LUISS

Department of Business and Management

Master's Degree in International Management

Chair of Tourism Management

Sustainable Strategies performed by Hotel Firms to limit their Environmental Impact and their Aftereffects

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Academic Year 2022-2023

Abstract

Sustainability is an essential element to be taken into consideration as part of organizations' strategies, objectives and decision making. In this sense, hotel firms are not an exception. The impact of hotel firms' actions on the environment has to be managed and assessed carefully and special actions have been reported to be accomplished in the last years by different important hotel groups. This research will firstly explore the tourism industry as a whole to understand its current situation from an environmental perspective. In the literature review, Corporate Social Responsibility and its suggested effects will be examined to later continue with the opportunities that it may bring in terms of business and marketing. To have a better understanding of the proposed research question, CSR, Stakeholder and Marketing Theory will be approached. Five case studies have been chosen to be analysed in order to evaluate the effects of sustainable measures taken nowadays in the tourism industry. A review of 5 case studies will be carried out in search of the impact of the sustainable measures taken by different hotel firms on the environment and examine if this may generate benefits in terms of competitive advantage. The main objective of the selected study cases' analysis is to evaluate and discuss which are the possible costs and benefits that hotel organizations' sustainable practices bring along, doing so with the support of key performance indicators. To conclude, the findings about the relation between the theories previously presented and the study cases analysis' results will be proposed as the current sustainable strategic trends used by the studied organizations that are considered as of managerial relevance and can be used as examples to continue implementing policies that contribute to a sustainable and responsible tourism management.

Research Question

How do implementing sustainable strategies benefit hotel firms in terms of competitive advantage?

Summary

In the present work, a qualitative study will be carried out in which five different case studies will be analyzed in relation to sustainability in the hotel sector. Primarily, the aim is to understand the tourism's current situation in relation to sustainability, as well as the factors and pursued effects that lead a company in the sector to follow the objectives of corporate social responsibility. Subsequently, it seeks to study the impact of the adoption and implementation of sustainable measures, strategies and standards by hotel organizations and their effects on environmental issues and within the organization itself. The selected case studies will be examined in order to comprehend from a practical perspective how these policies and activities used by organizations (e.g. Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, Damaì Lovina Villas) influence and impact on environmental issues, recognize who are the affected stakeholders and identify economic and marketing benefits. At the same time, this work contributes to the tourism management literature since it will be possible to have a better knowledge of the ongoing sustainable trends and current measures used by hotel firms and help other managers in the sector to implement them in their organizations.

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1. Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction to Tourism and Sustainability

1.1.1 Introduction

Sustainability is a crucial issue that must be taken into consideration by any company around the world. In 1987, the United Nations defined it as "the meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Since then, as the hype of sustainability grows, governments from around the world, the media and consumers' put pressure upon organizations in order for them to start adopting and implementing sustainable policies and measures have grown too. They have been pushed to follow certain standards that help counter the negative impact their daily practices trigger on the environment and the community they operate within. By the late 90's and the beginning of the 21st century, corporate sustainability efforts have evolved into a complex and disciplined business imperative focused on customer and stakeholder requirements (Ernest & Young, 2012). Business owners look forward into developing sustainable plans and programs on this matter and also because there is an increasing pressure on behalf of the government and media to regulate environmental and social issues (Jones et al., 2013).

Tourism industry is not the exception when speaking about environmental impact. The United Nations Environment Program indicates that tourism mainly leads the overuse of water, energy, land and materials such as for instance, fossil fuels and minerals, bringing with it a worrying loss of resources and biodiversity, an increase in greenhouse gas emissions and a huge solid waste disposal problem. Therefore, a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry is required. According to the UN Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organization, sustainability in tourism refers to "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). The UNWTO encourages relevant stakeholders involved in the industry such as hospitality corporations, like hotels, to be socially responsible corporations and adapt their policies and practices in order to counter the negative impact they

have towards the environment and the community they operate within and bring instead economic, social and environmental value to it. This is actually called; Corporate Social Responsibility.

Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility, also referred as CSR, are in fact two main concepts that are directly related. Companies that commit to CSR standards look forward into adapting their operations and taking corporate decisions that help enhance society. A very familiar term with CSR and Sustainability is Corporate Sustainability.

A large number of companies look forward into publicly announcing their commitment into sustainable development and policies, in order to differentiate themselves from competitors in the marketplace (Jones et al., 2013). Hotel companies are not the exception. As they see this as an opportunity to enhance their reputation while indeed helping society, the environment and the economy. Hotel company managers are in the constant search of something that may give them competitive advantage while implementing the sustainable measures that they suffer pressure of. and in this context it can be said that the hotel industry is in the midst of a sustainable awakening (Prarie, 2012).

1.1.2 History of Tourism

Tourism has evolved deeply throughout the years and therefore changed considerably in order to be appraised as the important economic activity it is today. Nowadays, globalization has definitely had an impact on it, since it has progressively allowed tourists, to access to foreign knowledge in an easier way and therefore facilitated their mobility around the world. It has also enhanced international competition, having the rise of emerging market firms such as hotels and new forms of accommodation and holiday getaways that are fully dependent on new technologies. But to have a better comprehension of what tourism is, it is important to understand where does it come from, in other words, its background and which were the early forms of travel that led to what tourism is today and how does globalization has reshaped it since the 1960s.

Globalization is referred to as a complex web of social processes that intensify and expand worldwide economic, cultural, political and technological exchanges and connections (Campbell,

MacKinnon, & Stevens, 2011). As previously mentioned, tourism is quite related to globalization as it is an international phenomenon that has a direct effect on the world's economy. Prior to the pandemic, Travel & Tourism (including its direct, indirect and induced impacts) accounted for 1 in 4 of all new jobs created across the world, 10.3% of all jobs (333 million), and 10.3% of global GDP (US$9.6 trillion). Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US$1.8 trillion in 2019 (6.8% of total exports) (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019).

Hence, being such as essential part of the global economy, tourism has been studied to a greater extent since the 1960's. It is in fact a multi-disciplinary bundle of academic approaches, for instance, the sciences of economy, geography, psychology, architecture, ecology, sociology, political science and even medicine (Krippendorf et al., 1987). Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, it is crucial to raise the importance of history in the comprehension of what tourism is today and the development it has had along the way. Even if it is commonly thought that tourism is a modern phenomenon, older forms of travel have to be taken into account to understand and contextualize the evolution of tourism and why it has reached the level of significance it has to this day.

Early Forms of Tourism

To trace the development of tourism to the present day, there are two terms that have existed since the ancient world that have to be studied: luxury and education. These were the two main reasons that encouraged early forms of travel. There are many examples than can be mentioned indeed. From the pleasure journeys made by the pharaohs in Egypt, to the Greeks travelling to Delphi to question the Oracle (Ludwig, 1990). Romans also had their own way of travelling, as a matter of fact, they had holidays from time to time and due to their advanced infrastructure and road networks, private travel started being common for wealthy travelers who were looking for pleasure and relaxation, as they even had summer and bathing holidays (Spode, 1995).

Educational Journeys

By the twelfth century, educational journeys were the trend. Errant scholars pursued trips to the most famous academic institutions of that period, e.g. France, (Paris, Montpellier), England (Oxford), and Italy (Bologna) (Knoll, 2006). These scholars were mainly motivated by the desire to experience the world and learn more along the way. These kind of trips became essential for the education system of that time, and even now it can be seen that these forms of travel still exist and intercultural exchange academic programs, where groups of students travel to other universities to enhance their education. There were also the so called "journeymen" which were mainly craftsmen who traveled to train themselves and mature while travelling, get to fully experience the world and upgrade their crafts skills and go back to their towns as accomplished men (Spode, 1993).

The Grand Tour

Several historians trace the origin of tourism as we know it today, marking the 17th century as a starting point. This is because young European nobles and aristocrats from the time, used to make a journey that was called the Grand Tour. The Grand Tour was a pioneer form of modern tourism. In a broad sense, it was a trip around Europe taking place in countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Greece. It was a well structured and planned to detail journey that lasted around three years. The main goal or purpose of the trip was to enhance the individual's education and mark the beginning of their maturity by obtaining skills and knowledge of social importance and soaking up history, art and cultural heritage. The travelers learned appropriate etiquette and social norms and manners, politics, art, culture and history from the destinations (Opaschowski, 1996). It was considered a perfect way to be educated and the trend even ended up expanding throughout the wealthy families in America by the 18th century (Périz, 2020). As it can be seen, this kind of traveling became very popular and terms like leisure and pleasure began to be key parts of them. In fact, amusement and enjoyment were also important elements who were looked after along with the educational purposes (Hachtmann, 2007).

Italy and France were two of the most popular destinations where the trips took place. Not far away from the actual situation as France recorded the highest volume of inbound travelers

worldwide in 2021 (Statista, 2022). It is safe to say that Italy was the favorite place to visit too. Thanks to its heritage and ancient Roman sites such as the Colosseum, the British aristocrat and noble travelers, chose Italy as the highpoint of the trip. According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics, the current situation is very similar, as Italy welcomes 65 million tourists per year on average (ISTAT, 2019).

Stepping into the 18th century, characterized by the emergence of the Industrial Revolution, a major economic, social and technological transformation around the world arose. Following the educational journeys' boom, new trends and ways of travelling started to take place, as simultaneously developments in transport were also a key, which brought better comfort and improvements in freight and passenger transportation, from which travelling by train was the most popular, specially in Europe where the railway networks were really well connected among different countries. Thus, the appearance of leisure and new forms of travel started to take place (Périz, 2020). Coach journeys, countryside, cities, natural sites and cultural and art explorations began to acquire popularity. The upper class was not the only one making these kind of journeys, but as the appearance of new social classes took place, the so called middle class as well was in search of education and art and therefore developed new ways of travelling. It is important to mention that the majority of these middle class travelers apart from the search of education and art, were also looking forward upon the gathering of information and professional or economic interests, to learn more about industry, trade, agriculture and above all technology trends of that time and contribute to the progress of innovation and industrialization of that period in history (Brilli, 1997).

First steps into Modern Tourism

In the 19th century was where in fact the major foundations of modern tourism occurred. It marks a starting point until 1915 (Spode, 1993). This era was witness of the introduction of mass tourism that establishes the popularization of leisure tourism. (Leibetseder, 2004) In this period of time, several and important changes in the progress of industrialization, urbanization, enhancement in infrastructure and transportation, as well as social and labor rights and more market opportunities were evident due to a so called "revolutionary development" that had just materialized after the Industrial Revolution. Mobility of tourists was easier and consequently few day stay trips became

popular. The first travel agencies were also created. Thomas Cook & Son was the first one in the market, whose mission was to offer excursions and holidays for groups, with even transport, accommodation and food tickets included, thus being able to have lower costs (Périz, 2020). As a matter of fact, Thomas Cook is extensively recognized for his pioneering role in mass tourism, as he was an inspiration for other entrepreneurs who invested in the opening of other travel agencies around the globe (Spode, 1993).

Railway transportation was the most popular way of travelling and was a great promoter of the first forms of tourism. However, steam navigation was also a trend, which was born in Scotland in 1812 and rapidly expanded throughout Europe. In addition, this two main means of transport of the time, influenced and encourage this brand new named tourists to write, so travel literature had a hype and also many novels, guidebooks were written and published on this topic, being the first promoters of tourism (Prahl et al., 1979). Rail transportation is therefore considered a big key factor on the appearance of modern mass tourism. It was until 1860s that it was well noticed travelling had become a popular form of movement and a sort of response to the need of relaxation among society (Hachtmann, 2007).

Tourism in the 20th century

In the first half of the 20th century, between 1915 and 1945, the development of tourism industry continued to grow thanks to the mass production of buses and cars, which is considered a period of growth. Coastal tourism began to gain popularity as the development of famous locations, coastal resorts and beaches took place. Exclusivity began to drop and thanks to investments in entertainment and distraction offerings, accessibility increased (Schivelbusch, 1989). But this type of relaxation was still limited to only some members of society as high and middle class, and most European countries still lacked holiday rights by 1900. It was only after the First World War that this scenario started to change and laws on workers' holidays began to exist (Hachtmann, 2007).

Since the late 1800s, "Summer retreat" was an innovative way of holidaying that include middle-class families and children who went to relax to the seaside or the countryside (Prein, 2003). It was after the First War, that employees and workers with low incomes were able to enjoy the summer retreat's offer and had a simple, healthy economical holiday (Kaschuba, 1991).

After World War II, the Mediterranean coast quickly grew in popularity and improvements in air transport (charter flights) were seen. (Périz, 2020). During the post-war period, a growth in social welfare, high technological progress and competition level, and the creation of new destinations and ways of travelling took place (Prein, 2003). This led to a boom in tourism, having as an effect; tourism being an important branch of the global economy for the first time (Prahl, 1979).

The peak of European tourism was in the 1960s as the market economy grew shaped by the nature of competition. Therefore, cheaper offers, trips abroad, journeys by car and charter flights were the trend, driving into the direction of mass tourism (Hachtmann, 2007). During the 1970s, mainly due to the energy crisis, leading to lower costs and prices, tourism suffered a recession, that led to even lower costs. That is when it was evident mass tourism emerged. Travelling went from being something only for an exclusive group to become a leisure activity within the reach of many and foreign tourism started dominating the market (Périz, 2020). Subsequently, hotel companies started progressively internationalizing themselves, as well as travel agencies and airlines.

Tourism Today

Today, the tourism industry has developed into one of the great economic drivers in many countries around the globe. It even forms part of the international political agenda and international agencies and organizations have been created on its behalf, such as The World Tourism Organization. The WTO is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. UNWTO offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide (UNWTO, 2023). It is important to say that tourism not only has an impact on the economy, but on social structures, culture, environment, heritage and lifestyle of the destinations that are being visited too. Nevertheless, the increase in touristic traffic around the world has indicated that since 1990, the impact on the environment has become higher. Therefore, the challenge now is to provide solutions by developing a sustainable tourism awareness that is respectful with the environment and the local way of living of society (Périz, 2020).

1.1.3 Hotel Industry and Sustainability

Since the 1980s there has been a growing interest in the ethical standards of businesses. Sustainability indeed, fits very well into this concept. Sustainable development is a form of social and economic development that involves the integration of political, social and economic efforts along with the maintenance of an environmental balance in order to assure the permanence of environmental processes that serve to meet the basic needs of current and future generations (Environmental Protection Law, 2001). Sustainable development requires collaboration with the local community and the aim of solving real social issues working hand in hand with Corporate Social Responsibility (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2018) which will be addressed in the upcoming chapter.

Companies are every time more encouraged to take their responsibility in means of environmental and sustainability matters. Tourism industry is not the exception, and this takes into consideration important stakeholders such as hotel companies. Media, government and consumers have put a lot of pressure on this concern, and therefore, companies have increased their interest on sustainable development and implemented policies that are friendlier to the environment (Kapera, 2018). Currently, after several studies, it is known that 60% of hotel guests consider that hotel chains should pursue ecological measures (Kapera et al., 2017). In fact, this may bring to the hotel competitive advantage (Hendel, 2016). This is the reason why, major hotel companies from the industry are now highlighting their continuous participation in sustainable development and adapting these strategies to their business strategy. Unfortunately, this is still a big concern for the players of the industry, due to the fact that very often tourists are not willing to change their behavior and adapt to the new sustainable practices established by hotels e.g. when travelling they may prefer to maintain their comfort regardless of the impact this may cause on the environment. (Kowalczyk, 2010).

In the hotel industry, leading global chains have created and are willing to engage even more on sustainable development programs, sometimes because of the benefits they provide for their business goals. These large players tend to publicly deliver information about their actions in terms of social responsibility and sustainable achievements, bringing with them positive results in respect of business matters (Jones et al., 2016). These large hotel chains are normally forced to perform activities in line with the principles of sustainable development adopted by the central office. The

execution of these strategies are key elements in their marketing strategies too (Sztorc, 2017). It is seen that smaller hotels, by not having the capacity of developing these great sustainable programs, are less likely to adopt sustainable measures that actually have an impact on the environment and the community (Jones, 2016).

1.2 Tourism Industry Analysis

1.2.1 Tourism and Hotel Industry Current Situation

In 2019, the Travel and Tourism sector contributed to the 10.3% of the global GDP (WTTC, 2020). As this industry grows, it has had appreciable changes and has adapted itself to the new trends and challenges that have appeared along the way. Today, tourism industry faces a more competitive environment (Rao, 2014). One of the most important actors of tourism industry are certainly hotels with a worldwide market size of 1.06 trillion USD (Statista, 2022). There are a great variety of hotel types that are mainly categorized by size, function, service and cost. The well known star rating system is also an internationally-accepted indicator of a hotel's quality, cleanliness and standards. The higher the star rating is, the higher the luxury offered by the hotel can be expected. Just as the tourism industry in general, the hotel and resort industry perceived a noticeable growth on its market size around the world, but the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 made it stop growing significantly thanks to the travel banning that was established in that period, like it has never been seen before. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization tourist arrivals fell by 74% in 2020 compared to 2019 data (UNWTO, 2021). But, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said that 2023 "brings new grounds for optimism" and that tourist flows could be between 80% and 95% of pre-pandemic levels (UNWTO, 2022).

Leading Global Hotel Brands

The top ten global hotel brands are Marriot, Best Western, Hyatt, Iberostar, Hilton, Relais and Chateaux, Ramada (Part of Wyndham Worldwide), Holiday Inn (part of the Intercontinental Hotels Group, IHG), Ritz Carlton and Jumeirah (Heardable, 2012). It is important to mention that the hotel industry is one of the most competitive and in fact continues to show growth, this is because companies do not stop building or acquiring more properties to enlarge their portfolios with the mission of becoming the strongest brand of the market. In 2022, the leading hotel and

resort company by market value worldwide was Marriott International as it generated more sales revenue than any other group around the world (Statista, 2022).

The hotel industry, being such a large industry, it is logical that it will not only have economic impacts on the community, but also other consequences of a different nature. For it to work it is necessary a wide variety of companies, organizations and businesses to work jointly and thus can affect local communities (Melissen, 2013). Hotels contribute largely to CO2 emissions, for instance, and also play an important role in the local and global communities as they are strong employers, buyers and suppliers (Groisbois et al., 2011). Hence, the sustainability initiatives taken by the hotel industry can have an enormous positive impact on society and contribute to sustainable development on a global scale (Saarinen, 2006). Therefore, sustainability is considered the most important challenge and hence the predominant trend that the industry is facing right now, but that actually, it can be used and considered as sources of competitive advantage too (Malheiro et al., 2021).

1.2.2 Hotel Industry: Trends and Challenges about Sustainability

The tourism industry is capable of moving millions of people annually, being able to generate great amounts of profit that may be reinvested into sustainable measures and contribute to development of the destinations. But the rapid and uncontrolled growth of tourism may bring with it significant damage like cultural and environmental degradation, destruction of ecosystems, pollution and conflicts between tourists and local communities (Hopkins, 2005). This is the reason why; the industry must adopt sustainable measures to help counter these concerns. From this perspective, these measures can act as conservation tools and permit the preservation of important natural areas, wildlife, archeological and historical sites, manage resources efficiently and improve the way of living of the community they operate within (Verbeke, 2000).

In this sense, nowadays, sustainability is a well discussed topic, in constant change, evolution and constant adaptation. It does not refer only to ecological issues, but also to economic and social correct postures and strategies. Sustainability refers to stabilizing the currently disruptive relationship between earth's two most complex systems – human culture and the living world. The interrelation between these two systems marks every person's existence and is responsible for the

rise and fall of every civilization (Hawken, 2007). It is known that sustainability bases its actions on three main pillars which are; economic, social and environmental actions.

Speaking about the economic pillar, tourism has a strong influence as previously mentioned. Tourism is such an important activity in the global economy that it has the power to reinforce the local economy and its aim should be to create more jobs, increase income entry, be fair enough in terms of the distribution of wealth, ensure the sustainability of operations in the long term instead of its immediate profitability (Hopkins, 2005). Alternatively, the environmental pillar refers to the preservation and respect for natural resources, due to the fact that tourism depends in great sense upon these, for its correct function (Moniz, 2009). Last, but not least, the social pillar is committed to the conservation and maintenance of the local communities' cultural and historical heritage. Tourism should seek upon maintaining their values and local traditions and customs. (Malheiro et al., 2020).

The most popular pillar, that has indeed captured the attention of the media refers to ecology one (environmental actions). Because of this, environmental awareness has grown considerably throughout the years and has even become a crucial factor in terms of influencing customers' purchases. Customers or guests, specifically speaking in the hotel industry, tend now to verify if the product or service they are acquiring is ecological and sustainable. For that reason, hotels need to adapt their services and respond to these demands, which indeed may bring them differentiation and increase their competitiveness in the market.

Communication and Sustainability

There is a trend that establishes the importance of being able to communicate and integrate messages focused on corporate responsibility and the hotels' communication strategies in a serious and creative way, without falling into the greenwashing trap (Oliveira, 2019). As technology advances and develops new ways of communication, especially online, being transparent in the delivery of information and actions is essential for hotel companies (Malheiro et al., 2020). Leading global hotel companies play an important role in terms of the promotion of sustainability. Generally, they communicate their actions through public communicates and reports posted through their corporate websites, that reflect the most recent information on sustainability actions,

commitments and achievements they have taken concerning environmental, social and economic issues. (Jones et al., 2013).

Trends and Initiatives

Some of the actions that have been registered to be currently made by hotel companies in order to counter their impact on the environment and community and try to integrate the three main pillars of tourism sustainability regard; energy efficiency waste management, water management (Sloan et al., 2009), hotel eco-designs (Ozturkoglu et al., 2019), food and beverage management (Oosterveer et al., 2012), efficiency in the kitchen (Sloan et al., 2006) and tourists' awareness (Modica, et al., 2020)

In a more detailed way, the measures and contemporary approaches to sustainability that have been implemented consider the following actions:

"Ecotourism"

Ecotourism, for instance, is a good example of a trend that is seen currently in the industry. It refers to forms of tourism which have these characteristics: all nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas. It contains educational and interpretation features. It is generally organized by specialized tour operators for small groups. The service provider partners at the destinations are usually small, locally owned businesses. Minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment. Supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by; generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes, providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities and increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists. (UNWTO, 2022). As it can be seen, ecotourism bases itself upon the principles of sustainable tourism and its three main pillars (Hawkins et al., 2001) but it is not as easy as it seems. It can be considered a challenge to integrate these three pillars in a congruent way and be capable of

enhancing economic development, improving tourists and local communities' life quality and take care of the environment and cultural heritage at the same time.

Energy Efficiency

Some examples of good practices taken by hotels on this regard are for example, the purchase of high energy efficiency equipment and the appropriate choice of air conditioning parameters. Also every time is more common to see that renewable energy sources such as solar energy panels are being chosen (Sloan, 2009) (Werner, 2006). Hyatt, for instance, reports having established specific targets to reduce energy consumption by 25% (Jones et al., 2013). They reached this goal by for example installing 74,000 LED light bulbs during 2011.

