Farm tourism and dilemmas of commercial activity in the home

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Abstract

This article aims to analyse the overlap between work and home in farm tourism. When farmers diversify their production into tourism using their homes as a commercial arena for hosting visitors, new challenges regarding boundaries between private and public, home and work arise. The article shows how central aspects of hosting involve inherent dilemmas between the farm as a home and as a site of commercial activities. Moreover, it shows how the boundaries between work and home are managed in order to balance business and a sense of home. Such boundary work consists of attempts at adjusting the product, marking rules and creating separate spaces for home and work, something that produces a more conditional hospitality. The analysis is based on studies of twenty family farms from various districts in Norway. Some of the farms combine tourism and farming while others have altered their production to tourism only. The material includes formal interviews with sixteen women and nineteen men operating the businesses.

Keywords

commercial homes

farm tourism

conditional hospitality

boundary work

host–guest relations

emotional work

Introduction

Family farming is a type of industry where home and work have historically occurred at the same location. Using their homes as a commercial arena for a completely different type of work than conventional farming, is, however, a form of dual location that may lead to new challenges regarding questions of private and public, home and work. Hosting visitors on the farm means commercialization of the home where the products draw on ideas of country hospitality and connotations of the authentic farm homestead. The farm as a location where hospitality work and home meet has been scarcely researched.

Generally speaking, in selling farming, its places, people and practices, as tourist attractions, farm tourism trades on the positive connotations of the rural idyll. This is the dominant social representation of the countryside stressing its positive characteristics (Bunce 2003; Bell 2006; Short 2006; Horton 2008; Baylina and Berg 2010). The idyll is often a reminder of a past, 'usually a golden past that was lost in the rush to modernity' (Bell 2006: 152) and where the household was a centre of activity. David Bell (2006: 149) describes the elements of this idyll as consisting of qualities such as a remote farm and a wild landscape, a simple life that is safe, gentle and rustic, with animals, peace and quiet, community, domesticity, traditional and pure foods. What constitutes an idyll is culturally and historically variable, although Baylina Mireia and Berg Nina G. (2010) point out that the abstract idea of the rural idyll is quite general and placeless. Such ideal–typical idylls all go into the business of producing holidays in the countryside – the

packaging of local places as tourist attractions. Urban – rural differences are often

accentuated by employing images of countryside ideals (Hopkins 1998) where the home

is an important element.

Tourist studies have made a fairly recent move towards a culturally aware research

agenda (Tribe 2005). An increased interest in farm tourism, which is a search for unique,

authentic and individual travel experiences often operates in contrast to mass tourism

(Blekesaune et al. 2010). The new kinds of tourists, the 'post-(mass) tourists' (Urry

1990), are those who avoid crowds and instead search for experiences that are distinct

and authentic elements of local life. Tourism is premised upon differentiation; it 'takes

dreams and myths and inscribes them on to places' (Crang 2004: 76). Through their ideas

and performances, the post-tourists participate in (rural) place making, and the industry

makes serious effort to meet what it thinks tourists want (Skavhaug and Brandth 2012).

Thus, place-meanings – including the meaning of the home, are co-created by tourist

hosts and guests through negotiation and sometimes through conflict.

In this study we are interested in the hosts of farm tourism, and their lived host(ess)ing

experiences. The perspective is on the qualitative nature and the subjective experience of

the hosts. Our intention is to analyse how commercial hospitality is experienced and done

in the rural setting of a farm home.

Interactive service work and the commercial home

Research engaging in rural and farm tourism has addressed a whole range of issues.

Within the wider context of rural development, considerable attention has been given to

its potential for growth and its impact on rural communities and natural resources

(Sharpley and Sharpley 1997; Frochot 2005; Garrod et al. 2006). Farm- or agritourism is

more limited in scope but has likewise had as its point of departure the decline of farming

and the need for farm families to find new and additional sources of income in order to

preserve the family farm (Hjalager 1996). Prevalent themes in the literature are aspects of

small and family business development, entrepreneurship and innovation. A few studies

of innovation in the area have pointed to the importance of the family and local networks

in this reorientation (Brandth et al. 2010; Schmitt 2010). Moreover, research has studied

motivations for agri-tourism entrepreneurship (Nickerson et al. 2001; McGehee and Kim

2004; McGehee et al. 2005, 2007; Haugen and Vik 2008). One finding is that farm

women have a higher, but not very different motivation than men (McGehee et al. 2007),

and that they consider hosting to provide positive work satisfaction and economic

independence (Sharpley and Vass 2006). On the negative side, Richard Sharpley and

