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## **ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL: BEHAVIOURAL APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY**

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**Abstract:** The long-term viability of the tourism and hospitality industry hinges on its ability to accommodate increasing global demand while minimizing its environmental impact and preserving the well-being of local communities. As the sector evolves, the concept of sustainable development has become central—encompassing environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic resilience. Although interpretations of sustainability vary, a growing consensus aligns with the framework provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), introduced in 2015 as a universal roadmap toward a more equitable and sustainable future by 2030. These goals have steadily shaped policies and strategies across both public and private sectors, becoming a foundational reference in sustainability initiatives. However, the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant setbacks, exposing vulnerabilities in global systems and underscoring the urgent need for coordinated action. Within this context, fostering sustainable behaviors among stakeholders in tourism and hospitality is more critical than ever, demanding innovative approaches, cross-sector collaboration, and a renewed commitment to the principles outlined in the UNSDGs.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, Hospitality industry, Environmental impact, Local communities.

### **Introduction**

This special issue collects research on how actors in the tourism and hospitality supply chain can be encouraged towards sustainable behavior by connecting to their values. In line with Schwartz's (2012) value theory, values are interpreted as guiding principles in life. Recognizing the need for a coordinated effort among different constituencies in the transition toward a more sustainable future, the call was not limited to actors at the organizational level but wished to include those at the societal level, such as policy makers, and at the individual level, such as tourists and guests (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012), as well.

The tourism and hospitality sector's future greatly depends on its capacity to meet a growing demand without increasing its environmental footprint or its pressure on the destination communities (UNWTO and UNDP, 2017).

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In other words, tourism needs to develop sustainably. Although the debate about what sustainable development means is still ongoing, there is increasing consensus that it requires value creation on a social, environmental, and economic dimension. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) represent the most recent operationalization of sustainable development. The SDGs were established by the United Nations in 2015 as a new global sustainable development agenda for 2030. Gradually but steadily, the UNSDGs have since been embraced by governments and organizations alike and have become the reference point for all actors in the sustainability discourse. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted on the achievement of the UNSDGs and has dramatically highlighted the need for a global coordinated effort (UNWTO, 2018).

Considering the impact that tourism and hospitality have on both the socio-economic and the environmental aspects of sustainability, it is no surprise that each of the 17 UNSDGs can be related to the sector. Pre-COVID tourism, for example, accounted for 8 to 12% of worldwide carbon emissions (UNWTO, 2018). Most emissions were related to transport and the goods used in the service, particularly food. Tourism and hospitality, therefore, have a direct impact on goals 12 (sustainable consumption) and 13 (climate change). Providers and consumers have the option of choosing forms of transport with a smaller carbon footprint and goods that are both healthy for people and for the planet. It is also hoped that tourism's post-pandemic recovery will see a change towards local tourism (thus reducing long-haul flights) and an increased focus on the well-being of people at the destination (Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2020). Changes of such a magnitude, however, do not happen automatically, but must be purposively designed and managed. The aim of this special issue is to highlight the fact that it is essential to include tools in the design process that encourage people to show more sustainable behavior, and to support them in doing so.

The UNSDGs clearly encompass environmental, social and economic goals, and therefore align with an understanding of sustainable development as value creation at the social (or people), environmental (or planet), and economic (or profit) level. Even though progress has been made, a holistic understanding of sustainable development in the tourism and hospitality sector is still limited (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). Moreover, even those companies that fully understand the need for sustainable development face dilemmas when it comes to its implementation, due to the conflicting interests of stakeholders regarding the relative importance of people, planet, and profit. In some cases, COVID-19 has exacerbated these conflicts as several organizations in the sector have been and are still struggling for their survival (Chang et al., 2020). As stated above, a coordinated effort at all levels is needed to achieve sustainability and, more specifically, to assure that the recovery of tourism after COVID-19 follows a sustainable path.

It is important to remember that in the end, decisions are made by people. Without wanting to individualize the problem, this issue wishes to share some answers to the question as to how the behavior of actors in the tourism supply chain (providers and consumers) can be influenced towards more sustainable choices. (Abrahamse & Steg, 2013; De Groot & Steg, 2008). The six papers collected in this special issue give a range of interesting answers to this question.

