Editorial

Business Model Innovation for Sustainability. Highlights from the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Angelo Presenza [1],*, Antonio Messeni Petruzzelli [2] and Angelo Natalicchio [2]

[1]   Department of Economic, University of Molise, Via Francesco De Sanctis, 1, 86100 Campobasso, Italy
[2]   Department of Mechanics, Mathematics & Management, Polytechnic University of Bari, Via Amendola, 126/b, 70126 Bari, Italy; antonio.messenipetruzzelli@poliba.it (A.M.P.); angelo.natalicchio@poliba.it (A.N.)
*   Correspondence: presenza@unimol.it

check for updates

Abstract: In this paper, we introduce the themes addressed and the approaches used in this Special Issue to investigate the relationship between business model innovation and sustainability in the hospitality and tourism industry. After presenting the topics under investigation, we briefly discuss how the articles in the collection allow to unveil firms' approaches used to innovate their business model focusing upon sustainable practices and goals. Therefore, by offering multiple perspectives of analysis, this Issue increases our comprehension and understanding of which sustainable strategies companies may adopt to compete in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Keywords: sustainability; business model; innovation; hospitality; tourism

1. A Brief Background of the Special Issue

Aim of this thematic issue is to contribute to the existing literature by investigating how Business Model Innovation (BMI) may contribute to sustainability in the specific field of tourism and hospitality.

This sector has experienced continued expansion and diversification over time, hence becoming one of the largest and fastest growing industry in the world. At the same time, a wide range of publications (i.e., [1–3]) has shown that it is living a controversial condition. Indeed, tourism activities are becoming more and more societally, economically and environmentally unsustainable, while there is an increasing interest of tourists towards innovative and sustainable proposals.

BMI is emerging as a potential mechanism to integrate sustainability into business [4,5]. Indeed, new business models can help to develop integrative and competitive solutions by either radically reducing negative and/or creating positive external effects for the natural environment and the whole society [6]. Previous studies have analyzed how integrate sustainability issues in destination business model design and hospitality management practices [7–11]. These studies clearly reveal that tourism firms have reduced their sustainable attention [12]. It is indeed usual to observe firms that still consider sustainability in a defensive or passive way, e.g., by introducing environmental reporting, using 'green-speak' in their communications, or developing isolated initiatives to reduce CO_2 emissions. On the other hand, there are a growing number of companies that embrace sustainability and integrate 'green innovation' into their entire business model, looking at it as a future business opportunity around which the company can innovate and build a competitive advantage. However, this often requires fundamental changes to the existing way of doing business, thus opening the doors to a number of questions, as: what is our business offering? How does our business have to evolve? Who should be the main stakeholders to involve in this change? Moreover, many companies still don't have a clear innovation strategy, even fewer have a green growth strategy, and very few have a 'green innovation strategy'.

Thereby, environmental sustainability creates challenges, but also new business opportunities. The tourism industry is faced with some of these challenges in a more immediate way than perhaps most other industries. In line with the above debate, this Special Issue contains original contributions that increase our comprehension of how businesses operating in the tourism and hospitality industry can innovate their business models to promote sustainable goals. In the next section, an overview of the main aims and structures of the papers included in this Special Issue is presented.

2. Form and Contents of the Thematic Issue

Based on these premises, this special issue adds new knowledge to the existing body of literature on the relationship between BMI and sustainability in the specific field of tourism and hospitality.

Ten articles included in the Special Issue—written by senior and junior leading scholars from different countries—present unique studies to explore the implication of applying sustainable practices for innovating tourism and hospitality businesses. By using a variety of 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' methods, the authors address a number of issues. A first group of papers focuses on the traditional accommodation industry as well as on new typologies. A second group analyzes specific tourism services, while a third group takes the perspective of tourist side. The Special Issue ends with two papers, as a systematic literature review on the relationship between business models and sustainability in nature tourism and an overview on the role of Big Data on BMI.

