

SCULPTING ELYSIAN BLISS: CRAFTING A SYMPHONY OF SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HOSPITALITY OASIS

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Abstract

In an era where tourism reigns supreme as a global economic behemoth, Galle City stands at the crossroads of opportunity and adversity. The harmonious symphony of this bustling hospitality hub conceals a tapestry of challenges that resonate throughout its core. From the unpredictable rhythm of seasonality to the looming specters of environmental decay, job insecurity, and a shortage of skilled professionals, a complex tapestry of vulnerability unfolds. Amidst this dynamic landscape, a clarion call for sustainability reverberates, resonating with environmental preservation, social equity, and wealth redistribution. In this context, this study embarks on an exploration of management systems, the cornerstone upon which sustainability can thrive. The objective was to unearth the current practices that lie beneath this terrain. The methodological compass led to ten selected hotels within Galle City. Through surveys aligned with the scholarly discourse, it delved into the currents of management systems and sustainability practices that rippled through this domain. The results were collected and crafted into comprehensible form. Sustainability, like an emerging crescendo, stretches its tender tendrils across this landscape. Its undeniable growth finds certain lodgings embracing sustainable practices. However, its financial rewards, maturing over the medium to long term, cast shadows on the enthusiasm of the hotel management. A latent reluctance, driven by the desire for immediate financial gain, obscures the path to sustainability. This metamorphosis unveils the soul of the hotel sector and its relationship with management systems. Through strategies inspired by harmonious models, it is aimed at striking

chords resonating across the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The hotel sector, enticed by this newfound melody, may embark on an exploration into uncharted realms of effective and harmonious management. Thus, the symphony of sustainability unfolds in the hospitality oasis, not as a mere overture but as a resplendent, enduring masterpiece.

Keywords: Hotel management, management systems, pillars of sustainability, sustainable practices

1.0 Introduction

In the ever-evolving tapestry of contemporary hospitality, the intricate dance of luxury, service, and environmental consciousness takes center stage, defining an industry in perpetual transformation. Within this dynamic milieu, sustainability emerges as a defining symphony, reshaping the hospitality sector's landscape. This research embarks on an exploratory journey within the culturally rich and tourist-laden Galle district, providing a captivating backdrop for delving into the integration of sustainability principles in the hospitality experience.

As the world grapples with the imperative of sustainable practices, the hospitality sector undergoes a paradigm shift, elevating sustainability from a peripheral concern to an integral chord in modern hospitality orchestration. Galle, with its historical charm and contemporary allure, becomes a microcosm for examining how hospitality can harmonize with sustainability principles. This study aspires to shape an idyllic, sustainable haven—a sanctuary where guest experiences, ecological integrity, and community well-being converge into a resonant symphony.

Beyond dissecting the current state of sustainability practices, the research contributes to the ongoing narrative of crafting a utopia within the hospitality industry—a sanctuary thriving harmoniously with its environment, culture, and economy. As the study navigates the nuances, it aims not only to reveal challenges but also latent opportunities within sustainable hospitality practices. Galle, with its rich history, serves as a prism through which broader

insights into the intricate weaving of sustainability principles into the hospitality fabric can be gleaned.

In the contemporary epoch, the global emphasis on sustainability extends across various sectors, transcending public and private divides. The hotel industry, a prominent player in this collective pursuit, encounters the scrutiny of sustainability within the marketing domain. Diverse platforms empower consumers to express sustainable preferences, reshaping the industry's landscape. The research delineates how sustainability, a subject championed globally, finds manifestation in the hospitality industry through platforms like the United Nations Organization and initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

The reverberations of a global pact initiated in 2000 cascade through ISO's vision for 2030, emphasizing the transformative role of standardization in fostering sustainability. In the context of the burgeoning tourism sector, the research delves into the industry's impacts on natural, cultural, and social environments, tracing its evolution from the 1970s to the present. The crux of sustainability, balancing present needs with future generations' capacity, takes center stage in this erudite exploration.

This research embarks on an odyssey into the ramifications of management systems as a foundational pillar supporting sustainability in the hospitality sector. The overarching objective is to discern and comprehend existing practices that contribute to sculpting a sustainable Elysium within the hospitality oasis.

2.0 Literature Review

In the ever-evolving panorama of the hospitality industry, the intertwining of sustainability and guest experience is not a fleeting trend but an imperative that shapes a new paradigm. As we embark on this exploratory journey in Galle district, the literature on sustainable practices in the hospitality sector reveals a rich tapestry of insights, challenges, and innovative strategies resonating with the ethos of Elysian bliss.

