

## 2017 CHR Sustainability Roundtable Summary

Sustainability remains top of mind for many global hospitality industry corporations. This was evidenced by the robust engagements of participants that attended the 2017 Cornell Sustainability Roundtable recently hosted by The Center for Hospitality Research at The School of Hotel Administration in the SC Johnson College of Business at Cornell University. Participants gathered to from around the world to discuss a wide range of emerging topics including actionable strategies for the industry to meet prioritized United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), sustainable tourism “asset management” research, deeper engagement with hospitality business owners and developers in sustainability initiatives, and trends in furniture, fixture and equipment (FF&E) procurement and what a the hotel of 2050 may look like.

Members of the hospitality industry have been paying close attention to the proceedings from the annual United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Conference of Parties (COP) events, particularly the recent COP 21. At CPO 21, seventeen UNSDGs were adopted to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. In an effort for the hospitality industry to align themselves with these goals, International Tourism Partnership (ITP) worked with its members to prioritize actions to better meet these goals. During the Roundtable, ITP previewed their Vision for 2030 (aligned with 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals) and ITP’s Goals that outlined four commitments where the industry can work together to “get further, faster” than working alone. These four areas include Youth Employment, Carbon, Water, and Human Rights. This does not mean that companies in the industry are not working on other UNSDGs, but these four were deemed most significantly actionable by the hospitality industry. It was acknowledged as well that 2017 was declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development to raise awareness of the contribution of sustainable tourism to development, and to support change in policies, business practices and consumer behavior that lead towards more sustainable tourism industry.

The tourism industry has been enjoying strong growth (4% annually and up to 10% in emerging destinations). *Sustainable* tourism is by no means a new concept. However, it is not necessarily well understood or executed in many destinations. The concept of sustainable tourism asset management (STAMP) is the focus of a new program of study at the Center for Sustainable Global Enterprise at the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business. STAMP is focusing on recognizing the costs, impacts and benefits of tourism on critical assets. The program is evaluating attractions such as beaches, coral reefs, parks and/or protected areas, and historic monuments, to support investment that will help to manage and mitigate conservation of these destinations (both physically and socially). Many times these assets are the very reasons that tourists travel to the area receiving tourism economic benefit. Therefore bridging the gap between exploiting and preserving tourism assets through strategic investment is crucial for thriving economic and cultural prosperity.

As the discussion of sustainable development turned to the owners and developers of hotel buildings, the question was raised, “How will the industry meet the UNSDGs in 2030 and beyond, unless we build sustainable/efficient buildings today?” There remains a gap between the supporting of the UNSDGs by brands and management companies and the implementation of ultra-energy efficient design that is needed by owners and developers to meet these UNSDGs. Discussions related to costs of materials and cutting-edge technologies (particularly in energy efficiency) were robust with the acknowledgement of the dual pressures faced by owners and developers: maximizing financial returns to stakeholders through prudent investment of capital, and maximizing environmental performance. It is clear however, if building equipment and system design, and renovations today do not radically transform allowing for vastly improved environmental performance, there is no chance to meet the current UNSDGs.

Several brief discussions were held regarding emerging trends in sustainability in the hospitality industry. The development and manufacturing of sustainable FF&E products continues to grow. It was noted that there seems to be somewhat of a disconnect between the products that are available and the designers, developers and owners

awareness of such sustainable product options. Cost is often cited as a barrier to sustainable product specification. However, manufactures have noted that the differential in numerous instances has diminished significantly, and to zero in many cases. It remains an issue that more education is necessary regarding green product options for product/materials decision makers.

As the hospitality industry looks to the future regarding sustainability, radical innovation will be necessary on many fronts. Global think-tanks (such as Fraunhofer' Hotel 2050) and researchers are collaborating to design nearly zero energy hotels of the future. Concepts for hotel properties were discussed including carbon negative buildings, passive house building design, climate adapted design, green architecture (nature and daylight inspired), more robust reuse of materials, on-site energy production, and integrated agriculture production (hydroponics, rooftop, vertical vegetation) at the property.

The hospitality industry continues heighten its focus on mitigating negative environmental impacts and enriching the social prosperity of the communities where they reside. Through multiple NGOs and corporations, industry leaders continue to collaborate to raise awareness, educate, train and provide robust resources for business, guest and local stakeholders to improve sustainable hospitality operations around the globe.