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## **'Multicultural lunches': Sharing food in post-Brexit south coast of England**

### **Abstract**

Food can be considered a substance that brings people together through its material and sensuous qualities, through affecting shared memories of people and place, and through traditions of hospitality. It is a human necessity with multiple levels of communal understanding, and conviviality. Currently, much of the UK faces the fragmentation of communities based on closely divided political views. In this case, conflicting feelings related to Brexit, migration and refugees. This paper offers a qualitative analysis of a series of 'multicultural lunches' – named and organised by a local equality advocacy charity and partner volunteer organisations. The multicultural lunches took place in 2017. Drawing from 13 semi-structured interviews and 6 participant observations we provide detailed discussion that links food with leisure and community. Analysis of the findings illustrates the nature of local response to broader societal fragmentation and conflict, and offers discussion of the value of food to community development.

**Keywords:** food; sharing; community; migration; refugees; leisure

### **Introduction**

This study draws from a larger project that considers leisure at the level of the local and as a response to a political climate of division and austerity. In the UK, the EU referendum (23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016) and the on-going processes of Brexit occurred within a context of a politics of austerity (2008 – present), and were accompanied by three terror attacks in three months – March-June 2017. For this period, crime reports highlight increases in religious and racial hate crime with upsurges corresponding with the Brexit vote and the terror attacks (Dearden 2017; Travis 2017). At national and local levels, there has been an emergence of intolerance towards migration, migrants and mobile lives that has been popularized in sectors of the UK press, party politics, popular politics, public discourse and in personal actions, behaviours and interactions.

Notably, coastal communities reflect particular profiles with a majority vote to leave the EU, larger numbers of retirees (Balthazer 2017), lower than average earnings (ONS

2016) and rises in individual insolvency (Mulligan 2017). Home Office statistics show that the south coast county of Dorset experienced 100% increase in reported hate crime for the period July – September 2016 compared with April – June 2016 (O’Neill 2017). Aware of these local and national conditions and concerned about rises in local hate crime, an established equality advocacy charity and partner volunteer organisations responded with a series of ‘multicultural lunches’.

In this paper, we focus on these organised multicultural lunches, which emerged as a local response to broader political, economic and socio-cultural patterns. In particular, we consider how community members rely on making, sharing and eating food as a process to publicly welcome, include and celebrate migration, and to create a positive sense of local multiculturalism. Although multiculturalism is a contested concept, we continue to use it in relation to the lunches in the same way Wise operationalises it in her critical work on ‘everyday multiculturalism’ and food (2011 and 2014). Food is the main feature of the multicultural lunches. The lunches can be understood as leisure. As such, this paper makes a contribution to this Special Issue (*Imagining the possibilities – food as leisure in a fragmented world*) through its exploration of how food as leisure functions at the level of the local community, and how local food-leisure communities reflect a complex mix of spatialities and human interactions (cf Bell 2011 and 2016; Wise 2014).

### **Conceptual Framing**

In this section of the paper we draw on existing concepts familiar to the field of leisure studies through discussion of three aspects, namely the existing literatures on leisure and migration, hospitality and sharing food, and community and civil society. These three aspects are not usually connected. We link them in order to expand the conceptual boundaries of current thinking and to offer a theoretical frame from which to analyse our qualitative findings. Specifically, we develop debate of leisure, migration and ‘the most pressing social, cultural and political questions of our time’ (Lynch *et al.* 2011) through a focus on food. The consideration of food as it relates to migrant people, migration and mobile lives, and in the context of post-Brexit Britain, allows an inclusion of the work on hospitality (Bauman 2009; Derrida 2005; Levinas 1987). By stretching philosophical debate surrounding hospitality to include food as leisure, we enable a

critical analysis of the multicultural lunches. The analyses highlight the limits of community, food-leisure communities, multiculturalism and civil society specific to a particular locale within post-Brexit south coast of England.

### ***Leisure and Migration***

As a consequence of displacement, migrant populations often experience their leisure worlds as fragmented, and their leisure is often seen as a trivial or insignificant process of migration (Mata-Codesal, Peperkamp and Tiesler 2015; Stack and Iwasaki 2009). As such, leisure can be a hidden or forgotten element of migration, and studies of leisure and migration are prone to marginalisation (Floyd, Bocarro and Thompson 2008; Hasmi, Gross and Scott-Young 2014). However, as the role of leisure in migrant people's lives is increasingly recognised there has been an increased attention to available studies (Budruk 2010; Walker, Halpenny and Deng 2011; Hasmi, Gross and Scott-Young 2014). This existing research demonstrates that leisure can play a crucial role in processes of migration and 'integration' (e.g., Juniu 2002; Stack and Iwasaki 2009; Stodolska and Alexandris 2004), and that leisure is directly related to the quality of life of migrant people (Ruble and Shaw 1991; Stodolska 1998).

