building on Veijola and Jokinen's (2008) original concepts which address the phenomenon of 'feminine' skills in mobile work, in which the service actor's personality is an important factor in experiential product delivery. However, guiding in outdoor settings arguably differs from general guiding practices in that it is largely influenced by and dependent on fluid environmental conditions (Rantala et al 2011; Valkonen 2009). Natural environments are made accessible via the skills of the guide and interpreted with guests at the same time. Furthermore, the product extends way beyond providing clients with facts and figures, or the teaching of technical skills in recreational activities while pursuing adventurous journeys. Perhaps Valkonen (2009: 164) has it, as he opines that nature guiding is 'a combination of "traditional trailblazer" and modern customer service work', highlighting the social skills in delivering these services. The acquisition of hard skills (good rope handling, navigation, rescue skills) is a core part of the outdoor leadership training programmes, many of which often fall short in the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. For example, Easto and Warburton (2010: 27) in their market analysis report on adventure tourism in Scotland suggest that:

It is important to make a distinction between instruction and guiding in an adventure context. Scotland is endowed with a strong pool of well qualified and experienced instructors. However, the requirements of the adventure tourist are typically guided and experiential rather than instructional. There is an important blend of skills that are not taught as part of professional outdoor qualifications. An adventure guide should ideally have such skills, including good knowledge of the natural and cultural heritage, be an effective communicator (possibly including foreign languages) and possess a high level of emotional intelligence.

The soft-skill excellence of guides, beyond their technical proficiency to group management and hospitable services, has also been recognised by the ATTA (2014: 64):

A successful, responsible and safe adventure tourism operation requires a more expansive set of skills and processes than purely technical such as managing diverse groups of people or entertaining guests of different ages. However, due to difficulty in defining and scaling ‘softer’ skill education programmes; most regional, national and market-based training programmes focus on technical safety and environmental standards.

It seems clear that outdoor adventure tourism industry experts are appealing for a ‘softening’ of the skills applied delivering guiding services, placing an emphasis on customer needs and, although not yet articulated as such, delivering hospitality. As previously argued, outdoor adventure guides are required to be excellent hosts, ensuring world-class customer service in ever-changing climates, alien (for the clients) environments and simplified living conditions. They must facilitate the experiences of hospitality, homeliness and comfort, often being cook, coach, counsellor, interpreter, inspirer, friend and leader – on demand, 24 hours per day.

4. Dwelling, Communitas and Hygge

The sense of homeliness, belonging and comfort are the core qualities that have been most often woven into discussions around tourism and hospitality. The phenomenological proposition of *dwelling*, originally drawn from Heidegger’s ideas, usefully shifts scholarly attention to the importance of feelings of ‘being at home’ in both metaphorical and literal senses, in hospitality contexts, and particularly in the delivery of commodified adventure tourism experiences. For Heidegger (1993), being-in-the-world as a human being (*Dasein*) is accomplished through dwelling. He argues that the manner in which we dwell is the manner in which we are, in which we exist in the world. It involves immersion rather than mere physical presence in a space. The way in which humans are on this planet, is the way in which they think, they build, they *dwell*. To better illustrate this, Heidegger (1993: 350) extends the analogy of building: ‘We do not dwell because we have built, but we build because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers’. Dwelling in a metaphorical sense means ‘making oneself at home’. In this sense, ‘being at home’ implies getting back to our own nature, where there are no boundaries between society and nature, where humans are in harmony with their world (Ingold 1995, 2005). Indeed, Heidegger’s work has been criticised

for its arguably overly nostalgic celebration of simpler times when humankind's relationship with its natural origins was closer, and less problematic (Berthold-Bond, 1991). We acknowledge this potential criticism, but also view that very nostalgia as part and parcel of some key motivations driving tourism, including for example the romantic gaze (Urry, 2005), but also in part the existential anxiety and ontological insecurity driving the slow movements and aspects of adventure tourism in general (Varley and Semple 2015; Gelter, 2000).

