How to solve the contradiction between luxury and sustainability:

A comparative case study between four 5-star hotels in Europe, South America, North America, and Africa.

Written by,
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Dissertation written under the supervision of Professor Laure Leglise.

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Abstract

Title: How to solve the contradiction between luxury and sustainability: A comparative case study between four 5-star hotels in Europe, South America, North America, and Africa.

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Researchers show that many companies in the tourism industry are trying to adopt innovative ways to enhance their sustainability performance as sustainability awareness keeps increasing. Although studies are still limited, luxury hotels have also gone after this movement. This paper aims to analyse the different sustainability practices focusing on the environmental and social pillars adopted by four 5-star luxury hotels in Puglia, Zanzibar, Chiloé, and Antigua from the managers' point of view. This study follows a comparative qualitative case study design ensuring a triangulation and a cross-checking of the available data on the subject through semi-structured interviews and internal and external documents. The results suggest that sustainability practices are well integrated into the four hotels, but different challenges are faced. Overall, the central focus of the studied luxury hotels is mainly on developing environmental and social sustainable practices without neglecting the experience customers expect. This research identifies practical issues in implementing environmentally sustainable practices in their respective locations. Governmental regulations, accessibility to local suppliers of high-quality & cost-effective products, innovating & improving their practices, and maintaining high customer satisfaction sometimes lead the hotel to undertake less environmentally friendly strategies. Therefore, this research first extends the existing literature between sustainability and the hotel industry by exploring the impact on luxury hotels. Second, it envisions a more positive approach concerning the compatibility between luxury and sustainability within hospitality which numerous scholars have argued inconsistent.

Abstrato

Título: Como resolver a contradição entre o luxo e a sustentabilidade: Um estudo de caso comparativo entre quatro hotéis de 5 estrelas na Europa, América do Sul, América do Norte, e África.

Autor: Charlotte Spits

Investigadores mostram que muitas empresas da indústria do turismo estão a tentar adotar formas inovadoras para melhorar o seu desempenho em termos de sustentabilidade, uma vez que a consciência sustentável continua a aumentar. Embora os estudos ainda sejam limitados, os hotéis de luxo também já seguiram este movimento. Esta investigação pretende analisar as diferentes práticas de desenvolvimento sustentável centrando-se nos pilares ambientais e sociais adaptados por quatro hotéis de luxo de 5 estrelas em Itália, Zanzibar, Chile, e África do ponto de vista dos gestores. Os resultados sugerem que as práticas de desenvolvimento sustentável estão bem integradas nos quatro hotéis, mas que diferentes desafios são enfrentados. Globalmente, o foco central dos hotéis de luxo estudados é o desenvolvimento de práticas sustentáveis ambientais e sociais, sem negligenciar a experiência esperada pelos clientes. Esta investigação identifica algumas questões práticas na implementação de práticas ambientalmente sustentáveis na sua respetiva localização. Devido aos regulamentos governamentais, o acesso aos fornecedores locais de produtos de alta qualidade e rentáveis, a inovação e melhoria das suas práticas, e a manutenção de uma elevada satisfação do cliente, levam por vezes o hotel a estratégias menos respeitadoras do ambiente. Por conseguinte, esta investigação explora, em primeiro lugar, a literatura existente entre o desenvolvimento sustentável e a indústria hoteleira, examinando o seu impacto nos hotéis de luxo. Em segundo lugar, prevê uma abordagem mais positiva relativamente à compatibilidade entre luxo e sustentabilidade no âmbito da hospitalidade que numerosos estudiosos têm argumentado ser inconsistentes.

Palavras-chave: sustentabilidade, luxo, sector do turismo, indústria hoteleira, impacto, gestores, social, ambiental, económico, desempenho, perceção, experiência

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Marketing Manager   MM

General Manager   GM

World Tourism Organization   WTO-OMT

Introduction

According to Sofield (2003), tourism is often considered economically with negative impacts on local populations because it does not contribute to the improvement or development of these populations but rather ignores them, threatens traditional cultures, and deteriorates the environment. Today, tourism is oriented towards new forms inscribed in a perspective of sustainable tourism. The latter aims at respecting, preserving, and sustainably enhancing the heritage resources (natural, cultural, and social) of a territory for the benefit of the tourists welcomed to minimize the negative impacts that the latter could generate.