At the heart of the discourse is a global acknowledgment that sustainability is not merely a choice but an essential pathway for the hospitality sector (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The emphasis is on a shift from conventional profit-driven

models to a holistic approach that integrates environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

Focusing on Galle as a microcosm, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where the preservation of cultural heritage converges with the imperative of sustainable tourism (UNESCO, 2017), the hospitality sector faces a unique challenge of balancing authenticity with innovative sustainability practices.

The literature highlights the symbiotic relationship between sustainability and guest satisfaction, with contemporary guests increasingly favoring eco-friendly practices, demanding transparency in sourcing, waste reduction, and energy conservation (Piqueras-Fizman & Jaeger, 2016). This aligns seamlessly with the endeavor to sculpt an Elysian bliss where the guest experience is intertwined with environmentally conscious choices.

Innovative operational strategies, from green building design (Font, McCabe, & Fairhurst, 2017) to local community engagement (Brouder et al., 2019), are emerging as keystones in sustainable hospitality. The exploration seeks to unveil which of these strategies resonates most profoundly within Galle's unique sociocultural and environmental context.

The literature acknowledges challenges faced by the industry in adopting sustainable practices, from the initial capital investment to changing consumer behaviors (Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010). However, within each challenge lies an opportunity. Galle, with its distinct profile, provides an empirical ground to unearth these opportunities, crafting a narrative that synthesizes global insights with local exigencies.

This literature is not merely a preamble but a compass guiding our exploration into uncharted territories. As we seek to craft a symphony of sustainability in the hospitality oasis of Galle, the insights gleaned from this global discourse will serve as harmonious notes resonating through our research.

In the hotel industry, unfurling its tapestry since the early 1960s, sustainability has been embraced as the North Star—a strategic imperative sculpted to dissipate the environmental and social echoes resonating within its operational realm (Shanti, 2016; Mihalič, Žabkar, & Cvelbar, 2012). The birth of a sustainable hotel becomes a discerning sonnet, embodying a meticulously

choreographed entity adorned with the delicate interplay of socio-economic and environmental symphonies (Mousavi, Hoşkara, & Woosnam, 2017).

Research posits that the assimilation of sustainability by hotels transcends benevolence, pirouetting strategically within the folds of their economic fabric (Girard and Nocca, 2017). This strategic waltz seeks competitive advantages and cost optimization, predominantly through measured reductions in energy and water consumption (Tang & Lam, 2017). However, the social and environmental protection dimensions often pirouette to the margins.

The efficacy of a sustainable approach pirouettes on the delicate point of achieving equilibrium among its three interwoven facets: economic, social, and environmental. This proves to be a formidable ballet for the hotel sector, given the protracted tempo within which tangible results pirouette into existence. Compounded by the reality that customers may not pirouette readily beneath the economic weight associated with these practices, the sector dances with the conundrum of striking this balance (Mousavi et al., 2017).

While the pursuit of hotel sustainability may initially pirouette through substantial costs, it inevitably serves as a prima ballerina for enhancing brand value. This heightened value, crucial to be pirouetted through strategic marketing, targets an environmentally conscious demographic pirouetting willingly to invest more in the distinctive arabesque offered by such eco-centric hotels (Boronat-Navarro and Pérez-Aranda, 2020). Notably, hotel websites and media platforms emerge as potent ballets to effectively pirouette these sustainable practices, thereby fostering robust dances with customers and elevating their satisfaction crescendos (Li, Wang, and Yu, 2015), ultimately culminating in heightened economic pirouettes for the hotel (Khatteer et al., 2019).

3.0 Methodology

This research paper unfolds as a meticulous tapestry of applied research, resembling a journey through the intricacies of an exploratory study that adopts the guise of an experimental investigation. Serving as the architect's blueprint for a research instrument, it crafts a symphony for the Delphy methodology—a blend of practicality and conceptual depth. The outlined scheme (Figure 1) choreographs key steps, a dance of intricacies guiding the unfolding narrative. A literary overture, woven with threads of knowledge,

grounds this odyssey, aligning seamlessly with the study's objective. Real problems, like whispers in the wind, are teased out in the first act, where the questionnaire, guided by four hotel managers from Portugal, embarks on an alchemical quest to identify potential stumbling blocks. In the final crescendo, surveys journey to five selected properties, each with a distinct melody, seeking to unravel how management systems and sustainability dance in the ballrooms of the hotel sector in Galle City. The survey, an 11-question opus, emerges as a crafted score unveiling gaps in the hotel sustainability management model, orchestrated by content analysis to reveal thematic trends and propose solutions, akin to verses in the literature.