The first manuscript in this special issue, by Bogren et al., focuses on 'Swedish Tourism companies' sustainability communication – create legitimacy and value'. This article describes what and how different tourism companies

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communicate about their sustainability efforts towards their stakeholders. It finds that these organizations do realize how to use the tools they have to meet the demands of their stakeholders.

One such stakeholder is the tourist, who uses the information provided by the company to make their (sustainable) travel purchasing decisions. In the second manuscript of this issue, 'Sustainable travel through experienced tourists' desire for eudemonia and immersion', Sealer et al. investigate both the demand and supply side of sustainable travel. The paper's conclusion shows that experienced tourists are more likely to travel for eudemonic motives and show sustainable travel patterns.

Besides being an experienced traveler, there are several other factors that contribute to sustainable tourist behavior. Negacz's manuscript, 'Distinction through ecotourism: factors influencing sustainable tourism choices', investigates what kind of capital is required for making sustainable consumption choices as a tourist. She concludes that sustainable behavior is found throughout all social classes, but that the motivations for it vary. Tourists might need a nudge to change their behavior. The fourth manuscript in this special issue is by Chatterjee et al. and is titled 'Bottled water usage and willingness to pay: Visual nudges and the theory of planned behavior'. The authors used various visual nudges to motivate tourists to carry their own water rather than buying bottled water onsite. The research concludes that negative visual clues had a significantly higher effect on the tourists' willingness to pay than neutrally or positively framed message.

Once an individual starts displaying concern for the environment, they might end up applying sustainability strategies at their place of work. The fifth manuscript of this issue, 'The intertwinement of professional knowledge culture, leadership practices and sustainability in the restaurant industry' by Wellton et al., demonstrates how a chef's personal concern about environmental sustainability resulted in normative leadership via the creation of a knowledge culture.

A better understanding of how tourists make sustainable consumption choices is needed. The sixth and final manuscript, 'Tourists as reflexive agents of change: proposing a conceptual framework towards sustainable consumption' by Seeler et al., demonstrates how reflection is a critical element in changing the tourists' attitudes towards practices that lead to individual transformation.

Achieving a more sustainable future for the tourism and hospitality sector will depend on our capacity to implement the necessary changes. The articles in this special issue use specific

cases to show how to design and manage these changes at both the individual and the organizational level. Some articles give specific tools on how to do this, others present potential ways of encouraging people to behave more sustainably. As stated above, a coordinated effort at all levels is needed to achieve sustainability and to recover from the COVID-pandemic. While most of the data collected pre-dates the COVID-crisis, this crisis might work as a catalyst toward sustainability and speed up the changes needed to achieve a more sustainable tourism and hospitality sector, as highlighted in this issue's articles. In many regions, the pandemic has reset tourism and hospitality back to default and shown the problems caused by its complex international system. In that respect, the pandemic might also be seen as an opportunity to help tourism and hospitality develop into a sustainable business (Chang et al., 2020). Whether this will be the case will mainly depend on the decisions made by individual people all along the tourism chain, including tourists, managers, and policy makers. In other words, it

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depends on the extent to which all the actors in this sector will be able to choose more sustainable practices and behaviors.

We are aware that this special issue is not an exhaustive answer on how to make tourism and hospitality more sustainable and that more research is needed. Interesting suggestions for further research on sustainable behavior in tourism and hospitality can be found in the articles in this issue, for example on highlighting personal benefits of sustainable choices (Chatterjee & Barbhuiya, 2021), on accumulating and distributing knowledge about social sustainable leadership in the restaurant industry, especially among its young leaders (Wellton & Lainpelto, 2021), and on exploring which experiences trigger responsible tourists to show more sustainable tourist behaviour (Seeler et al., 2021). To these interesting suggestions, we wish to add the need for more research on how to encourage travel choices that are less harmful to the environment (related to UNSDG 13) and local purchasing (UNSDG 12).

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