

# THE 24 HOUR SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY HACKATHON

## “A World of Change in Hospitality”

IUBH International University of Applied Sciences (DE) –  
Hotel Management School MAASTRICHT (HMSM) (NL) JOINT-EVENT  
June 04 & 05 2020

## HIGHLIGHT REPORT

### Leading Question:

What must we change to drive more sustainability (urgently) in a post-COVID-19 world?

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## 1. Setting the Stage

The 2020 pandemic has catastrophic consequences on societies but particularly on the travel and hospitality sectors. The ways the industry currently deals with the current pandemic offer a glimpse into the crisis management endeavours in building a business case for disaster and climate resiliency. Climate emergency is not dissimilar to the coronavirus threat, whereby “both demand early aggressive action to minimize loss” (Cobb, in Sengupta, 2020, para. 3). At this stage, it becomes apparent that we need to take stock of our industry’s abilities; figuring out which parts are “already functioning well and don’t need changing and which parts are no longer working and do need changing” (Diamond, 2019, p.6).

On Thursday June 4<sup>th</sup>, 90 hospitality students from two universities (*IUBH International University of Applied Science Bad Honnef-Bonn* (DE) and *Hotel Management School Maastricht* (NL)) along with a dozen faculty members and industry experts were called upon to prepare and shape the future of sustainable hospitality. Over a 24-hr timeframe, actionable plans and activities were devised considering the overall opportunity (and responsibility) towards more sustainability in the industry (and not less) in a post COVID-19 world. Those plans were submitted to faculty at *IUBH International University of Applied Science Bad Honnef-Bonn* (DE) and *Hotel Management School Maastricht* (NL) on the UN World Environment Day June 5<sup>th</sup> and will be distributed to industry partners.

## 2. Framework to Tackle the Challenges

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development along with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement and the Convention of Biological Diversity (CDB) provide a global framework to tackle the major challenges faced by civilization: end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, biodiversity collapse and climate emergency (Legrand et al., 2020).

## 3. What is a Hackathon?

The idea behind a hackathon is the gathering, in this case virtually, of students and experts who care about the same issues and who can quickly collaborate, form bonds, share knowledge and solve problems.

## 4. What were the Tasks?

22 challenges were established (including all 17 SDGs), from decarbonisation of small independent hotel properties or restaurants to consumer engagement in responsible consumption. 22 student groups brainstormed in virtual breakout rooms with the continuous support from experts and faculty members and provided an extensive list of activities to be undertaken by hotels pertaining to the particular focus given. Those ‘activities’ were classified in three categories: **Easy Wins** (CAT1); **Adapt Your Plan** (CAT2) and **Game Changers** (CAT3). Additionally, CAT1; CAT2 and CAT3 activities had to be classified into **Short-** (within 12 months), **Medium-** (12-60 months), and **Long-term** (until 2030).

## 5. Topics Tackled

1. Decarbonisation – focus on independent/chain hotel operations (Paris Agreement/SDG13)
2. Decarbonisation – focus on chain hotel operations (Paris Agreement/SDG13)
3. Decarbonisation – focus on new hotel development (Paris Agreement/SDG13)
4. Decarbonisation – focus on restaurant operations (Paris Agreement/SDG13)
5. Poverty reduction – focus on low income countries (SDG1)
6. Zero hunger – focus on gastronomy/supply chain (SDG2)
7. Health and well-being – focus on sanitation (SDG3)
8. Quality education – focus on training, upskilling, continuous education (SDG4)
9. Gender equality – focus on the role of women in hospitality (SDG5)
10. Clean water – focus on freshwater use/mgmt. & wastewater mgmt. (SDG6)
11. Affordable & clean energy – focus on renewable energy production (SDG7)
12. Decent work & Economic growth – focus on community involvement (SDG8)
13. Innovation & infrastructure – focus on smart destination development (SDG9)
14. Reduced inequalities – focus on low income countries (SDG10)
15. Sustainable communities – focus on role and responsibilities of hotels in communities (SDG11)
16. Responsible consumption – focus on consumer booking process for sustainable hotels (SDG12)
17. Responsible consumption – focus on consumer sustainability engagement in hotels (SDG12)
18. Responsible production – focus on supply chain and production in restaurants (SDG13)
19. Life below water – focus on hotel in beach/sea/island destinations & restaurant (SDG14 / CBD)
20. Life on land – focus on biodiversity protection at destination (SDG15 / CBD)
21. Life on land – focus on restaurants food sourcing (SDG15 / CBD)
22. Peace & Partnerships – focus on stakeholder relationship (hotels/restaurants) (SDG16 / SDG17)

