The "ruin" bars of Budapest: Urban decay and the development of a genre of hospitality

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Abstract

This paper examines the development and management of "rom" (ruin) bars: eating and drinking venues operating in dilapidated, urban buildings in Budapest, Hungary. The paper reviews and interrogates the evolution of the rom phenomenon and discusses three issues: 1) the relationship between hospitality, urban regeneration and urban space, 2) entrepreneurship and the production of rom bars as particular hospitality spaces, and 3) the relationship between symbolic forms of capital and hospitality. It is argued that the key characteristics of the rom phenomenon are encapsulated in the notion of 'guerrilla hospitality.' The paper outlines the characteristics of guerrilla hospitality and argues that it is an example of a commodified symbolic form, which draws together intellectual, aesthetic and commercial interests in the creation of hospitality venues and consumer experiences. The paper concludes by considering the implications for hospitality management and hospitality research.

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1. Introduction

This paper examines drinking and eating venues operating in dilapidated, urban buildings in Budapest, Hungary. These bars, often called "rom" – meaning ruin, are established in abandoned residential or office buildings. Several rom venues have been adapted for all year opening but the majority operate from the early spring until late autumn. Some have reopened in the same location in subsequent years, although most have moved from one place to another and the leisure topographies of Budapest's districts have been reconfigured each year. This paper examines the development and evolution of rom bars. It considers three sets of issues: 1) the relationship between urban regeneration, urban space and rom venues, 2) entrepreneurship and the production of rom bars as particular hospitality spaces, and 3) the relationship between symbolic forms of capital and rom hospitality. It is argued that the key characteristics of the rom phenomenon are encapsulated in the notion of 'guerrilla hospitality.' The paper outlines the characteristics of guerrilla hospitality and argues that it is an example of what Scott (2001) calls a commodified symbolic form, which draws together intellectual, aesthetic and commercial interests in the creation of hospitality venues and consumer experiences. The final part of the paper considers the implications for hospitality management and hospitality research.

2. The study

The paper is drawn from an exploratory study, which used a mixture of secondary and primary data collection methods. This study represents what Reimer (1977) calls opportunistic research. Reimer (1977), emulating Mills' (1959) earlier work, argues that researchers can and should draw on their own experiences in developing new areas of research. Intimate, personal experiences of spaces, people and events provide unique, subjective insights into social phenomena. The initial interest in the subject stems from personal experience of the venues, which were visited, often repeatedly, between 1999 and 2007. The first author encountered the rom venues during his stays in Budapest, and visited venues such as the original Szimpla kert while working on a study of a company organising walking tours in the city (see Lugosi, 2002). One of the bars visited on the walking tours was located next to the original Szimpla kert and guides often took guests to this and to other rom venues. The second author lived in Budapest during this period and worked as a public relations manager at several theatres specialising in contemporary performance art. She was part of the cultural scene and socialised in many of the venues discussed in this paper.

In 2007 photographs were taken during visits to capture and illustrate particular design features of the venues. The perspective offered by personal experience of the venues was complemented by a review of commentary and representations of the venues in printed and electronic media. This included Hungarian and English language newspapers and magazines, online forums and blogs. In addition to this, four owner/managers of three venues were identified through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) and recorded interviews were conducted. One is a member of the team that operates the Szimpla kert - one of the longest established rom venues. The second is a member of the team that operated the Szoda Udvar: a second long running, but now defunct venue. He is also part of a team that operates a new venue: the Corvintet?. The remaining two operate a third venue: Fecske, which opened in 2007. The Fecske and Corvintet? are the newest manifestations or evolutionary forms of the rom phenomena.