Leisure has value for individuals because it is 'relatively freely chosen' (Roberts 2011, 8). This aspect of leisure is important for most people, including those who migrate. This may be especially so when migrant people have little control over key aspects of their lives. Leisure has unique characteristics compared to other activities, for example, its emphasis on enjoyment and informal interaction, and learning and sharing may be more naturally facilitated in a leisure context (Stack and Iwasaki 2009). Through leisure, migrant people can gain social support, expand their networks, develop their sense of place and alleviate so-called settlement distress (Hasmi, Gross and Scott-Young 2014; Kim and Scott 2000; Stodolska 2002; Tirone and Pedlar 2000). 'Going out' and socialising can act as a refuge from the conditions of social isolation and boredom in which many find themselves (Lewis 2015). The meaningfulness of leisure also involves processes of self-realisation and self-expression, and this can enable a sense of self in a world of flux and uncertainty (Mata-Codesal, Peperkamp and Tiesler 2015). As Rojek (2000, 37) notes, 'our participation in leisure activity is a way of demonstrating to others who we are and what we believe in'. It follows that leisure engagement can serve

as an expression of migrant people's cultural characteristics (Stack and Iwasaki 2009), which can be useful in confronting questions of belonging, membership, social status, self-perception and cultural change. Leisure may be an important area to develop, express and negotiate personal, social and cultural preferences (Mata-Codesal, Peperkamp and Tiesler 2015). Cultural expression through leisure can help to retain a connection with traditional ways of life, provide psychological comfort, facilitate the retention of cultural elements, and help resolve problems associated with migration distress (Kim and Scott 2000; Stodolska 2002; Tirone and Pedlar 2000). Leisure can serve as a 'buffer' (Stodolska 2002), and it can enable a healthy emotional balance (Kim and Scott 2000; Tirone and Pedlar 2000). Thus, socially and culturally meaningful forms of leisure can facilitate social connections and networks with families and friends, and provide opportunities for cultural celebration, problem-solving, learning and development including cross-cultural interaction (Stack and Iwasaki 2009). This can be a means for connecting with local people, and has implications for positive experiences of social inclusion and 'integration' (Stack and Iwasaki 2009).

Spracklen et al. (2015) argue that leisure has value for migrants' lives because it offers a sense of belonging and identity. In a late modern, possibly liquid modern society, leisure has become recognized as having enormous potential for bringing people together and making people feel they belong (Blackshaw 2010). Leisure is a realm where emotional closeness or distance to people from the host society emerges (Mata-Codesal et al. 2015). However, it is still unclear how leisure can actually enhance 'integration,' 'inclusion' and belonging. Migrant people often spend leisure time with their own ethnic groups due to the comfort of similar experiences and background, as well as a lack of language skills, and discrimination/exclusion, and fear of the unknown (Stodolska 2002). Peters (2010) suggests that organising interactive and inclusive activities in public leisure spaces such as urban parks can help bring people together and facilitate inter-ethnic interactions.

For leisure to be enjoyed it requires resources, assistance and continuous self-effort (Gross and Scott-Young 2014). The leisure constraints of lack of disposable time, lack of finance, lack of transport and limited social connections as well as age, class and gender are significant for migrant populations (Hasmi et al. 2014; Long, Hylton and Spacklen

2014). According to Spracklen et al. (2015), migrant people do not often have sufficient resources to do the things they want to do in their leisure time, and the choices they have are limited. For example, in their study, African migrants were constrained in their leisure because of fear and previous experiences of prejudice, and racism. Spracklen et al. (2015) found that the social and cultural capital held by this group of migrants in their countries of origin often had little value in the UK. Additionally, Stodolska and Santos (2006a; 2006b) found that Mexican migrants' leisure was constrained by separation from families, unstructured work arrangements, the financial burden for remittances, lack of networks, and legal statuses.

To focus on gender constraints, McMichael and Manderson (2004) demonstrate how Somali women migrants living in Australia report deep sadness from the loss of their previous social networks and social capital. These findings can be compared with Somali men living in Australia who have more opportunity to form new networks and build social capital via sport and work (Spaaij 2012). Interestingly, Russell and Stage (1996) found that Sudanese refugee women expressed leisure as a 'burden' as it thwarted traditional role activities, and was perceived as creating a dependency on others.

Finally, Stodolska and Livengood (2006) show how religion can affect leisure for some groups of migrants and they recommend that providers of leisure opportunities should exercise cultural sensitivity, and make an effort to offer services to meet cultural needs. Clearly, social events, religious gatherings, and celebrations play an important role in the lives of migrant people, as all provide opportunities to share spaces and social encounters, which are a major source of social capital. To date, there has been little research on the specific role of cooking, sharing and eating food—multicultural lunches—as leisure in the lives of migrant people.

