The Changing Role of Hotels: Hotels as Safe Spaces in Cities

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Abstract

The hospitality industry has undergone a transformation, shifting from its traditional role as provider of overnight accommodation to multifunctional service hubs. With this change, hotels' potential to contribute to healthy, livable, and resilient neighborhoods and urban quarters has increased widely. This development is driven by the erosion of urban infrastructure and social services, such as the decline in local shopping infrastructure for daily needs, the lack of care services, the closure of public swimming pools and libraries, and the decease of pubs with a corresponding increase in loneliness among the German population, to name just a few examples. At the same time, society's need for places to stay, meet and exchange ideas across social milieus is increasing. Since 2008 the research project FutureHotel Innovation Network has examined trends and developments in the hospitality industry and most recently focused on the changing role of hotels, particularly in the context of urban resilience and social sustainability. Empirical findings from a survey of 4,880 respondents reveal that hotels increasingly function as nodes of security, inclusion, and emergency support in urban environments. Research identifies three primary ways in which hotels act as safe spaces: First, hotels serve as urban sanctuaries, providing secure and accessible spaces for diverse stakeholders extending from guests to employees, business partners, and local communities. This positions hotels as integrated elements of the urban fabric. Empirical data shows that public access to safe and quiet environments is increasingly valued, particularly for individuals facing urban stressors such as noise, heat, or personal distress. Hotels function as non-discriminatory, accessible spaces that foster social cohesion and psychological well-being. Second, hotels demonstrate high adaptability in crisis situations, acting as temporary shelters during natural disasters, extreme weather events, or social unrest. Their existing infrastructure, professional staff, and round-the-clock availability enable hotels to respond swiftly to urgent community needs. Case studies highlight that hotels have been utilized as emergency shelters, vaccination centers, and safe havens for vulnerable populations. This suggests an underutilized potential for hotels to be formally integrated into urban resilience planning, particularly in cities facing climate-related or social instability challenges. Third, hotels are emerging as providers of essential services in urban and rural settings, particularly in areas with inadequate public infrastructure. Survey findings indicate that public restrooms, secure gathering spaces, and temporary refuge areas are among the most in-demand services that hotels could offer beyond their core hospitality function. Innovative business models are already experimenting with hybrid hospitality concepts, where hotels provide workspaces, wellness services, and communal facilities to both guests and non-guests. These multi-functional roles position hotels as critical service hubs in urban ecosystems, fostering livable and resilient communities. The primary purpose of this article is to shine light on the mechanisms by which hotels function as safe spaces for urban environments. Ultimately, the role of hotels as safe spaces redefines their importance for neighborhoods, highlighting their potential to foster resilience and social cohesion in increasingly complex cities.

Keywords: neighborhood services, urban resilience, urban hotel refuge, emergency response, inclusive hospitality, crisis management

1. Introduction: Hotels in Urban Sociology

Cities are complex ecosystems where different social groups, economic forces, and cultural influences converge, creating both opportunities and challenges [1]. According to recent projections by the United Nations, approximately 4.4 billion people – representing 57 percent of the global population – lived in urban areas in 2023. This share is expected to increase to 5.2 billion by 2030, 6.0 billion by 2040, and 6.7 billion by 2050 and thus reach 60 percent, reflecting the ongoing global trend toward urbanization [2]. This trend is relevant to urban sociology as the research field examines how social structures, relationships, and institutions shape life in urban areas. It explores the dynamics of urbanization, economic development, migration, social stratification, and the ways in which people interact within the built environment [1]. The theoretical foundations of urban sociology emerged from the Chicago School in the early 20th century [1]. The scholars emphasized the impact of urbanization on social relations, positing that the rapid growth of cities led to social disorganization and the breakdown of primary relationships. Chicago School's work laid the foundation for understanding the complex interplay between space and social behavior, influencing future sociological studies of urban environments [1]. Contemporary urban sociology has expanded to incorporate critical perspectives on neoliberal urbanization, gentrification, spatial justice, and the right to the city, examining how power dynamics and capital flows reshape urban spaces and experiences [3]. Research explores the dynamics of urbanization, economic development, migration, social stratification, and the ways

in which people interact within the built environment. In contrast to the Chicago School, contemporary urban sociologists include factors such as capitalism, class exploitation, racism, gender, and space in their research [1].

Within complex city ecosystems, hotels are recognized as **integral components of the city's social fabric, serving both functional and symbolic roles**. Historically, grand hotels symbolized modernity, wealth, and urban progress, acting as spaces where elites, business travellers, and tourists converged [4]. From the 19th century onward, as demand grew for luxurious accommodations catering to a mobile upper class, investors and city officials embraced grand hotels as symbols of prestige [4]. Over time, hotels have evolved into diverse spaces that reflect broader urban transformations, from the rise of budget motels along highways to the emergence of boutique hotels as markers of gentrification in revitalized city centers [4]. As established temporary spaces, hotels function as transitional zones, where tourists, business travellers, and transient populations temporarily disconnect from the broader social environment [4]. This transient nature reflects themes of mobility and globalization, as hotels cater to the increasing fluidity of social, economic, and cultural exchange in urban areas. They **reflect and challenge existing social hierarchies, economic disparities and cultural norms** [4].