If, in the beginning, sustainable tourism was determined only by the environmental criterion today, the economic and social (ethical) aspects are also at the center of the concerns (Merasli, 2004). Therefore, sustainable tourism must achieve an optimal allocation of resources and establish an adequate balance between its three pillars (Swarbrooke, 1999). According to Swarbrooke (1999), the environmental/ecological aspect represents the hub of sustainable tourism development, which requires optimal exploitation of environmental resources while preserving essential ecological processes and helping to safeguard natural resources. The economic pillar aims to ensure long-term viable economic activity, i.e., providing equitable socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders, including stable employment, profit opportunities for businesses, and social services for host communities, thereby reducing poverty. The third pillar must ensure the sustainability of the socio-cultural aspect, preserving the cultural heritage of the host communities (Swarbrooke, 1999). Awareness of the concept of sustainability is genuine today. Companies in the tourism sector are increasingly following sustainability approaches under pressure from their stakeholders, particularly governments (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014).

Therefore, it is evident that luxury companies must follow this movement in this context, or they risk being singled out. They have always been under scrutiny because of the significant economic growth they have experienced (Achabou & Dekhili, 2021). Accordingly, the luxury hospitality segment represents the third-largest market share in the global luxury goods industry (Peng & Chen, 2019). Luxury travelers expect high quality, service, and exclusivity, but experience and sustainability are becoming increasingly important aspects (Demir & Sarıbaş, 2014). According to Davies et al. (2012), the luxury hotel industry is highly competitive and constantly evolving. Success for this type of service lies in distinguishing oneself from the

competition, renewing oneself, and satisfying an excessively demanding clientele. The main strategic challenge for a luxury hotel is to mobilize its intangible assets (reputation, know-how, customer relations, innovation) and transform them into sustainable competitive advantages.

The definition of a sustainability strategy remains the major challenge for any company in the sector (Sachs, 2012). If the luxury hotel industry has made a choice to engage in responsible actions, they are faced with the difficulty of convincing the relevance of this strategic choice. Perceived contradictions between the values of sustainability and those of luxury can create a dissonance in the minds of consumers (Dekhili & Achabou, 2015). Also, responsible practices can harm perceived quality; luxury product has always been associated with noble raw materials (Dekhili et al., 2019).

This thesis aims to shed light on a particular angle: the articulation between luxury and sustainability adopted by the hotel industry. To truly understand how luxury hotels can in practice solve the contradiction between sustainability and luxury, this research intents to answer the following research question:

How can luxury hotels implement sustainability practices without neglecting their luxury aspect?

To answer the research question, I adopted a qualitative approach, and I conducted a multiple case study on four luxury hotels: two independent hotels: Hermitage Bay (Antigua) & Ycona Luxury Resort (Zanzibar), and Masseria Torre Mazzia (Puglia) & Tierra Chiloé (Chile), belonging to the Rocco Forte Group and Tierra Hotels, respectively.

The findings highlight that the four cases demonstrate the shift of this study towards compatibility between luxury and sustainability practices within the hotel industry. By emphasizing the social and environmental factors primarily, the hotels show utmost care towards the health and well-being of both the planet and the people. They believe that the exceptional settings of their resorts integrated without harming the environment, combined with a sustainable aware community, enable an outstanding quality of service and overall customer experience. Each hotel is performing well and has a high level of satisfied customers, which can be retrieved through the number of reviews and favorable high rates on TripAdvisor.

This thesis is divided as follows. The first chapter outlines a literature review identifying the concepts of the theoretical framework, followed by the second chapter evoking the methodology, allowing the successful completion of the research question. The third chapter outlines a brief background to understand better the chosen cases' socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. The fourth chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis performed. Finally, the fifth and last chapters provide a critical discussion of the work carried out based on the cases and the literature review and acknowledge the limitations and potential for further research.