### ***Hospitality and Sharing Food***

The notion of hospitality has a history within moral and philosophical theory that has influenced aspects of international relations *qua* migration. The ethical content of the debate (Dufourmantelle and Derrida 2000; Levinas 1987) is applied to the inaugural encounters between 'hosts' and 'strangers'/'guests', and Welten (2015, 7) makes the

point that: 'Hospitality is often understood as an ethical openness towards the other'. The possibilities and limits of openness are significant to current discussions of migration (Friese 2010; Still 2010), migration and 'otherness' (Noble & Noble 2016), ways of relating/responding to the 'other' (Barnett 2005; Popke 2003), the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers (Ahmed 2000), and the rights of strangers (Cavallar 2017).

As Gauthier (2007) highlights, Levinas posited that the ethical and political dimensions of hospitality involve welcoming the stranger within the sphere of both the private and the public:

In the ethical realm, the self is morally compelled to welcome the individual stranger into the private space of the home. In the public realm, the self is politically obligated to welcome the whole of humanity into the public space of the homeland (p. 158).

Levinas offers detailed and dense rationale for his reasoning, which includes the moral worth of the self and the potential for a politics of tolerance and justice (Noble and Noble 2016). This combination of morality and governance means that his perspective can be viewed in terms of political theology (Gauthier 2007). There is insufficient space to cover his thesis, but it is worth stressing the impact of his ideas. Through reading Levinas both Derrida (2002) and Bauman (2009) developed their work on the conditions of (post)modernism vis-à-vis migration and inclusion.

Derrida (2002, 2005; Dufourmantelle and Derrida 2000) deconstructs Levinas' foundational concept of hospitality, identifying it as the Law of Hospitality – the absolute, unconditional or infinite law of hospitality. Through his critique, he considers the conditional law of hospitality (Still 2010), which recognizes the impossibilities set out in Levinas' aporia of hospitality (Westmoreland 2008). Writers (Friese 2010; Welten 2015) have shown how Derrida extends the philosophical debate to interrogate the close relation between hospitality and hostility that is engendered by unconditional hospitality (e.g., his concept: hostipitality). By considering the complex conditions of hospitality, Derrida raises interesting questions surrounding, for example, the host as hostage (Noble and Noble 2016; Westmoreland 2008), and the complex nature of reciprocity and non-reciprocity (Still 2010).

Best (2016) argues that Bauman takes a sociological, as opposed to a purely philosophical perspective, to the notion of hospitality and the treatment of strangers. Changing the focus of inquiry to the liquidity of boundaries and communities, Bauman argues that it is now harder to distinguish the host, stranger, guest and visitor. Furthermore, he stretches his conceptualisation to include liquid hospitality (Welten 2015). As such, hospitality becomes ambiguous, but can emerge as 'a deliberate strategy, a reordering of social relations in the world, an architect' (Welten 2015, 18). The latter leads to a focus on hospitality that centres analyses of who is included and who is excluded (Best, 2016). Here, the excluded signal a return to the Other, and for Bauman this gives rise to what he describes as wasted lives and outcasts, which he associates with the internal workings of modernity and liquid modernity (2004).

Within contemporary hospitality studies, Lynch et al (2011) argue that hospitality can be theorised through two positions: 'as social control' and 'as a form of social and economic exchange' (p. 5). The former reflects arguments surrounding exclusion, inclusion and the Other. The latter encompasses notions of reciprocity and the blurring of boundaries between hosts and guests. Bell (2011) refers to 'hostguests' as a way to capture the 'mixed-up-ness of host-guest relations' (p. 146), and to help conceptualise the moments of 'interpersonal interactions in public spaces' (p. 138), which enable informal hospitality to build society. He refers to this as the 'social work' of hospitality. The idea of 'social work' can be linked with Wise's research on food, everyday multiculturalism and low-level cosmopolitanism (2011). Wise explores the spatiality and materiality of food to identify 'convivial experiences of multiculturalism' (p. 82) in a range of settings in Australia. Her findings demonstrate how eating together gives rise to commensality, civility, solidarity, anxiety, ambivalence and disjuncture. She highlights the 'precariousness of hospitality' (p. 104) and like other commentators, she is clear not to overly romanticize and/or fantasize the impact of food in building new communities.

