

# **Engaging Guests in the Environmental Management of Private Hotels in Germany**

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<p>This study is aimed at understanding the current and potential role of a hotel's guest in its environmental management performance. It is a research-based bachelor thesis made up of a literature review and an empirical study in two parts, involving in total 33 research participants. The process of composing the paper took place between January and April 2019.</p> <p>The increasingly severe conditions caused by the ongoing global problematics of pollution and climate change are supposedly among the most urgent current priorities of humankind. In order to go against the pressing deterioration tendency, it is being aimed at reducing the impact of several industries by means of a thorough ecological sustainability strategy, in the shape of a number of practices that form part of a hotel's environmental management, like water saving installations.</p> <p>At the same time, the modern consumer society gradually shifts towards an economic form of co-creation with the consumers seeing themselves in a more active role. Besides that, a considerable share of today's population is showing an increasing concern and consciousness for ecological issues and for finding a way to solve those. Therefore, ecological hotel businesses are advised to make use of not only the society's favourable attitudes towards environmental initiatives, but also their readiness to engage in those. However, how does that work in practice? Which aspects need to be considered? Which type of guests would be willing to get engaged, and which setting does the hotel have to provide for them to be ready and able to do so? Those are the questions this thesis aims to answer.</p> <p>With the pursuit of reaching this objective, a qualitative study of two parts has been executed: First, a series of expert interviews with seven hotel representatives of, in this case, private hotels in Germany, and after that, for validating purposes and in order to grasp the guest perspective, four focus group discussions among 26 university students.</p> <p>Regarding the study results, it can be said that, despite there being room to improve, the increase in society's environmental consciousness and a change in behaviour have been confirmed. It was further made clear that guests do not generally hinder a hotel's environmental strategy. It appears to be crucial to differentiate between distinct guest groups, as some guests can be classified as responsible guests, who are willing to engage strongly and even pay more if there is added value. In terms of guest engagement, the standard practice is, as expected, the towel and linen policy. However, some new engagement forms have developed, like involving guests in an energy transition, offering educational walks, or sowing vegetables together. In any case it seems as though the right way of communication is key, where finger-wagging does not work, and it is about a customer-oriented way of selling it, through gamification or creativity for instance. Not only is that part of a new image of ecological hospitality, there also appears to be a new definition of luxury rooted in ecological offerings, which is about health, relaxation - re-connecting with nature.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Responsible Consumerism, Sustainability, Ecological Hospitality, Eco-Tourism, Customer Engagement, Customer Citizenship	

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# 1 Introduction

Over the past centuries, the human activities on this planet have had a severe impact on the availability of essential resources, the ecosystem and the earth's climate. This has reached such an extent that the pollution caused can barely be absorbed anymore, with high concentrations of nitrogen oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and methane (CH<sub>4</sub>). The consequences are diverse and include, among others, deforestation, species loss, exploitation of fisheries and natural catastrophes. The rapid growth of population might make this even more severe, combined with an increasing water scarcity. (Gossling & Peeters 2015, 639 & 640.)

At the same time, environmental consciousness as a whole appears to be among the hot topics currently. Companies can gain market share by proving to act responsibly (Levy & Park 2011, 147). While the tourism industry is growing drastically, its impact on the planet is increasing equally, which makes action towards a more sustainable business environment necessary (Levy & Park 2011, 147). Besides that, for any hotel company, being able to better control and improve its sustainability performance, will lead to a wide range of benefits, like cost savings, talent attraction and complying with institutional requirements (Aragon-Correa, Martin-Tapia & de la Torre-Ruiz 2015, 502).

Being aware of negative consequences of their behaviour on other people or the environment can make guests feel responsible and initiate some type of corrective behaviour (Tuan 2018, 1182). To become active in giving back during their stay at a hotel, guests could be invited to join environmental activities (Bohdanowicz 2006, 679), like tree-planting or educational tours (Weaver et al. 2013, 23). Several major hotel chains have already launched such activities (AccorHotels 2019; Clausing 2011; Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts 2018; International Tourism Partnership 2018; IHG 2019, Hilton 2018, Marriott International Inc 2017; Rewards Provider 2018).

The topic of this research paper is connected to both the hotel's sustainable actions and the guest's potential role in it: What are the considerations to be made when aiming at involving hotel guests more into the environmental management of a hotel?

## 1.1 Objectives

Having said this, the purpose of this work is to explore the external and internal variables of impact on the guests' engagement in the ecological initiatives of a hotel, in order to tackle this area of uncertainty. While the overall question has been mentioned already, it

will be given more detail in the following. In the context of guest involvement into environmental management there are, in fact, several sub-questions to be answered:

1. How is environmental management implemented in hospitality businesses?
2. What are the conditions and motives required as a basis for guests to get involved? (Guest-related variables of willingness)
3. Which setting does the hotel have to provide to incentivize guests to get involved? (Hotel-related variables)
4. How will the guest engagement be implemented in reality?

As an attempt to answer these questions, insights shall be found through the empirical study to illustrate the similarities between different variables of both the hotel and the guest side that influence the possibility and willingness of guests to get involved in pro-environmental initiatives. Not only is this meant to serve hotels at creating the right setting for guest engagement but also identifying the right guests that would be willing to engage.

This thesis is research-oriented, based on a qualitative study and executed without a commissioning party, since there was none within realistic reach to the author, and because the main aim was reaching a diversity in inputs and opinions among the participants.

## **1.2 Justifications**

Hoteliers in charge of reaching certain CSR targets should know how to influence the guests' share in it, since that might in some cases be the main cause for variance. Therefore, it shall also be analysed, which setting has to be created by the hotel for the guests to be able and willing to get involved.

The author's personal interest lies in sustainable business strategies in general, which is why in an earlier semester, she took part in a research project in the area of food waste. During these five qualitative interviews with experts from the hospitality industry, it aroused as an issue that, while a hotel can try to be as environmental-friendly and socially responsible as it wants, there will be no success if the guests do not join in on it. Putting up signs about the environmental-friendly towel policy might not reduce the number of times a guest leaves those towels on the floor. While accepting the fact that the hotel guests' comfort is at the heart of any strategy, the author is personally interested in the application of an innovative approaches towards motivating them to do good at the same time.

Besides that, the impression has been gained that there is not a lot of academic research on this field yet, since it is mostly about employee engagement instead, or, in the guest perspective about guest's interest in CSR activities, their willingness to pay more for it and the inclination to choose hotel properties according to sustainable values.

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis and research outline**

The present report is structured into a theoretical framework, a part of explaining the research methodology used, a result section and one where the results are interpreted and discussed, and finally the concluding part, made up of implications, limitation, topics for further research, a description of the author's personal learning process and eventually the actual conclusion. The theoretical framework builds the academic foundation of both perspectives to the main research question, the hotel and the guest perspective, beginning by first introducing the environmental issues, then explaining the hotel industry's reaction to it, before switching to the consumers' take on it and finally bringing both sides together in the description of guest engagement in a hotel's ecological strategy. The methodology describes the approach to the empirical study, beginning with the research type, moving on to the research method, the sampling approach, the research structure, the approach to testing, the study execution, the data analysis of the study findings and finally the potential limitations based on the chosen research type. Since the author intends to, once again, gain insights into both the guest and the hotel side, a mixed method study approach has been chosen, using both expert interviews and focus group discussions with potential guests, which is why two different research methods are explained in this part.

In the result section, the findings of both study parts are presented, which are brought together in a synthesis with the reviewed literature in the discussion part. The implications describe how the study results should be understood and integrated into a changed strategy by any hotelier willing to reach a higher level of guest engagement in his or her environmental management strategy. The section after that, "*Validity and Reliability of Research Results*" describes the actual limitations, which are based on the experiences from the actual use of the research method in this particular case. This qualifies them as something different than the potential limitations according to the research type, as those are based on the theory about research methods. The section after that is describing the personal learning and development process, which means that the author describes what she gained in terms of knowledge, experience, insight and learning effects during the process of executing this research project and writing the thesis. Further research is a part, where any still existing gaps or shortcomings are described, like for example

limitations in the sampling and research scope, or topics that came up during this research and that could be filled by future studies.

#### **1.4 Definitions and concepts**

In the following, several different concepts and definitions of words used in the study shall be given. To begin with, *Sustainable Business Management* can be described as a strategy to reduce the harmful impact of a business' activities on its environment, both in its technical and organizational areas (Chung & Parker 2008, 273). It is an organizational responsibility that originates from the understanding that a business is not an isolated entity but closely connected to its social and natural surroundings (Knowles, Macmillan, Palmer, Grabowski & Hashimoto 1999, 258).

An *Ecolabel* is defined as "a label used to characterize products that satisfy particular environmental management considerations with regard to their production, usage, or disposal" (Bloomsbury Business Library 2007).

*Environmentally Responsible Tourism* was defined by Juvan & Dolnicar (2016, 31) as follows: "Environmentally sustainable tourist behaviour is tourist behaviour, which does not negatively impact the natural environment (or may even benefit the environment) both globally and at the destination."

As per definition, *Customer Citizenship* is the display of helpful, discretionary and pro-social extra-role behaviour, which benefits the company or other customers (Balaji 2014, 222; Bettencourt 1997, 384; Bove, Pervan, Beatty & Shiu 2009, 698; Groth 2005, 11; Yi, Gong & Lee 2013, 341). It goes beyond the level of required coproduction and involves an actual active contribution to the development of an organization (Bettencourt 1997, 386; Groth 2005, 20). One sub-division of Customer Citizenship Behaviour is the so-called *Citizenship Behaviour for the Environment* (Tuan 2018, 1178). Knowing that tourists have a significant effect on the environment, they can also play a relevant role in restoring it (Tuan 2018, 1178). There are different types of this citizenship behaviour, such as eco-civic engagement, eco-helping or eco-initiatives (Boiral & Paillé 2012, 431).

*Extra-role Behaviour* is described as a form of voluntary behaviour supporting a company, performed towards that company or other customers - those actions which are not part of the core service delivery (Bove et al. 2009, 698; Cheng, Luo, Yen & Yang 2016, 263). There are different forms of such behaviour: participation, cooperation and loyalty (Bove et al. 2009, 699).



## 1.5 Research method and scope

This study is done in an exploratory approach, since it is about discovering and finding insights into a wide and relatively unexplored area (Hair, Babin, Money & Samoel 2003, 57 & 58). As it is not about measuring something objectively or testing a hypothesis but about understanding, interpreting and then describing a phenomenon, the research is of qualitative nature (Barbour 2008, 10; Creswell 2014, 4 & 110; Rugg & Petre 2006, 34). The empirical study is made up of a primary and a secondary data collection stage. Firstly, expert interviews are chosen from the qualitative research methods available, as an observation of guest behaviour is not possible and as they are expected to trigger a wide variety of opinions on the topic of guest engagement into environmental management (Barbour 2008, 48; Creswell 2014, 191; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 29). As a second stage, the focus group discussion was selected because it is an open discussion that generates a wide range of different opinions (Aurini, Heath & Howells 2016, 136; Hair et al. 2003, 136). According to the research type, the choice of the study sample resulted in a non-probability sampling approach for both, in order to be able to obtain valuable ideas (Hair et al. 2003, 208 & 221). The interviews are done in a semi-structured and responsive way, based on open questions, flexibly adjusting to the conversation and asking follow-up questions when wanted (Aurini et al. 2016, 93; Creswell 2014, 194; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 37, 38 & 42; Rugg & Petre 2006, 139).

CSR is a wide area, involving the three pillars of social, economic and ecological areas of focus. While a holistic approach is generally recommended, the author decided to narrow the area of this research down to initiatives related to the environment. The reason for this choice is the personal interest in such aspects and the perception that there might be more initiatives already applied widely in the industry rather than guest-inclusive community service for instance. Geographically, the study is limited to Central Europe, Finland and Germany, due to a limited possibility to access other parts of the world for the required period of time. Out of the whole area of tourism and hospitality, this study shall focus on hotels, in this case it was even a highly specific sub-category of independent country-side hotels of mostly under 100 rooms, with the majority of them being part of a regional ecological lodging association. For the expert interviews, 7 participants were reached. The second target segment for the focus groups was a university course of 26 students, which were divided into four focus groups.

## **2 The environmental impact of hotels**

The current state of environmental pollution can be related to several different industries, but, among others, also to tourism, which is responsible for 5% of the global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 499; Puig et al. 2017, 245; UNWTO 2010). Out of that share, 20% of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions originate from accommodations, meaning that the hotel industry represents 1% of the global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (UNWTO 2010). This percentage has the potential to grow, since the tourism industry, and consequently also the accommodation business, have been going through consistently strong growth rates (Sharma & Rao 2018, 2). According to the UNWTO (2017, 2), there has been an increase in visitor numbers by 8% in Europe, 6% in Asia-Pacific, 5% in Americas, 9% in Africa and 5% in the Middle East in 2017. The effects that the industry leaves on the planet are varied. Tourism as a whole is quite polluting, and the overly intense use of water, for instance, is a major issue in hotels (Lowry 2018).

### **2.1 Areas of consumption and forms of environmental impact**

In the following, the most important areas of consumption and therefore the most relevant sources of impact shall be discussed. To begin with, freshwater consumption plays a crucial role in the operational resource use of a hotel. It can originate from showering, toilets, ski tourism, spas, wellness areas, saunas, swimming pools, hotel gardens or golf courses, food production or even already the construction of a hotel. A guest's consumption of water is usually higher when being on vacation than at home, leading to a water usage volume of between 84 and up to 2425 L per tourist per day in his or her accommodation, when adding up all the different types of freshwater consumption. As this scope is quite wide, the average might be somewhat more representative: A hotel guest uses an average of 350 L freshwater per day. (Gossling & Peeters 2015, 644 & 645.)

Besides water consumption, direct or indirect land use is also essential for tourism. While direct land use relates to space physically used by the guests, indirect areas could include food production space, waste disposal sites, water treating plants, etc. As the indirect land use is hard to grasp in some cases, it appears to be more reasonable to name the span of direct land use: the span goes from 25 m<sup>2</sup> to 4580 m<sup>2</sup> per bed depending on the type of hotel, as resorts for example tend to be more space-intensive. On average, per bed there is a 42m<sup>2</sup> land use worldwide. Within the next 25 years this number is expected to double. (Gossling & Peeters 2015, 645, 646 & 652.)

Another major topic of hospitality is its guests' consumption of food. On average, there is a difference of at least 0.5 kg per day between the food consumed at home and the food consumed while on vacation. With 75 billion tourist meals worldwide per year, the daily consumption is at 200 million meals. Besides the actual food consumed, there is also a lot of spoilage, cooking losses and plate waste. Food consumption has various ripple effects and impacts, like increased water consumption, emissions, the use of potentially harmful substances like pesticides, the loss of species, and the destruction of ecosystems or the land conversion for agricultural use. (Gossling & Peeters 2015, 647.)

Finally, energy consumption, as well as its effects on the planet may not be neglected in this context. A tourist trip leads to an average consumption of 3.575 MJ of fossil energy. Hence, tourism depends on an intense use of fossil fuels but also has a direct or indirect impact on the emissions of Green House Gases, like carbon dioxide, methane or nitrous oxide. Having said that, individual journeys can have very different levels of emissions, for example when comparing a long-haul trip made up of flights and cruises with a domestic bicycle tour. On average, each trip leads to the emission of 250 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>. (Gossling & Peeters 2015, 643 & 644.)

The different forms of impact of a hotel's business activity are often highly complex, and sometimes not directly explainable (Sharma & Rao 2018, 11). Besides that, they can also vary highly. For instance, the water and energy use of a hotel may be different according to its size, location, climatic zone, type of construction, category, or technology in place like lighting, air conditioning, as well as heating (Puig et al. 2017, 246). The effects of its operations can be positive or negative, long-term or short-term, indirect or direct, singular or cumulative (Sharma & Rao 2018, 3).

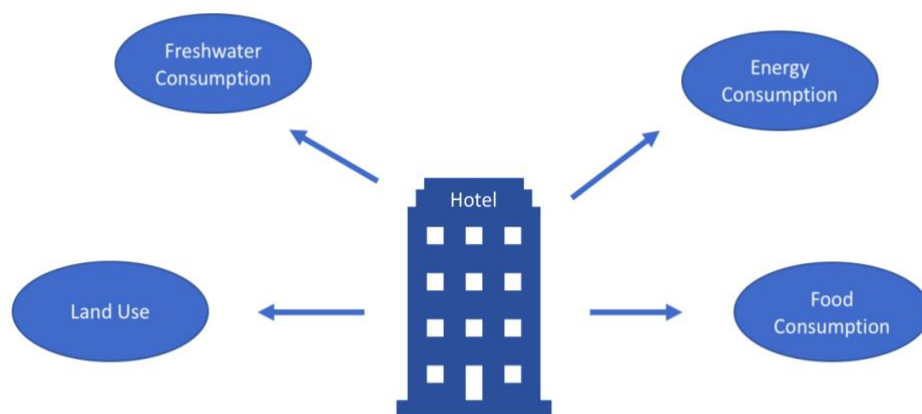


Figure 1. Consumption forms at a hotel (adapted from Gossling & Peeters 2015, 643-647 & 652)

## 2.2 Symbiotic relationship and study examples

While its effect on the planet has become clear, hospitality relies on having a symbiotic relationship between its business and the environment (Sharma & Rao 2018, 3). The natural environment, the biodiversity and its intact ecosystems are often a main reason for people to visit a destination in the first place (Sharma & Rao 2018, 2). This means that hotels might be most affected by the pollution and climate change and become increasingly vulnerable to the scarcity of resources, as they depend on those resources, as well as steady climate conditions (Gossling & Peeters 2015, 654; Lowry 2018). Having said that, the natural response to climate change, resource depletion and industrial exhaustion of its natural surroundings, can come in all different shapes and forms, like hurricanes, droughts, wildfires or floods – which leave, for example, coastal communities specifically threatened (Lowry 2018). This brings up the question of whether it is even possible for tourism and nature to co-exist and build a successful symbiosis (Sharma & Rao 2018, 12).

