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# Reflections on the theme issue outcomes

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## How could tourism planners and policymakers overcome the barriers to sustainable tourism development in the small island developing state (SIDS) of North Cyprus?

Theme Editors Hale Özgüt and Ali Öztüren share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

### *Overview*

The dramatic contraction in tourism that took place during 2020–2021 prompts many questions about recovery and future patterns of tourism. This is a moment for reassessment too – an enforced period for reflection about the role that tourism plays in small island economies and its likely future development and impact. This issue examines the barriers to and opportunities for a more sustainable approach to tourism development. Specifically it considers the planning and policy-making implications for North Cyprus – a destination that has relied mainly on mass tourism in the past but with natural attractions, culture and traditions that lend themselves to new forms of sustainable tourism in the future. As they reflect on what has been accomplished, Theme Editors Hale Özgüt and Ali Öztüren comment on the significance of their theme issue question, their theme issue plan and approach, the forms of collaboration that enabled them to produce this issue, the key outcomes and the implications for management action and continuing applied research. A list of the articles in this issue can be found in the [Appendix](#).

### *Why in your view is your theme issue strategic question important?*

North Cyprus is a SIDS that has had to cope with political challenges and obstacles for many years. They stem from being an unrecognised country – the United Nations views North Cyprus as a territory of the Republic of Cyprus, and only Turkey has officially recognised North Cyprus as a sovereign state. Yet, North Cyprus has well-established tourism and higher education sectors even though there are no direct flights other than from Turkey. Investment in tourism development and especially in hotels and casinos has been on-going for many years, but is the current mix of development the right approach for the future? Sustainable development is currently impeded by numerous challenges – not least that tourism and hospitality operations are not based on sustainable practice. Yet, tourism is seen as an effective vehicle for development due mainly to its less diversified economy and relatively limited human and natural resources. Given this backdrop, we set out to explore the barriers to sustainable tourism development to help stakeholders to rethink long-term policies and strategies. By exploring this critical issue about how to ensure sustainable tourism development in North Cyprus, we sought to derive a better understanding of the main challenges related to managing tourism in this destination and some of the wider implications for other SIDS.

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

The strategic question we developed for this theme issue is exploratory in nature because we wanted to explore the practical barriers to sustainable tourism development in North Cyprus and for SIDS more generally. We felt that if we could derive a better understanding of the barriers and obstacles, this would make it easier to develop remedies in the medium to



long term. We began by reviewing the relevant literature on sustainable development in North Cyprus and found that there was a gap in terms of prior investigation of the obstacles to developing and managing sustainable development. Given this, we framed a theme issue question that sought to explore how tourism planners and policymakers might overcome the barriers to sustainable tourism development in North Cyprus and potentially in other SIDS. To address the question, we assembled a writing team consisting of academics and practitioners, and drawing on their backgrounds and expertise, we considered how our overarching question could be explored in relation to four sub-questions:

- Q1: How are sustainable tourism practices managed in North Cyprus?
- Q2: What are the sustainable measures for managing and mitigating tourism impacts in North Cyprus?
- Q3: How is stakeholder collaboration in sustainable tourism policy and planning managed in North Cyprus?
- Q4: What practical tools do tourism planners and policymakers in North Cyprus use to encourage tourism sustainability?

We used these sub-questions to learn from the experiences of sector representatives (mostly practitioners) and to augment the breadth and depth of their analysis via academic analysis and applied research. We are pleased with the outcomes because they provide a foundation for re-shaping approaches to sustainable tourism development with both practical and theoretical implications for consultation, planning and policy development.

*How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?*

At the pre-planning stage for this issue, the Theme Editors and the *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT)* Managing Editor provided a workshop briefing for potential academic contributors. In particular, we outlined the purpose of *WHATT* and the role of a strategic question that was important to industry in developing the theme issue plan. Thereafter, the theme editors assigned academics to work with sector representatives from industry so as to ensure that their perspectives on obstacles and barriers to sustainable development would be captured. Academic engagement with practitioners enabled us to organise discussion sessions relating to the theme issue sub-questions and to refine them. Further, the collaboration between industry and academia helped us to ensure that the theme issue outcomes have both practical and theoretical value in assessing current and future implications for sustainable tourism development in North Cyprus and some of the wider implications for other SIDS.

