
Reflections on the theme issue outcomes

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643

Theme Editors Dimitrios Diamantis and Annick Darioly share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor, Richard Teare.

Overview

This theme issue focusses on initiatives taken by hospitality firms and one airline in response to the challenges arising from the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and specifically the 2030 Agenda for sustainability provided as a developmental guide by the United Nations (UN). The theme issue contains 22 case examples of sustainable development initiatives, and it is clear that much is being done to address the SDGs, though there are still gaps because of the complexity of the task in hand. The aim of the issue is to derive a better understanding as to how sustainability can be applied, and the array of industry examples helps to identify the challenges ahead and the inter-linking that is needed during planning and development to address each goal as well as adjustments that are recommended to achieve both the SDGs and the needs and expectations of stakeholders.

To address the theme issue question, analysis of secondary data from publications on corporate websites was supported by third-party data in the public domain and recent material relating to the COVID-19 crisis. One article on adaptive re-use (AR) drew on a series of interviews with practitioners with expertise on aspects of AR. In all, the collection of articles demonstrate progress on the SDGs across a wide spectrum of businesses from iconic hotels to local providers and large chains with a global perspective and outlook. A list of the articles in this issue can be found in the [Appendix](#).

Why in your view, is your theme issue strategic question important?

The SDGs and their likely impact on hospitality and tourism are significant now and in the decade ahead, and although the industry has made steady progress towards sustainability, there is still much to do. Setting the tone for the 2020s and beyond and ensuring that the industry adopts a global perspective and remains committed to the goals and is willing to maintain momentum is of paramount importance. This endeavour will need to be reflected in sustainability policy and practice embracing environmental and social considerations, as well as in economic dimensions, where the principles of good governance need to be demonstrated. Critically, an increasing number of consumers expect to see and experience more sustainable management of resources and in this context, the industry can showcase a growing sense of global stewardship. Taking all these factors into account, this *WHATT* theme issue evaluates current practices and progress towards the SDGs and points to future scenarios of practice where the notion of trade-offs between the goals and stakeholder management will become even more significant.

Thinking about your theme issue plan and approach, what worked well?

One of the objectives of the MBA Sustainability course is to build on the work of our students through publication. Our work with a group of talented postgraduate students has enabled us to facilitate a deeper understanding of sustainability issues and we wanted to enable them to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the course in a practical, tangible way. One of the challenges at this level of study is to encourage students to respond to an issue



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such as this and then to help them to do so in a professional, well-informed way. For us, the journey with our students was rewarding and the research they undertook clearly demonstrates the outcomes we hoped to achieve in the form of a collective contribution to current industry insights on sustainability and the array of future possibilities. We were especially impressed by the commitment needed and ably demonstrated during the worst of the COVID-19 crisis when all our students were working remotely. A highlight for us was their attention to the deadlines we set and their commitment to the process of research and writing.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?

A feature of the MBA at Les Roches is location visits to the cities of Shanghai and Chicago and these are an integral part of the programme. These visits enable us to liaise on a regular basis with a number of highly regarded hospitality firms in addition to regular communications with a number of other firms built-up over the past 24 years. This feature enabled us to follow through on aspects of sustainability progress – both theoretically in the classroom and in practice during field visits. In fact, the field experience and the dialogue arising helped us to shape the theme issue question and our approach to exploring it.

What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?

During our visit to the corporate office of Hyatt hotels in Chicago and our engagement with a number of other stakeholders such as the UN office in Geneva, we have been able to follow the development of the SDGs closely. A visit made by a number of UN representatives to Les Roches in 2017 was a pivotal moment for the MBA group at that time and so we have maintained this connection via a number of visits since then to the UN offices in Geneva. In essence, the main highlight of our interactions with Hyatt, the UN and Accor Hotels among others is the breadth and depth of insight that we have derived from industry and policy-maker progress on aspects of sustainability. In fact, it was these insights and the dialogue that ensued that inspired the MBA Sustainability course projects. Further to this, in November 2019, we hosted at Les Roches an environment week (which now occurs twice a year), where the early versions of the articles contained in this issue were presented for discussion. In part, this gave us the confidence to further develop the work for publication.

Thinking about your peer review process: What went well and why?

The fact that our Sustainability course has facilitated the development of Environment-centred events and that these facilitate shared learning and feedback, meant that the peer review process underpinning the preparation of articles could be extended and strengthened. In summary we felt that the procedures used to develop the articles from early stage ideas to draft form and then further refined after presentation and discussion worked very well, and we appreciated the comments and the constructive insights that were received.

What are the most significant outcomes of your theme issue in terms of the contributions to knowledge and/or professional practice?

They are a number of key outcomes arising from this theme issue. First, it has enabled us to showcase in a single journal issue, the on-going work of 21 companies and the progress they are making towards sustainability and the UN SDGs. Second, it has been possible to derive a global perspective - ranging from international brands to regional operations in the Middle East and local operations in Costa Rica, Greece and Cyprus. Third, we have been able to

highlight the growing importance of the circular economy concept and the trade-offs that need to occur between the goals. Finally, it has been a privilege to guide a group of MBA students in applied research relating to a topic that will impact their hospitality careers and in turn, inspire future student-led publication initiatives.

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the theme
issue outcomes

What are the implications for management action and applied research arising from your theme issue outcomes?