Adrian Vass (2006) point to them having their private life intruded. In many countries,

farm-based tourism business seems to be run by women (Garcia-Ramon et al. 1995;

Sharpley and Vass 2006; Jennings and Stehlik 2009); however, in Berit Brandth and

Marit S. Haugen's (2007, 2010) study from Norway, the farm tourist business was very

much a joint project with both husband and wife involved in the business, and with new

identities that represented a reinterpretation of the 'discourse of the family farm' (Brandth

2002). The farm tourism literature has only to a very small extent discussed issues of

hospitality, service provision and conflicts of private/public distinctions. In this article we
draw on literature on service work (Hochschild 1983, 1997; Forseth 2005a, 2005b) and
commercial homes (Lynch 2005a, 2005b; Di Domenico and Lynch 2007; Lynch et al.
2009; Seymour 2007).

Service work has been termed 'interactive work' as it involves a service exchange
between employees and customers (Leidner 1993). Since tourist hosting implies relating
to and interacting with customers, it has much in common with front line service work.
Research on front line service work has stressed the importance of the triangle between
the employer, worker and customer. Ulla Forseth (2005a, 2005b) has pointed out that
while each party within the triangle is dependent upon the other, all have conflicting as
well as complementary interests. In farm tourism the triangle is absent. The farm tourist
hosts are both owner-managers and workers. In opening their homes for commercial
hospitality, it is the hosts who 'police the conditions by which the front door remains
open or closed' (Molz and Gibson 2007: 12). It may be especially challenging that the
farm tourist hosts are their own bosses while at the same time operate as service workers.
Moreover, in service work it is often the customers who are perceived as the bosses. This
means that the hosts need to handle the dilemmas of these various roles in situations
when they are interacting with customers.

In his article on tourism employment, Philip Crang (1997) stresses the distinctiveness of
tourism-related work. One of them is the importance of 'the socially constructed meaning

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of the setting in which tourism product provision takes place' (Crang 1997: 143) – in our case the farm/home. Moreover, tourism products are largely intangible and experiential, being about creating a special experience for the visitor. A further important distinctiveness lies in the encounter between the tourist host and the tourist. Customers act as co-producers, and the quality of the product depends on the quality of the interaction (Crang 1997: 139). On the farms in this study, the interaction takes place between the guests and a host family serving the guests on the premises where they themselves live, and thus where the space is shared. These characteristics influence the interaction.

Increasingly, employees in front line service work have been instructed to do 'emotional labour' (Knights and Thanem 2005), and ever since Arlie R. Hochschild (1983) introduced the concept, it has been central in research on interactive service work as it is used to capture people's attempt to create interactional quality and manage the emotional climate within relationships (Forseth 2005). In tourist hosting, work performances typically deal with managing emotions, and the importance of the home setting in the hospitality product construction draws attention to the hosts' emotional engagement in their work. In smaller organizations workers may provide emotional well-being as a 'gift' to customers (Bolton 2005).

Erika A. Cederholm and Johan Hultman (2010) describe how intimacy has become a commercial value in the hospitality industry. This leads to a need to create boundaries to

avoid tensions between intimacy and distance in the interaction between hosts and guests. Since the intensity of interaction between hosts and guests is high, we are interested in how the hosts manage these distinctions. How do they mark boundaries between work and leisure, public and private space, authenticity and staging?

The literature describes several attributes of commercial homes, three of which are important in our context: the meaning of the private home, that of living on the premises where commercial hosting takes place, and sharing the domestic space that thus becomes public (Lynch et al. 2009). Home is commonly understood as a space of security, intimacy and reproduction free from public scrutiny and free from the stresses and strains of working life. There are strong connotations between home and the familial and domestic. The service provided within the home, is usually provided out of love (Borchgrevink and Holter 1995). However, the home is an equivocal symbol and according to Marianne Gullestad (1992: 79) it 'is a rich, flexible and ambiguous symbol […]' Moreover, home is integrally bound up with identity and self. In other words, it is very emotive and charged with meaning (Lynch et al. 2009). 'Emotional tourism' has emerged as a new term, describing a hybrid form of tourism where the tourist seeks the experience of emotional relationships with other human beings (Bialski 2006). Allison J. McIntosh et al. (2011) sees commercial homes as providers of a form of emotional tourism.