## 6. Expert Support & Input

Experts who care about the same issues (i.e. driving more e more sustainability (urgently) in a post-COVID-19 world) provided insightful feedback over the 24hours.

### **Leontine van Eerden,**

*Sustainable Development Manager Northern Europe, Accor* kick-started the 24hr Sustainable Hospitality Hackathon discussing the responsibility of Accor, as one of the world's largest hotel companies (>5000 hotels), towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the Paris Agreement. The company is seeking carbon neutrality by 2050 and has a multitude of goals and targets within their Planet 21 programme. As a reminder, the International Tourism Partnership (ITP) goals on climate have been developed following science-based data aligning the hotel sector to the Paris Agreement. The outcome calls for the global hotel industry to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per room per year by 66% by 2030 (compared to 2010 levels), and 90% by 2050 <sup>(1)</sup>. This partial decarbonisation until 2030 can be achieved through energy efficiency measures and gradual implementation of renewable energy production and sourcing. Entering this new decade, numerous examples of carbon neutral hotels or energy-positive hotels are to be found, so best practices can be replicated. Some smaller hotel companies have already achieved carbon neutrality. This is the case for the Explorer Hotel Group in southern Germany and Austria with its nine carbon neutral hotels. Some larger hotel brands are clearly committed towards decarbonisation including a detailed trajectory, which is the case for Accor. As Ms. Van Eerden stated, Accor was *“one of the first stock listed companies to create an environment department. This means we took the lead in our sector and made it part of our strategy. All our (operational) actions reflects this great involvement. Sustainable hospitality is part of our DNA”*.

<sup>(1)</sup>International Tourism Partnership (2017). Hotel Global Decarbonisation Report.

<https://tourismpartnership.org/download/2053/>

**Dr. Kyriaki Glyptou,**

*Senior Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University*, provided the hackathon attendees with a concise review of all 17 SDGs, targets and indicators. After a review of the global status quo, Dr. Glyptou mentioned that for many indicators, measurement is still complicated as *“there are no available data”* which offers *“the opportunity to propose new schemes of measurement”*. For the hospitality industry in specific, the SDGs represent a real opportunity to begin the discussion on how the industry should prioritize goals versus cherry picking on them. Dr. Glyptou stated that *“the goals they [hotel businesses] often prioritize are climate actions, and responsible production and consumption as they are perceived as the easier to implement, and the ones [...] there is more buzz about”*. Additional barriers to overcome are the lack of understanding of the business case around the SDGs, the complexity of the agenda, the absence of clear targets and the lack of leadership. This provides an opportunity to external organisations, including university researchers, to tackle the barriers with actionable proposals to the industry.

**Harco J. Leertouwer,**

*Managing Director Benelux at Acre* discussed how a career in sustainability has evolved over the past three decades. And while professionals may have grown into the function in the past, *“In the future you will need a Master if you want to have a sustainability related job”*. This is due in part to the level of complexity of issues surrounding corporate sustainability as sustainability itself has moved into being major business decisions. However, according to Leertouwer, the hotel and tourism industry still has a long way to go as the progress has been slower compared to other industries but on the same token, the current COVID-19 crisis may accelerate the transition towards more sustainability. Leertouwer also mentioned that circularity *“has been gaining a lot of traction. The circular economy action plan of the government, the anti-plastic sentiment, there is momentum now!”*. So to develop a career in sustainability, one must be knowledgeable in multiple fields combined with what Leertouwer labels as *“agile approach to engagement and communication (you will have to convince people)”* as well as being a *“nimble and adaptable change manager with commercial acumen”*.

