An ethical examination of sustainable development and disaster recovery in the hotel industry

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1. Introduction

The climate disaster is here and as a result, the intensity and frequency of disasters, whether that is humanitarian, biological or natural, is set to increase (Institute for Economic & Peace (IEP), 2020). This may be cause for concern given that disasters can negatively impact economic, social, and environmental factors potentially leading to unsustainability in these areas (Fernandez and Ahmed, 2019). It is already warned that 1.5 planets are needed to sustain current consumption levels and experts caution that immediate and radical action is needed (Isaksson, Garvare & Johnson, 2015). Along with environmental challenges, social sustainability issues become ever more pressing as issues such as class divisions and racial inequities broaden. Alongside navigating these issues, organisations must also remain financially sustainable. As such, organisations must focus on their triple bottom line (TBL) to consider the value that they add or destroy whilst also being attentive to the threat of future disasters (Elkington, 1994).

2. Research Questions

1) How can normative ethics and stakeholder theory develop our understanding of the interactions between sustainable development and disaster recovery in the hotel industry?
2) How can the virtuousness of hotels' stakeholders' impact the sustainability and disaster recovery approaches of hotels in the North-West of England?

3. Aims

To develop knowledge on the complex interplays that exist between ethics, sustainability, and disaster recovery and to understand how applying an ethical framework of TBL sustainability can provide organisations with the means to successfully recover from future disasters in a way that promotes long term sustainability and disaster recovery preparedness.

4. Literature Review

The literature suggests that sustainability and disaster recovery may be practically linked in that disasters may foster unsustainability and unsustainability may give rise to disasters (IEP, 2020). Furthermore, these concepts seem to be conceptually similar. Namely, both are normative (Bageac, Furrer and Reynaud, 2011), both involve multi-stakeholders (Mannakkara & Wilkinson, 2014; Freudenreich *et al.*, 2020), both include at least three interdependent dimensions: economic, environmental, and social (Tate & Bals, 2018; Rousseau & Deschacht, 2020) and both involve an important temporal dimension (Hahn et al., 2017; Mannakkara & Wilkinson, 2014). Sustainability and disaster recovery also share critical operational issues including the mitigation of trade-offs (Hahn et al., 2010; Frenandez and Ahmed, 2019). Research into organisational sustainability is already a well-established area of study (Ergene *et al.*, 2021). While research into post-disaster business recovery is limited, there is a growing interest in disaster recovery in this context (Morrish & Jones, 2020). However, research into sustainability *and* disaster recovery is very limited in the field and even more so from an ethical perspective. As such, there is a need for clarity regarding how the relationship between sustainability and disaster recovery works both conceptually and practically. Particularly,

ethical examination of sustainability and disaster recovery is underdeveloped and even more so, within the context of the hotel industry.

5. Theoretical Framing

This research suggests that value can be added from combining virtue ethics and stakeholder theory. Firstly, stakeholder theory arguably lacks solid normative foundations and falls short on providing action guidance and detailed ethical motivation (Bridoux and Stoelhorst, 2016). As a highly comprehensive ethical theory with a detailed account of practical wisdom as a virtue that orients and guides human action, virtue ethics may strengthen stakeholder theory (Melé, 2010). Stakeholder theory can enhance virtue ethics by providing further virtue content specification and important contextual nuances relating to management (Wijnberg, 2000).

6. Methodology

This explanatory research applies an interpretivist approach and uses a qualitative research strategy comprising collective case studies (Yin, 2014). A relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, value-laden axiology and inductive approach to theory development is applied. The research questions are examined using semi-structured interviews and analysis of relevant secondary data such as policy documents. The context for the data collection is the hotel industry because sustainability is the dominant challenge facing tourism oriented organisations and, hotels are also vulnerable to the treat of disasters. The unit of analysis is hotels' sustainability and disaster recovery approaches whilst the units of observation are the hotels and individuals that represent the hotels' stakeholders. Cases were selected using purposive criterion sampling which led to the selection of three cases representing key ownership and affiliation strategies in the industry: independent, franchised and managed (Fernandez-Barcala et al., 2022). Thematic analysis is employed to recognise, categorise and interpret themes in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

7. Relevance and Contribution

(Un)sustainability and disasters present supply chains with severe challenges that can have ruinous consequences (Elkington, 1994; Marshall and Schrank, 2020). The implications of both also impact wider society as businesses are the backbone of society and hence, when businesses suffer the whole of society suffers (Tierney, 2007). Given the significant effect that unsustainability and disasters can have on organisations and society, any research that aims to advance theoretical understanding of these concepts and improve the efficacy of their practical implementation, will be both relevant and significant. This research proposes to do just that through utilisation of an innovative theoretical framework and approach. The expected theoretical contribution is to advance understanding of the complex relationship between sustainability, disaster recovery and ethics. The expected practical contribution is to advance understanding of how applying an ethically ground, TBL framework can improve the applicability and effectiveness of sustainability and disaster recovery approaches and hence, provide organisations with the means to be both sustainable and disaster recovery ready.

8. References

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