Emotional labour in the analysis of farm-based hospitality projects

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Abstract: While conventional analyses of farm-based hospitality upsides and downsides exist, the emotional labour requirements of such service-intensive activity are frequently overlooked. Ignoring this emotional component and its consequences (e.g., identity loss vs. reinforcement, emotional harmony) can explain project fates. By applying emotional labour to farm-based hospitality, we draw new insights. Farmers can benefit from guests' emotional support and become 'makers' rather than 'takers' of emotional rules. From a policy perspective, increasing the farmers' emotional literacy can facilitate a better match between their characteristics and agritourism projects.

Keywords: agritourism; diversification; emotional labour; farm-based hospitality; farmers; local markets.

1. Introduction

> *"There will be times when you will want to tell the person to get lost! But you have to be polite. If you can't keep control over your own feelings then you are not in the right business" (A farmer engaged in agritourism, quoted in Dupej, 2016).*

Farmers are encouraged to diversify in order to create new sources of income while improving sustainability. One such example is agritourism, which constitutes an important and profitable diversification strategy (Schilling et al., 2014). For instance, using data from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, Carpio et al. (2008) found that the average number of trips to farms demanded by American visitors is 10.3 trips per year with an average cost of $88 per trip. Most farm-based hospitality projects (e.g., bed & breakfast in the barn), work sharing, and direct sales to consumers on local markets or on-site shops are service-intensive (Lai et al., 2020; Skuras et al., 2007; Slee et al., 1997).

Nevertheless, most analyses of diversification projects in agriculture do not pay sufficient attention to the emotional labour component (Hochschild, 1983). This overlook can cause a mismatch between the farmer's characteristics and the project requirements. While emotional labour and emotion management have been extensively discussed (e.g., Brook, 2009; Grandey and Gabriel, 2015) notably in tourism and hospitality literatures (e.g., Lee and Ok, 2015; Simillidou et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020; Shagirbasha and Sivakumaran, 2021), applications and extensions to the agricultural sector are scarce (e.g., Dupej, 2016; Brandth and Haugen, 2006; Lai et al., 2020). Addressing this research gap is crucial given that most farm-based hospitality projects raise new emotional labour-related challenges that can determine their fates.

A deeper analysis also allows to advance promising insights that could enrich the emotional labour theory in various directions. In previous emotional labour studies, researchers attempted to categorize three occupational types for further theoretical and empirical potential: commercial service (e.g., hospitality), caring or human service (e.g., health care and social work), and social control (e.g., police and security) (Burch et al., 2013).

Not only do they face the challenges of economic efficiency and the expectations of standardized performance (Erickson and Stacey, 2013), each of them requires a distinctive set of emotional performance (e.g., friendliness for commercial service and empathy for caring service) and has to face different emotional labour outcomes (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002).

Several farm specificities (e.g., small and family business, gendered division of labour, tourism as a collateral activity, timing of on-farm activities) can lead to original insights. Let us emphasize at least three reasons that make emotional labour in farm-based hospitality especially insightful. First, the farm constitutes the *home* of the farmer and the *site of commercial activities* (Brandth and Haugen, 2012). This overlap, with the presence of guests, creates specific emotional challenges that have to be managed creatively. Indeed, the overlap between the farmer's private space and life and the presence of agritourists can generate difficult-to-manage situations. Second, the desire of authenticity and malleability of guests' emotional expectations offer to farmers an opportunity to shape these expectations. Farmers can become "makers" rather than "takers" of emotional expectations. Third, besides economic benefits, farm-based hospitality also frequently addresses the farmers' need for social ties, overcome farmers' isolation and make non-farm agents get a better understanding of farms (Annes and Bessière, 2018). Surprisingly, emotional labour could even play a therapeutic function for the involved farmers.

Given the considerations mentioned above, we posit that applying the emotional labour framework to farm-based hospitality is original and fruitful, makes sense, and can substantially enrich the conceptual apparatus of emotional labour. Indeed, some specificities of agritourism projects make them more vulnerable to emotional labour considerations than other hospitality occupations. Taking into account these frequently overlooked considerations can contribute to more successful agritourism projects by matching project emotional requirements with characteristics of farmers. Moreover, a better understanding of emotional labour requirements can help policymakers in charge of promoting and accompanying these projects. Moreover, this understanding can indirectly contribute to higher levels of job and life satisfaction among farmers.