### ***Community and Civil Society***

Community is an enduring yet contested concept (Neal and Waters 2008), though one that continues to pervade policy and practical implementation of initiatives (Localism Act 2011; Kempen and Wissink 2014). An extensive literature discusses the evolution of

traditional place-based communities (Putnam 1995; Wellman et al. 2003; Fortunati et al. 2013) that are altered by a rise in individual social networks, which reflect a mobile population (Frith 2012; Wellman 2001). For example, migrant people typically maintain geographically dispersed social networks that are less dependent on the place where they live (Kempen and Wissink 2014). Similar to traditional communities, these networks offer support, a sense of belonging and identity (Wellman 2001), and liberate individuals' place-based obligations (Portes 1998). However, while migrant peoples' social networks may be widely dispersed, their lived experience resides in neighbourhoods (Kempen and Wissink 2014), hence it makes sense for policy responses to operate at this level. Interventions at a community or neighbourhood level are often led by external agencies, as is the case with the multicultural lunches described in this paper. This reflects the shift away from both predominantly place related community actions and an institutional response at the community level.

This evolution of communities has implications for social support and social cohesion (Hampton 2016). Communities offer places and spaces to build social capital (Carrasco and Cid-Aguayo 2012; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995), and reciprocal arrangements (Putnam 1995). Dispersed social networks might provide emotional support at a distance. However, migrant people may find it more difficult to access material resources (Carrasco et al. 2008) in their new place of residence. Furthermore, where place-based communities are strong, exclusionary practices may operate (Julien 2015) as the existing population conserves access to resources and encounters of others may reinforce a sense of difference (Kempen and Wissink 2014) and segregation (Rose et al. 2013). Meeting places, including both material and virtual leisure spaces, can reinforce segregation of social networks as people go to spaces where they meet familiar people (Kempen and Wissink 2014). Spaaij (2014) describes the negotiation of belonging to communities of sport as a process of 'seeking' and then a process of 'granting' inclusion. On a more positive note, El-Bialy and Mulay (2015) suggest where there is low diversity of ethnicities this may be beneficial for social support and wellbeing of migrant peoples.

In this paper, we are interested in the sharing of food as a signifier of welcome and inclusion. This interest is at the level of the local community, specifically the food-leisure communities of the multicultural lunches. Our approach involves the social

spaces of proximity (Barnett 2005) and the cultural work of reciprocity operating within the 'fold of community' (Popke 2003, 309).

## **Methodology**

The empirical inquiry that informs this paper took place within the leisure spaces of the multicultural lunches – participant observation - as well as during 13 semi-structured interviews with lunch participants (x 3) and organisers (x 10)<sup>1</sup> that support migrant individuals and groups in Dorset, UK. Methodologically, the participant observations provided a natural setting in which we could explore food sharing, leisure and community. Our approach sought to locate the researchers in these spaces to gain an etic perspective but also an emic, insider's view (Bernard 2006; Morris *et al.* 1999). The purpose was to uncover and describe the participants' perspectives on food, leisure and community, and it is this subjective view that mattered (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Participant observation involves 'getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives' (Bernard 1994, 136). Prior to this research, little detail was known about people's experiences in these leisure spaces created by local organisations.

Four researchers conducted a total of six observations at five multicultural lunches during July to October 2017 (see Table 1). The researchers attended the lunches as participants and were known to the organisers. Researchers fully participated in activities, observed them and took notes. Throughout the process the researchers identified themselves as academic researchers, but otherwise joined the multicultural lunches as participants. The participation therefore involved some covert and overt observations. Observations lasted around two hours, which was generally for the duration of the lunch. Observations adopted an open strategy with no protocol to observe specific features or interactions. This helped develop a detailed, holistic description and provide insight into the interview findings. The subsequent analysis draws on both researchers' as well as participants' voices.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we focus on the 3 interviews with lunch participants. We draw from the 10 interviews with members of local organisations to establish the general context in terms of provision and issues surrounding leisure provision more broadly.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 13 research participants. The interview participants were recruited during the first lunch and through contacts with groups associated with Bournemouth University’s Refugee and Migrant Leisure Network. Interviews were semi-structured and guided participants through a series of questions. Interviews with lunch participants (x 3) explored their experiences and reflections of the multicultural lunches, while interviews with members of local organisations (x 10) explored a broader range of topics, and captured material on experiences of community, welcome and leisure.<sup>2</sup> In all cases, the interviewer followed up emergent topics based upon what seemed most appropriate in the context of the ‘conversation’ (Robson 1993). The interviews lasted around one hour.

Observations were written up and interviews were transcribed as soon as possible. These outputs were shared among the researchers. Each observation and interview was considered in turn, with the whole body of text brought together, integrating the themes from the observation notes along with interview transcripts. This was a qualitative procedure (Huberman and Miles 1998) that provided thick descriptions (Bernard 2006). ‘Significant statements’, sentences or quotes were identified that provided an understanding of how participants experienced certain phenomenon (Creswell 2007). The researchers sought to achieve verification and validity through multiple sources and layers of analysis (Bernard 2006).