1.　　Literature Review

This literature review shows that the importance of sustainability within a company is well-known by today's executives to be competitive within the hotel industry. Implementing sustainability practices and reacting to a more prominent number of stakeholders is essential. Studies continuously evoke the contradicting beliefs between luxury and sustainability within hospitality. However, stakeholders' perception of the importance of following a sustainable path and creating customer awareness keeps increasing.

This chapter reviews the hospitality industry literature regarding luxury and sustainability practices. First, a short explanation of the concept and characteristics of luxury within hospitality will be discussed, followed by a description of sustainability and its implementation within the luxury hotel sector. Next, the (in)compatibility between luxury and sustainability within the hotel industry is questioned. To end on how to raise customers' awareness and adoption of a luxury hotel's sustainability measures.

1.1.　　Luxury Hotel Characterized by its Ultimate Experience

Although the hospitality and tourism industries are both already well-established since the era of capitalism and freedom, which increased the need for accommodations in different geographical locations (Sandoval-Strausz, 2007), luxury hospitality was born as a channel for travelers to dream of another lifestyle (Curtis, 2001).

A person's hopes and dreams define how they experience luxury. Michman & Mazze (2006) mentioned that self-actualization and self-fulfillment through greater knowledge, beauty

appreciation, spiritual sophistication, peace, art, culture, and aesthetics are sought by individuals through luxurious experiences. Therefore, "luxury" is very subjective as every person has different ethics, cultures, origins, educational background, and personal experiences (Becker, 2009). Sometimes a person will assume luxury, and the other will define it as a need. Therefore, hotel managers need to exceed each customer's expectations and needs and personalize them accordingly (Danziger, 2006).

According to Medlik & Ingram (2000), Roger Doswell's framework below identifying the hotels' elements will be projected to the luxury hotel, the main subject of this study.
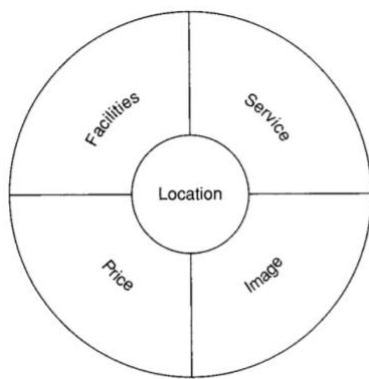
Figure 1 Source: The Business of Hotels, Medlik & Ingram (2000)

First, the location of a luxury hotel is essential. It is situated in or near a particular city, usually in a famous and rich district, in a quiet place, accessible to amenities, and where the surroundings are memorable to customers (Medlik & Ingram, 2000). A luxury hotel proposes a large range of room types to satisfy the client's requirements concerning the facilities. Additionally, the facilities may vary depending on the hotel's geographical area. Third, services play an important role in luxury hotels. It is based on quality, availability, speed, and efficiency (Medlik & Ingram, 2000). This factor is unique and critical to luxury hotels for customer satisfaction (Best & Serves, 2011) as they like to feel special and appreciate personal services (Talbott, 2006). The brand image is perceived by combining the hotel's location, facilities, and services (Medlik & Ingram, 2000). The way the hotel appears and is distinguished by its clientele plays a significant role in luxury hotels always wanting to keep at their best. Last, the price encounters all those previous factors with its performance and customers' satisfaction. The cost of a luxury hotel is usually on the high side, but it is reflected in its unique experience and exceptional service.

By appropriating luxury elements, the five-star hotel industry, closer to new individual aspirations, is becoming more and more attractive. Professionals in this sector have understood that the act of purchasing becomes an event, and by controlling the experience cycle, they will

generate an experience - certainly perceived - but with high economic value (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). By consuming, the customer builds himself; he wants to learn, be entertained, explore new sensations, and have a good time (Wu & Gao, 2019). The added value of the service provider evolves accordingly, and he becomes the director of a rich moment in the customer's life.

