Sustainability and hotel business: criteria for holistic, integrated and participative development

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ABSTRACT

Debates regarding sustainable management have become notorious, significant and pertinent to contemporary society. This perspective is justified by the fact that modern management should address concerns of a fully aware audience regarding limits to be imposed on the use of natural/cultural resources and the negative impact of operations on the environment and on society and individuals. Undoubtedly, this assumption is even more important in industries where the power of socioenvironmental, cultural and economic transformation is increasingly latent, such as in the case of hotels. First, this article introduces a bibliometric analysis that exposes sustainable criteria verified in current management models, which allows for an identification among hotel companies for a predisposition for environmental and external social responsibility. Second, a primary contribution lies in structuring more holistic criteria, integrated in the internal/external hotel organizational background, in a manner that will enable organizations to help protect the environment as well as sociocultural, political and economic aspects of society.

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1. Introduction

Recently, tourism has become a strong a catalyst for economic development (Rodríguez-Antón et al., 2012). This is demonstrated on a global scale as the tourism industry is responsible for 15% of economically active jobs (Pérez and Del Bosque, 2014); 09% of GDP; 30% of exports of services, representing a global economic impact of US$ 1.5 trillion (UNWTO, 2015).

Thus, when reflecting on multiplier effects, tourism is among the four largest world economic sectors, following fuels, chemicals and automobiles production (Aragon-Correa et al., 2015). The predisposition to touristic consumption is such that, despite the current economic crisis – in effect since 2009 – there is an expectation that international travel will reach 1.8 billion in 2030, achieving an average rate of 3.3% per annum, from 2010 to 2030 (UNWTO, 2015).

Therefore, discussion ensues regarding the direction this activity will take (Jarvis et al., 2010; Prud’homme and Raymond, 2013; Galpin et al., 2015; Longoni and Cagliano, 2015) because existing practices result in numerous negative impacts: increased energy, water and disposable products consumption, increased CO2 production rates (Aragon-Correa et al., 2015; Han and Yoon, 2015); reduced motivation and morale of collaborators (Sigala, 2014); commoditization of local culture rather than maintaining its authenticity (Cohen, 1988); disruption of local economic systems (Rodríguez-Antón et al., 2012). These negative impacts further increase the managerial and operational challenges in the tourism industry (Tyrrell et al., 2013)

Consequently, it is necessary to: (1) recognize dynamic characteristics of planning processes and evaluation of components, agents and impacts that form its scope of operation (Aragon-Correa et al., 2015; Fraj et al., 2015); (2) disseminate holistic and participative values across the organizational structure and culture (Boley and Uysal, 2013; Chen, 2015); (3) concentrate interdisciplinary efforts of academics, managers, public institutions and experts (Philippi Jr. and Neto, 2011) to achieve sustainable tourism.

Such points must be seen as sine qua non conditions required for tourist activity achieves more emblematic stages of development, going beyond the economic data, also prospecting results capable of contemplating sociocultural, political and environmental dimensions (UNEP, 2013).
For this purpose, tourism planning proposals need to be embedded in precepts that are set by the managerial matrices of Efficiency, Scale, Fairness, Self-Sufficiency and Ethics, as articulated by the Bruntland Report (WCED, 1987). Additionally, proposals should be structured such that they encourage cooperation and execution of objectives that are fair, ethical, and equitable for stakeholders, society, the environment and consumers (Bocken, 2015).

Furthermore, this process will promote tourism practices in which managers are capable of aligning their strategic analysis to economic, environmental, social, political and cultural dimensions (Perez and Del Bosque, 2014), which are discussed in the sustainable development proposal.

However, other situations do arise. In discussing touristic sustainability, many managers emphasize the importance of actions capable of: (1) reducing energy and water costs; (2) promoting green marketing and attracting consumers concerned with environmental issues (Segarra-Ona et al., 2012; Hu, 2012; Boley and Uysal, 2013). An example that corroborates this supposition is the “Planet 21 Program” developed by Accor Hotels — one of the largest hotel networks worldwide, present in 94 countries with 3,792 establishments (Accor Hotels, 2015). This program is based on seven pillars that result in environmental awareness: water, energy and CO2 reduction; recycling; biodiversity protection; the use of biodegradable products; and other factors (Accor Hotels, 2016). Therefore, considering the possibility of a lack of more holistic criterion for sustainable practices in addition to environmental issues — the use of electric power, water and green marketing (Boley and Uysal, 2013). Therefore, this article aims to expand the analytic scope of the literature by introducing criteria for analyzing the social, cultural, political and economic responsibility with which the tourism industry must comply to ensure that sustainability may be seen as a processing agent of external/internal reality.

