

16

Conclusion

Elena Cavagnaro

It is difficult to write a conclusion to a book dedicated to sustainability in hospitality. In fact as long as the hospitality and tourism industry is not fully engaged in the transition towards sustainability, one cannot speak of a 'conclusion'. It is therefore more appropriate to remind ourselves here that sustainability requires a paradigm shift in the way we look at the economy; in the way we understand our responsibilities as professionals; and in the way we look at ourselves and others. Paradigms can be regarded as lens or viewpoints through which we look at the world. Therefore, paradigms are not a perfect representation of the world and may change if people perceive that another paradigm describes reality more accurately. In this case a paradigm shift occurs. When a paradigm shift happens people not only see the reality differently (because they look from a new paradigm or viewpoint) but will also act differently. A typical example of a paradigm shift can be found in astronomy. For centuries it was believed that the earth stood still at the centre of the solar system while the sun, the planets and all stars rotated around it. In the 16th century, first as an hypothesis to render the calculation of the planets' orbits more easily, then as a better representation of reality, the sun was considered as the focus around which our planet and its neighbours rotate. Even later, it was understood that the whole solar system is located in the periphery of the Milk Way galaxy and shares its movement through space. The transition from a 'business as usual', or mainstream, model to sustainability constitutes a paradigm shift. This shifts, as stated above, affects the way we think and act in our economy; our businesses and among ourselves.

I will explain this statement briefly starting with the mainstream paradigm on the economy. This paradigm states that the economy can grow forever because the natural environment is an endless source of raw materials and an unlimited sink for waste. In this view, if a resource becomes difficult to get or too costly to dig, technology will solve our problems by finding new materials that can substitute the old one. Technology will also help if waste becomes a problem, or pollution hits in.

The mainstream paradigm was seriously shaken when people, on Christmas Eve 1968, were confronted for the first time with an image of planet earth from