The special issue opens with the article "Hotel Profiles Based on Environmental Management Practices: Evidence from a Study at an Alpine Destination" by Buffa et al. [13], which outlines the role of environmental management practices (EMPs) adopted by hotels within a community destination. With this research, authors want to: (a) understand whether hotels have changed their EMPs in the last ten years and, if so, how; (b) analyze the link between hotels' environmental commitment and propensity of collaboration among local stakeholders. The paper uses a CAWI survey and involves all the hotels (N = 1.514) of Trentino, a community destination in the Italian Alps. Results revealed new and original aspects of the propensities of hotels to invest in EMPs and identified three different environmental hotel profiles, as: (1) not eco-friendly, (2) proactive, and (3) reactive. Proactive and reactive hotels have a greater propensity to invest in EMPs and collaborate with the Destination Management Organization and with other hotels. The research contributes to the scientific debate on EMP adoption and the extent to which stakeholders' power and pressure influence the environmental sustainability strategies of hotels.

The second article "The Hotel Industry in the Metropolitan Region of Rio De Janeiro: An Analysis of the Legacy of Accessibility in Civil Construction Projects Post Mega Events" by Soares et al. [14] analyzes the civil construction projects of the hotel industry in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). The main goal is to detect how these hotel construction projects are prepared to receive disabled tourists during the period of Mega events. Data are obtained through the Inventory of the Tourist Offer of the State of Rio de Janeiro, referred to approximately 400 hotels. Findings reveal how the investigated hotels do not show the necessary accessibility, due to the small number of them that reach the accessibility requirements of Brazilian Association of Technical Standards (ABNT NBR 9050: 2015), as well as the Mega events that occurred in the city did not leave a legacy of accessibility. The study contributes to raising awareness of the tourist and civil engineering markets relating to people with disabilities or reduced mobility, and the possibility of reversing the current scenario in Rio de Janeiro.

The third paper "Implementation of Integrated Management Systems and Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives—A Romanian Hospitality Industry Perspective" by Ionescu et al. [15] is developed in order to identify the effects of implementing integrated management systems and quantify the influence of corporate social responsibility initiatives on the market value of hospitality industry in Romania. Results demonstrate the existence of a direct correlation between the implementation of integrated management systems and the evolution of the economic performance of the companies. Furthermore, a positive correlation between the existence of corporate social

responsibility initiatives and the increase of the market value of Romanian hotels is demonstrated. Therefore, the authors highlight how implementing integrated management practices has benefits to clients, management, employees, and shareholders. At the same time, the involvement of companies in corporate social responsibility activities represents a return of these benefits to the whole local community.

The paper number 4 "The What, Where, and Why of Airbnb Price Determinants" by Perez-Sanchez et al. [16] focuses on the breakthrough changes intervened in the rental market with the introduction of peer-to-peer accommodation services, as the case of Airbnb. The aim is to understand the relationship between Airbnb accommodation attributes and listing prices. In addition, the authors aim at investigating the influence exerted by variables related to the properties' location and surrounding urban environment. A multivariable analysis technique is used for estimating a hedonic price model that adopts the ordinary least squares and the quantile regression methods. The empirical analysis is developed using the touristic characteristics of the four Spanish Mediterranean Arc cities selected as case study. This research enriches the current debate on the range of factors that influence Airbnb accommodation prices. Findings offer contrasting evidence respect to the previous literature. Indeed, accommodation prices increase incrementally by 1.3% per kilometer from the tourist area, which are situated in the historic area of the city. However, at the same time, accommodation prices decrease incrementally as distance from the coastline increases. Lastly, results related to how the listings' accommodation, host, and advertising characteristics impact Airbnb prices concur with previous investigations.

Article number 5 "Business Model Innovation for Sustainable Performance in Retail and Hospitality Industries" by Cheah et al. [17] aims at understanding how industry turbulence in retail and hospitality affects the competitive advantage of the firms operating in these industries. Based on a quantitative study of 214 retail and food services companies, the study empirically demonstrates that firms operating in an industry with high turbulence have a higher probability of achieving a competitive advantage. Authors also reveal that firm's business model innovation (BMI) partially mediates this positive relationship. They indeed deduce that BMI plays a role in enhancing the firm's ability to address the challenges of the present, as well as prepare itself to adapt to the industry evolution.