Given our interest in exploring "what", "why", and "how" issues rather than "how many" or "how often" questions, our contribution is mainly conceptual (Whetten, 1989; Gilson and Goldberg, 2015; Vargo and Koskela-Huotari, 2020). We are interested in identifying and proposing new relationships between constructs. This conceptual stance and subsequent reasoning allow us to draw new insights on the design and management of agritourism projects. We use secondary data such as scholarly analyses, case studies and anecdotal evidence to illustrate and back up our reasoning.

After characterizing emotional labour in farm-based hospitality, we show that this extension is very fruitful. We also propose a bi-dimensional framework to analyze farm-based hospitality projects and draw several original implications, especially for agritourism promoters.

2. Emotional labour in farm-based hospitality

Emotional labour means "*the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value"* Hochschild, 1983, p.7). It shares similarities with cognitive or physical labour and is analogous to feelings commoditization in service settings (e.g., frontline employees in hotels, see Lee and Ok, 2015; Shagirbasha and Sivakumaran, 2021). Grandey and Gabriel (2015) distinguished three components of emotional labour: emotional requirements (i.e. the job's display rules), emotional regulation (i.e., the effort expended by the employee in trying to

meet the socioemotional demands of the job), and emotional performance (i.e., the observable expressions).

Farm guests have emotional expectations. Creating emotional well-being in guests can be very demanding and unusual, especially for farmers who were trained for other activities (e.g., crop production, breeding). These other activities are frequently performed in some isolation and do not require face-to-face interactions with guests. A female farmer stated: "*From the very first telephone talk with potential guests it is important to make them feel welcome to this place*." (Brandth and Haugen, 2016, p. 16; Dupej, 2016). Interestingly, agritourism is not (yet) a standardized activity and leaves space to co-construct what is emotionally expected (unlike other hospitality settings, see e.g. Lee and Ok, 2015). The rural harshness and the farm as the farmer's home is frequently used to delineate emotional expectations. The emotion regulation represents the farmers' efforts to satisfy guests' expectations. A farmer explained that "*it is quite exhausting to be a host. It is much more strenuous than to milk cows"* (Brandth and Haugen, 2016, p. 16). The emotion performance (deviance) is related to observable expressions that are (in)congruent with the agritourism emotional requirements.

Side effects occur when individuals display forced emotions leading to stress, exhaustion, and satisfaction decrease. If there is a high congruency between farmer's characteristics and the activity requirements (emotional harmony, identity supporting), emotional labour can deliver positive outcomes such as increased job and life satisfaction and intrinsic and financial rewards (e.g., tips) (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987).

When interacting with consumers, farmers are expected to display adequate positive emotions, like smiling or pleasure to discuss. Farmers can use three approaches to regulate their emotions in order to fulfil emotional display requirements, notably *surface acting* (showing an emotional display that does not correspond to the felt emotion), *deep acting* (regulating ones' emotions by aligning true and felt emotions with the emotions that must be displayed) and *genuine emotional labour* (the naturally felt emotion corresponds to the "display rules"). Farmers who enjoy emotional interactions can even transform a labour into a pleasure or a need. When displayed emotions are (in)congruent with the activity requirements, the performance is high(low).

Controlling one's emotions is effortful (Hochschild, 1983) and can even create inconsistencies. A farmer reported: "*You know the emotion part of it (...) People (…) want to buy carrots but they also want the story, you know? And they want the relationship (...) "I lost my health insurance", "I just got laid off", you get all these stories (...) I can't work the cash register here or at the market because I know too much about these people (…) Which is why it's great I hire other people who can take the money and I can just take their stories*" (Brachtenbach, 2016, p. 17). The emotional exhaustion of farmers can even deteriorate higher level evaluations, like personal or job satisfaction.

In emotional labour-intensive situation, an individual can act at his/her own level to shape emotional requirements. A farmer stated: "*People can't come to my home and be rude and get away with it. It's like people don't consider how their actions affect other people*" (Dupej, 2016, p. 203). The individual can also enjoy emotional labour support by family members, neighbours, volunteers or even guests. Farmers reported that hosting guests and receiving feedback "produce energy" (Brandth and Haugen, 2014).

Innovative arrangements (e.g., Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)) transform the relationship between farmers and consumers. Besides the commercial transaction, the guests' expectations are frequently motivated by relationship building.