The case of Trung and Kumar (2005) serves as a representative example for the current state of sustainable business management at hotels, as they analyse the waste management and resource consumption of 50 hotels in Vietnam. With rapidly increasing numbers of visitors in Vietnam of between 30 and 40 percent, the resource use and waste production appear to increase proportionally. This has led to a negative image of hospitality due to its environmental impact on the biodiversity of Vietnam. The main results reveal that especially the 4 star and above hotels tend to have the worst performance numbers in efficiency, waste management and energy use. (Trung & Kumar 2005 109, 110 & 114.) Another example is the study done by Öñüt & Soner (2006) for the energy efficiency of 5-star hotels in Antalya, Turkey. The majority of the analysed hotels, 23 out of 32, were judged as inefficient, as the electricity and water use could still be reduced. (Öñüt & Soner 2006. 964 & 969).

### **3 Sustainable business management in hotels**

In the course of sustainable business management in hotels, natural resources are aimed at being used in a rational manner, as the triple bottom way of thinking focuses on the economic, social, but also the environmental aspects of a business' operation (Ioana 2013, 280; Levy & Park 2011, 147). Among others, eco-efficiency lies at the heart of sustainability, which means consuming as few resources as possible (Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 172). In case of it being a priority, an environmental strategy needs to be compatible with the overall business strategy in a clear balance between sustainable and economic goals (Chong & Parker 2008, 279, 281 & 282; Knowles et al. 1999, 263).

The thorough implementation of a sustainable strategy implies acting in a sustainable way in all departments and aspects of the business (O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 231) and going beyond the norms and regulations (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 502). A sustainable business is moving away from short-term financial goals (Chong & Parker 2008, 277). In order to reach long-term, balanced goals, a clearly defined base of the environmental strategy is often written down, which then results in a more concrete, formal management plan (Chong & Parker 2008, 280). If values play a strong role, companies will go the extra mile in terms of sustainable management (Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 177). Finally, for a company to successfully implement its sustainable strategy, a controlling system is important, to know how change has been progressing (Chong & Parker 2008, 282).

Many hoteliers believe that there is always the risk that sustainable initiatives have a negative impact on the quality image (Brown 1996, 18). The challenge for hotels is, therefore, to find the balance between offering luxury and being ethical and environmental-friendly (Dicum 2007). Especially in luxury hotels, waste is a significant issue. However, some hotels appear to be simply afraid of the guests' reaction. In some existing cases, it has already been possible to offer both luxury and comfort while being environmental-friendly. For that, it appears to be important to let guests understand the energy and water consumption, as well as the waste generation that result from a hotel stay. (Dicum 2007.)

#### **3.1 Tendency towards increased application in hospitality**

Each industry has its own way of tackling the environmental problems it causes (Álvarez-Gil, Burgos-Jimenez & Cespedes-Lorente 2001, 457). Traditionally, more research was done on the field of the more pollutant, heavy industries like manufacturing, but the tourism industry as a whole is growing rapidly and so is the attention on its environmental

footprint (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457; Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 499; Butler 2008, 237; Chung & Parker 2008, 272; Goodman 2000, 202). However, not until recently, hotels hadn't joined the trend of being ecologically efficient (Butler 2008, 235). Now there is an increasing involvement in environmental management (Ioana 2013, 278; Nicholls 2012, 953; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 172; Tzschentke, Kirk & Lynch 2004, 116). This might have happened due to the increasing pressure of the society on businesses to act more environmentally-friendly (Bohdanowicz 2005, 190; Butler 2008, 234; Chung & Parker 2008, 273; Knowles et al. 1999, 255; Nicholls 2012, 953; O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 221; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 172). As a consequence, several major hotel chains have launched sustainability initiatives (Butler 2008, 235; Stalcup, Deale & Todd 2014, 392). Among those, the young innovative brands like Starwood's W can be considered the main trendsetters (Butler 2008, 235), whereas some hotels appear to be somewhat hesitant and wait for others to test the waters of an environmental strategy first (Le, Hollenhorst, Harris, McLaughlin & Shook 2006; 563). Adding to that, not a lot of collaboration between different properties or chains has happened on this topic so far, as each property generally goes its own way (Knowles et al. 1999, 263).

Nevertheless, several sustainable practices have become standard in hospitality nowadays (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 512). More and more hotels have an environmental strategy written down as a plan (Bohdanowicz 2006, 666; Chong & Parker 2008, 274). While some companies are committed to a deeply rooted and long-term change of their ways, some only aim at having short-term, often marketing- and image-driven effects (Chong & Parker 2008, 283). Not only are there differences within the industry, there is also generally still a gap between good intentions and their actual implementation (Knowles et al. 1999, 255; Nicholls 2012, 954; O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 221). Many hotels tend to comply with what is expected, instead of becoming more innovative in sustainability, which could be explained by a lack of knowledge, but also a lack of willingness (Bohdanowicz 2006, 675; Levy & Park 2011, 152; Weaver et al. 2013, 25). Having said that, despite a generally existing awareness, there still seems to be room for improvement in the lodging industry (Bohdanowicz 2005, 200; Levy & Park 2011, 147).

### **3.2 Motives and benefits of the implementation of a sustainable strategy**

Companies apply environmental measures for many different reasons or motives. Originally, many green initiatives were actually mainly started for cost reduction purposes (Bohdanowicz 2005, 191; Bohdanowicz 2006, 666; Le et al. 2006, 548; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 175; Stalcup et al. 2014, 392; Tzschentke, Kirk & Lynch 2008; 128). Besides that, hospitality companies can come across several forms of pressure: One

example are regulations or institutional pressures to conform with environmental or ethical standards (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 503; Bohdanowicz 2006, 666; Knowles et al. 1999, 255; Le et al. 2006, 548; O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 224; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 172). It is believed that, actually, even stronger effects are reached through the pressure of consumers or other immediate stakeholders than those governmental influences (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 503 & 506; Bohdanowicz 2005, 191; Bohdanowicz 2006, 666; Butler 2008, 234; Le et al. 2006, 548). While those can be classified as reactive motives, other reasons could be morals, values and the perceived need to become active (Bohdanowicz 2006, 666; Knowles et al. 1999, 255; Le et al. 2006, 548; O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 224). However, some hotel companies remain completely reluctant to taking action, as they are not legally obliged and do not see the profitability of doing so (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 509).

Thoroughly applying a sustainable business strategy in a hotel can have several direct or indirect benefits. First of all, complying with environmental and ethical regulations reduces the likelihood of getting government fines, and instead tends to lead to more government support (Álvarez et al. 2001, 461; Levy & Park 2011, 146 & 148; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 176). Many initiatives also appear to lead to a significant reduction in costs, like for example reducing a hotel's energy expenses (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 461; Bohdanowicz 2005, 193; Butler 2008, 242; Chong & Parker 2008, 281; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390). At the same time, several initiatives actually lead to improved, more efficient operations, since they have the potential to perfectionate processes (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 461; Chong & Parker 2008, 281). As the demand for such actions is high, they are said to also lead to an increase in the hotel's guest satisfaction levels (Chong & Parker 2008, 281; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 173). They might even incentivize a stronger customer identification and loyalty (Levy & Park 2011, 147; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 173), once again improving the image and reputation of a property (Bohdanowicz 2005, 193; Chong & Parker 2008, 281; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Nicholls 2012, 963; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 176; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390). This, in return, can cause an increase in room revenue and repeat business (Chong & Parker 2008, 281; Levy & Park 2011, 148). Sustainable business practices appear to be quite a good subject to use for marketing purposes (Chong & Parker 2008, 281). The changed demand among guests could eventually even create a certain competitive advantage for responsible hotel businesses (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 461; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Tzschentke et al. 2004, 120; Weaver et al. 2013, 16). Ideally, the consequence of that could be an increased market share by attracting new customer segments, who are interested in sustainable hotels (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 461; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 175). All these aspects

can be seen as part of a long-term economic sustainability (Stalcup et al. 2014, 390; Weaver et al. 2013, 16).

Recruitment among a new pool of young talents with their values and expectations of a future employer can equally be affected positively by such strategies, as the hotel might be particularly attractive to them and even increase its staff retention rates, with employees being more likely to identify with a responsible company (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 461; Butler 2008, 241; Levy & Park 2011, 147 & 148; Stalcup et al. 2014, 391). There are even assumptions regarding an improved health of people working in green buildings (Butler 2008, 239). Finally, the most underrepresented area of benefits might be as simple as having a good feeling by making the right choices (Butler 2008, 242; Levy & Park 2011, 147 & 148) and actually seeing some sort of environmental success (Chong & Parker 2008, 281).

Although cost savings have been rated as the most popular benefits, there is still an extensive controversial discussion on whether being a responsible hotel business actually leads to financial benefits or not. Some studies speak of positive financial effects of applying such a strategy, while others speak of negative ones (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 462). In traditional economic literature, environmental protection was seen as a high cost factor (Le et al. 2006, 548). Purchasing ecological goods is often actually more expensive (O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 228). On top of that, there is no clear agreement of researchers on whether hotel guests are willing to pay more for a sustainable stay or not (Kasim, 2004; Kuminoff et al., 2010; Levy & Park 2011, 148).

On the other hand, waste disposal, energy and water are becoming increasingly expensive, which is where cost-savings could be reached by environmental management (Tzschentke et al. 2004, 118). By acting in an ecological way, costs can also be saved among others through the use of modern technology (Ioana 2013, 278). O'Neill and Alonso (2009, 224) claim that, if costs are perceived as a barrier, this is because of a lack of awareness for the economic benefits. Several studies show a clear support of the assumption that applying sustainable measures leads to financial benefits (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 502 & 506; Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 459; Brown 1996, 18).

### **3.3 Sustainable business practices in hospitality**

If a hotel decides to apply a sustainable strategy to its operations, there are various activities that could be adopted. For it to have a certain background of validity, the criteria and best practices used by the three of the most common ecolabels in European



hospitality, the Nordic Swan Label, Green Key and Green Globe will be presented in the following, together with common practices of the industry. Ecolabels were introduced as a system of environmental certification to help consumers choose products or services without needing to investigate too much further into which brand to choose (Björner, Hansen & Russell 2004, 412). In many cases, they were launched to give environmental-friendly producers more market share (Björner et al. 2004, 412). In hospitality, those ecolabels can also give assistance to hotels in their strive for environmental-friendly operations (Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 4). In a hotel, the sustainable strategy typically concerns waste reduction, reduction of energy and water use, pollution regulation, as well as resource management (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 458; Bohdanowicz 2005, 200; Chung & Parker 2008, 273; Ioana 2013, 279; Knowles et al. 1999, 257 & 261; Weaver et al. 2013, 20).

Efficiency is, as mentioned before, one of the main pillars of any sustainable strategy. Already at the stage of construction, the properties could be built in an ecological way, using material that supports any efficiency goals and is not harmful to the environment (Green Key 2018, 49; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390). Concretely formulated objectives with strict limits are used and accounted to through close monitoring of the energy and water consumption, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and waste generation (Green Globe 2019; Green Key 2018, 3, 5, 13, 29 & 32; Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 12 & 13). The energy use, a clear main focus of ecolabels (Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 4), can be reduced, for example by an efficient isolation system, or by using energy-saving light bulbs (Green Key 2018, 37-43; Ioana 2013, 279; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390). In a similarly important area of focus, the water consumption, a very common activity is the reuse program for towels and linen, which is widely spread, among others because it is considered to be a low investment with high benefits (Levy & Park 2011, 148; Nicholls 2012, 959; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390; Weaver et al. 2013, 16 & 20). Going a bit further, water saving installations and sensors could be used in toilets, showers, or dishwashers (Green Key 2018, 16).

Minimizing waste is another main goal of environmental management, which is mostly done by recycling, effective waste separation, an appropriate disposal system, or by reusing goods as much as possible, but might also mean a reduction of the use of chemicals in cleaning, or avoiding non-reusable cups, plates and cutlery (Bohdanowicz 2005, 200; Green Globe 2019; Green Key 2018, 22, 25 & 65; Ioana 2013, 279; Knowles et al. 1999, 261; Nordic Label 2019, 17; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390; Weaver et al. 2013, 20 & 24). Next to that, other pollutions are expected to be reduced, such as noise, light, erosion, or air and soil contamination (Green Globe 2019).

Hotels can shape their sustainable performance already at the purchasing stage, by collaborating with eco-certified business partners and suppliers, as well as purchasing a certain percentage of fair-trade products, eco-labelled, organic and locally produced food, next to purchasing less meat and less processed food (Green Key 2018, 23, 44 & 47; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390; Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 23, 24 & 34). As a modern approach, including suppliers in the sustainable strategy is also part of the recommended practices (Green Globe 2019).

Moving on to the people aspect of sustainability, ethical human resource practices and working conditions are another area of focus (Stalcup et al. 2014, 390). In order to get the hotel staff members on board, the hotels are asked to do regular staff meetings about the progress of environmental management and inform and train them accordingly (Green Key 2018, 6 & 8; Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 29). Besides that, some hotels' employees are paid for volunteer community work, such as cleaning initiatives, taking care of a natural habitat, or biodiversity protection (Ioana 2013, 278 & 279; Levy & Park 2011, 147; Weaver et al. 2013, 22). Further on, there could be educational initiatives for staff members and guests (Butler 2008, 242; Iona 2013, 278; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390). From a philanthropical perspective, some hotels choose charity donations or some forms of collaboration with local communities (Ioana 2013, 279; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390).

Summing up, there are some measures that go into the prevention area, while others can be considered to be rather "end of the pipe", like waste disposal for example (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 504). Practices that are time-, effort- or cost-intensive are considered less popular (Knowles et al. 1999, 261; Nicholls 2012, 962).

### **3.4 Different aspects of influence on the application of sustainable strategies**

The way a sustainable business strategy is shaped and implemented, depends on several internal and external factors. Generally, it could be hindered by a high cost of implementation and maintenance, but also a managerial lack of experience and knowledge (Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 509; Bohdanowicz 2005, 189; Bohdanowicz 2006, 663; Nicholls 2012, 954; Stalcup et al. 2014, 391; Tzschentke et al. 2004, 116). Besides that, a company's resources determine its ability to reach ambitious sustainable goals (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 459; Bohdanowicz 2005, 189; Bohdanowicz 2006, 663; Nicholls 2012, 954; Le et al. 2006, 550 & 560), just as much as its level of technology (Bohdanowicz 2006, 671). Recently renovated properties are often more active in ecological initiatives than somewhat outdated ones (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457;

Bohdanowicz 2006, 671; Chong & Parker 2008, 275). The external environment such as the public facilities available, like waste sorting institutions for example, can also play a fundamental role (Bohdanowicz 2006, 674; O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 229). Further on, the legal framework a hotel is in, equally has a strong impact on its environmental and ethical strategy, as well as the level of pressure it is given from different stakeholders (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457 & 459; Bohdanowicz 2005, 189 & 191; Chong & Parker 2008, 274). One type of stakeholder are the guests, for example, indirectly shaping business strategies with their demand for a responsible way of operating (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457 & 461).

When looking at the interior pre-conditions, a sustainable business strategy often depends highly on a hotel's prior organizational capabilities (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 459; Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 506; Chong & Parker 2008, 283). It is said that businesses that are generally more innovative tend to also be more engaged in environmental management (Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 173).

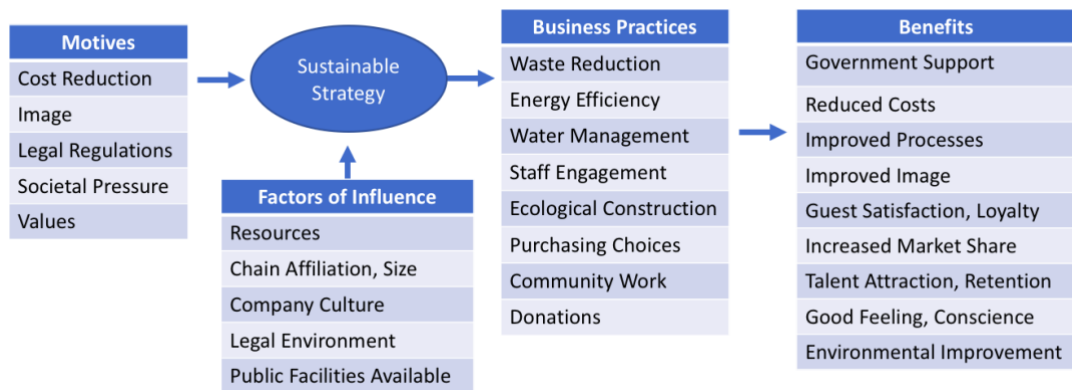


Figure 2. Sustainability business management at hotels (personal summarizing model based on chapter 3.2-3.4)

There are major differences between large companies and hotel chains, as opposed to small independent properties. In many cases, the somewhat more effective and strategic environmental strategies are to be found in larger, chain-affiliated hotels, as they have more experience and resources (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457; Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 506; Bohdanowicz 2005, 188; Bohdanowicz 2006, 669; Chong & Parker 2008, 274; Le et al. 2006, 550 & 560; Nicholls 2012, 954; O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 232; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011; Tzschentke et al. 2004, 116; Weaver et al. 2013, 17). Chains of a certain size can actually exert pressure on their suppliers, which might be harder for smaller companies or private properties (Goodman 2000, 214). It is also believed that smaller, independent hotels are less formal in their ecological approach, but also more purposeful and value-driven (Bohdanowicz 2006, 671; Le et al. 2006; 560; Nicholls 2012, 969; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 173; Tzschentke et al. 2008; 117 & 122). Being the main

focus of public attention, chain hotels and major properties appear to be under higher pressure (Bohdanowicz 2005, 189). Consequently, there seems to be more leniency on small businesses, as it is known that they have less resources (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457; Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 507 & 508; Chong & Parker 2008, 274; Le et al. 2006, 550). Having said that, the impact of small entities might seem marginal on a business unit level, but since as a whole they represent the majority of the industry, it appears necessary for them to join the trend as well (O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 231; Tzschentke et al. 2004, 117).

