SUSTAINABLE LUXURY:
OXYMORON OR COMFORTABLE BEDFELLOWS?

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ABSTRACT

The following paper examines the complex relationship that exists between the concepts of luxury and sustainability in the accommodation sector. A review of the literature on luxury consumption, luxury tourism and sustainability indicated considerable debate about linking luxury and sustainability. The emergence of concepts like 'intelligent' and 'sustainable' luxury raises a number of research questions, especially in terms of understanding consumer motivations and evaluations of luxury and sustainable experiences.

This paper reports on a qualitative analysis of accommodation reviews mined from the World Wide Web and examined using Leximancer. The analysis produced a number of concept maps linking luxury with other accommodation features. Overall the results did not support a strong link between luxury tourism and sustainability. The paper concludes with some issues facing the longer term sustainability of luxury tourism experiences.

Keywords: luxury, sustainable tourism, user-generated content, accommodation

1.   INTRODUCTION

'Intelligent luxury' has been used as a marketing slogan of Soneva Resorts and Six Senses Spas. This company runs small, expensive resorts in South East Asia, the Maldives and the Middle East. The concept of intelligent luxury in these resorts is defined as offering "luxuries of the highest international standard in an environment that nurtures the indigenous feel in design, architecture and service, fusing nature with guest experiences" (Weinstein, 2010, p.30). The company claims to be guided by a

philosophy labelled SLOW LIFE which stands for "Sustainable Local Organic Wholesome Learning Inspiring Fun Experience" (Weinstein, 2010, p.30). This 'intelligent luxury' is an example of the application of the broader concept of 'sustainable luxury' to tourism, with the basic assumption being that it is possible to design and offer a luxury product or service that is based on sustainable design and management.

This concept has other labels including green luxury (Weinstein, 2010), balanced luxury (Ellis, n.d.) and deeper luxury (Bendell & Kleanthous, 2007) and is often accompanied by claims about the growing environmental and social concerns of luxury consumers who are willing to support such options (Bendell & Kleanthous, 2007; Poblete, 2008). But as Dolan (2002) notes, the definitions of, and relationships between consumption and sustainability are vague and confusing with arguments made that often depend upon untested assumptions about consumers and their motives. This paper will critically examine this concept of sustainable luxury in the context of accommodation with a particular emphasis on consumer perspectives.

Tourism and Luxury

Tourism and luxury have always been linked. With a few exceptions, until the advent of mass tourism in the twentieth century, the bulk of leisure tourism was about travel by a very small affluent, educated elite social class (Towner & Wall, 1991). In the modern era many destinations have become popular for mass tourism after being initially a place of interest to elites looking for fashionable luxury experiences. This destination development pathway often results from a combination of two forces. The first force is the desire by tourists to seek luxury experiences as a temporary escape from their every day realities (Low, 2010).

A stay in a luxury resort or hotel provides an opportunity to take on a different persona and lifestyle, albeit temporarily. The second force is the ability to build and run luxury tourism facilities at much cheaper prices in lesser developed locations. The relationship between tourism and luxury is especially complicated in more remote and peripheral destinations. Eco-tourism has become a popular option for government tourism policies with a resulting focus on developing small scale tourism based around wildlife and pristine natural environments. But the kinds of tourist able to afford both the time and money to access this type of tourism are often more affluent and accustomed to high levels of luxury. Thus the majority of more remote

eco and wilderness lodges and resorts in places like Africa, Australia and Central and South America are luxury experiences (Ryan & Stewart, 2009).

Despite being focussed on ecotourism, luxury consumer demands for facilities such as spas and pools, infrastructure such as landing strips and the long haul travel to get to the resort can create large ecological footprints (Ellis, n.d.; Gössling et al., 2002; Ryan & Stewart, 2009). The question of the compatibility between luxury and sustainability is thus an important one for many tourism destinations.

Low (2010) argues that luxury tourism has not been given much attention in the academic tourism literature, but has been a major topic in consumer behaviour and marketing research. Reviews by Low (2010) and Husic and Cicic (2009) describe a number of different models or frameworks to define and describe luxury goods, brands and services. There exists, however, considerable consensus amongst these models and frameworks and luxury is consistently associated with the following features: high price; iconic brands; conspicuous consumption; perceived high quality and/or superior performance; uniqueness and scarcity; exclusivity and prestige; membership of elite classes or groups; and a desire for status, social reputation and to impress others (Husic & Cicic, 2009; Low, 2010, Blevis et al., 2007).