**Table 1. Participant observations**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Observers</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> July 2017	<b>Kinson</b> Bournemouth (St Andrew’s Church Hall)	Hosted inside a Church Hall at the end of a lane where there is little passing traffic. Participants booked to attend the event. This restricted participants to those invited through a pre-existing network.	Researcher 1
2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2017	<b>Weymouth</b> (Chapel Hay Community Garden)	Hosted in a small community park providing a space that was open to the passing public. This enabled local people to join the event without prior invitation. The event built on an existing family-	Researcher 2 & 3

<sup>2</sup> The 10 interviews contribute to a larger research project of which this paper is one element.

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		centred event that takes place monthly.	
13 <sup>th</sup> Aug 2017	<b>West Howe</b> Bournemouth (Henry Brown Community Centre)	Hosted in an outdoor space adjacent to a community centre. Participants booked to attend, but the location also opened up opportunities for passers-by to join in.	Researcher 4
30 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2017	<b>Branksome</b> Bournemouth (Branksome Centre)	Hosted in an indoor space in a community centre in a park. An outdoor activity took place after the food. This was not a lunch <i>per se</i> rather it celebrated 'Tea and Cake from Around the World'. Participants were invited through established contacts.	Researcher 3
29 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2017	<b>Bournemouth University</b>	Hosted in a university building. This was the final event in the series and was a little larger than earlier events. Participants were invited through pre-existing networks. Given the location on a Saturday there were no passers-by likely to join in.	Researcher 3

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### **Multicultural lunches: Shared leisure and food-leisure communities**

Drawing from the findings the following analysis focuses on two main themes: shared leisure and food-leisure communities in order to critically explore the links between leisure, food and community. The multicultural lunches took place in traditional community spaces, including community centres, church halls and parks. Researchers describe positive vibrant spaces: 'the centre was well kept, clean, bright and colourful' and 'it was a lovely community park and a community centre'. To offer a sense of the range of food at the events, researchers reported seeing and/or eating food from the following origins: Afghanistan, Africa, Bangladesh, Caribbean, China, Egypt, France, Hungary, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Romy, Scotland, South Africa, Sudan, Syria, Sweden, Turkey, and Venezuela. This list is a simplistic representation of participation and it ignores the nuanced experiences of the multicultural lunches. For instance, a researcher noted: 'I always thought falafel was Turkish food, but the name tag identified it as "Sudan and Egypt Falafel".' Similarly, interview participants talked about cooking and eating food that belonged to multiple origins, for example:

*I am cooking Egyptian food, as part of the Muslim community ... So each one of our [Muslim] community is cooking different food. We've got Syrian people, we've got Iraqi, we've got Egyptian, Indian, Pakistani. So it will be a lovely variety of food.*  
(Maibe)

### **Sharing Leisure**

At the five events, food provided an 'object' around which people could interact. Wise (2011) refers to this as the material interactions within which food mediates 'inter-ethnic intermingling' (p. 86). The presence of food made it easy for the researchers to say 'hello', start small talk/polite conversation, and ask people questions about their background that might feel presumptuous in other settings and contexts. Through sharing food, it was possible to talk about tastes and recipes, and this provided some potential to explore how participants identified culturally, and ethnically. The food also generated emergent conversation through its sensuality and participants posed questions such as: 'Did you try this dish?' The interview participants had similar experiences, for example:

*There were different cultures, different ways of cooking and different food which we never tasted before ... all of the food looked delicious, and you tend to ask: "oh what are the ingredients", "how did you make that", and so forth. So it was a way of communicating with each other. ... you can't have better conversation than having it around food! ... When you've got something like that [food], which is basic, I am sure we all enjoy eating different food and talking to people over it.* (Maibe)

*You sit down at the big long tables and everybody sort of sat all over the place and you found yourself sitting next to people that you didn't know and conversing with them. It was over food, which is generally what would start it, the conversation would move on to other things ... Food is universal. We all eat it; we all engage in it in some way.* (Toni)

As a central substance food served as a 'buffer' (Stodolska 2002). It enabled the celebration of cultural expression and cross-cultural interaction (Stack and Iwasaki, 2009). It is the food that predominantly facilitated self-expression (Mata-Codesal,

Peperkamp and Tiesler 2015; Rojek 2000). It permitted participants to connect with former ways of life, which can help to preserve cultural identities (Kim *et al.* 2002; Stodolska 2002). Clothing, music, singing and games/play also appeared as significant ways to demonstrate and share culture, heritage and notions of belonging (Lewis 2015). At most of the multicultural lunches, a small number of participants arrived in traditional dress. For instance, at one event a participant brought a range of traditional African and Middle Eastern clothing, which people could try on and wear, and the provider of the clothing did an informal quiz about the clothes. It was apparent that these activities provided a space for cultural expression, and that participants felt safe to reveal their heritage.

