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A Vision of Change: Sustainability in the Hotel Industry

The Hospitality industry is one of the largest contributors to environmental degradation. However, in recent years, the industry has developed an increasing awareness of the need to adopt sustainable practices. "Sustainability hospitality refers to the ability of the industry to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves the use of eco-friendly practices, reduction of waste and carbon footprint, preservation of natural resources, and support for local communities" (Jones and Sotiriadis, 2017). The concept of Sustainability is based on three main pillars: environmental, social, and economic. The environmental pillar refers to the need to protect natural resources and ecosystems, reduce waste and pollution, and promote sustainable practices. The social pillar involves ensuring that hotels have a positive impact on local communities, supporting local businesses, and engaging in philanthropic efforts. Finally, the economic pillar focuses on the need to maintain financial viability and profitability over time, ensuring that economic growth is sustainable and benefits all stakeholders (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). These pillars will be considered throughout this essay and the steps that the hotel industry has taken towards sustainability, and why it has become a key focus will both be examined. This essay will discuss the relationship between circular economy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the hotel industry, with a focus on CSR strategies and policies that promote sustainability. This essay also will critically evaluate the business concerns that have motivated hoteliers to embrace sustainability and make it an integral part of their corporate agenda, supported by key examples.

The hotel industry is an ever-adapting one, not only to customer needs, but also to world crises, like that of the climate. One significant way that hotels are adapting to sustainability is through their energy consumption. Many hotels are now implementing energy-efficient systems, such as LED lighting and occupancy sensors to reduce energy consumption when rooms are unoccupied (Henderson, 2016). The Hilton hotel group, for example, has pledged to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions

by 61% by 2030 (Hilton, 2021). This not only reduces the environmental impact but also lowers energy costs, resulting in financial savings for the hotel. As a result of being big contributors to the negative impact on the environment, particularly through their use of energy and water waste, and contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, many hotels have implemented sustainability initiatives to reduce their environmental impact, like reducing their water consumption by implementing low-flow showerheads, faucets, and toilets in their hotels. For example, the Marriot hotel has committed to reducing its water usage by 15% by 2025 (Marriot, 2021). The Marriott hotel also has a towel and linen reuse program that encourages guests to reuse their towels than having them washed every day (Marriott, 2021). Other hotels have implemented sustainable design practices, such as using renewable energy sources, green roofs, and rainwater harvesting systems (Font & Buckley, 2001). This has resulted in a significant reduction in water and energy consumption. Hotels are also working toward sustainability by reducing their use of consumable goods. Many hotels are switching to biodegradable and compostable products, such as biodegradable straws and compostable food containers (Lacalle, 2021) The Intercontinental Hotels Group has implemented a global ban on the use of plastic straws in all their hotels, reducing plastic waste (InterContinental Hotels Group, 2021). By reducing the use of consumable goods, hotels are reducing their impact on the environment and promoting sustainable practices.

In addition to environmental initiatives, many hotels are also focusing on social sustainability. This can include promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace, supporting local businesses and communities, and engaging in philanthropic efforts. For example, the Goring Hotel in London has partnered with a local charity to providing training and employment opportunities for young people (The Goring, 2021).

Finally, economic sustainability is also a key consideration for hotels seeking to ensure their long-term viability and profitability. This can involve implementing sustainable business practices, such as reducing waste and energy usage, as well as investing in sustainable technologies and practices. For example, the Ritz-Carlton hotel chain has implemented a comprehensive sustainability program that includes reducing energy usage, water consumption, and waste production, as well as investing in renewable energy and sustainable design practices (Ritz-Carlton, 2021).

There are three key pressures that drive sustainability within the hospitality industry. The first one is the increasing government pressures as it can incentivise businesses to adopt more sustainable practices in order to comply with regulations and avoid penalties. Dallari (2014) argues that this can lead to a “virtuous cycle” of sustainability, in which businesses that adopt sustainable practices are rewarded with increased business and positive publicity, which in turn encourages other businesses to follow suit. Governments around the world have introduced regulations and policies aimed at reducing the negative environmental impacts of businesses, including hotels. For example, in 2018 the European Union introduced new rules requiring hotels to reduce their energy consumption by at least 55% by 2030 (Ortiz-Cancavate, et al., 2020). Similarly, in the United States, the environmental protection Agency has introduced a range of programmes aimed at reducing the environmental impact of hotels, including the energy program, which provides hotels with guidance on reducing their energy and water consumption (EPA, 2023). Tourism also is an example of economic policy pursued by governments because, it brings in foreign exchange, generates employment, and creates economic activity (UNWTO, 2021).

Another driver of sustainability within the hospitality industry has been competitors’ action. Many hoteliers have recognized that sustainability is an important factor in the decision-making process for customers, particularly younger generations who are more environmentally conscious. As a result, hotels that prioritize sustainability are more likely to attract and retain customers, giving them a competitive advantage over those that do not (Han, et al., 2009). For example, Marriot has also launched a program called “serve 360: doing good in every direction” which focuses on four key areas: sustainable operation, responsible sourcing, community engagement, and employee opportunities. The program includes specific goals such as reducing greenhouse gas emission, sourcing sustainable seafood, and providing skills training and career opportunities for employees (Hasek, 2009).

