Editorial

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (*WHATT*) encourages its theme editors to build on prior work, and I am delighted to welcome back to this role Chiara Mauri and Raphaël Dornier who, in 2018, examined tourism sustainability in Alpine regions. This issue investigates a wider tourism sustainability perspective and the implications for a diverse range of locations. I should like to thank Chiara, Raphaël and their writing team for highlighting significant impacts and implications for sustainable tourism development.

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 me.

Richard Teare
Managing Editor, WHATT

Tourism sustainability in natural, residential and mountain locations: What are the current issues and questions?

The final chapter in a recent book on place branding (Fona, 2020 in Foroudi *et al.*, 2020) identifies four major themes on which both academics and practitioners should focus in the near future:

- contested place and identities and, as a consequence, an intensification of geo-political and economic tensions;
- unsustainable destinations, due to climate changes, mass migration, overtourism and the increased exploitation of natural resources;
- new and emerging destinations, in terms of both new real places to go and of virtual places to visit; and
- digital place brands, which promote the tourism experience through real and digital encounters via online platforms and content.

In our earlier *WHATT* theme issue (Mauri and Dornier, 2018), sustainability was discussed with an exclusive focus on Alpine destinations, mainly related to the winter season. Key issues raised were mobility and mobility infrastructure; global warming, snow shortage and the long-term viability of ski stations; pollution and clean air; price of accessibility; stakeholders' involvement and networking and cross-border partnerships.

The collection of articles in this issue broadens the perspective of sustainability in tourism in terms of both places and seasons. The focus is not only mountain areas but also natural spaces such as parks and marginal rural areas. The two articles on over-tourism at Cinque Terre in Italy and in Corsica open another perspective: that of mountain and sea co-existing in the same space, with their unique dialectic relationship: walking in the mountain or bathing in the sea? Sipping an aperitif on the beach or visiting a small local trattoria in the hills? If mountain and sea are both present in the same place, sustainability is to be considered for both seasons, Winter and Summer.

According to the Mobility Market Outlook on COVID-19, the revenue for the travel and tourism industry in Europe will be the most affected by the pandemic, decreasing from US $211.97bn in 2019 to roughly US$124bn in 2020 (Statista, 2020). Tourism experts are estimating that for the coming Summer seasons the percentage of tourists going to the

mountains may increase, and smaller places may win over comparatively larger destinations. This means that if on the one hand, the pandemic has seriously undermined the tourism sector, on the other hand new avenues may open for mountain and rural areas. Given this perspective, sustainability can make the difference. Sustainability has almost always been depicted as a "wish" and a "desirable state" because the reality tends to be a lack of sustainability: too much pollution, private and individual transportation, too many people, too expensive to be accessible and weak networking and coordination between the stakeholders involved in managing the destination. What is different here is that every article in this issue adopts a positive perspective and proposes a solution, a way out of the situation as is.

The articles published in this issue reflect our strategic question and elaborate on eight recurring themes:

(1) Theme 1: Perceived sustainability

Sustainability is a complex issue and is often accompanied by many attributes. Ecotourism, nature tourism, wildlife tourism, rural tourism and bio-tourism are all expressions of sustainable tourism, each attribute with its specific meaning but also with its ambiguity. There are wide degrees of freedom to interpret the meaning of sustainability, but how much are customers and consumers aware of this meaning? Mauri's article analyses consumers' perceived sustainability to understand what consumers know of sustainability and how they interpret this word.

(2) Theme 2: Over-tourism is not only concerned with too many people in one place

There is a growing number of destinations that are smaller than the number of tourists they can host at any single moment in time. This is the case of Cinque Terre in Italy and Corsica in France, and the two articles by Vegnuti (Cinque Terre) and Barthod-Prothade and Leroux (Corsica) describe the situations of these two similar places, characterized by the close relationship between mountain and sea. Beyond being a problem for visitors and tourism operators, the volume of tourists determine long-term consequences on the economy and society of the destination. It often the case that the destination quickly adapts to the business created by overtourism losing sight of the consequences. Vegnuti and Barthod-Prothade and Loroux identify actual challenges and avenues for future work to slow down the overtourism phenomenon.