### **3.5 Example of sustainable business management at Scandic Hotels**

The case of the Nordic hotel chain Scandic Hotels proves that applying a new, more triple-bottom oriented strategy can help turn a company around and make it more successful as a whole. The organization was about to go bankrupt in the early 1990s, with a strategy that had not been clearly formulated and focused. In 1992, change came along with the new CEO, Roland Nilsson, who launched a different strategy consisting of two pillars: decentralization and sustainable development. The strategy was also about becoming less company-focused and more customer-focused. The environmental management approach as a part of this customer-focusing policy was shifted into the core of the corporate strategy – a move, which was highly rare for this industry. The newly defined values with a stronger emphasis on sustainability helped create a relationship of identification both with the employees and the guests. (Goodman 2000, 202-213.)

While applying major and seemingly disruptive changes in areas like the supply chain management and employee training, the guest comfort remained at the centre of attention and should not be affected by any of these initiatives. The results showed incredible success rates both in environmental and economic terms, with a full recovery already in the mid 90s. The Scandic case displayed a wide range of the above-mentioned benefits. Besides that, this example appears to prove that not only stable, well-performing companies can afford to focus on doing business in an ecologically and ethically acceptable way, if it is integrated thoroughly into their overall strategy. (Goodman 2000, 202-213.)

Being the organization to invent the practice of hanging the towel to reduce a guest's environmental impact, today Scandic is still the industry leader in many areas of sustainability (Scandic Hotels Group AB 2019). In the annual report, ambitious goals were set for waste and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to be reached by 2020 already (Scandic 2018, 35; Scandic Hotels Group AB 2019). Since 1996 there is a comprehensive monitoring and

reporting system on water, energy, chemical use and unsorted waste in all Scandic hotels (Scandic Hotels Group AB 2019). The responsibility for meeting the targets lies with the general managers of each hotel (Scandic 2018, 36). Besides that, Scandic Hotels are making use of third-party certifications, mainly the Nordic Swan for Nordic countries (Scandic 2018, 36). The organization was Sweden's most sustainable brand in 2017, when they had 79 percent of their waste recycled, among others by selling food leftovers digitally (Scandic 2018, 37).

## **4 Responsible Consumerism**

Today, consumers play an important role in reaching a sustainable future, a phenomenon which has its roots in the past century (Shaw & Clarke 1999, 109). Since the 1960s a trend towards environmental psychology could be observed (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 239). During this movement, being environmental-friendly meant reducing one's consumption in general (Schlegelmilch, Bohlen & Diamantopoulos 1996, 37). In the 1970s and 1980s there was a drop in the society's environmental concern due to existing pollution control and energy efficiency (Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 37; Sikula & Costa 1994, 859). Only recently, since the 90s, the concerns grew again, but instead of reducing consumption as a whole, it was about consuming the right products - which is when Responsible Consumerism was born (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000, 355; Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 37; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 109; Strong 1996, 5).

Several campaigns have made consumers more aware of ethical issues, with increasing coverage of the topic on TV, in documentaries or in printed media (Harrison 2003, 127; Strong 1996, 9). Through the diverse access to information, today's consumers have become more sophisticated, aware of the possibilities to compare and choose from, but are also conscious of manipulative advertisement, (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000, 358; Carrigan & Attala 2001, 563; Harrison 2003, 128; Strong 1996, 7). They are not only expecting a certain quality and price, but many also look for a product's ecological character and the company's social values (Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 127 & 128). The consumers and the society as a whole have developed stricter standards and expectations in terms of ecological behaviour (Beckmann 2007, 28).

### **4.1 Environmental Education**

Modern Environmental Education has been done for the last 50 years (Crohn & Birnbaum 2010, 155), in several different contexts, with different names (Erhabor 2018, 3). In the area of Environmental Education, William Stapp is one of the most famous scholars (Erhabor 2016, 4). His ground-rule-setting ecological work explains the origins and importance of Environmental Education: Due to an increased urbanization of the human population moving away from the rural lifestyle, a disconnection of humans from nature could be observed, as well as a decrease in awareness of its importance. According to Stapp et al. (1969, 30), people can only make a difference in this context by changing their behaviour towards nature, but they first need the awareness and knowledge about the topic, as well as about the possibilities of taking action. (Stapp et al. 1969, 30.)

Environmental Education is actually at its fundament about the relationship between humans and their environment (Erhabor 2018, 3). Its main concept has always been and still remains connecting people with nature (Crohn & Birnbaum 2010, 155). It is not solely about informing people about the problematics, it is further about teaching them how to actually apply their acquired environmental knowledge in their every-day lives (Erhabor 2016, 3). As a next step, resulting from the increased knowledge and awareness, people should be able to take up a more active role in environmental protection (Ardoin 2009, 9).

The transmission of environmental knowledge and skills can come in very different shapes, forms, setting and technique (Ardoin 2009, 3; Crohn & Birnbaum 2010, 156; Erhabor 2018, 3). There is not just one target group, people of different age groups can be educated, as, according to the educational ideologists, it is a life-long learning concept (Ardoin 2009, 1 & 2; Erhabor 2018, 3).

In this order, people's awareness and concern about the environment shall be raised, their understanding of the connection between economic, social and environmental wealth shall be shaped, as well as the knowledge, attitudes, skills and commitment required for environmental protection, and finally, a change shall be reached in people's behaviour to a more responsible one (Ardoin 2009, 2; Erhabor 2018, 3). People are given a more dynamic role in environmental protection (Ardoin 2009, 9), while maintaining the balance between human quality of life and the quality of their natural environment (Erhabor 2016, 1).

Environmental Education has a wide range of benefits to offer. To begin with and overall, it helps improve the general environmental awareness and knowledge (Erhabor 2018, 3). The study of Yeh, Ma & Huan (2016, 1215) indicates also that Environmental Education leads to increased environmental motivation. If people are knowledgeable and aware of the importance of the nature, they are more likely to engage in environmental-friendly initiatives. This means that social and financial benefits can originate from Environmental Education. (Yeh et al. 2016, 1204, 1205 & 1207.) There can even be inter-generational benefits, as people tend to spread their knowledge among their family and friends (Crohn & Birnbaum 2010, 156). While most environmental strategies focus rather on the "end of the pipe", this type of strategy is looking for the roots of environmental problems, making it possible to avoid those problems beforehand (Erhabor 2016, 1).

## 4.2 External and internal factors of influence on responsible behaviour

Earlier studies in the 70s, 80s and 90s indicate the existence of a direct connection between demographics and the ecological beliefs of a consumer (Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 128). As an example, it used to be the general opinion that women tend to have stronger social and environmental concerns, prioritizing justice in a context of interpersonal behaviour, while men connect it to legal regulations (Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 129). There is no academic agreement on whether men and women have different ethical beliefs, and different value-constructs and processes used to evaluate situations ethically (Sikula & Costa 1994, 859; Tsalikis & Ortiz-Buonafina 1990, 509 & 517). The study by Pedrini & Ferri (2014, 31 & 32) does not find any difference related to gender, but an influence of disposable income and age. Several studies paint the image of a Responsible Consumerist being of high educational level, rather young, urban, married and disposing of high income (Barr 2003, 230; Strong 1996, 6). Besides that, it seems as though there is a positive relation between being highly educated and developing a high level of ethical consciousness and knowledge about responsible consumption (Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 129).

There are several different external factors that have an impact on people's ability and willingness to show Responsible Consumerism behaviour. Sometimes they change their behaviour because they are forced to, for example through increased taxes on the existence of harming products (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 256). Besides that, social norms also have an impact, in the form of peer group behaviour (Barr 2003, 230; Sachdeva, Jordan & Mazar 2015, 62; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 114). Further on, cultural differences or religious norms can also have a strong influence (Beckmann 2007, 32; Björner 2004, 429; Carrigan & Attala 2001, 563; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 114). The consumers must also be able to get the information, optimally from a resource they have positive emotional connections with, to evaluate if a product or service is environmental-friendly (Barr 2003, 230; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 113; Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 128; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 113). Finally, the availability of certain facilities and services can have a strong effect on the opportunity for people to show responsible consumption behaviour (Barr 2003, 229).

Personal reasons appear to be stronger than societal ones (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000, 359). This is supported by the idea that personality and attitude have a stronger influence on an individual's actions than his or her demographic or socio-economic background (Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61; Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 48; Webster 1975, 188 & 196). Therefore, it is said that every consumer has the potential to be ethically motivated



(Kimeldorf, Meyer, Prasad & Robinson 2006, 24). In the following, the different internal aspects of influence on the development of Responsible Consumerism, as they were identified by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), shall be described.

To begin with, it is influenced by *motivation*, in the form of personal priorities and motives or the motivation originating from a threat caused by environmental problems (Barr 2003, 227 & 230; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 249 & 250). Moving on, it also depends on the existing *environmental knowledge*: People do not only have to know about the environment and its nature, they also have to know that they can make a change through the right buying decision (Barr 2003, 229; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 250; Webster 1975, 189). The next category are *values*, which have an individual influenced by his or her immediate social surrounding ever since childhood, through destruction experiences, role models, or education, leading to building up a certain level of environmental sensitivity (Barr 2003, 228; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 251; Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61).

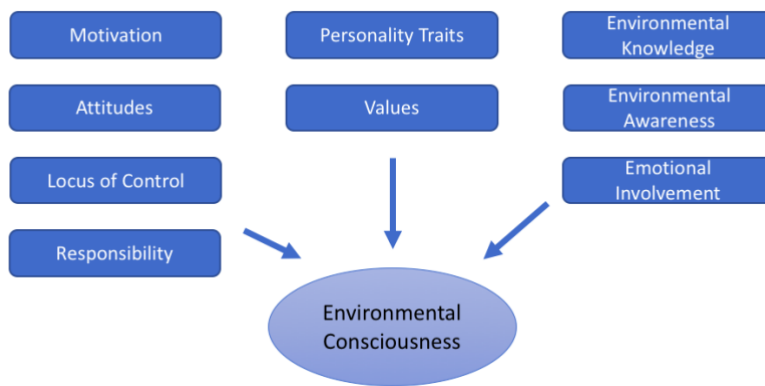


Figure 3. Internal factors influencing environmental consciousness (adapted from Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 249-257)

The fourth type of potential influence are *attitudes* (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 252 & 253; Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61). Green consumers still have hope, they do not feel helpless or pessimistic regarding aspects like climate change (Sachdeva et al. 2015, 62). What has been mentioned by several studies is the influence of *personality traits* like dominance, responsibility, socialization or tolerance (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 257; Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61; Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 36; Webster 1975, 191). Responsible Consumerists are described as influential people who like to take initiative and a leadership role as they feel that they can make a change (Webster 1975, 193). Another strong influence can be a person's *habits* (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 256). In order to act responsibly, people further need to have the necessary *environmental awareness*, which is knowledge-based but might be threatened by the abstract, indirect and complex nature of ecological problems (Barr 2003, 227; Björner et al. 2004, 422; Kollmuss &

Agyeman 2002, 253 & 254). Awareness and knowledge can only work paired with *emotional involvement*, which is a sensitive relation to nature, the emotional investment in an issue (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 254). Another aspect of impact could be the so-called *locus of control*, which is the perception of the ability to change things (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 255). Finally, Responsible Consumerism is naturally also about *responsibility* and *priorities*, which are a tendency to feel morally obliged without expecting benefits in return (Barr 2003, 230 & 231, Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 255).

### **4.3 Customer Citizenship and Customer Engagement**

While traditionally, customers were not seen as partners in the delivery or development of service, now there is a trend towards co-creation, some even see them as partial employers of a company (Bettencourt 1997, 384; Bove et al. 2009, 698; Groth 2005, 13 & 20). Such extra-role behaviour of a customer has positive effects on the success of brands, contributes to the company goodwill and serves as a competitive advantage, which is why companies should try to build a positive relationship with their customers to promote those behaviours (Bartikowski & Walsh 2011, 40; Bove et al. 2009, 698; Cheng et al. 2016, 273; Tuan 2018, 1182). This means that a customer has to feel personally connected to a company by identifying with it for certain values, in order to support it more than what would be normal (Tuan 2018, 1179).

Just like employees establish a relationship with a company, customers do as well, which is described as the customer-company identification (Groth 2005, 12). The first pre-condition of this relation is the value perceived by the customer (Cheng et al. 2016, 263). Customer satisfaction and loyalty are the antecedents of the establishment of a customer-company identification (Fatma, Khan & Rahman 2018, 461). With people nowadays switching their hotels of choice very often, this identification can play a crucial role (Fatma et al. 2018, 461). For an identification to develop, there should be a perceived congruence between the consumer's and the company's characteristics, values and defined attributes (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001, 227).

There have been several studies about a potential relation between the Corporate Social Responsibility of a company and the development of a customer identification. In fact, it is believed that there is a positive influence of the customer's CSR perception on his or her identification with the firm, consequently leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty (Fatma et al. 2018, 460 & 463). To achieve that, it might be of high importance to get customers engaged in CSR initiatives (Jarvis, Ouschan, Burton, Soutar & O'Brien 2017, 847). In order to be successful in this attempt, it appears to be important to identify the

social or environmental causes the customers would want to engage in, to really create a connection with them (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001, 228; Jarvis et al. 2017, 834, 838 & 847).

The three main areas of extra-role behaviour, participation, cooperation and loyalty, can take the shape of affiliation, helping other customers, a positive word of mouth, providing some type of information, like helpful feedback to the company, getting additional products, paying a premium price or participating in company activities (Balaji 2014, 223; Bartikowski & Walsh 2011, 40; Bettencourt 1997, 383, 385 & 386; Bove et al. 2009, 698 & 699; Groth 2005, 9 & 16; Yi et al. 2013, 341).

People traditionally tended to show their environmental consciousness through their purchase behaviour (Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 37). “The act of buying is a vote for an economic and social model, for a particular way of producing goods.” – as it was formulated by Harrison (2003, 131). This doesn’t seem to have changed, as there is a new form, the “boycott” - deciding to particularly support companies that are doing ethically well (Kimeldorf et al. 2006, 24). Originally, consumers based their choice on price, quality and availability, as well as convenience (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000, 363; Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 128; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 115). Nowadays, quite a few customers take corporate citizenship into account for their buying decision (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004, 9; Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 128), as it might be influenced by altruism, or the fear of being ethically irresponsible (Björner et al. 2004, 413). Although the purchase decision remains influenced by other attributes (Beckmann 2007, 31; Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000, 359; Strong 1996, 10), customers are willing to choose the more responsible brands, as long as the quality and price remains the same (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004, 9 & 18).

In their buying decision they can exert a certain level of power by sanctioning, which is about choosing not to buy products from a company that is seen as immoral or irresponsible, and thereby trying to make a change with their choice (Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 128; Strong 1996, 12). Even if not all consumption areas got the same attention, the actual potential power of the consumer choice is significant (Kimeldorf et al. 2006, 28) and several studies predict a market growth of green products with more and more consumers ready to pay higher prices for ecological products (Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 35).

#### **4.4 The case against Responsible Consumerism**

As much as there might be an ideological tendency towards Responsible Consumerism, it is still unclear if consumers would really actively reward companies for ethical behaviour and punish them for irresponsible behaviour (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 560). It has often

been assumed that society expects a certain behaviour, but this assumption has not been clearly confirmed (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 563). According to several reports, there is only a minority of customers that make their ethical and ecological image of a company the essential criterion in their buying decision (Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000, 364, Carrigan & Attala 2001, 572; Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 50). In fact, there seems to be a variety of more important criteria for a person's buying decision than those aspects, like for example brand image and, ultimately, its price (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 564 & 571; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 115). In particular, there appears to be no boycotting if a customer relies on a product (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 565).

For some people, being responsible or ethical means following the legal requirements, and many appear to be responsible in a selective way, not comprehensively (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 566 & 570). Some people seem to find excuses or justifications for why they don't see a company as unethical, covering up for obvious ethical or environmental shortcomings (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 568 & 569). Besides that, there are clear cultural differences, as the strength of public opinion is different in different parts of the world (Harrison 2003, 130).