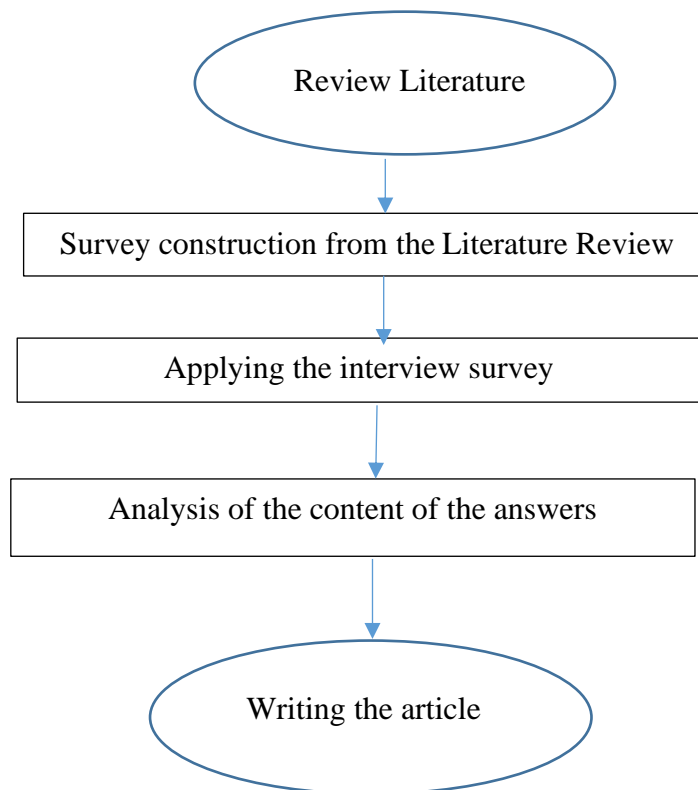


Figure 1 - Key steps for investigation

The study conducted a thorough literature search to inform its framework, tailoring interviews and surveys to the target audience's needs. Aligned with the study's objectives, this approach aimed to authentically highlight challenges for subsequent discourse within the designated geographical area.

Initial questionnaire validation involved interviews with four hotel managers from Portugal, refining potential complexities. Surveys, inspired by an extensive literature review, were distributed to five chosen establishments in Galle. Questions were categorized for clarity, and the 11-question survey was strategically aimed at discerning gaps in the hotel sustainability management model. Content analysis organized findings, revealing sector trends, and proposals grounded in literature enriched the discourse on hotel sustainability management.

Section	Interview Questions	Question of Inquiry	Authors Association
Covid-19 versus Hotel Sustainability	I. Within the realm of the tourism and hotel industry, what paramount challenges have manifested both antecedent to and subsequent to the pervasive influence of the pandemic? Against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic, do you perceive an escalated conscientiousness towards matters of sustainability within this sector?	I. Within the domain of the tourism and hotel industry, do challenges persist both antecedent to and subsequent to the influence of the pandemic? Should your response affirm the presence of challenges, kindly delineate at least one such challenge. III. Against the backdrop of the contemporary pandemic scenario, do you perceive an augmented consideration for matters pertaining to sustainability?	I. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, how has the tourism industry adapted, particularly in the sphere of team-building activities within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)?
Sustainable hotel - Practices	II. To what extent do you perceive the multidimensional facets of sustainability, encompassing economic, social, and environmental considerations, as pivotal within the intricate landscape of the hotel sector?	IV. To what extent do you deem sustainability, spanning economic, social, and environmental dimensions, to be germane within the contextual milieu of the hotel sector, and what	(Mihalič, Žabkar and Cvelbar, 2012)

		underpins your assessment?	
	III. To what extent does the hotel sector ascribe value to the imperative of sustainability?	V. To what degree does the hotel sector, or the specific hotel unit to which you are affiliated, assign significance to the matter of sustainability?	(Mihalič, Žabkar and Cvelbar, 2012) (Mousavi, Hoşkara and Woosnam, 2017)
	IV. What are the intricate social, environmental, and economic quandaries that exert influence upon the tourism/hotel sector?	VI. What are the multifaceted social, environmental, and economic challenges exerting their impact on the intricate fabric of the tourism/hotel sector? VII. Discern and explicate one or more intricately interwoven problems, encompassing social, environmental, and economic dimensions, significantly influencing the dynamics of the sector.	(Mousavi, Hoşkara and Woosnam, 2017)
Sustainable hotel Practices	V. In your discerning perspective, do you posit that the conceptualization of a 'sustainable hotel' possesses the inherent capability to foster market expansion? If affirmative, kindly expound on the specific mechanisms through which this augmentation is anticipated to manifest.	VIII. Do you subscribe to the proposition that the conceptual framework encapsulated by a 'sustainable hotel' has the potential to augment market growth? If so, could you elucidate the precise manner in which this influence is envisaged to unfold?	(Mousavi, Hoşkara and Woosnam, 2017) (Tang and Lam, 2017)
	VI. - Could you enumerate three sustainability practices, encompassing economic, social, and		(Weerathunga et al.,