**Anna de Visser-Amundson,**

*Research Fellow in Marketing at Hotelschool The Hague (HTH)*, closed the Thursday round of experts with an update in regards to research and practices linked to food waste. Recent<sup>(1)</sup> research shows a ratio of 1 to 7 which means that for every euro invested in food waste management, seven euros are saved from food not being wasted. However, despite the data, food waste remains a prominent issue in the hotel and restaurant industry. One of the issues is that the *“lack of measuring food waste holds back behavioural change for both industry and consumers”* according to De Visser-Amundson. She argues that behavioural change is essential when tackling the issue of food waste. Nudging (as an effective and inexpensive influence strategy) in the form of seeking commitment from employees via a pledge on reducing food waste before the start of a shift as well as social norm nudges work because *“we like to behave in alignment with our promises and with how other people behave”* according to De Visser Amundson.

<sup>(1)</sup>Clowes, A., Hanson, C., and Swannell, R. (2019). The Business Case for Reducing Food Loss and Waste: Restaurants. Champions 12.3. <https://champions123.org/the-business-case-for-reducing-food-loss-and-waste-restaurants/>

**Ernest van der Voort,**

*Director Business Development & Marketing at Albron*, closed the Thursday expert session during an event where awards were presented to the top three sustainable dishes created by the students in the gastronomy minor. Van der Voort stated that the gastronomy sector can be a guide towards change whereby *“restaurant operators will be defined by what they put on the menu”*. Consumers have a role to play and increasingly they *“will identify themselves to others by what they eat”* argued van der Voort. The top three winning dishes (‘Carrot Tartar’ by Claartje Verschoor & Isabelle Steiner, ‘Haddock in Green’ by Jitske Strolenberg & Mauk Meijers and ‘Beet Ravioli’ by Marlies Samsom & Noa Roos) will be part of the campaign ‘Put the future on the menu’ during the awareness rally put by the [The Green House](#) later this year in Utrecht.

**Nicolas Dubrocard,**

*Hotel Environmental Auditor, Founder of Solutions Tourism*, started the Friday with an early morning keynote on environmental low-hanging fruits in hotels. With more than 200 environmental audits of hotels and resort worldwide, Dubrocard presented best and worst practices he experienced on properties. Dubrocard stated that often, *“a hotel is a crime scene; too many resources are being wasted”*. Easy wins, or so-called low-hanging fruits, are often found in the area of water reduction and energy consumption. The point being made that low hanging fruits are actions that do not require extensive investment. From housekeeping cleaning and laundry SOPs to basic maintenance of fridges and water leak management, Dubrocard supported claims with data and hands-on calculations. One critical aspect also includes consumer communication. However, Dubrocard gave a word of warning stating *“Unfortunately, storytelling does not always work as it is also culturally sensitive. Think of language, but also interpretation. Not all cultures will get your message”*. To overcome this challenge and have consumers engaged in sustainability, Dubrocard noted: *“I believe in gamification and fun as a strategy”*.

**Karina O’Gorman,**

*Head of Corporate Responsibility, InterContinental Hotels Group*, discussed ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) reporting as well as community involvement of hotels. The difficulties in creating yearly sustainability or ESG reports stems from the mixed audience; investors’ interest in sustainability endeavours of the business, potential employees researching about the ethics of a company they would apply to; or the non-governmental organisations seeking greater transparency of globally operating hotel companies. The demands on the level of details vary and it is a difficult endeavour to satisfy the different stakeholders. However, those stakeholders are important in driving the sustainability agenda as O’Gorman stated *“external pressures can help to drive greater sustainability change; many parallels are being drawn to COVID, making the climate agenda more urgent”*. She also mentioned that working with the World Benchmarking Alliance will help to create better standards across the industry.

**Madhu Rajesh,**

*Director for International Tourism Partnership at Business in the Community (BITC)*, closed the 24hr Sustainable Hospitality Hackathon with a powerful address in regards to the hotel response and opportunities in a post COVID-19 era. Rajesh commented *“to see hotels closing down and the impact that will have on their staff and the communities, that is heart-breaking. But, with hotels, large and small, around the world stepping up in the face of crisis, we can all try to ensure that this spirit lives on as we begin to rebuild”*. With the support and evidence of a multitude of adaptation cases (hotels converted into hospitals, quarantine centres, offices and safe spaces for victims of domestic violence and rough sleepers) and support examples (Hotel supporting staff of closed properties, through financial support and temporary job placements), Rajesh demonstrated the role hotels play in community resilience but also in helping the world to recover. This is possible because *“we believe in the power of collective action”*.