3. The history of the romkert and romkocsma

Romkert means ruin garden, while romkocsma means ruin bar or pub in Hungarian. Writers and cultural commentators claim the rom phenomena started in 1999 with the opening of a bar/restaurant venue called the Pótkulcs (meaning spare or latch key) in a crumbling street in the VI district of Budapest (Lakos, 2003). The Pótkulcs is located in a gap between two buildings. In the beginning the bar had no sign or any indication of its existence; and even now the sign consists of a piece of paper attached with sticking tape to an inconspicuous rusty door. This door opens into a courtyard, which leads through to the bar. The venue is relatively small and the majority of the dimly-lit bar space is in the basement of the residential building. The bare walls are painted and it is furnished with an eclectic collection of beaten up tables, chairs and sofas. The venue regularly hosts photo and other art exhibitions as well as musical performances and DJ selected music. Another important venue in the evolution of the rom scene was the Ráckert – an outdoor bar in Buda, which was patronised by members of the Budapest intelligentsia. The Ráckert was a bohemian venue located next to the thermal baths at the foot of the Gellért Hill. It was away from and outside of the central tourist areas and it became a symbolic focal point for writers, artists, poets, musicians, journalists and others involved in the media. The venue was eventually closed as the area was demolished to make way for a hotel development.

Entrance to the elusive Pótkulcs

The real shift in the evolution of rom venues came in 2002 with the opening of the Szimpla kert. The original Szimpla was an indoor cafe, which opened in 2001 and was patronised, in part at least, by people involved in new media, art, journalism, writing and design. The owners wanted to open an outdoor venue for the coming summer season and found an abandoned residential building in the VII district of the city – the characteristic but crumbling Jewish district, which is undergoing a massive rehabilitation or regeneration process (Amichay, 2004). The building on Király Utca was already famous because residents and officials had fought a long battle over eviction and the vacation of the building (Lakos, 2003). Attila Kiss, one of the Szimpla's operators, claimed the local council could not find an appropriate status for the rental agreement and it was originally rented as a storage building. The rest of the building, like many of those in Budapest, was made up of several floors of flats which were located around an inner courtyard. The flats were barricaded off and the inner courtyard was furnished with a makeshift bar, lampions and an assortment of chairs and tables. Customers entered the crumbling building's courtyard through a car park of an adjacent building. Interestingly, Kiss claimed one of the most significant operating costs was not the lease of the actual building but the rental of the parking spaces which had to be kept empty so customers could move through the car park unhindered.

Szimpla was forced to move in 2003 and reopened in nearby Kazinczy Utca. In the same year two more

venues opened: the Gozsdu and Szoda Udvar (Soda court), which was an outdoor venue and brand extension of an indoor bar, Szoda, operating in the VII district. Following the Szimpla kert model the Gozsdu and Szoda Udvar both opened in abandoned courtyards of residential buildings. The Gozsdu venue was part of a large building complex named the Gozsdu Udvar, which was built in the early 20th century by a Romanian born lawyer. The ownership of the Gozsdu Udvar has been contested throughout the last century by Hungarian and Romanian authorities. The rehabilitation of the Gozsdu Udvar complex was delayed partly by arguments about ownership but also because of disagreements about the nature and character of the rehabilitation process. Added to this was the almost legendary resistance by one particular resident of the Gozsdu complex, a dentist, who refused to vacate his premises and allow demolition and building to begin (Földes, 2003; sulinet.hu, ND).