It even appears to be difficult to do reliable research on this field, as there are factors of bias like social desirability (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 566; Kimeldorf et al. 2006, 25). In reality, there seems to be a gap between people having environmental concerns and an ecological consciousness, as well as the necessary knowledge and awareness and them showing actual pro-environmental behaviour (Björner et al. 2004, 412; Carrigan & Attala 2001, 563; Kimeldorf et al. 2006, 27; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 239; Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61). The attitudes might be supportive, but there is no actual change in people's buying behaviour for several reasons (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004, 18; Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000, 359). In fact, there seems to be a complex relationship underlying the gap between thought and action (Shaw & Clarke 1999, 117). Even an increasing level of general sophistication does not automatically lead to a change in buying decisions, as people might be stressed and overwhelmed with the abundance of information, leading to an attitude of not being able to do anything about certain issues (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 571, 573 & 569; Shaw & Clarke 1999, 113). Instead, for some customers it would have to be made easier to be a responsible consumer (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 572).

## **5 The responsible and cooperative hotel guest**

As modern tourists are becoming increasingly concerned about environmental issues, there is an increasing number of environmentally managed hotels, green hotels, which among others aim to reduce water and energy use, as well as waste production (Lee, Hsu, Han & Kim 2010, 901 & 902). More and more guests intentionally choose such a hotel, and many are even ready to contribute to the hotel's green initiatives (Lee et al. 2010, 902). Therefore, green initiatives increasingly become part of the guest experience (Kang, Stein, Heo & Lee 2010, 570). In this part, the academic view about the trend towards guests showing ecological citizenship behaviour will be described.

In its essence, environmentally responsible tourism is about making certain vacation choices to protect the environment and behave accordingly during those vacations (Juvan & Dolnicar 2016, 32). There is an increasing awareness of hotels' efforts to be ecological (Millar & Baloglu 2011, 302), and a preference for green hotels over irresponsible ones, as guests aim to decrease their ecological footprint by engaging in initiatives like a towel and linen reuse program (Goldstein, Cialdini & Giskevicius 2009, 472; Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 364). However, in many cases, people actually feel more responsible to act sustainably in their own communities, and not so much on holidays, or do not find the necessary facilities for it at the destination (Miller, Merrilees & Coghlan 2015, 29 & 36).

Besides that, there is a number of internal and external factors of influence, which have already been discussed in section 4.3. People who choose genuinely ecological hotels, do that because they want to have the feeling of doing something good for the planet with their purchase (Lee et al. 2010, 910). That is why engaging in green practices has been observed to increase the hotel guests' satisfaction and willingness to return (Susskind & Verma 2011, 229). The segment of environmental conscious customers is growing increasingly, and nowadays it can be said that if two hotels are the same except for their environmental management, people would choose the eco-friendly one (Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 365; Susskind & Verma 2011, 236).

### **5.1 Extra-role behaviour among hotel guests**

In order to show active environmental-friendly behaviour during their stay, guests of a hotel need to have the willingness, the ability and the opportunity to do so (Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 368). Besides that, interactions with a hotel's employees can actually have a positive impact on guest's citizenship behaviour if pro-environmental values are taught (Tuan 2018, 1178, 1179 & 1185).

Currently, the general level of guest engagement in customer citizenship behaviour at hotels is still considered relatively low, as there is no sufficient understanding of the barriers to it (Miller et al. 2015, 29). Some of them might be the potential risks of liability, inappropriate tasks, the need for supervision or a perceived compulsion (Weaver et al. 2013, 25).

Finally, there is once more the financial discussion. Due to extra costs resulting from marketing, new, more efficient technology, responsible purchasing choices or waste disposal, some hotels might want to charge a higher price for selling a green hospitality product (Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 368). However, there is once more no clear answer to the question of whether people would pay more or not for a more ecological stay, since some studies support this assumption, while others do the opposite (Millar & Baloglu 2011, 308).

According to Lee et al. (2010, 902) and Susskind and Verma (2011, 564), there is an increasing number of people who are willing to pay more for a stay at an ecological hotel. On the contrary, other studies claim that the majority of hotel guests are not willing to pay more for it (Kang et al. 2010, 564; Millar & Baloglu 2011, 304). Different customer segments might be more or less willing to do so (Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 369; Kang et al. 2010, 565). Besides that, cultural difference might also play a role in the willingness to pay more (Kang et al. 2010, 565). Some guests appear to be ready to pay a slight extra, and some even more than that (Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 369), but if they do not feel like the product itself has been enhanced in quality, then they do not seem to want to pay anything additional (Kang et al. 2010, 566).

## **5.2 Guests' expectations for hotels**

Generally, guests are said to be quite acceptant of the policies in a hotel, since they know the purpose behind it (Millar & Baloglu 2011, 304). Nevertheless, as much as sustainability practices are seen as positive by the guests, they do not want to compromise on their holiday experience (Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 364; Lee et al. 2010, 908; Stalcup et al. 2014, 392). Any ecological changes in the room should not be too disruptive where guests notice a difference in quality (Susskind & Verma 2011, 235). As an example, hotel guests prefer having recycling bins in the hotel lobby instead of having them in their room (Millar & Baloglu 2011, 306).

However, that does not mean that they are opposed to making ecological changes in the hardware or software of a hotel. Modern hotel guests prefer eco-rooms, as they do not

only give a good feeling, but are also believed to have an aesthetic natural design and better air quality (Lee et al. 2010, 910). In that context they support energy-saving light bulbs, refillable shampoo dispensers, towel and linen reuse programs, key card electricity control, as well as recycling facilities (Millar & Baloglu 2011, 302). That is why, for any of the latest hotel projects, the guest wishes about environmental protection are being taken into consideration in choices about the construction, processes and the design of the hotel building (Susskind & Verma 2011, 228).

Not only do guests prefer a hotel to have an ecological certification (Millar & Baloglu 2011, 306), they want to see actual proofs that the hotel is environmental-friendly (Jauhari & Manaktola 2007, 371). There is no tolerance for any perceived green-washing tendency, the frontline employees are expected to demonstrate the ecological values (Tuan 2018, 1196).

### **5.3 Effective communication between hotel and guest**

In order to reach a successful environmental collaboration with hotel guests, there needs to be a clear communication of a hotel's green strategy (Susskind & Verma 2011, 229). The emotional or functional benefits of supporting this strategy should be communicated, just as much as the reasoning behind any initiatives or possibly behind an increase in price as a result of environmental management (Lee et al. 2010, 911). The overall CSR message should involve the hotel guests and inspire them to become active co-creators (Tuan 2018, 1196). In many cases of actual hotels, this type of information is given mostly through posters or leaflets in the hotel rooms (Millar & Baloglu 2011, 308). There is also often a sign in the guest room or bathroom informing the guests about a hotel's towel and linen reuse program (Goldstein et al. 2009, 472).

When formulating these messages, it appears to be crucial to do so in a normative way, not only asking them to cooperate (Goldstein et al. 2009, 474). People do not only follow what the society approves of, they more importantly follow what is generally done (Cialdini 2003, 105). Instead of communicating that environmental pollution is something common, a clearly pro-environmental behaviour needs to be promoted as common and ethically correct (Cialdini 2003, 105 & 108). This might mean describing what the majority of other hotel guests did, like 75% of them joining the towel reuse program (Goldstein et al. 2009, 474). Naturally, there is always an interaction of a variety of different influences, so it is not only the social norm that shapes somebody's behaviour, but it has actually been proven to be effective to use a positive descriptive message of normative behaviour in such signage (Goldstein et al. 2009, 473).

## 6 Existing guest engagement initiatives

Although it might be a relatively new trend in sustainability initiatives, guest engagement activities in hotels have become increasingly spread throughout the industry, especially when looking at the major chains. To begin with, at the InterContinental Hotels Group, IHG, guest engagement is done by employees, through clear signage and in form of written information like flyers in the room about the existing programs, encouraging guests to participate actively. During the booking process, they can already see the property's IHG Green Engage level, which is the chain's own ecological certification system. They can choose the property they would like to stay at according to its achieved certification level on a scale from 1 to 4. Besides that, IHG Rewards Club members can participate in a campaign called "A Greener Stay", where they can decide to go without any linen and towel replacement for a stay of at least two nights. (IHG 2019.)

Its American competitor, Hilton also lets guests and visitors see the ecological performance of their property of choice in the Travel with Purpose program. Guests can see that performance when logging into the hotel's WIFI. In an individual initiative, Hilton representatives asked their guests in China for a feedback on their environmental performance. As a consequence from their guests' suggestions, they removed the plastic bottles from any meetings, the gyms, spa facilities and events. (Hilton 2018.)

To mention another example of guest engagement, Starwood, since 2017 part of the currently largest chain, Marriott International, has launched the "Make A Green Choice" program, where guests, similarly to the IHG program, can choose to go without the change of linen and towels for up to three days, which gets them between 250 and 500 points on their loyalty program each night. (Marriott International Inc 2017.)

In Marriott's own loyalty program, members can even decide to do good by donating some of their loyalty points to support sustainable projects with organizations, like for example, WWF and Clean the World (Rewards Provider 2018). One of Marriott's most famous brands, The Ritz Carlton has called its own guest engagement campaign "Get Involved". They actually offer guests to actively contribute and volunteer for their social and environmental projects. By understanding that their tourism is always based on the destination's value, guests shall learn to give back already during their stay. (Clousing 2011.)

Another luxury hotel brand has taken a similar approach: At Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts guests can participate in CSR activities in the local community and environment



(International Tourism Partnership 2018). They are involved in choosing the projects together with the local properties, can actively contribute to revitalizing the environment, or support local families and students in educational initiatives (Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts 2018).

Moving on to the French competition, Accor Hotels has decided to launch a very special type of linen and towel reuse program. The “Plant for the Planet” program lets guests contribute to a tree planting project by reusing their room towels and bed linen. The money saved is used to fund this special initiative, where one tree is being planted every minute. (AccorHotels 2019.)

Finally, a special mention is well deserved for the Zaton Holiday Resort in Croatia, which has launched several activities to involve guests in their sustainable strategy. Many of those are educational projects to raise awareness among their hotel guests. In a project about energy saving, guests were given free coffee for providing the electricity needed to create the coffee on stationary bikes with a dynamo. While this initiative was widely supported, another one rather led to irritation among the guests: Under the theme “Water is not Free, Let’s Think about a Fee”, they made guests pay about 2 € for each glass of tap water - without any prior notice. The guests’ reaction was negative and surprised until the staff members explained the awareness campaign. Since this saw a considerable educational effect, the resort was given the Green Key award for the third best sustainable initiative in 2017. (Green Key 2017.)

Table 1: Existing guest engagement initiatives (personal summary based on chapter 6)

Hotel Company	Initiative
IHG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee engagement, clear and informative communication, actively encouraging guests to participate</li> <li><i>IHG Green Engage</i> level displayed during booking process</li> <li><i>A Greener Stay</i> for IHG Rewards Club members</li> </ul>
Hilton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Travel with a Purpose</i>: information about property’s ecological performance open to guests</li> <li>Involving hotel guests in ecological choices</li> </ul>
Starwood & Marriott	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Make a Green Choice</i> in SPG loyalty program</li> <li>Donating loyalty points</li> <li><i>Get Involved</i> at Ritz Carlton, active contribution of guests to environmental projects</li> </ul>
Four Seasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guest participation in CSR projects for environment and community</li> </ul>
Accor Hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Plant for a Planet</i> towel and linen program, tree planting</li> </ul>
Zaton Resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational projects to raise awareness: guests grinding coffee; <i>Water is not Free. Let’s Think about a Fee.</i></li> </ul>

Not only shall the actual industry best practices in the area of guest involvement be looked at, but once again the guidelines of the above-mentioned ecolabels will be introduced.

Their guidelines recommend several options of involving guests into a hotel's environmental strategy. Many of them are connected to the area of generating awareness through clear communication of information, like by incentivizing the employees to raise awareness among guests, informing them about ecological problems and the hotel's environmental initiatives (Green Key 2018, 6, 11 & 60). The guests should be, among others, informed about the waste separation options (Green Key 2018, 30; Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 22 & 30). Reducing a hotel's food waste is an important area of focus in the criteria of the ecolabels, which is why it is recommended to inform and involve guests in reducing it (Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 39). In case of buffets, there should be an encouragement for guests not to fill up their plate too much (Green Key 2018, 46) and they should also be informed about the origin of any product, especially fish and meat (Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 30). Besides that, it is recommended that guests are made aware about alternative, less polluting transportation solutions, which could help reducing their ecological footprint (Green Key 2018, 12). There should also be visible information and signs in the guest rooms about towels and sheets telling their guests about the procedure to follow in order to show whether any new towels are needed or not (Green Key 2018, 12 & 21).

## **7 Methodology**

In the following, the choices made for the methodology shall be described. This study is aimed at understanding the current and potential role of a hotel's guest in its environmental management performance. It is split up into a primary data collection stage in the form of expert interviews and a second stage in the form of focus group discussions. Those methods were chosen as they highly support the research approach and purpose.

### **7.1 Research type**

Out of the three business research categories available, exploratory, descriptive and causal (Hair, Babin, Money & Samoel 2003, 57), exploratory was chosen because the research question is quite open, and the research topic is about discovering and understanding concepts (Hair et al. 2003, 57 & 58). Consequently, the approach of the study is qualitative and not quantitative, as this topic simply cannot really be examined with numbers and objective data, (Barbour 2008, 10; Creswell 2014, 4 & 110; Hair et al. 2003, 71; Rugg & Petre 2006, 34). Instead, it is about subjective data, opinions, words, and rather exploring, understanding, questioning, describing, as well as interpreting (Barbour 2008, 10; Creswell 2014, 4 & 20; Hair et al. 2003, 72; Rugg & Petre 2006, 34).

As the author is trying to collect ideas and bring them together to an overall understanding of the topic of guests' involvement in hotels, this study takes an inductive approach, which is typical for qualitative studies of complex topics, and not the deductive approach of measuring a pre-determined phenomenon (Creswell 2014, 4 & 20). It's about explaining minor mechanisms, not so much the bigger picture, the author wants to immerse into the nature of the research topic in order to explain gaps and discrepancies instead of following pre-defined variables (Barbour 2008, 11-14).

### **7.2 Research method**

The method chosen for this empirical study is connected to its research type and question, as well as the type and volume of data that is being looked for (Hair et al. 2003, 124). Since this study is a form of exploratory research, the author is looking for narrative data, and not numeric and quantitative data (Creswell 2014, 13; Hair et al. 2003, 124). While quantitative measures would typically be experiments, questionnaires or surveys (Creswell 2014, 12; Hair et al. 2003, 124; Rugg & Petre 2006, 64; Walliman 2010, 97), this study is executed by using one of the typically qualitative measures, which are personal interviews, focus groups, observations, non-intervention case studies, narrative research,

the grounded theory, or ethnographic methods (Creswell 2014, 12 & 13; Hair et al. 2003, 124; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 26; Rugg & Petre 2006, 66; Walliman 2010, 99,100 & 102).

For this study, personal expert interviews are used as a first stage, and focus group discussions as a validating second stage. Interviews were chosen as a method, because they are quite useful when observation is not possible, as they generate profound insight into personal experiences (Barbour 2008, 48; Creswell 2014, 191; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 29). Furthermore, the topic appeared quite complex, which calls for open questions and the possibility to ask for clarification given in a personal interview (Hair et al. 2003, 135).

In some cases, the sub-category of telephone interviews was chosen as an option – a method which is less costly, involves less effort for both sides, bridges large distances, but generally offers less of a comfortable environment to get as much in depth as personal interviews (Hair et al. 2003, 140; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 177). In the case of this study, that mostly has to do with availability and preference of participants.

In the focus groups, the author assembles, as it is prescribed for this method, a group of people for a discussion of the main questions surrounding this topic (Barbour 2008, 18; Hair et al. 2003; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 30). This approach was taken, as it proves to be particularly helpful, when there is a large variety of opinions (Aurini et al. 2016, 136; Hair et al. 2003, 136). Since focus groups are platforms for several individuals to discuss a topic and interact, they make participants more comfortable in sharing their views (Aurini et al. 2016, 118, 136 & 137; Barbour 2008, 133). Besides that, focus groups are expected to give this study somewhat more validity, as they gather rich, but also comparable, slightly more representative data (Aurini et al. 2016, 136; Barbour 2008, 48 & 133).

### **7.3 Sampling structure**

In this section, the nature of the sample shall be described, as well as how the interview and focus group participants were chosen. According to the exploratory research type and the resources and time available, the author selected between the two general sampling approaches, probability and non-probability sampling (Hair et al. 2003, 208 & 211; Rugg & Petre 2006, 69; Walliman 2010, 95). As it is not about generalizing or proving a point here, but about exploring valuable ideas, the non-probability sampling approach was chosen (Hair et al. 2003, 208 & 221). That is, because sampling for qualitative studies is about purposefully selecting the participants that can give the information and data the researcher is looking for in the most satisfactory way (Barbour 2008, 49; Creswell 2014, 189; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 53). Hence, the sample size for this present study is meant to

be sufficient to understand the situation and identify patterns, at the same time offering a diverse range of views, but not raising the claim of reaching the volume of generalizability (Barbour 2008, 36 & 49; Hair et al. 2003, 209; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 60; Rugg & Petre 2006, 68).

Consequently, for the personal interviews, the author was looking for a certain profile of participants, according to the purpose and objectives of this study: people with insight and experience in guest involvement, who are knowledgeable about the topic of environmental management (Hair et al. 2003, 209; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 60). In terms of the geographic scope of the study, an approach of convenience has to be applied due to the limited resources and time available.