Although the notion of dwelling initially did not refer to tourism or to hospitality, some authors such as Obrador-Pons (2013) and Sheller and Urry (2004) have built on this idea to conceptualise embodiment and describe bodily engagement with and immersion in the world through tourism practices. To Urry (2007), too, the sensual and corporeal dimensions are central to the mobilities agenda. Sheller and Urry (2004) later examined the playfulness of place, arguing that what makes places objects of desire is people's need to be elsewhere and to get immersed in another environment. They describe this process as an interplay between hosts and guests who 'enact' places. They further argued that the embodied practices require simplification of complex and different cultures, which, to better serve the needs of the visitors, are thus commodified. Obrador-Pons (2003) picked up Urry's claim that 'there are... a variety of ways of dwelling, but that once we move beyond that of land, almost all involve complex relationships between belongingness *and* travelling [...]. People can indeed be said to dwell in various mobilities' (2004: 157). Humans' need to dwell may be explained by their 'readiness to commit [...] to the experience of the moment (Hansen 1980: 36).

In discussing this mobile aspect of embodiment in tourism, Obrador-Pons (2003) draws on the metaphor of dwelling to articulate tourist practices as such, as *being* in the world, engaging and being-with a physical environment in order to create knowledge. His account is informed by Deleuzian post-structuralist debate, situating tourism phenomenologically within a fluid dwelling metaphor. He therefore contends that physical presence (of a tourist) in a certain space is not sufficient, but one needs to be bodily and mentally immersed in it. It is thus not enough, as a guide, to deliver the adventure tourist to a wild place. They must be helped to relax, and to engage, via disconnection and reconnection, with the place and with others. However, rather than adding pressure to the guides' already packed schedule, we argue here for guides to meld the hospitable role with those of 'doing' the camp, the journey, rest-times and fire-times. We therefore argue that guides have a role in stimulating and allowing *communitas*, which is the second concept used in this article to understand hospitality in the outdoors.

The concept of *communitas* refers to the feeling of equality, community and togetherness. The term was first coined by Turner (1969) and regards situations when people step out of their structural roles and obligations into a free and equal social space where the aforementioned ‘communal effervescence’ of level social interaction can arise. Both concepts of dwelling and *communitas* can help us to better understand the practices of hospitality outdoors taking the focus to the *being-in-the-world* as an embodied engagement with the environment outside the structural and accentuate non-representational everyday practices as the core of how humans construct the world (de Certeau 2000; Macnaghten and Urry 2000; Thrift 1999). Furthermore, the concept of *communitas* helps to better understand the development of community bonds between guides and participants of the outdoor trips that are in nature anti-structural as people can step out of their daily structural roles and obligations with the rules of everyday life possibly altered (Turner 1974). The occurrence of *communitas* has been previously recognised in the adventure tourism literature (Varley and Semple 2015; Sharpe 2005; Weber 2001; Arnould and Price 1993) as well as amongst hospitality scholarship in the proposition of *communitasque*, emotional encounters between hosts and guests (Lugosi 2008). It was also in some cases connected with the concept of ‘flow’ (Weber 2001; Csikszentmihalyi 1975). The state of flow is where self, self-awareness, behavior, and context form a singular experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). In this sense flow is the optimal experiences in people’s lives when joy and satisfaction arise or when people experience a ‘state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1997: 6). In an activity with multiple participants such as multi day commercial adventure trips the shared state of flow may create a bond among people and develop anti-structural relationships (Turner 1972). Moreover adventure trips potentially offer the perfect environment for *communitas* to develop as this is often seen as a temporary process whereby people bond with one another in the absence of clear everyday markers of status such as cars, brands, dress, and so forth, alongside recognition of newly valued qualities such as practical competence, fortitude etc. (McGinnis, Gentry and Gao 2008). *Communitas*, as extraordinary experience shared with other human beings (Arnould and Price 1993) on adventure trips may facilitate this process focusing also in the wellbeing of the participants. This is of course a somewhat utopic hope (see also Eade 1992 and Sallinow, 1981, Kontogeorgopoulos 2017) as the unfolding stories shared by guests may begin to allow hegemonic positions and cultural differences to emerge, and personalities to jar, particularly as group members tire, become hungry or more emotionally fragile. Paradoxically, and also worthy of critical consideration regarding any

consideration of commercial *communitas* is the difficult and potentially intrusive, deleterious role of the guide. They may emerge as overly controlling, too heroic, focusing on only certain group members, or simply being the natural focus of the group's attention, thereby compromising the natural fermentation conditions necessary for *communitas* to occur.