	environmental dimensions, either currently operational or potentially implementable by the organization, which align with and have demonstrated success in accordance with the recommendations of the European Community?	2020) (Bacari, Séraphin and Gowreesunkar, 2020) (Alameeri et al., 2018)
Hotel Management	VII. To what extent can leadership, personnel management, and a dedicated focus on stakeholders influence the competitive standing of the company?	(Pereira-Moliner et al., 2012)
	VIII. To what extent do you concur that the implementation of management systems can constitute an augmented value proposition for the sector?	(Boronat-Navarro and Pérez-Aranda, 2020)
	IX. Do you posit that the implementation of Sustainable Governance (SG) yields a positive impact on the sustainable performance metrics within the hotel sector?	(Pereira-Moliner et al., 2012)
	X. Are you cognizant of the presence of excellence models tailored for the sector, such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)?	(Sila and Ebrahimpour, 2004)
	XI. In your expert opinion, would the implementation of a management system (e.g., ISO 9001, 14001, 45001) or a model of excellence prove advantageous?	(Benavides-Velasco, Quintana-García and Marchante-Lara, 2014)

Table 1. The Survey, with 11 questions

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The methodology employed in this study meticulously tailored interview and survey questions to align with the study's objectives. Initial interactions with four Galle hotel managers refined the questionnaire's clarity. The categorized questions aimed for a comprehensive reflection of the results, revealing the multifaceted challenges encountered by the hotel sector pre- and post-pandemic. Pre-pandemic, a scarcity of skilled labor was evident, persisting as a challenge post-pandemic. Post-pandemic hurdles included space hygiene, protective equipment use, unprofitability, and cost escalation. Despite this,

there's a notable rise in sustainability awareness among companies and clients, though with a reduced focus on environmental aspects.

Respondents emphasize sustainability's role in gaining a competitive edge and resource management's importance due to resource limitations. Sustainability's high significance is linked to attracting environmentally conscious customers, although Galle lags in sustainable practices. Newer entrants prioritize sustainability, while existing infrastructure faces hurdles due to higher investment requirements. Social concerns like a lack of skilled labor, environmental challenges such as climate change, and economic hurdles like increased living costs are prevalent. A "sustainable hotel" concept is viewed positively for its competitive advantage potential, despite challenges in implementing such actions in urban areas. Leadership, HR management, and stakeholder focus are cited as influential factors affecting hotel competitiveness. While respondents value management systems' advantages, models like EFQM aren't widely known. Implementing management models is perceived as arduous and costly, requiring support. The study delineates a complex landscape, stressing strategic alignment and resource considerations in navigating these intricacies.

5.0 Conclusion

This inquiry delves into the influence of management systems on sustainability within the hospitality domain, shedding light on prevailing practices. Findings reveal a reluctance to adopt quality, environment, and safety management systems, attributed to perceived high costs and a lack of discernible demand. While respondents see these systems as generic, they acknowledge their potential to enhance the value proposition and positively impact sustainable performance. However, the upfront costs are deemed exorbitant, yielding returns over a protracted timeframe.

On the sustainability front, a rising trajectory is evident, with certain hotels already embracing practices. The introduction of ISO 21401:2018 is seen as a catalyst for more concentrated integration of sustainability practices. Empirical evidence highlights existing practices in environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Environmentally, initiatives include recycling, water conservation, solar panels, and plastic elimination. Social practices involve

support for local associations, customer feedback contributions, and philanthropy. Economic practices encompass financial investments, contributions to the local economy, and preference for sustainable suppliers. The study concludes that hotels exhibit an enhanced awareness of sustainable development for cost mitigation, and consumers are increasingly attuned to these practices, potentially influencing their choices. Despite the exploratory nature and modest sample size, the research provides a nuanced understanding of sustainability management trajectories in the sector from the managerial perspective.

6.0 Recommendations

In consideration of forthcoming scholarly investigations, it is proposed to delve into inquiries directed at additional hotel establishments, bearing in mind the constrained scope of this study and its limited representation of Portuguese hotel units.

These interviews are intended to serve as a foundational framework for the application of the Delphy methodology to approximately 12 authorities in the field, comprising professionals from the hospitality industry, academia, and the public sector.

Beyond the augmentation of the study's sample size concerning this subject and in light of the recognition of the new ISO 21401 standard, prospective research endeavors are devised to scrutinize the implementation of said standard and assess its alignment with the sector's expectations.

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