2003 represents a significant stage in the evolution of rom culture as a particular genre of hospitality experience, provision or operation. This evolution of the rom phenomenon is summarised in figure 1 and represents a convergence of a number of social, cultural and commercial forces. Existing networks of individuals involved in the creative sectors and the operational features of a small number of venues that were associated with the "cultural scene" converged with the commercial interests of operators already targeting these segments, who wished to extend their brands to open air venues for the summer season. A further dimension in this process of convergence is the representation of these venues, by reporters, cultural commentators and bloggers, who began to define this as a distinct cultural phenomenon (see e.g. Földes, 2003; palkata.hu, 2003).
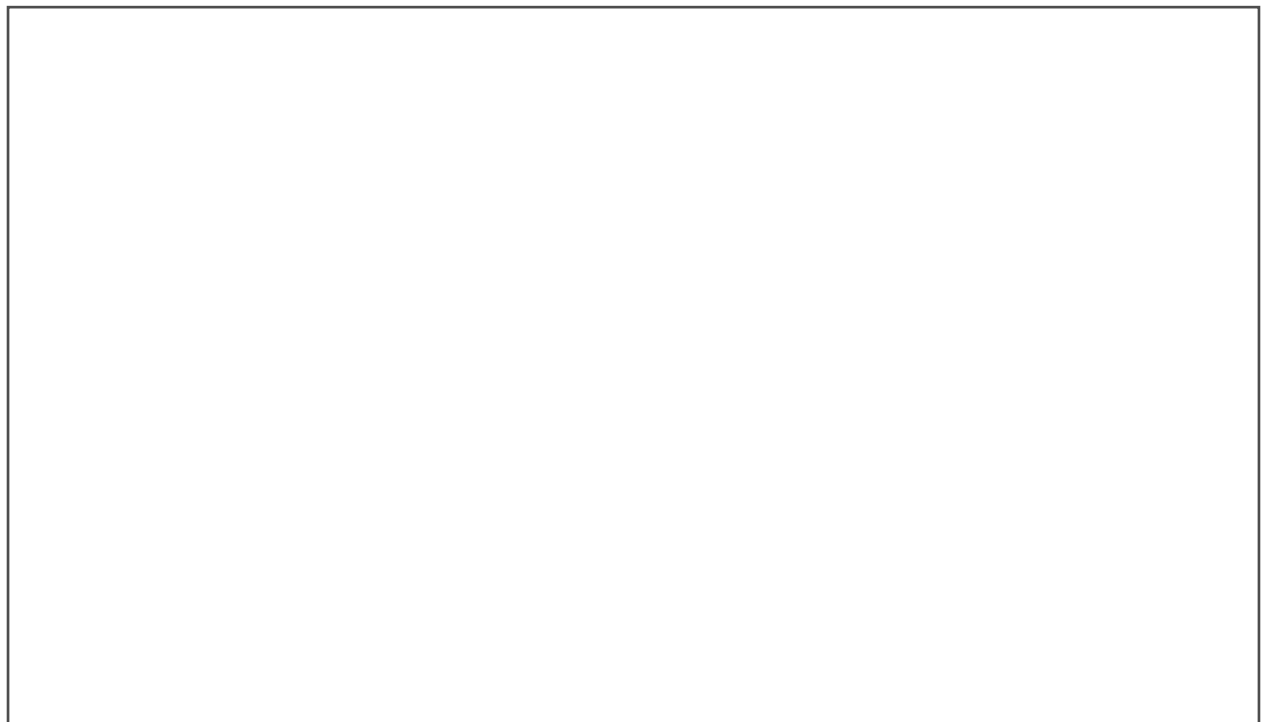

Figure 1. The rom phenomenon as cultural and managerial convergence

In 2004 further groups of young entrepreneurs began looking for abandoned buildings and a new generation of rom venues opened in the VII as well as other neighbouring districts (Földes, 2004; Földes et al., 2004; Mayer, 2004). The Szoda Udvar and Szimpla kert were joined by several other venues including the Szimpla kiskert (small garden), Mumus, Tetthely, Kuplung and West Balkan, which was previously an outdoor venue situated on a dam in Buda. The summer 2004 season represents the most significant growth stage in the rom phenomenon and is frequently referred to as the "golden age" of the scene.

In 2005 the mayoral office of the VII district refused to lease the premises or grant licenses to the third generation of venues that opened in the previous year, despite appeals by operators that they were actually providing cultural resources or institutions rather than bars (Dudás, 2005; Munkácsy, 2005). The noise generated by the bars in previous years had attracted protests from local residents. The venues opening in 2003 and 2004 were soundproofed using improvised, low-tech solutions e.g. padding the doors leading to the inner courtyard, but noise remained a problem. Patrons walking to and leaving the venues in inebriated states during the early hours of the morning also attracted a lot of negative attention. The operators collaborated to introduce the bagoly (owl) initiative: signs were displayed, which asked people in several languages to respect the surrounding residents and to keep the noise down and security staff stood outside the bars quietening people as they approached and as they left.
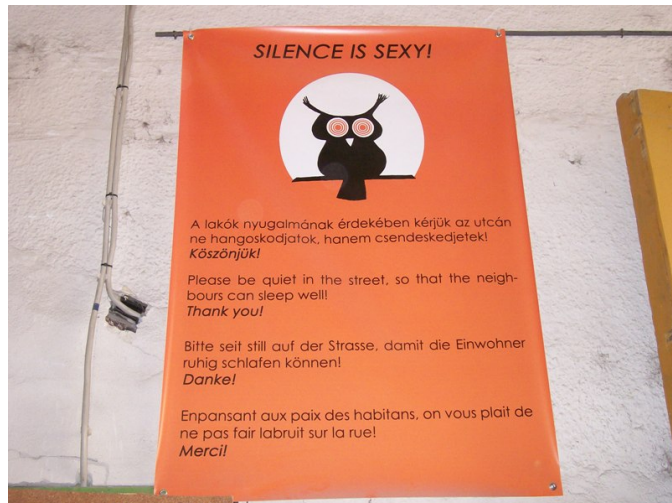
"Silence is sexy"