Nonetheless, this is potentially where the concept of *hygge* fits into the new conceptualisation of hospitality in adventure tourism scenarios. The concept of *hygge* from the Scandinavian literature (Howell and Sundberg 2015) focuses on the mobilisation of positive feelings about a place *and* the folk in it. It is the social construct connected to affective emotions linked to cosiness, relaxation and security. In this sense, *hygge*, *communitas*, and dwelling are the conceptual foundations for our understanding on how 'ideal-type' hospitality in the outdoors may be facilitated by adventure guides.

Hygge (pronounced as hoo-gah), emanates from the Old Norse concepts of wellbeing. It has been most often associated with Danes, who are self-proclaimed *hygge* fundamentalists, and is described as their 'national feeling' (Howell and Sundberg 2015) and a 'cultural keyword' (Levisen 2014). Knowing how to *hygger*¹, Danes are considered one of the world's happiest nations. However, Linnet (cited in Brits, 2016: 23) suggests that 'it makes sense that everyday experience and practice of something like *hygge* would not be reserved only for Scandinavians but shared with other societies'. Indeed, there are similar conceptualisations in other cultures as well, such as Japanese *Wabi-sabi*, German *Gemutlichkeit*, or Dutch *Gezelligheid* (Edberg 2016; cf Pennartz 1999). Its lengthy lexical explanation in the Oxford Dictionary, which adopted the term in late 2016, is that *hygge* is 'a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being (regarded as a defining characteristic of Danish culture)'.

One of the most common explanations is that *hygge*'s meaning refers to a safe environment with an emphasis on home, homeliness, and community membership (Howell and Sundberg 2015) and the *hyggelig* experience is that of comfort and joy. To Gullestad (2001) the term implies ideas of beauty, warmth, emotional closeness, feelings of solidarity and equality, and relaxation from work. Similarly, Hansen (1976: 54) describes it as 'a state of pleasant wellbeing and security, with a relaxed frame of mind and open enjoyment of the immediate situation in all its small pleasures'. It may seem that it takes so little to *hygger*, which

¹ There are two *hygge*-related verbs: non-reflexive *hygger* and a light reflexive *hygger sig*.

signifies a safe, low-key, intimate form of socialisation. For many people, the notion of having ‘a hyggelig time’ would refer to being with good friends or with one’s family or partner, having fun in an easy-going yet not overly exciting way (not a party, as such), talking and telling jokes in a relaxed manner, or perhaps watching a movie together or playing a board game. The home seems to be the most common setting for hygge, although social encounters in other locations can also easily be seen as hyggelig (Linnet 2011: 23).

However, it can be a rather fragile condition, and *hygge* is thus described as ‘a fickle guest that can quickly vanish when social interactions become too materialistic or status-orientated’ (Linnet 2011: 27). *Hygge* is about creating a pleasant, harmonious atmosphere (Brits 2016; Pennartz 1999), with an emphasis on illumination and light, in opposition to the long, dark Nordic winters (Bille 2015; Bille and Sorensen 2007). It is having a good time with other people, in a casual way, where egalitarianism takes place. As such, it fits well in the context of guided outdoor experiences, where informality, *communitas*, light and dark are often defining qualities, but it is co-created, fluid and somewhat unpredictable. However, to create a warm atmosphere, it is important to belong to a place, to be ‘anchored’ as Brits (2016: 29) would have it:

When we hygge, we feel firmly emplaced – anchored and present. We thrive on strong sense of place. Our souls are fed by the predictable rhythm of returning to settings that are comforting in their familiarity – a local coffee shop, a particular tree, an aunt’s quiet apartment, a regular swimming spot.