The development and design of hotels have always been closely linked to economic factors. Hotels are **commercialized spaces**, often governed by market logic, where access is determined by financial means. This raises questions about social inequality and accessibility in urban settings, highlighting the role of economic factors in shaping the use and function of urban spaces [5]. Hotels have always had to **balance the contrast between private and public spaces**. While the majority of their structure consists of private rooms, public areas such as hotel lobbies serve as key sites of social interaction [4]. “Commercial hospitality spaces are, therefore, theatres of regeneration as much as theatres of consumption” (Bell 2007: 8). Yet, Bell suggests that hospitality spaces should not be dismissed as purely commercial enterprises but rather examined for their broader social significance. He appeals for a ‘hybrid hospitality’ and the necessity to move beyond simplistic definitions of hospitality. Numerous good practices underline the potential hotels hold to actively contribute to **reducing tension and** creating more **inclusive and permeable urban spaces**.

Urban sociologists have increasingly recognized **hotels as sites where global flows of capital, people, and cultural practices intersect with local urban contexts**, making them valuable lenses through which to study processes of globalization, gentrification, and urban transformation. Moreover, hotels often function as experimental zones for **emerging social practices and technologies** that later diffuse throughout the broader urban environment, positioning them as both reflections of and influences upon evolving urban sociality [5].

On top of that, hotels play a significant role in the production of urban space by **influencing local economies and urban development**. The presence of hotels in a city boosts local economies through the multiplier effect, where money spent by tourists circulates within the local economy. The World Travel & Tourism Council demonstrates multiplier effects where each dollar spent in the hotel sector generates an additional $1.50-$2.00 in broader economic activity [6]. Oxford Economics quantified the industry's support of over 8 million jobs across direct, indirect, and induced employment categories in the United States alone [7]. In Barcelona, one of the most visited cities in Europe, the tourism industry generates billions of euros in revenue each year. In fact, tourism accounts for around 14% of the city’s GDP, highlighting its vital role in driving economic growth and job creation, since 9% of employment is in that sector [8]. In Bali, Indonesia the travel & tourism sector is expected to create more than five million new jobs over the next decade and accounts for 5.7% of the GDP [9]. During the Covid 19 pandemic an increase in visits to the Scotland’s outdoors was noticed. Due to that an extra of 127 rangers and seasonal staff was employed to meet the high demand [10]. Additional tourists also support the revitalization and preservation of rural communities by sourcing local products and making the region more attractive to visitors which leads to an improvement in infrastructure e.g., transportation networks or public amenities, that also benefits local residents. Research in Warsaw documents how international hotel chains contributed approximately 124 million euro to surrounding infrastructure development between 2008-2017 [11]. Hotels have the potential to reshape urban identities and revitalize previously underutilized areas by attracting complementary businesses [12]. As key players in the service sector, hotels also contribute to gentrification processes, shaping the cultural and socio-economic landscapes of cities. Thus, while many villages struggle with depopulation and economic challenges, sustainable accommodations and other tourism providers often serve as **lifelines for local infrastructure and quality of life** [13].

In recent decades, the hospitality industry has undergone significant changes, evolving from a sector primarily focused on overnight accommodation for temporary guests to a multifunctional service ecosystem that serves a wide range of stakeholders. Nowadays, hotels facilitate the interaction of employees, business partners, guests, and the local neighborhood and they **connect diverse social groups through their spaces and offers** [4, 14]. The hotel industry’s broader transformation includes the **blurring of boundaries between private and public services** [15]. This hybridization represents a significant shift from traditional hospitality models that prioritized exclusivity toward more inclusive approaches. The traditional conception of hotels as exclusive, transactional spaces primarily serving travelers has given way to more multifunctional establishments that actively engage with their surrounding communities [15]. Thus, **hotels fulfil multiple functions for society** which leads to hotels being perceived as integrated elements of urban infrastructure.

Research reveals that forward-thinking hotel properties now deliberately design their ground floors and common areas as semi-public spaces that welcome non-guest visitors, creating hybrid environments that serve both commercial and community purposes. Hotels have found innovative ways to expand their revenue streams, such as partnering with local businesses to host events like yoga sessions, barber services, book club meetings, or open mic nights. These offerings are often aimed at engaging the local community [16]. Rather than functioning solely as spaces for tourists, hotels increasingly seek to become **vibrant, community-integrated hubs**. Interacting with local residents enhances the guest experience, making the hotel more appealing to visitors. For a hotel to successfully integrate into its neighborhood and maintain a positive relationship with the local community, it must understand and address the needs of all stakeholders [16].