Article number 6 "Toward an Economically Sustainable Casino Industry: A Development of Customer Value Indicators Using an Analytic Hierarchy Process" by Park et al. [18] underlines the importance of the casino industry as the major tourism solution that can overcome the limitations of the tourist sector. The main purpose is to develop a model and indicators to assess the life value factor of a typical customer for the casino industry. As a result, authors formed the five components of customers' lifetime value assessment model, thereby laying the foundation for management of the customers' specific strategies and customers' care. Based on the findings, authors highlight that the foundation for the competitive advantage in the casino industry is strongly dependent on the substantiality of the competitiveness in casino industry.

"Redesigning In-Flight Service with Service Blueprint Based on Text Analysis" is the title of the paper number 7 edited by Nam et al. [19]. The authors' aim is at redesigning an in-flight service process by using a service blueprint while incorporating direct customer perceptions of service experiences. They apply topic modeling to 64,706 passenger-written online reviews of airline services. Passenger experiences of in-flight services are the sum of experiences from service encounters in all the subsequent steps. They assume that the direct perceptions of the experiences of passengers are faithfully contained in the online reviews. Topics extracted from the reviews can be regarded as service encounters strongly based on passenger experiences. Then, the service encounters are reorganized within the framework of a service blueprint. Results show that the complexity, a number of service steps, decreases by 38% compared to the benchmark service blueprint. However, the divergence, a latitude of service steps, increases for a couple of service encounters. Moreover, the authors quantitatively analyze the divergence by using the probability of word frequency statistically distributed across topics.

The in-flight service using the proposed design tends to be sustainable with respect to customer-focused service while considering direct customer experiences in real-time.

"Understanding Travelers' Behavior for Sustainable Smart Tourism: A Technology Readiness Perspective" by Pradhan et al. (Paper Number 6) [20] shows how smart tourism has contributed to making people's travels easier and more enjoyable, even if sometimes it has a negative impact on their travel experience. In fact, while most studies have considered the usefulness of smart devices in tourism, negative perceptions of smart tourism have rarely been discussed. Starting from this premise, this study investigates travelers' risk perceptions of smart tourism from a technology readiness perspective. Indeed, the paper examines the impact of optimism, innovativeness, insecurity, and discomfort on travelers' usage intentions of smart devices through their perceived risks and benefits. To test the proposed model and corresponding hypotheses, a partial least squares analysis was performed on data collected from 250 survey respondents. Findings reveal that the perceived benefits of smart devices have a significant effect on usage intentions of smart devices while traveling. The study also confirms that the influence of perceived risks depends on the characteristics of travelers. This research is the first empirical study applying the TRI (Technology Readiness Index) model to examine the negative effects of smart devices on tourists' travel experience. Results thus provide meaningful insights into smart tourism to companies and governments.

Paper number 9 "Business Models and Sustainability in Nature Tourism: A Systematic Review of the Literature" by Sahebalzamani and Bertella [21], explores the business model literature within nature tourism, focusing on its sustainability-related aspects. The research questions concern how scholars use and operationalize the business model concept in the context of nature tourism, and to what extent sustainability-related aspects are included and discussed. A literature review was conducted including a total of 18 scientific articles from various disciplines. Findings suggest that the scientific literature on business models in nature tourism is very limited, both in relation to the number of articles and their content. With regard to the latter, the business model concept is sometimes adopted without any clear definition, sustainability-related aspects—especially those relative to the environmental dimension—are scarcely discussed, the perspective adopted is usually static, and innovation for sustainability is only marginally included. Therefore, this indicates a clear gap in the literature and a relevant opportunity for future studies.

The last article "Open Innovation and Social Big Data for Sustainability: Evidence from the Tourism Industry" by Del Vecchio et al. [22] discusses the role that social networks can play as enabling platforms for tourists' involvement and as a source for the creation and management of valuable knowledge assets. In addition, the huge amount of data generated on social media by tourists can be a valid source of open innovation. To achieve this aim, the paper presents evidence of a digital tourism experience, through a longitudinal case study of a destination in Apulia, a Southern European region. Results demonstrate how Big Data may open up innovation processes that can in turn support the definition of sustainable tourism experiences in a specific destination.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Juvan, E.; Dolnicar, S. Measuring environmentally sustainable tourist behavior. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2016**, *59*, 30–44. [CrossRef]
2. Juvan, E.; Dolnicar, S. The attitude–behavior gap in sustainable tourism. *Ann. Tour. Res.* **2014**, *48*, 76–95. [CrossRef]
3. Grazzini, L.; Rodrigo, P.; Aiello, G.; Viglia, G. Loss or gain? The role of message framing in hotel guests' recycling behavior. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2018**. [CrossRef]