There is also agreement in this literature that luxury consumption is changing. The rise of more affluent middle class consumers in a number of countries has resulted in what has been called a 'democratization of luxury', with larger numbers of consumers buying luxury goods and services (Blevis et al., 2007). This has resulted in two types or levels of luxury (Low, 2010). The first level is the most expensive and exclusive and can be seen as traditional luxury associated with exclusivity, superiority and elite group membership. The second level is less expensive, more widely available and driven by a desire for social status through conspicuous consumption (Husic & Cicic, 2009). The term 'new luxury' has been coined to describe this trend, but it has been used by different authors to describe either one of these levels. Some apply it to the first level and argue that elite consumers are now more concerned about experience, authenticity and rarity of goods and service than conspicuous consumption (Poblete, 2008). Others apply the term to describe the second level of more widespread luxury consumption (Blevis et al., 2007; Rytilahti, 2008).

1.2   Luxury and Sustainability

Confusion about the motives of luxury consumers reflects conflicting views about the links between luxury and sustainability. For many there is a fundamental conflict between luxury consumption and sustainability. Opponents to the idea of sustainable luxury argue that consumption driven by anything other than meeting basic needs is the core force behind the environmental and social problems that have prompted the need for sustainable development (DeWeese-Boyd & DeWeese-Boyd, 2007; Robins, 1999; Blevis et al., 2007). In this case, making the production and presentation of luxury goods more environmentally friendly and socially responsible does not address the long term systemic issues. It is also argued that luxury is inherently rooted in social inequality and thus by nearly all definitions of sustainability, luxury cannot be sustainable (Blevis et al., 2007; DeWeese-Boyd & DeWeese-Boyd, 2007).

In a similar argument, Ryan & Stewart (2009) note that much of the discussion in tourism has been about improving the sustainability performance of suppliers rather than changing the values and behaviours of the tourists themselves. Robins (1999) believes that little will change until we explicitly address and change consumer behaviour and make people responsible for sustainability. This seems potentially problematic for luxury tourist accommodation where many of the arguments for 'sustainable luxury' also assume that new practices and technologies mean that consumers can continue to have a luxurious experience without having to compromise on their expectations of comfort and service (Mastrelli, 2007). This is the claim made in the Soneva definition of 'intelligent luxury'.

On the other hand it can be proposed that improvement in the environmental and social performance of any product or service means better outcomes in practice. Proponents of sustainable luxury argue that a shift towards luxury motivated by authenticity and experience rather than conspicuous consumption means that luxury can be more sustainable. A report for the World Wildlife Fund (Bendell & Kleanthous, 2007) argues that luxury brands can improve their ecological and social sustainability considerably by changing a number of design, production and management approaches. This report suggests that the investment required to improve sustainability performance will be repaid because of increasing demand from luxury consumers for more sustainable options.

The evidence presented for this demand is however anecdotal and not compelling. Similar arguments have been made in the tourist accommodation literature for luxury products with claims that hotels and resorts should not be afraid to adopt more environmentally and socially responsible practices because consumers are demanding them (Poblete, 2008; Mastrelli, 2007). Again the evidence to support such claims is limited and where systematic analyses are published the evidence tends to suggest that few luxury consumers seem to be concerned about environmental and/social issues (Myers, 2003; Hanks et al., 2008; Ellis, n.d.).

This debate about sustainable luxury reflects differences in definitions of sustainability, beliefs about the action needed to address sustainability, and assumptions about the motivations of consumers. The proponents of 'sustainable' and 'Intelligent' luxury argue that it is possible to produce and offer luxury goods and services in ways that are more sustainable. In these discussions luxury is defined more by scarcity, experience and authenticity and reflects a desire by consumers to have quality experiences that benefit others. These consumers are less interested in conspicuous consumption, tangibles, comfort and service than in authentic experiences. However, the opponents of sustainable luxury believe that those seeking luxury tourism experiences are more focussed on service quality and tangibles and are unlikely to be concerned about their impacts or unwilling to change their broader consumption patterns. To date there has been little research or evidence presented about consumer perspectives on these issues. A number of questions can be identified for research:

- Are those who seek and have luxury experiences aware of or seeking more sustainable options?

- What is the trade-off for consumers between service and authenticity in the luxury tourism experience?

- What do tourists themselves associate with luxury?

This paper particularly seeks to answer this last question and represents a preliminary attempt to explore possible consumer perspectives on the connections between luxury, experience, and consumer evaluations.

2. METHODOLOGY

The approach taken in this preliminary study was qualitative and emic. The data source used consisted of user generated content (UGC). UGC has been likened to more traditional Word of Mouth. According to Agichtein, Gabrilovich, & Zha (2009), the unprecedented amounts of information available on user generated content sites creates opportunities for new knowledge-rich approaches to information access and analysis. These approaches are potentially more powerful than conventional word-based methods and can be explored using a range of qualitative data analysis techniques. When considering travel products, it quickly becomes evident that accommodation reviews are the most prominent category of UGC.