By developing the experience they offer to their customers, service providers seek to increase (Danziger, 2006):

- The attractiveness of their establishments: The customer knows that there is always something special at a particular provider, setting them apart from their competitors.
- The level of profitability of their surfaces: By developing the usefulness of the moment and the pleasure that customers experience, providers stimulate sales.
- Customer loyalty: A consumer experience is more memorable and rewarding for a customer when it touches on his personal history.

Most studies only consider the four- and five-star hotels. They are very competitive, presented in prestige terms, and surpass the classic level of design, luxury, service, elegance, and uniqueness (Chu, 2014). The quality of personal service is crucial as a competitive differentiation strategy (Talbott, 2006). As Porter said, for a company to be outstanding over its competitors, it needs to be different and maintain this difference (Porter, 1996). This observation is well applied to luxury hotels as there is a strong demand basis but also an increasing number of options for consumers (Talbott, 2006).

Unlike standard hotels that target mass tourism, luxury hotels have a specific clientele targeting expectations either in terms of quality or personalized service and live an experience (Danziger, 2006).

Therefore, the main emphasis for a luxury hotel is the experience they create for their customers and the guests' satisfaction. For this reason, luxury can be identified more by the experience rather than a product (Cortis, 2001). This framework has been applied and studied through hotel elements. However, no investigation has been done about the impact of sustainability on these factors, which will be further developed in this study. As sustainability is the second central concept of this study, it will be elaborated on in the next section.

1.2. Sustainability Implementation within the Luxury Hotel Industry

Sustainable development is identified by the World Tourism Organization (WTO-OMT) (1998) as a concept that "meets the needs of tourists and the host region while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future" (Cernat & Gourdon, 2012).

Sustainability has environmental, economic, and social concerns, and its purpose is to find a coherent and sustainable balance between these three issues. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2005) has further clarified this concept by identifying twelve objectives: "economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfillment, local control, community well-being, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency, and environmental purity" (UNWTO, 2005). The implementation of sustainable tourism thus implies management that respects the local population and the environment and whose economic benefits primarily benefit them (Seetanah, 2011).

However, sustainability is a concept subject to many interpretations (Sachs, 2012). Numerous definitions exist, and thus the ambiguity surrounding the concept contributes to its poor understanding in the tourism industry (Pezzey, 1992). Sustainability focuses on long-term goals and the desired end-product resulting from the growth strategy to minimize a company's negative impact on the planet (Diesendorf, 2000). Therefore, the three axes that make up sustainability are part of the central concept in this study, sustainability, and their proper understanding. Those are linked to the luxury hotel sector, allowing to situate the challenges of the concerned hotel's sustainability strategy.

To implement sustainability, different strategies exist for each pillar. The environmental pillar focuses on water preservation, energy efficiency, optimal waste management, and recycling (Bohdanowicz et al., 2011; Pirani & Arafat, 2016) while the social pillar emphasizes employees' well-being, the maintenance of local culture, equal opportunities, and community development in general (Jones et al., 2016). The last pillar refers to employment, sales increase, and the overall stability and profitability (Sachs, 2015).

However, one criticism of the hotel industry's sustainability initiatives is that they often reflect only one aspect of the concept, mainly the environment (Ayuso, 2007). On the other hand, the scientific literature agrees that, very often, studies focus on one sector of human activity (Holden, 2006; Abolina et al., 2002) or a single dimension of sustainability (Mederly et al.,

2003; Whitford et al., 2001, Prud'homme & Raymond, 2013). For example, Prud'homme and Raymond (2013) focus on the social aspect considering the link between customer satisfaction and social sustainability initiatives taken in the hotel sector. Overall, the research on the social element is rare (Melissen et al., 2016) even though the latter is as essential.

Additionally, to help companies implement sustainability, there are many sustainable development certifications in the hotel sector that a company can adhere to. For example, the Green Globe (GG) certification is a program integrating the three pillars of sustainable development. Any tourism company can adhere to operationalization and organizational management respectful of the concept of sustainability. This ecolabel is based on several international standards and agreements (Globe, 2012). To ensure compliance with international standards, an independent third party is called upon to work on the ground with companies embarking on this GG certification process. It assesses the reliability and quality of the various sustainability projects undertaken by the company (Griffin & DeLacey, 2002).