4. Aldebert, B.; Dang, R.J.; Longhi, C. Innovation in the tourism industry: The case of Tourism. *Tour. Manag.* **2011**, *32*, 1204–1213. [CrossRef]

5. Souto, J.E. Business model innovation and business concept innovation as the context of incremental innovation and radical innovation. *Tour. Manag.* **2015**, *51*, 142–155. [CrossRef]

6. Chesbrough, H. Business model innovation: opportunities and barriers. *Long Range Plan.* **2010**, *43*, 354–363. [CrossRef]

7. Bohdanowicz, P.; Zientara, P. Hotel companies' contribution to improving the quality of life of local communities and the well–being of their employees. *Tour. Hosp. Res.* **2009**, *9*, 147–158. [CrossRef]

8. Mihalič, T.; Žabkar, V.; Cvelbar, L.K. A hotel sustainability business model: Evidence from Slovenia. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2012**, *20*, 701–719. [CrossRef]

9. Høgevold, N.M.; Svensson, G.; Padin, C. A sustainable business model in services: An assessment and validation. *Int. J. Qual. Serv. Sci.* **2015**, *7*, 17–33. [CrossRef]

10. Sarkar, R.; Sinha, A. The village as a social entrepreneur: Balancing conservation and livelihoods. *Tour. Manag. Perspect.* **2015**, *16*, 100–106. [CrossRef]

11. Scheepens, A.E.; Vogtländer, J.G.; Brezet, J.C. Two life cycle assessment (LCA) based methods to analyse and design complex (regional) circular economy systems. Case: Making water tourism more sustainable. *J. Clean. Prod.* **2016**, *114*, 257–268. [CrossRef]

12. Cvelbar, L.K.; Dwyer, L. An importance–performance analysis of sustainability factors for long-term strategy planning in Slovenian hotels. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **2013**, *21*, 487–504. [CrossRef]

13. Buffa, F.; Franch, M.; Martini, U.; Tamanini, A. Hotel Profiles Based on Environmental Management Practices: Evidence from a Study at an Alpine Destination. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 4531. [CrossRef]

14. Soares, C.; Longo, O.; Alcoforado, L.; Ramos, T.; Camello, N. The Hotel Industry in the Metropolitan Region of Rio De Janeiro: An Analysis of the Legacy of Accessibility in Civil Construction Projects Post Mega Events. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 4261. [CrossRef]

15. Ionescu, G.; Firoiu, D.; Pîrvu, R.; Bădîrcea, R.; Drăgan, C. Implementation of Integrated Management Systems and Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives—A Romanian Hospitality Industry Perspective. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 3684. [CrossRef]

16. Perez-Sanchez, V.; Serrano-Estrada, L.; Marti, P.; Mora-Garcia, R. The What, Where, and Why of Airbnb Price Determinants. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 4596. [CrossRef]

17. Cheah, S.; Ho, Y.; Li, S. Business Model Innovation for Sustainable Performance in Retail and Hospitality Industries. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 3952. [CrossRef]

18. Park, P.; Kim, D.; Lee, S.; Whang, J. Toward an Economically Sustainable Casino Industry: A Development of Customer Value Indicators Using an Analytic Hierarchy Process. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 4255. [CrossRef]

19. Nam, S.; Ha, C.; Lee, H. Redesigning In-Flight Service with Service Blueprint Based on Text Analysis. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 4492. [CrossRef]

20. Pradhan, M.; Oh, J.; Lee, H. Understanding Travelers' Behavior for Sustainable Smart Tourism: A Technology Readiness Perspective. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 4259. [CrossRef]

21. Sahebalzamani, S.; Bertella, G. Business Models and Sustainability in Nature Tourism: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 3226. [CrossRef]

22. Del Vecchio, P.; Mele, G.; Ndou, V.; Secundo, G. Open Innovation and Social Big Data for Sustainability: Evidence from the Tourism Industry. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 3215. [CrossRef]