Emotional literacy can equip farmers to understand and address emotional requirements of farm-based hospitality. Consumers can show their appreciation by giving a compliment, expressing support or gratitude. This support decreases the likelihood of

emotional exhaustion and can lead to replenish farmers' emotional resources. A farmer praised this support: "*The gift of receiving: thank you, (…) for connecting to our work through the food that we grow! And those intangible gifts, that emotional labour of listening, encouraging, (…), being a shoulder to cry on: this farm would not exist without you, dear community*." (Breckbill, 2017). Interestingly, the concept of meta-hospitality (i.e., temporary states of being that are different from rational manifestations of hospitality) introduced by Lugosi (2008) is well-adapted to analyse these situations where a shared emotional space is created between the farmer and his/her guests. This shared emotional experience can even perform a therapeutic function for the two parties.

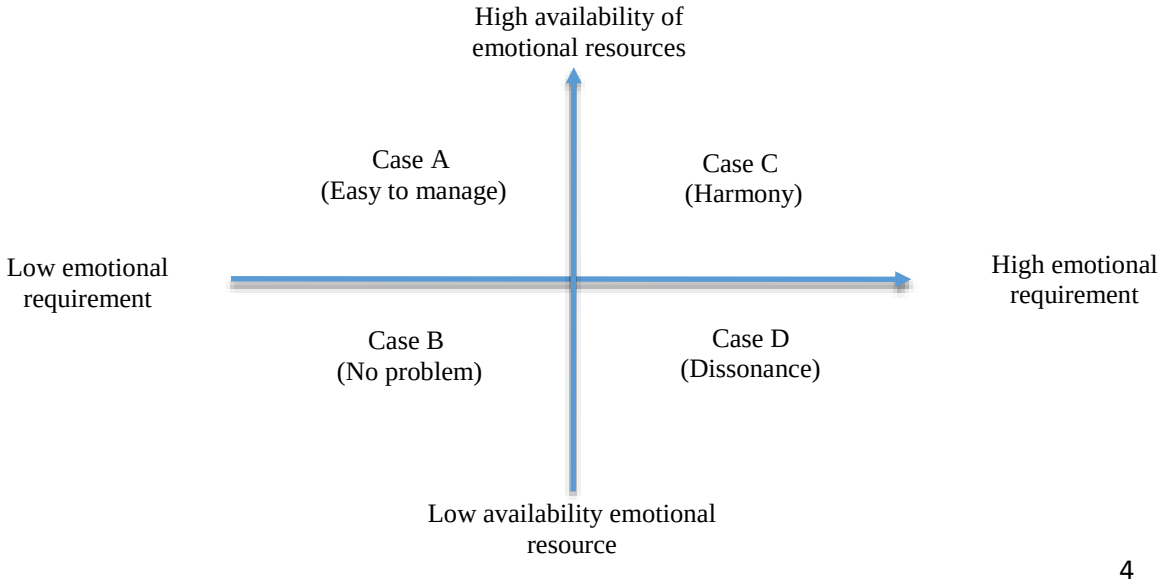
> Insight #1: The emotional dimension of farm-based hospitality is overlooked while it influences farmers' mental health and job satisfaction. We argue that the emotional labour strategy of farmers (e.g., surface versus deep acting versus genuine emotions) and its related outcomes (e.g., physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, quality of life) are affected by the servicescape, secondary nature of agritourism and social jetlag experienced by farmers. For instance, farmers are more likely to exhibit authentic emotions (although they can be sometimes negative) because the hospitality activity is collateral, performed in their homes, and respond to a guests' search for authenticity and a farmer's need for social bonds. Increasing farmers' emotional literacy, helping them to mobilize others' support, including guests can lead to the creation of a shared emotional experience and increase agritourism success.

3. A bi-dimensional framework to analyze farm-based hospitality projects

From a practical viewpoint, we characterize farm-based hospitality in a bi-dimensional framework (Figure 1), namely the level of emotional labour required and availability of emotional resources and support. Unlike other occupations, some farmers seek emotional labour and could self-select in agritourism projects.

Another perspective could be to consider the supply and demand of emotional labour. When there are low emotional expectations with low or high emotional availability, there are no issues (A and B). A good match combining high levels of emotional requirement and emotional availability makes the activity sustainable (C). The worst situation is the mismatch between a high level of emotional requirement and a low emotional availability (D), especially at times where usual agricultural activities are demanding (B&B during harvest).

Figure 1. Characterizing farm-related services in a bi-dimensional space



Beyond the traditional analysis of agritourism projects, we recommend an initial evaluation of the farmer's emotional resources and support to detect potential mismatches, by also considering the malleability degree of emotional expectations. All farmers are not created equal, especially regarding their ability to address emotional requirements. Self-evaluation of emotional resources and reference points (e.g., examples of similar farmers engaged in similar diversification projects) constitute a first step and can reveal an untapped potential or indicate a deadlock, allowing to discriminate among projects or generate propositions matching the farmer's situation.