*What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?*

It is generally difficult to undertake academic research with industry stakeholders, especially using interview or focus group techniques because industry practitioners have busy schedules. We think that this issue is the first time that industry and academia have come together in North Cyprus to explore a specific problem, and it was a very fruitful interchange for the entire team. A highlight and important outcome is that the views of practitioners and their recommendations about how to overcome existing obstacles are fully integrated with academic analysis. It was interesting to observe that as academics and practitioners shared their ideas during discussions about article content and approach a mutual understanding of the obstacles emerged. Prior to this, academics and industry representatives may have had different ideas based on their different perspectives, yet they came together to focus on our industry-led theme issue question and sub-questions and that helped to facilitate creative thinking about possible remedies to existing problems.

Furthermore, this interchange helped to frame further questions for exploration and applied research that will help to address unsolved problems.

*Thinking about your peer review process: What went well and why?*

The collaborative writing process is also reflected in a collaborative review process too. The articles, which were written by academics, were reviewed by tourism industry practitioners, and the practitioner-led papers were reviewed by academic staff from universities. This collaboration helped to ensure the careful articulation of ideas, reliability of results and the appropriate formatting of articles. At the concluding stage of the review process, the Theme Editors provided further feedback and guidelines to the lead writers to enable them to finalize. The Theme Editors would also like to thank Managing Editor Richard Teare for reviewing and refining the clarity of expression in the final versions of the articles. This three-phase review process helped to ensure that each article contains both academically and practically valuable content.

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

This theme issue explored the practical and theoretical aspects of sustainability relating to tourism development in North Cyprus and the medium and long term implications. Thus, the results can be used by policymakers and industry practitioners as a reference for future development, and additionally, academics can begin to explore a number of research gaps that have been identified. The issue contains nine articles that address different aspects of sustainable tourism development in North Cyprus, and together, these yield a number of key outcomes that contribute to knowledge and professional practice. One of the most significant findings is the need for broader and deeper collaboration in the development of sustainable tourism destinations. Further to this, stakeholder involvement, the role of local government, community and residents' participation in planning and policy development and the development of environmental sustainability policies for sustainable development exemplify other significant outcomes.

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

The theme issue sheds light on critical issues that require attention to overcome barriers and promote sustainable tourism in North Cyprus. The outcomes will, we hope, influence the extent to which collaboration and consultation is more widely adopted by policymakers, local and national authorities, industry and all other stakeholders with an interest in protecting and conserving resources, empowering stakeholders in planning and implementation processes, enhancing awareness of sustainability through education and training and differentiating tourism products to support sustainable tourism development.

*Having served as a WHATT Theme Editor, what did you enjoy about the experience?*

Hale Özgüt and Ali Öztüren write:

*Serving as WHATT Theme Editors exceeded our expectations in terms of the level of genuine collaboration that occurred between industry sector representatives and academia. Prior to this, our experience of working with practitioners was limited to relatively informal discussions on topics related to our theme issue question but they were not documented. As an outcome of this issue, we have been able to establish deeper relationships with industry and achieve a great deal more within the structured framework of a WHATT theme issue.*

*The role of WHATT theme editorship was a significant responsibility for us as we wanted to explore some pressing problems facing the tourism industry that is operating in a fragile environment. We are proud to say that the collaborative effort has been a success, and it sets the scene for further discussion when we launch the theme issue and for a constructive, step-by-step transition to sustainable tourism development. This is a significant move in the right direction for North Cyprus, and we should like to thank all the contributors and our mentor in the process, Richard Teare, Managing Editor of WHATT for inspiring us and assisting us on this journey.*

### **About the Theme Editors**

Hale Özgit PhD is an Associate Professor in the School of Tourism and Hotel Management at Cyprus International University, North Cyprus. Her research interests are tourism management, sustainability, tourism education, organisational behaviour and human resources management in tourism and hospitality organisations.

