Reflections on the theme issue outcomes: smart tourism: what developments and issues are important to the Baltic States?

Theme Editors Zanete Garanti, Galina Berjozkina and Anda Zvaigzne share their reflections on the significance and outcomes of the theme issue with Managing Editor Richard Teare.

Overview

The concept of "smart tourism" and its application to smart tourism destinations have been facilitated by advances in information and communication technologies that, in turn, enable ways of enhancing destination competitiveness. Here, the main objectives are to enhance tourism experiences and improve resource management and destination competitiveness, with a growing emphasis on sustainability. How then is this concept applied in the Baltic States? Theme editors Zanete, Galina and Anda share their reflections on the outcomes of this issue.

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?

Smart tourism has been a mainstream topic for many years, and the pioneers of smart tourism are encouraging academics to sharpen their research focus on smart technologies. Worldwide, smart technologies are widely used on a daily basis, and smart tourism is playing an important societal role and facilitating economic development and environmental protection.

Although the Baltic States are minor players on the world stage in terms of smart tourism, they are focusing on different types of technology. The investigation undertaken by our writing team and presented in this issue reveals that smart technologies exist in different forms: digital technologies, cultural heritage, smart projects and more. In fact, the application of these technologies helps to make the Baltic States more visible on the global stage and also helps to promote tourism. They are not yet major tourist destinations, although each of these countries is generating innovative smart technologies that can promote tourism.

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

We were fortunate in that we were able to assemble a dedicated group of writers who collaborated in small teams and provided peer-reviewing support to their co-writers. As we reflect on the outcomes, we are delighted to say that all parties involved had a great writing experience. Additionally, we organized regular meetings to discuss ideas and to keep everyone updated on the status of each individual article. We feel that we have accomplished our objectives and that we have been able to determine the current capability and potential of the Baltic States in relation to smart tourism technologies.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?

As returning theme editors, it was easier for us as we were familiar with the role and the steps involved. Furthermore, we did not have COVID-19 restrictions to contend with in the areas

where our authors live and work. For us, it was a very enjoyable experience, especially in terms of the collaboration that occurred with a variety of stakeholders. The main focus of our work was to engage with the different stakeholder groups in order to better understand their opinions about the situation in each of the countries we were studying. The stakeholders were kind and patient enough to answer all our questions. Their openness was key to enabling us to write this collection of articles that reflect current developments in smart tourism in the Baltic States. Overall, many different opinions were gathered and then summarized. In summary, we can say that we have derived important knowledge that we did not have before and, also, that each team member played a key role in this.

What were the highlights from stakeholder group interactions?

We used various approaches to interacting with and collecting data from industry practitioners, residents, policymakers and other stakeholders. The team that was based in Latvia was actively engaged and interacting with different practitioners and stakeholders, mainly via interviews where they could ask questions related to the overarching theme issue question. Overall, many questions were answered, and a lot of issues were explored and became clearer after the team engaged with our stakeholders. We concluded that researching and writing this theme issue generated a good impression among practitioners and contributed to the industry via the analysis of information that stakeholders provided to the authors. Further, there is significant implementation of different smart tools and ways of promoting tourism in the Baltic States, and each country has its own unique way of doing this.

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

We were able to bring together an array of academics from different universities, disciplines and countries. Having gained experience from theme editing on two prior issues, we knew exactly what would work for us and how to approach it. As before, we set up a shared Google Drive, and everyone had access to it, so that we could access the on-going work of the entire team at any time, from two different countries. As we reflect on what was accomplished, it is evident that open file sharing was the most convenient way of monitoring the work and providing feedback to the authors of the articles. The process was very smooth and relaxed, and the experience was a good one.

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

Our writing team explored various developments and issues that relate to smart tourism in the Baltic States. The issue focused on technology and, specifically, its application in tourism. The most significant contributions cited in the articles are accessible tourism, which is a relatively new development, and, in terms of tourism operations, smart tools that are used in the preservation of cultural tourism in support of digital innovation and digital twinning to promote smart tourism destinations. These smart tourism applications may also help facilitate the sustainable development of tourism.

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

This theme issue is significant for stakeholders, including policymakers and experts in tourism. This is because it makes recommendations for new and creative approaches to enhancing tourism visibility for the Baltic States and, additionally, in relation to the implementation of new technologies. That said, an applied longitudinal study is needed in order to follow up on the

changes in the technology of tourism as well as in society and among the residents of these countries.

Having served as a WHATT theme editor, what did you enjoy about the experience?