It has been pointed out that opening up the home to commercial activity will disturb the meaning of the home. Paul A. Lynch et al. (2009: 11) claim that it is inevitable that the commercial home disrupts the home as a 'private place that people can retreat to and relax in'. The term commercial home is paradoxical, combining two different worlds, that of commerce and that of home/privacy. In short, boundaries between work and home tend to become blurred (Di Domenico and Lynch 2007). This is, according to Soile Veijola and Ewa Jokinen (2008), one of the characteristics of contemporary work where host(ess)ing has become a grounding principle, and where tourism is a prime example of how the 'new economy' meets private, personal life.

Commercial homes may challenge many of the binary distinctions, for instance between commodification and authenticity, public and private, commercial and non-commercial activity and spaces (Lynch et al. 2009: 14).

In this article we are particularly interested in the boundary question in commercial homes that operate as farm tourist enterprises. How does the relationship between hosts and guests trigger boundaries and disclose dilemmas, and how are these dilemmas managed? First, it deals with the production of the commercial farm home as a rural idyll. Second, it deals with the dilemmas between being personal and professional, between intimacy and distance, between the farm as a home and as a site of commercial activities. Lastly, it asks how are the boundaries between work and home handled in order to balance business and a sense of home?

Data and method

Research for this article was conducted during fieldwork undertaken from 2005 until

2008 in a study of farm-based tourism in Norway. The main objective of the study was to

identify farm hosts and how they operated their businesses. In order to achieve these

objectives, we conducted both surveys and ethnographically inspired interviews in the

field. This present article is solely based on the qualitative data, something that has been

called for in hospitality research (Lynch 2005a). Altogether twenty family farm tourist

businesses from various districts in Norway were visited and farm couples interviewed.

We selected most of the sample from catalogue marketing farm tourism businesses (see

HANEN 2012). For each business the catalogue contains picture, contact information and

a short description in Norwegian, English and German of its characteristics and what it

has to offer visitors. The companies represented in the catalogue use the village and farm

resources as a basis for their products. For our study, we selected farm tourism businesses

that offered accommodation and were distinctly family based. In the sampling process we

sought additional information about the businesses from their homepages. In addition, we

relied on our networks and own knowledge of possible cases for sampling. Our main

criteria were that the enterprises had small-scale tourism activities based on a family farm

that was run by the farm couple who had themselves experienced the transition to

tourism.

This sample represents variants of commercial homes, defined by Lynch:

> 'Commercial home' refers to types of accommodation where visitors or guests pay to stay in private homes, where interaction takes place with a host and/or family usually living upon the premises and with whom public space is, to a degree, shared. (2005b: 534)

All the businesses in our sample had been engaged in farm tourism for periods of between three and 23 years, and over the years they had changed concerning the use of the physical spaces within the home, the use of the buildings, the farm-yard and garden. While many started out accommodating visitors in their own living quarters, separation between the spheres seemed to have increased as time passed. At the time of the interview, none of the hosts in our sample accommodated guests in their private living quarters, but in other spare buildings on the farm, for instance the renovated barn, stable, storehouses, cottages and house where the retired farmer used to live. Old farms in Norway consist of many buildings – often one separate building for each function. Many have a fairly newly built house that the family lives in, while the old houses are used for tourists.

Two of the businesses in our sample did wilderness tourism and had special campsites for the visitors. One of them, however, was in the process of rebuilding the barn to start a spa, something that meant bringing visitors to the location of the farm yard. The other stressed the importance of showing the guests how they lived and used the natural resources in their household – in other words, how their family practices relied on the

natural surroundings. The hosts on both of these farms did their administrative work in one of the farm buildings making them into dual purpose locations. The private space was breached by business telephone calls, guests and suppliers. In these ways, the farms studied are variants of the commercial home phenomenon as the physical separation of the commercial guest accommodation and the hosts' homes varies. Consequently, in this study, the term 'home' is given a wider meaning than the premises where the host families live. The home comprises the farm space with its various buildings and garden; in short, the property in which the hosts are emotionally engaged.

Ten of the businesses in the sample combined a working farm with tourism, while ten had renounced traditional farm production after having started farm-based tourism. The farms that are still in operation produce meat, milk and grain. Only two of the working farms offered farm related activities to the guests. To engage visitors in the activities of a modern farm is something that seems to be rare in contemporary farm tourism (Sharpley and Vass 2006; Skavhaug and Brandth 2012). The majority of cases had seasonal opening with summer being the peak season. The farms offer a diversified range of tourist products, adapted to various groups of customers. Accommodation and food are offered by nearly all, in addition to activities such as fishing, hunting, mountain hiking, guided tours, canoeing, courses, cultural activities, horseback riding and many more.

