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Introduction

Two decades after the popularisation of 'sustainable development' by the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987), sustainability-related practices are becoming widespread in the global tourism and hospitality sector (Weaver 2006). However, as considered below, no concerted attempts have yet been made to construct a holistic inventory of these practices or to identify differential patterns of adoption based on setting. To address this gap, 2009 and 2010 applications to a major Asia-Pacific sustainable hotel award were content analysed to develop a comprehensive classification scheme of nominated practices and to identify differences between big city and other applicants. The implications of these findings for the evolution and facilitation of sustainability within the hotel sector are discussed.

Literature

Prior to the popularisation of sustainability, an era of 'perfunctory environmentalism' in the tourism sector focused on minimal adherence to government regulation, and satisfaction of tourist expectations. Subsequently, 'pragmatic environmentalism' is indicated by the normative adoption of profitable and visible operational practices such as recycling and energy reduction. Increasingly ubiquitous linen re-use signage epitomises this era, which Weaver (2007) characterises as embodying paradigm *nudge* rather than paradigm *shift*, given its opportunistic connotations and non-questioning of the fundamental corporate growth-and-profit ethos. Notably, Weaver (2006) argues that this superficiality is a reaction to the dominance of superficial environmentalism in society, wherein widespread concern about environmental issues is not matched by popular willingness to respond in ways that entail personal inconvenience.

Scepticism notwithstanding, such practices do entail positive environmental and social outcomes and may serve incrementally as transitional measures beyond paradigm nudge toward a future of 'pervasive environmentalism'. This may emerge when a critical mass of superficial environmentalists transitions to 'true' environmentalism, motivated perhaps by concerns about climate change and a growing lack of confidence in the capitalist ethos due to the effects of the global financial crisis. Regardless, concurrent resource cost escalations provide an incentive for corporations to produce more energy and resource-efficient products, assisted by rapid advances in 'green' technologies that make such products cost-effective relative to their conventional counterparts.

Early support for sustainability included its adoption in mission statements and codes of conduct. The latter provide moral suasion, direction, and facilitation of active involvement, but are impeded by their voluntary nature, self-regulation, vagueness, and lack of penalties for non-adherence (Genot 1995; Mason and Mowforth 1996). Certification-based ecolabels such as Green Globe are potentially more effective indicators of adherence but are minimally subscribed to within the tourism industry. This owes partly to their cost, the cession of corporate control, the risk of losing the ecolabel, and low levels of public recognition or patronization. In any case, few possess sufficient 'guts' (i.e. rigorous and comprehensive indicator set) and 'teeth' (i.e. procedures ensuring awarding and display only where warranted) to be effective as substantive quality control mechanisms (Buckley 2002).

Sustainability awards situate between these extremes, qualifying as ecolabels by being trademarked, sponsor-identified and (in theory) awarded on merit. However,

they differ by their affiliation with corporations, limited awardees, publicised annual ceremonies, prize provisions, and defined duration. Awards have been criticised as public relations exercises and for their vulnerability to abuse during judging and through exaggerated claims. However, they are applauded for recognising innovative best practice and encouraging excellence through competition (Font and Tribe 2001). Accordingly, awards such as Tourism for Tomorrow, World Savers, HICAP Sustainable Hotels and Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism have become prestigious and competitive, attracting numerous contenders.

Despite the hospitality sector's increased interest in sustainability practices and the growth of initiatives such as awards to incentivise their adoption, there is no template or prototype to encapsulate the range of normative and innovative practices that could be adopted. Available information about practice is disadvantaged by its presentation in isolated (and thus necessarily limited) case studies (Bohdanowicz, Simanic and Martinac 2005, Enz and Siguaw 1999), its focus only on a particular component (e.g. operational or design), or its solicitation of participation in only a limited number of target practices (e.g. recycling, conversion to energy-efficient lighting). Legitimate information, moreover, is often obscured by the proliferation of inferior or outdated material on the Internet. This research addresses these shortcomings by focusing on a critical mass of hotel award applicants, a selection that moreover differentiates applicants in large urban and rural/resort settings.