Szimpla kert retained its license in 2005 and continued to open the kiskert, which was located (by a few hundred metres) in the VI district. The owners continued to operate in Kazinczy Utca and had begun to transform the venue for all year opening. According to Kiss, unlike many of the other buildings in the VII district, which were owned and thus leased by the local authorities, the Kazinczy Utca building was privately owned. Their case for the operation of a cultural institute rather than a bar was also stronger because they organised various cultural events and the venue had an outdoor cinema. The sign outside the Szimpla still states that it is a cinema rather than a bar, and Kiss had claimed in an earlier interview that the cinema placed it above the status of a romkocsma (Balogh, 2005). However, the Szimpla kert's future remained insecure: the local authorities imposed a 12pm closing time and threatened to close the venue (Munkácsy, 2005). The Szimpla's owners subsequently mobilised their customers and local residents to sign a petition in support of the venue (ibid.). Other venues, such as the Sark kert, relocated to Margaret Island between Pest and Buda – while retaining its romkert designation in the media (Schmidt, 2005).

In 2005 the T?zraktár (fire warehouse) opened in a disused medical supplies building in the IX district. It has since changed its name twice, initially to T?zraktér (fire storage) and then to T?z-Tate. The T?zraktár emulated the design features of the earlier rom venues, but it was an overt attempt to develop a cultural centre and to bring together the hospitality industry with art and culture. As well as having the usual features of rom venues such as the bar space and table football the venue hosted fashion shows, literature evenings, concerts, theatre shows and exhibited work by artists in the empty rooms in the building. Szoda Udvar reopened in another venue during 2005-6, but the Szoda's owners did not reopen a courtyard in 2007.

2007 was another evolutionary phase in the development of the rom scene. The Szoda's owners collaborated with the operator of another venue, Sark, to open the Corvintet? (Corvin roof), which sits on the top two floors of a department store in Pest. In Buda, a terrace bar, Fecske (swallow), has opened on the roof of a swimming pool. The Corvintet? and Fecske continue to incorporate the features of the rom bars: both occupy and reuse unusual and somewhat dishevelled spaces and both venues are decorated with graffiti and other art.

Fecske, with swimming pool below

Corvintet?, with the Budapest rooftops in the background

4. Urban regeneration, culture and hospitality

Researchers have begun to examine the relationship between hospitality and urban regeneration and they recognise the role that hospitality can play in the regeneration process (see Bell, 2007a; Bell, 2007b). Bell and Binnie (2005: 80) suggest that "urban culinary culture can play a paramount role in producing the habitat for ongoing regeneration, and also provide a powerful symbolic statement about urban fortunes." This echoes earlier observations about the role of cafes, bars and restaurants in the gentrification process

(cf., Zukin, 1988, 1995; Mitchell, 2000; Latham, 2003). Hospitality venues become focal points for particular consumer segments and the symbolic value of individual outlets becomes synonymous with their surrounding milieu. Venues are thus part of the social and economic processes in which urban areas are transformed into gentrified, aestheticised playscapes for an affluent new middle class. Nevertheless, the relationship between hospitality and urban regeneration has received relatively limited attention.