In terms of leisure and migration studies, these aspects of the multicultural lunches reiterate the positive value of sharing public leisure spaces and practices (Peters 2010). The multicultural lunches can be described as ‘flickering moments’ of hospitality and the events constitute ‘the social work of hospitality’ (Bell 2011, 146). Researchers frequently noted the lunches as uplifting and efficacious in relation to sentiments of welcome, the celebration of diversity, synthesis, harmony, and sharing, albeit micro and ephemeral spaces of local leisure. Research participants reported similar feelings:

*... it was lovely. It was amazing, how people actually like living together, when you look at how many nationalities were there, it was like, oh my gosh. ... Sharing food, sharing life, sharing culture, there is a lot behind it. (Taavi)*

*... a community garden in kind of a deprived area is good because it brings people together no matter who they are. No matter what class, which country or background they come from, so it was lovely. (Maibe)*

In this way, we can argue that sharing food as a form of ‘intercultural contact’ (Wise 2011, 83) generates new understanding and relationships across cultures and ethnicities (Marte 2011), and the practice can function as a social resource in ‘stitching the self in place’ (Hall 1992). As Marte (2011) argues, food nurtures comforts, familiarity and a local sense of place. She goes on to suggest that within such as context, individuals become ‘social food’ to each other, ‘consuming’ and ‘being consumed’ in a feasting through alliances that can produce new realities. Similarly, Wise (2011) suggests that ‘through the consumption of the Other’s food ..., at least for the duration of the meal’, there can be ‘a sense of ‘we-ness’ in difference’ (102)

Returning to our conceptual framing it is important to [re]consider the multicultural lunches in the context of post-Brexit south coast of England and migration. Specifically, how the concept of hospitality affords a critical view of the dynamics between ‘host’ and ‘strangers.’ The series of events was organised and funded by a local equality advocacy charity and partner volunteer organisations. Both agencies receive a range of funding from a variety of sources to work on projects and initiatives that seek equality for groups and individuals that are excluded, marginalized and experience discrimination, prejudice, and abuse within the locale. In this way, the lunches reflect ‘a situation of ordered reciprocity and hospitality that incorporates hybrid others’ (Wise 2011, 101). The ethos of these agencies tends to side with ‘an ethical openness toward the other’ (Welton 2015, 7). In terms of pragmatism, the agencies, and similar agencies, might be considered the ‘host’. At the same time, this status is not fixed and links with local venues—religious buildings, youth/community centres, gardens, parks, education institutions—and the people who inhabit these venues, which means an extension of the idea of ‘host’. It is difficult to determine, exactly, who is the ‘host’. A central feature of the multicultural lunches is the provision of food by participants. As has been shown above, the food is cooked and shared by individuals and groups who are perceived to be migrants and/or refugees. As such the ‘stranger’, ‘visitor’, ‘guest’ becomes the ‘host’. Bauman (2004) highlights that it is not always possible to distinguish between host, stranger, visitor and guest. For him, the host-stranger relation is no longer clearly marked as a binary – it is liquid in nature. Bell (2011) confirms the ‘slipperiness’ (146) of the host-guest dyad when he argues that hosts are often guests. These arguments contest the assumed socio-political dominance of the ‘host’ and disturb traditional conservative views of ‘strangers’, ‘visitor’ and ‘guests’.

The multicultural lunches, as representations of hospitality, both literally and metaphorically, do not exist within the realm of nation, state and/or sovereignty. They are local, regional, community-led initiatives that involve participants extending welcome and hospitality to other participants who may or may not identify as migrant and/or refugee. The nature of this hospitality does not touch national, international and/or transnational relations and migration policy. However, it does touch local

spaces and people to offer a palpable counteraction to occurrences of intolerance and hatred.

The moral-economy of place sharing and the gifting of food have the potential to generate new forms of 'everyday recognition' (Wise 2011, 97). During an interview with paid/unpaid support workers from local agencies, one participant spoke about the potential of exchange and reciprocity to a group of women recently arrived in the UK:

*I wanted to help these women see that they had something to offer us, it wasn't just always giving to them, but they've got many, many skills that we would love to learn about. (Women and Families Support Worker)*

The multicultural lunches are an example of structured interventions where participants who provide food become central players offering hospitality. For some, it is an opportunity to give, and this can be important in terms of independency. Marcus (2009) suggests that people seek to maintain a reciprocal balance through giving as well as receiving, and being unable to give back can lead to a sense of indebtedness, which can cause humiliation and withdrawal. The multicultural lunches represent an opportunity to give, where the act of giving is a beneficial process (Greenburg and Shapiro 1971; Uehara, 1995). The external funding for the events facilitated this because volunteers were paid expenses to cover their food costs. The giving is therefore contingent on the funding, but nevertheless significant to processes of conviviality and solidarity (Wise 2011)

The multicultural lunches can be explained through a focus on the links between leisure and migration, including forced migration. The cooking, sharing and communal eating of food can be viewed in terms of 'the social work of hospitality' (Bell 2011). The research findings suggest that the lunches add to a local sense of 'everyday multiculturalism' and 'low level cosmopolitanism' (Wise 2011). However, the impact of the lunches in terms of sustained community building must also be critically examined.