The outlined developments are not only driven by social responsibility but also by **new business models that incorporate community-oriented services** into hotel operations, creating value through deeper integration with local ecosystems and addressing unmet needs in urban environments [17]. Hotels increasingly function as ‘third places’ – neither home nor workplace – where locals can access services, socialize, or work remotely in comfortable environments. Gardiner & Scotts destination innovation matrix categorizes these community engagement initiatives along spectrums of novelty and market development, with the most innovative approaches **creating entirely new service categories that address previously unrecognized community**

needs. For instance, hotels established public libraries, community gardens, art galleries, and maker spaces within their properties – services traditionally provided by municipal institutions but now supplemented through private hospitality venues [17].

This evolving hospitality paradigm reflects broader societal shifts toward shared economy principles and collaborative consumption models. By **reimagining hotels as community resources** rather than exclusive enclaves, the industry is developing innovative approaches to creating value while simultaneously addressing pressing urban challenges such as public space deficits, service gaps, and social fragmentation.

The outlined aspects highlight that hotels have become versatile urban infrastructures playing a significant role for urban sociology as both microcosms of urban life and significant actors in the broader dynamics of urbanization.

2. Theoretical Background: Urban Resilience and the Need for Safe Spaces

Over the past years, the concept of resilience has gained significant attention, leading to the publication of numerous books and articles across various academic disciplines, including psychology, urban planning, sociology, and hospitality management. This interdisciplinary approach has enriched the discourse on resilience by incorporating diverse methodologies and perspectives e.g., from individual psychological resilience to community resilience. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how systems withstand and adapt to challenges [18, 19]. In this context, several studies and books about 'resilient cities' have been published.

As cities continue to expand and face uncertainties and challenges such as climate change, the concept of urban resilience has gained increasing prominence. Etymologically, the word 'resilience' originates from the Latin *resilio*, meaning 'to bounce back'. However, as an academic concept, its definition and origins are more ambiguous [20, 21]. According to Meerow et al. (2016) urban resilience refers to a city's ability to withstand and recover from disruptions such as environmental changes, economic shifts, and social stressors [20]. This definition frames resilience as a desirable state and highlights the role of adaptive capacity. But urban systems are inherently complex and dynamic, making a full return to their previous state after a disturbance highly unlikely [20]. Factors such as climate change and urbanization are expected to further amplify instabilities. Therefore, urban resilience is conceptualized as a state of non-equilibrium, emphasizing a system's ability to sustain key functions rather than revert to a former condition.

Resilience is framed as a normative goal – an aspirational agenda that cities should pursue. Achieving urban resilience may require different levels of change, ranging from incremental adjustments to more radical transformations. A spectrum of responses is incorporated in the urban resilience framework, such as persistence (resisting change), adaptation and transformation, depending on the specific needs of an urban area [20]. Given the uncertainties cities face, from climate change to economic volatility, **resilience depends on general flexibility and adaptability rather than rigid responses to specific threats**. While **persistence** may be important for certain aspects, such as ensuring buildings withstand storms, other areas may necessitate incremental changes or deeper transformations, particularly in **addressing inequities that impede communities' adaptive capacity** [20].

A key characteristic of resilient cities is their ability to act swiftly and recover quickly. Rapid restoration of critical functions after a disturbance is essential, as the speed of recovery for systems like telecommunications and energy has a direct impact on the extent and duration of disruptions [20]. However, the priority areas, sectors, and types of hazards will inevitably vary from one city to another. Contextual factors also influence the timeframes and geographical scales at which urban resilience is implemented. Considering the time-scale of resilience, involves determining whether to concentrate on short-term disruptions, such as storms, or long-term pressures, like climate change, and adapting the terms 'rapidly return' or 'quickly transform' to fit specific contexts. Similarly, the question of the spatial limits of resilience addresses the challenge of defining the spatial boundaries of an urban system that is often interconnected through complex global networks, and how changes in one area or at one level can affect others. [20].

When applied to cities, resilience presents challenges but also holds potential. Both 'resilience' and 'city' are open to various interpretations, influenced by scale and whether the emphasis is on physical spaces or social communities [21]. Given that cities and their regions are structured in ways that reveal and perpetuate socio-economic inequalities, some areas demonstrate significantly greater resilience than others, with vulnerability often tied to factors such as geography and income level. This **unevenness in resilience can undermine the overall economic, social, and political functioning of cities**. For resilience to remain a valuable concept and a forward-thinking practice, it must be closely linked to efforts aimed at enhancing the life prospects of marginalized groups [21].

