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Conclusion: how to achieve tourism sustainability in Cyprus?

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Abstract

Purpose – This concluding paper summarises the main points and outcomes related to the theme issue question *what are the challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Cyprus?*

Design/methodology/approach – This paper draws on the findings of the theme issue articles summarising key points on how sustainability can be achieved in different tourism and hospitality industry areas in Cyprus.

Findings – The overall findings highlight the challenges the tourism and hospitality industry faces in Cyprus to implement sustainable tourism measures while significantly depending on the income industry generates. Articles in this thematic issue also explore the opportunities that stakeholders, support measures, education, advanced technology, rural thematic tourism activities can provide.

Originality/value – The articles in this issue address sustainability challenges and opportunities for a small island state Cyprus that heavily depend on sun and sea tourism activity. The articles in this theme issue provide academic and practical insight through thematic literature reviews, field visits, case studies, interactions and interviews with practitioners, residents, and policymakers.

Keywords - sustainability, challenges, opportunities, tourism, hospitality, Cyprus

Paper type - Viewpoint

Overview

The papers in this theme issue provide some critical insights into challenges and opportunities that the tourism and hospitality industry in Cyprus faces due to fast-developing tourism activity centred mainly around one type of attraction. Economic, social and environmental struggles and opportunities are discussed from multiple contexts and perspectives, involving a large number of stakeholders.

The thematic issue starts with two thematic literature review papers. The first article is titled *Sustainability and its Challenges in Destinations that Highly Depend on Tourism*, written by Iveta Dembovska and Anda Zvaigzne. The article gives key points and explores the main social, economic, and environmental challenges relevant to the small island state of Cyprus, which generates a large share of its income from tourism activity. The article points out the risks of

seasonality that challenges economic sustainability and economic leakage. Many tourism businesses and activities are not owned by locals, weakening the economic effect of tourism activity in Cyprus.

Further, since four times more tourists come to Cyprus than there are residents (statistics of 2019), the article explores risks of commercialisation, standardisation and adaptation, as local culture and customs are at high risk to be modified towards the needs of tourists. There is also the risk of cultural clashes, as various visitors from different cultural, religious, social, economic backgrounds visit the island. Finally, the authors conclude that tourism is an industry with a significant impact on the environment, specifically the natural environment and resources, marine, land, cultural environment and animals.

To continue, Iordanis Katemliadis and George Markatos focus on stakeholders involvement in sustainability planning and implementation in Cyprus. The paper explores the participation of stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry in Cyprus, showing the complexity of international, national and individual stakeholders. Being a member state of UNWTO, EU and OECD, Cyprus has committed to several goals and objectives to achieve sustainable development; however, the national and local government and non-government organisations take responsibility and adopt the commitments into action plans. One of the main challenges to plan and implement sustainability in Cyprus is to balance the needs and interests of all stakeholders.

The thematic issue continues with the review of the data/evidence articles. The tourism and hospitality industry is closely related to some significant success factors for small island destinations. Violaris and Charalambous (2021), in their research, are using Cyprus as an example to examine the positive and negative characteristics that characterise each of the traditional pillars of sustainability from a tourist perspective: social, environmental, and economic, as well as patrimonial and cultural. Authors state that the industry coordination into sustainable, quality island development is steady with the current conditions; it plans and creates the tourism industry in Cyprus that is based and incorporated with indigenous resources, and supports indigenous business and financial areas; it fuses the thoughts of value and sustainability over the medium and long haul. Given all these factors, there is still inherent issues that need to be resolved, such as reduced seasonality, improved utilisation of natural and human resources, a need for the creation of a platform and environment for stakeholders to come together and commonly share experiences that will help bridge the gap allow Cyprus to develop further its tourist industry based on solid sustainability practices.

Liasidou et al. (2021) explore how residents' perceptions of how tourism activity in rural areas impact their environment, economic and social lives individually and as a community. Given the contribution of tourism, it is arguable that it affects those who live in popular tourist areas. Still, not all locals have the same opinions of tourism's importance to their community/region. For this paper, the authors have conducted semi-structured interviews with residents of rural areas of Cyprus and asked about the satisfaction of tourism development in their place of residence, opportunities, governmental support, change in lifestyle and habits. Research findings have shown that the opinion of locals match the notion that tourism may bring both harmful and beneficial

elements to a region, and the majority of respondents are worried about the government's participation in rural planning and development plans.