(3) Theme 3: Mountain areas should work on two key words: rarefied and uncontaminated

Bramanti and Ricci's article on the comparison between the production systems of the Alpine region and the peri-Alpine belt shows that they are not significantly different. However, the employment growth of the Alpine region is lower. To fill the gap, tourist operators should work on the unique attributes of the place. Given this perspective, a winning model for mountain areas is to work on two keywords related to sustainability – *rarefied* and *uncontaminated* – to transform the weaknesses of the place into assets for development.

(4) Theme 4: Women entrepreneurs seem to be more prone to sustainability

In re-shaping the destiny of rural and marginal areas, sustainability can make a difference. The article by Martini, Malacarne, Pederzolli Giovanazzi and Buffa shows that in rural and marginal areas, women entrepreneurs are more prone to sustainability than men; hence, they have been a significant force in re-launching these areas. Elements of authenticity,

experientiality and innovation are shown to be characteristic of female entrepreneurship, as is the propensity of women to create and foster local stakeholder networks (directly or indirectly) linked to their own businesses. The role of women in the tourism industry is also featured in the article by Vegnuti.

(5)   Theme 5: Children should be a target of educational initiatives focused on sustainable behaviour

As children are the tourists of the future, they can and should be a target of educational initiatives focused on sustainable behaviour. Seraphin's article on the role of Mini Clubs in mountain resorts shows that children could potentially play a role in the sustainability of tourism if they are empowered to do so. Mini Clubs could contribute to children's social empowerment using a blend of educational and entertaining activities.

(6)   Theme 6: Secondary residences are going through a process of commercialization and uberization

Secondary residences, once a significant component of one's life (a form of double life) and of the local community, are losing their role and are going through a process of commercialization and uberization. Secondary residences are not simply second homes, but a complementary part of the experience of living, and many of them appear as a reproduction of the primary residence. The article by Bachimon, Eveno and Gelvez shows how the commercialization of these second homes on a spectrum that ranges from lending to rentals to home exchange has turned secondary residences into an object of trade.

(7)   Theme 7: Tourists' decision to choose natural parks creates an ethical dilemma on the exploitation of animals

Animals represent a potential attraction for visitors of national parks and protected areas. The article by Dell'Eva, Osti and Nava shows that tourists' decision to choose these destinations creates an ethical dilemma on the exploitation of animals, exacerbated by recent and increasing pressure on sustainable management.

(8)   Theme 8: The pandemic of COVID-19 may open new opportunities for mountain and marginal areas of the tourism industry

The pandemic COVID-19 has had and still is having a strong impact on the tourism industry, but it may open new opportunities for mountain and rural destinations. Natural and mountain areas have the opportunity to reflect on their sustainability strategy. As many tourists may choose to turn away from city breaks and crowded beaches, these territories may appear in the eyes of many as a type of refuge. They will therefore have to consider and manage changes in tourist behaviour, as it is more likely to become more sensitive towards sustainability. As a consequence, the questions around the sustainability of these territories will need to be tackled. The main challenges for private and public organizations now are no more related to tourism competitiveness and the capacity of a destination to attract more and more tourists each year, but to the development of a balanced territorial model limiting the negative impacts of tourism and offering the locals the possibility to improve their living conditions while preserving their cultural specificities. In any case, the COVID-19 crisis reminds us of the dangers related to over-dependency on tourism, and the necessity for organizations to have a broader view, including a large diversity of stakeholders, about the future development of a territory.

These changes and challenges give rise to number of questions regarding the sustainability of natural locations and mountain areas. We therefore aim in this theme issue

to consider some current issues and questions regarding their sustainability. Whereas our previous theme issue dealt specifically with the Alpine space, we sought in this theme issue to extend the analysis to a broader diversity of natural mountain territories as they share similar issues and constraints regarding their sustainability strategy.

Sitography

www.statista.com/forecasts/1103431/covid-19-revenue-travel-tourism-industry-region-forecast

References

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About the Theme Editors

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