Since, also for focus groups, random samples are not needed and often also not wanted, the author is using a non-probability convenience sampling approach (Hair et al. 2003, 136). While there could have been the option of choosing a heterogeneous group of different ages and professions, the participants chosen are students from the author's university in Helsinki, as people are said to feel more comfortable to share their real thoughts in a homogeneous, possibly even familiar group (Aurini et al. 2016, 121 & 122). Since the focus group sample needs to be knowledgeable enough to give valuable insights, the requirement for them to be qualified, is having the ability, experience and knowledge to contribute to the topic of guest experiences and expectations (Barbour 2008, 135). Through their studies they are sensitized and have insight into the hospitality industry and its current developments, but also into the guest perspective, because of their own experience. In this combination, the participants are expected to be able to give valuable contributions.

#### **7.4 Structure of expert interviews and focus group meetings**

There are several different approaches to an interview's design or structure. According to how much control the researcher intends to have over its course, and how close it should be to an optional set of pre-determined questions, it could be a structured, a semi-structured or an unstructured interview, also called conversational interview (Aurini et al. 2016, 82; Hair et al. 2003, 135 & 138; Rugg & Petre 2006, 136 & 138; Walliman 2010, 99). The author selected semi-structured interviews, which means that, while all participants have to answer the same set of main questions, the interview is open-ended, flexibly organized and allows the conversation to flow freely, which is expected to trigger profound, extensive answers with rich data (Aurini et al. 2016, 82; Barbour 2008, 17; Hair et al. 2003, 135; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 31). In other words, the interview is meant to take

place in a responsive way, as new questions can evolve, there is always room for probing or follow-up questions and each interview is expected to be customized to the conversation (Aurini et al. 2016, 93; Creswell 2014, 194; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 37, 38 & 42). Just like the interview, the focus groups are done in a semi-structured way as well for the same purpose of making participants feel comfortable to share valuable thoughts (Hair et al. 2003, 135).

The interview is made up of 25 questions in the long version and 10 questions for a shorter, phone-interview version. As for the preliminary structure – although subject to spontaneous variation as described above – the interview is subdivided into an introduction, main body and a closing section (Aurini et al. 2016, 93; Creswell 2014, 194). In the first section, rather general questions create a context, let people become familiar with each other, break the ice and to get the conversation started (Aurini et al. 2016, 95; Creswell 2014, 194; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 107). Several questions are about the hotel's environmental strategy and ideology, which gives the author valuable background information. The second section evolves around one of the main topics, beginning with environmental consciousness of people, which can be seen as a warm-up to the main body with rather easy questions, to get the respondent to talk comfortably (Aurini et al. 2016, 95; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 109). In a somewhat psychological approach, this part is about trying to reach a further understanding of the guests' thoughts. After focusing on the guests' thoughts, the next section then relates to their actions. After that, the hotel's strategy of guest engagement is investigated, asking for opinions on other existing guest engagement initiatives and finding out about best practices and what is already in place at this hotel. This is the most significant section of the main body and the main topic of research, where the rather complex and most valuable questions are asked (Aurini et al. 2016, 95; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 110). Finally, in the outlook part, it is all about toning the emotional and complexity level down and finally concluding the interview with a positive feeling of closure (Aurini et al. 2016, 95 & 96; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 111 & 11).

The structure of the focus group is fairly similar, based on a discussion guide with all the topics that need to be covered, which is less extensive than the interview guide (Aurini et al. 2016, 129). After the introduction, where the participants are informed about the research topic and the outline, each group gets organized while familiarizing with each other, which is followed by a main part of the discussion and finally the closing questions, where the discourse becomes more general again and puts an end to the discussion (Aurini et al. 2016, 130-132). The questions for this second part of the study result from the findings from the interviews and are necessary to verify the generated model.

The choice of the type of questions to be worked with, once again is coordinated with the research type and method. Therefore, this being a qualitative study, open and not closed questions are used mostly (Creswell 2014, 4; Rugg & Petre 2006, 139). Some questions appear to be closed-ended or dichotomous but are expected to naturally trigger further comments besides simply saying “yes” or “no”, as the interviewee generally knows that his or her thoughts behind an opinion are being looked for. To keep the conversation flowing in a natural way and get further insight, explanations, background information and details, the main questions are accompanied by follow-up and probing questions (Aurini et al. 2016, 98; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 116, 117 & 118). In the focus group, some questions are aimed at triggering the participants’ description of their own behaviour, while others ask for their opinion.

### **7.5 Testing of the research method**

The interview guide was tested in several layers. To begin with, a preliminary question list was sent to the thesis coach, who gave several comments on it. According to those comments, it was adjusted. The first version of questions was created in a brainstorming approach, oriented at the research focus and main research questions. Later, after reviewing the academic literature, several questions were added that came up. After that, the questions were tested in action with two fellow students, as it is helpful to test the interview first to avoid the first-time nervousness and make some adjustments (Rugg & Petre 2006, 87). Thereby it was reduced to 25 questions, re-formulating the ones that seemed difficult to understand. The updated version was finally given to a German high school teacher for correcting grammatical and expression errors and evaluating the thought process displayed by the order of questions. The focus group discussion case was also first tested with two other students and then examined in terms of wording with the thesis coach before being rephrased to a final version.

### **7.6 Ethical considerations**

As a part of showing respect for the participant at all times, the author considers it important to ensure his or her privacy and the confidentiality of the data collected (Hair et al. 2003, 107). Therefore, the participants have to sign an informed consent form in advance, with information about the study, its purpose, the level of the participant’s involvement, the guarantee of confidentiality, the participant’s rights and the researcher’s contact information in case of questions (Creswell 2014, 98). As, once again, the confidentiality is regarded as a fundamental right, it was decided to anonymize all names and brands appearing in the interviews. The author executes this research project without the background of a commissioning party, as it appeared to be the wrong approach to the

purpose of getting a variety of different views from the industry. The participation of the industry experts and students is voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point. They did not get any monetary or material compensation for taking part. In the choice of participants and the whole process of the thesis execution, to the author's knowledge no preconceived opinions were used and it was refrained from influencing the participants in any manner.

## **7.7 Execution**

Generally, the interview could be taking place between two or numerous people (Rugg & Petre 2006, 136), but since the author aims for in-depth interviews with a profound, personal conversation, the set-up dictates having one interviewer and one participant (Hair et al. 2003, 59). In the context of going for a responsive interviewing style, that conversation is further shaped by the following typical characteristics: A relaxed atmosphere to make people feel like sharing, the establishment of a trust relationship, the use of a friendly, casual, understanding tone, where both parties work out the answers together and the researcher also shares her experiences (Hair et al. 2003, 135; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 36 & 37). The purpose of that is to reach a conversational feeling that facilitates diving into personal insights, experiences, or in some cases even sensitive topics, feeding the researcher's curiosity for further details (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 36 & 37).

For the execution of the interviews, there are several options, like, among others, doing them face-to-face or by telephone (Walliman 2010, 100). Generally, the face-to-face approach seems to lead to a more in-depth, trustful conversation, producing more valuable and extensive data (Aurini et al. 2016, 83). However, this approach appears to make reaching a high level of participation difficult, as people working in the hotel industry tend to have a heavy workload and a tight schedule, in particular during the high season the study takes place in. Several potential interviewees might show the intention to participate but are not able to fit a whole hour into their schedules. That's why the option of short phone-interviews appears to be appropriate for such cases (Aurini et al. 2016, 83).

For the focus group, there are different opinions on the number of members it could have, depending on the topic, some say 10-12, some 6-8 or even less (Aurini et al. 2016, 119; Barbour 2008, 135). While large groups tend to be the choice for rather general topics, to get an extensive number of opinions, the author prefers smaller groups, in this case, of around 4-7 members, as they are said to be highly suitable for emotional topics, where people have a lot to say (Aurini et al. 2016, 119; Hair et al. 2003, 58). It was further



decided to organize four group sessions, as one is not enough to detect valid tendencies (Aurini et al. 2016, 19). The discussion is guided by the author as a moderator, who starts and guides the discussion, makes sure to cover the pre-determined list of topics, ensures the participation of every member and asks follow-up questions (Aurini et al. 2016, 123 & 124; Hair et al. 2003, 58).

With the participants' consent, the whole interview, or the focus group discussion is recorded on tape, instead of just taking notes, to keep the conversation flowing, stay fully engaged and get all the accurate details (Aurini et al. 2016, Barbour 2008, 136; 135; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 60 & 100; Rugg & Petre 2006, 90; Walliman 2010, 100). Those interview recordings are then transcribed, in the case of the interviews, translated from German to English and the collected data is used for analysis (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 100).

## **7.8 Data analysis**

The analysis approach once again goes hand in hand with the research type and method: While quantitative research is about testing hypotheses and coding in numbers, qualitative research implies putting answers into categories (Hair et al. 2003, 230 & 252). For the data analysis, the collected empirical data is coded in order to answer the research questions (Barbour 2008, 197; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 206). In the course of coding, meaning units, themes and categories that are relevant to the research question are established and given a name – only focusing on the valuable part of the data due to the large volume (Creswell 2014, 195, 196 & 198; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 190; Rugg & Petre 2006, 153).

The codes can be predetermined by the questions or the reviewed literature but could also emerge from the interviews (Barbour 2008, 198; Creswell 2014, 198 & 199; Rugg & Petre 2006, 154 & 155). The author decided to make a combination of all three options. That means that the coding frame is constantly revised throughout the process of applying it (Barbour 2008, 216).

For the focus group, there is a rather deductive form of coding the answers into several main categories that could be related to the findings from the interviews. The author intends to somewhat influence the discussion's direction and lead it towards the main areas of focus that were established. Affirmative and negative statements are collected to evaluate the validity of the primary results. The level of unanimous agreement is also measured, to be selective on valid findings.

In the next step, patterns and repeated ideas, but also anything surprising shall be detected (Barbour 2008, 217 & 225; Rugg & Petre 2006, 166). In the course of this, it is not just about identifying themes but also about putting them into a context, showing connections and relationships (Barbour 2008, 217; Creswell 2014, 200; Rugg & Petre 2006, 164). Then, in the interpretation stage, it is about finding meaning, overall tendencies and explanations for these findings (Barbour 2008, 217 & 225; Creswell 2014, 200). Nevertheless, the empirical findings cannot be disconnected from the theoretical framework (Barbour 2008, 197). That means that it is analysed, whether any arguments made in the literature could be strengthened or denied and how the theoretical aspects could be revised and expanded using the findings from this study (Barbour 2008, 234, 235 & 238).

### **7.9 Limitations based on the choice of research**

The chosen approach to the empirical part of this thesis brings a number of limitations with it. To begin with, due to the use of non-probability sampling generalizing is barely possible, and the results cannot be qualified as fully reliable (Hair et al. 2003, 221). The choice of using an interview for the main part leads to the limitations of people having a subjective view, only giving indirect information, whereas observing people in their natural environment would be more reliable (Creswell 2014, 191). The author could be a factor of bias, as she might have an influence on the responses of the participants and as it is her subjective point of view that is used for the interpretation (Creswell 2014, 191; Aurini et al. 2016, 61 & 85). Besides that, there is the aspect of reactivity, meaning that there could also be a change in behaviour of the respondents because of this unusual situation of being interviewed and they might give other answers than they would usually give, possibly trying to fulfil what appears to be socially desirable (Aurini et al. 2016, 62).

Focus groups also bear a few risks to their validity: The group dynamics might lead to individuals – especially the dominant ones - influencing each other, making people change their original view for the purpose of conformity, the discussion atmosphere might lead to more extreme statements than usual, or, once again, the moderator could be taking a misleading and influencing role (Aurini et al. 2016, 137). Having said that, however, it has to be made clear that qualitative research might not be designed to fulfil the criteria of generalizability and reliability – it is not concerned with finding statistical proof for a theory, but rather with giving a reasonable rationale (Aurini et al. 2016, 61; Creswell 2014, 201; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 56).

## 8 Findings

Out of 26 potential interview partners contacted, 5 were willing to do a standard-length personal interview, 2 were willing to do a short interview, 4 declined, 4 agreed, but the interview did not take place for different reasons, and 11 remained non-responsive. The interviews took place between the 30<sup>th</sup> January and the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2019. One out of the seven interviews was done by phone. The conversations took between 16 and 58 minutes, with two interviews done in a short version of 10 questions for availability reasons and the other five done in the original interview guide length of 25 questions. Both templates can be found in the appendix (Appendix 1 & 2). The four focus groups took place in one university class, on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2019. The length varied here as well, where the shortest was 36 minutes long and the longest one took 43 minutes. Having said that, the average length of the expert interviews was 35 minutes and the average length of the focus group discussions was 39 minutes. The case used for the focus group discussions can be found in the appendix as well (Appendix 3). As the interviews all took place in Germany, they were held in German. The author decided to translate them herself to her best knowledge and accepts the accountability for any mis-translations and slight variations in meaning based on her own choice of words and expressions. Since the focus group discussions were held in English, no translation was necessary for the analysis.

### 8.1 Environmental management of the hotels

For five out of seven interviewees, sustainability was the main priority, or at least had a very high significance when they were asked about its meaning. One hotel representative described it as follows: "...doing business against the ecology is counter-productive, and it should... be the highest priority for everyone." (R1). The meaning of sustainability was in several cases described as being connected to the conviction of the owner's family, or part of the hoteliers' private life already, before deciding to make it shape their work life as well, in the harmony between humanity and nature. Another participant described it as accepting responsibility for one's own decisions, a choice of a certain path of life, while another respondent related this responsibility to the future generations.

In six out of seven conversations, the ideology of the hotels came through to a certain extent. While one interviewee highlighted the idea of taking time, which was also applied to food being given the time to grow, another one mentioned the idea of austerity and making people aware of what life was really about by removing distracting factors like a television or WIFI. The importance of nature as a source of strength and life was connected to trying not to pollute the planet more than necessary. One respondent

explained this as the concept of giving nature a break and at the same time showing guests that they give a positive impulse by staying at this hotel. Another interviewee claimed that it was about being true to one's own conviction and ideology and doing one's stint for humanity. In the focus group discussion, one participant brought up the idea that there are two types of sustainable hotels - a passive and an interactive one. One was just fulfilling certification standards and the other one was actually actively engaging with customers.

In terms of activities mentioned, the range was, as expected, quite wide. Regarding the purchasing decisions, the interviewees mentioned choosing regional products where possible, not supporting factory farming, selecting suppliers consciously, buying organic cotton, as well as recycled or eco-labelled paper, or even in one case, toilet paper made from recycled milk boxes. While two hoteliers did not fully rely on organic products, but did pay attention to it where possible, the other five contestants used 100 percent organic food products according to their association's regulations. Another respondent described their use of home-grown fruits like pears or plums to make jam, juice, or chutneys from it. An organic way of doing laundry was explained by three of the contestants as not using any heavy chemicals, but instead degradable, or eco-labelled materials. Four interviewees mentioned using natural cosmetic products, in two cases they replaced small bottles with large, refillable ones. One hotel used an alternative air conditioning system with hoses that were heated up or cooled down. In terms of energy, the mentioned sources were wood chips heating, district heating, electronical gas, waste heat recovery with organic gas and oil heating only as a back-up. Three hoteliers were using green electricity and two had their own photovoltaic system.

With regards to waste management, recycling and separating waste came up twice, besides reducing packaging and abolishing single-serving packages and straws – just generally reducing plastic. Food waste was a significant topic for all respondents, describing initiatives like offering tailored portions for children, giving guests the leftovers to take away, using as much as possible of an animal, not offering a buffet, or even offering just one dinner menu per day and reducing the number of eggs per egg dish. In four cases, the hotels apparently charged their guests for mineralized tap water. Besides that, for water management, a grey water plant for toilet flushes came up once, as well as different water-saving towel and linen policies. According to two respondents, the ecological ideology already shaped the construction or renovation phase, leading to a use of natural materials with a focus on stone, wood, cotton and glass and the creation of eco-rooms equipped with furniture from a local carpenter. Moving on to transportation, one interviewee mentioned offering electric car charging stations and another one referred to

offering job bikes for rent to the employees. Besides that, four representatives mentioned getting a CO<sub>2</sub>-footprint every two years according to the number of overnight stays, the energy consumption, the laundry, and the meat consumption. As another form of an accountability system, the common environmental welfare report was used in two cases.

Table 2. Environmental practices mentioned in both literature and interviews

Measure	Literature Source	Mentions
Ecological material for construction	Green Key 2018, 49; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390	5
Towel and linen reuse	Levy & Park 2011, 148; Nicholls 2012, 959; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390; Weaver et al. 2013, 16 & 20	4
Water saving installations	Green Key 2018, 16	1
Recycling, waste separation	Bohdanowicz 2005, 199; Green Globe 2019; Green Key 2018, 25; Iona 2013, 279; Knowles et al. 1999, 261; Weaver et al. 2013, 20;	2
Degradable cleaning products	Green Key 2018, 22; Nordic Label 2019, 17; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390	3
Eco-certified, organic, local, vegetarian food & beverage products	Green Key 2018, 23, 44 & 47; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Stalcup et a. 2014, 390; Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 23, 24 & 34	5
Sensitizing suppliers	Green Globe 2019	2
Educational initiatives for guests	Butler 2008, 242; Iona 2013, 278; Stalcup et al. 2014, 390	1
Renewable energy sources	Knowles et al. 1999, 261; Nicholls 2012, 962	2

When being asked to name concrete goals, four respondents said that it was more about an ambition for constant improvement instead of concrete, fixed goals. Two contestants mentioned the association's goal of becoming CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral within the next two years, one other contestant was even trying to reach it within a year's time. Besides that, it was argued in one case that the goal was always 100 percent in all areas, even if that might not be realistic. In a more romantic way, it was described as the aim to make the world a better place, or be an ecological, but also modern hotel, and, eventually, meeting one's own expectations first to create as much sustainable tourism as possible.