**7. The Highlights**

A list of 221 activities to be undertaken by the hospitality industry have been proposed over the 22 topics. More precisely, 82 Easy Wins (CAT1), 74 Plan Adaptations (CAT2) and 65 Game Changers (CAT3) were presented in a matrix-style set of tables (*CAT + Timeframe + Resources needed*) following the 24hr Sustainable Hospitality Hackathon. All recommended activities required support in form of evidence from practice or scientific research. The highlights of each topic researched are presented in **Table 1. 24hr Sustainable Hospitality Hackathon Highlights**.

**Table 1. 24hr Sustainable Hospitality Hackathon Highlights**

Topics	Easy Wins (CAT1)	Adapt your Plans (CAT2)	Games Changers (CAT3)	Students
1. Decarbonization - focus on independent /chain hotel operations; 66% reduction by 2030; 90% by 2050 (Paris Agreement/SDG13)	Provide a <b>discount to local travellers</b> ( <i>tourist in your own town</i> ) and shared transport such as trains and E-taxis (Scope 3 GHG)	Invest in an <b>Extensive rooftop gardens</b> / green roof for direct local sourcing, biodiversity enhancement & improved insulation method	Capture all movement / <b>kinetic energy</b> for lighting or water system (e.g. fitness studio)	<i>Finders, Anne Mooren, Joris du Preez, Nienke</i>
2. Decarbonization - focus on chain hotel operations; 66% reduction by 2030; 90% by 2050 (Paris Agreement/SDG13)	Provide <b>facilities for improved online meetings / trainings</b> to corporate clients	Implement a <b>Sustainable Bonus System</b> - functions like a loyalty program but adapts to saving resources & sustainable endeavours of hotels and guests	Shift towards <b>plant-based F&amp;B concepts</b> (Pilot Projects / Lifestyle Brands / Adapt Menus of Main Restaurants)	<i>Stroosma, Mette Uden, van, Koen Danne, Laura Engel, Antonia</i>
3. Decarbonization - focus on new hotel development (Paris Agreement/SDG13)	Develop <b>sustainable laundry programme</b> (focus on 3 gains; energy, water and chemicals)	Install new generation of <b>photovoltaic panels</b>	Consider circularity in the use and development of <b>recycled / recyclable building</b>	<i>Buul, van, Saskia Gorissen, Hannah Meckfessel, Nina Soons, Sophie</i>
4. Decarbonization - focus on restaurant operations (Paris Agreement/SDG13)	Cooperate with <b>anti-food-waste apps</b> (e.g. Too Good to Go, Karma, ... )	Install <b>reverse osmosis systems</b> into dishwashers	Shift to <b>alternative protein consumption</b> (grains, insects...)	<i>Relewicz, Sebastian T. Schreiber, Cara Maas, van der Chiara</i>
5. Poverty reduction – focus on low income countries (SDG1)	Support employment by <b>recruiting primarily local workers</b>	<b>Promote local ownerships</b> by advertising them in hotel brochures and travel guidebooks	<b>Establish a scholarship programme</b> by collaborating with local schools	<i>Assem, van den, Milou Barte, Julia Nguyen, Dieu Linh Tishkina, Maria</i>
6. Zero hunger – focus on gastronomy/supply chain (SDG2)	<b>Prevent food waste</b> by implementing the possibility to buy food a reduced price in hotels and restaurant	<b>Get certified</b> for efforts in mitigating food waste (e.g. The PLEDGE on Food Waste)	<b>Participate in agriculture development</b> supporting smallholder farmers	<i>Heuvel, van den, Jorg Voermans, Vincent Boersma, Melloney Steiner, Isabelle</i>