It is here that we begin to see some of the yearned-for ideals of hospitality and tourism emerging in this apparently unrelated context of outdoor living – and further linked to the earlier discussion on dwelling. It is said that *hygge* is shared with close friends and family in a familiar setting like home, but it does not necessarily need to be associated with the domestic environment (Bean 2011). The feeling of being in a cosy environment may also occur in touristic commercial settings that seek to involve consumers in the co-construction of hospitality (Lugosi 2007), such as coffee shops or offices for example. As Linnet (2011: 95) suggests, these places are ‘experienced as homey and authentic, often through the presence of close social ties among neighbourhood, guests and staff’. Homeliness is thus not only achieved in the private home; the sense of homeliness can be felt in tourism settings as well, and particularly in outdoor, *friluftsliv* contexts (Gelter 2000; Varley and Semple 2015)

the premise here is being cosy and comfortable, having the feeling of ‘being at home’, belonging and even dwelling in wild forests or rain-scoured shorelines, rather than being physically present in a built structure (Blunt and Dowling 2006). However, to revisit Obrador-Pons’ (2003) ideas, in order to dwell, physical presence is not sufficient. People need to interact with the physical and social environment, to be bodily and sensually immersed in the place and experientially engaged in the activities.

Finally, we argue that a holistic understanding of the hospitality practices in adventure tourism is not based only in dwelling and *communitas* as previously explored by the adventure tourism literature but in a triumvirate as presented in Figure 1. Following this, the next section explores the multiple ways the concept of *hygge* and *hyggelig* experiences can be applied to hospitable experience in the outdoors.

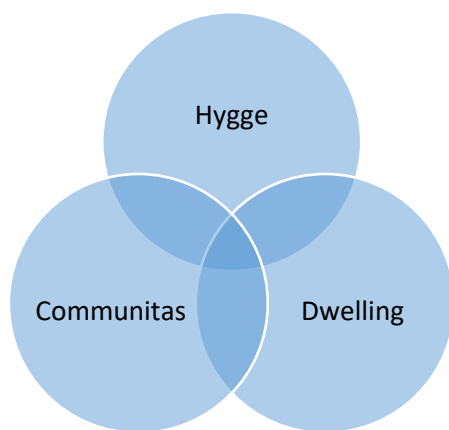


Figure 1: Conceptual Triumvirate: Hospitality in Adventure Tourism

5. Creating and Delivering Comfort in the Outdoors

While the notion of comfort and ‘being comfortable’ may at first glance seem naïve and straightforward, it has a rather complex and nuanced quality, which is manifested as ‘satisfaction with the relationship between one’s body and its immediate physical environment’ (Crowley 2003: ix). Broadly, comfort has been described variously as a corporeal sensibility (Bissell 2008), basic human need (Malinowski and Stamler 2002; Tutton and Seers 2004), personal (thermal) comfort (Chappells and Shove 2005) or physical or mental quality of slow adventure (Varley and Semple 2015).

Comfort is derived from the medieval French word *conforter/confort*, meaning physical and emotional support, which initially had a medical connotation (Crowley 2003). Providing

facilities for washing, clean clothes, a bed, a fire, and someone to serve these amenities were crucial elements of hospitality in this era. However, the physical meaning of comfort emerged in the 1700s as a consequence of discussions around the luxury/necessity dichotomy in relation to the economics of the marketplace, which consequently gave rise to the consumer revolution. Ever since, people have been willing to spend money on various ‘conveniences’, such as tea tables for example, which hold symbolic value and carry meanings associated with leisured socialisation. In addition, people increasingly seek convenience, security and comfort as a paradoxical yet inevitable intangible aspect of the purchased adventure tourism product (Varley 2006).

In this context, there have been two conceptualisations of comfort in the literature – physical/embodied and mental/spiritual. When speaking about physical comfort, the discussion often focuses on the absence of its ‘other’: discomfort. For example, adequate clothing provides the essential protection from the elements, and protects the body from suffering (blisters or frostbite) and therefore delivers relative comfort. Stargazing in the middle of a thick forest on a freezing winter night is an experience many might enjoy, however the barriers are often due to an inability or unwillingness to sacrifice the comforts of warmth, light and security many insist upon. This might sound at odds with the statement that one of the essences of adventure tourism is stepping out of one’s comfort zone (Easto and Warburton 2010). However, this does resonate with Varley and Semple’s (2015: 83) contention that a part of journeys in the wild ‘is the process of becoming comfortable with the challenges presented by the journey’.