For three hotel representatives, the strategy was to live what was felt to be right, according to one's own conviction. This consciousness was described to be omni-present, meaning that every choice was questioned according to its sustainable value and a lot of thoughts were put into details. In other words, "...being 100 percent bio-certified, we have obliged ourselves to doing business in an ecologically sustainable way in all areas of the hotel." (R3). According to three people's statements, this was not about trying to be highly profitable, but nevertheless, still about a strive for quality and a holistic approach. Three of the seven hoteliers took quite a straightforward and sometimes rigorous approach to it,

which was admitted to be somewhat challenging to the guests, while one of them refrained from offering a breakfast buffet, by replacing it in a creative approach to variety. When it comes to responsibility, one respondent referred to the department heads, and in two cases the owners and their families were mentioned. Another participant described that as follows: “The orientation of the house, its philosophy, the concept, all that was my initiative. I am the owner, and of course, my values shape this house.” (R6). Finally, it was also stated that being sustainable wasn’t the guests’ responsibility, but the hotel’s.

In the focus group discussion the opinions on implementing a sustainable strategy varied: In one group, being too rigorous was seen as risky, while in another one it was accepted that being radical worked if it was done in a positive way, although it was made clear that forcing people did not work as well as inspiring them. It was important to the participants that guests were given the option to choose to join an initiative or not, they should be able to ignore it or be part of it. Besides that, it was brought forward in three out of four focus groups that it had to be made easy for the guests to participate, for it to work. In this context, the idea of gamification was mentioned, giving guests a playfully challenging and possibly also educating experience, often involving all senses, which would be more engaging and attractive to them. Finally, two groups brought up that modern guests liked to take something home or show off their experience on social media, which is why it was recommended to offer social media-worthy occasions that would be shared, as well as positive memorabilia to take home, which could be a reward for them having participated.

When being asked about the image of his hotel, one interview respondent explained that the hardcore alternative concepts, as they used to be known, were not what they were going for. Instead, it was said to be about offering real, authentic and comfortable value, as being ecological should be fun and enjoyable as well. In fact, according to this interviewee, the concept should not be too far out of people’s comfort zone, too much of a shock, as even people who have nothing to do with being ecological were welcome. In that context, it was also said four times, that guests didn’t just come back because of sustainability, but because of the quality of service and ambiance, the whole package, and because they experienced something authentic and holistic.

On the topic of independent hotels, it was acknowledged twice, that there was room for improvement in their involvement. It was further said that for those hotels, who are closely related to the region they’re in, it was even more important to become active ecologically but also socially, by binding forces in their own region. That was formulated in a nutshell as, “It is about serving the region, but also about serving oneself from the region.” (R3).

However, in five out of seven cases, it was claimed that major chains weren't doing as much as independent hotels, which was explained by the idea that chains communicated more than they were actually doing and thereby portrayed a certain image. According to two contestants, it appeared as though it was a modern trend to be sustainable, while the independent hotels had been doing that for a long time already. One hotel representative formulated this idea as follows: "It's just that they have different financial resources... to put sustainability on their flags, while we have been carrying it in our hearts for 20 years already, without anyone noticing." (R4). In this context, the long history of several private properties was mentioned, with some existing for over a century in some form – many of them being a farm originally. A number of five out of seven respondents described the idea of living consciously for several generations or decades already. It was claimed that the hotels were the way they are today because of the generations preceding.

## **8.2 Environmental consciousness**

Six out of seven respondents confirmed the development of an increased general awareness for environmental issues. Not only was it said that people knew that their buying decisions mattered, they also started to look into the production and origins of a product. In that context, it was said that eco-labels and brands were becoming increasingly known and popular, with more and more organic products finding their way into supermarkets, which was seen as a sign for the mass market having been entered. An increased awareness of the dependency on and importance of nature was observed by the participants, not only among people, and in particular young people, but also among businesses. In the course of the focus groups, it came up that environmental consciousness was still a new development, which was described as a trend followed by people without being actually knowledgeable about it, while a large part of this society still didn't really believe in climate change, meaning that it still hadn't reached everyone, despite a high media-coverage. It was, however, believed that the consumers of the future would choose their hotel according to ecological reasons.

In the context of the general awareness of the consequences of people's buying behaviour, two respondents stated that an increase could be noted. On the other hand, one interviewee said he couldn't make a statement on this, while another one said that there wasn't enough awareness yet, and finally one mentioned that not all people wanted to become aware of it. Besides that, there was a statement of one participant, saying that there were different groups of guests, with some who were quite aware and others a little less, or even not at all. According to another respondent, some people only developed this awareness after noticing actual restrictions. The focus group members of one discussion

claimed that certain people didn't know about the consequences of their actions, while others already did.

On the topic of a discrepancy between wanting to become active and actually doing something, five out of seven contestants said that people didn't let actions follow their words, which was in some cases connected to them having to leave their comfort zone, or the time and costs involved. One interviewee described it as a typical human mechanism, while another one saw today's society as the reason for it. Examples were given of people using multiple towels and not switching to green electricity although it was not a large effort. However, other interviewees stated that more and more people had understood the need to take action, and some had a few principles they were following strictly.

When being asked about any demographical differences in the environmental-friendly behaviour of guests, two respondents stated that they did not observe any differences, neither in gender nor in different generations, as they described their guest structure as very diverse. About the age, one respondent said, "Yes, that connects everything. Many young, very young people are very open and very good and there are of course also many older ones who say, 'I always knew and said that this, but nobody understood me!'" (R4). According to two participants, all guests were united by the common ground of supporting an ecological philosophy.

Actually, in two responses, the diversity of generations was seen as an important aspect of variety, making a pleasant mix. Two respondents saw a difference in age and two others saw one in gender, both stating that women tended to be more empathetic, open and concerned about environmental consequences. It was said in that context that men could not be punished with a bad conscience, but instead reacted more to logic. Finally, it was brought up in one answer, that education and cultural differences also played a role in the development of an environmental consciousness, which was also said by two focus group participants. In terms of generational differences, it was said that people of all ages could develop this conscience. Besides that, the discussion brought up the idea that there were different behaviours of different target groups, like business customers not necessarily seeing sustainability as a decisive factor, while leisure guests would more likely get involved if interested. A further customer group that was discussed were the luxury customers, who would be ready to pay a lot of money to show off their responsible behaviour but were often not genuinely concerned with sustainability.

The values connected to the development of environmental consciousness varied. One respondent related it to love for and a connection with nature, or to people being sensitive and seeing risks everywhere, while one even related it to aesthetics, hence the image of



how the food was actually produced. For two interviewees it was the conscience of certain guests, who were looking for the good feeling according to the following ideology: “The way I treat myself, I should also treat the environment, the planet I live on.” (R4). When doing the focus groups, it was mentioned in one discussion round that people had different levels of sensitivity, sensitive people being a better target for emotional messages.

The opinions on Environmental Education varied. While one respondent said that people shouldn't have to be educated, two others claimed that the awareness still needed to be raised, among others, as they saw people as disconnected from nature through urbanization. It was also mentioned that some people didn't need to be educated, as they had an intrinsic need to become active, while others would only change if the negative consequences had become apparent. The importance of Environmental Education becoming part of children's education was brought up twice, as one interviewee said that children were more open and could be shaped in their behaviour more easily, which would then be carried into their adult behaviour.

On the topic of Environmental Education, several different statements were made in the focus group discussion. While all groups supported the idea of education being important, it was twice stated that it was about informing instead of educating and still leaving the choice up to the guests. In one case it was said that people who did not care would not care, which was then discussed further and accompanied by the statement that in many cases people were influenced by their social surrounding and were not necessarily ignorant by choice but needed moments of realization. On the idea of making it part of the primary school education, some focus group participants agreed, since they said it was hard to educate adults, while others saw it as too early. The concept of disconnection from nature by urbanization was mentioned by one group, with another one stating that people would need to see the effects of their actions in order to show willingness to change.

### **8.3 Guest behaviour**

Four contestants confirmed that there was an increased interest for their hotel, since it had been promoted as an ecological property. One interviewee responded also that their guest structure had changed, losing only a few regular guests but seeing a significant increase in interest, which was even worded as entering the mass market by another respondent. As a reason for this increase, the idea was brought up, that guests knew what they would get at such a property because of the association's clear positioning.

Apparently, for them, the association was a unity, leading to them expecting the same ecological quality in any of the hotels.

On the topic of guests identifying more with a responsible hotel, it was brought up in one response, that many identified with the association, while some even did so with individual properties. Another contestant described it as follows: "I think that the [hotel] attracts the right guests for it and those guests find the [hotel], because it fits their needs, whether that be in this point of life or according to their character." (R3). It was added that such an identification was rather common for private than for business travellers. According to the statements in the focus group discussion the identification was not about the hotel being sustainable, but about what it offers. Besides that, it was also said that it had to do with the customer values aligning with the company values.

When being asked if guests would hinder the ecological strategy, four out of seven interviewees said that they didn't, explaining that it was accepted in a very uncomplicated, smooth way. The two respondents who did experience it, made clear that it was a rare phenomenon. In some cases, guests were described as irritated in the first place but adjusting throughout their stay. Several contestants claimed that you could influence the guest behaviour to some extent, by either forcing them in a way or – on a more positive note - incentivizing it. Besides that, two participants made clear that they did not observe their particular type of guests showing such behaviour, while one said that he could imagine other commercial chains having a somewhat harder time. Actually, there was an example of people not hindering but in fact actively supporting a hotel's ecological strategy, where the guests sponsored the new photovoltaic system to perform an energy transition and were given discounts on their future stays as dividends in return.

As the conversation reached the question of price elasticity, four interviewees openly stated that their guests would be willing to pay more for an ecological hotel stay, none of the respondents said they wouldn't. Having said that, two of those interviewees referred to their personal experience of guests accepting their increased, above-average prices. As a reason for those prices being accepted, an increased value was mentioned. Another contestant explained that guests who were specifically looking for such an experience, who wanted to rely on its organic quality, would automatically accept having to pay a bit more. That was in two cases related to people understanding that the costs for ecological quality, especially in F&B, were higher. As one participant formulated it: "Looking at the wholesale market, it would be horrific, if it didn't become more expensive." (R2).

Out of the four groups in the focus group discussion, one came to the conclusion that guests would generally be willing to pay slightly more for an ecological hotel choice, since organic was a synonym of healthy. In three cases, differentiations between distinct guest groups were made, saying that cost-conscious people like students wouldn't pay more, as opposed to wealthy, health-conscious and environmentally conscious guests. In terms of the possible scope of price increase, it was stated that the elasticity was relatively low, accepting an increase of around 2 euros per restaurant dish. Finally, it was brought up in two cases, that there needed to be some sort of added value for the customers, like visually appealing dishes or high customer service to justify an elevated price.

On the question of whether guests get influenced by other guests in their environmental behaviour, three contestants said that they did. As examples, the dinner or breakfast buffet situation was mentioned twice, as well as extra activities like the bee walk. It was acknowledged twice, that there were always more dominant people who influenced the choices others made. While it was said that guests mostly influenced each other positively, it was also stated that, in a negative sense, they could infect each other in their bad mood of dissatisfaction. This was when two respondents brought up the phenomenon of having their own lobby among the guests, some guests acting like ambassadors of the hotel, by mediating, explaining, relativizing, or, if necessary, defending principles.

“For example, when somebody is complaining at the buffet, ‘That’s a poor choice!’, even though there are many options, and then he is still complaining. Well, that’s when a regular guest steps up and says, ‘What else do you want? There are already 14 salads...’” (R5).

It was, however, made clear that the interviewees thought that this might not be the case at other hotels.

On the issue of guests behaving less environmental-friendly on their holidays than at home, two interviewees answered that some might become more lenient during their holiday, possibly wanting a break from their responsibility for once and letting the hotel take care of it. This was in one instant explained by a lack of facilities that are needed to be as environmental-friendly as at home, like for example recycling systems in the rooms. On the other hand, it was mentioned once that some guests might try to be more environmental-friendly on holidays and take ideas home from their conscious holiday. It was further said in one interview that the ones with a strong conviction wouldn't change their behaviour and even wanted the same standard they lived at home.

In six out of seven interviews it was mentioned in some way that the guests who choose to go to green hotels were different, more responsible, more informed, and more

conscious. Apparently, people knew where they would stay and chose to stay there intentionally, “Because our guests, the ones who stay with us, have purposefully chosen a certain type of holiday, for ecological reasons...” (R4). In an extreme form, one interviewee explained that “...we have also already had guests, who apologized to me for not finishing the last half of the bun.” (R3), or “...we have guests, who come here and, if they saw tomatoes, some of them would go up to us and say, ‘Why are there tomatoes?’” (R5). Besides that, it was said that responsible guests wouldn’t fly long distances for an all-inclusive holiday, that they cooked at home, knowing the value of good, healthy food and lived a very ecological lifestyle in their normal lives, going to organic shops and buying local products. In this context, a respondent stated, that those guests knew what they wanted to do, didn’t need to be entertained, had moderate expectations and didn’t come because they were bored at home.

#### **8.4 Guest engagement**

When being asked about their existing guest engagement initiatives, four hotel representatives mentioned the towel policy of only changing them when placed on the floor, one representative mentioned water-saving installations in guest toilets and showers, while one described providing a nature experience on their bee walks or informing guests with a brochure. For the transportation, one respondent referred to picking up guests who wanted to come by public transport. One participant mentioned offering waste separation bins in the rooms, while another one brought up tree planting initiatives. In terms of informing guests, one interviewee described a weekly evening event to introduce guests to the initiatives of the hotel. In the case of one hotel, the guests were not only involved in its energy transition, but also in the decision of installing an air conditioning or not. Two participants said that they didn’t have any direct forms of engagement but the fact that their guests knew that they were doing something good by staying at their hotel.

On the question of whether the guest’s hotel experience might be restricted due to the ecological strategy, different answers were observed. While one respondent said that there were no restrictions at all, as everything was available in an organic version, one said that people with stereotypes would fear being restricted or another one said that guests could very well be restricted, but wouldn’t perceive it as such if it was communicated in the right way. Initiatives like offering only one menu and no TV or WIFI in the room, as it was the case in one hotel, or only having a very ecological towel and linen policy, were acknowledged as a potential restriction for guests in the first place, especially when staying only for one night. This idea of treating oneself was then backed

up by three contestants with the ideology of offering a break from responsibility to guests, them not having to think about it too much, as they already chose an ecological hotel. It was also explained that some services could not be cut out, and that in winter it would be quite difficult to fill a buffet in the region the hotel was in. In the focus group discussion, it was explained that as a guest, there were some situations, like when coming straight from the airport after a long journey, where ecological practices would simply not be a priority. Therefore, it was stated that it should never be the idea to restrict the guests but it should evolve around making suggestions. It was also brought up, that luxury properties could not apply strict towel and linen policies, as guests had certain expectations according to the room rates they paid.

According to several interviewees, there was no conflict with luxury at all, as three of them offered highly ecological luxury rooms and facilities. As described by one participant, luxury was defined differently by each and every one. For more and more people, ecological hotels and food were said to be greater luxury, than choosing from an abundance of food that is unhealthy and irresponsibly produced. Besides that, health and taking time off, was also described as luxury. In other words, "...there is more luxury in enjoying a holiday where you know you are also doing something good for the environment." (R5).

There were different forms of communicating an ecological strategy mentioned in the responses: Information about food displayed in the breakfast rooms, magazines and flyers about the ecological offers and initiatives, clear messages or the ecolabel displayed on the website, social media activity like Facebook and Instagram in one case, visiting ecological fairs, or actually communicating by doing it. In terms of style, one contestant stated that for her, the language and design should be fun and positive when describing for example the suppliers of products. It was in one case acknowledged that communicating was key, not only to prepare people for their stay, but also to ensure that the right target group was attracted. Three contestants admitted that they should communicate more, like chains are doing it. The focus group members also highlighted the importance of communication to let guests know a hotel's values, present its mentality, let guests understand why what a hotel does is good and to increase credibility through transparency about processes. The potential means of communications mentioned were short videos, website sections, quotes on the wall or sustainable exhibitions in the hotels with art made of recycled plastic. This would apparently not only change the perception of guests, but also convert them into loyal customers, after understanding the positive impulse they left. It was, however, made clear that putting up too many signs in every part of the hotel could be uncomfortable – guests should still have the choice of reading them

or not. Instead, two other participants proposed communicating in a more hidden, subtle way, yet still keeping it easily accessible.