7. <i>Health and well-being – focus on sanitation (SDG3)</i>	<b>Create a WASH training</b> , linking sanitation measure to sustainability measures (e.g. water usage, chemical usage)	Install a <b>pulsed water meter</b> and <b>use apps available for SOPs</b> on sanitation and maintenance purposes (e.g. MaintainX)	Consider <b>grey water recycling</b> to mitigate water shortages affecting local population at water scarce destinations	<i>Bopp, Sarah Dalmulder, Lisa Damen, Lopez Murielle Timmer, Lauren</i>
8. <i>Quality education – focus on training, upskilling, continuous education (SDG4)</i>	Implement <b>social hygiene course</b> and training increasing trust and safety-feeling of guests and employees	Support <b>intercultural knowledge and awareness programme</b>	Use <b>Artificial Intelligence</b> to analyse and predict employees' interests for personal growth and for support of daily tasks.	<i>Ingels, Genni Pijl, Sophie Samsom, Marlies Morales, Tunon David</i>
9. <i>Gender equality – focus on the role of women in hospitality (SDG5)</i>	Be transparent in regards to <b>wage structure</b> in the company	Support <b>women empowerment</b> programmes	Lobby for <b>governmental control</b> on equal wages	<i>Aggelen, van Lennard Boer, de, Marlotte Roos, Noa Dam, van, Marijke</i>
10. <i>Clean water – focus on freshwater use/mgmt. &amp; wastewater mgmt. (SDG6)</i>	Achieve water conservation by <b>implementing innovations based on efficiency</b>	Ensure that all employees and their families have <b>ample access to safe drinking water and access to adequate sanitation</b>	Invest in <b>water management and monitoring technologies</b> (e.g. for cooling towers; wastewater etc)	<i>Dissel, Lloyd Koene, Marijke Middendorp, Mart Sprang, van, Femke</i>
11. <i>Affordable &amp; clean energy – focus on renewable energy production (SDG7)</i>	Re-use <b>deep-frying oils for biomass/biofuels</b>	Install <b>heat exchange shower systems</b>	Adapt a <b>circular-thinking in the use of resources</b> (e.g. food waste, compost, biogas)	<i>Vermeulen, Jonas Hinderks, Ruth Hoek, Emmy Kerckhoffs, Esmée</i>
12. <i>Decent work &amp; Economic growth – focus on community involvement (SDG8)</i>	Offer to <b>lower work week to 4 days</b> and offer <b>flexible contracts</b>	Implement a <b>supply policy to focus on fair-traded/direct traded products</b>	Install a <b>policy against unfair hiring and recruitment practices</b> , particularly towards vulnerable groups	<i>Jaspars, Lotte Kastelein, Fleur Starrenburg, Fleur Limpt, van, Felice</i>
13. <i>Innovation &amp; infrastructure – focus on smart destination development (SDG9)</i>	Offer <b>complimentary passes for public transportation</b> upon check in	Implement <b>mobile devices apps</b> to manage hotel stay (payments, key card, maps/routes, hotel information, locating people travelling with you, etc.)	Invest in <b>augmented reality</b> to provide experience to explore hotels and surrounding area	<i>Ketelaar, Lara Steskens, Rachelle Jarzombek, Daniela Nurmaganova, Laura</i>