Establishing farm tourism at a time when agriculture is under pressure was motivated by a wish to be self-employed rather than seeking off-farm employment, which would have

been the most realistic alternative (see Brandth and Haugen 2011). The establishment of the new enterprise was very much a joint family decision. In agrarian ideology, taking care of the farm resources and improving them for successors is a central imperative. The motive to maintain and develop the farm property by building the tourist enterprise on the resources of the farm can be seen as a continuation of this ideology.

From the twenty farms, 35 people were formally interviewed; sixteen women and nineteen men. Each interview was conducted at the farm site and lasted between two and three hours; they were digitally recorded and later fully transcribed. In most of the cases both husband and wife were interviewed together, but in six cases only one person in the couple was interviewed due to practical reasons. Respondents and farms are anonymous and the interviewees are given fictitious names.

The interviews were semi-structured and flexible in style, allowing the possibility to follow up on matters that were particularly interesting in each case. As a starting point for the interview, a list was made of items to explore and this encouraged open discussion. Discussion centred on the transformation of the farm into tourism and the implications of this action. The development of the product and the business, consequences for the farm and the family, their working situation, competence, division of work and gender identity were also discussed during the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews are known to be appropriate for inductively investigating peoples' own experiences regarding a phenomenon (Berg 2001). Exploration of the topic of commercial home dilemmas was not the main objective of the broader study; rather it is one that is grounded in the data. The phenomenon was discussed by participants during the interviews as a common issue important to them in their everyday lives seeking to manage home and hospitality work. Data analysis for this article involved a thematic search of all interview transcripts for issues dealing with dilemmas of home and work. As a first step we read the transcripts thoroughly, singling out thematic categories. The topic became apparent to us in a late stage of data analysis as we had been immersed in the data for some time analysing topics such as gender, identity, embodiment, competence and entrepreneurship. Thematic content analysis is adapted from Michael Q. Patton's (2002) 'cross case analysis' or Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin's (1990) 'open coding'. As a next step, transcripts were read through again with our full attention on the topic of the problematic commercial home. All the cases are used in the analysis, but not equally represented in the quotations.

The commercial farm home as a rural idyll

A farm is the archetype of a rural home, and the home is a significant commercial dimension in farm tourism. Likewise, family traditions and heritage are important aspects of farm tourism products (Brandth and Haugen 2011). In our study, old buildings and stories about the farm and its family history represent the cultural context of the products (Brandth et al. 2010). Some of the hosts created an illusion of peasant farming with many

small animals around the farm yard. Daniel, who runs a small farm together with his wife Grete, explained:

> What we try to present is the image people have of living in the countryside, and that image comes from children's books with idyllic, nice and friendly farmyards, charming surroundings and hens tripping around the yard and things. This is the picture people have of living on a farm, and this is what they come to experience, I think.

Daniel and his wife aspire to live up to cultural meanings of the countryside by practicing popular representations of idyllic rurality. They want to meet the visitors' expectations of the farm home as a relaxed and beautiful spot. This means that the yard must be tidy and presentable without visible agricultural equipment or junk, dirt and plastic lying around as it is a representation of their homes. Their visitors are to large extent families with young children, and children's books and television programmes are known to be important mediations of the rural idyll (Horton 2008). As noted, the socially constructed place characteristics are seen as important in tourism (Crang 1997). Besides, guests may anticipate 'good old rural hospitality' where the relation between hosts and guests is constructed in accordance to expectations based on traditional country stereotypes, the idealized/romanticized farmer and his wife.

Mariann and Olav who combine tourism work with small-scale sheep farming, are well aware of the special qualities of the home. Mariann says: 'It [the product] must be personal. Without hosts with a belonging to the farm, you may as well go to a hotel!' Martin, a former dairy farmer, expands on this same idea:

> At a hotel you don't walk up to the receptionist and start talking to him about what he does in his everyday life and things like that. But they [the guests] do here. They are interested in hearing about how we live and what we do…

Thus, they both confirm that it is precisely the home sphere that distinguishes a commercial home from other forms of accommodation. Many visitors might not find the place interesting to visit if it resembled any other restaurant or conference site. Contrasting the hotel with the more personal farm home underlines the importance of the home as a site for welcoming visitors. The hosts wish to meet their perceptions of the visitors' expectations in order to make the stay memorable and unique. This way the personal and homey character of the products is being co-constructed by the hosts and guests.

