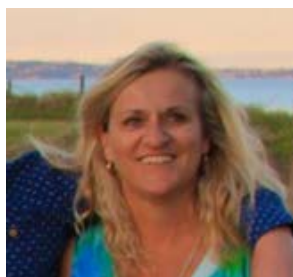


# Hospitality artisans and sustainability: Disrupting the status quo

---

**Maree Stansfield**

Maree is a postgraduate researcher at Auckland University of Technology. Her research passions are generating practical knowledge to aid the operationalisation of sustainability in hospitality environments, which resulted in the completion of her Master of International Hospitality Management thesis on hospitality artisans and sustainability.



This article reports the findings of a study identifying modern artisans as potential harbingers of the hospitality fraternity, claiming an authentic sustainability consciousness embedded in the hospitality business DNA is a key ingredient toward success. The ‘DNA’ finding helps identify the importance and necessity for hospitality operators to reflect on their reasoning for pursuing a sustainable business model over the conventional equivalent. Artisans influence significant societal, economic and political change. With so much concern around sustainability, and the revival of artisan production, hospitality artisans are likely contemporary versions of their historic namesakes.

History portrays artisans as entrepreneurial, status-quo disrupters, challengers of social problems, and positive influences on the well-being of society [1–3]. It is said that the radical artisan voice revolted against a dehumanised way of life, cared for its society and was instrumental in generating hope for a better future [3]. Similarly, modern-day artisans identified with their historic counterparts and described their potential contribution to societal change in a sustainability context as hospitality artisans. A research participant demonstrated this:

*And you look at where potential problems are in the food supply, you know if you want to create a dynamic food supply you need to encourage it. It's the small artisan producers which are on the cutting edge that influence the major cultural values of a country. (Research participant)*

Indeed, the success of a hospitality sustainable business model lies in an operator’s ability to understand, generate and embed a mind-set in the business that insists on environmental stewardship, social well-being and economic success. All eight artisans interviewed in this study demonstrated high levels of perseverance, innovation and like-minded network building when faced with obstacles that threatened their sustainable business model. Sustainability was deeply entrenched in what one referred to as his ‘backstory’, and in the ‘DNA’ of their businesses, and this appeared to fuel their determination when faced with challenges. Their spheres-of-influence (customers, regulatory bodies, industry and education providers) were at times perceived as road-blocks, hindering their sustainability-focused intentions. When this occurred, the artisans moved from being impacted stakeholders within a sphere-of-influence and, instead, turned into agents of change. They created, used and developed innovative mechanisms, internal policies, educational processes, and built tribes of enabling like-minded others to foster their sustainability practices.

The sustainability consciousness provides the fuel and resilience to navigate a new and progressive pathway to operational success. The artisans demonstrated an unrelenting drive to practice sustainable principles and found ways of overcoming any hurdles they came up against. The artisans, like their historic namesakes, were agents of change and the following research extract showcases the sustainability consciousness in action:

*I think the more you make something exciting and sustainable the norm that's how you can change the world. You don't change it by sitting back doing nothing and waiting for someone else to do it and sipping on your Coca-Cola hoping that some other person's gonna save the boat, when it's filling full of water. If you want to change the world you know you need to get off your arse and do it. (Research participant)*

This study sought to find practical solutions for hospitality operators considering the less-travelled road of sustainability. The artisans articulated why they were so intent on a sustainable business model, and this reasoning manifested as the sustainable DNA of their hospitality operation – the most important element enabling them to put this into action. This is important for operators because it illustrates the level of resilience and determination needed to embark on a less conventional business journey and to create, operate and maintain a successful and sustainable hospitality business. Most significantly, however, it suggests to operators that it may not be enough to know ‘how’ to operationalise sustainability in a practical sense. This study’s findings illustrated that a sustainable model demands so much more from an operator than the conventional equivalent. It must be recognised that it may not even be enough if the operator has an entrepreneurial mind-set. It is advisable that the operators reflect on ‘why’ they want to pursue a sustainable business model. The importance of an authentic sustainability consciousness is highlighted as a more favourable starting point from which to orientate the journey and realise success.

Forward thinking hospitality operators will choose to navigate a sustainability-focused road, currently a road less travelled. Primarily, at the root of change, is the progressive thinking hospitality operator, an artisan producer with a sustainable consciousness that manifests as the resilience and fuel to carve a new road.

More information about this study is in the master’s thesis document [4]. Pending examiners’ approval, the thesis can be accessed from AUT scholarly commons: <https://tuwhera.aut.ac.nz/open-theses>. Currently, a copy is available from the author.

### **Corresponding author**

Maree Stansfield can be contacted at [mareelouisestansfield@gmail.com](mailto:mareelouisestansfield@gmail.com)

### **References**

- (1) Chartist Poetry. *The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* Dec 4, 1841. British Library website. <http://bit.ly/2l7LLKv> (accessed Jun 15, 2018).
- (2) Howell, M. C. Fixing Movables: Gifts by Testament in Late Medieval Douai. *Past & Present* 1996, 150(1), 3–45. <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/150.1.3>

(3) Lucie-Smith, E. *The Story of Craft: The Craftsman's Role in Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981.

(4) Stansfield, M. L. Exploring How Hospitality Artisans Operationalise Sustainability: "How Do They Do It?"; Master's Thesis, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, 2016.