### **Food-leisure communities**

The aim of the multicultural lunches was *'to provide a series of community based events in neighbourhood locations across Dorset to provide opportunities for diverse groups and*

*individuals to meet and to build friendships'* (Community Development Officer, Equality Advocacy Charity). Such an aim reflects a neighbourhood policy agenda (Lager et al. 2015; Painter 2012), with the lunches seeking to build place-based connections and relational communities. The involvement of a small number of community-based organisations indicates that local people sought to create inclusive food-leisure spaces. Lead individuals were significant to this process:

*One of the important people was XXXX. She brought three Syrian families to today's event. She, as a volunteer, translated Arabic for them and assisted them in settling down in this country. She is originally from Egypt and has lived in the UK for 25 years. She said she volunteers for many different refugees and migrant communities while having a part time job at a hospital. (Researcher observation)*

These leaders included not only volunteers, but also employees from third sector organisations, which reveals some of the complexities and contradictions in community making practices (Julien 2015; Neal and Waters 2008).

The multicultural lunches were promoted through the established networks of the community organisations involved. Some of these organisations are aligned with local religious institutions. Posters and social media, especially Facebook pages, played an important role in raising awareness about the lunches. Such networks can become self-limiting over time as all members of already-involved groups are reached and no new people are apparent. Obviously, this challenges the notion of inclusivity. However, interview participant Taavi asserted that through these existing community organisation networks and word of mouth the series of lunches did attract new participants.

Once at the lunches, some participants were unsure about how to engage. Interview participant Toni described her anxiety about her first multicultural lunch and her personal concerns over causing offence to other cultures. This is likely to be heightened for participants who have recently arrived in the UK and for those who have had limited contact with other cultural groups. A researcher was also initially a little uncertain about her presence in the food-leisure space:

*I wasn't sure what to do as it looked like the event was in full swing and no one in particular was greeting those who entered... I felt a bit out of place as this was obviously quite an intimate, family community event.*

This disappeared when she met a familiar face and through this person she felt formally welcomed to the lunch.

Family groups were dominant at some lunches, particularly in Weymouth, but not all. Individuals were encouraged to attend, but as Toni explains, many refugees are single young men who might not seek out these food-leisure spaces. There are challenges to attending community events that might appear full of strangers especially if religious or participants' cues suggest they are for 'others', thus reinforcing community difference (Kempen and Wissink 2014) and exclusivity (Julien 2015).

Underlining the self-limiting networks, many participants knew other people and the lunches provided a space to renew acquaintances. However, there was also evidence from the interviews that friendships were built at and then sustained beyond the lunches.

*When we go somewhere, like this kind of event... and bring more people, these people will begin seeing each other often... they will become more than just faces I see... they become more of a friend, the friend sometimes becomes a family. So it's taking steps, for how many times you actually going, you're getting people closer to each other. (Taavi)*

The opportunities for repeated meetings were significant for building friendships and by the final event there were suggestions that these were sustained beyond the spaces of the multicultural lunches. There is a negotiation of belonging through the events similar to that described by Spaaij (2014) in relation to sport-communities. This process takes time and our research indicates that meaningful leisure, enacted around food, can establish community-based connections for local people and for migrant people (Stack & Iwasaki 2009). Additionally, the public nature of the spaces, particularly

in parks and community centre gardens where the lunches were highly visible, encouraged unplanned participation. For example:

*It seems like a few people from the surrounding area turned up obviously because the park was slotted in between the houses, it's not far away from anything, kind of in the corner, and people just turned up. So it was great. (Maibe)*

A researcher reflected on the spontaneity and lack of institutional feel to the Weymouth event:

*Very interested as to why this kind of community event had sprung up in this particular neighbourhood as it didn't appear to be attached to any institution... Noticed that people were very relaxed – children left to play and babies in pushchairs didn't need to have someone with them constantly. I thought this must mean people really felt part of a supportive community here.*

This somewhat idealised view of community reflects this particular lunch's heritage. Through the interviews with members of local organisations, we realised that the lunches had built on an established monthly event run by local people. As a consequence of this history, this lunch, more than the others, reflected people's lived experience of community in a physical place (Frith 2012; Hampton 2016; Wellman et al. 2003).

