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Reflections on the theme issue outcomes: what are the challenges and opportunities for tourism sustainability in Cyprus?

Theme Editors Zanete Garanti and Galina Berjozkina share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

Overview

Inbound tourism has traditionally made a significant contribution to the economic development of Cyprus. However, a high influx of international tourists to coastal destinations in the peak season is followed by a low season with far fewer visitors, and this uneven pattern has consequences for the environment and for the economic, social and cultural development of the island. Given this backdrop, this theme issue explores the challenges and opportunities for tourism sustainability in Cyprus. A list of the articles in this issue can be found in [Appendix](#).

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

In light of recent events and various crises that the tourism and hospitality industry has faced in recent years, it is essential to pay attention to sustainable tourism plans and practices. Cyprus is renowned as a resort destination with more than four million tourists arriving every year and has become one of the most notable over tourism destinations in the world. The main reason hotels and destinations need to be sustainable is to ensure that economic, social and cultural resources are consumed in a manner that considers the needs of future generations. While Cyprus is committed to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), European Union (EU), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) sustainability goals and agendas, practical implementation is currently lagging behind. Tourism and hospitality operations contribute a large share to the country's GDP, and with many stakeholders involved and depending on tourism income, implementing change is a difficult task. The temptation to do more of the same is evident: for example, industry practitioners are still trying to attract even more peak season tourists, and this risks sacrificing long-term sustainable growth for short-term gain. However, given the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, policymakers now admit that sustainability is no longer an option; in fact it has become a top priority for recovery and for the future.

Cyprus is a small island state and currently has limited sustainable tourism practices and sustainability measures, mainly due to a lack of knowledge, experience and resources. However, as discussions amongst tourism policy planners, practitioners and organizations evolve and the requirements of international tour operators and tourists change, this theme issue sought to discuss the specific challenges that small island states face regarding sustainable tourism and to propose some options for the future.

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

We sought to structure our theme issue in a way that enabled us to reflect on the leading sustainability problems in Cyprus from various perspectives and approaches. We decided to include two thematic literature review articles in order to explore the main sustainability concepts and issues regarding stakeholder involvement in sustainability. One of these

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introduced tourism sustainability and discussed the conceptual understanding of sustainable tourism development that as yet is not well-understood in Cyprus. The second literature review explored the role of stakeholders and their involvement in sustainability planning and implementation. After a detailed look at the existing literature on the subject, we included three evidence-based articles relating to aspects of sustainability implementation, residents' perceptions of sustainability in rural areas and sustainability implementation in tourism education. Finally, we wanted to initiate discussions with practitioners in order to generate some practical solutions and so the issue contains three articles with this objective in mind. First, we examined how the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative is helping to raise standards for sustainability. Second, we explored sustainable regional development and opportunities for the regions given the need to reduce coastal concentrations of tourism. The third article profiled technology-based opportunities for sustainable tourism development with reference to 3D printing and some of the solutions it can provide in support of tourism sustainability.

We had a committed group of contributors that worked in teams on their articles and provided peer-review for other team members. This collaborative approach to writing was a very positive experience for all concerned. We also held regular meetings to exchange ideas, and in this way, everyone was aware of individual article and overall theme issue progress. We believe that in this way, we managed to tell the story of Cyprus' tourism sustainability in a relatively seamless way via ten free-standing yet interdependent articles – all of which are rooted in the main theme issue question.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?

As the issue explores challenges and opportunities for tourism sustainability in Cyprus, the stakeholders we consulted were the primary sources for insights on progress and feedback about barriers. They provided a lot of detail from an industry perspective, and the fact that we were able to consult with community representatives and others helped to ensure a balanced approach. As the industry representatives and other stakeholders are geographically scattered, the writing team used a snowball sampling method in order to secure the involvement of one stakeholder and drawing out from them information and contacts that led to the participation of others. It was for us, exciting to discover that there are many active people with great ideas located all around Cyprus. However, we came to realize that they rarely seemed to know about each other's work, and the snowballing technique enabled us to bring some of them together. It is motivating to know that we were able to facilitate these connections that will hopefully continue and gather momentum.