An area that has received greater attention is the relationship between regeneration and culture. However, rather than treating hospitality in isolation from other cultural activities, it is useful to consider the provision and consumption of hospitality as part of a broader set of cultural activities. This blurring of boundaries between hospitality and culture is particularly important here for a number of reasons: firstly, the view that hospitality can be reduced to the provision of food, drink and shelter has come under increasing criticism (Hemmington, 2007; Lashley et al., 2007; Lugosi, 2008). Food and drinks may be provided with minimal or no provider-customer interaction, although the consumer experience is often assured because of extensive interactions between staff and customers and between consumers. Consequently, interactions within a hospitality context may become entangled with the production and consumption of cultural goods, services and transactions. Secondly, many of the rom bars utilised cultural artefacts and activities into the production of the venues and into the consumption experiences. Thirdly, hospitality venues may exist to provide a service (or experience) to workers or local residents who are involved in such cultural activities as the arts (including film), libraries, museums, heritage and cultural tourism. Within research on culture and regeneration, hospitality venues are seen as important ancillary services that help to build and perpetuate the communities of individuals involved in cultural industries (Evans and Shaw, 2004).

Evans (2005) argues that there are three potential relationships between culture and regeneration: culture-led regeneration, cultural regeneration and a parallel relationship, which he calls culture and regeneration (see also Evans and Shaw, 2004). Within culture-led regeneration "cultural activity is seen as the catalyst and engine of regeneration—epithets of change and movement. The activity is likely to have a high-public profile and frequently to be cited as the sign or symbol of regeneration" (Evans, 2005: 968). Within cultural regeneration "cultural activity is more integrated into an area strategy alongside other activities in the environmental, social and economic sphere" (ibid.). Finally, cultural activities may not be planned or developed as part of the regeneration process. Indeed, Evans (2005) suggests that cultural activities may develop in response to a lack of provision within a formal regeneration plan. However, Evans (2005: 968-969) notes that "the lack of discernible cultural activity or provision within a regeneration scheme does not necessarily mean that cultural activity is absent, only that it is not being promoted (or recognised) as part of the [regeneration] process."

The evolution of rom bars in Budapest reflects the culture and regeneration model; however, an alternative way to conceptualise this relationship is a culture *versus* regeneration scenario. The venues shared a tense relationship with the broader forces of regeneration in the city. The initial generation of rom venues operated within a fracture in the regeneration process, when existing occupants had been dislocated but the totalising transformation processes of regeneration had yet to take effect. These venues became liminoid sites – ephemeral entities that offered temporary rejuvenation for urban space without fundamentally altering its physical structure. They were temporary appropriations of spaces, in which the visible signs of urban decay became an overt character feature of hospitality space.

5. Entrepreneurship and rom hospitality

There are numerous definitions of entrepreneurship and it is not possible to provide a lengthy discussion here (cf., Dewhurst and Horobin, 1998; Thomas, 1998; Morrison et al., 1999). However, a review of the literature points to a number of recurring characteristics. Within small, entrepreneurial organisations, the visions and values of the founders are usually central to shaping the organisation, and owner-managers are

often at the centre of decision making – relying on intuition, improvisation, innovation, experimentation and personal relationships (see e.g., Timmons, 1994; Goffee and Scase, 1995; McCrimmon, 1995; Morrison and Thomas, 1999; Kirby, 2003; Deakins and Freel, 2006; Wickham, 2006).

The primary and secondary data echoes a number of the themes highlighted in the literature on entrepreneurship. Firstly, the owners often invested considerable personal time and effort into the design and rebuilding of the physical space. Secondly, the owners were often directly involved in the management and operation of the venue. Thirdly, the owner-operators frequently mobilised their personal contacts in developing the venues and their associated activities. For example, friends and acquaintances provided creative input into the design of websites, premises and decoration; on several occasions acquaintances designed and produced artwork both for the summer rom venues, and in the case of the Szoda bar, for the original indoor venue. This ability to mobilise networks and artists in particular was illustrated in the development of the Gozsdu: students from a local arts college contributed to the decoration of the venue through their labour and the display of their works in the venue. Finally, the Szimpla kert, Szoda Udvar and Fecske were all financed through private capital rather than investment from formal financial institutions such as banks, larger corporate investors or licensed venue operators.

Artwork in Corvintet?

