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The commercial home enterprise and host: a United Kingdom perspective

Paul A. Lynch*

*School of Business and Enterprise, Queen Margaret University College, Clerwood Terrace,
Edinburgh EH12 8TS, Scotland, UK*

Abstract

Different approaches to the study of small accommodation enterprises emanating from outside of hospitality are identified and a new hospitality-derived approach described: the commercial home enterprise (CHE). The commercial home sector is a numerically important yet often neglected part of the commercial accommodation sector and is briefly described and associated statistical problems highlighted. A critical review is undertaken of key studies concerning the commercial home host, identified as an integral part of the commercial home product, and inferences drawn out. Finally, broad characteristics of the CHE are summarised and areas for future research suggested.

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1. Introduction

There are three common approaches to the examination of small accommodation enterprises.

*Permanent address: The Scottish Hotel School, Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde, Curran Building, 94, Cathedral Street, Glasgow G4 0LG, Scotland, UK. Tel.: +44 141 548 3900; fax: +44 141 552 2870.

E-mail address: paul.lynch@strath.ac.uk (P.A. Lynch).

The first is the small firm or small business approach where the perspective is within a body of literature concerned with understanding small firms, where the determining criteria is usually that of size (e.g., [Thomas, 1998](#)). Size has been well debated, notably by [Peacock \(1993\)](#), [Morrison \(1998\)](#) and [Thomas \(1998\)](#), and is recognised to be problematical owing to issues of sectoral differences, alternative perspectives on the nature of size, and the general lack of common approaches. A main advantage of this approach is the development of conceptual understanding sensitive to the type of businesses being examined, rather than imposing models derived from larger firms. The second approach is that of the family business where the distinctive dimension of business is that of the family involvement (e.g., [Getz and Carlsen, 2000](#); [Getz et al., 2004](#)). This perspective is not size-sensitive as the distinguishing characteristic is that of the family owner nature of the business. It has the advantage of making allowance for how families, their goals, life cycles, and interrelationships can affect the running of a business. Both perspectives are influenced by literature from outside of hospitality and applied to the sector.

A third approach is that of entrepreneurship and within this perspective, the lifestyle entrepreneur perspective has been given significant attention recently (e.g., [Altjevic and Doorne, 2000](#); [Morrison et al., 2001](#); [Di Domenico, 2003](#)). This approach is helpful in moving away from a problematical assumption of the profit-making imperative as prime motivation and recognises the significance of personal values in determining firms' economic performances. This perspective also emanates from outside the field of hospitality and has been 'imported'. A fourth, more specialised perspective is proposed here, which, whilst influenced by the valuable contributions of the foregoing approaches, emanates from within hospitality and the study of small accommodation enterprises: the commercial home enterprise (CHE) approach. 'CHE' was first used by [Lynch \(2003\)](#), and subsequently elaborated ([Lynch, 2004](#)). The term arose from a study of small commercial accommodation.

'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. 'Commercial home' therefore embraces a range of accommodation types including some (small) hotels, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), and host family accommodation, which simultaneously span private, commercial, and social settings. By using the terms 'hotels' and 'B&Bs', accommodation such as guesthouses, boarding houses, lodging houses, sometimes used synonymously with hotels and B&Bs ([Walton, 1978](#)), are also included as commercial home establishments. Not only the objective description is important, but also the associations: private homes, interaction with host/family who live on the premises, sharing of space that thereby becomes 'public'. The associations are linked by the concept of the home.

The home concept distinguishes commercial homes from other forms of accommodation. For example, those hotels where the host's private home, or those of the manager or other staff, is not on the premises, and the boundaries distinguishing public space, open to staff and visitors, from private space, open to staff only, are relatively distinct. One may refer to a sector of commercial home accommodation to distinguish the accommodation from other types. The host

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