Thus, having identified how certain firms have made sustainable tourism a strategic orientation in the hotel sector and how they use standards and certifications to signal this positioning, it will be assessed through the analysis of four luxury hotels developed later in this paper. It will allow understanding to what extent each case has taken the sustainable shift.

1.3.   Luxury & Sustainability within the Hotel Industry: Incompatibility or Not?

Numerous scholars have argued about an incompatibility between sustainability and the luxury hotel industry. The advanced argument is based on sustainability, which is seen as a barrier to luxury hotels' economic performance (Barber & Deale, 2014). Implementing sustainable strategies in a luxury hotel will neglect the hospitality experience through the comfort and luxury factors (Barber & Deale, 2014). As explained, the experience is the main characteristic of a luxury hotel to its guests; it impacts their emotions and purchases intentions (Danziger, 2006). Therefore, luxury hotels sometimes implement strategies that are not environmentally friendly to maintain their high-end status and brand image, such as replacing guests' towels every day (Peng & Chen, 2019).

Additionally, consumers tend to be reluctant when booking a luxury hotel if it identifies sustainable practices. The latter is impacted by people's belief that luxury hotels will not be able

to provide superior quality products, an excellent value for money, and reach their expectations of luxury (Peng & Chen, 2019).

Overall, the previous literature's main emphasis has been on the incompatibility between luxury and sustainability in the hotel industry. However, many luxury managers believe sustainability does not neglect customers' luxury experience and positively impacts both the environment and the community. Peng and Chen (2019) support this optimistic approach; they put forward motives in operating sustainability practices. Some consumer segments, such as millennials, want to establish their luxury consumption with sustainable companies (Lee, 2017; Schemken & Berghaus, 2018). Also, luxury and sustainability share a common point, focusing on 'rarity' (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2017). As luxury includes high-quality products that require rare materials and elaborated working skills and sustainability focuses on conserving natural resources by limiting materials that cannot be recycled (Amatulli et al., 2017).

If the luxury hotel industry has chosen to engage in responsible actions, they are faced with difficulty convincing the relevance of this strategic choice. Perceived contradictions between the values of sustainability and those of luxury can create a dissonance in the minds of consumers (Dekhili & Achabou, 2015). Therefore, for a customer to understand and adopt sustainability measures in a luxury hotel, the latter needs to create awareness through appropriate communication strategies for an optimal client experience which is discussed in the next section.

1.4.   Creating Customers' Awareness about Sustainability Practices

The preservation of our planet and sustainability are today's central issues on the international scene. These themes touch all fields and are particularly relevant if we associate them with the luxury world, particularly in the hotel industry. Millennials want to establish their luxury consumption with sustainable companies (Schemken & Berghaus, 2018). Moreover, because of the fundamental principle of supply and demand, luxury hotels are taking steps toward a greener future. The adoption of green practices is both ethical and beneficial. Many hotels recognize the cost reduction, image enhancement, market differentiation, and increase in sustainability from implementing those strategies (Kularatne et al., 2019). Therefore, according to Kularatne et al. (2019), it improves a hotel's profitability and customer retention while building a strong reputation and better social responsibility.

Numerous authors have studied the link between the consumer and hotels implementing sustainability practices. Some focused on the consumer behavior perspective and what sustainable practices matter most. The most critical choice factors for guests are recycling, energy conservation, and "*greenscaping*." The latter refers, in other words, to shaping the hotel building in a greener way, based on its design and materials, anticipating reducing its negative impacts throughout its life cycle (Verma & Chandra, 2018). Others acknowledged the importance of the communication strategy. Hotels' sustainable communication strategies could change their guests' behavior and make them more environmentally aware (Cvelbar et al., 2017).