Ali Öztüren PhD is a Tourism Management Professor and the current Vice Dean in the Faculty of Tourism at Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus. His research interests include sustainable tourism management, tourism and hospitality management, service operations and technology management in the tourism industry.

*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.

**Richard Teare**

*Global University for Lifelong Learning, UK*

### **Appendix. Theme issue contents (WHATT v13 n4 2021)**

#### **Sustainable tourism and the role of stakeholders in North Cyprus: A literature review**

*Shiva Ilkhanizadeh*

The study aims to identify the main stakeholders and the extent of their collaboration in the management of sustainable tourism policy planning practices in North Cyprus. It recommends that national government should collaborate more widely with other stakeholders to attain long-term goals.

#### **Tracing the complexity-sustainability nexus in a small Mediterranean island: Implications for tourism and hospitality education**

*Arash Akhshik and Hamed Rezapouraghdam*

The study draws on systems theory and thinking to gauge how tourism and hospitality students discern sustainability in North Cyprus. It reveals that students lack a holistic understanding of sustainability, and given this finding, the theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

#### **Creating a sustainable tourism model in North Cyprus during the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic**

*Müriide Ertaç and Erel Cankan*

The study discusses the strategies that could be used to maintain competitiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. It concludes that a plan in support of sustainable tourism initiatives such as ecotourism would help to increase domestic tourism and later attract international travellers when the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

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**Investigating stakeholder awareness of the sustainable development goals and tourism stakeholder collaboration: The case of North Cyprus**

*Hale Özgüt and Serkan Abbasoğlu*

The study considers the extent to which the 17 United Nations sustainable development goals contribute to sustainable tourism and to relevant targets in North Cyprus and investigates how tourism stakeholders in North Cyprus understand and implement the UN's sustainable development goals.

**Barriers to sustainable tourism for small hotels in small island developing states and some suggested remedies**

*Nafiya Güden, Mete Ünal Girgen, Tülen Saner and Erkan Yeşilpınar*

The study provides an overview of the barriers and difficulties small hotels encounter in Cyprus and some of the possible solutions and remedies. Trade literature and academic analysis are augmented by interviews with representatives from 12 small hotels located in both North and South Cyprus.

**Towards sustainable tourism development: An evaluation of the current state of energy efficiency in North Cyprus**

*Hale Özgüt and Serkan Abbasoğlu*

The study uses documentary analysis to evaluate the state of energy efficiency in North Cyprus and the related policy implications. The study finds that energy efficiency policy has not yet been applied and that much needs to be done in support of sustainable tourism development and environmental protection.

**Strengths, weaknesses and challenges of municipalities in North Cyprus aspiring to be a sustainable Cittaslow tourism destination**

*Ecem Ince and Ali Öztüren*

The study aims to identify the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of municipalities in North Cyprus as they transition to becoming Cittaslow tourism destinations. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with the mayors of municipalities that are members of the international Cittaslow network.

**Managing natural tourism attractions based on visitor reviews: A case study of Golden Beach, Karpaz**

*Ali Öztüren, Hasan Kılıç, Victor Oluwafemi Olorunsola and Benjamin O. Osumeje*

The paper aims to uncover key factors relating to the enhancement of a natural tourism attraction from a visitor perspective. The paper emphasises the value of visitor generated comments in enabling local authorities to make decisions that align with the expectations of visitors and better manage their resources.

**Conclusion: How could tourism planners and policymakers overcome the barriers to sustainable tourism development in the SIDS of North Cyprus?**

*Hale Özgüt and Ali Öztüren*

The study draws together the key outcomes in response to the strategic question with particular reference to the contribution to knowledge, policy and practice and the implications for applied research in relation to sustainable tourism development in North Cyprus and SIDS more generally.