The guests seem curious to learn about work and life on the farm and the ways of rural living. As a consequence, the hosts' own lives in the everyday become part of the product. Laila runs a dairy farm in a remote valley with her husband and son, and says the following: 'We try to communicate our way of living […] So we want to tell about

our everyday life, how we actually live and how we have adapted to life in this valley'. It is the atmosphere and qualities of the farm home, its heritage and the hosts as representations of this uniqueness that contributes to making it attractive. Indeed, it is the home itself that is made into a tourist object. 'We *are* the place in a way', Mariann says. 'I think it is because of *us* that people come here. I am quite sure of that'. Identity and intimacy become an integral part of the hospitality they provide, and good customer relationships are closely linked to the performance of the hosts (Forseth 2005a: 441).

Taking good care of visitors is a conspicuous element in hosts' understandings of the rural home. Thus, it is quite common for hosts to perceive of the rural home as a place where stressed visitors can relax, rest and lower their shoulders. 'We market ourselves as a quiet place in close connection to nature', Mariann says. One guest explained: 'I would definitely recommend this place to others who need to get away from stress, hustle and bustle, or from the noise of the city'. It is thus not just the guests' own homes, but the home that they visit which becomes their needed 'haven in a heartless world'.

On Kari's farm they didn't want to stage a past rural idyll, or to present the farm as a relic of the past, like many agri-tourist enterprises do to represent authenticity. Rather she emphasized that which was contemporary 'natural and simple', 'genuine and real'. Very often this translates into creating a 'homey' feeling for the visitors. The fact that farm tourism is based on the family as a unit of production and takes place at their homes, and combined with the fact that the many services being offered are similar to the work

women have been doing in the home, adds to the homey aspect. 'When they come into the kitchen', Mariann says, 'they feel like home. The atmosphere is a bit like home. If they smell the freshly baked bread in the evening, they suddenly might feel hungry and come to get a thick slice of bread in the kitchen'. Also, when it comes to serving food they have images of country norms to live up to, for instance, when it comes to size of portions and the responsibility that the guest can eat one's fill.

In sum, the rural idyll on which farm tourism trades is constructed to consist of a romantic farm nostalgia where intimacy and homeliness are essential elements of what they offer guests.

Dilemmas of distinctions

When hospitality is made into a commodified service, the valuing of it becomes difficult. One does not for instance expect payment from friends and family when they come to visit. With paying guests monetary transactions is a question of serious concern. This aspect is discussed by Laila, who finds it difficult to set the price of her tourist services. She says:

> It is a bit difficult to receive payment, and we often think ourselves that it is too expensive. Sometimes we are tempted to say: 'Dear friend, just come and stay overnight.' But, we don't do that. […] What I as a guest would think was obvious to pay for, I think is difficult to get paid for.

In order to create the desired homely atmosphere she has to play down the business aspect. When the focus is on making the visitors feel at home, monetary valuing becomes a dilemma because the logics of the personal and the commercial are conflicting. Laila feels that when it is her home that is open for guests, it is almost like treating the visitors as 'friends', and it becomes awkward to ask for payment for her hospitality. This confusion between hospitality in the home as a commercial or non-commercial activity would not happen in a hotel. The second aspect she finds difficult is to put value on her own work – work that traditionally has been understood as unpaid work in the home.

Performing high-quality hosting implies overcoming and controlling bodily reactions like anger and frustration and tiredness. Lisa explained how she sometimes experienced a contradiction between her feelings and the way she portrayed them to the guests. Although she might feel bone-tired, 'you have to smile and be gentle'. She told of an episode where she had been working very hard for a long period of time and hardly slept for a whole week. Still she tried to meet the expectations of being a happy and gentle hostess. A guest came by when she was feeling the most down and said: 'Oh, it's so nice to stay here with you because here is never any hustle and bustle!' 'Then I knew that I had succeeded', she said and continued,

> One has to keep a straight face. In periods you might want to tell the guests to get
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> lost! But you have to be polite. It is very important. If you can't suppress feelings
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> like that, you are in the wrong business.

Lisa's story demonstrates how she has to perform and suppress her feelings. The guest,

however, understands the actions of the hosts as authentic. Hochschild's (1983) work on

emotional labour shows how service employees are trained to suppress some emotions

and create others in order to shape a customer-oriented atmosphere. In the case of

commercial homes this is important in order to provide a pleasant atmosphere. Unlike

service employees, the farm tourist hosts cannot 'go home' at the end of a working day.

They constantly need to handle the distinction between the personal and the commercial,

the private and the public as these spaces overlap.