The relationship between sustainability and the hotel industry is crucial, as increasing numbers of consumers are looking for eco-friendly options when it comes to travel and accommodation. According to a study by Booking.com (2019), 87% of global travellers want to travel sustainably. The implementation of sustainable practices can not only

have a positive impact on the environment but can also attract customers, save costs and contribute to the well-being of local communities.

Another important aspect of sustainability is sustainable tourism which is a form of tourism that takes a long-term approach. It considers the needs of the future, not only the present, and forms close ties with a number of other tourism forms such as responsible tourism, alternative tourism, and ecotourism (UNWTO, 2019). Tourism can have both positive and negative effects on sustainability in the hotel industry. On the one hand, tourism can bring economic benefits to local communities and promote environmental conservation through sustainable tourism practices. On the other hand, tourism can also lead to environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and social inequality. Doxey's Irridex, (Doxey, 1975) is a seminal work in the field of tourism studies. The Irridex was developed as a tool for evaluating the impacts of tourism, and it explores the various stages of the tourism life cycle. Doxey's Irridex can be linked to sustainability in the hotel industry by highlighting the importance of managing the impacts of tourism in a way that promotes long-term sustainability and benefits both tourists and local communities. By understanding the predictable stages of the tourism life cycle, hotels can take proactive steps to minimize negative impacts and promote sustainable tourism development.

Another concept that minimises negative impacts on the environment is circular economy which is defined by Geissdoerfer as a "regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission and energy leakage are minimized by slowing. Closing and narrowing material and energy loops can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing and recycling" (2017). This is achieved by designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural system. In the hotel industry, Circular economy can be implemented in various ways, such as reducing food waste, using renewable energy, and implementing water-saving measures (Wu & Lee, 2018). By adopting circular economy practices, hotels can reduce their environmental impact, save costs, and enhance their reputation as sustainable businesses. In a survey carried out by Sorin and Sivarajah to analyse the adoption of circular economy by 246

hotels, it was found that most hotels were aware of the concept of circular economy, only a relatively small percentage of the hotels actually applied circular economy practices in their operations (2021). The adoption of circular economy practices was found to be influenced by factors such as the hotel's size, age, ownership structure, and level of environmental certifications.

CSR is an essential aspect of sustainable development, and it involves businesses taking responsibility for their impact on society and the environment (Bocken et al., 2014). In the hotel industry, CSR strategies and policies are crucial for promoting sustainability. One example of CSR strategy is the implementation of green policies, such as reducing energy and water consumption, waste reduction and recycling, and supporting local communities (UNWTO, 2019). These policies not only reduce the hotel's environmental impact but also create a positive image for the hotel, which can attract environmentally conscious customers. Another example of CSR strategy is the adoption of sustainable procurement practices (Gössling et al., 2013). This involves sourcing products and services from suppliers who adhere to sustainable practices and standards. By doing so, hotels can reduce their carbon footprint and support sustainable supply chains. For instance, some hotels have replaced single-use plastic amenities with sustainable and biodegradable alternatives.

Furthermore, social sustainability is also an important aspect of CSR in the hotel industry. Hotels can promote social sustainability by supporting local communities and providing decent working conditions for their employees (UNWTO, 2019). This includes fair wages, training and development opportunities, and equal opportunities for all employees, by promoting social sustainability, hotels can contribute to the development of the local economy and enhance their reputation as a socially responsible business. A key example of this is Accor's "Planet 21" - a sustainability program that was launched in 2011, which contributes to CSR through some of their key initiatives, which include energy and water conservations, sustainable and food beverage sourcing, waste reduction, and recycling, among others (Accor, n.d.).

To conclude, the hospitality industry is adapting to become sustainable through energy-efficient systems, water conservation, and reducing the use of consumable

goods. These changes not only benefit the environment but also result in financial savings for hotels. Sustainability has become a key focus for the hotel industry because it is important to consumers, as they become more environmentally conscious. By implementing sustainable practices, hotels are not only reducing their environmental impact but also attracting consumers who value sustainability and getting a competitive advantage. Additionally, sustainability has become an integral part of the corporate agenda for many hoteliers, driven by increasing government pressure and competitors' actions. By embracing sustainability, hotels can comply with regulations, enhance their reputation, and improve their bottom line. Examples such as Marriot International demonstrate that sustainability can also be a key driver of competitive advantage in the hospitality industry. As sustainability continues to be a key issue for customers, it is likely that more hoteliers will prioritize sustainability within their corporate agenda in the future. Circular economy and CSR are also essential for promoting sustainability in the hotel industry. CSR strategies and policies that promote sustainability can enhance hotels' reputations, reduce their environmental impact, and contribute to the development of local communities. To achieve sustainability, hotels must adopt a holistic approach that considers the fundamental pillars of sustainability, namely economic, environmental, and social sustainability. By doing so, hotels can contribute to a more sustainable future and create value for stakeholders.

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