Water Management

Water consumption in hotels has been reported along the years to be significantly higher than in other industries. Not only having water consumed in great amounts by guests but also in other activities of the hotel, such as the kitchen, laundry and common areas. Trends show that hotels are opting to adapt efficient designed distribution systems that prevent water leaks, purchasing washing machines that help save water and also implementing systems that help gather rainwater (Sloan et al., 2009). InterContinental Hotels Group established that their hotels in temperate zones could conserve between 10% and 20% of their water usage. They have also reported several water conservation initiatives such as water-efficient fixtures and appliances, water collection, treatment and reuse and irrigation (Jones et al., 2013). Best Western, for example, uses a linen reuse program which helps save water in a considerable amount (Best Western, 2012). It is in fact, one of the most difficult challenges for the industry, since they have to avoid compromising the well-being of guests and the general hygiene standards that are expected. This can be indeed more difficult to accomplish for luxury hotels since maybe the usual guests are not willing to accept taking common measures such as reusing towels and bedsheets.

Waste Management

It is well known that the hotel industry generates large amounts of waste everyday. The majority of hotels follow the trend of reducing, reusing and recycling, or even making contracts with suppliers that practice the same action. This can bring a good image to the brand and costs savings too. (Sloan et Al., 2009) Hyatt, for example, has reported to sent waste to landfill by 25%. The company has web-based tracking system that enables it to benchmark their performance and to drive improvement on this end (Jones et al., 2013). It also offers their guests shampoo and lotions in bottles made of 100% recycled plastic. Best Western, for instance, commits itself with room recycle bins (Best Western, 2012).

Ecological Design

There is an ongoing trend that hotel firms are following which establishes that since the beginning of the construction of any of their properties, the general aim is to reduce environmental impact. This is becoming more popular each day due to technological advances and greater environmental awareness that exists (Malheiro et al., 2020). Hotel firms work along with architects that are willing to take into account the environment they are integrating their project into, without harming the surrounding environment and also encouraging to take care of the heritage and the community of the area. Construction materials are also from sustainable suppliers and this may even help the image of the hotel giving it competitive advantage and therefore, lowering their investment risks (Malheiro et al., 2020).

Sustainable Suppliers

Many hotels are also carrying out initiatives like the choosing local, safe, organic, seasonal foods (Ooosterveer, 2012). A concise example of this is Marriott International, that pursues the practice of purchasing organic and responsibly sourced food by contacting local farmers instead of big processed food companies. (Marriott, 2012). Marriott looks forward to working with suppliers that indeed help advance the sustainability of their products and help achieve their sustainable goals,

e.g. conserving energy, reducing water, use recycled materials, such as eco-smart pillows, recycled pens, biodegradable laundry bags, low energy light bulbs and coreless toilet paper (Marriott, 2012).

Employee Work Life

Another key point that regards sustainability is the quality of work environment delivered to the employees. This can include diversity and equality, training and development, human rights, customer health, safety and security and charity for example. (Jones et al., 2013). A hotel chain called Jumeirah, stresses its aim on promoting a working environment free of discrimination and where all employees are treated with dignity, courtesy and respect. (Jumeirah, 2008). Also, in this regard, Hilton sets up that it is critical to have a great working culture where team members feel appreciated and empowered to build rewarding careers in hospitality within an inspiring and stimulating work environment (Hilton, 2012). They also have created an internal education program in which they offer courses that go from management skills and personal development to training processes (Hilton, 2012).

Local Communities and Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Donations to charity are also a big part of the hotels' sustainable commitments. Marriot, for instance, donated 23 million in cash and gave donations to several organizations around the world in 2011. (Marriott, 2012). They have also helped restore houses that have been lost in times of disaster, made donations about hunger needs and aiding children that live in poor conditions worldwide. (Marriott, 2012). Best Western reports that it has helped poor communities to have access to food, clean water, health and education. Wyndham Worldwide points out that its stakeholders are very important drivers on their sustainability goals and that thanks to them they keep focused on offering their very best to community (Wyndham Worldwide, 2011). Wyndham Worldwide has reported their constant interest on measuring their impact upon greenhouse gas emissions and their goal was to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20% by 2020. (Wyndham Worldwide, 2011). Marriott also defines its efforts on this behalf, since it has developed industry standards for carbon measurement, setting up criteria for the greening of furniture, fixtures and

fittings for the Hospitality Sustainable Purchasing Consortium and also, working along with governments and non-governmental organizations on this end (Marriott, 2012).

Challenges

As mentioned before, the congruent integration of the main three pillars of tourism sustainability, is the main current challenge for hotel companies. Also, the pressure that comes from sustainable tourism policies established by international organizations, media, local governments legal motivations, diverse stakeholders, market pressure, consumer orientation towards sustainability; that are some of the leading driving forces for companies to adapt and develop new sustainability policies (Malheiro et al., 2020). Due to a constant increasing competition on the market, another challenge is also how to use the implementation of these measures as a competitive advantage. The integration of actions into their brand perception. Thus, it is a challenge for the marketing departments of the companies too (Chen, 2009). Needless to say that innovation plays an important role on this end, and that the initiatives taken by the organizations, along with the way they are incorporating it to their brand is what makes the difference with their competitors. In this regard, it is important for companies to ensure that every innovative service they come up with should be sustainable (Ozturkoglu et al., 2019). Getting more into detail, the hotel industry is one of the industries that affects more the environment. Waste is one of the main issues in this sense. About 1 kg of waste per guest per night and around 180 kg of carbon CO2 for each square meter in a year. Water waste is also a big problem, since on average 320 liters are used per night per guest on a usual hotel establishment (Sloan et al., 2009).

Guests' Awareness and Communication of Sustainable Practices

In the hotels' quest to involve their guests into sustainability and invite them to adopt practices that are beneficial for the environment, some initiatives have started to take place, organized by hotels themselves, pursuing awareness among their guests (UNWTO, 2005). Some initiatives are organized tours around the hotel's area and involve guests in the local community and environment (Lockyer, 2007). Organize events that support these communities with charity activities and donation funds. Inform and educate by recycled paper brochures, for example, how are they

collaborating with small actions to the planet well-being by reusing sheets or towels (Sloan et al., 2009). Some of the most important hotel chains around the world reflect and communicate their actions through yearly public domain reports on the matter of sustainability. They look forward to publicly emphasize and let the market know about their commitment to sustainability and sustainable development, in order to improve their competitive advantage and be able to construct a stronger brand (Jones et al., 2013). To help build or enhance their brand they also use the internet, social media, product labels, packaging, press/media relations, newsletters, issue related events, reports, posters, flyers, leaflets, brochures, websites, advertisements, information packs and word of mouth (European Commission, n.d.)

Reality is that hotel companies in their search to contribute to the community with their sustainable actions for a better world, they are also looking forward to secure competitive advantage within the market place and have cost savings. (Jones et. Al., 2013). But, this also comes with new challenges and risks that hotel chains must be aware of. For instance, Marriott's commitment to "reduce costs whenever possible" can affect its commitment to "guest satisfaction". Therefore, managers should be willing to focus on working with owners and franchisees to ensure that brand standards are met and at the same time continue encouraging sustainable operational practices (Marriott, 2012). In this framework, a deeper market research could be implemented by the hotel global industry actors, in a way that it could be better understood what sustainability means to customers and the ways they are eager to change their patterns of hotel patronage and their perception on the brand by taking the sustainable measures previously mentioned and acquiring an "environmentally friendly" brand personality that creates differentiation and awareness (Jones et. Al., 2013). This differentiation may contribute to a better reputation and greater adhesion and loyalty of tourists (Matias et al., 2008). Therefore, investments done in the psychological capital of the hotel workforce is essential for a positive commitment by employees speaking about environmental knowledge, awareness and concern (Chan et al., 2014). It has been found that there is a positive correlation between organizational sustainability efforts and employee satisfaction (Kim & Choi, 2013). If shared values and common beliefs between the company and employees exist, it is more likely for employees to become more involved into EMPs actions (Govindarajuli & Daily, 2004).

2. Chapter 2

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism and Hospitality Industry

2.1.1.1 CSR Initiatives in the Tourism Industry

Corporate Social Responsibility, refers to the concept whereby businesses integrate social and environmental concerns into their operations and interactions with stakeholders. It is a framework that encourages companies to go beyond profit-making and actively contribute to the enhancement of society and the environment. It can also be defined as a commitment to improve the community's well-being through careful business practices (Kotler & Lee, 2022) or a corporate action that its main objective is to generate the best trade-off between communities, environment and profits (Aguinis & Elkington, 1998). It is important to mention that CSR is a multi-theoretic and multi-stakeholder construct.

There are three suggested approaches to CSR according to Aguinis and Elkington:

1. The shareholder approach: companies owe their first responsibility to shareholders.
2. The stakeholder approach: all of the involved stakeholders are important, and companies have to protect their interests while they perform their operations.
3. The societal approach: companies are in debt in terms of responsibility to society.

CSR encompasses a wide range of activities and initiatives that companies can undertake to make a positive impact on various stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and the environment. Here are some key aspects of corporate social responsibility. The first one could be referred as environmental sustainability. Many companies recognize the importance of minimizing their environmental footprint and therefore, they may implement measures to conserve energy, reduce waste and pollution, and promote sustainable practices throughout their supply chains. Other measures are for instance, ethical labor practices where CSR emphasizes fair and ethical treatment of employees. This includes providing safe working conditions, fair wages, and benefits,

as well as promoting diversity, equal opportunity, and work-life balance. Philanthropy and community engagement is also important for companies who tend to engage in charitable activities by donating funds, resources, or expertise to support local communities. They may sponsor educational programs, healthcare initiatives, disaster relief efforts, or other social causes. In terms of supply chain CSR promotes responsible sourcing practices. This may involve ensuring suppliers adhere to ethical labor standards, environmental regulations, and human rights principles. CSR also encourages companies to be transparent about their social and environmental performance. This can involve publishing sustainability reports, disclosing information about their CSR initiatives, and engaging in dialogue with stakeholders. Engaging with stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and investors, is an essential part of CSR too. Companies can actively seek feedback, involve stakeholders in decision-making processes, and address their concerns and expectations. Finally, some companies use CSR as an opportunity for social innovation, creating new products or business models that address societal or environmental challenges. This can lead to positive social change while also generating business value.

To give an outline of what is mentioned above, CSR may flourish due to four main driving forces (Van Der Woerd & Van Den Brink, 2004):

1. CRS driven by the need of compliance.
2. CSR driven by profit motives.
3. CSR driven by a desire to improve the community and connect with stakeholders
4. CSR driven by the desire to generate synergy among the before mentioned three driving forces and therefore go beyond the need for any trade-off.

Although, in the competitive based economy companies perform nowadays, firms may use CSR as the standardization of business practices and competitive pressures around the market (Singh et al., 2021). The motivations behind adopting CSR practices can vary. Some companies genuinely want to make a positive impact, while others may recognize the business benefits of being socially responsible, such as enhanced brand reputation, increased customer loyalty, and improved employee morale. It's important to note that CSR is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and practices can vary across industries and companies. Furthermore, CSR should not be seen as a substitute for

compliance with laws and regulations, but rather as a way to go beyond mere legal requirements and proactively contribute to society and the environment. Therefore, as the CSR practices and societal expectations towards the environment continue to evolve, it is more and more common for companies to start implementing strategies for sustainable management practices.

Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism

Sustainable forms of tourism may include: eco-tourism, green tourism, environmentally friendly travel and alternative tourism (Nyahunzvi, 2013). Many authors affirm that the only way that hospitality related companies can thrive and remain competitive in the market is by the adoption of sustainable tourism forms and of sustainable tourism strategies that may indeed attract tourists (Youell, 1998). This is because as much as tourism enhances and contributes to economical growth, it can also affect, on a large scale, to environmental prosperity, hence, society. To diminish this issue, the tourism industry has increasingly adopted corporate social responsibility initiatives (Cowper-Smith & de Grosbois, 2011; Han et al. 2020; Henderson, 2007; Nyahunzvi, 2013). In this sense, the adoption and relevance of CRS practices not only refers to an environmental impact but also affects the stakeholders that are involved in the industry and their wellbeing.

Tourism and Hospitality Industry depends on local communities, human and natural resources and the environment to function, thus, the companies that make up the industry should be concerned and take action to cope with the environmental demands and the enhancement of the quality of life of the industry's involved stakeholders such as employees, their families and the local society in general (Madanaguli et al. 2022).

2.1.2 Theoretical Framework on the use of CSR in the Tourism Industry

Currently, the tourism sector is very susceptible to the impacts of climate change and at the same time it significantly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions which also contributes to global warming. Taking determining actions within the tourism sector is decisive for its long-term resilience, therefore the tourism industry actors such as hotel firms are increasingly taking into consideration the implementation of Environmental and CSR initiatives to counteract the damage

and impact caused by their actions and adopt a low carbon pathway and cut emissions by 50% by 2030 (UNWTO, 2023).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization has estimated that against a current scenario by 2030 transport-related CO_2 emissions from tourism will grow 25% from 2016 levels. This growth in CO_2 emissions will represent 5,3% of all made emissions in 2030 in comparison to 2016 that represented the 5%. (UNWTO, 2023). UNWTO is determined to speeding up and lowering carbon emissions made by the tourism sector and encourages its main actors as hotel firms to strengthen their measures and accelerate the decarbonization of tourism operations and endure strong actions and commitment to perform

Environmentally Sustainable Policies and Practices

Environmentally Sustainable Policies and Practices also referred as ESPPs are the basic principles, guidelines and practices created to help a company in pursuit of its environmental management goals and to carry out its sustainable initiatives (Kraft, 2017). These principles have gain popularity and have become crucial for companies to adopt in the recent years by virtue of climate change and the environmental deterioration that has been accelerated in the last decades (Khatter et al., 2019).

Policies work out as a framework for the companies' decision making not only environmentally speaking but also in terms of all their business operations. (Weimer & Vining, 2017). Therefore, CSR environmental initiatives that a hotel firm may have, are required to embrace certain policies that function as a guide so they can achieve their purpose and goals, and that being the case is the main focus of ESPPs. They provide the company with concrete actions and work as reference points for managers and their teams so they can fulfill their initiatives and intentions in regards of environmental and sustainable goals (Carroll & Shabana, 2010) and also demonstrate their commitment to green initiatives and environmental responsibility (Shanti, 2016).

As already mentioned, companies are prioritizing their environmental sustainability measures and it is even becoming in some cases its core business value (Bocken et al. 2014; Lubin and Esty,

2010). Stakeholders are increasingly expecting transparency regarding their environmentally sustainable initiatives. Hotels usually use their websites to communicate and share the measures taken in this regard, and thus, it turns easier for external stakeholders to be informed about the hotel firms actions about their environmental actions (De Grosbois, 2012) as well as the use of annual CSR and environmental reports.

2.1.2.1 Adopting Sustainable Strategies

So, why do tourism firms adopt CSR initiatives? Tourism firms may use six motivations in the adoption of CSR: the inspiration generated to adopt a parent company's best CSR practices, in advocacy of society, to fulfill community's expectations, to attract more tourists to their establishments and enhance occupancy or as a matter of environmental concerns or because of personal managerial values (Melubo & Carr, 2019). These motivations indicate that the driving forces for the implementation of CSR in a given tourism company can be originated by external forces (institutions) and internal forces (company's internal culture).

Hence, tourism firms use CSR to generate shared value for the stakeholders (Burcin et al., 2016). Firms tend to focus on environmental issues, especially what concerns water and energy management (Font et al., 2014). In a theoretical sense three theories that can better give response to the question of why do firms use CSR initiatives are the theory of Stakeholders (Freeman & Reed, 2983) theories of institutions (North, 1992), the theories of cultures and subcultures (Dheer, et al., 2015; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

2.1.2.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory is perhaps one of the most important theories at the moment of studying the relationship between an organization and its customers. This theory focuses on the connection between an organization and all the interest parts of it (Freeman & Reed, 1983). According to the stakeholder theory, an organization is part of a group of stakeholders, and its purpose must be to manage the perspectives or points of view, needs and interests of these stakeholders (Mensah, 2014). This theory if often used in research about sustainability management with the intention of

understanding how businesses work alongside with society and the environment, as well as their motivations to use Corporate Social Responsibility (Hörish et al., 2014; Orlitzky et al., 2011). Businesses must meet the requirements and expectations of all stakeholders and not only shareholders (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014). This theory also stands for tourism companies, and speaking about hotel firms, who are expected by stakeholders to stay in line with the sustainability standards that the market establishes.

Stakeholders have a big influence on an organization's policies and practices, specifically in those regarding to environmental and social performance (Fernandez-Feijoo et al., 2014; Stead & Stead 2000). Normally, stakeholders look forward to the engagement of businesses in responsible practices and expect information about their efforts and effectiveness (De Grosbois, 2012). If there is indeed a strong collaboration between firms and stakeholders the achievement of environmental sustainability can be effective and successful (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014).

Employees as a driving force and the influence of CSR on them

Several studies have demonstrated a positive impact of CSR on employees' behavior and attitudes. For instance, it has been discovered that the use of CSR measures can be associated with higher levels of psychological well-being and satisfaction among employees, especially during the Covid-19 emergency (Mao et al. 2020). Employees' and managers' work engagement has also been found to be positively affected, the sense of belonging to their organization and identification as a perceived external prestige are two great examples of this statement. Moreover, a study focusing on touristic hotels revealed that when employees actively participated in the hotels' green practices, it positively influenced also their guests' and tourists' perception on the hotels' firms and their efforts on being more socially responsible (Srivastava & Shree, 2019). Additionally, it has been observed that CSR authenticity can certainly act like a mediator between environmental management efforts and CSR legitimacy among hotel managers (Lin et al., 2020). Furthermore, it has also been identified that ethical leadership from managers plays a significant role in the indirect effect of CSR on a company's reputation (Zhu et al., 2013).

2.1.3 CSR practices in the customers' perspective: Brand Green Awareness

2.1.3.1 Brand Experience, Engagement & Loyalty

Accordingly, to what previously mentioned, CSR practices have a direct influence on customers' attitudes and perceptions. Several studies have emphasized on the effect of CSR on customers, which would be considered as external stakeholders. Customers present internal factors, which are responses that shape their perceptions of CSR initiatives present themselves as emotions, satisfactions, customer citizenship, commitment, customer identification behavior, and destination loyalty. Therefore, such factors, determine and play a crucial role by defining how do customers view the firm's CSR actions and thus, the brand itself (Chubchuwong, 2019; Wang et al., 2018).

Connection to the Hotel Brand

Some studies made in the United States and Mexico in the area of Quintana Roo, have shown that encouraging customers' support for CSR activities had a positive effect on customer engagement to the hotel's and their behavior. Customers' can feel a connection with the hotel brand and feel part of something bigger rather than just being a simple guest. For instance, the state of Quintana Roo in Mexico, has eleven protected natural areas (NPAs). Some hotel firms from around these areas have established certain activities that motivate customers to actively participate on green activities and also encourage them to be aware of the green technologies and CSR activities carried out by them. Therefore, it has been noticed that visitors of these areas, who have stayed in socially responsible hotel firms and that they have either participated on or have perceived the green actions made by the firms, indeed enhances the hotels' brand reputation and also the visitors' commitment to make their visit have a positive impact on the environment and the community. The use of green technologies and actions are thus, seen as CSR measures by their guests and consequently create a positive experience to them, since these actions provide them with a positive image of the hotel brand because of the positive contribution on environmental sustainability and the enhancement of the overall touristic experience (Alvarado-Herrera et al., 2019).

2.1.3.2 Communication of CSR practices: CSR Reports, Certifications and Hotel Websites

The way in which CSR actions' awareness can be enhanced by firms is crucial. This is made by CSR communications, that tend to focus on raising awareness about social concerns within the tourism sector and that through these customers may adopt positive attitudes towards hotels. If customers are aware of CSR engagement, it is more likely for them to engage in pro-environmental actions. This is therefore one of the most significant effects resulting from the implementation of CSR initiaves in the tourism sector (Liobikiene and Juknys, 2016)

When hotels promote the idea that they are behaving ethically, such communications can help them reduce the "green hushing". Green hushing refers to when companies deliberately do not communicate about their environmental initiatives for fear of being called out of greenwashing. Greenwashing instead according to the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to the activities made by a company or an organization that are intended to make people think that it is concerned about the environment, even if its real business actually harms the environment. Every time, more and more companies belonging to the touristic sector, have been accused of greenwashing. This is surely an important aspect that may take place when hotel firms are trying to communicate their sustainable actions, and indeed, should not happen, that is to say, an example of a bad practice done by firms to enhance their brand awareness that should not be accepted. To avoid risking their reputation, some hotel firms have decided to implement green hushing, but as already stated before, it is important to involve customers into a truly kind of greener tourism. Greenwashing will be addressed as an important issue later on in this study.

As a result of the implementation of environmental initiatives hotel firms can also obtain customer loyalty and customer citizenship behavior. In other words, if customers feel identified with a company's CSR activities, their perception of the brand will improve and therefore their loyalty and trust too (Akbari et al., 2019). It is important to add that customers' personal values, attitudes, environmental knowledge or awareness, perceived benefits, and firm perceptions strongly impact their behavioral intentions towards green hotels and restaurants (Gao et al., 2016). These entities play a crucial role in shaping how CSR efforts are perceived by the public. As a matter of fact,

some hotels lack a well-defined and coherent environmental strategy, and on occasions adopt CSR initiatives mainly as a marketing tactic to attract guests by "falsely claiming to be environmentally friendly (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

CSR Reports

It is common for hospitality and tourism companies to publish the so called CSR reports. Organizations are facing growing demands to disclose performance metrics beyond financial aspects. To meet this need for transparency, Corporate Social Responsibility reporting has emerged as a way to provide stakeholders with information about an organization's social and environmental performance.

CSR reports involve the disclosure of an organization's non-financial metrics, providing transparency regarding its societal and environmental impact. They are usually published annually, and it is voluntary, even though some large organizations to reveal their social and environmental performance. This helps stakeholder to assess the organization's non-financial impacts. Nowadays, CSR reports focus non only on social metrics but other non-financial measures of success and it is changing its name into ESG which refers to Environmental, Social and Governance reporting. The organization may choose to focus into several reporting frameworks such as greenhouse gas emissions, economic performance or social impact.

To avoid being accused of greenwashing and to protect their reputation, hotel firms should prioritize transparency in their reporting. This entails not only showcasing their CSR successes but also openly acknowledging their shortcomings and areas that require improvement. When organization are truly hotels and forthcoming about their efforts and challenges, consumers are more likely to trust that the organization genuinely cares about this issues. Transparency builds credibility and fosters trust between the organization and its customers.