There are a number of key management interventions and applied research implications arising from this theme issue. The main anticipated research implication is the connection between the concept of the circular economy and the SDGs. This seems likely to highlight the importance of trade-offs that as yet are not clearly understood and will need to be formulated. Next, it is clear from our work that hospitality brands that can point to their sustainability credentials are likely to flourish in the years ahead. Finally, we have observed that an emphasis on sustainability that reflects an investment in economic, social and environmental considerations is more likely to be viewed as good governance.

645

Having served as a *WHATT* theme editor, what did you enjoy about the experience?

We have enjoyed the journey! We have greatly appreciated the support and encouragement of WHATT managing editor Richard Teare from the outset and it is satisfying to know that as a team, we have accomplished something that is worthwhile. A new experience for us has been the challenge of guiding a group of postgraduate students – the next generation of industry professionals – on the process of applied research, analysis and on writing for publication. The WHATT format and approach has enabled us to do this and we hope it will inspire future generations of postgrads to engage in this way. We believe that future generations of students and others will need to find their own solutions to the problems caused by climate change and other negative impacts – this is an important principle of sustainable practice.

About the Theme Editors

Dr Dimitrios Diamantis is Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor, Les Roches, Switzerland and Dr Annick Darioly is Associate Professor, Les Roches, Switzerland.

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a *WHATT* Theme Editor, do please contact the Managing Editor, Dr Richard Teare via the Emerald website.

Appendix. Theme issue contents (*WHATT* v12 n5 2020)

How can the hospitality industry increase corporate value aligned with sustainable development goals? Case examples from Hilton, Meliá and Sun

Victoria Matteucci

Explores how corporate social responsibility could be integrated with the UN SDGs to enhance corporate value drawing on case examples from Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc., Meliá Hotels International and Sun Limited. Sustainability endeavours for SDG goals 8, 12 and 17 are analysed and opportunities for inter-sectoral partnerships or trade-offs are highlighted.

Corporate social responsibility in hospitality: are sustainability initiatives really sustainable? Case examples from CitizenM, Lefay and Six Senses

Virginia Maria Stombelli

Draws on case examples from CitizenM, Lefay Resorts and Six Senses to analyze the influence of the triple bottom line concept and integration with SDGs practices. This article considers the interrelationships between SDG goals and poses thought-provoking questions about the future of sustainability.

Corporate social responsibility and consumerism: Case examples from Hyatt, Scandic and Walt Disney

Sylvie-Cécile Luiten

Illustrates with reference to case examples from Hyatt Hotels Corporation, Scandic Hotels AB and the Walt Disney Company linkages between the triple bottom line concept and current sustainable development practices. The article highlights the challenges ahead as well as the balances that needs to be achieved between the SDG goals and the needs and expectations of different stakeholders.

Action and progress on sustainability challenges: Case examples from Marriott, Booking and Soneva

Tomer Landau

Explores current sustainability issues with reference to case examples from Marriott International, Booking Holdings and The Soneva Group. The article examines differing perspectives in the context of a framework for sustainability in order to review the challenges posed by the SDG goals and the difficulties and constraints that arise.

Embracing sustainability in the drive from ordinary to outstanding: Case examples from Emirates, Jumeirah and Rotana

Sabina Stanojevic

Profiles three Middle Eastern-based companies (Emirates Airline, Jumeirah Group and Rotana Group) and highlights the different challenges posed by the SDGs for airlines and hotel operators respectively. The article also considers the strategic role that public and private sector partnerships can play in building sustainable cities as a current and future response.

Learning from sustainability practice: Case examples from Accor, Scandic and Atlantica

Nikos Onoufriou

Explores the concept of corporate social responsibility with reference to case examples from Accor Hotels, Scandic Hotels and Atlantica Hotels. The article illustrates the concept of trade-offs between addressing individual SDGs and the development of a more holistic, integrated approach to sustainable business development.

Exploring the applicability of sustainable development goals in Costa Rica: Case examples from Mastatal and Conchal

Juan M. Kandler

Focuses on cases examples from Rancho Mastatal and Reserva Conchal in Costa Rica. Costa Rica is playing a leading role in tourism sustainability and the cases profile a management company (Conchal) and a small, independent company (Mastatal). The examples include reference to climate change initiatives and efforts to integrate the SDGs with hospitality practices.

Sustainable development and the circular economy in Greece: Case examples from TEMES and Grecotel

Dimitra Christopoulou and Justin Darayus Khodaiji

Reviews two hotel case examples from Greece: that of Costa Navarino (TEMES S.A) and Grecotel (Lux Me) on the island of Rhodes. The cases highlight the growing importance of the circular economy as a strategic response to the SDGs and a way of reducing both operating costs and waste.

Sustainable development: An adaptive re-use solution for the hospitality industry

Tonglin Chelsea Ling and Elena Wong

Explore how AR could be better used in the hospitality industry as a viable strategy to help achieve the SDGs. AR can be used both as a framework for achieving the SDGs but equally as a circular economic sustainable action. The latter concept is explored through a series of interviews with practitioners.

Conclusion: A direction for sustainability and research notions after 2030

Dimitrios Diamantis

Summarizes the main contributions and practical implications arising from the theme issue with reference to 22 case examples relating to sustainable hospitality and tourism industry development and one interview-based article drawing on practitioners with expertise in the practice of AR.