

Transformative Hotels of the Future

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Transformative Hotels of the Future, by Ksenia Kirillova, Henri Kuokkanen, and Xinran Lehto. London: Routledge, 2025. ISBN: 9781003517900 (paperback), 166 pages.

The emergence of the experience economy over the past three decades, and its continued evolution into the transformation economy, have marked a paradigmatic reconfiguration in the ways in which economic value is (co-)produced, consumed, and destroyed across consumer and business-to-business markets. In tourism business contexts, accommodation service providers present one of the key business sectors, and thus levers, for influencing and enacting a preferable tourism future at a global scale.

To that end, the book, “Transformative Hotels of the Future”, by Ksenia Kirillova, Henri Kuokkanen, and Xinran Lehto, presents a forward-looking and conceptually rich assessment of how hotels can indeed evolve into active agents of personal, social, and environmental transformation, exploring the phenomenon of transformation on three levels: the individual, community, and systemic level transformation.

From a theoretical perspective, the book is rooted in transformative service research, health and wellness studies as well as design, architecture and regenerative business research. Bridging the theory-practice gap through conceptual, futures-oriented work on hotels as multi-level platforms for human and planetary flourishing, the book is written by three well-known international scholars in tourism and hospitality. Perhaps stemming from this, the book is also split into three sections.

The first section of the book addresses personal and private transformations, exploring how hotels can, on the micro-level, serve as spaces for self-discovery, healing, and learning as part of guests’ pre-stay, during stay and post-stay experiences. Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from psychology, health and wellness, and design, the authors claim that future hotels may become “sanctuaries of growth,” offering transformative experiences that go beyond traditional comfort and service towards sustained behavioral changes.

The second section continues onto the meso-level, looking at social transformations by positioning hotels as potential hubs for cultural exchange, social innovation, and for building stronger community ties at the local level. The authors introduce concepts such as “living heritage anchors” and “co-living ecosystems,” suggesting that hotels should in the future help foster deeper

connections between guests and local communities, in line with the so-called “local-turn” (Higgins-Desbiolles & Bigby, 2022).

The final part of the book focuses on macro-level transformations, focusing on different dimensions of sustainability by evaluating the limitations of current environmental, social and governance (ESG) frameworks and advocating for a more regenerative hospitality and tourism ecosystem. Supported by several worked case examples, the authors call for a shift from box-ticking sustainability initiatives to a more purpose-driven strategy for change.

The writing is accessible yet intellectually stimulating, and it is clear that the book is intended for a broad readership. For graduate students and researchers in hospitality, tourism, experience design and sustainability studies, the book offers a clear multi-level framework that can anchor conceptual studies and inspire new empirical work. Analyzing the micro-meso-macro level implications of transformative hotel experiences through a cross-disciplinary lens helps students and academics rethink hospitality as a site of human and planetary well-being, expanding the potential scope of future-oriented academic inquiry.

For hospitality professionals seeking to innovate beyond conventional service models, readers gain strategic insight and practical case studies on how hotels can evolve beyond conventional service models toward wellness-focused, community-connected, and regenerative value propositions. The book provides concrete inspiration for designing transformative guest experiences that adhere to the “local-turn”, facilitating service innovation that may help differentiate brands in a post-COVID growth market.

Finally for policy makers and urban planners interested in the intersection of tourism, community, and environment, the book reframes hotels as socio-cultural and ecological actors, offering planners a systems-level understanding of how local hospitality can support broader community resilience and environmental goals. In particular, the chapters on social transformation may help inform policies that align tourism development efforts with long-term community well-being and regenerative business practices.

Despite its commendable future-oriented approach, it should be noted that the book is not intended as a practical toolkit for managers nor a ready-made research agenda for academics. Indeed, there could sometimes be a stronger connection between the – at times very broad – concepts discussed and their real-world implications. To help bridge this theory-practice gap, the book presents multiple case studies. However, it would have been interesting to see more variation in these, e.g. both bite-sized and extensive case examples, rooted in both Anglocentric and non-Anglocentric contextualizations. Particularly interesting would have been to read more about the practical business impact adopting a transformation-focused approach may yield. Likewise, to better serve an academic audience, the authors could have more actively engaged in theory-building rather than synthesizing previous knowledge.

Regardless, “Transformative Hotels of the Future”, published in 2025 by Routledge, is a timely and engaging book that invites the reader to see hospitality in a new light: not just as an industry, but as a platform for building meaningful change at the individual, community and planetary scale. In doing so, the book presents a suitable avenue for continuing emerging discussions at the intersection of Experience-Technology-Sustainability Nexus even further.

References

Higgins-Desbiolles, F., Bigby, B. (2022). A local turn in tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research* 92, 103291. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103291>