When being introduced to the Croatian example of raising awareness, three interviewees immediately said that they liked it, whereas one said he wouldn't want to do it in such a shocking way, but rather in a positive, fun approach, like introducing a climate dish with ingredients sourced within the area of 5 km. One hotel representative explained their own initiative as follows: "When we had the last CO<sub>2</sub> measurement, we put up three containers where people could put a number of wooden wheels... according to whether they came by plane, with public transport or by car." (R2). She further said that both the hotel guests and the employees showed positive reactions to this initiative. The already mentioned one-menu-policy also included such initiatives, in the form of one fish evening and two completely vegetarian evenings to make people aware that it does not always have to be meat. The idea of charging for tap water was highly supported by two interviewees as an awareness campaign for the value of water and for the processes behind serving a glass of tap water. Another respondent referred to one of her colleague's initiative of collecting people's car keys for their stay and giving them a cheese of some other sort of reward for not using the car for their whole stay. For her, it was a suitable approach for a holiday resort, not a city hotel. When doing the focus group discussion, several ideas about raising awareness came up: Signs with information about the green ideology of the company, a note for the key cards to save electricity, art installations provoking people's curiosity, some sort of visualisation of the possible negative consequences, and small reminders in areas of the hotel where guests tend to create a lot of waste, energy and water use.

The example of Ritz Carlton and Four Seasons doing tree planting initiatives was responded to by two contestants saying that they either had the same concept on their desk or were doing it already. By the other hoteliers, the implementation was, however, often seen as a barrier, as one respondent said that they wouldn't have enough employees to take care of such activities, and another one said that every guest planting a tree would lead to logistical issues. It was made clear by one interviewee that any initiative like this would have to work according to the hotel's ideology. Another hotel representative brought up the issue of finding an adequate, high-quality campaign, as she explained that in the past those had often back-fired if not designed in the right way. While two contestants already supported such initiatives in form of off-set projects offered by the carbon footprint measuring company, one said that she could imagine doing an initiative like "reducing plastic", or another one spoke about a special agricultural engagement project:

“There is this project called ‘sowing the future’... where guests come in spring and join us on the fields to sow some sort of vegetables or crops, so when they come back in autumn, they can see what became of their seed, what the vegetable and crops look like.” (R6).

That way, guests could be part of the process and learn what happens on the fields, taking home a very unique and mind-opening memory. That idea also came up in the focus groups, where it was said that showing people how vegetables were grown would make them connect with it more. It was also described, that certain nationalities, like Finnish guests would most likely not be willing to participate in any extra activity that could disturb their privacy. Finally, it was said to also depend on the visit purpose, stating that business guests would generally not be willing to join such activities.

Finally, one ideology that came up in every single interview was the opinion that finger-wagging and lecturing wouldn’t make people change their ways. As formulated by one participant, “Nobody likes to be addressed in a moralizing undertone. Instead, it has always been better to appeal to sanity and reason...” (R4). This was also described as not talking about the negative sides but teaching people about the precious beauty and importance of nature with positive or fun messages, making them want to preserve it. Instead of rubbing it into people’s faces or shouting it from rooftops, three contestants showed their preference for a subtle approach of raising awareness, which was defined among others as demonstrating and living it instead of talking about it. Instead of scaring guests off and building high psychological barriers, one hotelier said that it was more about understatement, not being too rigorous and too openly green. By giving guests food for thought, another contestant explained, questions would come up automatically. Not only could there be a development throughout a hotel stay, according to the respondents, a subtle, positive approach could generally have a bigger impact. It was said that for the guests, being sustainable should seem attractive, fun, and not too difficult, for example by showing the benefit and the quality side of it.

On the topic of lecturing, the focus group discussion led to a number of results. In two groups, the clear statement was that lecturing never worked, saying that adult people were, or were thought to be, sufficiently educated. Instead, it was proposed to be done in a rewarding, story-telling, engaging, fun, creative and catchy way. Guests should enjoy being sustainable and feel comfortable about their choices as they understood the *why* behind it.

## 9 Discussion

As mentioned in the introductory part of this paper, the main objective of this research is to find answers to the following question: What are the considerations to be made when aiming at involving hotel guests more into the environmental management of a hotel? Based on the findings from not only the literature review, but also the empirical study, several elements of response can be given for this question. To begin with, it seems to be all about catering the right approach to environmental management to the right customer group and profile. Guests who are already highly sensitized to the topic and aware of the necessity to become active can be involved in a more straightforward manner, offering more drastic and comprehensive measures of engagement. For guests, who still need to be brought closer to the issue of environmental management, the approach and especially the tone of communication has to be chosen thoughtfully, in order to increase their readiness to get engaged in ecological initiatives. In that case, the activities offered should also not represent too high of a psychological barrier to less sensitized guest groups. In order to reach the highest possible success rate and positive environmental impact, a combined approach has to be adopted to get several different guest groups on board. On the area of characteristics of such guest groups, the present research could only provide a considerably superficial level of insight. Nevertheless, it can be seen as a valuable result from this study, to be able to see the existence of different groups of guests in terms of ecological consciousness and determine a variety of approaches for each of them. In the following, the four sub-questions to the main research question, as they were mentioned in the introductory part, shall be elaborated on one by one to the author's best knowledge gained from her research.

### 9.1 How is environmental management implemented in hotel businesses?

While the reviewed literature described a slow adaption process of the hospitality industry as a whole to the necessity of doing business in a conscious way (Butler 2008, 235), the interviewees that were part of the ecological association demonstrated the clear opposite, as all of them already had a long history of acting responsibly. More than that, while a large number of academic authors claimed the main motive to be cost reduction purposes (Bohdanowicz 2005, 191; Bohdanowicz 2006, 666; Le et al. 2006, 548; Smerecnik & Andersen 2011, 175; Stalcup et al. 2014, 392; Tzschentke, Kirk & Lynch 2008; 128), none of the respondents mentioned it as their main motive, thereby defying the claim that it was the most popular benefit (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 462). The interviewed hoteliers are doing it because of their conviction, they do not see a financial benefit in it, but do it because of the tradition in their house – which in return gives them, among others, high credibility among their guests. These different motives behind and commitments to sustainability, as



discussed by Chong and Parker (2008, 255), were highly confirmed in the pattern of contestants mentioning the difference between hotel chains and individual properties like their own. Many of them claimed that a lot of the major players were only doing green campaigns for the good reputation, which made a certain frustration apparent. There seems to be a slight sentiment against major chains, possibly a bitterness about them having a larger marketing pool, which led to the interviewees realizing their own necessity to become more communicative.

Formulating concrete goals, as recommended in the guidelines of the ecolabel Green Key (2018, 2 & 3), was not really supported by the findings of the study. Instead, it was rather about the somewhat vaguer approach of constantly improving. This could be a proof of the validity of the idea that independent hotels are less strategic in their approach (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457; Aragon-Correa et al. 2015, 506; Bohdanowicz 2005, 188; Bohdanowicz 2006, 669; Chong & Parker 2008, 274; Le et al. 2006, 550 & 560; Nicholls 2012, 954; O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 232; Tzschentke et al. 2004, 116; Weaver et al. 2013, 17). Instead, it seems as though they are more intuitive and less formal. The idea of sustainability shaping every aspect of the hotel's businesses clearly reflected what had already been discussed in the literature (O'Neill & Alonso 2009, 277). A sustainable strategy is often adopted out of an acceptance of the symbiotic relationship with nature (Sharma & Rao 2018, 3), meaning the awareness that without nature many things would not have been possible. This ideology appears to be highly connected to the aspect of the hotels operating in this way for several generations and to the fact that many of the properties were originally agricultural or are still affiliated with a farm.

As the ideology was seen as a means to reach a clear and distinct positioning, or even a niche, it could be solidified that sustainable business practices serve as a good marketing purpose or even a competitive advantage, just like it was brought up in the literature as well (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 46; Chong and Parker 2008, 281; 461; Levy & Park 2011, 148; Tzschentke et al. 2004, 120; Weaver et al. 2013, 16). One respondent saying that it is not even a niche anymore can be connected to the described general increase in not only the demand for ecological offerings but also the supply of those. That means, that hotels can no longer only be distinctive by their ecological character, they have to offer an overall appealing package. The focus group findings support this idea as well, saying that it is not just about offering different, more ecological products but also about creating added value for the guests. That's how an ecological property can not only have advantages in attracting guests, but also in the area of the recruitment or retention of skilled employees (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 461; Butler 2008, 241; Levy & Park 2011, 147

& 148; Stalcup et al. 2014, 391), a benefit which could be validated by the actual experiences that were described.

Chong and Parker (2008, 282) highlighted the importance of a controlling system. In practice that is done by either using a quality management system or by giving clear responsibilities to each departmental head. However, since many of the hotels were rather small properties, that was often done in a less formal way, with the main responsibility for conformity often being in the hand of the owners. This shows, once more the different strategic and organizational approaches to the topic depending on the size and chain affiliation.

Where Knowles (1999, 263) also claims that there is a lack of collaboration, the mentioned association was a proof of the complete opposite. In the case of the participating hotels, there is a tendency of moving away from being tough competitors, especially when it comes to environmental management. Instead, it seems to be about sharing best practices and knowledge and working towards a common goal of increasing the environmental tourism.

## **9.2 What are the conditions and motives required as a basis for guests to get involved?**

There appears to be a notably increased consciousness among the modern consumers and ecological qualities are playing a more important role nowadays, just like it was established by Pedrini and Ferri (2014, 127 & 128) and Beckmann (2007, 28). Corporate social responsibility is said to be taken into consideration in more and more people's buying decision (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004, 9; Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 128), some focus group members even described it as a current trend – but does that mean, that it is really becoming a part of the mass market? The idea that more and more people are willing to pay higher prices for ecological products (Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 35) is reflected in more organic and eco-certified products entering the supermarkets. Nevertheless, it became clear that there was still room for improvement in the area of general consciousness, as a large share of the population is said to be unaware of many issues, which in some cases appears to be based on cultural differences. A wide majority of the world's population making buying decisions according to ecological values is still part of an undetermined future.

The increased interest for ecological concepts, and in this case ecological hotel concepts (Lee et al. 2010, 902) was generally confirmed, which does prove the increased general

consciousness about environmental issues. Just like there was no clear academic stance on the question, whether the development of responsible consumer behaviour depends on the gender or age of the person (Pedrini & Ferri 2014, 31, 32 & 129; Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 47; Sikula & Costa 1994, 859; Tsalikis & Ortiz-Buonafina 1990, 509 & 517), there seemed to be disagreement on that aspect in this study as well. It might actually be true that the ecological ideology binds everybody together, and while there might be different approaches or motives to it, the goal is the same for people of all ages and genders. The focus group discussions brought up the topic of disposable income having an influence, which can be understood in the context of a current trend evolving in that area, with wealthy individuals showing their affluence through their ecological buying decisions, while students might have to make choices according to their income.

In terms of internal factors of influence, or, in this case, the environmental awareness (Barr 2003, 227; Björner et al. 2004, 422; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 253 & 254), not very many factors of the model by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, 253 & 254) were mentioned - only different levels of awareness, a certain love for nature, which can be translated into emotional investment, as well as the personality trait of being sensitive and afraid of potential consequences (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 254 & 257; Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61; Schlegelmilch et al. 1996, 36; Webster 1975, 191). In some cases, it also seemed to be connected to conscience, or, one could say, certain values, as well as education (Barr 2003, 228; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 251; Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61). This composes a relatively random mix of different internal factors, meaning that possibly the hotel representatives simply didn't have enough insight into people's psychological grounds to be able to make a statement.

Further on, it has to be said that not all interviewees agreed on the importance of Environmental Education in creating awareness (Stapp et al. 1969, 30), as some of them stated that people did not need or did not want to be educated, which was underlined by some of the insights from the focus group. This seems to prove that there are really differentiations to be made between different parts of today's society, with some more open to the topic of environmental sustainability than others. From what came up in the focus group discussions, it can furthermore be said, that the people's willingness to engage in environmental initiatives depends on the situation and the purpose of visit, meaning that business guests are less open for it.

The discrepancy between wanting to become active and actually doing it (Björner et al. 2004, 412; Carrigan & Attala 2001, 563; Kimeldorf et al. 2006, 27; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, 239; Sachdeva et al. 2015, 61) was acknowledged by the majority of the interview

respondents, meaning that these issues really seem to exist. Some guests will have the awareness level and knowledge, even feel the need to become active, but simply do not seem to translate that into actions. That might also depend on their purpose of visit, as business guests are less likely to get engaged than leisure guests.

The lack of consensus on the guests' willingness to pay more, (Kasim, 2004; Kuminoff et al., 2010; Levy & Park 2011, 148), was clearly defied in the interviews, showing a strong tendency towards people actually wanting to invest to higher product quality implied by using only organic products (Kang et al. 2010, 566) and a more conscious hotel concept. However, the findings from the focus group discussion seemed to contradict this statement again, since there it was presented as though only some people, who were health- or environmentally conscious were generally willing to pay more for ecological products, while the others were not or would expect an increased value. This discrepancy could be explained by the focus group members representing more of the average guest profile, while the main guest groups of the interviewed hotels were already quite conscious about ecological issues and willing to pay more for organic products in their private life as well.

When Schlegelmilch et al. (1996, 37) talks about people showing their ideology through their buying behaviour, this could be the case for the particular category of responsible guests, who choose their hotel purposefully. However, the revolutionary character about openly making that buying decision seems to have been lost somehow, as it appears to be more about inner peace and fulfilling one's own principles. The overall concept of the existence of a sub-group of responsible tourists could definitely be found in the results of the interviews. They are carrying certain life choices, like for example them going to the organic shops at home, into their vacations (Juvan & Dolnicar 2016, 32).

### **9.3 Which setting does the hotel have to provide to incentivize guests to get involved?**

Millar and Baloglu (2011, 304) claim that responsible guests are quite accepting of the hotel's environmental policies, which in reality seems to depend on the way the hotel approaches and communicates it, but also on the awareness and tolerance level of the guests. Some will react irritated quite easily and therefore have to be either forced to their luck or convinced in a more sub-conscious manner.

That might be why a new image of green hotels seems to have come up, moving away from the original, somewhat off-putting, extreme and alternative image of having to restrict one's consumption. Instead, being an ecological hotel is a form of contemporary green

consumerism, which is about being creative, being modern, being guest-centric. Some ideas could be added to this from the focus groups, where it was about telling a story, being creative, involving challenges and games, or pieces of art to trigger the guests' curiosity. Besides that, they should have something worth sharing with their social media friends, or something to take home. This way being sustainable could really become something enjoyable, something of added value for hotel guests.

Being guest-centric means, keeping the guests at the centre of the strategy and also designing the engagement opportunities around them. In fact, it seems as though in some cases they even have a chance of influencing the strategy and shaping the actual tactics in the ecological management of hotels (Álvarez-Gil et al. 2001, 457 & 461), like their preference on the installation of an air conditioning. By letting them participate and actively design the hotel's environmental management approach, they will connect with that particular hotel on a more profound level and certainly show a stronger identification and loyalty, as well as a higher motivation to engage in any of the practices to guarantee a responsible way of doing business.

Bringing guests closer to the importance of preserving nature and the climate has to be done in a subtle way, as it won't work by lecturing them, or making them feel bad. Instead, the right approach appears to be to make being environmental-friendly an enjoyable, nourishing experience. The idea of green hotels getting a new, more subtle, fun, and understated image, can be seen as an actual implementation of the concept that being ecological has to be made easier for the consumer (Carrigan & Attala 2001, 572). This can also be connected to Jauhari & Manaktola (2007, 365) claiming that people still make their booking decisions based on several different attributes apart from the ecological ones, which was strongly supported by the statements in the focus group discussion.

Having said that, involving the guests in environmental management tactics does not have to go against luxury, but can be in perfect harmony with it. Besides that, luxury is in some cultures currently being redefined as actually having high-quality food that was given time to grow, for example, instead of the abundance of an all-inclusive buffet. When one respondent described the new ecologically built hotel rooms and their naturalistic luxurious design, this was strongly reflecting the idea of new luxury meaning pleasing natural aesthetics (Lee et al. 2010, 910). According to some focus group participants, it was even a bit of a trend to show one's wealth by choosing costly ecological options, as being sustainable became quite respectable, or even fashionable.

Nevertheless, it has become clear that in order to make a change, drastic measures have to be taken, which might mean being unorthodox. However, it is not about window dressing, it is about being authentic, which is something the guests feel. Being drastic will only work with people in the right mindset; however, none of the respondents seemed afraid of the guests' reaction, a concept described by Dicum (2007). One even said that they calculated with some guests being irritated. As opposed to that, the focus group members did say that there was the danger of overwhelming guests with ecological messages, which once again can be read in the context of ecological hotels needing a new image and taking a more subtle approach. It appears to be important, that guests can choose to participate or not, since it should still be up to them.

For people who are willing to become ecologically active, the required facilities need to be made available, which is one of the significant external determinants (Barr 2003, 229; Miller et al. 2015, 29). That could mean offering guests recycling bins in the room or facilitating the use of public transportation options.

Besides that, communication was a major topic in this study, especially when it comes to a lack of communicating the association's ecological strategy (Susskind & Verma 2011, 229). It was acknowledged that the current main communication form of leaflets, the website and brochures were not enough to make people know about the association. Instead, there should be a way to communicate in several touchpoints, especially at crucial moments, where guests can decide to either follow the green ideology or not. This might be a sign of independent hotels not having the necessary experience and knowledge in promoting what they have been doing in such a self-evident and unquestioned way. It is not so much about the negative sides of making a different choice, but about showing the guests, which positive impulse they are giving by their choice of hotel, thereby triggering the good feeling of an emotional reward, which might increase their satisfaction and make them more loyal.

#### **9.4 How will the guest engagement be implemented in reality?**

Several approaches to guests engagement that were included in the ecolabel guidelines seemed to be applied in the hotels that participated in this study: The clear communication of the ecological practices (Green Key 2018, 6, 11 & 60), on websites and in brochures, as well as some form of informing the guests about the problem and encouraging them to help reduce it (Swan, Nordic Label 2019, 39), like in the form of the one-menu policy, and offering alternative transportation solutions (Green Key 2018, 12), as well as informing guests about the towel and linen policy (Green Key 2018, 12 & 21). The variety of new

ideas gained from the focus group shows the future potential for an even more creative and interactive way of environmental management that could actually create added value.

Offsetting during the hotel stay, such as tree-planting or educational tours as extra-role behaviour (Bohdanowicz 2006, 679; Weaver et al. 2013, 23) are the tested and well-established way of creating extra-role activities for the hotel guests. If those initiatives are designed in a thoughtful and successful way, that could even lead to a higher guest satisfaction level, since it would be pleasing to the individual's conscience (Weaver et al. 2013, 25). Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that some guests are not willing to join such initiatives, which needs to be respected carefully.

The potential risk of restricting the guest's holiday experience and feeling of luxury (Brown 1996, 18; Dicum 2007), was seen in a different way by the industry experts, as mostly no conflict was seen at all. Besides that, the approach to it seemed, once again, important. The focus group members saw this in a somewhat more critical way, especially when it came to certain target groups, destinations and situations. Bridging those two views, it should possibly be more about offering to be environmentally friendly, inspiring but not forcing anybody.

A topic that was not mentioned in the reviewed literature was the new definition of luxury, as stated in the chapter above, meaning that an ecological, conscious stay with high quality food would replace the traditional luxury of abundance. Another approach would even be to completely relieve guests from having to take care of their environmental responsibility and rewarding their every-day responsible behaviour by giving them the luxury of laying back and taking a break. That, once again, appears to depend on the approach of each hotel to the implementation of its environmental strategy. As opposed to somewhat more rigorous guidelines of hotel chain organizations, the independent hotels affiliated with the ecologically motivated association still have their own leeway to be more or less active.

Finally, guests can become multipliers of a hotel's responsible message, which is the most effective form of customer citizenship and the most reliable form of branding, as it was also described in the reviewed literature (Bove et al. 2009, 698; Groth 2005, 20). This form of voluntary guest engagement became highly perceivable in the examples of guests acting as a hotel's ambassadors and stepping up to protect its reputation.

## 10 Implications

Based on the findings from this study and the knowledge gained from the reviewed literature, it can be said that becoming an ecologically sustainable hotel business is highly recommended, not only because it is the only possible way to avoid a future of drastic restrictions to the quality of life on this planet, but also because there is an increasing market for it. Instead of doing it for image purposes, the strategy adopted should be based on personal values and ecological convictions, as guests will notice and sanction any approach of window-dressing. Following this new strategy, it is suggested to formulate a concrete management plan. Besides that, it also seems recommended to adopt change in a gradual manner, not starting by aiming for perfection, but going step by step, which would remove the possible barrier of high costs or time effort. There appears to be such a variety of practices to follow with some of them being considerably low in cost and not too disruptive. Joining a collaborative association like the one described by many of the participants, could be quite helpful to join forces and compensate for independent hotel's disadvantages in terms of financial resources and know-how.

To begin with, the customer structure of a hotel has to be analysed, to identify the guest groups that are more ready to get engaged and catch their interest. In this respect, communication is, once again, key: The hotel's ecological strategy should be communicated in a non-pretentious but confident way, if applicable, mentioning the tradition for environmental-friendly hospitality in this particular property and promoting the value of nature – not in a negative tone, but in a tone that gives food for thoughts, as people will start reflecting.

The guest involvement itself has to be done in a more creative, playful and subtle way instead of forcing guests to join. This way, the behavioural gap and potential barriers of prejudices can be overcome. The initiatives are recommended to be designed to be open for all ages, backgrounds and levels of education. For the guests to be able to get involved, the necessary facilities need to be offered, as well as the clear but voluntary possibility to participate in projects. In terms of price flexibility, guests will only be willing to pay more for a hotel room if its value has increased in several ways, not just for it being ecological. That, however, works hand in hand with a new definition of luxury, health or else that is increasingly connected to organic food, like taking a break, and getting closer to nature again. Therefore, the hotels have to sell a new, redefined form of luxury with an added value that is based on, but not limited to its ecological character.



## 10.1 Validity and reliability of research

In the following, it is to be determined whether an adequate quality of the findings and conclusions is given (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2014). In fact, the quality of a study is often evaluated by means of assessing several criteria, among others trustworthiness and authenticity (Barbour 2008, 259), credibility and accuracy (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 64) or representativeness (Miles et al. 2014, 295). Miles et al. further categorizes study findings according to whether they are reasonable, valid, reliable, true, dependable, credible, confirmable, trustworthy, credible, significant, compelling, useful (Miles et al. 2014, 310). For this study the two variables of reliability and validity have been chosen since they are essential for a study to be grounded sufficiently (Miles et al. 2014, 310, 295; Wang & Park 2016, 31). Reaching the optimal level of reliability and validity can be challenging, for instance because there are time, money and accessibility restrictions, but it should be strived for regardless (Miles et al. 2014, 295 & 311).

Reliability is about consistency of information, being able to trust data (Wang & Park 2016, 31). This consistency and quality has to be reached in the research process already, as well as in the data sources, the setting, a solid, scientific and systematic research design or the circumstances – reaching a process that can be replicated bringing the same data results (Miles et al. 2014, 312; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 64; Wang & Park 2016, 31).

Reliability already begins at the choice of sample that represents a mix of opinions and backgrounds, selecting people who are not biased, who are knowledgeable about the topic and can give reliable information (Miles et al. 2014, 295; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 64 & 65). The sample should also be as large as possible (Miles et al. 2014, 296). The information obtained should be reviewed and proven as facts (Barbour 2008, 260; Miles et al. 2014, 296; Wang & Park 2016, 31). All these aspects are necessary for a researcher to make his or her claim based on a study legitimate, substantiate the findings (Barbour 2008, 260).

The criterion of validity appears to be somewhat more common for quantitative studies but is nevertheless important for the determination of the value of this study (Miles et al. 2014, 313). Valid information should answer the main research question and should be measured according to the envisioned concept (Wang & Park 2016, 31). The results are expected to make sense, to be clear, coherent, convincing, plausible and correct, creating a logical connection to the theory and permitting accurate conclusions and predictions (Miles et al. 2014, 312 & 313). Not only do the sources of information have to be credible, the information also has to be relevant for the topic of research (Miles et al. 2014, 295).

Besides that, it is expected to avoid any type of bias – the participants of a study should give truthful, consistent answers and they should be independent of any hidden agenda, or the influence of interest groups (Miles et al. 2014, 295 & 296; Rubin & Rubin 2012, 65 & 67; Wang & Park 2016, 31). To ensure validity, some sort of evidence should be provided to make the research results compelling (Barbour 2008, 262; Wang & Park 2016, 31).

Applying these two criteria to the present study makes a few limitations apparent, which can mostly be explained by the lack of resources and the restricted time frame the author had. For the interview, the sample size ended up being rather small, with a total number of 7 participants, which goes against the aim for a reliable sample size. Besides that, it can be said that there was not the highest level possible in terms of consistency in the research process. Not only did the structure of the interviews vary – which was actually part of the responsive interview style, the length of interviews and therefore the in-depth quality varied highly as well, depending on the time available to the contestants and their ability and willingness to share their thoughts. As many of the sample hotels are actually eco-certified, there might have been a somewhat biased view on the ecological topic discussed, thereby possibly reducing the validity. Finally, all interviews only describe the hotel side and sometimes tend to fail in presenting a reliable insight into the guest behaviour. Nevertheless, it can be said, that this study led to several valuable insights.

The most significant limitation of the focus group is its convenience sampling strategy. However, it can be said, that the guest perspective was represented quite well by the chosen participants and they appeared to even have a substantial level of previous knowledge and experience on the area of hotel strategies, sustainability and guest behaviour. Besides that, once again, it can be said that the sample might have been too small to be reliable and representative. Also, the argument could be put forward that young people like the participants tend to not have an extensive experience in hotel stays yet, meaning that they might not reach the required knowledge for validity. Finally, it might be seen as a limitation, that the two different parts of the study represent different geographical regions – Finland and Germany.

## **10.2 Personal learning and development outcomes**

When initiating the process of writing this thesis, the author was not experienced in its requirements in terms of approach, structure and form yet, which she had to learn independently in the course of doing it. The process of building up one's own understanding of the core issues and the correlations, made writing this thesis an

increasingly intriguing process, triggering a high level of genuine interest and making the research project the author's main interest and occupation for several months. It had to be learned that contacting all potential participants of the study was very work- and time-consuming and could only be done successfully by being persistent. In terms of the process of writing a bachelor thesis itself, the main takeaway was to learn how to focus on the most important information and cutting out what was unnecessary.

In terms of content, there was a large variety of new insights, especially when it comes to the approach of small independent properties to sustainability, there were many new ideas and points of view that the author hadn't considered and, more importantly, that seemed to be clearly underrepresented in the existing literature on this field. Every interview had different dynamics, every participant had a different view and interpretation, there could have probably been even more views if this study had been done in a larger scale. The interview questions were often understood in a very different way, as some of them might have been a bit too ambiguous, which is why the answers varied strongly. The author found out about the vast variety of ways to commit to an ecological strategy - it is not only about the towel and linen policy anymore. This was supported especially through the insights from the focus groups with the student's very creative ideas, which could unfortunately not be included into the research findings. As said before, the view and knowledge gained on environmental management and the importance of a sustainable way of doing business appeared to be completely different in the academic area than in real life. That is why, once again, this study proves the discrepancy between theory and actual practice. For the author, the biggest takeaway is that sustainability is not this old-fashioned, ultra-alternative, somewhat idealistic and naïve movement, but is something that is done by very reasonable business men in a modern, creative, but genuine way.

### **10.3 Further research**

There are several topics that appear to be worth exploring further in any future research, some of them based on unexpectedly arising topics and others on limitations of this study in terms of scope and choice of viewpoints. While this study only analyses the ecological side of sustainability, the social side would definitely be an option for a study on hotel guest engagement. Besides that, a different choice of geographical area could be used for the sampling of participants, since there are very likely significant regional differences in the approach to sustainable business management. Furthermore, a larger sample could give more insights and even more different perspectives, or even reliability. In this study, most experts were from the administrative and back-of-house area of hotels, while it could

have been actually interesting to involve operational representatives, like a housekeeping manager for example, since they have a daily interaction with guests and their behaviour. The research was also limited to a certain type of hotels, private rural hotels, while it would equally be important to analyse the situation at urban hotels, chain hotels, or hostels, which would certainly lead to different results. Finally, the guest perspective could be involved more profoundly, in a different format, like an experiment in a real setting of a hotel property combined with a survey. There were also several potential research topics that came up in this research but were unfortunately not directly connected to the main research question: independent vs. chain hotels, organic vs. regional products, creative solutions to guest engagement or perceived entry barriers for businesses to becoming sustainable.

#### **10.4 Conclusion**

With the current developments in this planet's climate and future prospects, taking effective action has never been as urgent as today. Not only do consumers have to be sensitized, businesses have to be taught the right way to reduce their ecological footprint – a necessity that applies to hospitality just as much as to any other industry. The hospitality being a people-oriented industry, it is all about people joining forces and finding a way out together. That means that, as it was described by many participants of this present study, businesses have to share knowledge with each other, but besides that, it is also about the role of the main customer of this industry – the hotel guest. Hotel guests cannot only contribute by getting involved in the variety of initiatives a business can launch to reduce its footprint but can also bring their own input in form of suggestions and feedback. A highly thrilling element in this context is guests becoming ambassador of ecological hotel businesses and therefore serving at spreading the knowledge and ideology – the importance of nature. For the ones who have not yet reached this level of consciousness, it appears to not be what you say, but how you say it. The message has to be brought across in a creative, authentic and positive way in order to guarantee its success.

After having conducted a highly insightful study on this field, the author would like to leave the closing words to one of the interview participants, in a quote that shall be recited here: "...It has always been very clear that humans cannot be without nature, cannot be humans in the best sense. And nothing is possible without nature. The consequence of this is that nothing is possible without sustainability." (R3)

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Interview questions

### Interview Questions for the Bachelor Thesis “Guest Involvement in the Environmental Strategy of Hotels”

#### General Questions

1. Which meaning does an ecological way of doing business have to you?
2. How do you see the environmental footprint of hospitality?
3. Many major hotel companies and chains are already engaging in this area, but wouldn't it be important to get the small independent properties on board as well, as they are making up the majority of the industry?
4. Which strategy do you have for ecological hospitality and who is responsible for its creation, implementation and monitoring?
5. Which measures have you already implemented? Could you maybe name the five most significant ones that come to your mind?
6. Which goals have you set yourself for your ecological strategy?
7. In a prior study I conducted it has become clear that the guests' behaviour can be crucial for the success or failure of a hotel's sustainability strategy. What are your experiences on this?
8. Do you involve your guests into your ecological measures? If so, how do you do it?
9. To which extent is it acceptable to restrict guests in their desire to relax and enjoy their holiday undisturbed?

#### General Environmental Consciousness

10. Do you think that guests have already been informed sufficiently about the negative environmental effects of their consumption?
11. The concept of “Environmental Education” describes diverse forms of increasing the general public's awareness and knowledge about environmental issues and the possibilities to eliminate them. This form of education is seen as a pre-condition for the development of an environmental consciousness. How do you see that? Do people have to be informed first before they change their behaviour?
12. To which extent have you been watching an increase in general environmental consciousness throughout the last years?
13. Is there a gap between the guests' environmental concerns and actual actions supporting the environment on their holiday?
14. Are there any demographic differences? Like for example age or gender?
15. And if you do want to appeal to their existing environmental-consciousness, which of their values do you have to involve in order to succeed? Does the guests' consciousness play a role?

#### Guest Behaviour

16. To which extent do you believe that your name or certification indicating your ecological type of hotel creates interest among people?
17. Do you believe that your guests would rather identify and stick with your hotel due to your conscious way of doing hospitality business?
18. Do you think that people's behaviour can be influenced by the other guests' behaviour?

19. According to your own experience, do people tend to act less environmentally-conscious during their holidays than at home?
20. Do you believe that hotel guests would be ready to pay more for a stay in an ecological hotel?

### **Hotel's strategy of guest engagement**

21. How do you communicate your environmental strategies?
22. The hotel chains Four Seasons and Ritz Carlton offer their guests the possibility to participate in environmental initiatives like planting trees. Could you imagine using such a type of involvement?
23. The Zaton Holiday Resort in Croatia went even further. In order to make their guests aware of the real cost of clean water, they spontaneously introduced a price of 2 euros per glass of tap water, leading to consequently irritated reactions. What do you think about such an approach?

### **Outlook**

24. For you, which are the advantages of thinking responsibly as a sustainable company of today?
25. What would you tell a Hotel that would like to get involved into this area?

## **Appendix 2 – Interview short form**

### Interview Short Form

1. Which meaning does an ecological way of doing business have to you?
2. Which strategy do you have for ecological hospitality and which measures have you already implemented?
3. In a prior study I conducted it has become clear that the guests' behaviour can be crucial for the success or failure of a hotel's sustainability strategy. What are your experiences on this?
4. To which extent have you been watching an increase in general environmental consciousness throughout the last years?
5. Is there a gap between the guests' environmental concerns and actual actions supporting the environment on their holiday?
6. According to your own experience, do people tend to act less environmentally-conscious during their holidays than at home?
7. Do you involve your guests into your ecological measures? If so, how do you do it?
8. To which extent is it acceptable to restrict guests in their desire to relax and enjoy their holiday undisturbed?
9. Do you believe that your guests would rather identify and stick with your hotel due to your conscious way of doing hospitality business?
10. The hotel chains Four Seasons and Ritz Carlton offer their guests to participate in environmental protection activities like planting trees. Could you imagine such a form of guest engagement?

## **Appendix 3 – Focus group task**

### The Green Case

In times of ever more depressing news and developments concerning our climate and the future existence of this planet, sustainability is a topic that can no longer be excluded from any business decision. The hospitality industry being one of the sectors that leave quite a significant ecological footprint on its natural surroundings, any existing or planned hotel projects will have to be done with the consideration of a responsibility towards the environment. The [hotel] does not ignore this responsibility either and therefore wants to make sustainability an integral part of its strategy. However, being a people-focused industry, the guest's view on that cannot be ignored.

Put yourself in the shoes of your future hotel guests – I mean, you have certainly been a hotel guest yourself already. Which ecological attributes would they be looking for when staying at your property? How much can you involve them into striving for a conscious way of doing business?

1. Buying only 100 percent organic products for all food outlets would be an effective approach but would increase the costs significantly, resulting in higher prices to keep up the profitability. Do you think guests would be willing to pay more for their stay or their food and drinks? And if so, how much more?
2. The hotel could also play a strong role in educating guests about the existing environmental issues and the best way to be environmental-friendly. But does lecturing adult people on what to do really work?
3. Do you think guests are already aware of the consequences of their actions or buying decisions and the need to make a behavioural change towards reaching a more sustainable future?
4. Do you think guests would be more likely to become loyal to an ecologically active hotel than a less responsible one? What might be other factors of identification?
5. Other hotel chains offer people the opportunity to become environmentally active together with them, by planting trees, for example. How do you think guests would like such extra-role activities?
6. To which extent do ecological practices like a towel-and-linen policy maybe have a negative effect on the aspect of relaxation and enjoyment of a hotel stay by restricting the guests too much?