What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?

We used various ways to interact with and collect data from industry practitioners, residents, policymakers and other stakeholders. The methods included: interviews, phone calls, Zoom interviews, field visits, semi-structured questionnaires and participation in events. Given the unpredictable situation in which we were working with frequent changes to the severity of lockdowns, travel restrictions between cities in Cyprus and working from home restrictions, the writing team had to be very flexible in finding the best way to approach and interact with stakeholders. For example, one article that centred on community participation was in progress during a full lockdown, and the majority of respondents were unwilling to meet even in compliance with social distance protocols. Given this scenario, the writing team had to make full use of telephone and Zoom interviews. In contrast, the timing of the research for an article focused on tourism in rural areas and theme-based centres, villages and attractions meant that it was possible for the writing team to visit and conduct face-to-face interviews. Differing and challenging experiences, but the situation simply meant that we had to think creatively about how we engaged with our key stakeholder groups.

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

The peer-review process was organized so that contributors to the theme issue could discuss and review other articles in the theme issue and this encouraging open discussion. Article direction, content and progress were also discussed in regular meetings. What worked very well for our writing team was shared access to Google Documents so that everybody could see at a glance the progress of others, suggest edits at an early stage and generally motivate each other. Further, our more experienced researchers were working with those with less experience, and industry professionals were contributing too. In these and other ways, our academic writers and industry practitioners were working as one team and with a constructive spirit of collaboration, professionalism and shared sense of ownership. We think that the effort was worthwhile – we have been able to identify what progress has been made, generate some excellent ideas and examples for possible wider adoption and fostered a collaborative approach that we hope to sustain and we continue to explore aspects of the sustainability agenda.

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

While writing up the issue, we thought about many outcomes that we can bring to the tourism industry in Cyprus. For industry practitioners and all interested parties, there are several significant outcomes, such as understanding rural tourism through the experience of locals and tourists, the value of engaging with technology and the way it can help with the sustainable tourism transition in Cyprus and the role that tourism education has to play in supporting sustainable tourism development in Cyprus. Overall, we think that the theme issue has touched on the most significant and emerging issues, and we are already planning further research in a follow-up issue that will explore some topics in more depth.

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

There are several implications for management action and applied research arising from this theme issue. First, the literature reviews revealed some particular social, economic and environmental challenges specific to Cyprus due to seasonality and dependency on tourism activity and income. The reviews also highlighted the complexity of stakeholder interests, each with different agendas when planning and implementing sustainability. Therefore, one significant management action relates to planning for sustainable tourism growth in Cyprus with the aim of addressing the social, environmental and economic challenges and balancing stakeholder interests.

The evidence-based articles revealed that while sustainability implementation for the long term has undeniable benefits for tourism businesses, the transition requires support for the action taken and to promote sustainability. Furthermore, that one of the major stakeholders – local communities and residents – hold both positive and negative opinions about tourism growth in rural areas, and so it is vital to ensure that growth is beneficial to local communities. We also concluded that tourism education has a key role to play in preparing future industry professionals to work in an industry that is in transition and they must be equipped to implement sustainability concepts given that as yet, this issue is still emerging in Cyprus.

Our interactions with practitioners and industry professionals highlighted the important role of the Sustainable Cyprus Tourism Initiative in promoting and facilitating tourism sustainability in Cyprus. Our studies of two rural villages and their own journey to the creation and promotion of authentic, theme-based tourism experiences revealed that there are generic criteria or success factors that can be applied elsewhere. Finally, while 3D printing is

an emerging field in Cyprus, it is clear that it could be widely applied in support of building, historical and cultural conservation, souvenir production and even food printing.

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

We found it to be a challenging but worthwhile task to assemble and sustain the work of a diverse team of professionals with the aim of finding solutions to a pressing question. We were lucky enough to have contributors who were willing and able to support each other and work as a team rather than separately. We were able to achieve this outcome because of the approach that WHATT adopts to collaborative investigation, and we enjoyed working on this theme issue and our theme issue question. We would like to thank WHATT Managing Editor Richard Teare for his on-going support and for encouraging us to find the best possible solutions to every problem. Overall, it has been an enriching experience in a supportive atmosphere, and all of us feel that we have been able to advance the agenda for sustainability as a result of this issue.