The data used for this study was collected from accommodation reviews posted by travellers on a popular online travel review site. These reviews were identified by searching for reviews containing the keywords 'sustainable', 'sustainability', 'environmental', 'environmentally', 'ecotourism', 'eco lodge' and 'safari lodge'. This search identified over 8,000 accommodation reviews. The reviews used for this analysis were a subset of the larger dataset and were identified by conducting a second search to identify only reviews containing the words 'luxury', 'luxurious', 'extravagant', 'extravagance', 'sumptuous', 'indulgent', 'indulgence', 'sumptuous' and 'opulent'. These terms were all identified as synonyms of the word 'luxury' using an English thesaurus and generated a final data set consisting of 776 reviews representing a 282,888 word corpus.

Thus luxury was associated with environmental/sustainable in approximately 10% of the reviews initially identified. Of these 776 reviews, 393 (50.6 per cent) reviews were for hotels, 273 (35.2 per cent) for specialty lodging and 110 for bed and breakfast/inns (B&Bs) (14.2 per cent). The reviews included properties scattered around the world but the top five destinations were South Africa (15.5 per cent), the USA (12.1 per cent), the United Kingdom (7.0 per cent), Costa Rica (6.4 per cent) and Kenya (6.4 per cent). Figure 1 provides a more comprehensive overview of the number of reviews captured by country.

FIGURE 1.   Number of Reviews per Country (bubbles are proportional, with the largest bubble representing 120 reviews)

Table 1 provides a profile of the reviewers, although it should be noted that categorical data was not available for many of the reviews. Most reviewers did not provide their age group but the limited data that is available suggests that a majority of reviewers are aged between 25 and 49. Reviewers mainly travelled for leisure purposes and were most likely to be travelling with their partner. Many reviewers were active contributors and had posted more than one online review (including reviews not captured by the dataset). Most of the reviews were positive, with ratings of 4 (Very Good) or 5 (Excellent). The reviews were analysed and compared using an innovative semantic content analysis technique.

Krippendorff (2004) describes content analysis as a research technique for breaking text down into categories based on explicit rules of coding. According to Rooney, et al. (2009), recent advances in computer assisted qualitative analysis have resulted in new approaches to concept and semantic mapping, presenting new analytical possibilities for understanding the cognitive and semantic frameworks of qualitative data. A major advantage of a computer assisted approach is that it provides an objective, comprehensive and quantitatively derived framework in which qualitative analysis is more effectively facilitated (Scott & Smith, 2005; Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

This is particularly useful for large qualitative datasets. The computer assisted content analysis technique used in this paper includes both conceptual and relational content analysis. The conceptual analysis identified the presence and frequency of concepts on the reviews whereas the relational analysis measured and identified how the concepts were related to each other. An analysis package known as *Leximancer* was used for this analysis.

The use of Leximancer has become more prevalent in the social sciences in recent years. It has been used in tourism research to examine destination branding (Kattiyapornpong & Nel, 2009; Marzano & Scott, 2006; Pitt, Campbell, Berthon, Nel, & Loria, 2008; Tkaczynski & Rundle-Thiele, 2010), event image (Scott & Smith, 2005), destination management plans (Baggio & Marzano, 2007).

TABLE 1:   Profile of Reviewers

Characteristics	No.	Percentage	Characteristics	No.	Percentage
Age groups (n=180)			*Year of Stay (n=419)*		
18-24	5	2.8%	2004	1	0.2%
25-34	73	40.6%	2005	13	3.1%
35-49	67	37.2%	2006	27	6.4%
50-64	28	15.6%	2007	26	6.2%
65+	7	3.9%	*2008*	37	8.8%
			2009	187	44.6%
No. of contributions (n=642)			2010*	128	30.5%
1 review	143	22.3%			
2-5 reviews	149	23.2%	*Trip Purpose (n=373)*		
6-20 reviews	187	29.1%	Leisure	310	83.1%
21-40 reviews	71	11.1%	Business	24	6.4%
More than 40 reviews	92	14.3%	Other	39	10.5%
Travel Party (n=559)			*Ratings (n=775; mean=4.5)*		
Spouse/Partner	323	57.8%	5 Excellent	534	68.9%
Family	106	19.0%	4 Very Good	154	19.9%
Friends	59	10.6%	3 Average	38	4.9%
Solo Traveler	27	4.8%	2 Poor	35	4.5%
Large Group/Tour	5	0.9%	1 Terrible	14	1.8%
Other	39	7.0%			

* Data only includes first half of 2010.

An initial exploratory analysis was conducted to see what concepts were automatically generated without intervention by Leximancer. A 'concept' consists of sets of words that are used in close proximity to each other in the same review. Leximancer identifies these concepts by using word occurrence and co-

occurrence frequency to produce a word co-occurrence matrix. The strength of relationships between concepts is measured by the number of direct links between concepts (Rooney, et al., 2009). The words that make up each concept are placed in a 'thesaurus' that contains the set of associated words and weightings, which indicate the words' relative importance in the concept generation (Angus-Leppan, et al., 2010). Leximancer then compares one concept's thesaurus with those of other concepts.