A well-crafted CSR report can serve as a powerful Public Relations tool for firms. It allows them to effectively communicate their environmental initiatives, showcase their achievements, and present themselves as socially responsible entities. CSR reporting becomes an integral strategy for

organizations seeking to build a positive reputation and gain trust from stakeholders. However, for CSR reporting to be credible and impactful, organizations must genuinely commit to their initiatives. It's crucial that employees and managers are encouraged to integrate CSR and sustainable practices into their daily work. Any CSR commitments made by the hotel firms, in this case, should be clearly communicated, and evidence of their implementation and effectiveness must be provided in subsequent reports. This transparency and evidence-based approach strengthen the legitimacy and authenticity of the firm's CSR efforts.

As mentioned earlier, CSR reporting is gradually being replaced by ESG reporting, which stands for Environmental, Social and Governance reporting. ESG reporting is more comprehensive and tangible, as it not only communicates social responsibility but also quantifies environmental and sustainability efforts. It focuses on measuring sustainability performance using comparable metrics and sets specific targets for the future. These reports provide a more detailed and precise assessment of an organization's and sustainability practices, making it a more robust and informative reporting approach.

Not all hotels are in the same position and able to adopt Environmental Sustainability and Protection Policies due to internal barriers like the absence of skills, knowledge and resources to implement environmental management policies and systems or to have effective results due to the lack of expertise and human resources. This phenomenon occurs especially to small and medium sized hotels (Chan, 2011). This small chains also phase less pressure from tourists and the media. On that account, non-chain hotels are indeed less active in communicating information online or by sustainable reports in comparison to larger hotels. Larger hotel chains instead show a larger interest in sustainability and in sharing their environmentally sustainable practices with their stakeholders.

Green Certification and Accreditation Programs

To enhance customers' trust in the hotels' brand and legitimize their green actions some green certification, accreditation programs, or standards are taken by hotels. Some examples of the most important ones in the industry are the following.

LEED certification

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, LEED, is a worldwide known green building certification that is a symbol of sustainability and it is supported by a whole industry of committed companies and individuals. It was created by the non-profit U.S. Green Building Council. Buildings that own a LEED certification; save money, improve their efficiency, have lower carbon emissions and provide a healthier place for people or consumers or guests in the case of hotel firms (USGBC, 2023). In hospitality, LEED certification signifies that a hotel has met certain standards for sustainability.

ISO 26000

One can find that ESPPs are not compulsory for hotels but there are standard codes such as the International Standard on Social Responsibility, ISO 26000 that are implemented by organizations that can affect positively an organization's performance on social responsibility, competitive advantage, reputation, ability to attract and retain workers or members, customers, maintain of employee morale, commitment and enhancement of its productivity, the perception of investors, owners, donors, sponsors and financial community as their relationship with other companies, governments, media, suppliers and the community they operate within (ISO, 2018). To summarize, the standard ISO 26000, is designed to help organizations play a role in promoting sustainable development.

ISO 14001

Another important standard code provided by the International Standard on Social Responsibility is ISO 14001, which is referred to as the criteria that companies should follow in terms of environmental management systems and can be certified to. It is essentially a framework that firms may use as a guideline to implement an effective environmental management system. It does not matter what type of organization wants to follow these guidelines, every kind of firm can use it. These are practical tools to manage their environmental responsibilities (ISO, 2023).

Global Sustainable Tourism Council

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is an independent and non-profit organization that establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, known as the GSTC Criteria. These criteria divide itself into two major groups. The first one refers to the "Destination Criteria" concerning public policy-makers and destination managers, and the second one concerns "Industry Criteria" regarding instead, hotels and tour operators. Its mission is "to develop a common language with reference to sustainability in tourism and to increase knowledge, understanding, adoption and demand for sustainable tourism practices." (GSTC, 2023).

Destination Criteria and Industry Criteria both care about four major pillars which are:

1. Sustainable management
2. Socioeconomic impacts
3. Cultural impacts
4. Environmental impacts

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council is aware that each place has their own culture, environmental conditions, legislations and traditions or customs, the criteria above mentioned is planned to be adapted to each destination's characteristics. The GSTC offers an accreditation program through its partner ASI/Assurance Services International to accredit Certification Bodies. (GSTC, 2023).

Green Globe

Another major tourism and hospitality environmental certification is Green Globe. Green Globe, is one of the most important certification for sustainable operation and management of travel and tourism around the world. Green Globe, certify either hotels, resorts, conference centers, cruise ships, restaurants, transportation companies such as car rentals, attractions, between others, and offer criteria and indicators as well as sustainability training for tourism firms to be able to achieve

sustainable tourism, solutions for sustainable management, acquire green globe business certifications and also Sustainable Management, Corporate Social Responsibility, Cultural Heritage and Environment Courses. Nowadays, Green Globe counts with over 600 members in more than 80 countries and endorses high standards of sustainability (Green Globe, 2023).

EarthCheck

There are also globally recognized certification programs like EarthCheck which is a world's leading certification, consulting and advisory group for sustainable destinations and tourism organizations It provides recognition and promotional support to a global consumer market. EarthCheck has been recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council in 2016. This certification takes into consideration the three main features of sustainability, which one of is environmental sustainability and the key aspects established are: greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency and its conservation and management, management of freshwater resources, ecosystem conservation and management, social and cultural management, land use planning and management, air quality protection, wastewater management, solid waste management, and management of environmentally harmful substances (EarthCheck, 2023)

Green Key

Green Key is a renowned certificate that establishes standards for environmental responsibility and preservation as well as sustainable actions and in the tourism industry. This certificate indicates if businesses such as hotels, hostels, small accommodations, campsites, holiday parks, conference centers, restaurants and attractions have indeed committed to meeting strict criteria set by the Foundation for Environmental Education. Throughout documentation and meticulous audits, these businesses uphold high environmental standards. Over 4,000 hotels in 60 countries are Green Key certified (Green Key Global, 2023).

Eco Lodge

Eco Lodge is program that aims to minimize the negative effect that lodging causes to the environment meanwhile contributing in a positive way to local communities. They use renewable energy sources and focus on water preservation. Recycling and reusing is also predominant as well as using organic towels, non-toxic cleaning products and offering food that comes from local production. Usually Eco Lodges are found in places such as the jungle, mountains, or natural areas. These type of lodges are beneficial for the traveler and the local community, it creates nature awareness, preservation of the surrounding environment and its wildlife and rewards the locals and the travelers with knowledge of new customs and traditions (Balmforth, 2022).

Hotel Websites

Besides presenting data in sustainability reports, hotels also tend to use their hotel websites to communicate their sustainable practices and which can indeed include the sustainability reports too. In a study made in 2018 in Melbourne, Australia, researchers analyzed hotel websites to understand how differently rated hotels communicated information about their environmental practices (Khatter et al., 2018). The study looked into 220 hotel websites, 46% of the hotels were chain-affiliated while the 54% remaining were independent hotels. The 58% of the studied hotels were 4 stars rated establishments. Focusing on the 46% regarding the chain-affiliated hotels. The 57% had published in their firms' website environmental-related information as well as sustainability policies. The 38% had published to keep a record on the success of their environment sustainability program and also offered the possibility to access their environmental reports on their corporate website, additionally chain-affiliated hotels had also reported their environmental awards and certifications previously obtained, and as being chain-affiliated, the majority of them belonged to either 5 and 4 star rated hotel firms (Khatter et al., 2018). The authors concluded that the higher rated hotels are, the more they are involved in showing their sustainable efforts and results on their websites, which may indicate that they are also more interested in adopting ESPPs. Hotels tend to put attention into the areas of energy management, water management and also its conservation, solid waste management, harmful substances management, green procurement and environmental education for its employees and guests. (Khatter et al., 2018).

Large multinational hotel firms use their hotel websites and reports as a marketing instrument to effectively communicate their environmental-related information and actions. This is something that indeed big chain hotels are currently doing to communicate to their stakeholders about the ESPPs implemented. Hotels are in part "obligated" to report such data to their shareholders and stakeholders, so their commitment to sustainability is crucial, and therefore it is more likely to have environmental reports and programs addressing problems such as waste management, energy conversation, water conservation and green procurement (Khatter et al., 2018). There is a trend that establishes that the general public, environmentalists, consumers in general and other stakeholders are urging hotels to embrace environmental management practices and to take responsibility for their environmental impact (Tang et al., 2014). There is in terms of marketing, a huge opportunity to show the environmental efforts that hotels make in response to consumers' and stakeholders' increasing demands (Khatter et al., 2018). Some studies indeed, have indicated that more and more hotel customers value ESPPs undertaking by hotel firms when selecting their hotel and are even willing to pay more for this if necessary (Hawkins & Vorster, 2014). A survey conducted by Operto revealed that 85.6% would pay more for an ecofriendly hotel. Respondents stated that they were even willing to pay up to 75% more to a hotel that could indeed put in evidence their authentic and genuinely green practices (Haertel, 2021).

A lack of information on the hotels' websites

Usually, the majority of travelers use major booking sites such as Booking.com, Expedia or Hotels.com or go directly to the website of the specific hotel they know already. However, some of this platforms are lacking the word "sustainability" into their search filters. This issue may be due to the fact that sustainability is indeed hard to prove. Booking.com has generated a "Travel Sustainable Handbook", with the help of sustainability specialists such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. This handbook provides the newest sustainability data and science and also practices that hotels can implement to make positive changes into their businesses, the environment and local communities (Haertel, 2021).

2.1.3.3 Challenges: Greenwashing and Green Trust

Advertising has always been a powerful tool that helps companies attract customers and inform them about their products, while at the same time building customer trust. Most companies around the world use some type of advertising to help them enhance their sales and profits and also reach out targeted markets. Hotel firms are not the exception and due to the fact that these companies have realized that using strategies in reference to safeguarding the environment and sustainability can increase their profitability, many times they take advantage and use it merely as marketing strategies and even to deceive to their consumers. As the Marketing Based Theory establishes, practitioners should build relationships with customers through trustworthy dialogue and unbiased information (Chen et al., 2018). If a practitioner is open and honest then the practitioner can build customer trust which will further develop a loyal customer base (Urban, 2003)

Greenwashing is therefore defined as the misleading use of marketing or public relations to advertise the perception of environmental friendliness (Aji & Stutikno, 2015). It is in other words defined as "tactics that deceive consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" (Parguel et al., 2011). With the passage of time, it is increasingly common that consumers demand for environmentally-responsible actions by hotels (Han, 2015; Rahman, 2018). Consumers or guests, in this case scenario, are increasingly demanding and are more and more skeptical about the green practices that hotels state to carry out. They are even aware that hotels may only execute this practices and refer to them as "green actions" but in reality they are only cost-saving strategies (Chen et al., 2018).

Consumers normally tend to rely on corporate advertising when they are about to acquire a service or a good, so if they suspect there is any kind of greenwashing on the corporate advertising, their trust on a particular brand may decrease, hence, the brand's reputation would also be damaged and consumers' behavior will be negative (Chen et al., 2018). A research made by GWI in the UK has shown that 62% of consumers do not rely that much on the fact that brands will definitely carry out their environmental actions' claims or pledges and the 22% of them do not trust brands green statements at all (GWI, 2022).

In hotels, usually, guests find sustainable programs such as the towel reuse and reminders signs about water usage in their rooms, with that being said, sometimes guests experience greenwashing after they have started the consumption process (Chen et al., 2018). The guests' perceptions generated throughout these encounters with green initiatives also have a relation with their preceding values and their knowledge about green programs. These way, many times, their opinion is generated and hence behavioral intentions as visit and revisit intentions take place (Rahman & Reynolds, 2016). Studies indeed suggest that hotels should present a credible and trustworthy image for their costumers (Rahman & Reynolds, 2017).

Sometimes, as previously mentioned, hotels present sustainable programs like towel reuse and energy or water savings, which are very popular activities that hotels do communicate to their guests, to make them feel involved or participative in their green practices. But they fail to communicate that in fact it also helps them reduce their expenses, and thus, guests may feel they are not indeed helping the environment, but helping the hotel to have less expenses, perceiving the hotel firm as dishonest and not trustworthy, creating a negative image for the hotel. In 2016, statistics showed that 94% of hotels in the United States use these programs and about 90% of consumers participate in them (TripAdvisor, 2014). This is certainly an important number so in order for hotels to use it in their favor, a consumer centric approach should be therefore, taken into consideration in the moment of presenting and advertising environmental measures, in a way that skepticism is reduced and the hotels' credibility can be better positioned and hence, provide the consumers with literature focusing on the hotel's goal for lowering their environmental impact and this will, as a matter of fact, increase consumers' willingness to visit such hotels due to their trustworthiness (Choi et al., 2015).

2.1.3.4 Customers' Attitudes and Brand Awareness

As previously stated green trust can be defined as a "willingness to depend on a product, service or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its performance (Chen, 2010). When referring to hotels, green trust is also present, as the green image of green hotels has a positive influence on consumers or potential guests that have green trust (Wang et al., 2018) and also it can affect positively on their intention to visit these

hotels and thus, have a positive brand awareness (Choi et al., 2015). Green trust affects loyalty and thus, future behavioral intentions to visit again and also to recommend the hotel to their social circle, creating a positive word of mouth (Chen, 2013).

Consumers that have prior satisfactory experiences with green hotels might trust and have intentions to visit a green hotel, even if they do not know the hotel's brand (Verma & Chandra, 2018). This is because, they usually are concern about environmental issues and their moral takes them acquire environmentally responsibly services or products (Rahman et al., 2015). Therefore, a high level of green trust is directly related to loyalty to the hotels' brands (revisit intention) and positive worth of mouth. Greenwashing affects in a negative way green trust, so hotels must avoid at all costs to continue placing deceptive advertising and "green" practices, so they can uplift consumers' trust. Studies have found that hotels must not consider taking into action only one or two green initiatives such as the towel replacement or energy savings, but instead, implementing a great variety of environmental actions that truly positively impact the environment and community they operate within, and inviting their guests to be practitioners of these actions too (Chen et al., 2018).

The involvement and being certified from renowned and credible worldwide green hotel certifications such as LEED, Green Globe and Earth Check can also help their brand image increase green trust from their customers and get rid of greenwashing speculations. Consumers indeed tend to endorse these certifications (Geerts, 2014) and it is important to establish this trust especially for customers with no previous green hotel experience because there are higher chances for them to spread negative word of mouth about the hotel if they have low green trust in it, this can be made by ecological education placing posters, or infographics around the hotel and making sure the hotel's workforce is educated about it too, in order to inform the guests about the hotel's sustainable efforts (Chen et al., 2018).

2.1.4 Hotel Firms' Performance and Aftereffects

The impact of CSR initiatives on a firm's performance has been a focus on several studies, particularly in the hotel industry. If a hotel firm engages into CSR activities, it is very likely for it

to project a favorable image of the firm in the tourists' minds (Baniya et al., 2019). In the case of managers, it has been revealed that their attachment, value identification and perceptions towards CSR can definitely influence their attitudes and their decisions towards the adoption of CSR initiatives (Chi et a., 2019). It is crucial for the internal stakeholders or in this case managers to be convinced about the actions they are taking regarding CSR and to have a positive attitude in order to obtain effective outcomes.

Nevertheless, CSR practices do not only have an impact on the way customers or tourists perceive their brand but also, they can also positively influence firms' short-term profitability by reducing costs and increasing revenue. Positive financial effects are also a result in terms of profitability (Inoue and Lee, 2011). To this it can be added that as long as a firm presents a real engagement with its CSR practices and the community it works within, it may surely present positive outcomes in terms of its market value. Hence, the financial results of CSR enactment can be increasing considerably profits and sales, decreasing costs and therefore, increasing revenue, improving the company's competitiveness. These outcomes may result due to the customers' satisfaction with the firms CSR action and consequently loyalty and revisit intentions will appear. (Brammer & Millington, 2008; Moneva et al., 2020).

A study conducted on travel agencies in Tehran, Iran in 2011, revealed that CSR significantly influences customer loyalty and brand positioning (Akbari et al., 2019). The variables that were studied were: customer trust, identification and value. Being customer trust and value the ones to have established a significant impact on the correlation between CSR and Customer Loyalty and Brand Positioning.

CSR also acts like a mediator between brand reputation and visitors' commitment and between CRS commitment and social and environmental performance. As previously described, not only managers' attitudes towards hotels' CSR communication is important but also employees' because this way they can adopt more ethical behaviors. This therefore suggests that the decision-making processes of both managers and employees have a significant impact on the outcomes that CSR produces.

Figure 1: *"Contextual factors that affect stakeholders' perceptions of CSR measures and affect their engagement in CSR activities"*
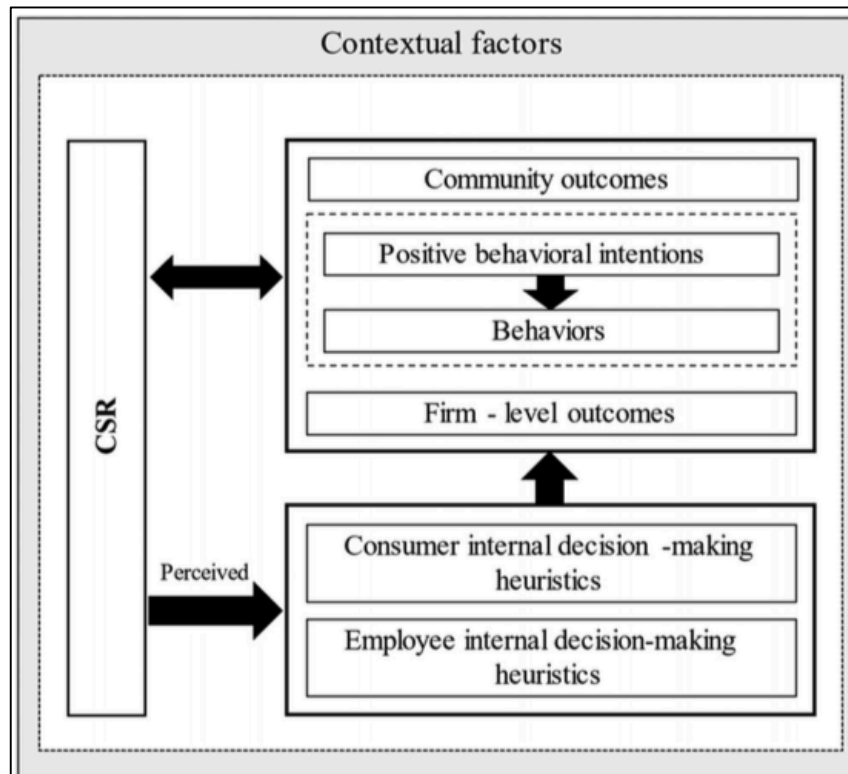
Contextual factors can be refer to as the different stakeholders' perceptions of CSR can influence their engagement in CSR activities (See Figure 1). To sum up, three types of stakeholders can be taken into consideration which are: Internal (Employees and Managers), Direct External (Customers) and Indirect Contextual External (Institutions, community and media) as explained in figure 1. There is a trend that indicates that environmental awareness is growing, and thus, customers are increasingly preferring eco-friendly businesses, so it is vital for tourism companies such as hotels to adopt environmentally responsible practices in a way that they can contribute to sustainability. Employees show a higher loyalty towards tourism firms that are involved in CSR while managers, are the guiding forces that set and impulse CSR activities (Saha et al., 2020; Yasit

et al., 2021). Tourism industry firms should commit to the well-being and sustainability of the industry's stakeholders and community they operate within, and in consequence that might even have an enhanced performance of profitability (Freeman, 2010).

If a hotel firm adopts sustainable measures and CSR activities, it can be deduced that cost savings will be even better (Rahman et al., 2012), their corporate image will also be enhanced (Hemenway & Hale, 1995) as well as a greater number of reserved nights (Martinac et al., 2001). Actually, many hotel firms, may step into the trap of involving in the endorsement of "sustainable initiatives" just for the mere fact of the strong benefit they represent for the company's financial savings, becoming part of, as already explained: greenwashing.

2.1.4.1 Competitive Advantage and Sustainable Practices

Over time, firms have always been driven by the idea of how they can compete and differentiate themselves within a specific market and have an advantage over their competitors. To carry this out, companies tend to either adapt to opportunities present in its competitive environment or exploit their internal resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). Firms call these different efforts "business strategies". After the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the importance of sustainable development strategies began being popular and to be taken into consideration for business strategies and business decisions. Nowadays, environmental sustainability is claimed to provide a competitive advantage to companies (Falkenberg & Brunsael, 2011; Baird et al., 2012; Gerstlberger et al., 2014). In order for it to be communicated environmental sustainability marketing is used, and the hotel industry is not the exception. This works as a tool in a way that hotel firms can be positioned in the market and let the public know about their differentiated services to their potential consumers, which generally are sustainable minded guests and therefore trust can be created (Kasim, 2006; Graci & Dodds, 2009; Rettie et al., 2014). It has been found that environmental sustainability strategies can adopt either a low-cost, a differentiated or a hybrid (a combination of the two) approach to creating a competitive advantage as it can be observed in Figure 2 (Walsh & Dodds, 2017).

Figure 2: *"Low Cost and Differentiation Sustainability Strategies lead to Competitive Advantage"*
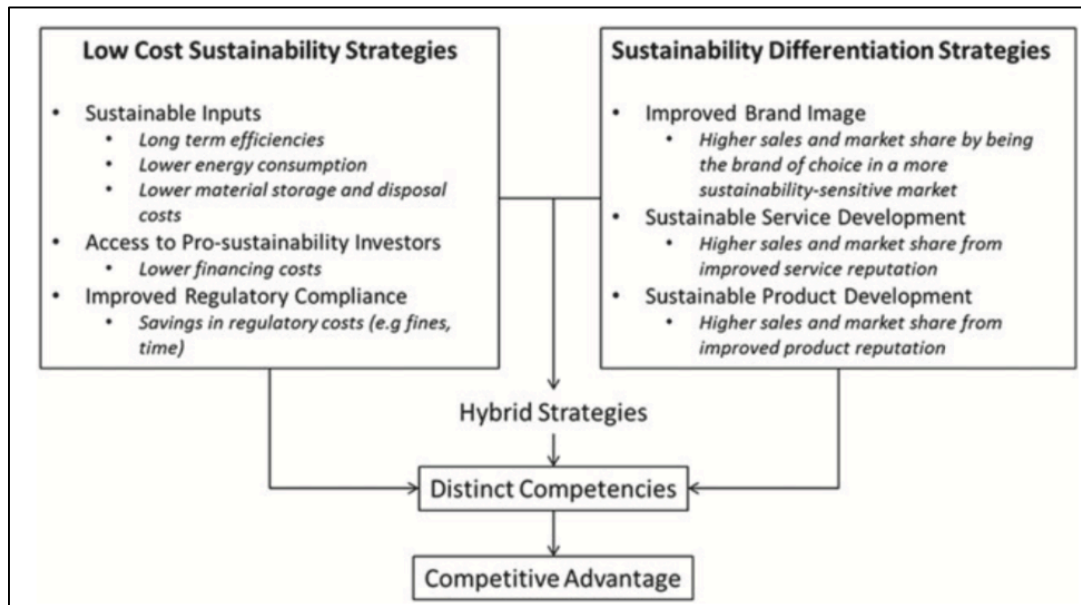
Figure 2 better illustrates how do low cost sustainability strategies and sustainability differentiation strategies have working either separately or together can form distinct competencies which could eventually bring a competitive advantage to a given firm (Walsh & Dodds, 2017).

The Low Cost Sustainability Strategies refer to basically adopting cost effective strategies that have been explained throughout this chapter, such as lowering energy consumption, having long term efficiencies, lowering material storage and disposal costs, having lower financial costs by approaching to pro-sustainability investors and also improve their regulatory compliance and lowering costs in terms of regulatory costs. It alludes to the importance of low cost strategies in giving a competitive advantage stated by Porter in 1985. On the other hand, Sustainability Differentiation Strategies make reference to improving brand's image, which would bring higher sales and enlarge the market share, and having either a sustainable development for either a service

or a product which would also bring higher sales as a consequence from an enhanced reputation. These two different kinds of strategies, if used together (See Figure 2) bring a third strategy which is called the hybrid strategy. The goal of all of them three is to create competitive advantage (Walsh, 2014).

Hotels that use the low cost approach are more likely to be able to demonstrate their successful execution since results can be reflected or measured as a financial benefit (Gilmore et al, 2014). Instead, hotels that decide to use the sustainability differentiation strategies, which require to gain trust and fulfilling stakeholders' expectations, are indeed in a harder position to measure results (Punitha & Rasdi, 2013). It is then when hotel companies can use marketing strategies to attract customers. Some authors state that when a hotel firm uses marketing to advertise its environmental sustainable practices, it can increase its competitiveness and position itself way higher than its competitors in the market, creating a competitive advantage in terms of marketing and finance (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Kirk, 1998). Relationships with the community and consumers can also be enhanced (Kirk, 1998).

In 2014 a study carried out by Jones et al., in which the top ten global hotel brands were analyzed with reference to environmental sustainability strategies revealed that they had adapted perfectly to the model of the three generic approaches above mentioned. This study showed that the hotel firms who decided to use the low-cost approach were more capable of measuring the successful implementation due to the fact that these strategies may reflect in financial benefit. In another study made by Hsieh in 2012, the world's 50 largest hotel chains were examined. Throughout their websites, Hsieh could determine that cost efficiency (low-cost) initiatives predominated. Measures such as energy and water consumption and waste management were the ones that were more common among these hotel firms. Instead, actions such as reduction of carbon footprint, ecological or organic food offer and air quality were not that predominant. This means that usually, hotel chains tend to follow environmental sustainability strategies that would result in cost efficiency and use this as their competitive advantage (Walsh & Dodds, 2017).

Reality is that by only using the low-cost approach, it can be difficult to create an effective competitive advantage, since consumers might not be aware of the actions that hotel firms are

taking. "Implementing environmental protection measures while satisfying guest needs is plainly not an easy task" (Chan & Hawkins, 2010). An example of this can be the hotel Westin Bayshore located in Vancouver, Canada. The hotel saved around $100,000 per year in electricity costs. They were able to achieve this by changing light bulbs and implementing smart monitors to reduce air conditioning in unoccupied rooms. Unfortunately, guests did not notice any difference and were not aware of the energy conservation program (Mullens, 1999). Therefore, some hotel sustainable operations go unnoticed and the opportunity of generating a sustainable image as a competitive advantage is lost. But as mentioned, it is not an easy job, because hotel companies sometimes are afraid that their consumers might perceive that by using environmentally sustainable hotel measures the service quality offered can go down, or even worst they are also afraid of being accused of greenwashing as previously explained. This is when the certifications made by organizations such as Green Key Global, EarthCheck and Green Globe already mentioned, that can help the hotel firm gain credibility and enhance their brand image.

In another study made in 2012 by Zhang et al., 984 hotels in the United States where analyzed in terms of environmental sustainability initiatives. It was discovered that there are two factors that can provide an enhanced competitiveness to hotels. One factor refers to management controlled lowering of costs using electricity, water and sewers in an efficient way. The other factor concerns customer-centric activities that include their usage of laundry, linen and other room amenities. This could be achieved by using strategies like procurement of environmentally sustainable supplies, guest education and also the way in which these actions are communicated to the customer (Walsh & Dodds, 2017).

Sustainability Differentiation Strategies and Competitive Advantage

Occupancy can definitely be considered as a great indicator to determine the relationship between having sustainability differentiation strategies with competitive advantage. Occupancy means the number of rooms occupied by guests in any given night. The number of visits to a determined hotel is significantly correlated to the hotel's usage of environmental sustainability branding strategy but also with the environmentally sustainable procurement of products it uses, its guest's sustainability education strategy and the way it effectively communicates with credibility to its

stakeholders its sustainable actions (Walsh & Dodds, 2017). Competitive advantage can be measured through factors like financial performance, the attraction of customers and ensuring customer satisfaction, and environmentally sustainable strategies contribute indeed to all of the above mentioned. For instance, the financial success of a hotel is moderately linked to how much the hotel frim has emphasized environmental sustainability in their branding.

Low cost strategies are generally implemented all together, for instance, energy and waste management as also water conservation activities are strongly correlated to one another. But hoteliers are not convinced that these activities bring them indeed competitive advantage in comparison to their competitors, even though it is logical that they bring financial improvement, it has been seen that other environmental strategies have a bigger impact on granting them a competitive advantage. These are the so called sustainability differentiation strategies that are seen by hotel owners or managers to really have a significant impact in providing a competitive advantage (Walsh & Dodds, 2017). Sustainability differentiation strategies include environmental sustainability education and a well defined communication strategy. If communication with stakeholders is optimal, thus, stakeholders will carry out sustainable activities perfectly and will feel they are indeed part of the hotels' sustainable efforts which will create loyalty and reflect in a greater occupancy rate.

Environmental Sustainability Branding, Education and Communication

If hotel companies embrace environmental sustainability branding for their business strategies, as long as offering a well established environmental sustainability education for their guests and define a transparent and well functioning communication system to communicate their sustainable practices to their stakeholders and the community, it can expect to have positive results in terms of performance and advantages such as; a greater number of visitors, an enhanced guest satisfaction and larger revenues obtained due to an environmentally sustainable brand. In the study regarding the 984 American hotels (Zhang et al., 2012), it was found that the North American hotel industry is convinced that if they are being brand as an environmentally sustainable hotel it is more likely to have success in the future, rather than only using the low-cost strategies that they find somehow very common around the market. This idea, as a matter of fact, challenges the statement

made by Porter in 1985, which refers to the importance of cost savings as the most important strategy to provide a competitive advantage to a company. This does not mean hotel firms' management are not aware of the importance of low cost strategies, although they consider them as strategies that are easy to implement or copy and hence do not offer a sustainable competitive advantage or something that differentiates them from their competitors.

Using sustainability differentiation strategies can help hotels to brand themselves as such. The capacity of hotels to create a distinct and well defined brand focused on sustainability can be the origin of sustainable competitive advantage (Grant, 1991). Nevertheless, senior hotel management should include in their agendas the importance of low cost sustainability strategies and to work at the same time with branding, using a more hybrid strategy (see Figure 3) that could lead to a competitive advantage and have as a result continued economic success, greater revenues, enhanced occupancy and customer satisfaction.

Low cost strategies can bring them instant financial advantages and therefore improve their profitability which can lead them to be more flexible in the matter of price competitiveness and allow them to invest in environmental sustainability that can help them differentiate and bring a competitive advantage to their firm. It is also suggested to communicate clearly to customers about the environmental advantages the sustainable strategies can provide not only to the community they operate within but also for their own performances, establishing that a direct effect will be the enhancement of quality in their services and this way, customers might feel motivated and trustful (Walsh & Dodds, 2017).

Figure 3: "*Hybrid Strategies bring Competitive Advantage*"
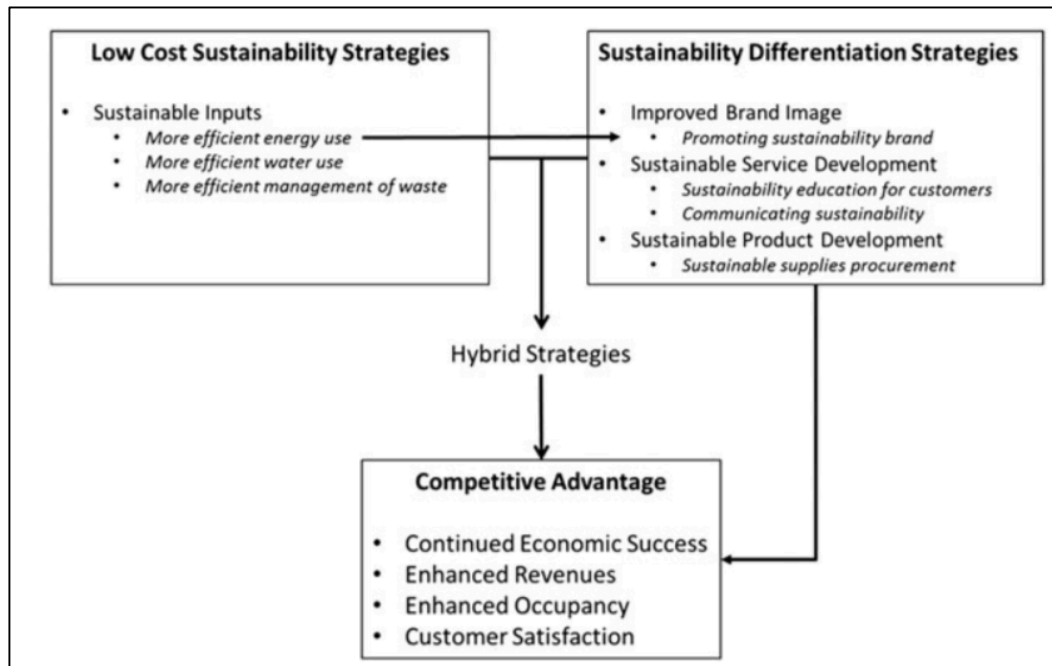
Source: Walsh, P. R., & Dodds, R. (2017). Measuring the choice of environmental sustainability strategies in creating a competitive advantage. Business Strategy and the Environment, 26(5), 672–687. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1949

Both low cost sustainability strategies and sustainability Differentiation Strategies can deliver a competitive advantage for a company, and thus by implementing the two of them together hybrid Strategies can be formed which would also generate a competitive advantage (See Figure 3) (Walsh, P. R., & Dodds, R. (2017).

3. Chapter 3

3.1 Methods

This research is a qualitative analysis. Data was collected from four diverse case studies and two Environmental, Social and Governance Reports from Hilton Worldwide and Marriott International. Predetermined information regarding the sustainable actions taken by five diverse hotel companies to counteract the impact of their operations on the environment was analyzed. Two of the most important hospitality companies have been selected to be studied in this research, Hilton Worldwide and Marriott International, as well as two luxury local hotels located in London, Bali and Istria. The selected case studies have been examined with the aim of understanding from a practical point of view, how the policies and programs implemented by hospitality organizations influence and impact on environmental issues, recognize who are the affected stakeholders and identify financial and marketing benefits. A comparison of all the five different hotels was done, to determine their key performance indicators and the general aftereffects of their sustainable strategies on the environment, communities and affected stakeholders, the cost benefits and brand positioning. Additionally, the study cases' analysis aims to determine the relation between the theoretical framework in regards with stakeholder theory, customer perceptions about the brand and competitive advantage theories in which predominantly authors proclaim that competitive advantage is nowadays presumably brought by sustainable actions done by firms and identify current environmental trends. Therefore, it is also determined which are the sustainable trends used renowned brands such as Marriott and Hilton and luxury hotels from 3 different countries.

3.2 Case Studies' Analysis

3.2.1 "Hilton Hotel Worldwide: A case study exploring corporate social responsibility and stakeholder management."

Hilton faced three major controversies which were sex trafficking accusations in 1998, corporate espionage scandal in 2009 and 2015. To confront these major issues and public discontent, HHW

was able to create a corporate code of conduct, an environmental reporting program and established a comprehensive communication platform for Corporate Social Responsibility across the whole company. These initiatives generated opportunities and positive changes in fundamental practices to address public complaints and raise Hilton to a prominent position in CSR within the hospitality industry (Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc., 2015). Within the internal code of conduct created by HHW, there is an ethical and moral guidance, that highlights the importance of ethical behavior in the company's CSR initiatives. In 2011, Hilton Hotel Worldwide launched "Travel with Purpose" which is established as Hilton's global corporate responsibility commitment and its main focus is "*to create shared value and provide a cohesive, yet flexible framework to guide the activities of business across regions, brands and properties*" (Travel with Purpose Corporate Responsibility Report, 2012). Its main aim is to share information with stakeholders and dedicate resources to address worldwide and community issues and challenges, and at the same time increase awareness and consciousness. Nevertheless, the primary obstacle in the industry is upholding a uniform international strategy and executing effective worldwide human relations, sustainability and environmental initiatives, as well as training and development program. This is particularly difficult in a fragmented industry where the franchise management lacks comprehensive control.

In Hilton's Annual Corporate Responsibility Report and code of conduct, policies that went further than environmental activities were established. Such policies were referred to equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion, protection of human rights, access to health and of course, environment sustainability. Hilton included on its CSR program, for the first time, an environmental benchmarking instrument which regarded environmental reporting, in was indeed called Hilton Environmental Reporting, that later on, in 2010 it would change its name to LightStay. LightStay is a monitoring system for properties that analyzes and determines how much environmental impact they can reach. By the end of 2011, just a year later, Hilton had met its goal of implementing Light Stay in all of its hotels, making conservation and sustainability a brand standard and placing Hilton as the first major multi-brand firm in the hospitality industry to need a property level measurement of sustainability (Hilton Worldwide, 2011).

Approaching to the future, as previously mentioned Hilton's CSR activities and efforts go beyond environmental conservation. Through their Public Relations Department and their Travel with Purpose report and also by the use of social media as Twitter, currently named "X", Hilton seeks to communicate and highlight its CSR activities press releases and sponsoring filmmaking at Sundance Fil Festival for ecological films, its support to minorities, nature protection and interventions and its support for food for communities in need (Hilton Worldwide News, 2013). Additionally, something that HHW has on its favor is the legitimacy given by third party independent audit companies, that help verify their CSR actions, to be able to assure their stakeholders that its goals and performances are being accurately reported.

3.2.2 Sustainability Integrated Reports: Hilton & Marriott

3.2.2.1 Travel with Purpose: Hilton Worldwide 2022 Environmental, Social and Governance Report

Hilton Worldwide is an American multinational recognized hospitality company that manages as direct owner and franchises a diverse collection of hotels and resorts. Hilton has its headquarters located in Virginia in the United States. By 2020, Hilton stated to have in its portfolio more than 7,165 properties with a total of 1,127,430 rooms located in 123 countries and 400,000 team members. Hilton counts with its own guest loyalty program called Hilton Honors, where frequent guests are able to collect points and even airline miles by staying in one of Hilton's hotel portfolio. The firm, reports to have approximately 120 million members (Hilton, 2023). In 2012, Hilton was the first company in the ranking of "Happiest Companies in America" (CareerBliss, 2013).

As previously mentioned, since 2011, Hilton launched, Travel with Purpose, which is a report that presents information about its strategies and performance in regards to its environmental, social and governance. This report in done following the standards of the Global Reporting Initiative. Hilton also provides through its websites, information about their programs and progress so far in regards to its 2030 goals, which is written in Hilton's Form 10-K, Annual Report and its Proxy Statement. This goals have been updated with more ambitious environmental and social objectives

that are focused on providing a net zero emission future and creating numerous opportunities to the communities they operate within. Hilton states to base their environmental goals on reliable data that is supported by the Science Based Targets Initiative, and their main aim is to reduce emissions from all of their properties and at the same time being more efficient in their operations. Some of the actions that working along with managers and owners have been achieved are; decreasing the use of single plastic amenities, replacing traditional light bulbs with LED ones, implementing more than 1,600 electric charging stations for guests' electric cars, and investments such as the one they made in 2022 in Fifth Wall's Climate Tech Fund which works on innovating decarbonizing technologies for the real estate industry. The firm has received the acknowledgment for its environmental and social positive actions from organizations such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices, EcoVadis, DiversityInc and was awarded as the second world's best Workplace by Great Place to Work Institute and Fortune Magazine (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

Hilton's Environmental, Social and Governance Strategy: Responsible Travel and Tourism

As already stated, Hilton's ESG Strategy is called Travel with Purpose, which its progress in terms of environmental actions, will be analyzed in this research. In 2018, the 2030 Goals were added to the Travel with Purpose strategy, that indeed line up with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. In 2022, a new framework was established for the ESG Strategy to help achieve the 2030 Goals. This framework is divided in 3 main pillars; Environmental, Social and Governance Commitments (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Hilton's Environmental, Social and Governance Goals for 2030*

Environmental Goals	Social Goals	Governance Goals
Reduce Carbon Emissions by 75% and franchised portfolio emissions by 56% by 2030, having 2008 as a baseline and achieve towards a net-zero future.	Generate 5 million job opportunities for Team Members and communities for minorities groups by 2030. Reach 50% more gender diversity in leadership and	Support public policies that help achieve Hilton's Travel with Purpose Goals.

	attain 25% Ethnic Diversity by 2027.	
Reduce water usage by 50% by 2030 having 2008 as a baseline.	Positively impact 20 million community members by 2030 by supporting communities, through disaster relief and providing economic opportunities, achieving 10 million volunteer hours, actively participating in food donation programs, and sourcing from local suppliers .	Generate partnerships and create cross-industry networks to achieve Hilton's Travel with Purpose Goals.
Reduce waste by 50% by 2030 having 2008 as a baseline.	Positive influence of responsible and inclusive conduct on 100% of Hilton's chain operations, sourcing from sustainable certified suppliers animal products for instance.	Work with LightStay, continue actively reporting annually to the board, compliance of training on management risks such as human trafficking.

Source: Travel with Purpose, Hilton 2022 Environmental, Social and Governance Report, Hilton Worldwide, 2022

Going further into detail some of the specific actions implemented by Hilton to achieve the above mentioned goals are; providing guests Hilton Digital Key for reducing single use plastics (saving 183 tons of plastic since 2020), make their front house employees be aware and report any doubt of human trafficking, create new job opportunities and education programs about diversity and human rights for all Hilton's staff members, employ Hilton's Meeting Calculator and LightStay to measure and compensate its carbon emissions on events, encourage volunteering, recycle soap and reduce energy and water usage during cleaning activities, use the towel and linen reuse program, use LED light bulbs, acquire from cage-free egg suppliers and sustainable animal products, reduce

waste by donating food and decrease kitchen energy usage (Hilton Worldwide, 2023). An example of a sustainability action already taken by Hilton's associates is; the Waldorf Astoria's partnership with Aesop that produces sustainable goods for skincare, such as body wash, shampoo, fragrances, between others, and that will be displayed in the room leaving behind the travel size plastic bottles.

Stakeholder Engagement

Hilton declares to be aware of the importance of engaging with internal and external stakeholders in order to carry out their ESG goals. Hilton's internal stakeholders which include the leadership board, team members, owners and developers express full commitment in setting the direction for the correct development of the above mentioned activities that intend to accomplish the Travel with Purpose 2030 Goals (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

Meet with Purpose

Meet with Purpose is a program established by Hilton that enables its customers to integrate social and environmental factors into their meetings or events, that are in line with Hilton's ESG goals. It works out as a partnership throughout the planning of events with the objective of achieving the customer's climate and social impact goals as well as Hilton's. Its aim is to aid customers in identifying opportunities to reduce their emissions from their meetings and events and therefore be more sustainable in their planning and purchasing decisions. Hilton provides a program called Carbon Neutral Meetings, which is designed to back up sustainable development initiatives, decrease emissions and overall safeguard the environment. Through the implementation of this program Hilton is able to offset the carbon dioxide emissions that is produced during meetings and events by obtaining carbon offsets that contribute to projects aimed at reducing carbon footprints. In 2022, Hilton established a collaboration with ClimeCo, which is a prominent international developer of environmental credit projects and that provides opportunities for carbon offsetting. Hilton also reported to have partnered with American Express Global Business Travel Global Business Consulting to demonstrate how hotels can aid business travel managers and event planners to integrate sustainability into their trip schedule, by being aware of the global travel trends in regards to hotel sustainability and green initiatives and after this, be able to measure their

positive sustainable advance with help of the LightStay report which permits customers to hold tailored environmental and social reports that detail carbon, energy, water and waste that was generated by the meeting or even based on the hotel that hosted it (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

LightStay

As previously discussed, LightStay is the management system that helps Hilton keep a record of its progress regarding its Travel with Purpose goals. This management system enables hotels to understand specifically where to focus in terms of reduction targets and social impact, by capturing information about energy, carbon, water and waste efficiency programs and also social activities such as volunteerism and donations. It is a monthly report that keeps all of Hilton's properties aware of their ESG progress. LightStay helps Hilton adhere with ISO 90001, ISO 50001 and ISO 14001, which refers to Environmental Management. Google, acknowledges LightStay for its eco-certified label and Booking.com uses its data to classify Hilton hotels into one of its three Travel Sustainable levels. In 2022, taking 2008 as a baseline, LightStay reported that overall Hiltons' progress has been to reduced in a 47.1% watts' emissions per m2, 33.4% water consumption per m2 and 65.4% waste per m2, which translated into more than $1.38 billion USD in savings since 2009 (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

The Hilton Global Foundation

The aim of the foundation is to have a positive impact on the communities that Hilton operates within, following the objective of creating a better world to travel for generations to come. The foundation focuses on four main topics which line up to the Travel with Purpose's environmental and social goals; climate action, destination responsible use of resources, career development and community resilience. Hilton grants $2 million USD in total, and in October 2022, it allocated the grant to 18 organizations that have proven to commit to the preservation of travel destinations with actions such as creating access to water, enabling hospitality skills and supporting communities to be able to access to the vital resources they need. Another $125,000 USD grant was given to organizations that were dedicated to enhancing the travel destinations they operated in and tried diminish the environmental impact (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

2030 Goal Updates

For the purpose of this study, from the 3 main objectives of Hilton's 2030 Goals, solely the environmental goals' progress will be analyzed (see Table 2), which as mentioned align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 2: *Hilton's 2030 Environmental Goals and Progress up to 2022*

Environmental Goal	Progress up to 2022 (2008 Baseline)
Reduce Carbon Emissions by 75% and franchised portfolio emissions by 56% by 2030, having 2008 as a baseline and achieve towards a net-zero future.	44% reduction in carbon emissions in all hotels 100% use LightStay against climate risks Opened first net-zero carbon emissions hotel in the US, the Hotel Macel New Haven, Tapestry Collection by Hilton Collaborate with Schneider Electric for a science-based action plan for 2030 LED bulbs as a global standard Fifth Wall investments
Reduce water usage by 50% by 2030 having 2008 as a baseline.	38.1% reduction in water intensity in all hotels 9 community water programs completed Mapped 100% hotels against WWF water risk indices Enhanced the Energy and Water Efficient Design Companion Guide to improve energy and water efficiency
Reduce waste by 50% by 2030 having 2008 as a baseline.	57.6% reduction in landfilled waste intensity Became part of WRI Cool Food program to reduce food waste Expand Digital Key program to reduce plastic use

| | 5,500 hotels engaged to recycle soap |
| | Design a program for food waste donation |

Hilton aims to fulfill the growing expectations of the increasing population of conscientious travelers who highly regard sustainable tourism. Thus, being aware of this in 2018, Hilton was the first important hospitality company to establish science-based targets to diminish greenhouse emissions and in addition, in 2022 reevaluated its existing goals and align them to the latest information provided by SBTi, a collaboration between the World Resource Institute Center for Sustainable Business, World Wildlife Fund, Climate Disclosure Project and The United Nations Global Compact. Therefore, their carbon intensity reduction goals were enhanced making them more realistic. There is indeed a phased implementation strategy to reduce Hilton's emissions that prioritize key sustainability initiatives for maximum impact. This plan was developed in collaboration with Schneider Electric, which is a global sustainability leader (Hilton Worldwide, 2023) To see what the plan consists of see table 3.