6. Rom venues and forms of capital

Bourdieu (1986) distinguished between economic and symbolic forms of capital. In discussing symbolic forms he further distinguished between cultural capital and social capital, the resources that may be mobilised by networks of individuals. The importance of social capital is evident in the development and operation of the rom venues. Kiss, for example, noted that information dissemination about the Szimpla kert often utilised their own email lists of people who then spread word about the venue and brought other patrons. Several of the venues, and the Szoda in particular, organised events for cycle couriers who patronised the bars. Within these advocacy networks, loosely connected groups of individuals were called upon and mobilised to support the venue's operation and the consumer experience. This advocacy network also involved other cultural entrepreneurs, such as the producer of the Budapest City Spy map, who, for a fee, included the venues on small colour maps that are distributed freely in and around the city.

Cultural capital refers in part to abstract knowledge and competencies, but also to embodied, material and institutional manifestations, which reflect and transmit knowledge and competencies. The mobilisation of cultural capital was evident in the construction and reproduction of the rom genre. Seminal venues such as Ráckert and Pótkulcs were historically associated with members of the creative industries or sectors. Creativity and art in particular frequently re-emerges in the design and operational policies of subsequent generations of bars. Rom venues have in the past hosted intellectual debates, book launches, exhibitions, fashion shows with local art college students and musical concerts – particularly jazz or blues influenced and contemporary electronic music, which represents alternative discourses to mainstream, popular culture. Many of the venues have incorporated graffiti, poetry extracts, paintings and artistic collages into the decoration and projected artistic images on to the walls of the dilapidated venues.

Wall projections in T?z Tate (formerly T?zraktár)

Even in the latest manifestation of the rom venues, the rooftop terraces of Corvintet? and Fecske, art and artistry re-emerges in the design and operation. The walls of the entranceway leading to the Fecske are adorned with elaborate graffiti works and large prints. The toilet attendant, "Ági Mama," has decorated the facilities with quotes and sells copies of her book of stories alongside other items such as chewing gum, contraception and spare clothing. Corvintet? uses comic inspired graphics throughout the venue – even in the toilet signposting and in the warnings for patrons to refrain from throwing material off the roof. This is not to suggest that all the venues have the same musical policies or are equally keen to champion art. The

Szimpla, for example, may be much more likely to play jazz or blues influenced and alternative electronic genres of music than the Szoda venues, Corvintet? and Fecske, which have (or had) much broader music policies. Nevertheless, all the venues attempted to utilise some aspects of art or the creative industries, albeit in subversive or 'non-institutionalised' forms of art such as graffiti.
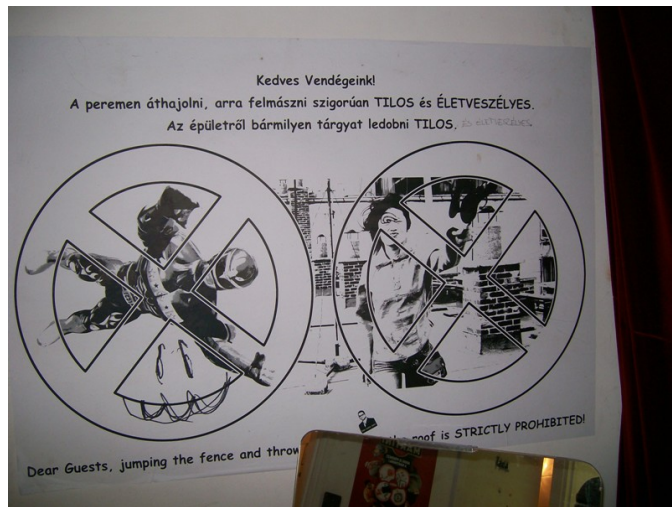

Art in Corvintet? (top) and Fecske

One of the most important manifestations of the symbolic value of the rom venues is the celebration of the urban decay that characterises them. The crumbling facades and interiors, exposed brick walls covered in stickers and scratched messages, the ramshackle collection of beaten up chairs and tables, exposed cabling and lampions are objectified states or manifestations of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Whereas some contemporary bars may communicate discourses of style through the use of strategically displayed cookware, slick spot lights, stained wood and leather furniture and stainless steel work surfaces (Cuthill, 2007), the eclecticism and ruinous state of the fixtures and fittings in the rom venues are inversions that communicate and reinforce the bohemian credentials of the owners and operators. Moreover, the establishment of the rom venues in the crumbling buildings of the VI, VII and IX districts weave together the discourses of ruin and marginality reflected in the urban fabric with the discourses of marginality and dissent of people involved in the creative sectors who originally patronised these venues. In other words,

the hospitableness of the venue was inseparable from the urban milieu in which it was located.