Methodology

Access was granted to all 68 HICAP Award applications for 2009 and 2010. The Awards, conferred across several categories, 'recognize hotels in the Asia Pacific region demonstrating exemplary sustainable best practices'. Applicants must describe these practices in a free-form submission of no more than 2000 words (http://www.hicapconference.com/). Any hotel within the 'Asia Pacific' region is eligible. Four hotels applying in both years were counted only for 2010. Discrete practices were identified and sequentially grouped into successively larger categories through Nvivo-assisted content analysis. The settings of the 64 hotels logically divided between big cities of over one million residents (61%) and 'other' properties in rural areas or small (usually coastal resort) cities (39%). Almost all applicants were affiliated with multinational or regional chains.

Results and Discussion

Content analysis produced 590 discrete practices, or 9.2 per applicant. Urban applicants accounted for 53% practices (8.4 per applicant) and other for 47% (11.3 per applicant). *Operational* practices yielded one-half of all practices (n=298), of which 68% were accounted for by the urban applicants. Urban percentages were 73%, 70%, 61% and 58% respectively for the operational sub-categories of 'energy management' (e.g. energy-efficient lighting, air heating/cooling), 'water management' (e.g. efficient fixtures, water treatment, linen re-use signage), 'waste management' (recycling) and 'supplies management' (e.g. biodegradable or re-usable packaging). In contrast, urban applicants accounted for only 35% of *community engagement* practices (n=162 or 27% of all practices), and 41% and 19% respectively for the sub-categories of 'local residents' and 'environment'. Support for charity was the most 'urban' of the local residents sub-sub-category, with a 63% share, while educational empowerment, employment opportunities and support for the local economy were all

below 30%. Finally, design practices (n=130, or 23% of total practices) had an urban contribution of 35%, with the sub-category of 'protection of overall natural/cultural environment' (protection during construction, and then afterwards) yielding an urban share of 29% and 'sustainable facility design elements' 43% (e.g. sustainable building materials, transportation, green roofs, air circulation).

The outcomes, firstly, include a tentative sustainable practices template anchored by the three macro-categories of operations, design and community engagement, as well as attendant categories, sub-categories and sub-sub-categories that facilitate strategic implementation. The dominant status of operations is not unexpected, since measures related to lighting and recycling are relatively easy to implement and embody principles of normative pragmatic environmentalism. (It is surprising however that alternative energy was poorly represented, given the approaching convergence of conventional and alternative energy costs.) Design and community engagement are more indicative of pervasive environmentalism to the extent that the former usually needs to be incorporated into initial planning, while the latter is a manifestation of outreach that seldom has immediate financial benefits.

Overall, 'other' applicants not only report more practices per capita, but are greatly over-represented in these two macro-categories. This pertains especially to practices that involve the preservation and maintenance of the on-site natural environment, which is not surprising considering the urban properties are far more constrained in this respect. However, this applies even more to off-site environmental practices (under community engagement), indicating an unfulfilled potential for big city hotels to enhance the sustainability of their surrounds and to resituate their urban environ as a 'community' that can be engaged as a sustainability partner through charity participation, architectural vernacularisation, educational empowerment, employment and other explicit support for the local economy.

Conclusion

The results are not purported to represent the entire population of Asia-Pacific hotels but rather a self-selected few deemed exemplary enough to compete for a prestigious regional hotel award. That independents and national chain affiliates are essentially unrepresented could indicate that these are less engaged in sustainability-related practiced, that they perceive members of larger chains to be more competitive (and hence they do not participate), or that they are less likely to be aware of the HICAP initiative. Nevertheless, a major distinction between the featured practices of big city and rural applicants is indicated that merits further investigation, perhaps leading to the development and implementation of setting-sensitive award and certification schemes that take relevant circumstances and characteristics into account. More generally, the results provide a comprehensive template of potential sustainability practices for aspirational hotel managers, with prevalence of these practices providing an indication of the extent to which the latter are normative (i.e. lower risk) and innovative (i.e. higher risk).

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