Security, too, accounts for an aspect of comfort. Arnould and Price (1993: 31) in their seminal article ‘River Magic’ seem to identify comfort with safety:

Comfort and safety: Inexperienced customers articulate simple, general desires for safety: ‘knowing our daughter is safe’; ‘that I don’t drown’. Most fail to anticipate many factors that could affect their safety. Their concerns carry an undercurrent of fear of rafting—that this is something they might die doing. Such fears contribute to perception of the experience as extraordinary and set the stage for a rite of intensification that extends and renews the self.

Comfort is thus a state of mind. It is a distinctive characteristic of Nordic friluftsliv practitioners (the original slow adventurers) that, when spending time in wild places, they strive for ‘comfortable dwelling’ (Varley and Semple 2015), which is predicated on the fact

that nature *is* our home and humans *are* part of nature (Ingold 1995, 2005; Næss 1973). Bissell (2008: 1700) characterises comfort ‘as an aesthetic sensibility, a sensation of being-at-one with the immediate environment that might include the presence of others, together with a combination of memory and anticipation of specific events’. It might be that ontological security (Hyde and Olesen 2011; Kaaristo and Rhoden 2017; McCabe 2005; Quan and Wang 2004; Stone and Sharpley 2008; Stone 2012; Wickens 2002) can be achieved through the individual’s spiritual reconnection with nature, as well as sincere belonging to a certain social group, be it a family, sports team or a tourist group. Both dwelling and collective effervescence (Turner 1974) may thus trigger feelings of existential comfort as an affective sensibility that emerges from qualities such as belonging, cosiness, sharing, intimacy or togetherness. These qualities are found to be embodied in the concept of *hygge*, framed as an ultimate state of well-being in Danish society. Here, we claim that the concept may be one part of an adventure tourist’s journey toward dwelling in outdoor places and the bolstering of a sense of momentary ontological security, and that to some extent this can effectively be facilitated by guides in the outdoors.

Edberg (2016) recognised that being a good host is more than providing guests with food, drinks and accommodation, and that it entails the stimulation of feelings of mental wellbeing and comfort as well. The emphasis is on simplicity, togetherness, intimate spaces, atmosphere and stories that are told in small social circles and casual environments – perhaps around a fire, or with steaming mugs of tea shared in a tent, as the storm rages and the flysheet flaps. Borish (1991: 276) in his ethnography of Danish sociality explains:

Hygge as practiced by Danes has special characteristics. First, it depends on the complete and positive participation of all present in the encounter.... Second, it requires an evenness of flow, a sustained back-and-forth dance of involvement that encourages and even demands this level of participation. And third, the achievement of these goals is made possible by a range of positive social skills, including teasing (a national pastime), quick repartee, the telling of stories and jokes, patience, sensitivity, and the ability to be an enthusiastic audience as well as performer. The ability to participate easily in social encounters that bring this principle to life is a part of the Danish heritage that others can well regard with envy.

Hygge is determinedly a-political. It is a social ideal which strives for egalitarianism. The sense of togetherness, belonging, sharing and intimacy are qualities that govern the sense of

comfort and wellbeing in social encounters. Here we see the significant role of the ‘guide as non-guide’; able to meld into the group at times so that there is no ‘leader and followers’, but rather a temporary community of equals, sharing stories, feelings and dreams in the flickering light of the fire. In the consumer era, this might be further enhanced by inevitable *hyggelig* tangibles, props if you will, such as food and drink, cushions, candles, blankets, ceramic mugs or a fireplace. These objects do not only have a functional use, but also a symbolic value as they summon up feelings and emotions – of safety, of conviviality, of casualness, of informality. The importance of emotional stability and dwelling, which account for preconditions of ontological security, is further achieved through meaningful collective activities, undertaken at home or at work, in nature or elsewhere.