While the concept of urban resilience has traditionally been anchored in ecological frameworks and climate change discourse, its application has expanded significantly to encompass broader urban systems and social dimensions. As cities face increasingly complex challenges beyond environmental threats, the multifaceted nature of urban resilience has come into sharper focus [22]. At this critical intersection, the notion of 'safe spaces' is an important component of resilient urban environments. The demand for safe and secure places continues to upsurge, reflecting growing concerns about personal security in urban contexts. This conceptualization positions urban safety as an essential quality of the environment, defined relative to a person or group within an urban area. Through this lens, we can understand how **the creation of safe spaces forms a crucial strategy in the broader pursuit of urban resilience, extending protection beyond environmental hazards to address social vulnerabilities and enhance the overall adaptive capacity of urban populations** [22]. Within this framework, safe spaces play a crucial role in ensuring public safety and well-being.

In urban contexts, **safe spaces serve as critical infrastructure for community resilience, providing locations where diverse populations can gather, particularly during times of crisis or uncertainty** [23]. Efforts to secure spaces can inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics and inequalities, excluding marginalized groups under the guise of improving security. This highlights the importance of creating inclusive safe spaces for different social groups. It also warns against security approaches that prioritize surveillance and access control, arguing that truly safe urban spaces must balance security measures with openness and inclusivity [23].

Traditionally, safe spaces include community centers, public institutions, and designated emergency shelters. The idea of safe spaces has its origins in the 20th century and the women's movement but is used in different contexts [23]. This dual nature of safety – both physical safety (protection from threats) and psychological (freedom from discrimination and harassment) is crucial for the concept. **Safe spaces provide physical protection and psychological safety for diverse urban populations**, especially during crises or for vulnerable groups such as women, gay, lesbian or queer people [23]. However, the concept can be applied in different contexts and helps to analyze the use of spaces, taking into account that these are socially determined and context dependent [23]. "The work of producing safe space entails continually facing, negotiating and embracing paradoxical binaries: safety/danger, inclusivity/exclusivity, public/private, and so forth" (Noterman & Rosenfeld 2014 : 1355).

Research by Jacobs and Malpas (2018) has emphasized the **importance of placemaking in creating safe spaces, suggesting that strong social ties and a strong community identity contribute significantly to perceptions of safety beyond physical security measures** [24]. Placemaking refers to the process of designing and activating public spaces to make them more welcoming, functional, and vibrant for the community. In the context of safe spaces and resilience, placemaking involves creating environments that are safe, inclusive, and supportive, and promote the well-being of individuals [24].

Urban safe spaces function on multiple levels: as physical environments with protective features, as social spheres that foster belonging and trust, and as symbolic locations that represent stability in the face of urban unpredictability [23]. This aligns with Hubbard and Lyon's findings that **commercial establishments can serve as informal safe spaces** when they foster social interaction and community belonging [25]. **As urban environments face increasing challenges from social fragmentation, climate change, and public health crises, the deliberate development of safe spaces represents a crucial strategy for enhancing overall urban resilience** [21, 26]. While traditional approaches to urban safety have focused primarily on formal security infrastructure and public services, recent scholarship emphasizes the role of semi-public and commercial spaces in complementing municipal resilience strategies [27]. These spaces, including various built environments like community centers, libraries, and commercial establishments, contribute to a distributed network of safety that enhances overall urban adaptive capacity [28].

This article suggests that **hotels are emerging as an alternative category of safe spaces**, providing secure and stable environments in urban and rural contexts alike. Hotels guard a unique position as both private enterprises and public assets allow them to bridge the gap between individual needs and community resources. They possess inherent characteristics that make them uniquely qualified as safety nodes in unstable situations. **By recognizing and deliberately strengthening hotels' capabilities as safe spaces, cities can expand their resilience networks and better protect citizens during increasingly unpredictable environmental, social, and economic challenges.**

While extensive research has examined hotels through economic, tourism, and management perspectives [4], the hotels' contribution to urban resilience and their potential as urban safe spaces remains notably underexplored. Especially in the light of the recent developments in which **hotels have evolved substantially beyond their traditional role as accommodation providers, emerging as multifaceted urban institutions that increasingly contribute to community safety and stability,** the potential for hotels becomes clear to increase resilience within complex, vulnerable urban environments [18].

The scarce literature in the field of hotels and urban resilience has primarily focused on hotels as crisis management assets during disasters [19] or as securitized spaces for international travellers but has insufficiently addressed their **everyday role in providing psychological and physical safety for visitors, employees, and local communities.** This research gap is particularly significant considering the growing urban challenges of the 21st century, including increased social fragmentation, public health crises, climate emergencies, and security concerns [20]. As cities struggle with these multidimensional threats to urban stability and wellbeing, hotels – with their unique combination of accessibility, professional management, and spatial liminality – are increasingly positioned as critical infrastructure that enhances urban resilience through providing consistent safe environments that transcend typical public-private boundaries of urban space [29].