The home is understood as a place where one can relax, regenerate and freely show

emotions and care. The relationship between the host and the guest is more fragile as it is

based on commercialized activities. This means that the hosts have to balance their own

needs and emotions with the tourists' expectations. It seems like a paradox that many of

the hosts in the study stress that they have to mask negative emotions at the same time as

they are preoccupied with 'being genuine': 'The day we start to act/pretend, we have lost.

As the product we sell has to be real […] we have to sell ourselves' (Lisa). In other

words, they have to pretend that they are naturally and genuinely good humoured. They

communicate a demand for emotional honesty but only to a certain point, as they must be

careful not to show emotions that may discomfort the guests. In short, there is a dilemma between 'being themselves' versus acting nice and friendly all the time. According to Brit: 'You have to be nice and friendly, accommodating and service minded. So you have to offer yourself all the time whether you have a good day or not'. Marialaura Di Domenico and Paul A. Lynch (2007: 333) found that the less distance there is between the home and the remunerative work 'the greater the likelihood of hosts experiencing emotional dissonance'.

Another aspect of the tension between the personal and commercial concerns the complexity of power in the host-guest relationship. When the farm home is transformed into a tourist business, the question of who holds the power to determine is challenged. Martin puts it this way:

> You must dance attendance on the customers. It is necessary in order to succeed in this business. The guests who come here must feel appreciated and receive good service. When we charge them for a pleasant adventure, it is obvious that we must deliver.

In Martin's understanding, the customer is the boss. Without guests the business will not survive. That this is a dilemma is demonstrated by Roger who sees it quite differently:

> This hosting business is sensible, but I usually say that we [the hosts] are not here
> for the guests! We are not living here in order to have visitors. But they are very
> welcome on our terms. We have been taught that 'the customer is always right',
> but we don't perform – it is real what we are doing. So the guests must accept our
> terms.

Roger's point is that in order for the product to be authentic and mirror their ways of living, hosts are the ones most able to define it, and guests must adapt. His attitude is similar to what McIntosh et al. (2011) calls 'self-marginalization'. He lives in a remote area, and his home is simple, his lifestyle has characteristics of subsistence farming and gathering. He thinks that the guests appreciate the primitive and simple. Thus, the hosting he does is very much on self-defined terms.

Comparing Martin and Roger illustrates the ambiguity and the complexity of negotiating hospitality in a commercial home. One of the tensions this creates has to do with the multiple roles of being both a self-employed owner-host and a service worker. The tension between being in control versus always being at someone's beck and call is also exemplified by Henry who explains: 'The customer is always right, that is a saying. But that is not entirely true, because *we* have to set the rules. One has to be determined, but at the same time flexible enough for the guests to be happy'. Setting the rules is part of their job as a manager of the business. Being flexible is about seeing the needs of the visitors as a host.

As mentioned, since the business is located in the home, the distinction between public and private, work and leisure is indistinct. The hosting is never separate from their everyday family life where cultural norms get played out, and the everyday may be more or less reflexively embodied. One tension between private and public concerns the distinction between private and commercial spaces and norms of behaviour in the two spaces. Nils illustrated this dilemma in the following episode:

> Suddenly, I saw cigarette-butts scattered on the steps, and right outside the door and in the yard, and I told the group of visitors that I wanted them to tidy up. It became very silent because none had expected a host to say things like that. Then I explained to them that this is my home. I live here and I expect that people who come here are well-mannered. While I was talking one of the guests demonstratively threw a butt right down and replied that they were paying for the service! I told him that we are hosts, not servants.

The point Nils was making is that when you visit someone's private home, you do not throw cigarette-butts around. He felt provoked because the guests acted disrespectfully being in his home. In this situation he left his professional role and spoke up to his guests. In his mind the guests had crossed a line for what he could tolerate, and he admitted that it felt good to let off steam in this way. Unlike front-line workers in general, he was in a position to put his foot down and demonstrate who is the boss – not at the risk of being

fired, but perhaps at the risk of losing some future customers. In this case hosts and guests defined the place in different ways. To the host it was a home; to the guests it was a leisure domain that they paid to have access to. This is an example of how place-meanings are negotiated in conflict between host and guests. The host has trouble being a professional around his home, something that shows that tensions exist both in relation to definition of place and work. Guests bring with them their own notions that they use to compare and challenge hosts' definitions. As has been noted in the literature, it is not always simple to apply attributes of the home to a public domain (Di Domenico and Lynch 2007).