Table 3: *"Hilton's 2030 Goals' Actions and Investments on Sustainability Measures"*

Actions	How	Invest on
1. Standard Operating Procedures	Practices that require no cost or low cost.	Trainings, control, monitoring, orientation
2. Energy Efficiency	Improving efficiency with payback investments that return faster. Capture tax or utility incentives to make ROI faster	Buildings Envelope, Full Led Retrofits, New Build Efficiency
3. Renewable Power Procurement	Collaborate with property owners to invest in off-site renewable energy sources, creating the chance to sell	Virtual power purchase agreement

	excess energy back to the grid and acquire Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs)	
4. Retrofits and Electrification	Prioritize investments in more efficient mechanical equipment, that is preferably powered by electricity. at the end of their operational life	Electrification of Heating systems Fuel switching New build efficiency
5. On-Site Generation	Using sustainable energy sources from solar or geothermal systems	Solar panels on-site Geothermal power on-site
6. Offsets and Renewable energy certifications	As a final measure, procuring yearly premium carbon offsets and Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) to compensate for any remaining balance	RECS, EACS, GOS Shortfall (offsets).

Source: Travel with Purpose, Hilton 2022 Environmental, Social and Governance Report Impact, Hilton Worldwide, 2022

Hilton reports to be member of many sustainable groups such as the Global Business Travel Association, Sustainability Leadership Council, the American Hotel & Lodging Association's Sustainability Committee and Responsible Stay Initiative and the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance. Hilton states to follow these groups' initiatives and that its aim is to continue making the hospitality industry more environmentally and socially sustainable. Another example of the actions taken by the hotel firm is the new hotel that was open in 2022, Botánika Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica. The main goal of this hotel is to connect tourists and nature by teaching them about the local environment and how to preserve it by doing a responsible use of resources, to be able to protect local ecosystems, create jobs, and reduce waste (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

Decarbonization Strategy

Hilton states to be in the process of transitioning to renewable power which has the goal of reducing costs and greenhouse has emissions from all of its global properties. Hilton and hotel owners work together to recognize opportunities to invest in renewable low carbon emission technologies with the aim of enhance the environment and also reduce costs. The goal is to make all hotels become autonomous in terms of energy supply. Almost 33% of managed hotels all over EMEA, Hilton's Watford and Glasgow corporate establishments are powered with 100% certified renewable energy and 66% of Hilton's Middle East, Africa and Turkey hotels have achieved a feasibility study to implement on-site solar panels implementation to provide their own energy. By 2024, it is expected that all of Hilton's hotels have passed to LED lighting, also helping reduce hotel's energy consumption while at the same time yielding long-term cost savings. In 2022, Hilton's partnership with Aquicore got stronger (Walsh, P. R., & Dodds, R. 2017). Aquicore is a well-known American platform that takes care of energy and facilities' performance management in commercial real estate. Since the first implementation of this platform in 2017, Hilton has been able to save more than $4 million USD in energy cost savings. A few examples of this matter can be the Hilton Vienna Park which states to use electricity that is 100% hydropower generated, solar window foil to decrease energy waste and LED light, thus it has been awarded the Austrian Eco Label certification for sustainability. Rome Cavalieri from Waldorf Astoria has achieved the Green Key for four consecutive years due to its high level of energy efficiency, outstanding waste management, low carbon emissions and its collaboration with various local association to help local communities (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

Water Conservation, Waste Reduction and Plastic Diminishment

Hilton's water conservation efforts involve the execution of architecture and landscaping standards. For instance, implementing water sensitive landscapes as well as water efficient fixtures such as controlled showers, toilets and faucets than help saving water, using water from storms and capturing it to for outdoor terraces irrigation. Hilton requires all of its hotels to monitor and report their water usage metrics to be able to accomplish their environmental goals, also in this

case using LightStay. Regarding waste reduction, as previously mentioned, Hilton focuses on its value chain through sustainable sourcing alternatives, avoiding food waste through donation, recycling, and composting. Concerning food waste, Hilton encourages its properties to use the Hotel Kitchen Toolkit which was created by the World Wildlife Fund and instructs hotels by how to use their food waste reduction methods by careful and detailed planning, recovering wholesome, compost and food waste donation when it is possible. In 2022, Hilton continued to carry out plastic reduction programs and as aforementioned, looks forward to eliminate miniature toiletries by the end of 2023 in all of its properties, has implemented in more than 2,400 hotels sustainable hydration as reusable drinking vessels and refill stations to reduce plastic bottles use. One of the most important initiatives is the soap recycling program, which has been used in 80% of Hilton's properties. Soap that has been used in rooms is sent to Clean the World, Soap Aid, Soap Cycling and Sundara. These institutions help sanitize the used soaps and turn them into new soap bars ready to be donated. More than 2.3 million soap bars have been donated in 2022 (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

Impact in Local Communities

Volunteering is also an essential part of the Travel with Purpose Hilton's programs. Some of the most impactful activities that characterize this programs are the volunteering efforts from beach cleanups, tree planting and recycling projects. For instance, staff members from Hilton New Orleans Riverside have been working together with the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana to incorporate recycled oyster shells to build oyster reefs. In U.A.E., DoubleTree by Hilton Ras Al Khaimah joined forces with Ras Al Khaimah Waste Management and did a beach cleanup to stop garbage going into the ocean. The Hilton Queenstown Resort and Spa and DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel also in Queenstown, Australia, created an environmental challenge for their team members which was required to do 10 actions in a week that were environmentally friendly. These actions were carpooling, having short showers, and only eating vegetarian meals. They gathered points and at the end the one go had gathered more points was awarded as the Sustainability queen or king (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

Sustainable Sourcing

Along with Hilton's supply chain sustainable goals, there is concern to work with suppliers that are committed to responsible business and sustainable operations, this is when Hilton Responsible Sourcing Policy becomes present. This policy specifies all supplier contracts requirements and that companies should meet the minimum ESG standards established by Hilton. Hilton's global procurement and supply chain services team, named as Hilton Supply Management, works with a cooperative platform called EcoVadis, which evaluates, tracks and enhances Hilton's suppliers' sustainability performance. Some other examples done by Hilton are; working for animal welfare, buying ugly vegetables and buy from sustainable oyster farms. Being aware about the fact that stakeholders are expecting responsible decisions and Hilton's contribution in making a positive environmental impact, responsible and sustainable sourcing is a priority for Hilton Supply Management, always putting first the company's standards to safeguard the community (Hilton Worldwide, 2023).

3.2.2.2 Serve 360: Marriott International 2022, Environmental, Social and Governance Report

Marriott International is an American multinational renowned company that operates, franchises, and licenses of hotels, residential complexes and timeshare properties. Marriott's headquarters are located in Maryland, in the United States. It is the largest hotel chain worldwide. By the end of 2021, Marriott reported to have 30 brands, 7,989 properties with a total of 1,479,179 rooms all over 139 countries, more than 160 million members to its loyalty program called Marriott Bonvoy and 325,000 associates around the world (Marriott International, 2022). Marriott's values are very important for the brand as they resemble its identity. "Putting people first, pursuing excellence, embracing change, acting with integrity and serving our world", these are the core values that can be found in Marriott International firm's website. In which throughout their annual report is what the brand pursues to look forward to achieving. Regarding the "We serve our world" goal, Marriott uses a sustainability and social platform called "Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction". The latter is basically a list of guidelines to make a positive and sustainable impact in every business

the company accomplishes. Marriott has also presented a list of sustainability and social impact goals set to be accomplished by 2025, and also follows the UN Sustainable Development Goals, being committed to have a positive and sustainable impact in all of its businesses (Marriott International, 2023).

Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction

As previously mentioned, Serve 360, guides the firm to carry out the goal of making a positive and sustainable impact in whatever business the company performs, in fact, the company refers to them as coordinates. Going into detail, this program is settled as a social impact platform that is leaded by four main coordinates or issues that regard impactful initiatives in all the countries which Marriott is present, to have a positive change and to execute global sustainable targets such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The four main pillars or coordinates (see Table 4), as Marriott refers to them, are some sustainability and social impact goals that Marriott uses as a guide to carry out their mission of being a globally responsible company. These goals are expected to be fulfilled by the year between the year 2022-2025 (Marriott International, 2021). Some of these goals were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, hence are behind schedule, but at the moment, Marriott continues to be committed to these goals (see Table 4).

Table 4: *Marriott's 4 Main Coordinates and 2025 ESG Goals*

Coordinates	Goals
1. Nurture Our World: Marriott invests in the sustainable development of the communities it operates within, safeguarding natural resources and supporting them in difficult times.	By 2025, provide 15 million hours of volunteer service to support the company's priorities and the strategy of commitment with different communities. At least 80% of managed hotels have got involved in community service activities. Finally, 50% of all of the volunteer activities should be based upon skills.
2. Sustain Responsible Operations: Implementation of a sustainable value chain to help reduce the impact on climate change and environmental impacts, creating sustainable hotels	By 2022, all of Marriott hotel properties websites should have a Serve 360 section with the key points and hotel impact metrics to inform the stakeholders about their actions.

and obtaining resources from sustainable providers.	By 2023, all suppliers should provide information about the sustainability of the products they are selling as well as social and human rights impacts. By 2025, environmental footprint should be reduced by water usage 15%, carbon intensity 30%, waste reduction 45%, food waste reduction 50% and reach a 30% of renewable electricity use. A 100% of Marriott International hotels should have recognized sustainable certifications and 650 hotels will seek LEED certification or equivalent, including prototypes and reuse projects. Responsible sourcing by 95% of its top 10 priority categories: animal food products, water, cleaning supplies, cocoa, coffee, guest room amenities, paper products, sugar, textiles, etc. 50% of products should be locally sourced. Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment sources should be on the top tier of the Mindclick Sustainability Assessment Program for Marriott.
3. Empower Through Opportunity: Marriott looks forward to a culture of inclusion in the company. They stand upon the ideal of offering the opportunity to work in the firm to young people, women, people with disabilities, veterans, refugees and other population groups.	By 2023, gender equality in the firm's leadership should be achieved. By 2025, 35 million dollars should be invested in strategies, programs and partnerships that uplift and enhance hospitality skills and develop opportunities for young groups, woman, people with disabilities, veterans, refugees, etc.
4. Welcome All and Advance Human Rights: Marriott International expects to have a safe working environment and fight human trafficking, child exploitation and forced labor.	By 2025, 100% of on-property associates should have completed human rights training which regard human traffic awareness, responsible sourcing and recruitment standards and practices strengthen human rights criteria in recruitment and sourcing policies, specially regarding human rights risks in the construction phase. Encourage a sustainable and peaceful tourism and invest 500 thousand dollars to enhance the tourism's role in cultural understating.

Source: Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction: 2025 Sustainability & Social Impact Goals, Marriott International 2022.

Regarding the Sustainable Responsible Operations since 2021, Marriot has announced the following goals' status and progress (see Table 5).

Table 5: "Marriott's 2025 Sustainable Goals Progress since 2016"

Goal	Status	Progress 2021 since 2016
15% water usage reduction	Behind Schedule	4.7% increase
30% carbon intensity reduction	On Track	25.6% decrease
45% waste management reduction and 50% less food waste	Behind Schedule	Finalized the Hotel Waste Measurement Methodology
30% increment renewable energy	Behind Schedule	0.30% sourced renewable energy
100% hotels with sustainable certifications	Behind Schedule	30% hotels with certifications
650 hotels LEED certification	Behind Schedule	227 hotels certified
250 adaptive reuse projects	Ahead Schedule	211 opened projects
95% responsible sourcing	Behind Schedule	Engagement with existing suppliers
50% Locally sourced products	Behind Schedule	Engagement with existing suppliers
Furniture, fixtures and Equipment suppliers top tier of Mind Click Sustainability Assignment	On track	55% of evaluated products gained top tier leader categorization.

Source: 2022 Serve 360 Report, Environmental, Social and Governance Progress, Marriot International, 2022

For the analysis of Marriott's Serve 360 report the Report for the purpose of this study will just be taken into consideration Marriott's environmental goals and actions.

Marriott's Stakeholders

Marriott International works jointly with a large range of stakeholders and state to care about their priorities and needs. With a focus on understanding their demands, Marriott uses global forums and industry associations, as well as putting efforts and investing into the development of policies, programs and reports that show important Environmental, Social and Governance concerns. Marriott considers as its stakeholders; associates, customers, guests, hotel owners & franchisees, suppliers, communities, industry associations and nongovernmental organizations and investors. Marriott takes care of its associates by investing on their development, acknowledgement, compensations, career opportunities and continuous trainings, specifically regarding Serve 360 and ESG. Marriott also looks forward into working along its customers to support its Serve 360 Goals and ESG strategy. Guests are key stakeholders for Marriott too, because through their opinions and reviews, the company can effectuate a higher guest satisfaction and therefore generate loyalty, this is where the loyalty program Marriott Bonvoy appears. Marriott Bonvoy is a loyalty program that permits guests to collect points for staying in any Marriott property. Guests have the option to donate their points to Serve 360 partners. Hotel owners and franchisees are invited by Marriott to participate in diverse forums where they are motivated to adopt relevant initiatives, collaborate through new opportunities and move forward with ESG actions. Suppliers are also considered one of Marriott's most important stakeholders, where the hotel firm works along with them through sustainable procurement and supplier diversity programs. Suppliers must be responsible with their sources and work in collaboration with minorities too. The communities where Marriott's associates, hotels and business councils operate within are certainly large interest parts where Marriott interacts with them through investment, volunteer activities and supporting them through disaster relief programs and biodiversity funding. Industry Associations and Nongovernmental Organizations such as the World Economic Forum, the Business Roundtable, the World Travel and Tourism Council, The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, U.S. Council for International Business, U.S. Travel Association, U.S. Traven and Tourism Advisory Board, Brand USA and the American Hotel & Lodging Association, WEConnect International, Out & Equal,

between many others are some examples of organizations where Marriott participate being part of the leadership and following their guidelines. Last but not least, investors, with whom Marriott engages to share with them updates about ESG information and regarding the progress of the 2015 Serve 360 goals (Marriott International, 2022).

Marriott's Environment Actions

Marriot aims to reduce its hotel greenhouse gas emissions using technologies that are able to keep a record of energy consumption. To achieve this Marriott has created the Marriott Environmental Sustainability hub, which is an internal tracking and reporting platform in which Marriott's hotels' environmental information is managed. A group of engineers, members of the Marriott's Engineering Global Leadership Team are also part of the sustainability hub and have active participation in the carbon emissions reduction strategy. The emissions reduction targets that Marriott pursues are all science based and it seeks to achieve a net-zero value chain greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The firm has as well announced in terms of energy efficiencies, that in 2021 many of their managed hotels that carried out energy efficiency projects saved about 130,000 MWhs of energy. Marriott states to constantly seek for energy efficiency investment opportunities, such as implementing saving energy and environmental action plans, signature projects, upgrading light fixtures to increase energy efficiency and automation systems. One example of this is the JW Marriott Washington in the U.S. who reported to reduce about 725 metric tons of carbon emissions over three years and was granted with the 2021 global Energy Management Leadership award (Marriott International, 2022). As prior mentioned, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Marriott reported to have a decrease in carbon intensity in the different locations in which the firm is present, but it is still behind its goal to reduce carbon intensity per square meter of conditioned space by 30%. The company reports to continue to execute programs to reduce energy usage across Marriott hotels and change the goal into a 100% carbon reduction goal by 2050.

Marriott Infrastructure Resilience and Adaptation Program

Aware of the risks that climate change brings to Marriott's physical assets, the Marriott Infrastructure Resilience and Adaptation Program (MIRA) was created. Working hand in hand with StormGeo, Marriott has begun to plan a series of steps to manage climate related risks, in

order to help property managers to know how to react in terms of weather emergencies. In 2020 and 2021, Marriott carried out an analysis for more than 9700 hotels (open and ongoing projects), to determinate physical climate change risks from the year 2030 to 2050, thus, the hotels that are in a riskier position to be affected by climate change were identified and are subject of deeper vulnerability studies. Marriott throughout MIRA, pursues to enhance consciousness and awareness about extreme climate change weather events and has created training programs to learn how to handle these situations.

Renewable Energy

As one of Marriott's goals is to implement renewable energy by a 30% before 2025, the firm continues to invest on renewable energy solutions, that not only befit the environment but also give hotels a benefit for cost saving. An example of this can be the Ritz-Carlton in the Maldives, Fari Islands, which reported to have installed more than 2,000 solar panels that produce around 3,000 kWh each day. This action could save up to 200,000 liters of diesel and decreased its carbon emissions by 650 metric tons annually. In order to enlarge and enhance the renewable energy usage, Marriott executed an analysis in which in was determined that around 800 of 1,300 properties in the United States were candidates for the installation of on-site solar panels. Since 2016, a reduction on a global scale from Marriott's properties has reported to decrease a 17.2% in energy intensity per square meter of conditioned space (Marriott International, 2022).

Water Management

As Marriott owns so many different types of structures, in terms of attributes such as size and location, managing water must be done depending on these characteristics, but they have all something in common which is the responsible use of this resource which as it is known is a critical global issue today. To address this issue, Marriott seeks to implement water conservation programs in hotel operations such as saving water in dishwashing, water service at restaurants and events, central plant operations, landscaping and irrigation, pools and fountains and golf course maintenance. Marriott expects all property and franchised hotels follow the Serve 360 global water goal, and is willing to reward hotels that perform the best in terms of water conservation. In North America, the Caribbean and Latin America, Marriott has established a set of rules to track water usage in cooling towers and irrigation. Hotels use an automatic meter-reading systems made up as

special device at the establishments where water and sewer costs are high, there is a lack of water problem, or irrigation use is more than usual. These devices create reports with data that is send every 15 minutes about water use and leaks. An example of this is Ecolab's 3D Tracer Technology that has been used by Marriott since 2014, which is a system that provides smart sensor technology for cooling water management and due to this Marriott has reported to have saved over 425 million gallons of water in 2021. Some other actions that Marriott managed properties have taken into action to accomplish the goal of reducing water intensity per occupied room by 15% taking 2016 as baseline are the use of low-flow faucets, toilets and showers, smart irrigation controllers, laundry water reuse systems, and high-efficiency irrigation sprat nozzles. Unfortunately, another effect of Covid-19 was the occupancy reduction and therefore the increase in water intensity per occupied room even increased on a global scale by 4.79% in 2021 (Marriott International, 2022).

Waste Management

Marriott follows a plan to reduce waste on a global scale, with the aim of helping Marriott hotels minimize waste and manage its disposal in a way that it does not harm the environment and is also cost-effective for the company. The main focus of the company in terms of waste management is to reduce the use of single-use plastics and disposables, as well as reduce food waste. Marriott encourage its properties to buy products that can be reused, recycled, composted or donated. The firm also follows local laws, regulations and adopts worldwide waste management trends. There is also a worldwide standard present in all guest rooms for recycling, which states that hotels should collect recyclable items from their rooms. Concerning the use of plastic, Marriott has stated to have a plan to reduce the single use of this material. The company is moving from small individual toiletry bottles to larger bottles with pump tops for products like shampoo, conditioner, body wash. This change was expected to be accomplished by the end of 2022 in all their hotels. By the end of 2023, they also expect to offer more environmentally friendly options for guests such as shaving kits, dental kits and makeup remover cloths.

Some examples can be the actions taken by The Westin Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia who in 2019 partnered with EcoPure Waters to get rid of single-use plastic water bottles in guest rooms and instead now offers reusable glass bottles. This simple action can prevent 400,000 plastic bottles from being used each year. Another example is that 40 Marriott hotels in Japan work hand in hand

with Nespresso to recycle used coffee capsules from guest rooms. A million capsules have been returned between 2021 and 2022. In the U.S and Canada, more than 1,200 owned, leased managed and franchised hotels have adopted My Digital Office which is a paper-less document management solution and thanks to this, it is estimated that 8,000 trees for paper production were not harvested in 2021. In 2022, Marriot implemented the Hotel Waste Measurement Methodology which aims to measure the progress towards its goal to reduce waste-to landfill by 45% and food waste by 50% from a 2016 baseline. Marriott reports that many of their properties continue to implement innovative management solutions for food waste, for instance, Marriott hotels in Hong Kong work with O-Park, which is the city's first organic resources recovery center, and together they turn food waste into electricity. The firm also cares about waste management education, in order to accomplish their waste reduction goals. Therefore, they offer training programs and educational webinars. For example, in 2021, the Renaissance Cancun Resort & Marina in Cancun, Mexico organized a training session about their Waste Management Plan. During the training, they shared updates on their strategies and actions to manage waste and introduced new ideas to enhance how waste is collected, compacted, stored, recycled and disposed of (Marriott International, 2022).

Sustainable Buildings & Adaptive Reuse

In 2021, Marriott received a lot of inquires from customers who wanted to know more about the sustainability efforts of individual hotels, specifically speaking about third-party sustainability certifications. Thus, the goal to make sure that all their hotels have a section on their website dedicated to Serve 360 was embedded. This new section was launched in 2022 and provides details about third-party sustainability certifications, data on the carbon and water impact of the hotels and some of the environmental practices they follow. By 2021, 30% of hotels reported to be certified to a recognized sustainability standard, and 227 hotels acquire LEED, BREEAM or Estidama certifications. Also by 2021, Marriott had almost accomplished its goal of developing 250 adaptive reuse projects by 2025, having opened 211 projects in the same year. The company, has also set up Sustainable Design Standards, focusing on energy efficiency and water saving. (Marriott International, 2022).