While the multicultural lunches were focused in localities, the presence of more dispersed social networks was also evident. For instance, a researcher '*noticed one of the Syrian ladies was walking around with a small child in buggy whilst on Skype to someone*'. This reflects 'transnational social spaces' where migrant people share experiences with absent others (Kempen and Wissink 2014), maintaining close social ties (Humphreys 2010) that offer emotional support. It was apparent that mobile phones were also used to browse social media. This is a form of 'psychic cocooning' (Wilken 2010, 452) where individuals seek to distance themselves from the immediate social space. It was the sharing of food that reconnected these participants to the physical food-leisure community.

Though the lunches provided a positive shared space, there was less scope for some to interact. For new arrivals to the UK there were language barriers and, though difference was celebrated, a sense of otherness was marked out by the dress code adopted by different cultural groups at some of the lunches. Researchers observed that some participants tended to socialise in separate groups.

At the time of the research, relatively few refugee people had been settled in Dorset. However, there was evidence that the local population welcomed the then small number of re-settled Syrian families.

*If they are the only [Syrian] family in the area, the English people step up to the plate. Totally. And they have been absorbed into the community, they have been welcomed. (Women and Families Support Worker)*

While in urban areas migrant and refugee people have scope to orientate together, in rural areas this segregation is less likely to happen due to low ethnic diversity. Research in Canada found this to be the case (El-Bialy and Mulay 2015). Nevertheless, the orientation of migrant people with other migrant people with shared characteristics was evident in our research. This opportunity to make connections with people in similar circumstances can be beneficial (Stodolska 2007). For example, Maibe explains the connections made by recent refugee people:

*The Syrian family there [Portland], met the Syrian family in Dorchester and both have got children and when we finished the event, it was a very warm day in fact, very sunny, and I can't remember what time we finished the event, maybe 2 or 3 o'clock. And then both of them, the two families, decided to go down to the beach. So, you can see that friendship could be there.*

Despite these positive community-building incidents, there was less evidence of impact on the broader community and non-participating local people. Rose et al. (2013) claim that exposure to cultural differences can reinforce feelings of community division as opposed to commonality. Moreover, Kempen and Wissink's (2014) research has

questioned the policy focus on neighbourhoods given that many individual connections reside beyond the usually place-based spaces of communities. While this is apparent in our research, the above discussion on sharing food does indicate the potential of the multicultural lunches to provide a leisure practice for emerging food-leisure communities as well as the value of public community space to people's leisure (Long et al. 2014).

### **Concluding comments**

The post-Brexit period, at all levels (local, regional and national), has meant that people and communities within the UK face unprecedented political, economic and social conditions. For the last 2 years, these circumstances are known to have impacted on individual and collective ideas and behaviours surrounding migration, migrants and mobile lives. There are reliable reports of increases in racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia, and rises in hate crimes against migrant and refugee people (European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance 2016). From previous research, coastal communities in the UK are known to be hostile places for minority ethnic groups to inhabit, and migrants and refugees living within them are usually negatively conceptualised as 'strangers' (Burdsey 2011 and 2013).

In this research we focused on a series of multicultural lunches in the south coast of England and the county of Dorset in particular. By aligning leisure, food and community we were able to explore the contribution of the lunches to challenge local sentiments of hostility and intolerance. Leisure practice has an established status within leisure studies of migration and migrant people's lives. Less is written about the contribution of food to leisure studies of migration. In this paper we draw upon Bell's (2011) advocacy to not underestimate the 'social work' of hospitality and Wise's (2011) call to register the contribution of 'everyday multiculturalism' to conviviality. Our research shows that food and sharing food provides a significant substance to engender welcome and commensality. How this is achieved is not straightforward and concepts such as liquid hospitality (Bauman 2004) and hostgusting (Bell 2011) emerge as useful in recognising the intricacies of delivery, and levels of participation.

Clearly, further in-depth research is required to more fully explore the provision of food within and across a range of communities that face fragmentation and conflict related to contemporary migration flows. Extending the focus of inquiry to local people who do not participate in multicultural food sharing has the potential to offer insights that are not yet available. This information—from non-participants—is useful to organisers in their efforts to increase participation and extend local community involvement.

In the end, we are careful not to romanticise the role of the series of multicultural lunches to food-leisure community development. The reach and sustainability of the multicultural lunches is contingent upon funding, local legacy, and existing networks, including local people and agencies. The short-term positive affectual impacts of sharing food are usually *in situ* and ephemeral. There is no evidence from this research that the strong sentiments to celebrate diversity, preserve [multiple]cultural heritage, and publicly promote welcome influence the wider local communities, and/or impact broader regional/national policy formation. And so, it is the simple shared sensations of tasting and consuming food that makes the multicultural lunches a unique, and arguably potent, leisure practice within the realm of migration studies.

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