Interestingly, Telfer (2000) distinguished hospitality and hospitableness on the basis of underlying motives of the host (e.g., ulterior motives versus pure joy of giving) and argued that becoming hospitable results from a genuine desire to care for and please others. Lashley (2015) advanced a mapping of motives along a continuum from the most calculative reasons to the most altruistic one. More precisely he described five mutually exclusive dimensions of hospitableness that are ulterior motives, containment, commercial, reciprocity, and altruism. Telfer and others (e.g., Blain and Lashley, 2014) proposed that some people have higher innate propensity for hospitableness and frequently choose to work in environments where they can welcome others. Blain and Lashley (2014) developed a suite of questions designed to measure these qualities in individuals, that can help to identify hospitable farmers and facilitate the match between farmers and agritourism projects.

> Insight #2: Considering the match between the project emotional requirements and farmers' emotional resources and motives could avoid predictable failures. Because of the organization of agricultural activities (e.g., small family business) and their social jetlag (e.g., the farmers' isolation and need for social ties), some farmers have an emotional untapped potential and propensity for hospitableness that can elicit farm-based hospitality projects that were not initially considered.

Moreover, the emotional dimension is not fixed once and for all. It evolves over time though recurrent contacts. As showed by Harness et al. (2020) in a different context, emotional labour can be interpreted as a "temporally rooted accomplishment that is continuously adapted with each encounter". Consequently, farmers can learn and refine skills over time to read and react to particular interactional situations, creating relational trajectories.

4. Implications and conclusion

Ignoring the emotional dimension of agritourism activities is detrimental. Helping farmers to realize what these seemingly trivial costs really represent can lead to agritourism projects that match their emotional resources.

Making *emotional considerations more visible* at appropriate steps is crucial. Candidate farmers can participate in small-scale trials where they experience emotional labour in real-time activities and anticipate its multidimensional effects. This preparation can include redirection towards more relevant projects, emotional training, restorative practices (Buckley, 2020), social sharing and other activities that could replenish the emotional resources.

Regarding display rules, farmers can behave as rule-makers rather than rule-takers, by developing realistic expectations among guests. Lai et al. (2020, p. 1980) provide evidence that organic farmers seek to shape guests' emotional expectations, as exemplified in the following quote: "*I won't be nicer to WWOOFers*[1] *[volunteer guests] just because they offer*

[1] WWOOF: World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms.

free labour … I get up at 5 am and start working before 6 am, and I expect everyone to do so. They eat whatever a farm family eats… This is what I mean by sharing."[2] In some cases, a low emotional effort can even indicate a kind of authenticity, allowing the concerned farmers to match guests' expectations with their authentic emotional display. Within reasonable limits this low effort can be attributed to harsh realities, the traditional rural life and be experienced without disturbing guests. This strategy echoes endeavours to educate tourists to make them supporting the 'emotional labourers'.

To make justice to this issue, it is also important to stress that some 'guests' are not really wanted and can be treated in an inhospitable fashion. Typical examples of these 'unwanted guests' in farms could be discriminated minorities, asylum seekers, refugees or some foreigners (Lynch et al., 2011). In some situations, a causal ambiguity can arise on the real reasons behind an observable outcome, such as a booking refusal or a low level of emotional effort.

> Insight #3: Increasing the visibility of emotional considerations at key steps helps farmers developing or shaping farm-based hospitality activities corresponding to their characteristics and contexts. Because the not yet standardized nature of hospitality activities in a farm context and the guests' desire of authenticity, farmers can play the role of rule makers by shaping guests' emotional requirements. Farmers can act as emotional entrepreneurs. In some circumstances, they can also instrumentalize a causal ambiguity to hide the true reasons of (in)hospitality.

The Covid-19 pandemics increased online interactions and zero-contact relations that could make emotional labour going unnoticed and unrewarded. Our analysis is a vibrant call to encourage a deeper examination of the emotional labour performed by farmers and its consequences, notably in terms of job satisfaction, subjective wellbeing, and sustainability.

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[2] Interestingly, Kosnik (2014) has examined host-guest relationships in a non-commercial work-exchange context (WWOOF) and suggested that this dichotomy (host versus guest) can disappear when production and consumption roles become blurred.

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