Biodiversity

Marriot declares to have a strong commitment in safeguarding, revitalizing and improving the natural environments and communities where hotels operate in. So these areas can remain attractive and enjoyable places for people to live, work and visit. Biodiversity issues is one of the biggest concerns for Marriott, as they expect to help preserve the Earth's natural resources. Hence, they support worldwide initiatives that help achieve their sustainability objectives, by for example, investigating nature-based solutions through their climate working group to fulfill their goal of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The company also looks forward into encouraging their guests to protect, restore and appreciate nature. In 2021, they came up with the initiative of inviting their Marriott Bonvoy members who earn at least 50 Elite Night Credits in one year, could have the option of donating $100 USD to support World Wildlife Fund. Making customers feel as they are making a real positive impact. For instance, other biodiversity sustainable activities implemented by Marriott, is the case of the Sheraton Grand Mirage Resort, Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia, where guests are offered the opportunity to snorkel with local marine experts and help clean the Gold Coast Seaway waters (Marriott International, 2022).

Life on Land: Trees, Mangroves and Rainforests

Marriot reports to continue making efforts in the investment for reforestation all around the world. In regards of trees, Marriott is a founding member of the Evergreen Alliance and participates in GreenTrees which is the largest North American reforestation program. The company has reported to have reforested 34 acres by planting 20,000 trees. Mangroves in the tropical zones, are very incredibly important because they act as natural barriers against powerful storms along coastlines. They also support communities living by the coast, preserve diverse species of plants and animals, store carbon, between many others. Therefore, Marriott has developed partnerships with diverse associations to plant and clean mangroves. For instance, the Marriott Cancun Collection in Mexico, team up with local organizations and cleaned 394 kg of waste from a mangrove ecosystem. Referring to Rainforests, Marriot has partnered with the Foundation for Amazon Sustainability and the Government of Amazonas (Marriott International, 2022).

Oceans

Marriott outlines to continue to put efforts in the protection of oceans and the sustainable use of their resources. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Marriott hotels are actively involved in all year round programs to safeguard turtle nesting sites. They educate guests and staff about why it is crucial to preserve these nesting beaches and the overall environment and maintain a secure habitat for turtles. Since 2005, the hotels have been effectively running on-site programs to rescue sea turtles. Just in 2021, 70,000 baby turtles were successfully released into the ocean. Responsible fishery activities are also a concern for Marriott, and with their collaboration with WWF, support fishery improvement projects, to reduce overfishing, catching undersized crabs and weak enforcement, unregulated catch of sea turtles and sharks, between others. Additionally, in the Caribbean and Latin America the widespread presence of sargassum algae is causing significant negative effects on the hospitality sector and the environment. Marriott has teamed up with The Ocean Foundation (TOF) to support the Insetting Carbon Through Sargassum Mitigation Pilot Project. This project involved turning sargassum seaweed into organic compost, which helped trap carbon, prevent emission from landfills and improve crop quality and quantity (Marriott International, 2022).

Responsible Sourcing

Marriott states to be aware about the fact that it is important to collaborate with environmentally conscious suppliers, that follow their sustainable philosophy. This way, negative environmental and social impact can be diminished working together with programs and policies on responsible and using local suppliers. In order to assess suppliers and their products based on their environmental and social qualities, Marriott works with Avendra, a procurement services provider located in North and Latin America and the Caribbean. Avendra establishes contracts for suppliers in which they should stick to Marriott's Supplier Conduct Guidelines, that state the minimum standards for social and environmental responsibility and reduce their carbon footprints. With Avendra, Marriott makes its major suppliers to engage into the four highest deforestation impact that their products may have, e.g. paper, soy, palm oil and beef). Additionally, Avendra requires suppliers to provide a sustainability policy that addresses the specific environmental and social

impacts related to their industry practices and since 2021, distributors and manufacturers are being assessed by the Ecovadis sustainability assessment platform. To assist Marriott in promoting ethical sourcing practices, associates who handle procurement and purchasing duties are obligated to finish the Procurement 101 online training, which also covers Marriott's policies concerning human rights. As mentioned in the 2025 Marriott's goals, the company seeks to responsibly source 95% by spend enclosed by their top ten categories which are: animal proteins, bottled water, cleaning supplies, cocoa, coffee, guest room amenities, paper products, seafood, sugar and textiles. In the case of animal products, an example is that by 2025, Marriott looks forward to source 100% of egg products from cage free sources and to source pork products from responsible suppliers. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic several impacts on the supply chain were registered, such as price increases, thus, Marriott procurement teams report to be actively working to support the rebuilding of these markets to supply the company's hotels. Globally speaking, Marriott reported to have acquired 15.4% cage-free of the total egg products purchased, and only a 1.17% responsible pork treatment of the total pork products bought (Marriott International, 2022).

Local Sourcing Across the Globe and Hospitality Sustainable Purchasing Consortium for Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment

As, previously stated, one of Marriott's goals is to locally source 50% of produce. Since 2021, Marriott reports to keep working along with local suppliers to meet their product demands and needs. Some examples of this can be the Johannesburg Marriott Hotel Melrose Arch in South Africa whom is partnered with ABALOBI, a global social enterprise based in South Africa. This collaboration aims to help small-scale fishing communities become more sustainable and resilient to climate change while ensuring fairness, while procuring local fish from small-scale fishermen and women, hence helping the local community. Regarding Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FF&E), Marriott has reported to have joined the Hospitality Sustainable Purchasing Consortium conducted by MindClick, who is leader in environmental and social impact data and analytics, to have their suppliers and their products assessed annually. These evaluations cover factors like eco-friendly materials, production impact, carbon emissions, waste reduction, fair labor practices and human rights. The data and analysis are shared with Marriott, suppliers and the design teams through a program called Design for HealthTM. Marriott follows this process, in order to choose

products that are good for both people's well-being and the environment (Marriott International, 2022).

Community Impact

Marriott indicates that one of their main goals is to enhance the communities they operate within. This means making them better places to live, work and visit. The company attempts to do so by programs of volunteerism and charity. The company reported to have accomplished over 630,000 volunteer hours all around the world in 2021. The volunteer activities focused on environmental and social issues concerning their communities. Marriott reports that about 80% of managed hotels have participated in community service activities and 50% of franchised hotels did too. An example of this is the initiative taken by The Ritz-Carlton who is one of the first founding partner of Marriott group of IMPACT2030. The latter is a private sector initiative in collaboration with the United Nations and diverse stakeholders, and their goal is to use corporate volunteering efforts to contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Marriott reports to have donated more than $89.12 million dollars in 2021, through donated cash contributions, in-kind donations and loyalty points. Other global community activities and investments are for instance, events to raise money and awareness for communities in need as funds for the homeless in Canada or the fundraising organized by associates from the Middle East & Africa to enhance children's lives, where almost $10 million USD have been raised every year since 2008. One of the most important activities Marriott participates in is supporting non profit organizations that are dedicated to helping children globally. For instance, Marriott has been partner of the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals for 40 years and has raised more than $143 million USD from hotels, associates and guests. UNICEF is also another recognized Marriott partner since 1995, and Marriott reports to have raised over $49 million USD for the organization and helped over 4.5 million children. Additionally, another example of fund raising that was accomplished mainly by the participation of guests was done by the Zadun, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve located in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico, go were able to raise $40,000 USD to Los Cabos Children's Foundation (Marriott International, 2022).

Disaster Relief Support

In case of disaster, Marriott collaborates with local hotels and well-known relief organizations to assess and address the needs of affected communities. Their goal is to offer immediate help to their employees and members of the community. They help with financial support for recovery efforts and building reconstruction. Consequently, the Marriott Disaster Relief Fund was created to support communities around the world and mainly Marriott associates that have been damaged by important crises. Covid-19 crisis was not the exception, and the Marriott Disaster Relief Fund donated almost $2.5 million USD to help humanitarian organizations and more than 21,000 managed and franchised associates in 21 diverse countries that were severely impacted by effects of the pandemic. Hotel guests are also invited to participate in this initiatives and in 2021 more than 11 million loyalty points were donated by Marriott guests to support different disaster reliefs in 2021 (Marriott International, 2022).

Guest Engagement, Wellbeing & Satisfaction

Marriott states that their commitment to its guests is essential and therefore it is evident in every aspect of the things they accomplish. The firm aims to anticipate every evolving need of their customers, doing so by introducing fresh brands, expanding to new markets around the world, and creating innovative guest experiences. Marriott has created an award winning loyalty program called Marriott Bonvoy in which as previously mentioned, guests have the possibility to earn points by staying in Marriott properties. Members of Marriott Bonvoy can also be part of Serve 360, because they have the chance to donate their points to the sustainable causes that the firm follows, or exchange those points for diverse travel opportunities, experiences or other Marriott products. Throughout this loyalty program, guests who are members are able to choose between different tours and activities that can elevate and enrich their trip, such as cultural and outdoor experiences. This allows guests to fully immerse themselves in their destinations and sometimes even get to know better the culture and community of that place.

One of Marriott's most important objectives is guest satisfaction, thus, Marriott states to keep on working and putting efforts into the developing of technology to offer immersive and personalized experiences to their guests and continue to maintain high guest engagement and satisfaction levels

as in 2021, in a GuestVoice Satisfaction Survey 62.3% of guest respondents evaluated Marriott a 9 out of 10 in an overall experience.

3.2.3 "Planning for an environmental management program in a luxury hotel and its perceived impact on staff an exploratory case study."

When a hotel design and adapt environmental management programs and initiatives like the ones that have been already mentioned e.g. actions taken by Marriott or Hilton properties, it is crucial that managers do not only assess their effects on corporate strategy, cost savings and guests' brand awareness and reputation, but also its effects on employees and staff, which are essential stakeholders since they are the face of the company in terms of environmental management application. It is important to study the aftereffects that environmental management programs can have on staff attitudes, not only in the hotel they work within, but also in their job satisfaction, organizational commitment and personal life (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2017). Hereunder, an analysis of a case study regarding how hotel staff perceive the engagement of environmental management programs in a luxury hotel in the UK will be carried out.

Employees play a vital role in the effective implementation of environmental management efforts. Similarly, well-executed Environmental Management Programs (EMPs) can foster employee dedication, enhance organizational relationships, job satisfaction, staff retention and morale (Brokaw, 2009; Park & Levy, 2014; Supanti et al., 2015). EMPs increase employees' understanding of environmental concerns and help staff to connect with the firm's sustainability principles and work towards the company's goals (Park & Levy, 2014). However, if employees feel that the company puts first their financial concerns and gains over sustainability values, it can definitely create a conflict between their personal ethics and the company's ones. Thus, there is a very fine line in having a discrepancy that leads to job dissatisfaction and lower retention rates (Koh & Boo, 2001).

As already stated, the advantages of implementing EMPs in hotels can be having a competitive advantage, the possibility of standing out in the market and financial benefits (Aminudin, 2013). To accomplish this, it is crucial for hotel firms to collaborate effectively with all stakeholders,

which includes their employees (Porter & Kramer, 2006). This collaboration can be attained by educating its staff about the environmental effects of their their behavior (Aminudin, 2013; Gao & Mattila, 2014; Stalcup et al., 2014), look after eco-certifications or indeed adopting environmental management systems. Doing so by training employee training, setting environmental awareness building campaigns for the staff and engagement exercises (Rondinelli & Vastag, 2000). Nevertheless, despite the higher purchasing power for resources that a luxury hotel can have, sometimes, this kind of hotels can be resistant to adopt EMPs due to the fact that there is a misunderstanding in terms of the misalignment between luxury and environmental efforts, since it is thought by this hospitality sub-sector that guest comfort can be compromised and managers and employees can abstain themselves on implementing them (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2017). However, with the examples of Marriott International and Hilton, it can be seen that this not true, and EMPs can be effectively carried out in luxury hotels through the active participation of employees (Bohdanowicz et al., 2011). To do so, hotel firms need also to invest in the psychological capital of its workforce in order to enhance their environmental performance (Jabbour et al., 2015). Outcomes of this strategy can be; optimism, self-efficacy, hope and resilience (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Particularly, in the hotel industry, staff attitude plays a crucial role because they are the face of the company for the guest and this leads to customer satisfaction (Salanova, 2005). The sense of contributing to a positive change to society boosts employee motivation and job satisfaction. Additionally, helps reduce the prevalent emotional exhaustion that is often experienced in the hotel industry and may develop enhanced ethical environmental values outside their jobs (Lamm et al., 2015; Chou, 2014).

Human Resource Management plays a crucial role by being a mediator between EMPs adoption and employees. HRM can affect their motivations, and therefore should look after the implementation of a sustainability agenda (Guerci, 2015), it can also encourage staff engagement through effective communication and rewards, integrating sustainability in recruitment practices to attract environmentally-conscious candidates and incorporate sustainability into trainings to promote commitment and environmental responsibility from their employees (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2017). Throughout this practices innovation can also be enabled, as HRM can also encouraged because HRM can foster the exchange of ideas between the organization and employees through collaboration, communication and shared knowledge (Bohdanowicz et al.,

2011; Leitch et al., 1995). Rewards systems can also be implemented by HRM to motivate their staff to fulfill corporate sustainability goals (Chan & Hawkins, 2010; Epstein & Roy, 1997). Additionally, HRM strategies should be designed to impact employees' professional roles and personal lives (Elloy & Smith, 2003; Spaargaren 2003). Work settings are also important in terms of their strong influence on staff behavior, because they can either facilitate or inhibit sustainable consumption (Muster, 2010). This setting can assist employees in adopting new behavior patterns, and therefore, promote more sustainable consumption in routine situations, even outside work (Muster, 2010; Schrader, 2007). This is referred to as the "Spillover Effect" (Guest, 2002), given the enhanced training resources that are available (Selsky & Parker, 2005) Organizations can demonstrate in reality the tangible effects and benefits of sustainable actions, and employees can see these effects in first hand (Muster, 2010), encouraging them to adopt environmental attitudes in their personal lives (Ryan & Kossek, 2008). Even though the influence of EMPs on employees' attitudes is known, it is certainly a topic that remains basically without many studies (Chou, 2014), specifically speaking about luxury hotels, where as mentioned, hesitance or resistance from managers could be expected (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014).

A luxury vibrant five-star hotel in the heart of London, United Kingdom, with a substantial annual occupancy rate of approximately 90% and 69 rooms ranging from deluxe to suite, around 150 English and international employees, with several on-site amenities which include a fitness club and a Michelin-star restaurant was chosen for this analysis. The hotel's management had taken steps to incorporate environmental management values into their strategies. The hotel's management decided to implement Environmental Management Programs and Environmental Management Systems with the aim of saving energy and water, but they firstly, took into consideration their staff's opinion. A qualitative research was made, to have a deeper understating about their behaviors, emotions, motivations and experiences. Through the period of July-August of 2016, 17 semi-structured interviews involving hotel staff were carried out based on five main themes: general awareness and perception of environmental management practices both at work and in their personal lives, opinions about the potential implementation of an Environmental Management program at work and its potential impact on job motivation and satisfaction, the role of Human Resource Management practices in the encouragement of EMP use and the concept of green work-life balance. The interviews took the form of friendly discussions held in informal

settings around the topics of the prospective "green management" agenda which might be adopted by the hotel in the near future (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2017). A semantic approach was used for the thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns in the data, attribute significance to each pattern, and subsequently derive theories.

Results

Most interview participants showed an understanding of the negative impacts associated with hotel operations and defined sustainability as hospitality establishments' efforts to safeguard the environment and the right preservation of natural resources for the generations to come. Participants also demonstrated to be aware of the fact that is important that sustainability means that business operate not only for the profit, but also for a bigger picture, taking care of its employees and the environment, and that the business, remains profitable in the long run, while also engaging with the local communities. Respondents were also proved to understand if they were aware of any sustainable action that was already being implemented by the hotel that was being studied. The majority of the participants were aware of the hotel's practice of recycling solid waste on-site. They also mentioned that procuring organic and locally sourced products and using environmentally-friendly cleaning agents were areas within the hotel's operations that had significant potential for environmental management interventions, pending increased support and direction from management. Concerning employees' adoption of environmental management practices in their personal lives, some questions were also made in which participants indicated that they had indeed incorporated various "green" practices into their daily routines at home, such as recycling waste, using energy-efficient and water-saving technologies and opting for local and organic products. There is, as a matter of fact, the theory of generativity that suggests that a strong sense of commitment to the well-being of the broader society leads to an increased engagement in sustainable behaviors within one's personal space (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2017).

The effectiveness of environmental management actions, depends on the engagement, participation and support, interest and needs of employees (Hanna et al., 2000). If employees feel involved, it much more likely that they will accept and replicate the sustainable efforts of the company (Packer & Sharrar, 2003). This applies even more to hotels, where EMPs frequently

require additional responsibilities for employees, such as; manual and repetitive labor intensive activities, e.g. waste separation, watering plants and turning off lights, due to the fact that they can feel discouraged for the reason that they feel they will need to work more. Moreover, it's essential to implement managerial strategies aimed at making employee participation in EMPs more appealing and rewarding. These rewards can be for example, financial incentives, that recognize employees' efforts to improve the hotel's environmental performance (Renwick, Redman & Maguire, 2013). Many of the participants in this study case showed their willingness to embrace EMPs, aligning with the new sustainability-oriented corporate values, and being enthusiast to work for a company that contributes to environmental preservation (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2017). When employees are aware of the hotel's involvement in EMPs and their own values align the organization's ones, it leads to positive job attitudes (Lamm et al., 2015). Some of the respondents even mentioned that they would be more attracted to work for a "green" company rather than for one that is does not take care of the environment.

Participants also shared their perspectives upon the pros and cons of implementing EMPs in the hotel that was being studied. Some benefits such as cost savings, positive effects on consumers, improved business reputation and enhanced staff morale were mentioned. Although, financial implications and challenges in maintaining staff commitment and engagement were also added as disadvantages. Respondents also considered themselves as crucial stakeholders in the success of EMPs.

Job Satisfaction and Motivation

In order to understand what did job satisfaction meant to the respondents another probe was made. They referred to job satisfaction as the "fulfilment and the sense of achievement they get when they contribute to customer happiness and having job satisfiers as; good relationships with colleagues, managerial recognition and a pleasant working environment.". Strong positive correlations between the use of EMPs and job satisfaction were also found as most participants mentioned that if their workplace took environmental management steps, it would make them feel happier with their jobs, because it would make them more meaningful and fulfilling. This coincides with another study done in 2014 by Raub and Blunschi, that suggests that if companies use

environmental management practices, employees consider their tasks as more important, leading to higher job satisfaction. Trainings, effective evaluation and rewards systems were also mentioned by the participants as important aspects in the adoption of EMPs. They consider that their commitment to their job would be better if they can indeed observe the tangible difference that their participation in environmental management practices at work has actually achieved. Hence, it is suggested that the results of environmental management efforts should be shared with employees through reports, newsletters or social events at work, and also reward the employees who have performed well as a way to motivate them, encouraging healthy competition in the company and therefore, speeding up the hotel's progress in achieving its environmental goals (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2017). Thus, communication is also important and helps people work together better, which is important for successfully implementing EMPs in a hotel (Epstein & Roy, 1997).

Hence, what can be understood from this study case is that is important for hotels to take into major consideration employees at the moment of the design of EMPs. This because, staff can determine the success of environmental management interventions in the hospitality companies, and there can indeed be positive outcomes not only at their workplace but also in their private life in what concerns for the environment. Essentially, this study discovered that the majority of employees of the examined luxury hotel understood the importance of the integration of environmental management practices in the operations of the company they work in. It was also stated that the majority of them would support such programs because they believe they would make their work more meaningful and satisfying, it would bring them more motivation and foster loyalty to the company. They also acknowledged the positive effects of this environmentally sustainable approach on the environment, hotel's reputation, customer experiences and employee morale. Participants demanded clear communication and effective trainings, to carry out the practices as they should. Human Resource Management was identified to be a critical function in facilitating communication between management and staff. It was also noticed that a potential positive effect from adopting environmental management practices is that employees may show more environmental commitment in their personal lives and adopt responsible consumption habits outside of work. Thus, it can be illustrated how the implementation of these practices can have an

impact beyond just improving the company's environmental performance, but also bringing benefits to society as a whole.

3.2.4 "Damaí Lovina Villas: Can Eco-standards and Certification Create Competitive Advantage for a Luxury Resort? Study Case"

Damaí Lovina Villas are part of a Luxury Resort located in northern Bali, Indonesia, 3.2 km away from Lovina Beach. The hotel was made up of 8 romantic villas with a maximum capacity of 16 guests and 57 hotel employees were part of the staff. The resort offered every kind of luxury experiences, from, spa, handcrafted furniture, whirlpools, waterfalls, guided excursions, golf, yoga, welcome drinks, open-air dining room, a gourmet experience restaurant that used local markets' and hotel's own private gardens' products between many others. The majority of their guests were couples celebrating their honeymoon and came from Western Europe and the United States. In fact, it was then noticed, that 39% of their visitors were repeat visitors. The Hotel's revenues were derived 40% from room sales and 43% from the restaurant and beverage's sales. The remaining 17% came from the hotel's services; spa, excursions, between others. In Bali the cost of labor is very low as well as food production, thus, the hotel used this in its favor, and had low operating costs, making Damaì enjoy a good profitability and operational efficiency. Nevertheless, the hotel's management wanted to enhance its occupancy of the 65% and one way to do so, was by implementing sustainable initiatives. Since 2002, the hotel has become more sustainable throughout a series of actions, this was because Glenn Knape, the general manager of the luxury hotel, enhanced the resort's services efficiency in a better way in comparison to its competitors. Knape, was sure that Damaì had a strong advantage in contrast to its direct competitors, because there was no other small luxury hotel in Bali that offered the same environmentally friendly experiences and services as them. Damaí was the only boutique luxury hotel in Lovina (Darnall & Milstein, 2014).

Some of the actions taken were sourcing their own food and also preventing erosion. These actions were seen to impact in a positive way not only employees but also the local community the hotel operated within. In 2006, the hotel's management aim was to position Damaí Lovina Villas as a green hotel, which could bring benefits such as brand awareness and increase the hotel's revenues,

while enhancing its competitiveness. This was expected to be made by involving in a voluntary environmental program, where usually standards and certifications were given. The challenge was to understand if Damaí's current sustainable actions were enough to be eligible for these certifications and would therefore attract more guests, or indeed, if more actions were needed to be implemented, and if the costs of doing so, were worth it. Throughout the hotel's website, as some of the most important hotel chains in the market did, Damaì communicated to its customers their different initiatives aimed at promoting sustainability, where guests could acknowledge more about the hotel's vision, nevertheless just few information about the organic products of the restaurant were mentioned and nothing else (Darnall & Milstein, 2014).