One key factor in this context is the **adaptability** of hotels which enables them to serve as multifunctional spaces that can be rapidly repurposed during crises – whether as emergency shelters, temporary healthcare facilities, or community centers [30]. This flexibility is supported by their established infrastructure, including continuous power and water supply, catering facilities, and professional staff, making them particularly valuable for maintaining urban continuity during disruptions.

Moreover, hotels offer unique sociocultural benefits as **neutral territories** that can bring together diverse societal groups [5]. Their commercial nature, combined with publicly accessible spaces such as lobbies, restaurants, and conference rooms, creates semi-public spheres that **foster social encounters** while providing a controlled environment that minimizes security concerns [26]. This hybridity positions hotels at the interface between market and community, making them valuable nodes in the urban social fabric [4, 5].

This paper highlights that due to the changing role of hotels, they are increasingly perceived as secure environments that provide a sense of stability and accessibility, for guests, locals, employees, and business partners. **The following chapter examines the mechanisms through which hotels contribute to urban safety and resilience.** In this way, a clearer perspective on the hotels emerging role within urban ecosystems is gained.

3. Results: Three Roles of Hotels as Safe Spaces in Urban Environments

This paper is based on FutureHotel research. On the one hand, a survey with 4,880 respondents, including hotel neighbors, hotel employees, and hotel guests, was carried out between 3rd of August to 19th of September 2023 [14]. The survey explored how individuals evaluate hotels in terms of their role in urban ecosystems. It aimed at exploring innovative strategies for integrating hotels into urban frameworks and ecosystems, highlighting best practices and identifying existing challenges in implementation. The survey's target group were German-speaking people aged 16-69 years, weighted by age, gender, state and thus, representative for the German population. One the other hand, a theoretical whitepaper analyzing the social impact of hotels was carried out within FutureHotel which "identified four qualitative dimensions of social sustainability in which a hotel can become active" [Heydkamp and Borkmann 2025: 5]: Safe and healthy environments, sense of belonging, inspiration, and offer perspectives. These show strong connections to the question of hotels as safe spaces in urban areas which was confirmed in various expert interviews that were conducted for the empirical part of the report [31].

Thus, FutureHotel research provides valuable insights into the ways in which hotels serve as safe spaces within urban environments. The findings highlight three primary dimensions through which hotels contribute to urban resilience: as crisis response and emergency support hubs (Chapter 3.1), as urban sanctuaries (Chapter 3.2), and as providers of essential urban services (Chapter 3.3). Each of these dimensions underscores the potential of hotels to function beyond their traditional role and actively support communities in need of safety and stability.

3.1 Hotels as Crisis Response and Emergency Support Hubs

Hotels play a critical role in crisis response and emergency management by providing immediate shelter and resources during crisis. Their ability to provide rapid and widespread support during extreme weather events, natural disasters, social unrest, or public health emergencies has made them a critical consideration in planning for urban resilience.

One of the defining characteristics of hotels in crisis situations is their adaptability. Unlike many other urban spaces, **hotels operate 24/7 and have an existing infrastructure designed to efficiently accommodate large numbers of people**. Their well-equipped facilities, including air-conditioned rooms, reliable water and power supplies, and in-house catering, make them ideal emergency shelters. They also have basic digital infrastructure, Wi-Fi and computer access, and can serve as a communication centers

during crisis. The controlled access systems and security protocols that hotels implement as standard practice create environments where vulnerable populations can find protection during emergencies. Another key advantage of hotels in times of crisis is their **flexible use**. They can be quickly repurposed to serve a variety of community needs. For example, it can function as a distribution center for relief supplies or as a logistics hub for humanitarian organizations. This adaptability allows hotels to respond effectively to the changing needs of a crisis and ensure that resources are deployed where they are most needed. **Hotels' trained staff** represent another crucial asset in crisis scenarios. This human resource can be rapidly mobilized to address immediate community needs when conventional support systems are overwhelmed. Hotel staff are trained in customer service, crisis management and logistics, enabling them to quickly transition from guest care to emergency response when needed.

Several cases can be identified in which hotels served as emergency shelters and service centers during crises. For example, during **extreme weather events** such as hurricanes, heat waves, and severe winter storms. Displaced residents, emergency responders, and vulnerable populations who lacked safe shelters found refuge in hotels [32]. During periods of **social unrest or political instability**, hotels were used as safe havens for vulnerable individuals, journalists and humanitarian workers [33]. Furthermore, hotels contribute to **economic stability and disaster recovery** in affected regions. After a crisis, they often play a key role in revitalizing the local economy by accommodating displaced workers, supporting relief organizations and promoting business continuity. Hotels that remain in operation during crises help to maintain employee employment, provide essential services to relief workers and act as logistical hubs for the distribution of relief supplies. In this context, hotels can play a role in providing psychosocial support in times of crisis. They can serve as safe places where individuals affected by traumatic events can access counseling services and mental health resources. By working with mental health professionals and organizations, hotels can offer workshops and support groups designed to help individuals process their experiences and manage stress. This type of support is essential to promoting emotional well-being and resilience in communities dealing with the aftermath of disasters or emergencies [31].