The article *Is tourism education supporting sustainability?* by Berjozkina and Melanthiou, analyses the extent to which sustainability concepts have been implemented in higher education programs in the tourism and hospitality fields in all tourism and hospitality programs offered in Cyprus higher education institutions at the Bachelors level. The competitiveness of the hospitality and tourism industry in Cyprus has risen rapidly in recent years. The rapid growth of tourism and hospitality education programmes has stimulated the importance of sustainability incorporation into HEI curricula. In their paper, the authors state that the interest in sustainable tourism has grown in recent years. International initiatives and research in sustainable tourism are aimed at increasing academic interest in this field. The study's findings show that sustainability concept implementation in the undergraduate hospitality and tourism degree programmes is developing. Sustainability courses are not compulsory at universities and colleges in Cyprus that provide tourism and hospitality related Bachelor programs. Sustainability courses are offered as electives in various HEIs in Cyprus as a direction for future research authors have suggested extending the research to all levels of tourism and hospitality education programmes and geographical areas and involve different stakeholders in the research, e.g. students, HODs, and tourism and hospitality industry practitioners and managers.

Finally, the thematic issue is finalised by articles that include interactions with practitioners and practical solutions for Cyprus's tourism and hospitality industry. Interviews, field visits, interactions with practitioners and the local community were conducted. The purpose of these was to understand how significant is the involvement of the community and industry practitioners, and governmental bodies in making the tourism and hospitality industry more sustainable in Cyprus.

The article by Kolongou et al. (2021) explores rising sustainability standards from Cyprus Sustainable Tourism perspective and how this organisation helped the case of sustainable development. The hotel industry has recognised that tying its brands to sustainability may benefit them in various ways. Applying sustainable concepts in the hospitality sector may lower costs, protect vital resources, improve hotel appeal to international tour operators, and provide better experiences for visitors. The article's authors emphasise the significance of the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative, an organisation that deals with the tourism sustainability agenda in Cyprus. It aims to combine tourism demand, supply, and tourism resources to create a sustainable approach to tourism in Cyprus. The authors believe that improving the sustainability of Cypriot tourism and the hotel industry is a one-way path, and Cyprus will confront severe environmental difficulties, and caring for and enhancing the environment can help to reduce the negative consequences. The study's findings show a gap between theory and practice, and the industry needs to step up its efforts. The authors suggest that Cyprus can use sustainability to create a strong green brand image in the tourism and hospitality sector, which will help the industry differentiate itself from competitors.

In Litavniece et al. (2021), two rural villages in Larnaca and Limassol districts, Cyprus, are explored. The authors tried to identify the factors guiding the sustainable tourism development of

these villages. Cyprus, a popular destination for sun and sea vacations in beach resorts, has launched initiatives to promote alternative tourist experiences all year round to combat seasonality and the imbalance between under and overtourism. With increasing competition among locations worldwide, travellers have numerous options for visiting well-known cities and staying at unknown boutique hotels. The research findings show that nine success factors are crucial for the success of sustainable rural destinations. These factors make a significant effort towards rebranding Cyprus as a destination. The authors believe it adds to the scholarly and practical discussion on rural tourist development and its importance for sustainable development in Cyprus and abroad. In a future study, the authors propose expanding the research to other geographical locations to draw further findings and consequences and include success criteria crucial for tourism development in rural regions and destinations.

The concluding article of the issue *3D printing in tourism: an answer to sustainability challenges?* by Berjozkina and Karami explores new ways and opportunities to use 3D printing technology as a more sustainable tool in various areas of tourism and hospitality in Cyprus. There has been an increasing interest in innovative technology such as the Additive Manufacturing (AM) process in recent years. The broad interest in 3D printing for the tourism sector led several companies in Cyprus to use the technology for printing parts for tourism and cultural purposes. Also, individuals and groups of experts have undertaken many initiatives and projects. The authors do research that includes interviews with industry practitioners on the standpoint of 3D printing technology in tourism in Cyprus. After the conduction of the interviews and literature review, there were significant findings made, such as that currently, 3D printing is widely used in interior design and engineering parts in Cyprus. One of the rapidly growing areas is the development of art pieces, restoration and preservation of cultural heritage, 3D printing of replica monument models for visually impaired or disabled people. The authors state that there is very high potential to implement 3D printing for other areas in Cyprus, like 3D printing of buildings, souvenirs, and even food items.

Concluding notes

The research presented in 12 articles shows that sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry is critically essential for Cyprus overall development. Being the large and fast-developing industry globally and the primary income for Cyprus, both academics and practitioners, have acknowledged the need and importance of sustainability agenda. Thematic issue on challenges and opportunities for tourism sustainability in Cyprus explored the economic, social and environmental impact of heavy tourism activity and opportunities to help Cyprus transform into a more sustainable destination. The follow-up issue in 2022 will continue to explore possibilities for the Cyprus tourism industry. Articles on innovative, technology-enabled services in tourism, residents' involvement, interactions with policymakers on rebranding Cyprus as a destination, and visitors' perceptions will provide the ground for further discussion on how a small island state Cyprus can become a more sustainable travel destination.