
Reflections on the theme issue outcomes

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Tourism: How to achieve the sustainable development goals?

Theme Editors Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa Gowreesunkar share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

Overview

By now, it is established that the tourism and hospitality industry has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 with the aim of ending poverty and enhancing peace and prosperity. As a result, achieving those goals has become the over-arching agenda of the global tourism network, given that tourism not only contributes to the implementation of SDGs but also triggers a wide range of market opportunities. One of our theme issue observations is that SDG implementation is not dependent on the economic conditions of countries but rather on whether an effective national framework exists to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders. 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?

Numerous studies including the articles included in this theme show that tourism has the potential to contribute to economic and social well-being – providing that provisions such as government support, stakeholder collaboration, pro-tourism policies and access to education and finance are in place. Among others, the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and the African Union are committed to facilitating collaboration among stakeholders to realize the SDGs and the targets spelled out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite these and other laudable initiatives to encourage the adoption and implementation of the SDGs, many countries have not yet committed the effort and resources needed for this purpose. For example, the articles in this issue relating to the African Union and case examples from Algeria, Romania and India indicate that SDG implementation is guided by the level of commitment from government, which, in turn, is mainly dictated by the economic conditions of respective countries. The articles that draw on case examples from developed destinations like France and Dubai reveal the beginnings of SDG national planning, whereas less developed countries such as Kenya and Haiti are more focused on poverty and hunger alleviation and on health and sanitation issues using mechanisms other than implementation of the SDGs. As a result, the SDGs are not necessarily perceived as a national priority despite their potential for eliminating poverty and addressing an array of basic human needs. This is mainly explained by the absence of an appropriate business model or framework to guide countries on how to overcome their primary challenges using the SDGs as a foundation.



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

The *WHATT* format and guidelines encourage conceptual development that draws equally from previous published work and industry information and perspectives. Further, the *WHATT* format enabled us to incorporate novel data sources and perspectives that would not normally receive attention or support in other academic journals. In shaping their

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articles, the writing team members were able to interact with different stakeholders involved in the tourism industry. All the contributors are involved in tourism (directly and indirectly) and have a passionate concern for issues associated with the industry. Involvement in this collaborative research and writing project enabled them to undertake research in their domain of interest and we think that the outcomes could contribute to improving the performance of destinations in relation to sustainability.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?

When we started the project, we sought to involve practitioners in an open-minded way so as to encourage them to express their views by drawing on their work and life experiences. As for the academics, their input was mostly based on secondary analysis. Taken together, the theme issue drew on a range of experience and expertise related to a variety of world regions and destinations.

What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?

In this theme issue, the writing was organized around two different approaches and methodologies: First, secondary data were drawn from literature reviews. Second, the personal experience of contributors added significant value to the collection of articles. Thus, current perspectives relating to the SDGs and their implementation were explored with reference to destinations as diverse as Mauritius, India, France, Dubai, Africa, Romania, Zanzibar, Haiti and Algeria.

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

To facilitate the review process, contributors had to accept a dual responsibility for peer reviewing and because of the size, scope and experience of the writing team, this worked well. That said, it is important to highlight the fact that we had three rounds of reviews (and in some cases four). Academic reviewing was managed by the lead theme editor and the review process for practitioner papers by the second theme editor. The main difficulty encountered related to the time management of some contributors who because of the COVID-19 pandemic, struggled to submit their article on time and because of this added pressure, a couple of contributors dropped out.

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

Two key points emerge from the theme issue. First, there seems to be a lack of knowledge on how SDGs can be linked to current tourism businesses, especially in difficult socio-economic conditions. The second key point directly related to the first one is the lack of commitment from stakeholders and government in prioritizing SDG implementation. We think that the key question that all destinations need to begin thinking about is: *How could we benefit from SDGs implementation, get more out of less and make it a triple win for the economy, society and the environment?*

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

The collection of articles in this theme issue provides a diverse range of case studies, methodological approaches and possible responses to the strategic question. Equally important, this theme is to some extent calling for the implementation of SDGs through an organized framework of committed stakeholders. However, all the case studies in the issue,

as well as existing literature on the topic of sustainability in tourism, seem to share a common perspective (which is also a weakness), namely, the fact that current action is primarily based on short-term strategies with related impacts that are also short term.

Addressing this is all the more important as the SDGs and environmental sustainability are key concerns of the tourism industry. For example, resort mini-clubs offer the potential to educate future tourists while on holiday, if managed in an ambidextrous way, that is to say keeping its enclave dimension for the safety of young consumers, while at the same time opening the mini-clubs to the outside, by local people delivering fun and educative workshops (cooking local food, creating craft, teaching local songs, dances, etc.) to children. Young consumers are neither passive nor powerless, it is, therefore, important to empower them for the long-term benefit of the tourism industry. Young consumer empowerment will need to be at the heart of every sustainable tourism initiative, which will lead in the long run to the development of a future responsible tourist capital development (FRTCD) framework. Its purpose will be to equip young consumers with the essential skills, education and experience required for the responsible and sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Working with the SDGs requires a comprehensive understanding of its guiding philosophy as well as tourism's role in sustainable development, including its economic, environmental and social dimensions. In this regard, this issue offers a step forward as many hospitality and tourism organizations are beginning to explore ways of engaging with their stakeholders to develop their sustainability strategies. However, many are currently struggling to do this – partly we think because the range of possibilities for implementing the SDGs is not widely understood. The case studies presented in this theme issue illustrate some of the ways and means and we hope that they will inspire others to follow and to develop some of the existing ideas and practices.