Hotels have also played a significant role in **public health crises**. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many hotels were repurposed as quarantine facilities, field hospitals and vaccination centres [34]. Their ability to provide controlled, hygienic environments helped relieve the burden on overstretched healthcare systems. Some hotels worked directly with municipal authorities and non-profit organizations to house frontline workers, the homeless, or people recovering from illness [35]. This demonstrates that hotels are not only able to provide accommodation but can also serve as an important health infrastructure during pandemics and other medical emergencies.

In summary, hotels are not only places for leisure and business, but also essential pillars of urban crisis response. Their ability to provide immediate accommodation, basic services and logistical support in emergencies underscores their value for disaster risk reduction and recovery.

3.2 Hotels as Urban Sanctuaries

A second function of hotels for urban resilience which was identified in yet unpublished FutureHotel research in the field of a hotel's social impact [31] is their role as urban refuges, providing **structured, safe and accessible environments** in increasingly dense and fast-paced urban landscapes. With increasing urbanization and rising population density and pressure in cities, there is a growing need for calm, stable and welcoming spaces that ensure physical and mental well-being.

Empirical FutureHotel results show that public access to such environments is highly valued, especially by individuals exposed to urban stressors such as noise pollution, extreme weather, personal distress or social isolation [14]. Many urban spaces are restricted by membership, socioeconomic barriers or exclusivity [36]. The structured and regulated nature of hotel spaces ensures that they remain inclusive, non-discriminatory and universally accessible. Hotels could be a sanctuary with an open-door policy for guests and locals. Their consistent service levels, cleanliness and safety further contribute to their role as stabilizing forces within the urban ecosystem.

Another important factor that bolsters the perception of hotels as urban refuges is their ability to provide **air-conditioned, well-maintained indoor environments**. As extreme weather events become more common due to climate change [37], hotels provide an important refuge from heat waves, heavy rains and cold spells, especially for vulnerable populations who may not have access to adequate shelter in such conditions. Likewise, in times of crisis – such as natural disasters, political unrest or health emergencies – hotels can play an important role as temporary shelters for displaced people, emergency services and aid workers. An important aspect in the context of urban resilience is the **temporary provision of access to sanitary facilities and drinking water**, particularly for vulnerable populations or in situations where access to public infrastructure is temporarily restricted or disrupted. While hotels are typically connected to the municipal water supply and are therefore not structurally independent from urban systems, their **spatial availability, maintained infrastructure, and continuous staffing** enable them to serve as **decentralized access points**. In such cases, hotels can function as intermediaries in ensuring access to basic needs, especially when other facilities are inaccessible, closed, or overwhelmed [38].

Furthermore, hotels can play an important role in promoting **community gardens and green spaces**, which are particularly valuable in densely populated urban neighborhoods [31]. As cities grapple with issues such as heat stress and worsening air quality, green urban spaces are becoming increasingly important for the well-being of residents. These green spaces not only enhance the cityscape, but also provide crucial environmental benefits, such as improving air quality, reducing urban heat islands and promoting biodiversity. Furthermore, during extreme heat events, these green spaces can serve as well-ventilated refuges, providing shelter for both hotel guests, employees, and local residents. In addition, they can also become refuges for insects and animals [31]. By integrating community gardens and green spaces into their designs, hotels can contribute to the city's overall resilience and promote sustainability and well-being for locals [31]. These initiatives can also foster community engagement as residents can participate in gardening activities or events hosted by the hotel, promoting a sense of belonging and connection within the neighborhood. Such engaging activities can be found in hotels around the globe nowadays [e.g., 39]. Ultimately, hotels that prioritize green space not only enhance their guests' experience but also become key partners in addressing urban environmental challenges.

Beyond their function as physical places of refuge, hotels also serve as informal gathering spots where individuals can find **social support, human connection,** and a sense of normalcy in the midst of urban chaos. Many hotel lobbies, lounges, and co-working spaces are designed to encourage interaction and provide a welcoming atmosphere for guests and non-guests alike. This community aspect is particularly important in large, anonymous cities, where loneliness and social fragmentation are growing problems [40]. By providing spaces that encourage casual encounters, professional networking and social engagement, hotels contribute to the emotional and psychological well-being of city dwellers [31]. **Building communities** offers valuable opportunities within the ecosystems of hotel services. A strong sense of community can only arise if there are inclusive spaces for communication and interaction. Hotels have the opportunity to offer community activities for guests, locals and employees, such as

book clubs, dance events, sports activities and the strengthening of general well-being and social integration [31]. These services can thus combat current social challenges such as social fragmentation or loneliness and isolation (of older population groups, for example). In doing so, hotels provide social security by providing **community spaces without discrimination and harassment**. To create an inclusive hotel environment, it is essential that different groups of people feel safe and welcome and can freely participate in social activities and community events. By fostering a sense of safety and belonging, hotels can enhance their role as community centers that promote connections and interactions. A socially sustainable, cohesive, and resilient public space can be achieved by promoting social inclusion and empowerment of all groups of people.