Damaí Lovina Villas as a Green Brand

As previously mentioned, the aim for Knape was to position the hotel as a sustainable one, so its brand awareness and revenues could improve. Worldwide speaking, since 2006, the market showed a trend in terms of customers preferring to acquire eco-friendly products and services. Therefore, many hotels started stating to be environmentally friendly, but sometimes this statements could not be verified, which could lead to greenwashing and generate distrust between customers and this kind of hotels. This is the reason why Voluntary Environmental Programs made by nongovernmental organizations which are environmental standards and certifications are used to provide reliable information to guests about hotel's sustainability activities. Damaì's management decided to adhere themselves to recognized programs such as Best Green Hotels, Eco Lodge, Green Globe, Green Hotel Initiative, and ISO 14001. Some programs required hotels to report and disclosure their compliance with program standards and others required third party certifications, with the aim of enhancing the credibility of hotels' environmental claims. Some of these programs were free and other charged a percentage of bookings for instance (Darnall & Milstein, 2014). The greatest role model, that hotels took as an environmental standard were the certified eco-hotels located in Costa Rica, where due to its abundance of natural parks almost all of the country's hotels had obtained third-party certifications for sustainable tourism, although, hotels who could prove to have a higher commitment to sustainability and that they were doing exceptionally in terms of environmental friendly actions, were able to enhance their reputation as places who really cared about sustainability, and in fact customers were willing to pay even $30

USD above the regular price to stay in these eco friendly hotels (Rivera, 2002). The question was if Damaì could ask for a price premium to its guests like Costa Rican hotels did, and in doing so, if adhering to VEP programs and certifications could affect travelers' decision in which hotel to stay, in other words, would it lead for customers to pick Damaì because of its green certifications (Darnall & Milstein, 2014).

Internal Audit

Before establishing Damaì as a green brand throughout VEP, the hotel's management decided to run an internal audit regarding the hotel's sustainability practices, using a framework that was divided into four sustainability categories which were: Cost/Risk Reduction, Reputation/Legitimacy, Innovation/Reposition and Vision/Opportunity Framing (see Table 5). Each one of the activities made by Damaì were categorized into one of these categories and also this helped understand which ones were the activities that were missing to be done in the hotel. All of this was done with the assistance of a sustainability consultant which stated that depending on which category the companies tend to focus they could have different outcomes, as the following table explains.

Table 5: *"Hotels' Sustainability Practices Framework"*

Companies who focus on:	Tend to have:
Cost/Risk Reduction – control costs (Internal Issues)	Good position to manage nowadays environmental issues related to existing services, but could be at risk in terms of unexpected changes in the operating environment or consumer preferences.
Reputation/Legitimacy – control costs (External Issues)	
Innovation/Repositioning – drive revenue (Internal Issues)	Well built sustainability visions, but an absence of foundational capabilities or analytical skills to carry out their vision.
Vision/ Opportunity – drive revenue (External Issues)	
Internal Issues	*Concerns about activities they could control, which could make them not critical for external issues.*

External Issues	Concerns about stakeholder needs and external opinions and thus, vulnerable of greenwashing.

Source: Damaí Lovina Villas: Can Eco-standards and Certification Create Competitive Advantage for a Luxury Resort? Study Case, Darnall & Milstein, 2014.

This framework explains how does a company that focus between either internal or external issues and between the strategies of enhancing their revenue or controlling costs can create a sustainable organization value.

Using this structure, Damaì could discover if its sustainable activities were well balanced as well as their focus, to avoid falling into only one division and the traps of only focusing into internal or external issues, helping also recognize its organizational value due to the sustainability activities taken, considering the hotel's capabilities. This analysis would also help dictate the activities that were missing to acquire the VEP certifications (Darnall & Milstein, 2014). Firstly, the sustainability initiatives of the hotel were divided into: organic and locally-sourced services, operational efficiency and employees and community.

Organic and Locally-Sourced Services

Damaí grew 80% of its produce in the gardens that were around the hotel's area. The other 20% was bought to local producers and farmers who were assured to also use organic farming techniques. Its furniture was handcrafted and had an organic origin from the wood plantation close to Java. The spa and hygiene products of the hotel were also organically produced. Toxic hygiene products were forbidden and for their plantations no pests control that were not natural were allowed. They used citronella and lemongrass to control insects. Everything that was categorized as natural waste from the hotel, was composted and used as fertilizer for their own crops.

Improving Operational Efficiency

Energy and water conservation and solid waste reduction as plastic use, were three of the main issues that concerned the hotel's management. Some of the actions taken regarding energy efficiency were; placing compact fluorescent lights, which used only a quarter of the energy and lasted ten times longer than a 40-watt incandescent bulb. The lights from the garden were also changed to 12 volts, when previously they had 100 volts. Sensor water pressure systems were also installed to save energy. The curtains from the hotel rooms were taken down to help the room's temperature cool down. After the implementation of all of these actions, Damaì was able to decrease a 65% in terms of electricity costs. Concerning the hotel's solid waste management, new actions as sending plastic and bottle containers back to its suppliers to reuse and recycling methods were established. Many of the kitchen's utensils were also made up of recycled materials, such as recycled paper, linen, glass and bamboo products. No plastic bags were used for the waste baskets, but instead natural fiber bags were used. The hotel's pool was not heated either, due to the tropical temperatures that characterized the area where its located. An iodized water system for the pool was also implemented. In terms of water management, Damaì reused "gray water" that came from sinks and showers and store them on tanks which then was filtered and used for agricultural purposes. This allowed the hotel to save water by a 75%. Also permaculture was implemented, in order to decrease the water consumption and enhance their crop's health and quality. The effect of this was a reduction on crop's costs production by 90%. A solar energy system was also on Knape's agenda, and by the year of 2006 the installation process was started as a means also to reduce hotel's electric costs. Eventually, all of their electric systems were replaced by solar ones and there was even a surplus of electricity that the hotel's management decided to sell to the state (Darnall & Milstein, 2014).

Employees and Community

Damaì considered their employees and the community as essential stakeholders in the development of their activities, thus they cared about their well-being and offered them transportation, telephone service, meals, health service, visits to their religious temples, between others. In addition, many of their suppliers for uniforms or curtains, for instance, were family own

businesses from the employee's families. Regarding the community, Damaì was committed to teach local farmers about their composting techniques, in order to help them reduce their pollution impact caused by burning the land for the crops fertilization, which would also affect tourism. The hotel's administration also encouraged fishermen from the area, to stop using chemicals for their fishing methods, which also limited Damaì's access to acquire organically farmed fish, and instead use microorganism to moderate the algae growth, thus, firm farms were also able to save costs. Also, with the aim of prevent farmers of using chemical fertilizers to grow their crops, and this topsoil's water contaminating the ocean, Damaì created some large rock wall filters in the river that ran through the hotel's private area. These filters caught the topsoil from the 7 villages around the hotel's area. Lastly, Damaì together with other hotel leaders and the fire department in the area created a fire strategy in order to protect the surrounding community (Darnall & Milstein, 2014).

Considering the fact that from Damaì's 3 main competitors, only one who was in fact not even located in the same area, was involved into a Voluntary Environmental Programs, in this case, Green Globe Affiliate, but neither of them had a sustainability focus apart from Damaì Lovina Villas. Hence, Damaì could indeed use this on its favor to increase their competitive goals and their guest occupancy, thus enhancing their revenues by participating in a VEP.

3.2.5 "Sustainable development in increasing the competitiveness of hotel offer-case study Istria County."

Istria County is a triangular-shaped peninsula on the north-western part of Croatia and the most important tourist destination of this country. It covers an area of approximately 3,600 sq. km with sandy shores along the Adriatic Sea coasts, where ancient towns from medieval times are located. The coastal towns like Pula, Rovinj and Porec are the most popular places to visit in Istria. These towns are full of accommodations, restaurants and bars that warmly welcome tourists from all over the globe (Hotels.com, 2023). This destination is characterized for its cultural and natural heritage and also because of its high social standard regarding the sustainable development framework. There are a total of 101 hotels in Istria (Mint, 2013), from which 4 were 5 star hotels, 29 were 4 star hotels, 57 were 3 star hotels and 14 were 2 star hotel. In 2013, from 70.3 million overnights that have been accomplished in Croatia, 21.3 million happened in Istria (Mint, 2013).

In 2013, after the global crisis, Istria county had to reposition itself on the global market, by improving their quality in the tourist and hotel offer. Istria tourism industry hotel owners did so by boosting a sustainable development, adapting to the trends that were on the tourism market, which were characterized by sustainable and environmental activities. With a view to better understand the relation between customer satisfaction in some hotel firms in Istria a study was carried out. Managers were also asked about their social responsible activities to determine the importance of designing and implementing these activities, respecting the tourist destination. Subsequent trends for sustainable strategies were also found throughout this study. The main aim of this research was to discover if by executing innovative sustainable principles on hotels and touristic offerings, Istria can reposition itself and attract more environmentally friendly tourists (Pavia et al., 2013). An action taken by hotels was for instance, the adoption of a "Green Mediterranean Resort" branding.

In order to enhance the destination, hotels defined for themselves a set of goals which were; economic, social and environmental goals that in fact, compose the main objectives of sustainable development. The economic goals aimed to have return on investment, profitable turnover and enhancing the services' quality. Social goals instead pursued the recognition of the local community and the economical success of the citizens. Finally, environmental goals focus was the protection of natural resources and goods (Master Plan of Istria, 2003).

The four main operational strategies that were implemented to encourage sustainable development were the research and development, which studied and analyzed market changes and tourists' preferences, as well as changes on the environment and the impact of touristic activities on it. A market strategy was also defined, by segmenting tourists and placing Istria as a sustainable tourist destination. There was also a strategy that referred to human resources which sought to educate hotel managers to make a change in quality, as well as developing a motivation reward system for employee. Also raising awareness of sustainable development in the hotel management was a goal. Finally, a financial strategy was also structured, who aimed to attract EU funds, investors or green accounting. All of this, had the purpose to differentiate Istria's hotel offer, to enhance its competitiveness in the tourism industry (Pavia et al., 2013).

Competitiveness of Hotel Offer in Istria

The hotel industry in Istria had faced since 2003, a diversification and privatization processes where many low-category small family hotels had become part of international hotel firms such as Sol Melia, Park Plaza Hotels, Kempinski, Horstmann Gentilini Hotels (Pavia et al., 2013). This phenomenon increased the competitiveness between the sector and the challenge was to make tourists have a reason to choose one brand over the other (Kapferer, 2001). This international brands were already renowned brands distinguished by their quality, managerial education and staff professionalism as well as loyalty programs (Pavia et al., 2013).

In this study, the hotel group Park Plaza Medulin will be taken as an example to measure the degree of customer satisfaction of Istria and the hotel itself and illustrate the changes that were implemented in their business strategies to incorporate sustainable development strategies. Park Plaza Medulin is a 4-star hotel, member of Arenaturist d.d. Pula hotel group and Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts, with 178 rooms and 12 apartments. The hotel offers an outdoor pool, gym, spa, beauty center, sports center and 2 congress rooms (Park Plaza Medulin, 2013). In 2011, the implementation of questionnaires to the hotels' management of Arenaturist, Valamar and Maistra hotel was carried out for the purpose of the study, concluded that the hotels offer a unique tourist destination and are aware of what the modern tourists need, therefore they look after segmentation and differentiated options for customers. It was also found out that in terms of sustainability development, hotels were undertaking strategies such as the implementation of eco business guidelines as; energy efficiency measures, intelligent rooms and the follow-up of ISO standards, but that as a matter of fact, there was still missing so much awareness about the importance of sustainability measures in many hotels. Going into detail, when hotel managers were asked about how did their hotel participate in the sustainable development of Istria, their responses were that their hotels took part of the promotion and placement of sustainable tourism programs for the development of the destination, that they worked together with the Tourist Board of Istria in the project Sentona, which promoted Istrian products and helped them to define the destination's brand and that they helped the community by giving transportation support for events that were carried out in Istria. Between the ways in which the hotels' management fulfilled the eco hotel guideline were the energy savings systems, ISO standards, HACCAP systems, automated system of power

plant, but these efforts were seen not to be enough, due to the changing status of trends towards sustainability and the demands of tourists of having more sustainable options.

The need of a change in their strategies was evident. Therefore, a set of goals and strategies for the of hotel industry with the purpose of developing sustainable tourism in Istria were made. Hotels in Istria would need to follow guidelines for the coherent use of resources and focusing on the preservation of the environment and enhancing the quality of its hotel services by renovating and improving the current hotels in the market and concentrating in sustainable development. Managers recognized that new strategic directions were also needed to be implemented.

The implementation of eco-guidelines was insufficient, due to the fact that 80% of managers of large hotels in Istria do not recognize that their hotels' activities affect negatively the environment, which did not align with the previous research done in this study case, where 98.2% of European hotel firms stated to be conscious that their actions affect the environment (Bohdanowicz, 2005). Only 33% of the studied hotels in Croatia have an official environmental policy (Petric & Pranic, 2009). Generally speaking, about the hotel structures present in Istria, in order to adapt to the increasing demand of eco-standards, hotels from this region should have adopted sustainable strategies and become environmentally friendly hotel firms. Taking as an example the Park Plaza Hotel Medulin, determined standards for its hotel products prices, services and strategies following an eco-efficiency quality as well as energy efficiency. They could carry out energy efficiency throughout smart rooms systems, energy, water and electricity saving strategies and adequate waste management programs. Regarding the interior design decorations, the hotel tried to use as much as possible "eco friendly" primal matter. The hotel had also established a Corporate Social Responsibility Policy that listed the activities that were done concerning the Total Responsibility for Everyone's Environment also known as TREE and SEASON by the initials of Save Energy and Switch Off Now strategies. The hotel Park Plaza was also awarded with the "Considerate Hotelier Association Award" and the "Green Tourism Award". The hotel also presented some initiatives such as "Green Teams" that dealt with sustainable development matters. The hotel's management stands with the idea that a well educated staff and highly qualified managers in sustainable development will be able to perform and accomplish successful eco standards. Hence, all Istrian hotel firms should follow the actions of Park Plaza Hotel Medulin, which can lead to a

successful and leading position for hotels meeting the demands of the customers from the market which is to be sustainable and responsible. It was clear that Istria's hotels needed to enhance its position in the European tourism destinations by innovating and orienting their businesses into sustainable strategies and implementing environmental policies to be able to compete with other travel destinations (Pavia et al., 2013).

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Key Performance Indicators

When analyzing the information collected from the previous case studies, we can observe the following Key Performance Indicators. These show in quantifiable terms, the progress that the analyzed hotel firms have achieved, due to the sustainable measures applied to their structures in terms of energy, water usage, and waste management. As seen, only, Hilton, Marriott and Damaì Lovina Villas showed a quantifiable progress. Regarding an overall progress for energy, Hilton Worldwide reported to have reduced 47.1% of watt's emissions per square meter since 2022 and a 44% reduction in carbon emissions in all of its hotels considering 2008 as a baseline, while Marriott International disclosed to have made a 25.6% decrease in carbon intensity reduction, and 17.2% reduction in energy intensity, saving 130,000 MWhs of energy in 2021. Lastly, Damaì communicated to have decreased 65% its electricity costs. In the matter of water consumption, Hilton states to have reduced its water intensity in a 38.1% in all hotels, considering 2008 as a baseline. Marriott International instead, revealed to have had a 4.7% increase in its water usage regarding its overall business activities in a global scale due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, taking 2016 into account as a baseline, but in terms of water intensity per occupied room, they were able to reduce it by a 15%, in which 425 millions of gallons of water were saved. Damaì detailed to have had 75% savings in water usage since it had implemented water sustainable measures. With reference to waste management, Hilton has been able to reduce 65.4% of its waste production since 2008 and 57.6% reduction in landfilled waste intensity. Relating to plastic usage also Hilton reported to have saved 183 tons of plastic since 2020 by providing Hilton's Digital Key and the implementation of reusable drinking vessels and refill stations in 2400 properties to reduce plastic bottles use. Additionally, in terms of certifications, in their reports Hilton mentions

that 33% of its managed hotels are powered with 100% certified renewable energy, while Marriott announced that 30% of its hotels is certified with sustainable certifications of recognized sustainability standards. Moreover, in a Guest Voice Satisfaction Survey 62.3% of guests respondents evaluated Marriott with a 9/10 overall experience. Finally, in a general overview, Hilton facilitates through its sustainability report that $1.38 billion USD have been saved by the firm since 2009, as a consequence of their sustainable actions.

3.4 Discussion

3.4.1 Effects of the implemented practices

3.4.1.1 Environmental Effect

The outcomes of this research have provided some insights regarding the possible environmental effects that the measures taken by hotels can have. As previously studied, it is every time more common for luxury and 4-star hotel brands, to care about conservation and sustainability regarding the environment. The main focus of the initiatives and programs implemented by these hotel firms aim to reduce emissions from all their properties, reduce water usage and decrease waste. Hence, the goal is to protect the environment and the result or effect of the previous studied actions is the nature or environmental protection. This is possible due to strategies executed by this firms, that as it can be observed are becoming a trend in the industry. In terms of energy, net zero emission actions, such as reducing carbon emission, offset carbon dioxide emissions produced through meetings, the implementation of renewable and sustainable energy sources such as hydropower generated energy or solar panels that help decrease the energy usage which translates into a reduction of emissions and carbon footprints from their properties and a big step into helping reduce the effects of climate change.

The responsible use of resources such as water, which is indeed a limited resource and essential for life, is also a top priority for hotel firms. Therefore, solutions such as having a well managed use of water by establishing water conservation programs in hotel operations like for instance, reducing water during cleaning activities, implementation of sustainable design standards on water

saving, lead to water savings, that do not only have an effect financially speaking but most importantly, have a positive effect on the environment, as there is a conscious use of this natural resource and it is not spent inappropriately.

Waste reduction is also on the agenda of the studied hotels. Roughly speaking, in the analyzed case studies, actions including, reducing food waste by food donation, reduction in landfilled waste intensity, reusing, recycling and composting as well as implementing plastic reduction programs help minimize waste and manage its disposal in a way that it does not harm the environment and is also cost-effective for the company.

Other activities that have as a consequence the environment's enhancement, protection and appreciation for nature are for instance; reforestation activities, safeguarding turtle nesting sites, collaborating with environmentally conscious suppliers, protecting oceans and being actively involved in all year round programs to help connect tourists and nature by teaching tourists about the local environment they are visiting and how to protect it. This has the effect of helping preserve the environment, making tourists have a responsible use of resources, protect local ecosystems, help create new jobs and reduce waste.

Lastly, the analysis also yields the fact that if hotel firms encourage their employees to adopt new environmental behavior patterns at work the effect in helping the environment might double, due to the fact that employees might apply sustainable actions in their routines also outside work and reflecting the the "Spillover Effect" (Guest, 2002), having an even greater positive effect on the environment.

3.4.1.2 Affected Stakeholders

When referring to sustainable actions applied by a company in general, many interested parts can be recognized that can be affected by the companies' decisions. Thus, regarding hotel firms, this is not the exception as stakeholders are expecting responsible decisions to be taken and that their public complaints are heard and considered. In a general approach, the most important stakeholder that is being affected is the worldwide community, in other words, society itself. Evidently, society

is a broad concept and there are several actors implicated by the application of sustainable measures. Firstly, customers or guests can be identified as affected parts, as their experiences and the environment they are staying in reflect the consequences of the environmental measures implemented by hotel companies.

From an internal point of view, hotel firms' shareholders, leadership boards, investors, owners, franchisees, managers and employees, staff or workers are particularly key stakeholders since they play a crucial role in the application of sustainable initiatives, either financing the aforementioned activities, applying the measures themselves, or being the face of the company for the guest which may lead to customer satisfaction (Salanova, 2005).

There have been identified as well several external stakeholders, which in this case are referred to guests, some of whom are members of hotels' loyalty program as Hilton Honors or Marriott Bonvoy, suppliers (which include local and/or environmentally conscious and certified sustainable suppliers), family owned businesses and employees' families. After this analysis, it can be seen that occasionally hotels with the aim of acquiring products from environmentally responsible suppliers, are thus interested in helping their existing suppliers in adopting environmentally friendly measures when harvesting, cattle raising, fishing or extracting their raw material to be able to make their products. Therefore, manufacturers, distributors, local farmers, fishermen and breeders are considered also affected stakeholders. In a broader sense, also making reference to external stakeholders governmental and non governmental organizations and associations can be considered involved actors, such as local governments and local and hospitality associations as WWF, the UN, UNICEF, hotels and business councils, foundations and non profit organizations such as the Ocean Foundation, as their goals can be fulfilled with the help of hospitality companies such as hotels, due to the impact they have on the environment. Consulting companies and third party independent audit companies who are committed to the preservation of travel destinations are also affected in terms of being able to increase their businesses' profits by working together with hotel companies who successfully implement their standards. Donations, disaster relief funds, volunteering and community service activities are also an essential part of hotel firms' agenda, therefore, communities in need for instance, affected by natural disasters or in need of food, hospitals, ethnics, minorities and of course volunteers are considered as affected stakeholders as

well, because sustainable decisions taken by hotels also have a direct impact on them, as one of their aims is to enhance the communities they operate within, making them better places to live, work and visit.

3.4.1.3 Cost and Financial Benefits

Several sustainable measures are gaining popularity among hotel companies, which as studied, have been seen not only to have a positive impact regarding the environment, but also, being beneficial for the companies' finances. In terms of energy, reducing hotels' energy consumption through decreasing watts' emissions by placing LED bulbs, LED lighting, using hydropower generated and solar panel energy systems, implementing compact fluorescent light, which use only a quarter of the energy, changing outside lights to 12 volts bulbs (e.g. making Damaì reduce a 65% in terms of electricity costs), investing in off-site renewable energy sources, and even giving the chance to sell excess energy, represent indeed an income for these firms. Additionally, investments in renewable low carbon emission technologies with the goal of enhancing the environment also result in reduced costs and energy cost savings. Concerning water management, measures including reducing water consumption by using gray water from sinks and showers to water the hotels' gardens (after being filtrated), sensor water pressure systems, iodized water system for the hotels' pools, linen and towel reuse and water conservation in dishwashing, restaurants, landscaping, pools, fountains and golf course programs to save water, are some examples of the designed guides and plans to improve water efficiency that have made hotels been able to save costs in terms of water usage. Regarding waste control, minimizing waste and managing its disposal in a way that it does not harm the environment has been proved by hotels to be cost-effective. By decreasing use of single plastic amenities, turning food waste into electricity, reusing existing projects, even sourcing their own food and using "ugly vegetables and ugly fruits" to minimize waste, generates efficiency in the hotel firms' waste operations. A studied hotel from the selected case studies, reported also to grow their own crops and to have implemented a sustainable measure called permaculture, which is an innovative sustainable agricultural ecosystem designed to be self-sufficient and that reduces crops costs.

Investments in sustainable operations and improved efficiency have been reported by large hotel companies like Hilton Worldwide, analyzed in this research, to have given the company billions of dollars in savings and to have accelerated ROI. Another benefit is the enhancement of occupancy that is reflected in financial terms as increased revenues. This is due to the fact that the advantages of implementing environmental measures in hotels are proved to give the hotel firms a competitive advantage in obtaining financial benefits. Additionally, it was also seen that customers are willing to pay even more to stay in ecofriendly hotels, also increasing the hotel's revenue.