It is always a pleasure to meet new, highly skilled and enthusiastic researchers, especially to work with them on a daily basis. We enjoyed many shared experiences and gathered points of view from different countries that included observations about the differences in culture. We also learned a lot from each other and from those who were interviewed.

About the Theme Editors:

Zanete Garanti PhD is an Associate Professor and Head of the Research Center at City Unity College Nicosia, Cyprus.

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Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (*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, please contact the Managing Editor, Dr Richard Teare, via the Emerald website.

Appendix
Theme issue contents (WHATT v15 n5 2023)

Introduction: Smart tourism: what developments and issues are important to the Baltic States?
Zanete Garanti, Anda Zvaigzne and Galina Berjozkina

It uses a thematic approach to exploring the factors affecting the development of smart tourism, as well as the challenges and opportunities facing the Baltic region. Overall, the theme issue collection of articles reviews the literature and provides an analysis of data and a survey of experts, including tourism service providers.

Value co-creation in smart tourism destinations
Zanete Garanti

This describes the concept of smart tourism, placing emphasis on the smart tourism ecosystem and value co-creation concept within the system at a destination level. The work also summarizes the key challenges associated with smart tourism implementation and development.

Smart tourism: the role and synergies of stakeholders
Anda Zvaigzne, Iveta Mietule, Inta Kotane, Aija Vonoga and Ruta Meiste

This provides a thematic literature analysis of smart tourism and the role of stakeholders and synergy relating to the implementation of smart tourism and defines the concept of smart tourism as a form of technological, economic and social evolution, which is influenced by such elements as the Internet, social media, smart devices and mobile applications, among others.

Smart tourism in the Baltic States: current developments and trends
Lienite Litavniece, Jelena Lonska, Anda Zvaigzne, Nina Wieda and Rūta Adamonienė

This evaluates and compares the current trends in development of the second largest cities in each Baltic state – Tartu (Estonia), Kaunas (Lithuania) and Daugavpils (Latvia) – as smart destinations based on publicly available tourism information.

Accessibility and smart tourism: tourism for all and reducing inequalities: a tourism agenda 2030
Iluta Arbidane, Anita Puzule, Daina Znotina, Ramutė Narkūnienė and Jurgita Daubrienė

This analyses the role of tourism in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the need to integrate sustainability into tourism policies, which contribute to the development and accessibility of technologies and the quality of society.

Regional smart cultural tourism destinations in a region of Latvia
Liga Jankova, Anita Auzina and Andra Zvirbule

This analyses a regional cultural tourism object in Latvia, focusing on the elements of smart tourism as an indication of opportunities provided by digital technologies and its practical application.

Smart tourism and cultural heritage in the Baltic States: exploring strategies and tools for sustainable development
Galina Berjozkina and Kenny James Kuruvilla

This examines and analyses data relating to cultural heritage, smart tourism and smart tourism tools for preserving cultural heritage in the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Digital innovations in tourism: the perceptions of stakeholders
Anda Zvaigzne, Iveta Mietule, Inta Kotane, Sandra Sprudzane and Vaida Bartkutė-Norkūnienė

This examines the main aspects of innovation development regarding digital tools used in the tourism industry in a local area.

Digital twin: an approach to enhancing tourism competitiveness
Lienite Litavniece, Sergejs Kodors, Rūta Adamonienė and Jelena Kijaško

This presents the concept of digital twin technology for the digitalization of tourism product competitiveness and promotion and recommendations.

Factors in the development of smart villages regarding tourism in the Baltic States
Iveta Dembovska, Antra Kļavinska, Zanda Dimanta-Svilpe and Asta Raupeliene

This examines the nature of smart villages and the factors in their development in relation to the tourism industry in the Baltic States.

Synergy between rural and smart tourism – is it possible and necessary?
Anita Auzina, Andra Zvirbule and Liga Jankova

This aims to identify the opinions of rural tourism service providers on synergy between rural and smart tourism in Latvia, Zemgale region.

Gastronomic tourism and smart solutions used for its development: the case of a region of Latvia
Andra Zvirbule, Anita Auzina and Gunta Grinberga-Zalite

This examines opportunities for gastronomic tourism development and smart solutions in the regions of Latvia.

Conclusion: Smart tourism: what developments and issues are important to the Baltic States?
Zanete Garanti, Galina Berjozkina and Anda Zvaigzne

This utilizes a descriptive approach to summarize the key outcomes of the theme issue. The theme issue focuses on the problems, trends and developments of smart tourism in the Baltic States, namely Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.