Likewise, slow adventure journeys include similar elements that account for their key components: cooking wild food, gathering around a campfire, telling stories, being relaxed and comfortable with where you are and with who you are in that moment. Meik Wiking (2016: 142), the author of *The Little Book of Hygge* and chief executive of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen, asserts that ‘while homes may be central station for *hygge*, it is definitely possible to have *hygge* outside the home. In fact, cabins, boats and the great outdoors are excellent places to experience *hygge*’. He provides a personal example of the importance of slowness and simplicity in the outdoors:

One summer I went camping with a group of friends along the Nissan River in Sweden. We were roasting chickens over the fire and they were slowly turning nice and golden. In the fire, you could hear the sizzling of the baking potatoes wrapped in foil. We have paddled a fair distance in the canoes that day, and now darkness was falling. The fire lit up the trees surrounding our camp with warm colours but, despite the light from the fire, you could still see the stars through the treetops. As we waited for the golden chickens to be ready, we drank whiskey out of coffee mugs. We were silent, tired, happy and it was pure *hygge*.

In outdoor settings, the experience of being or dwelling in nature is often enfolded in a social milieu. Without the companions Wiking paddled, cooked or shared whisky with, his slow journey would have had a different rhythm and resonance, but could still have been ‘*hygge*’. Harking back to the slow adventure concept, many adventure clients take ‘time out’ and value this as part of their peak experience, beyond the easy-to-retell stories of risk, danger and ‘extreme’ activity. Hunkered down on a wild river bank with a book, blanket and

headtorch can be *hygge*, too, as the comfortable feeling of immersion in the place settles with sounds of the water and smells of damp moss as background sensations. Human silence, therefore, can be as important as the warm babble of relaxed chatter but drifts conceptually toward the dwelling element, more than that of *communitas* and *hygge*. This is an important aspect of *hygge* to note, as the related concept of *communitas* is dependent on the communal effervescence of a group of people sharing their experience (or post-experience celebration).

Personal reflections, such as the ones that Wiking provides in his book offer insights into people's feelings, emotions and desires on their journeys in the outdoors. This is particularly important in the context of longer tours where guides play a core role in facilitating tourists' experiences by enabling or allowing *hyggelig* (hygge-like) moments to arise. Interaction between hosts and guests can be pivotal in creating memories and a sense of well-being. For example, in developing their ideas around slow adventure, Varley and Semple (2015: 26-27) have asserted that:

deep, unique and memorable experiences may be delivered by well trained, professional guides, who in addition to the hard skills of navigation, first aid, mountaineering or kayaking, must be well-versed in the soft skills of outdoor hospitality, emotional intelligence and facilitation.

Successful management of people's time, energy levels, comfort, interactions and happiness requires more than mere technical expertise. There is a need to develop such guiding skills, and hospitable soft skills in particular, that will enable delivery of high quality customer experiences and ensure world-class hospitality, eventually realising growth in this very particular tourism sector. For this reason, further explorations of the concept of an 'outdoor hospitality' skill set, hitherto largely unrecognised within tourism studies, may deepen our understanding of hospitalities in wild, outdoor places.

6. Conclusions

Adventure tourism today includes more than just high-adrenaline activities. Commercially, manifestations of slow(er) adventure are increasingly applied (Slow Adventure in Northern Territories 2016; The Slow Adventure 2016; Slow Adventure Company 2016), offering activities as simple as star gazing, open water swimming, wild camping, cooking foraged foods or even just outdoor living (see Varley and Semple 2015; de Jong and Varley 2017).

Many of these focus on simple things: the immediate mental and bodily sensations of the taste of the food or the feeling of immersion in open water; of being connected to nature, of being comfortable with being in-place in wilder regions; of *communitas* and comfort, at peace with one's self and with others. What is missing from all of this, however, is any analysis of the skills and tactics required to 'clear' the setting for *communitas*, dwelling and *hygge* – supporting ontological security, and giving permission for clients to be comfortably relaxed in these places, and with others. We suggest that the creation of great hospitality in these contexts, therefore, must follow two critical principles: firstly, fostering feelings of confidence whilst allowing guests time to dwell in nature, and secondly, attention to the small things that comprise hospitality in wild places; brewing coffee, the telling and hearing of stories, the stimulation of the senses, and care for all.