14. <i>Reduced inequalities – focus on low income countries (SDG10)</i>	Ensure <b>equal rights of taking care of children</b> (equal maternity and paternity leave).	Do not allow operations in low-income countries <b>take advantage of work done in inhuman circumstances</b> (applies to supply chain as well)	Establish <b>funds for education and scholarship for students</b> with low opportunities	Anneveld, Justine Bruijns, Annabel Gacutan, Arabelle Kabelacova, Barbora
15. <i>Sustainable communities – focus on role and responsibilities of hotels/restaurants in communities (SDG11)</i>	Start a cooperation with city centers of less privileged areas to <b>donate old cutlery, or plates, or furniture and food</b> which is otherwise going to waste.	Develop a <b>sustainable working and learning program</b> for people unemployed	Start a <b>sustainable brand</b> based on a guilt-free concept where the hotel compensate for the direct and indirect damages on the environment	Friedeman, Kee Meeuwisse, Laura Schrijver, Bibi Strolenberg, Jitske
16. <i>Responsible consumption – focus on consumer booking process for sustainable hotels (SDG12)</i>	Add <b>filter on booking sites</b> (e.g. water or energy usage of the hotel, improvements of GHG reduction, water or energy usage; implement other certificates)	Implement <b>sustainable ratings for existing booking sites</b>	Implement an <b>IOT system for all hotels</b> with rewards for how sustainable the guests were within the stay	As, van, Yasmin Bakx, Wout Kohlhaas, Tobias Poschen, Lea
17. <i>Responsible consumption – focus on consumer sustainability engagement in hotels/restaurants (SDG12)</i>	Install a <b>visual component when guests log in to the WIFI</b> , which shows their opportunities regarding to sustainable choices outside and inside the hotel	Implement an <b>app which uses AI</b> to monitor how sustainable guests are and provide notification in a gamification manner	Develop a <b>loyalty programme</b> based on charity donation as the leading reward	Hölscher, Zino Poot, Vera Slooten, van, Marissa Boom, van den, Jip
18. <i>Responsible production – focus on supply chain and production in restaurants (SDG13)</i>	Implement <b>vegetarian and vegan options</b> (green your supply chain)	Develop a <b>climate choice meal concept</b> for restaurants based on carbon footprinting	Develop a <b>program to localize the supply chain</b> and production in restaurants (Local Match)	Getkate, Merle Riet, van, Lisa Huisman, Krista Verschoor, Claartje
19. <i>Life below water – focus on hotel in beach/sea/island destinations &amp; restaurant operations (SDG14 / CBD)</i>	Involve <b>local communities and tourists to clean the local environment/beach</b>	Provide <b>only fish on the menu with a quality mark against overfishing</b>	Ban all <b>plastic within the hotel or restaurants</b>	Rozendaal, Fleur Visser, Anouk Huizing, Amke Zwaal, Zoë

20. <i>Life on land – focus on biodiversity protection at destination; role and responsibilities of hotels (SDG15 / CBD)</i>	Promote <b>responsible recreation activities</b> and excursions and <b>supporting local biodiversity conservation efforts</b>	Partner and support <b>NGOs dedicated to the protection of rainforests</b> ; Make responsible choices in terms of <b>wood used for expansion or renovation projects or furniture.</b>	Plant a <b>vertical forest</b> in urban ecosystems where many hotels are located	<i>Chelaram, Lydia Driel, van, Julian Roccatagliata, Maria Sohlenkamp, Saskia</i>
21. <i>Life on land – focus on restaurants food sourcing (SDG15 / CBD)</i>	Make use of <b>coffee compost</b> making cleaning process cleaner and more organic (using it as a dry rub for the kitchen, make soap, use it as air freshener)	Promote <b>local suppliers</b> to decrease food miles but also inspire the locals to do the same.	Stop building new hotels, <b>instead recycle old buildings/facilities</b>	<i>Bùi, Mai Anh Peiffer, Ina Janssens, Ryan Aris, Jeroen</i>
22. <i>Peace &amp; Partnerships – focus on stakeholder relationship (hotels/restaurants) (SDG16 / SDG17)</i>	Provide <b>training dedicated to recognizing the “signs” linked to human trafficking</b>	Support <b>campaigns in making the topic of human trafficking ‘less taboo’</b> in the world of hospitality	Support partnerships in <b>developing AI and facial recognition to tackle human trafficking</b>	<i>Smajli, Annelise Thyssen-Nahon, Pauline Sijben, Jana Meijers, Mauk</i>

## 8. Conclusion

Following the credo of ‘only pressure creates diamonds’, this 24hr Sustainable Hospitality Hackathon has indeed created a world of change. The manifold ideas that were conceived by 90 motivated students, with the support of industry experts and academics, have created a list of actionable material every future-oriented hospitality professional should be aware of. Certainly, some of those suggestions may be applicable only in particular circumstances, need to be trialled and proven in reality or may take longer to introduce than expected. However, what they all present us with is a clear message that there is a lot that can be done to bring the hospitality industry a step forward in supporting the global sustainable development agenda and remain relevant to guests, employees, investors and the larger stakeholder community in future.

## 9. The Organisers

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