About the Theme Editors:

Zanete Garanti PhD is an Associate Professor at City Unity College Nicosia, Cyprus. She lectures on marketing and management and is actively researching marketing topics such as branding, social media marketing and influencer marketing.

Galina Berjozkina is a Senior Lecturer at City Unity College Nicosia. She is a PhD student at the University of Strathclyde, Department of Work Employment and Organization and is engaged in research on seasonal employees' work performance in the tourism industry.

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 v13 n6 2021)

Introduction: what are the challenges and opportunities for tourism sustainability in Cyprus?

Zanete Garanti and Galina Berjozkina

Outlines the theme issue approach and profiles the articles written in response to the strategic question that explores the challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Cyprus. The articles cover literature reviews, reviews of data and evidence, interactions with practitioners and case study practical solutions.

Sustainability and its challenges in destinations that highly depend on tourism: a thematic literature review

Iveta Dembovska and Anda Zvaigzne

Provides a review of the concept and principles of sustainable tourism development that apply to all destinations including Cyprus, the effects of tourism on society, sustainable tourism strategy and the importance of balanced environmental and economic development that takes into account the public interest.

Stakeholders' involvement in sustainability planning and implementation: the case of Cyprus

Iordanis Katemliadis and George Markatos

Provides a literature review perspective on stakeholder involvement in sustainability planning and implementation, examines the role of stakeholders at individual, local and international levels and

outlines how they can make a difference in transitioning to a more sustainable future for tourism in Cyprus.

Support for environmental, social and economic tourism industry development in Cyprus

Ioannis Violaris and Constantinos Charalambous

Analyzes the literature on sustainability and its challenges in destinations that depend on tourism for employment and income and reviews the steps that can be taken by government and other organizations. Observes that it is important to identify barriers as they hinder progress towards sustainability.

Residents' perceptions of the environmental and social impact of tourism in rural areas

Sotiroula Liasidou, Christiana D. Stylianou, Galina Berjozkina and Zanele Garanti

Investigates the impact of tourism activity on rural communities and argues that a more holistic approach to sustainable tourism development in Cyprus is needed ensuring that all local communities have an opportunity to develop small-scale niche tourism projects that provide income and enhance the image of rural destinations.

Is tourism education supporting sustainability?

Galina Berjozkina and Yioula Melanthiou

Concludes that implementation of the sustainability concept in undergraduate hospitality and tourism degree programmes in Cyprus is at a development stage. The majority follows trends and offer sustainability courses but concept implementation as reflected in course descriptions and learning outcomes is relatively limited.

Rising sustainability standards: the Cyprus sustainable tourism initiative

Stathis Kolongou, Iordanis Katemliadis, Philippos Drousiotis

Examines stepwise improvements in sustainability standards on the island of Cyprus and more specifically the work of the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative (CSTI). In addition, the article outlines how CSTI is helping to make the case for sustainable development and facilitating change.

Under-tourism regions and destinations: what are their opportunities to succeed?

Lienite Litavnece, Inese Silicka, Zanele Garanti, Galina Berjozkina and Stathis Kolongou

Identifies nine success factors guiding rural tourism sustainable development in Cyprus. Two rural villages were selected and interviews, field visits and interactions with practitioners and members of the local community then followed with thematic analysis to identify the factors guiding the sustainable development of these villages.

3D printing in tourism: an answer to sustainability challenges?

Galina Berjozkina and Rasoul Karami

Explores current applications and the wider potential for using 3D technology in building, restoration of cultural heritage, souvenirs and food-related printing that together could contribute to a more sustainable tourism and hospitality industry in Cyprus.

Conclusion: how to achieve tourism sustainability in Cyprus?

Zanele Garanti and Galina Berjozkina

Summarizes the sustainability challenges and opportunities for the small island state of Cyprus. Overall, the article collection provides academic and practical insight based on theme-based literature reviews, field visits, case studies, interactions and interviews with practitioners, residents and policymakers.

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