In this article we have confronted the gap in the literature around outdoor adventure tourism guiding and the growing recognition of the importance of existential engagement as a key tourism concept, by highlighting the importance of delivering comfort and hospitality on outdoor guided tours. We acknowledge both the industry and academic assertion that there is a need for 'softening' the guiding skills valued in outdoor adventure scenarios and thus argue that outdoor guides in effect provide hosting roles on multi-day guided tours. Technical enskilment is important, too, but this learning is part of a longitudinal process of, first, coping (technical), and secondly becoming comfortable whilst living outdoors .

Discussions around humans' belonging, *communitas*, and dwelling are deemed important to the debate around outdoor guiding as hospitable action, as the intrinsic human need to be absorbed to a place or a social circle becomes an increasingly important experiential aspect of adventure tourism. Tourism literature, particularly from the Nordic School, has shown that people tend to experience places and consume services in increasingly embodied, immersive ways, allowing the interplay of the senses in the pursuit of deeper, richer and higher quality experiences. Consequently, in our exploration of hospitality and the concept of dwelling, feelings such as comfort and belonging emerge as crucial qualities and as such readily align with concepts rooted in Scandinavian culture. The confluence of dwelling, hospitality, and *communitas* thus meet their apotheosis in *hygge*, a core Danish cultural concept.

Beyond outdoor adventure tourism, *hygge* may offer a richly malleable conceptual approach to consider the delivery of touristic experiences in general. The delivery of *hygge* in the great outdoors, where experiences are often framed as anti-modern, in-convenient, unmanaged and

uncomfortable, paradoxically allows tourists potential to engage with wilder spaces and natural places in *existential* comfort, arguably more in line with Heidegger's original ideals when he wrote about being and dwelling. The simplicity of facilitated, guided outdoor journeys and outdoor experiences provides for the rich appreciation of simple living requirements and may even prompt 'less is more' feelings in outdoor scenarios by, for example, pitching a tent in the woods, having a campfire under the starry sky and recalling memories or sharing simple stories with others. This perhaps echoes characteristics of many tourist experiences where, in vicarious encounters with so-called 'less developed' societies life is perceived as being lived more slowly, more richly. Sheltering from challenging weather, life simplicity, and the lack of the complex 'stuff' of late modernity all conspire to thicken the rich satisfying broth that is *hygge*: being-in, being with, and simply being in nature and with others.

Tourism and hospitality scholars have much to gain from closer investigations of *hygge*, and the settings, dispositions and performances which lead to its delivery and enjoyment. There are critical debates around the extent that *hygge*, like 'adventure' can deliberately be commodified or staged, and around the problem of the guide as some sort of emotional, ontological intermediary between passive urban consumer and 'nature'. Further possible criticisms of these conceptual forms may stem from issues of group size and trip duration. Whilst easier to effect on multi-day, small-group expeditions, how much *hygge* and *communitas* might arise during a large-group half-day mountain biking trip might depend on the time spent off the bike, rather than on it, and the opportunity to sit and reflect, jointly or alone in the woods. But 'time is money' and both clients and guides in such short-span activities expect to cut to the action, and then depart.

Nonetheless, it seems clear that the hitherto overlooked aspects of comfort, ontological security and *communitas* are important aspects of positive memorable tourist experiences in many settings. This is particularly so in the outdoors, where comfort is arguably harder to realise, and less expected. For hospitality, the wider applications of this concept could be beneficial, for example in servicescape design where brutal efficiency and the clean lines of rationality have expunged all vestiges of homeliness, even in places designed as hospitable spaces. The *hyggelig* feeling readily arises given a few simple props and cues: old, melting candles on a table top to gather round in a bar (rather than glaring light and a flat screen television to stare at); a crackling log fire in an hotel reception instead of marbled expanses and powerful architecture; stories stimulated by passing round memorabilia such as hunting

trophies, found natural artefacts or crafted products; the personal delivery of the menu's story, recipes and provenance; the empathetic skills of a guide, interpreter, sommelier or host. The warm embrace of people and place. People *in* place.

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