In the above example, in letting the customers into his home, the host had to take measure to ensure that they understood the rules of being in a home. Thus, one central aspect of the private–public distinction is related to the meaning of the two types of spaces. Using one's home as a site for tourism makes the relationship between hosts and guests quite complex as the set of social rules and obligations become more extensive than if it were a pure business relation. As has been pointed out by other studies, the fact that the context of this type of tourist provision is the hosts' own homes means that the norms of hospitality are strongly influenced by the meanings surrounding the home (Lynch and MacWhannell 2000; Tucker 2003).

Managing the boundaries

Above we have seen that farm tourism in a home creates contradictions that result in a need for boundaries and means of managing these boundaries where hosts apply certain strategies to minimize the impacts on their private lives.

One set of boundaries is physical. The most common boundary is to separate the private house from the commercial activity when it comes to accommodation and food service. On the other hand, they are available on the phone regardless of when and where they are. To further illustrate the blurring of boundaries between home and work, Sarah experienced that it was difficult to separate her office work from the domestic work when she did it at her kitchen table. Her strategy to predicate her position as a manager of the business was to move her office to a section of the barn that was rebuilt for that purpose. In this way she marked the boundaries.

Clothes are also used to mark boundaries. When hosting it is quite common to wear copies of traditional farmer's shirt (busserull) or various types of costumes inspired by local traditions. In one case where the hosts took guests for a trip into the wilderness, the hosts wore clothes made of moose hide. When they work as farmers (as some of them do) or when they have their spare time, they dress differently than when hosting. This way clothing may mark when they are available (or not) as hosts. Moreover, when they are on duty as hosts, visitors must be able to single out the hosts. 'There should be no doubts who are the hosts on the farm'. Through dress, hosts can mark differences between themselves and the guests.

Clothing holds a complex set of meanings. There is for instance a tension between using dress as a signifier of the product as having a personal, homey atmosphere and the business aspects of service provision. On the other hand, if they dress too businesslike, they risk weakening the image of rural competence in home-based hospitality. If they dress too casually they do not create the distance needed to signal sufficient professionalism at hosting.

Several farms received the guests in their hallway or kitchen when they first started out. Guests had to enter their private premises since there was no separate reception. 'It was no big problem, but when the season was over you felt, oh, finally they are out of the house! But, feeling this way means that we have allowed them to come too close and not managed to set limits', Henry said. As part of creating necessary distance he built a new separate reception area. This also seemed to make it easier for the guests to get in touch with the hosts, as they were sometimes reluctant to enter into the private space and disturb the family. Turid and Alf, who also built a separate reception, call this being 'on the same footing as the guests'. It is a space that is more clearly defined as a common space of business.

Another physical strategy to construct boundaries and mark privacy was to create private spaces in the garden out of sight for the guests. 'We don't sit out in the courtyard together with the guests', Turid explained. Mariann and Olav were very conscious to keep the

personal separate from the commercial, and one way of doing this was not to socialize in certain ways with the guests. Olav says: 'If we are invited to sit down in the evening to share a drink with the guests, we never do that. […] We talk a lot with them, but not in a way so that we get involved with them. On this issue we are very determined!' Keeping distance makes the relationship between hosts and guests easier to manage. It is a way to keep the personal and 'homey' product manageable as a commercialized product. Many of our hosts experienced that this was something also the visitors appreciated. Visitors like to know when the hosts are available to them, and it is important that the guests do not involuntarily invade privacy.

Based on these experiences, it seems like many of the commercial home businesses develop a much more *conditional* hospitality over time. Conditional hospitality is concerned with rights, duties and obligations (Westmoreland 2008). To practice it is regarded as a necessary strategy to mend the disruption of the home and survive in the business. We find that those who seem to have succeeded the best at using the qualities of their homes as a product are the ones who are conscious of developing rules and practices that entail boundary setting. For some, it amounts to defining their product carefully, managing spaces and making house rules of conduct. Others choose to mark time by defining opening hours and keep closed certain periods of the year.

We also find examples in our material of farm hosts who practiced more *unconditional* hospitality. Lisa, for instance, tried to please the guests whatever their wishes were. How

their farm tourist enterprise had developed was largely based on the demands from their guests. Some guests had desired self-catering facilities in their rooms, so Lisa and her husband built cottages with a kitchen. 'If they want dinner at midnight, I serve dinner at midnight', she said. Part of their reasoning behind this is a need to strive to earn a good reputation all the time. At Lisa's farm they had opened a small cafe in the barn that meant that she had to be more or less present all the time: 'Guests may just drop by to have a cup of coffee and a chat. Sometimes I have the impression that I am a kind of psychologist […] But, I like it very much'. Listening and showing interest in the well-being of her guests bring her close to taking a role as therapist.