3.4.1.4 Marketing Benefits

Meeting customers' demands, addressing public complaints and fulfilling the growing expectations of the increasing sustainability conscious travelers and guests are some of the predominant trends and challenges in the hospitality market. As previously seen, in 2021, Marriott International received numerous petitions from customers who wanted to have more information about the sustainability efforts of Marriott's properties, hence, responding to these petitions and enhancing the firms' brand awareness in respect of sustainability measures is essential for hotels these days to be able to enlarge their competitiveness. By analyzing the previous case studies, it was noticed that hotels were able to enhance their customers' experiences by increasing customer satisfaction with the adoption of sustainable initiatives, and thus, improving their business reputation. When hotels implement sustainable measures that can be certified or that adhere to well known standards such as ISO, establish partnerships with sustainable brands or recognized companies that have a sustainable vision, participate in global forums and become members of sustainable groups like for instance, the Global Business Travel Association, Sustainability Leadership Council or the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance can help them create a sustainable image for the company and enhance the brand's recognition as a responsible one.

Going further into detail, hotel companies that are able to acquire recognized sustainable certifications and demonstrate to follow environmental standards generate trust and loyalty which are two of the main marketing benefits that can be deduced from this analysis. Recognized programs generate and increase credibility of hotels' environmental claims and appear to be

reflected as guest satisfaction, giving the image to the brand of being trustworthy. As previously mentioned, guest are key stakeholders for hotel firms, and throughout their opinions, reviews and word of mouth, the company can generate a higher guest satisfaction and loyalty, that will be afterwards be reflected in a better position in the market.

In the studied hotel brands, it was perceived that throughout their websites and sustainability reports, hotels were able to communicate their sustainable actions and progress on this regard. These established communications, create a better relationship between hotel's brands and customers. Good communication is important for guest acknowledgement of sustainability activities and thus, websites should be updated and offer complete information to be taken as a successful communication tool and offer a trustful marketing to customers. Furthermore, activities to connect guests and nature by teaching them about the local environment they are staying within and how to help preserve it can really encourage them to protect, restore and appreciate nature or donate to support environmental actions, having an enriching effect for the hotel's brand for being the mediator between the environment and the customer, making customers feel that with their stay they are making a real positive impact. An example of this can be the education programs about why it is important to preserve turtle nests and beaches, inviting guests to help release turtles into the ocean done by Marriott International.

Nevertheless, when hotels report reliable information about their sustainable and environmentally friendly actions, marketing benefits do not only appear regarding guests, but they can also come from within the company, e.g. employees. This was studied throughout the analysis of the London luxury hotel's case study, where it was stated that employees, would be more attracted to work for a "green" company rather than for one that is not concerned about the environment. This can generate positive job attitudes which can be reflected as positive job satisfaction. When this happens, a company might even achieve important awards such as Hilton Worldwide did, being named the second world's best Workplace by Great Place to Work Institute and Fortune Magazine or being able to win awards such as the Dow Jones sustainability indices or EcoVadis, which positions the brand in a high level of awareness. For a summary of the main findings of this discussion see Table 6.

3.5 Findings

3.5.1 Summary of Main Findings

Table 6: "Main Findings from Case Studies"

Category	Main Findings from the studied hotels' environmental activities
Environmental Effects	• Nature and local ecosystems protection and responsible use of resources • Reduction of carbon emissions, plastic use, water use and waste • Energy and water efficiency • Reuse and recycling programs • Sustainable food sourcing • Positive impact on climate change • Enhancement of travel destination • Reduction in landfilled waste intensity • Connection between tourists and the local environment • Animal welfare and support • Reforestation • Oceans support and procurement • Environmental Education for guests • Sustainable behaviors outside work by employees

Affected Stakeholders	• Communities (society and worldwide communities) • Leadership board, shareholders, investors, owners, franchisees, managers • Employees, staff, workers • Tourists, Guests and loyalty program members • Suppliers, certified sustainable suppliers, local suppliers, local farmers, fishermen, family owned businesses, distributors and manufacturers • Employees' families • Media and the press • Organizations and foundations, non profit organizations • Governments, hotels and business councils, industry associations • Consulting companies and third party independent audit companies • Hospitals • Local hotels • Volunteers • Ethnics and minorities
Cost Benefits	• Efficiency in hotels' operations • Cost reduction in terms of energy, waste and water consumption • Long-term cost savings due to designed guides and plans to improve water and energy efficiency • Use of solar panels energy systems or hydropower to decrease electric costs • Use of compact fluorescent lights, 12 volts' lights and LED lights • Reduce costs using filtered gray water for e.g. irrigation • Turn organic resources to turn food waste into electricity and help the environment being cost-effective for the company • Improving efficiency with payback investments that accelerate ROI • Reducing costs through renewable low carbon emissions technologies investments • Reused projects to save costs

	- Use sensor water pressure systems and iodized water systems for the pools - Decreasing the use of single plastic amenities, help reduce costs - Source own food - Surplus of energy sold to the state - Customers are willing to pay more to stay in eco friendly hotels - Sustainable organization value is created which creates increased revenues and helps to enhance occupancy - Large chain such as Hilton: reported to have had billions of USD in cost savings due to environmental friendly strategies such as the previous mentioned
Marketing Benefits	- Fulfillment of increasing conscious travelers' environmental expectations - Improved business reputation - Enhanced customer experiences - Positive brand awareness - Being able to generate loyalty and trust and high guest engagement and satisfaction levels, e.g. Marriott International - Enhanced competitiveness in the market - Remain trendy, by sticking to global sustainable travel trends - Enhanced communication for guests' acknowledgement of sustainability activities - Enhanced websites with complete information regarding sustainable measures being carried out by hotels - Acquire certifications and environmental standards from recognized programs to generate trust and avoid greenwashing - Establish partnerships with sustainable brands - Creation of loyalty programs being able to donate points to green causes - Building campaigns for the staff and engagement exercises lead to positive job attitudes, and make employees become more attracted to work for a "green" company that actually cares for the environment. - Positive job attitudes

	• Enhancement of the hotel firms' brand and even the travel destination
	• Building a relationship and connecting with the customers throughout environmental education, e.g. Marriott educates guests and staff about why it is crucial to preserve turtle nests and beaches
	• Being able to be part of recognized green alliances and receive awards, which enhance the firms' brand and acknowledgement in the market.

3.5.2 Relation Between Theoretical Framework and Case Studies Analysis' Results

Throughout the results that were given after the analysis of the 5 hotel companies in this research, a strong relation between them and the theoretical framework could be noticed. To follow the structure of the preceding subtitle of this study, it will first be mentioned the relationship between the environmental theories given throughout the literature review from the second chapter of this work. It was stated that companies set up CSR environmental initiatives and policies that help guide themselves to accomplish their sustainable and environmental goals (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). This was seen to be implemented by the 5 analyzed hotel brands. Hotels may have six motivations at the moment of adopting CSR: a parent company (which could be the case of Hilton Worldwide or Marriott International properties), in advocacy of society, to fulfill community's expectations, to attract more guests and enhance occupancy (which can be the case of Damaì Hotel), or as a matter of environmental concerns (Melubo & Carr, 2019). Authors state that hotel firms tend to focus on environmental issues, especially regarding water and energy management (Font et al., 2014). After the analysis, this statement is considered to be true, due to the fact that the studied firms reported to have as its main objectives in sustainability concerns, to reduce emissions, reduce water usage and decrease waste. Doing so throughout several actions such as establishing water conservation programs, responsible use of resources, reducing carbon emissions, using renewable and sustainable energy sources. Authors and previous studies examined through the literature review suggest that hotels should not only take into consideration applying one or two green initiatives for their structures, but instead, to apply a huge variety of

environmental actions that can truly affect in a positive way the environment and community that they operate within, taking into account their guests to be involved in these actions too (Chen et al., 2018). Large firms reported to include their guests in environmental activities and continue to teach them about the local environment they are staying in and how to protect it.

With regard to stakeholders, in the literature review it can be found that according to Aguinis and Elkington, one of the approaches on adopting CSR (ESG) for companies is the stakeholder approach, which states that all of the involved stakeholders are important and that companies need to protect their interests while they perform their operations. Saying so, hotel firms should consider a priority to engage with their stakeholders, which include employees, customers, communities and investors. The sustainable decisions that a company can take do not only affect the environment but all of the stakeholders involved in the industry. After the analysis of the 5 hotel firms it was perceived that this hotel companies are aware of the fact that stakeholders are expecting responsible decisions to be taken. Therefore, studied hotels are lately seen to be taking into consideration local communities and guests. The stakeholder theory, which refers to the connection between an organization and all of the interest parts of it (Freeman & Reed, 1983) can be related to the results since, stakeholders play a key role in the application of sustainable initiatives taken by hotels, since shareholders, investors, managers and employees can either finance or apply the sustainable measures themselves, and external stakeholders such as guests, suppliers, local businesses, governmental and non governmental organizations who are witnesses, sometimes even participating in the implementation of these measures and who in turn are affected by the results of them. Theory states that if there is a strong collaboration between firms and stakeholders the achievement of environmental sustainability can be effective and successful (Epstein & Buhovac, 2014). Stakeholders have a big influence on an organization's policies and practices, specifically in those regarding to environmental and social performance (Fernandez-Feijoo et al., 2014; Stead & Stead 2000).

Concerning the cost and financial benefits that were found to be achieved by the studied hotel firms, due to the implementation of sustainability actions, can be associated to several statements made during the literature review. Firstly, ESG practices do not only have an impact on the hotel's brand but also can positively influence the firms' short-term profitability by reducing costs and

increasing revenue (Inoue and Lee, 2011). This is proved to be true, since for example Hilton, reported to have saved billions of USD since starting to implement sustainable measures. Theory also mentions that financial results of ESG practices can be increasing considerably profits and sales, improving the company's competitiveness, customers' satisfaction and loyalty to the brand (Brammer & Millington, 2008; Moneva et al., 2020). This can also relate to the results given after the analysis, since one of the hotels found out that customers were even willing to pay more to stay in an ecofriendly hotel. This connects to the survey conducted by Operto which disclosed that 85.6% of customers would pay up to 75% more to a hotel that could indeed put in evidence their genuine green practices (Haertel, 2021). The low cost sustainability strategies that stand for the adoption of cost effective strategies, like reducing energy consumption, having long term efficiency and lowering disposal costs were also found to be made by the studied firms, by reducing hotel's energy consumption, investing in renewable low carbon emission technologies, improving water efficiency and minimizing waste, with the aim of not only helping the environment but reducing their costs. These cost savings strategies could relate to the theory of competitive advantage from Porter in 1985, that is indeed aimed by companies.

Last, but not least, in connection with marketing benefits and the studied theory, it can be observed that, throughout hotels' reports and websites, some of them, especially large hotel chains as Hilton and Marriott, were able to communicate their sustainable actions and actual progress. As stated in the literature review, stakeholders are increasingly expecting transparency in the communication of hotel's environmentally sustainable initiatives and that usually they use either their websites or annual reports to inform the interested parts about their actions (De Grosbois, 2012). The Marketing Based Theory suggests that organizations should build relationships with customers through trustworthy dialogue and unbiased information (Chen et al., 2018). This statement relates with how information is presented in the reports and websites that have been analyzed for the purpose of this study. Hotel companies were able to acquire recognized sustainable certifications which is a huge support in order to be able to generate credibility and trust and enhancing the brand's image. Theory establishes as well, that customers' can feel a connection with a hotel brand if they feel that they are also contributing to something and are not just a simple guest. If customers feel identified with the companies' ESG activities, their perception of the brand will improve and thus, their loyalty and trust too (Akbari et al. 2019). This relates to the fact that some of the studied

hotels, have reported to implement activities in which they try to connect guests and nature by teaching them about the local environment and how to preserve it, making customers feel that with their stay they are having a positive impact. This can lead to an enhanced brand reputation. Theory stated that larger hotel chains tend to show a larger interest in sustainability and in communicating their environmentally sustainable practices, from the analysis made, this is partially true, as it is accurate to say that large companies such as Hilton and Marriott are seen to be more involved in sustainable activities in comparison to no-chain hotels, not for a lack of interest, but instead for a lack of resources. An example of this can be Damaì who wanted to be part of more accreditation programs and have more green certifications, which sometimes represent a high cost, but that indeed is an investment that will for sure pay off. Authors establish that the involvement and being certified from renowned and credible worldwide green hotel certifications such as LEED, Green Globe and Earth Check can also help their brand image increase green trust from their customers and get rid of greenwashing speculations. Consumers indeed tend to endorse these certifications (Geerts, 2014). Throughout the analysis it was seen that some of the studied hotels reported to be certified to well known standards such as ISO, LEED, Green Globe, EarthCheck, Green Key, between others. This, as previously mentioned, may enhance customers' trust in the hotels' brand, generate loyalty and revisit intentions (Brammer & Millington, 2008; Moneva et al., 2020).

3.5.3 Current Sustainable Implemented Strategies Trends

Following the logic that the 5 hotels analyzed for this study have followed, which are sustainable plans focused on reducing their carbon emissions and energy saving, reducing water usage, reducing waste and protecting nature by using renewable energy resources, some of the current sustainable strategies that are being implemented by hotels can be determined. Regarding the reduction in carbon emissions and energy saving strategies it can be found that hotels have been implementing actions such as; replacing traditional light bulbs with LED ones, reducing watts' emissions in general by upgrading light fixtures, utilizing compact fluorescent lights, putting the bedrooms' curtains down to cool them down, using sustainable energy sources from solar or geothermal systems, decrease kitchen energy usage, adapting electric charging stations for guests' and employees' electric cars and investing in renewable low carbon emission technologies in general.

With reference to the hotels' goal of reducing water usage, the following strategies were found to be implemented; setting water conservation programs in hotel operations such as saving water in cleaning activities, dishwashing, water service at restaurants and events, central plant operations, landscaping and smart irrigation controllers, pools, fountains and golf course maintenance, set up controlled low-flow showers, toilets and faucets, using water from storms and capturing it to water outdoor gardens and terraces' plants, laundry water reuse systems, placing high-efficiency irrigation sprat nozzles, collocate sensor water pressure systems, reuse gray water after being filtered and follow the reuse towel and linen program. Marriott for instance, uses a smart sensor technology for cooling water management and has been able to save over 425 million of gallons of water in 2021.

To fulfill their objective of reducing waste, hotels have reported to firstly have started to decrease their use of plastic and disposables by diminishing the use of single plastic amenities, not using plastic bags, but natural fiber bags instead, sending plastic and bottle containers back to its suppliers so they can be reused like used coffee capsules for example, and leaving behind the travel size plastic bottles and instead place larger bottles with pump tops for products like shampoo, conditioner and body wash. Additionally, reusable drinking vessels and refill stations to reduce plastic bottles have been set. Reducing food waste is also a concern, thus, hotels donate the remaining food that is still good, to communities in need, buying "ugly" vegetables and fruits to avoid them being thrown away. Recycling is also a trend in the industry, Hilton for example reports to have a recycling soap program and more than 2.3 million soap bars have been donated in 2022. Composting is very popular too.

To protect nature and its resources, the studied hotels firms have been reporting to acquire from cage-free egg suppliers and collaborate with environmentally conscious suppliers to buy sustainable animal products, implement architecture and landscaping standards that are environmentally friendly, doing activities together with their guests such as beach cleanups, tree planting and recycling projects, so this way they can help connect guests and nature and teach them about the local environment and how to preserve it. Educating guests and also staff about why it is crucial to safeguard beaches and protect oceans, and having on-site programs to rescue

sea turtles and help them being released into the ocean. To decrease the use of paper and the impact it has on forests, reforestation activities have been reported to be done by the studied hotels, and in addition programs such as My Digital Office which is a paper-less document management solution. Additionally, hotels reported to have been using kitchen utensils made up of recycled materials and interior design decorations made up of eco-friendly primal matter.

4. Chapter 4

4.1 Conclusions

In the last analysis it can be see how, just as the history of tourism indicates, the tourism industry, especially one of its biggest players; hotels, are in constant change and adaptation to new trends that broadly seek to create a competitive advantage over the wide offer that exists in the market. Nowadays, sustainability efforts are the main business focus for hotel firms, and taking into consideration their stakeholders' demands is essential to be able to compete in the market (Ernest & Young, 2012). Hotels represent a huge part of the travel and tourism industry and a key part of the economy itself. Just in 2020, hotels had a worldwide market size of 1.06 trillion USD (Statista, 2022). Therefore, as already studied, the impact it has is very important not only on the economy, but also on society, culture, environment and heritage. As this industry continues to grow and new trends and ways of travelling continue to appear (as it has been always registered to happen) hotels will need to be in constant adaptation and renovation. Hence, it is essential for hotels to study the sustainable trends that are present in the market, in order to not be left behind, to be able to continue playing a significant role in it and keep on innovating strategies that allow them to implement their sustainable goals and be responsible for their actions that may affect the environment. Because, as the tourism industry grows, its impact on the environment does too.

Hotels should base their sustainable efforts upon the three main pillars of sustainability which are economic, social and environmental actions. By creating more jobs, increasing income entry, preserving and respecting the natural resources and conserving and maintaining local communities' wellbeing and cultural and historical heritage (Malheiro et al., 2020). The pillar that was the main focus on this analysis was the environmental one, with the aim of understanding how

the implementation of ecological and sustainable policies and programs in selected hotel companies allow them to increase their competitiveness and differentiation in the market.

Marriott International and Hilton Worldwide two of the main leading hotel brands, who were taken into consideration for this research, face continuous challenges to remain competitive in such an ambitious market. Somehow, between the 5 hotels that were studied, due to their scope, these two brands report to be the brands who cover more sustainable issues and are able to implement the highest number of initiatives and programs on this behalf. They were the only two brands that offered the possibility to verify through an Environmental, Social and Governance Report the programs, goals and progresses they have made in terms of their sustainable actions. Nevertheless, the other 3 small luxury small firms in London, Bali and Istria stated to communicate their environmental actions throughout their websites. This is worth noting since throughout this research it was noticed, the fact that consumers are increasingly demanding hotels more and better communication and reliable and verifiable results of the sustainable measures carried out by them. It is important to point out that hotels should not fall into the so-called greenwashing that can only bring negative results to their brand and generate distrust.

It was also seen, that the majority of the studied hotels tend to apply the contemporary approaches and sustainability initiatives like energy efficiency, water decreasing consumption, sustainable waste management (reducing, reusing and recycling), ecological design, working with sustainable suppliers, caring about the well-being of your employees at work, helping local communities and decreasing carbon dioxide emissions and working along with governments and non-governmental organizations. In order to remain competitive in the market, a tourism company must adopt sustainable strategies that may indeed attract guests (Youell, 1998). But to address these issues is not as easy as it might seem, and in order for hotel companies to stay competitive, and respond to the pressure that comes from stakeholders, strategic, management, marketing and human resource teams need to integrate their actions and implement innovative initiatives too. On this behalf, during this research, it has been found that some of the studied hotels such as Marriott, Hilton, Damaì and the London luxury hotel, are taking measures into the involvement of their guests and staff and inviting them to adopt practices that are beneficial for the environment. This way, guests feel like they are part of something bigger and making a real positive change safeguarding the

environment, while team members stated throughout the case studies to feel a bigger connection to the company and commitment to implement the environmental actions given by it, having as a result both guest and employee satisfaction. In the hotel industry, staff attitude plays a crucial role because they are the face of the company for the guest and this leads to customer satisfaction (Salanova, 2005). The more a hotel is engaged with stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and investors, the more likely it is for them to be able to actively receive feedback and address their concerns and expectations generating business value. Generating trust is also important, in order to create value. Consequently, it also was discovered through this analysis that hotel firms tend to seek green and sustainable certifications that are seen to enable transparency and trust between customers and the company itself. Helping to counteract the possible effects of greenwashing and being able to demonstrate their commitment to green initiatives and environmental responsibility.

So overall, after carrying out this study it can be deduced, that more and more hotel companies are implementing sustainable measures for two purposes. These two purposes are the reduction of costs in terms of energy use, water, and waste management and the enhancement of the environment and community they operate within. Saying so, if hotels implement sustainable strategies they do not only enhance their profitability by reducing costs, but are also able to implement sustainable differentiation strategies that improve their brands' image and reputation and thus, make their sales higher as well as enlarging their market share. These sustainability differentiation strategies may be exemplified as environmental sustainability education programs, which were noticed to be implemented in the studied hotels, especially in the case of large chains as Marriott and Hilton, and having a precise and transparent communication strategy. A well implemented communication is essential for hotels and stakeholders to be able to create loyalty and thus, increase occupancy. Therefore, if both strategies, (cost saving strategies and sustainable differentiation strategies) are well implemented together, the outcome can be greater profitability, a better perception and connection of the hotel brand and stakeholders environmentally speaking, leading to satisfaction and competitive advantage.

Conservation and sustainability should be brand standards these days for hotel companies. Having nature and communities' protection as their number one priority, because without them, it is

impossible for a hotel to function. As hotels decide to implement sustainable measures upon their structures, they are not only enhancing their profitability or brand image, but also the travel destination they operate within. It is essential to connect tourists and nature by teaching them about the local environment and communities, doing so with a responsible use of resources and protecting local ecosystems, creating jobs, reducing energy and water consumption and waste. This as seen will lead to have positive environmental effects, committed stakeholders, costs reductions, enhanced revenues and marketing benefits.

4.2 Limitations

Some limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting this study's results. First, only 5 hotel firms were taken into consideration at the moment of selecting the analyzed case studies and conducting the analysis. From which 2 are not comparable in terms of scope to the other 3, being multinational hotel chains, and the 3 remaining local luxury hotel brands from only certain countries. Being the 2 multinational companies more advanced and capable in terms of technology adoption, which is very relevant for the implementation of sustainable measures and also more experienced and well positioned in the market. Therefore, a larger and more precise and representative sample with more hotel companies from the same size is needed to get more precise results and accurately establish the multinational hotel brand sustainable measures implemented these days and their consequences, in comparison to the small or medium hotel companies, as the results may vary from one another. Hence, further research on this topic is highly encouraged.

4.3 Managerial Relevance

The relevance of this study is to show the aftereffects that are brought into a hotel company by the implementation of sustainable strategies to limit their environmental impact. This topic is of managerial relevance, in view of the fact that, sustainability and environment protection is a crucial actual concern that could determine the competitiveness of a company. Therefore, it is certainly recommended for managers to step into action and adopt sustainable measures, that could not only help their businesses but also the environment they operate within, as it is seen to be increasingly expected by stakeholders. This study gathers the most recent sustainable and environmental actions

and programs established by two of the main players in the industry, as well as 3 small luxury hotel firms in 3 touristic locations. From which, managers are invited to adapt and incorporate into their own structures and businesses, in order to obtain financial, marketing and environmental benefits as the exampled hotels reported to have done.

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