
Guest editorial: Innovation in hospitality and tourism: ethical issues and challenges

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709

The UNWTO asserts that “through the direct, spontaneous and non-mediatized contacts it engenders between men and women of different cultures and lifestyles, tourism represents a vital force for peace and a factor of friendship and understanding among the peoples of the world” (UNWTO, 2001). The concept of “hospitality” even more clearly denotes a moral principle (Derrida, 2000; Lashley and Morrison, 2000). However, the ethicality of both these activities is not uncontroversial, as tourism, besides driving international friendship, is also associated with ecologically or socially unsustainable developments; hospitality as a moral act toward a visitor without expectation of recompense has become differentiated from conditioned or transactional hospitality.

Our increasing but understudied desire to travel the world (Oskam, 2020b) has spurred an overconsumption that contributes to climate change (Holden, 2017; Dogru *et al.*, 2019), alienation of resident communities (Harvey, 2012; Colomb and Novy, 2017; Milano *et al.*, 2019; Oskam, 2020a), food waste (De Visser-Amundson, 2020; Filimonau and Delysia, 2019), excessive water consumption (Garcia *et al.*, 2022), labor exploitation (Baum *et al.*, 2020) and social inequality (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Lashley, 2022). Growing attention in academic studies and in professional circles for these issues seems to indicate that tourism and hospitality are not generally seen as intrinsically beneficial to mankind. If there was any doubt about the perceived harmfulness of the industry with its growth rate prior to pandemic, evidence was provided by multiple articles advocating that the 2020 COVID standstill be used for a radical change or “reset” of tourism (Brouder, 2020; Gössling *et al.*, 2020; Gössling and Schweiggart, 2022; Hall *et al.*, 2020; Niewiadomski, 2020; Prideaux *et al.*, 2020; Sigala, 2020).

Besides an evident growth of the problems themselves, with the example of climate change symptoms manifesting themselves with increasing frequency around the world, and a greater awareness among scholars and practitioners, the attention to sustainable business and Corporate Social Responsibility is also the consequence of changing social forces. The private and corporate responsibility to act against pollution, injustice and other negative externalities of their economic activities mirrors the inability of public authorities to constrain the dark sides of market forces, either because they operate at a global, supranational level, or because of a withdrawal of public authorities from their regulatory roles. In this sense, the movement to self-regulate and self-constrain is an expression of neoliberal ethics.

What responsibility does the academic community have in these developments? It can be argued that current research practices favor a reproduction of the same ethical concerns and solutions that have emerged in the corporate environment. If we do not want market driven forces to be the sole agents for social good, the challenge is to not just examine ethical thinking and practices as they exist, but rather provide insights into practices that *should* exist. The first principle of Responsible Business Research suggests in that regard that the purpose of research is to structure the current knowledge of best practices such that it can help shaping and creating better futures. Business research thereby holds an important social role to observe and address negative consequences of firm actions; innovative research must spur companies toward more responsible practices (Community for Responsible Research in Business and Management, 2017).

Innovation, on the other hand, is traditionally defined in terms of commercial purposes, competitiveness or firm performance (Lelo de Larrea *et al.*, 2021; Schumpeter, 1934). Calls for



more sustainable tourism, especially when the definition of the concept started to shift from the prolonged viability of a business to the need to avoid alterations or degradations of the human and physical environment (Butler, 1999), marked the incorporation of ethical concerns as drivers of innovation. However, this shift in academic perspective does not imply that innovation and socially responsible practices are always a logical combination. That there is a tension between the two is illustrated by the debates around automation and employment, about economic growth, wealth distribution and the distribution of negative externalities; or, straightforward, by the observation that innovation is an important predictor of CO₂ emissions (Umar *et al.*, 2020).

This special issue explores the contradictory links between innovation in tourism and hospitality as an antecedent of ethical issues, and ethical issues as a driver of business innovation. It contains five papers covering a diverse range of ethical issues and innovation in hospitality and tourism including Corporate Social Responsibility, gendered perspectives, ethical leadership, food circularity, pricing, and the fundamental debate about ethicality in business. In *An exploration of female underrepresentation on executive boards in the Dutch hotel industry through an ethical lens*, Lereculey-Peran, Lombarts and Brannon study gender inequality in Dutch hotel industry executive boards through an ethical female stakeholder framework, finding different gendered perspectives on work-family balance and professional ambitions. With their findings, the authors call for “a wider discussion addressing ethical working conditions for all employees”.

The second paper, *The mediating effects of green organizational citizenship on the relationship between green transformational leadership and green creativity: evidence from hotels*, by Öğretmenoğlu, Akova and Göktepe, uses a ‘green context’ (i.e. environmentally friendly behaviors) with the focus on the effects of ethical leadership on employees’ creativity. More specifically, they demonstrate how employees’ readiness to voluntarily perform environmentally friendly acts on the work floor (defined as green organizational citizenship in the article) influences this relationship.

The third paper considers food waste and the role of consumers’ ethical judgments. It is written by Li Ding and titled *The effects of self-efficacy and collective efficacy on customer food waste reduction intention: the mediating role of ethical judgment*. Using a restaurant context, the paper shows that consumers’ food waste reduction intentions (FWRI) are positively influenced by their perceived self-efficacy and collective efficacy toward reducing food waste. Importantly, she also finds that these relationships are mediated by the ethical judgment of the study participants. This means consumers’ perception of how ethically a restaurant influences their FWRI through a pathway of both self and collective efficacy (i.e. the belief of how effective one’s own actions and actions by society in general against food waste).

So far, the angle has been: what are the outcomes of ethically motivated behavior? The fourth contribution to this special issue ventures into the ethical effects of innovation. Computerized pricing algorithms are an example of innovations that may lead to perhaps unforeseen or unintended ethical consequences. Discriminatory pricing inflicts a harm for which regulatory frameworks are unprepared. In their viewpoint paper on *Algorithmic pricing in hospitality and tourism: call for research on ethics, consumer backlash and CSR*, Van der Rest, Sears, Kuokkanen and Heidary detect a research gap around the embeddedness of pricing fairness in studies of CSR, arguing that more research is needed on the moral and reputational consequences of algorithmic pricing, and on the development of a consumer impact metrics to be incorporated into the customer-focused sections of CSR reporting standards.

Finally, in *A systematic review of ethical issues in hospitality and tourism innovation*, the authors give an overview of the state-of-the-art in studies of the overlap of ethical issues and innovation in the hospitality and tourism discipline. The review detects that a methodological bias towards a quantification of the effects of ethical innovations leads to an instrumentalization of the underlying principles; in other words, the dominant question becomes: “what is this ethical behavior good for?” At the same time, the authors

argue that the overview would not be complete if the numerous studies that refer to ethical issues without phrasing it in those terms would remain excluded. The imbalances in the study of the topic call for more scholarly attention to future ethical consequences of business innovations in hospitality and tourism.

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