Very few of the hosts we interviewed talked about developing lasting friendships with guests who returned summer after summer. 'We are conscious not to develop friendship with too many of our guests, because that is strenuous', Henry explained. But Sophie and Raymond had different experiences: 'You feel that some of them become friends because we have such good communication. We receive Christmas cards, birthday greetings and such'. One of the host families had even been on a return visit to a guest family from a different country. In the research literature this phenomenon has been conceptualized as 'commercial friendship' (Price and Arnold 1999; Lashley and Morrison 2003). Commercial friendship is a marketing relationship associated with positive word-of-mouth. Guests may return year after year, and host and guests develop a strong, mutual loyalty.

For farmers, hosting visitors is a much more social type of work than conventional farming where the farmer may work alone for most of the day. In tourist hosting the world enters into their homes, so to speak. One of the men explained: 'As a farmer you were alone most of the day. Now I work together with people and meet new people all the time. […] This is a positive difference'. Many of the hosts thus see tourist hosting as a means to transcend their social isolation. However, having seen above how the everyday dealings between hosts and guests include issues of physical separation, transcending social isolation, as well as inflicting it upon oneself, seem paradoxical and underline the complexities and ambivalences of commercial home hosting – and the need to obtain a balance.

Conclusion

When farmers use the spaces of the home as spaces for commercial hospitality, several dilemmas and contradictions are activated. Trading on the homey aspects of the countryside idyll is desirable, underlining the fact that hosts' relationships to their guests are inherently of a personal nature. They 'sell' themselves and the informality of their homes as parts of the farm tourist product. Yet hosts also expressed feelings about the importance of being professional at what they do – providing their guests with high-quality service. Providing comfort and service for the guests competes with efforts to obtain privacy for themselves.

To be personal may also mean getting involved in emotive relationships with the guests,
yet professionalism means keeping a certain distance and refraining from getting too
close and becoming friends. The hosting role implies being available and service minded,
putting aside one's own feelings. Anger and frustration is suppressed, something that may
result in a dissonance between their feelings and how they mediate them to the guests.

Generally speaking, in modern service work the roles are ambiguous (Forseth 2005: 443).
In the commercial home context described in this article, there are additional dimensions.
First, that the hosts are embodying both the owner/manager and worker in one person;
second, that the service work is carried out in a place that is both private and public. As
we have seen, having to juggle competing functions produces needs to handle the
tensions that come into existence. One such important tension concerns power. The hosts
may regard themselves as holding power and being in control, but as DiDomenico and
Lynch (2007: 334) have pointed out, they are 'paradoxically powerless'. This is so
because of their position as service providers in relation to their guests and because of
their limited ability to control what types of visitors they get.

The boundary work we have identified consists of physical and symbolic demarcations
through attempts at creating separate spaces for business and marking rules of conduct.
As a result hospitality becomes 'conditional'. There is also more subtle boundary setting
by means of dress and of the types of social relations engaged in. The strategies for
setting boundaries that we have been able to identify in this article may not be exhaustive.

But, it is interesting that there are examples of hosts who are rather limitless in this respect, and who are constantly making themselves available to the guests' wishes and service demands and practice close to what we have termed 'unconditional' hospitality. This is experienced as exhausting, and we have seen how some of them do their utmost to hide fatigue, stress and negative feelings in order to create the ideal and 'genuine' atmosphere of homey harmony.

In many cases, strategies of boundary setting do not seem sufficient. Rather than boundary setting, we may perhaps understand how hosts handle the dilemmas by means of the metaphor of a 'balancing act'. They need to be private, but not too private; personal, but not too personal; genuine, but not too genuine; professional, but not too professional. They must balance between being the boss, but not being too bossy. In other words, they need to find many ways of balancing when managing a home that is not only a home. This may mean a tendency to accept their 'in-between-ness'.

A commercial home may be regarded as a hybrid space. There is no clear dichotomist relationship between the various aspects of this complex space. The meanings are dynamic and varied as they may be interpreted either in the context of home or business; and the hosts must perform several identities at the same time. Commercial homes seem to make dichotomies and distinctions dissolve. In his book *Sociology of Postmodernism* Scott Lash (1990) describes the postmodern society as a de-differentiated society where the separate areas of social life break down. Society becomes 'porous' as the borderline

between home and work becomes obscure and the inside and the outside of the family

intermingle.

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