This analysis assesses indirect links between concepts to identify significant semantic relationships. The approach used by Leximancer is more potent than a simple frequency count of the most commonly occurring words because the software is able to distinguish between words and concepts, with concepts being the most semantically significant words (Rooney, et al., 2009). In this analysis, each block of text was also 'tagged' to indicate whether the review was for a Hotel, B&B / Inn or Specialty Lodging. The frequency of co-occurring concepts is measured, weighted and clustered to produce a map of concepts. The concept map also groups similar concepts together into themes. It was clear from the exploratory analysis that some intervention was required to fine-tune the major concepts and themes. This included deleting words or concepts from analysis that were not meaningful (e.g. stay, everything, time) or were too generic (e.g. hotel, resort, lodge). Word variants (e.g. luxury, luxurious) were automatically grouped together.

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis was conducted in two main stages with the first looking at all the reviews together to get an overview of the data. This first step suggested that different patterns might exist for the different accommodation categories and so in the second step the analyses were conducted separately for two accommodation groups: (1) hotels and (2) specialty lodging and B&Bs/inns combined. The latter two were combined because of their proximity in the overall concept map and because an inspection of the reviews suggested considerable overlap in the type of accommodation included in these two categories. While specialty tended to include safari, wildlife and wilderness lodges, a number of these types of accommodation were also included in the B&Bs/inns category. This combined group was labelled 'specialist lodging' and was made up of smaller establishment offering specialised experiences and including safari and game lodges, eco-lodges, specialist resorts and traditional bed and breakfast options. Leximancer generates both concept maps and lists of related words. Table 2 provides the list of related

words for 'luxury' for all three analyses. In this table the likelihood score is a calculation of the probability of the terms co-occurring. Across all three analyses luxury is most commonly identified by tourists as associated with comfort and the quality of the tangible services element such as beds, baths, rooms, showers, and the property itself. The following quotes illustrate these patterns:

- *The interior was luxurious as well as clean and comfortable. The swimming pool is a real plus.*

- *Still, this place is quaint but not the most comfortable and certainly not for those seeking a luxurious resort with all sorts of creature comforts. It is a great place for those who would like to see more sustainable tourism.*

- *It's a tented camp, with 12 tents. Each tent is v luxurious, with bath, shower, air con and balcony overlooking the river.*

- *However huts really does not do them justice, ours had heated floor, aircon, indoor bath and outdoor shower. The whole ambiance was a great combination of luxury and with a feel of the bush.*

- *The interior definitely has a 'barefoot luxury' feel about it, very rustic but very comfortable. The bath was the biggest I have ever seen and there was a huge indoor shower and a large outdoor shower.*

Luxury is also associated with experience and the location of that experience. Some tourists also made a link between luxury and environmental practices and issues, but this was substantially less common than the more traditional links between luxury and service. These lists provide an initial view of the associations with luxury, but the concept maps provide more detail on how these terms are connected.

TABLE 2: Related concepts list for 'luxury' (Top 20 Related Concepts)

All Reviews			Hotels			Specialty Lodging & B&Bs/Inns		
Related	*Count*	*Likelihood*	*Related*	*Count*	*Likelihood*	*Related*	*Count*	*Likelihood*
comfortable	88	29%	comfortable	41	26%	comfortable	47	33%
experience	78	20%	property	16	22%	location	28	28%
location	53	20%	experience	33	17%	shower	28	27%
shower	50	20%	shower	22	15%	service	28	27%
bed	68	18%	home	9	15%	perfect	21	24%
view	67	18%	view	32	15%	private	24	24%
bathroom	48	18%	location	25	15%	bathroom	22	23%
private	32	18%	bathroom	26	15%	hot	14	23%
place	107	17%	bed	33	14%	bed	35	23%
environmental	55	17%	environmental	33	14%	room	76	23%

perfect	32	17%	best	23	13%	experience	45	23%
beautiful	67	16%	clean	26	13%	environmental	22	22%
property	22	16%	place	43	13%	view	35	22%
room	182	15%	friendly	37	13%	place	64	21%
friendly	71	15%	room	106	12%	beautiful	41	21%
clean	39	15%	island	19	12%	friendly	34	20%
outside	22	14%	beautiful	26	12%	pool	18	20%
large	47	13%	area	28	12%	food	48	20%
best	39	13%	animals	9	12%	clean	13	19%
hot	22	13%	outside	12	11%	large	28	19%

Angus-Leppan, et al (2010) suggest that the concept maps generated by Leximancer should be interpreted according to five main elements and these are described in Table 3. In many ways the interpretation of the Leximancer maps is similar to that used for Multidimensional Scaling Analyses. Overall proximity and location give an indication of the strength of the connection between concepts. The maps can also include lines between concepts which indicate direct links.