For this study, hotel establishments will be analyzed, as they are a key element in the tourism life cycle. Therefore, the construction of sustainable criteria — more holistic, participative and integrative with internal/external realities from the perspective of hotel organizations — was only possible because: (1) the results from two bibliometric analyses that will later be presented in this study; (2) sustainable guidelines recommended:

- United Nations Environmental Programme: one of the primary authorities on contemporary environmental issues (UNEP, 2003);
- World Tourism Organization: an agency related to the United Nations, responsible for promoting touristic sustainability (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005);
- Foundation for Environmental Education: recognized by UNESCO as one of the main authorities on “Environmental Education” and “Sustainable Development” (FEE, 2006);
- Global Sustainable Tourism Council: the organization’s main purpose is to disseminate sustainable guidelines capable of improving and leveraging information to both public and private sectors (GSTC, 2012);
- Global Reporting Initiative: an independent organization, which helps public and private institutions to better understand the diffusion on their impacts (GRI, 2013).

2. Material and methods

Researches related to the sustainable development concept have resulted in more responsible actions, especially in regards to negative impacts of society on natural and cultural resources (Tyrrell et al., 2013; Sigala, 2014). Reports, such as the Bruntland Report (WCED, 1987) and Agenda 21 (Rodriguez-Anton et al., 2012) illuminate the necessity of revising conduct, values and contemporary consumption and production patterns (Bocken, 2015).

It is vital to create criteria capable of inducing modern management to employ sustainable practices that are closely tied to ethical and responsible values and internal/external specificities from any organization. In this scenario, tourism would never remain on the sidelines because there is a growing understanding regarding the interdependency of tourism development and sociocultural, economic, policy and environmental sustainability dimensions (Perez and Del Bosque, 2014; Sloan et al., 2014).

Particularly in the hotel industry, there is a need to gradually build an interdisciplinary discussion (Phillippi Jr. and Neto, 2011) that is capable of aligning management processes to sustainable development principles, achieving academic environment, trade, stakeholders, communities and superstructures that discuss, regulate and examine the hotel practice.

Interdisciplinary discussions demand a connection of principles and processes that will validate the accuracy of the results (Creswell, 2003). These agreed-upon principles should be submitted by planning bodies that attempt to decipher (Hair Jr. et al., 2009) the complexities related to the relationship between society and the environment (Phillippi Jr. and Neto, 2011). These complexities are assumed in consumer relations proposed by hotel businesses.

Therefore, this article is composed of two analytical aspects. The first aspect is grounded on the perspective that sustainable hotel management prioritizes environmental issues in their strategies (Jarvis et al., 2010; Boley and Uysal, 2013; Chou, 2014; Geerts, 2014; Fraj et al., 2015; Han and Yoon, 2015). Thus, the following hypothesis is drawn: there is a lack of organizational management models that align with more holistic and participative sustainability criteria, to address not only environmental issues but also include social, cultural, economic, policy dimension, aspects as suggested in the sustainable development proposal.

Therefore, two bibliometric studies were developed on Scopus between April and May 2015 in an effort to present current proposals of sustainable development to hotel businesses. These analyses were conducted to obtain quantifiable data, to ensure accuracy and credibility regarding results, and to avoid distortions in the data (Creswell, 2003).

The second aspect is regarding a concern to consolidate sustainable criteria that align with environmental, social, cultural, economic and policy dimensions. To that end, speeches on sustainability offered by large international organizations recognized in the tourism industry — UNWTO, WTTC, UNEP, GRI, FEE and GSTC — were measured. These speeches helped structure a more comprehensive analytical proposal regarding sustainable parameters that may be applicable to the hotel industry and policy makers.

3. Theory

Increasingly, academia is discussing a new organizational paradigm capable of suggesting more sustainable principles and processes to contemporary touristic proposals (Tyrrel et al., 2013; Boyle and Uysal, 2013; Perez and Del Bosque, 2014; Bocken, 2015). Nevertheless, such a finding could also be present in a market research scenario.

Ultimately, a growing number of companies consider such sustainable mechanisms capable of providing a competitive advantage (Longoni and Cagliano, 2015). The following data verifies this fact: (1) in a study by The Economist (2008), it was observed that fewer than 4% of the managers queried — among 1,122
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