Entrance to the Szimpla kert mozi
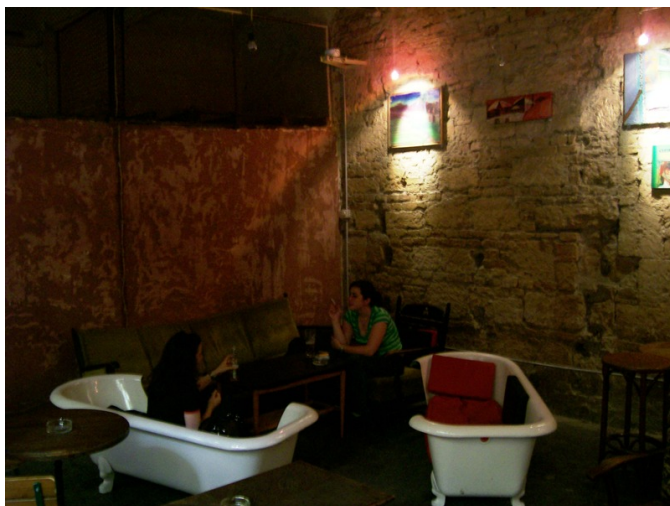
Eclectic furniture in Szimpla kert

It is important to recognise the tension between the different forms of capital that are entangled and generated in the operation of the rom venues. The drive to mobilise symbolic capital, whether in the social capital of the patrons or the cultural capital of art and the bars' programmes, competes with the drive to generate economic capital. The bars are, after all, businesses. Kiss, for example, noted that the original patrons of the Szimpla are no longer the core group that consume in the venue. The rising popularity of Szimpla kert and other rom venues and the growing number of newcomers, particularly "trendy" consumers from the city, tourists, stag and hen parties visiting them has disrupted the existing ambiance of the venues and the values they encompass (pestcentric.hu, 2007). As one commentator on a website forum notes:

> Foreigners don't bother me, as long as they are the *right* kind (a bit boho, can string an intelligent sentence together etc) but those trendy fake-nailed, hair-straightened, designer clothes wearing idiots that would be better at the White Party or whatever its called. Leave the romkocsmak

to the rest of us who probably wont' [sic] be spending 3 hours to get ready to go there. (pestcentric.hu, 2007 [emphasis added])

This reflects the great irony of tourism destinations and hospitality consumer experiences that develop organically through a gradual, bottom-up process. The creative vitality, ambience and sub-cultural discourses that are at the core of their appeal are also the things that are most likely to wane as its economic returns blossom. The challenge for operators is to balance the cultural credibility of the venues with the desire to generate profits. Alternatively, in Bourdieu's (1986) terms, the challenge is to maintain the circulation of symbolic capital while ensuring that it is not displaced by the increasing presence of economic capital mobilised by those without access to or appreciation of its symbolic forms.

7. Observations and discussion

The rom phenomenon can be described as a particular genre of hospitality: guerrilla hospitality. The secondary and primary data suggests that guerrilla hospitality has a number of defining characteristics. Firstly, it is entrepreneurial in flavour and organisation. Its existence relies on the personal investment of the operators who are central to defining its character and who are able to mobile networks of advocates in developing the operation and the consumer experience. Secondly, guerrilla hospitality requires less formal investment of economic capital than corporately branded and operated venues, and it is less reliant upon formal institutions such as banks for financial support. Thirdly, guerrilla hospitality is often temporary in its manifestation in a particular space, but then may remerge elsewhere. In Budapest, these venues found an ecological niche in which they could thrive, albeit temporarily. The relationship these venues had with the broader forces of regeneration in the VII district of Budapest meant that their existence in any one location was always going to be limited by the demolition or redevelopment of those buildings. Fourthly, guerrilla hospitality operations most often occupy buildings that were not hospitality venues previously, although this may not always be the case and it is not a prerequisite. The reuse of unusual premises adds to the novelty and appeal of the venues: it becomes a part of their unique selling point and distinguishes them from other operators on the market. Finally, guerrilla hospitality draws on alternative forms of symbolic capital for its appeal and existence, in which inversions define the quality and value of space and place.