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

This theme issue is dedicated specifically to the SDGs – a long-due obligation and reminder to stakeholders of the potential for hospitality and tourism involvement. We have found theme editing for WHATT to be both enjoyable and challenging. Our highlight is that it afforded an opportunity to exchange insights and perspectives with other academics and practitioners.

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.

Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa GB Gowreesunkar
Theme Editors

About the theme editors

Hugues Séraphin is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Event Management Studies at the University of Winchester. His research focuses on tourism development in post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations.

Vanessa Gowreesunkar is a Senior Lecturer, and she serves as the Head of Department for Tourism and Hospitality at the University of Africa (Bayelsa State, Nigeria). Her research interest includes, among others, sustainable tourism, island tourism, tourism management and marketing, post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations.

Appendix 1: Theme issue contents (*WHATT* v13 n1 2021)

Introduction: Tourism: How to achieve the sustainable development goals?

Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa GB Gowreesunkar

Provides an overview as to how the SDGs are being implemented by countries with different tourism requirements and resources. In so doing, this theme issue presents case studies from across the globe and examines them from academic and practitioner perspectives.

Sustainable development goals and the hotel sector: case examples and implications

Chaarani Bacari, Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa GB Gowreesunkar

Provides evidence that the hospitality industry is committed to the SDGs, but there are variations in the ways hotels address them. A series of examples show that hotels cover most of the SDGs and contribute to the three main spheres of sustainability, namely, the economy, the society and the environment.

The sustainability of French event companies: an exploratory perspective

Raphael Dornier

Evaluates and discuss the involvement in sustainable development of French event companies, mostly by identifying facilitators and barriers to their sustainability strategy. Based on the results some recommendations are provided, which aim at increasing the sustainability of French event companies.

From the desert to the city: How is Dubai branding itself through sustainable sport events?

Kamilla Swart, Asli Cazorla Milla and Leonardo Jose Mataruna-Dos-Santos

Explores sports events in Dubai and observes that key success factors are tourism attractiveness, good event management and the diversity of events in the region. However, sustainability is often neglected during event organization – one of the challenges in supporting a wide portfolio of major sport events.

African tourism and air transport: the role of the African Union and ECOSOCC in SDG implementation post COVID-19 pandemic

William Carew, Patson Malisa and Vanessa GB Gowreesunkar

Achieving the SDGs necessitates various forms and levels of collaboration and not all African Union members are willing to commit to this. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened many tourism economies and so there is growing interest in action to mitigate the impact – including collaboration.

Achieving sustainable development goals through agritourism in Algeria

Kamila Ait-Yahia Ghidouche, Lamia Nechoud and Faouzi Ghidouche

Explores the benefits that can be derived from agritourism and how this can be a distinguishing feature for a country in which conventional tourism is struggling to develop. The article outlines ways in which agritourism helps with poverty alleviation, inequality, food security and preservation of water resources.

Safari tourism and its role in sustainable poverty eradication in East Africa: the case of Kenya

Shem Wambugu Maingi

Investigates the ways in which safari tourism can help to connect communities in Kenya to tourism-related income as an integrated component of the tourist experience. Further, as the Africanization of the tourism sector in Kenya is a priority, community-led tourism can help to alleviate poverty.

Sustainable consumption and production of wildlife tourism in Indian tiger reserves: a critical analysis

Gavinolla Mahender Reddy, Vikrant Kaushal, Livina Agita, Sampada Kumar Swain and Henanth Kumar

Explores the status of sustainable consumption and production of wildlife tourism, particularly tiger-related tourism, in Indian national parks. The article also explores the implications for the various stakeholders in wildlife tourism.

Assessing the suitability of a single Brand for MSMEs in the hospitality sector to boost sustainable development: the case of Mauritius

Michael L.F. Pompeia

Explores the extent to which small companies in the accommodation sector in Mauritius could engage in effective brand management rather focusing on short-term business strategies that may jeopardize their long-term survival.

Transformative rural tourism strategies as tools for sustainable development in Transylvania, Romania: a case study on Sancraiu

Oana Adriana Gica, Monica Maria Coros, Ovidiu Ioan Moiseuc and Anca C Yallop

This study shows that sustainable rural tourism can greatly support the development of rural destinations and is making a significant contribution to the sustainable development of the Romanian tourism industry.

Tourism education in France and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education)

Hugues Seraphin, Mamadou Bah, Alan Fyall and Vanessa GB Gowreesunkar

The article, which centers on Sustainable Development Goal 4, argues that it is important to match the type of tourism education provided and the number of students trained with the needs of the industry, otherwise what is term “over-education” can arise.

Conclusion: Tourism: How to achieve the sustainable development goals?

Hugues Séraphin and Vanessa GB Gowreesunkar

Draws out the main points relating to achievement of the SDGs arising from the theme issue. In particular, it provides an insight as to how the hospitality and tourism industry is aligning its actions with the SDGs given the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent issues such as overtourism.