Furthermore, hotels play a significant role in promoting urban resilience by adapting to the changing personal needs of modern society. In response to changing demographics and societal expectations, many hotels have expanded their offerings beyond traditional hospitality services. They now provide wellness programs, meditation areas, and special zones for people seeking **spiritual and emotional balance**. By providing such amenities, hotels help to improve the overall psychological well-being of the community, enabling guests and locals alike to find calm and support in their busy lives.

In summary, hotels are more than just places of temporary accommodation – they act as important urban refuges offering stability, security and inclusivity in increasingly chaotic urban environments. By offering a **combination of physical refuge, social interaction and psychological respite**, they fulfil a fundamental human need for safety and well-being in the urban context. Their evolving role demonstrates how hospitable spaces can contribute not only to individual well-being but also to broader societal cohesion and resilience.

3.3 Hotels as Providers of Essential Urban Services

A third major function of hotels as safe spaces relates to their role in filling critical gaps in **urban infrastructure**. As cities grow and public resources become strained, hotels have the potential to provide essential services, particularly in areas where municipal amenities are insufficient or entirely lacking. Their strategic locations, reliable facilities, and round-the-clock operations position them as crucial extensions of urban infrastructure, serving not only travelers but also residents, employees, and vulnerable populations. Currently many services are not offered to all the user groups – especially the local community. But hotels are more and more becoming third places where people come eat, relax or interact and use it as a second home. They are becoming service hubs and ecosystems, which provide services for more people than only tourists. The study shows that new service offers can be success factors for the hotel industry and at the same time tackle deficiencies in essential urban services. The FutureHotel survey revealed that most respondents (61.1%) would pay for services offered by a hotel the same as they would pay for these services outside the hotel. In addition, 54% would be interested to work in or for a hotel in their neighborhood and be rewarded with money [14].

Hotels are emerging as **key providers of public services in both urban and rural settings**, addressing the shortcomings of traditional infrastructure. Survey data suggests that essential services such as clean public restrooms, secure gathering spaces, and temporary refuge areas are among the most in-demand amenities that hotels could offer beyond their core hospitality functions [14]. This growing demand reflects broader urban challenges, including the decline of public spaces, limited access to hygiene facilities, and the need for quiet, accessible environments in densely populated cities. The most desired services that are currently available are according to the study bakeries, restaurants and breakfast. Pools, kiosks with products of daily use, local markets and 24/7 Grocery shops are the most desired services that are currently not available [14].

Recognizing this shift, some hotels have already begun adopting hybrid service models that integrate elements of community access with their business operations. For example, in cities where public restrooms are scarce or poorly maintained, hotels have partnered with local governments to provide clean and safe sanitation facilities to the general public. The shortage of **care services**, such as medical care and elderly support, is a pressing societal challenge [41]. As demographic change continues to reshape the German population, the demand for improved healthcare, mental health services, and nursing care is becoming increasingly vital. With an aging population and a decline in the availability of healthcare professionals, many communities are struggling to provide adequate support for their residents. Hotels could play a significant role in addressing this issue by providing essential care, supply, and nursing infrastructure. By offering highly demanded services like 24/7 pharmacies, comprehensive healthcare, childcare, and mental health support, hotels can contribute to enhancing the quality of life for both residents and visitors while alleviating the strain on traditional healthcare systems. In rural areas, they can serve as community hubs where individuals can access a range of health services, social support, and wellness activities. This not only helps bridge the gap in care availability but also fosters healthier and more resilient populations.

Beyond care services, hotels are also adapting their spaces to serve evolving urban needs in a digital society. The rise of remote work and the demand for flexible work environments have led many hotels to repurpose their lobbies, lounges, and conference rooms into co-working spaces. These areas provide freelancers, entrepreneurs, and traveling professionals with a reliable, comfortable, and well-equipped alternative to traditional office settings. By offering high-speed internet, meeting rooms, and shared workspaces, hotels are becoming integral to the modern work culture, catering to a mobile workforce that requires flexible infrastructure. But hotels can also provide other technologies like repair shops for technical devices, technical equipment, copy shops or IT support. Especially in areas with poor digital infrastructure or a population that doesn't have access to high-speed internet or to a computer workplace, hotels can satisfy the demand regarding **technical and digital services.**

In addition, some hotels have expanded into **wellness, leisure and cultural services**, further embedding themselves in the fabric of urban life. Wellness centers, meditation rooms, and fitness facilities within hotels are increasingly being opened to the public, allowing local residents to access health and relaxation services that might otherwise be unavailable or prohibitively expensive elsewhere. Likewise, hotels are positioning themselves as cultural hubs by hosting art exhibitions, live performances, and community events, providing spaces where people can engage with local culture and creative industries. Fitness centers, cinema nights and events with artists are usually not commonly available but popular services among all hotel user groups. There is also a high interest in sports, activities and educational offers. Especially in areas with a lack of such public leisure services, hotels could fill a gap and provide cultural, educational and recreational activities.