TABLE 3:   Key Features of Leximancer Concept Maps

Key Features	Description
Themes	Concepts are clustered together and identified by themes. Themes are the highest level of abstraction generated by the analysis and provide a high-level summary of the data. Themes are indicated by the large open circles on the concept map.
Concept frequency	The concepts are shown as solid circles within themes accompanied by a label. The concept labels range in colour from black to grey with darker text indicating that a greater number of blocks of text have been coded against that concept.
Concept centrality	The size of the circle provides some indication of the centrality, or connectedness of each concept. The more connected a concept is with other concepts, the more central it is. Similarly, frequently occurring concepts tend to be positioned nearer to the centre of the map and less frequently occurring ones are positioned towards the periphery.
Contextual similarity	The proximity of concepts indicates the extent to which two concepts appear in similar conceptual contexts. Concepts that are adjacent to each other are frequently found in the same block of text and/or co-occur with each.
Categorical data	The concept map can also include information on different categories. These categorical tags are positioned around the edges of the map. Categorical tags are positioned closer to concepts with which they have strong associations.

Figure 2 provides the Leximancer concept map for the all 776 reviews combined. Looking at the five features described in Table 3 a number of patterns in the figure can be identified and highlighted. The main themes identified were 'Service', 'Activities', 'Trip', 'Experience', and the tangible features of 'Rooms'

and 'Beds', 'Luxury' and the evaluation 'Excellent' (which includes other descriptors such as nice, wonderful and fantastic). Although 'Experience' appears as its own theme supporting claims that experience is important to luxury tourism, it is on the periphery of the map reflecting limited links to other concepts and themes. Investigation of the concepts within 'Experience' also shows that it is limited to game or wildlife experiences.

Given that all of the reviews mentioned 'Luxury', the concept appears more central and has multiple links within the map. But the dominant and closest relationships are between 'Luxury' and the tangible elements associated with 'Beds' and 'Rooms' including bathroom facilities, outside areas and the accommodation property itself. 'Luxury' was also connected to the location, privacy and views and there is a strong and direct link between luxury and the 'Excellent' evaluations. When examining the placement of the different accommodation categories on the map, it is clear that 'Luxury' was also most closely associated with B&Bs while 'Experience' was the dominated by specialty forms of accommodation. 'Environmental' did not emerge as a theme and this map it is linked to the concept of 'Water'. It is important to remember that this sample was chosen because the accommodation reviewed was linked to both sustainability in some way and luxury. Despite this few tourists explicitly commented on environmental issues or practices and those that did made no link to luxury, to experience or to features beyond water. The following reviews provide typical examples:

- *They do ask to conserve water and recycle plastic, and to forego cleaning linens and only use biodegradable products … [but] they are not mindful of packing lunches in plastics, supplementing fruit with packaged store (non-local) goods and providing more reasonable transportation to and from the airport (I had a 12-person van to myself). They could also work towards more innovative apparatus such as composting toilets, solar heating/energy*

- *In an effort to be environmentally friendly there is a composting toilet located in an adjacent building. The crazy thing is that this building is fully plumbed and even has a bidet that wastes heaps of water!*

- *Even though it was very luxurious, the Inn and Spa are very environmentally conscious, and have their own water recycling system, so no water is wasted.*

For the tourists writing these reviews it appears that luxury tourism is seen in the more traditional fashion as associated with comfort, the quality of facilities and limited access to desirable locations. Positive evaluations of the accommodation are related to perceptions of luxury rather than experience.
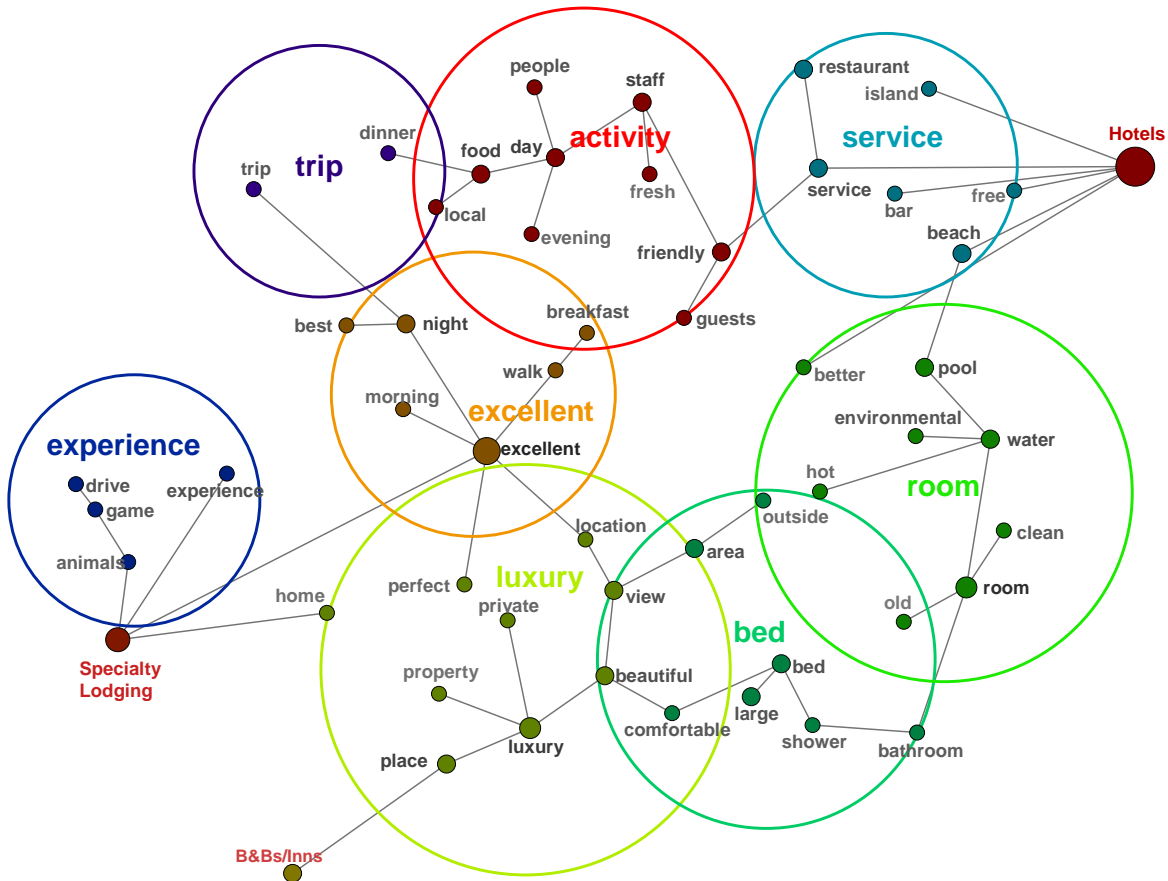

FIGURE 2: Overall Concept Map

As noted previously specialty lodging and B&Bs were close in the overall map and there was not a consistent coding of accommodation types between these two categories with both categories including small resorts, wilderness lodges, and upmarket B&Bs. So they were combined for the next analysis and Figure 3 provides the concept map for these two types of accommodation combined. The inclusions of the categorical tags allows for any continued differences between the two types to emerge and the concept map suggest that Specialty lodging, with dominance of safari and game lodges is most closely linked to the 'Animals' and to 'Tangible' or physical features of the lodges including pools and privacy. B&Bs are most closely linked to the themes of 'Environment', 'Friendly' and 'Luxury'. The main themes were 'Service', 'Tangibles', 'Luxury', 'Environmental' and the evaluation of 'Friendly'. Two patterns are of particular significance to the present discussion. Firstly, for tourists in specialist accommodation, 'Environmental' emerges as a theme. It is very closely linked to the B&Bs and it seems that tourists at this

type of accommodation explicitly consider environmental issues and comment on environmentally friendly or sustainable practices and concerns.

The following quotes illustrate these observations:

- *This eco-resort is totally off the grid (it uses renewable energy – solar, wind and hydro electric). We had total luxurious comfort with none of the guilt of using up natural resources.*

- *Stayed for one nigh … superb location and an exemplar for how hotels should be run. Simple and extremely comfortable with all creature comforts but as sustainable as possible, kind of 'green luxury'.*

- *A warning for those expecting luxury living - this is rustic with solar electricity running lights, no air conditioning, and rainwater providing showers.*

There is also a link between 'Environmental' and 'Luxury' in this concept map, although it is not strong. Again luxury is predominantly associated with comfort, and tangible element such as room, beds, baths, bars, and pools. Overall the pattern suggests that for some B&B style accommodation there is a possibility that guests will seek luxury and be aware of environmental issues. But for the lodges the experiences is still dominated by the game, the service and the tangibles provided.
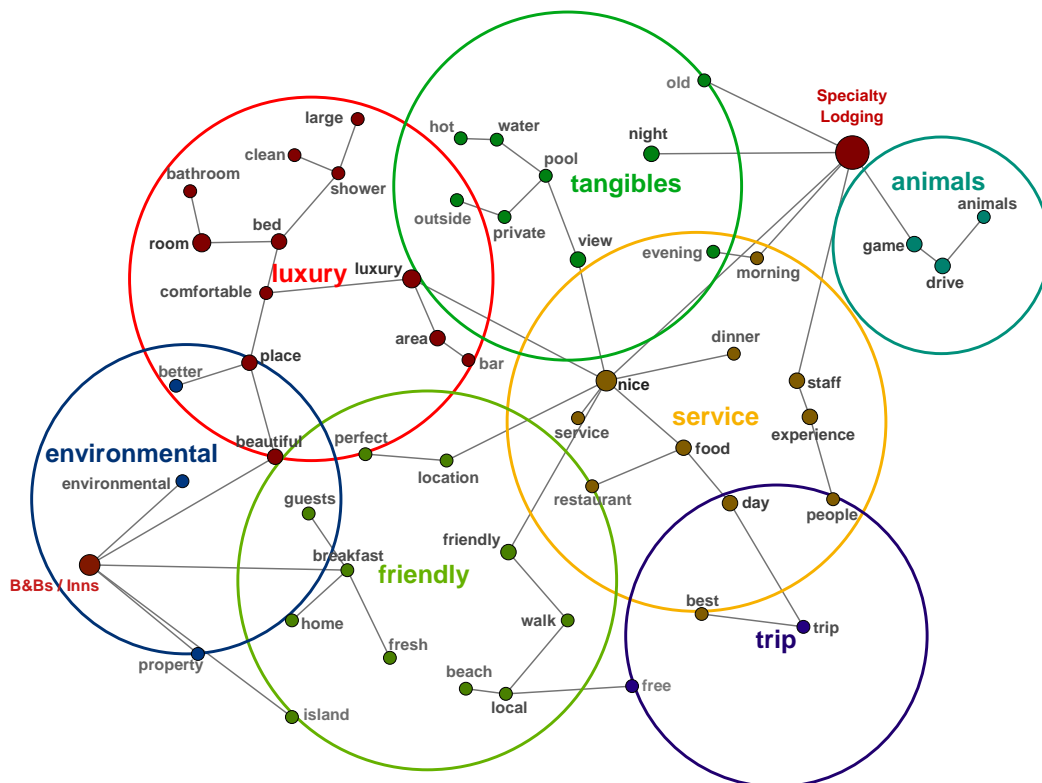

FIGURE 3: Specialist Accommodation Concept Map

Finally the category of hotels was examined and the resulting concept map is in set out in Figure 4. In this concept map the main themes are 'Service', 'Room', 'Staff', 'Restaurant', the evaluation of 'Friendly' and 'Luxury'. What is most interesting about this concept map is that 'Environmental' is located solely within the 'Luxury' theme.

The following quotes illustrate this relationship:

- *We stayed at Thala for four nights as part of our honeymoon travels. The resort manages that rare feat of being environmentally responsible as well as having all the luxury touches that make a holiday special.*

- *It was the perfect blend and showed me that being environmentally conscious does not mean going without luxury.*
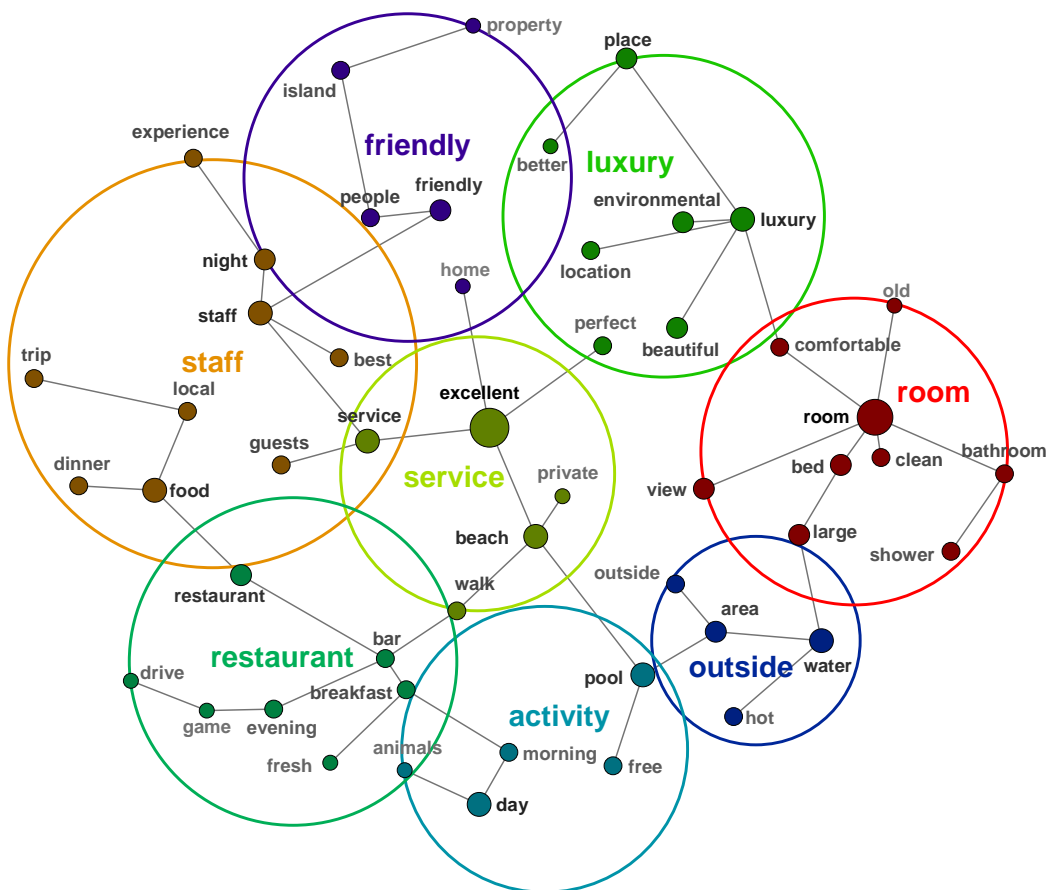

FIGURE 4: Hotel Concept Map

Luxury is directly linked to both the tangibles of associated with the 'Room', such as comfort, showers, beds and bathrooms, and to the idea of 'Friendly'. In some cases 'Friendly' describes the people and the

place, but in others it suggests that the accommodation is environmentally friendly as the following quotes illustrate:

- *The service is friendly and unobtrusive. Of note is the emphasis on environmental sustainability of the property.*

- *I agree with the other reviews, the service was good, reception was helpful in giving many delivery menus since I arrived late at night. Breakfast was fine, decent selection but everything was disposable (cups, plates, cutlery) which is not very environmentally friendly.*

This pattern is the most supportive of the idea of 'sustainable luxury' associated with consumer concern about environmental practices.

4. CONCLUSIONS: CONTRIBUTIONS TO DISCUSSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Before discussing the main conclusions and contributions to sustainable tourism it is important to note limitations to the analysis. A major issue identified by Agichtein, Castillo, Donato, Gionis, & Mishne (2008) for this type of analysis in general relates to the quality of user generated data. These data quality issues include punctuation and typos, syntactic and semantic complexity and grammaticality. These issues, if severe, have the potential to interfere with the semantic analysis and identification of themes and concepts. In order to avoid unintentionally changing the meaning and association between words in some reviews no attempt was made in this study to correct spelling or grammatical errors. However, proofing of the dataset indicated that most of the reviews used in this dataset were of a reasonable quality. There are also issues associated with counterfeit reviews that may affect the integrity of the data. While deceitful reviews can be difficult to detect (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009), recent analysis has suggested that only a small number of user generated reviews are likely to be faked (O'Connor, 2008). The travel website used as a data source for this study also uses software to identify abnormal reviews and employs staff trained in fraud detection to monitor fake reviews (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009).

In addition to the data quality issues the analysis is also limited by the type of information available about the accommodation reviewed. For example, it seems that the most expensive and exclusive accommodations, in terms of size and location, were associated with the category of Speciality Lodging and the least expensive and exclusive with the general category of Hotels but this classification was not

created by either the researchers or the tourists doing the reviews. A more detailed description and classification of the places reviewed would enable more detailed analyses to be conducted and this is the obvious next step for the study. Despite these limitations this exploratory qualitative analysis, based on the emic perspectives of tourists consuming luxury accommodation experiences connected to environmentally friendly or sustainable practices, does provide some insights into the relationship between luxury and sustainability. Firstly, at the broadest levels of analysis there is not much discussion by tourists about sustainability or environmental issues or practices. Possibly the reviewers included in this data took for granted the importance of sustainability in their choice of accommodation but scanning the reviews suggests this is unlikely.

More commonly it seems that the reviewers simply paid little attention to these issues. For some authors (Mastrelli, 2007) this may not be important and in fact supports the argument that accommodation suppliers can and should invest in sustainable management practices because they are unlikely to feature in the experiences of the tourists and cause problems with perceptions of service quality or satisfaction. On the other hand the finding does suggest that the inclusion of sustainable practices by suppliers is unlikely to have an impact on tourists beyond their holiday and not likely to have a positive impact on their sustainable practices in general which limits the contribution of these tourist activities to a broader sustainable development agenda (Robins, 1999).

Environmental issues were notably absent from the more remote and exclusive safari and wildlife destinations and given the significant ecological footprint often associated with travel to these places (Gossling et al., 2002), it is hard to argue that there is any cost benefit trade-off that favours sustainability for this type of tourism. The second major finding from this analysis is that perceived luxury dominates positive accommodation evaluations. The argument that experiences and environmental practices are emerging as key elements for consumer satisfaction is not supported here.

Luxury is still most directly, closely and commonly linked to levels of service, the quality of the tangible features of the accommodation and limited access to special locations. It does not appear to be moving in tourism towards any form of 'new luxury'. There is some limited evidence of the emergence of tourist

concerns about the environment and links between luxury and sustainable practices, especially for the B&B category. But overall these links appear to be the exception.

In summary, luxury tourism accommodation is for the most part connected with service quality, the provision of facilities and limited access to locations. It is most readily described as traditional luxury concerned with perceived quality, conspicuous consumption, exclusivity and social aspirations. Ironically the promotion of more eco experiences based on small scale, exclusive access to pristine environments may be inadvertently supporting a trend towards associating successful tourist experience with this traditional type of luxury. In turn this could increase consumer demand for some of these luxury features to be included in other types of accommodation which can generate a cycle in which tourist facilities are increasing rather than decreasing their ecological footprints. Even if individual resorts improve their sustainability performance the cumulative effect of increasing numbers of these resorts can still create problems for sustainable development.

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