The rom venues of Budapest and guerrilla hospitality represent the production of a symbolic form. Scott (2001: 12) defines symbolic forms as "goods and services that have some emotional or intellectual (ie aesthetic or semiotic) content." He goes on to argue that:

> commodified symbolic forms are products of capitalist enterprise that cater to demands for goods and services that serve as instruments of entertainment, communication, self-cultivation (however conceived), ornamentation, social positionality, and so on, and they exist in both 'pure' distillations, as exemplified by film or music, or in combination with more utilitarian functions, as exemplified by furniture and clothing. (Scott, 2001: 12)

It is useful to think about the rom venues and guerrilla hospitality as a symbolic form for several reasons. Firstly, by doing so it blurs the distinction between hospitality as a commercial enterprise and hospitality as a cultural activity and as a cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, some of the defining characteristics of rom venues and guerrilla hospitality i.e. the relationship between art and intelligentsia emphasises the multiple meanings of culture – both as a system of values, norms and codes shared by a social group, and culture as a series of creative processes or products that emerge from those processes. Secondly, conceptualising guerrilla hospitality as a commodified symbolic form helps to explain how its various features have re-emerged in subsequent generations of venues, which have borrowed from the aesthetic and entrepreneurial models developed by earlier seminal ones. The Corvintet? and Fecske draw on the discourses of rom

venues to create hospitality operations (and consumer experiences) that already have an emotional and aesthetic appeal; or, more specifically, the potential consumers of those venues may already have expectations of what such a rom venue may look, sound and feel like.

8. Conclusion and implications

Some elements of the rom phenomenon may be unique to the context in which it emerged. The VII district of Budapest is going through an intensive period of rehabilitation, which has allowed these entrepreneurial operators to occupy these premises. Furthermore, the Hungarian licensing system may be unique in allowing these dilapidated venues to be occupied and reused for such commercial purposes. Nevertheless, as Zukin (1988) suggested, cultural entrepreneurs and networks of creative individuals have established communities in numerous run-down city districts. Hospitality plays a significant role in the establishment of these networks – even if it is considered a set of ancillary activities or services that support these fragmented communities (e.g. Scott, 2001; Evans, 2005). However, the rom venues are more than supporting services: they have become cultural focal points and attractions in their own right. It may therefore be useful to consider how hospitality venues in other contexts may act both as symbolic focal points for members of the creative industries *and* as centres of creative output. McCleary et al. (2008) have pointed to the potential relationship between art and hospitality, but their analysis is limited to examining how support of arts by restaurants will enhance their image among those "high on the demographic scale." This paper has suggested that it is equally important to think about the relationship between subversive forms of art among a more diverse group of consumers. Moreover, it has been suggested here that the role of art extends to the physical design, the operational policies and to the consumer experience. The relevance and application of the emergent themes of this paper in other locations, therefore, deserves further attention.

This paper has also highlighted the role of space and the physical design in creating the consumer experience. The role of the servicescape in creating the brand image and consumption experience is well recognised (e.g. Zeithaml et al., 2006), and sensitivity towards the relationship between the physical environment and hospitality operation is evident (cf., Gillespie and Morrison, 2000; Cuthill, 2007; Di Domenico and Lynch, 2007). However, the rom venues and the notion of guerrilla hospitality connect the micro-spaces of the venues with the built environment or the urban fabric of the districts in which they are located. The consumer experience within these venues is intimately linked with the surrounding urban milieu. There is a need therefore to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the physical landscape, discourses of city living, and the operational policies of hospitality venues that thrive in particular urban locations.

Finally, the paper has pointed to the need to extend the study of hospitality and hospitality management through a critical appraisal of how cultural, physical and social forces and agencies interact to produce hybrid forms of hospitality. This reflects and adds weight to the growing calls for hospitality management research to move beyond a narrow focus on such issues as service quality to consider how broader sets of factors interact to form hospitality spaces and hospitable experiences (Lashley and Morrison, 2000; Hemmington, 2007; Lashley et al., 2007; Lugosi, 2008).

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