Furthermore, mobility services are, according to the survey, desired by the society. Bike rental, E-Bike rental and car rental are services that could be provided by hotels. Flexible shuttle services and access too carpooling is needed and would be frequently used.

Hotels have also played a role in addressing social challenges by supporting marginalized populations. Some establishments have partnered with non-profit organizations to provide temporary housing solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness, domestic violence survivors, or refugees. By leveraging their infrastructure to support these vulnerable groups, hotels are filling critical service gaps that governments and traditional shelters often struggle to address. The FutureHotel study revealed that 44,6 %

agree that hotels should offer women's shelters, care for homeless people (42.3%), spaces for aid organizations (43.1%) and spaces for refugees (40 %) [14].

These **multi-functional adaptations position hotels as essential service nodes within urban ecosystems, enhancing both livability and resilience**. As cities continue to evolve, the integration of hotels into urban planning strategies could help mitigate infrastructure deficiencies, offering accessible, well-maintained, and inclusive spaces for a diverse range of users. To further strengthen their role, municipal authorities and hotel operators could explore policy incentives, funding programs, and formal partnerships that encourage the use of hotel spaces for public benefit.

In summary, hotels are no longer just places for short-term stays – they are becoming integral parts of urban life, providing vital services that contribute to the overall functionality and well-being of cities. By bridging infrastructure gaps, offering flexible spaces, and supporting local communities, hotels are redefining their role within the urban landscape, helping to create more adaptable, inclusive, and resilient environments

4. Discussion: Raising the Potential of Accepting Hotels as Integral Parts of Urban Resilience Strategies

Even though the function of hotels as crisis response and emergency support hubs is addressed in applied research and has proven effective in moments of crisis around the globe, **hotels represent an often underutilized but highly adaptable infrastructure for emergency response.** Strengthening partnerships between hotels, local authorities and humanitarian organizations could improve cities' preparedness for future crises. City governments and emergency management agencies could incorporate hotels into their crisis management frameworks, since they provide a ready infrastructure for emergency shelter, medical care and coordinated emergency respond efforts. Developing pre-arranged agreements that enable rapid repurposing of hotels for emergencies – whether for disaster relief, medical response, or social support – would greatly enhance cities' resilience strategies. Hotels can participate in local emergency planning committees, share resources, and lend their facilities for community gatherings or training. Furthermore, hotels continuously contribute to the **everyday functionality, well-being and resilience of cities and rural areas** by offering urban sanctuaries and a wide service spectrum addressing multiple target groups.

By becoming integral members of the community, hotels can **improve their situational awareness and response capabilities**, ensuring they are well prepared to meet the specific needs of their neighborhood in times of crisis. In addition, hotels as resilience hubs need support to improve their own resilience to future crises. This includes adopting energy-efficient technologies, implementing water-saving measures, and adopting waste-reduction strategies that can help hotels maintain operations even when resources are scarce. By investing in renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, hotels can reduce their reliance on external power grids and improve their ability to function during disasters. Furthermore, hotels can engage in community-based sustainability initiatives, such as supporting local agriculture, which can improve food security in emergencies. Integrating sustainability into crisis response planning not only prepares hotels for future challenges but also contributes to the overall resilience of urban environments.

Hotels shall be motivated to raise their full potential as safe spaces in the context of urban resilience by **receiving acknowledgement as well as support from research and city authorities**. The task of urban planners and managers is to create opportunities for new forms of hospitality beyond commercial interests [5].

5. Conclusion and Outlook

This article shows that the role of hotels has significant implications for urban planning and policy development. It presents three areas in which hotels function as safe spaces in the context of urban resilience and highlights the potential advancement for the resilience capabilities of cities as well as rural areas if a more structured approach to positioning hotels as elements of urban resilience infrastructure is followed. Closer collaboration between hotels and municipal authorities is necessary to strategically considering and incorporating hotels into their urban resilience planning, cities can better respond to future crises while utilizing existing and highly adaptable infrastructure to protect vulnerable populations and maintain social stability.

Future research should focus on the long-term economic feasibility of integrating safe space functions into hotel operations, regulatory changes needed to formalize the role of hotels in emergency response frameworks, and public-private partnership models that leverage hotels' infrastructure to support urban safety initiatives.

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