Communication goes hand in hand with advertising messages, which are essential to luxury hotels. To gain environmentally connected customers, the latter tend to acquire green certifications, such as the green globe certification mentioned before. However, having certificates is one thing, but implementing green practices is another. Therefore, luxury hotels are aware of environmental and social concerns, and explaining to their guests how they contribute to their impact will, by far, be more successful (Lee, 2017).

Therefore, after a careful analysis of the existing literature, the implementation of sustainability practices nowadays is essential. However, within the luxury hospitality sector, studies are limited and tend to show contradicting results; as such, concrete integration measures need to be further examined. Additionally, the studies that have analyzed the effect mainly focus on the environmental aspect, whereas this thesis will equally support the importance of the three pillars. Thus, the specific research question of this master thesis is stated as follows: *How can luxury hotels implement sustainability practices without neglecting their luxury aspect?*

2.   Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design by the justification of the methodological choices, followed by explaining how the specific data has been collected and analyzed accordingly.

2.1. Research Design

Sustainability within the hotel industry is increasingly becoming a well-established topic. However, as confirmed through the literature review, there is a lack of in-depth studies on sustainability within luxury hospitality, which mainly evokes contradicting beliefs. Therefore, I adopted a qualitative research method as the most appropriate approach to answer my research question. As Graebner et al. (2012) identified, qualitative data builds upon theory where contradictions occur or whether there is simply a shortage, as mentioned in the literature review. Additionally, qualitative approach allows an in-depth understanding of an under-investigated phenomenon. It captures an in-depth understanding of individuals' personal experiences and interpretations (Graebner et al., 2012), leading to a profound description of real-life organizational situations (Gephart Jr, 2004). Bikinshaw et al. (2011) acknowledge micro-processes through qualitative research. However, the latter also contributes to creating more dynamic and robust models, which allows the study of the cultural and contextual interactions within the integrated activities. The sustainable luxury hotel sector is complex, depending on cultural, organizational, and institutional perspectives. A qualitative approach is necessary to accurately interpret and link those contexts and understand the companies operating internationally (Birkinshaw et al., 2011).

Furthermore, I conducted multiple case study on companies operating in the same sector. My aim is to have a broader understanding of the phenomenon of sustainability within the luxury hotel industry, comparing cases from four different continents (including Europe, North and South America, and Africa). The focus is on 5-star hotels implementing sustainability practices: Hermitage Bay in Antigua; Ycona Luxury Resort in Zanzibar; Tierra Chiloé in Chiloé; and Masseria Torre Mazzia in Puglia. Most of the studies identify luxury hotels based on their star rating and mainly identify 4- or 5- star hotels. They are very competitive, presented in prestige terms, and surpass the classic level of design, luxury, service, elegance, and uniqueness (Chu, 2014). Therefore, my focus on 5-star hotels only is explained by their ultimate luxury, sophistication, extraordinary location, meticulous service, and first-class comfort (AAA Diamond Classification). Additionally, each selected case has a sustainability report, public or not, outlining the different measures and concrete practices undertaken at present and for the future, allowing to cross-check their sustainability involvement. I also verified this information by contacting an eco-booking platform where the hotels can be found as they undertake the

necessary measures to verify their reliability. Furthermore, Hermitage Bay is green globe certified, while the others are trying to obtain an eco-label shortly.

The identification process of potential cases was complicated and lengthy. At the start of the selection process, my goal was oriented toward big, prestigious, and famous luxury hotels. As those prominent, often chained hotels are already well-established and recognized on the market, it made it hard to gain their interest and willingness to devote time to this study. Therefore, the target was restricted to smaller independent luxury hotels, which were more successful. However, after a more in-depth description of the studied subject or their availability request, the lack of answers was significant. After an exciting interview call with Isabella Sanchez, sales manager of the eco-booking platform mentioned above, called Eco Hotels & Resorts, I gained insights on smaller independent hotels, mainly outside Europe, having both the prestige and sustainability aspects. To be a member hotel on their booking platform, they require each hotel to present their sustainability report. Concerning the luxury aspect, they guarantee that each of them belongs to a particular luxury hospitality group (Interview, