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# Navigating the Experience-Technology-Sustainability Nexus

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## Tiivistelmä

Elämysten, teknologian ja kestäväen kehityksen rajapinta muokkaa taloudellisen arvon luontia, kuluttamista ja tuhoamista matkailualalla. Mökkiläisten teknologianäkemyksistä puettavaan teknologiaan, chatbotteihin ja dataekosysteemeihin, tämä Erikoisnumero pureutuu digitalisaation, kestäväen liiketoiminnan ja elämyksellisyyden ytimeen viiden artikkelin, yhden puheenvuoroartikkelin ja yhden kirja-arvostelun voimin. Toivotamme teille elämyksellisiä lukuhetkiä!!

**Avainsanat:** *Tutkimusyhteisöt, Matkailututkimus, Tieteellinen julkaiseminen*

## Abstract

The Experience-Technology-Sustainability Nexus reshapes how economic value is produced, consumed, and destroyed in tourism. From second-home owners' perspectives on technology to wearable technology, chatbots and tourism data ecosystems, this Special Issue tackles themes around digitalisation, sustainable business and experiences through five articles, one commentary and one book review. We wish you experience-rich, page-turning moments!

*Keywords:* *Research communities, Tourism research, Academic publishing*

## Navigating the Experience-Technology-Sustainability Nexus

The intertwined rise of the experience economy and what is increasingly framed as a transformation economy has fundamentally altered how value is created, staged, and contested in tourism. Experiences are no longer peripheral embellishments to tourism products and services. In many cases, they constitute the core promise of tourism destinations, platforms, and businesses that seek to design, choreograph, and monetise meaningful encounters. At the same time, tourism is confronted by urgent social and ecological limits. Climate commitments, labour shortages and wellbeing crises, demographic shifts, and infrastructure pressures demand that experiential value be rethought in relation to planetary boundaries and social justice, rather than designed in isolation from them.

Digitalisation sits at the centre of this reconfiguration. Artificial intelligence, sensor-based wearables, virtual platforms, and data-intensive smart destination systems mediate how tourists move, feel, and understand their own participation in tourism. They also shape how businesses imagine desirable futures, from cases on smart destinations to speculative concepts of seamless multimodal mobility. Yet, these techno-futures are never purely technical, but rather, socio-

technical imaginaries that crystallise values, trade-offs, and power relations.

This Special Issue on the Experience-Technology-Sustainability Nexus takes these entanglements seriously. Collectively, the five empirical articles, one commentary and one book review span multiple layers of the nexus.

The first study unpacks socio-technological value formation in virtual tourism experiences, setting the scene for possibilities digitalisation surfaces for rethinking tourism practices. The second article shifts the lens from a guest/user-centric view to that of the experience provider, examining how Finnish tourism experts conceptualise digitalisation and phygitality in the production of experiences. Building on these foundations, the third paper conceptualises the tourism mobility data ecosystem through a Digital Travel Assistant case, while the fourth article focuses on B2B motivations for gamified travel tours. The final two articles turn to the less visible sides of the nexus, analysing wearable technologies' potential for managing physically demanding tourism work and exploring Finnish cottage owners' shifting relationships with everyday technologies at the second home. At the end, a book review on the Routledge book (2025), *Transformative Hotels of the Future*, is presented as a potential avenue for the readers of this Special Issue to continue their exploration of the Experience-Technology-Sustainability Nexus.

Across the Special Issue, several cross-cutting themes emerge, and all contributions challenge simplified narratives of technological progress. For instance, virtual experiences and gamified tours are not automatically more sustainable or more transformative than conventional offerings. Their impacts depend on how practices are configured, how data is used, and whose values are prioritised in design decisions. Similarly, smart mobility visions remain aspirational if governance, regulation, and business models are not aligned with open ecosystems and inclusive access.

Experience-centred design also emerges as an under-realised ambition. While the articles on virtual experiences and on the tourism mobility ecosystem actively integrate user perspectives and affective dimensions, the expert interviews on digitalisation reveal a professional discourse still dominated by marketing, distribution, and technological efficiency, with limited attention to the experiential and value-laden consequences of technological choices. This disconnect suggests that design methods grounded in participatory approaches, speculative design, and socio-technical imaginaries could play a vital role in helping practitioners collectively rehearse desirable futures and understand the experiential implications of automation, personalisation, and datafication before they are locked into infrastructures.

Besides the digital, virtual layer, the Nexus is also deeply material and embodied. From wearable technology tracking tourism workers to improve wellbeing, to smartphones guiding travellers through hybrid physical-digital spaces, articles in the Special Issue illustrate that technology is felt in bodies and architectures, not just in interfaces. This calls for deeper engagement with sociomaterial approaches, affect theory, and phenomenology in future tourism research, especially when considering accessibility, sensory diversity, and inclusive experience design.

Finally, dimensions of sustainability appear continuously across the contributions. It is explicit in discussions of virtual experiences as low-carbon alternatives, in the ecosystemic framing of smart mobility, and in the wellbeing-focused analysis of tourism labour. It is more implicit in B2B

gamification and second-home owners' technology debates, surfacing in concerns about authenticity, place attachment, and long-term environmental impacts. This mirrors wider domain specific dynamics, where sustainability is sometimes central, sometimes peripheral, and sometimes invoked rhetorically without being structurally embedded.

Taken together, the contributions in this Special Issue invite tourism scholars, students, practitioners, and policymakers to treat the experience, technology, and sustainability nexus as a shared site of critical imagination and careful practice. If tourism is to remain socially legitimate and ecologically viable, digital systems, business models, and everyday routines will need to be designed not only for efficiency and spectacle, but also for solidarity, equity, and care. While the articles collated in this Special Issue do not settle that task, they offer grounded concepts, methods, and cases that can help us to rethink how experiences are produced, mediated, and governed in Finland and beyond. Our hope is that readers will take these ideas as prompts to experiment, to contest, and to co-create tourism futures that are not only smart and profitable, but also sustainable and meaningful.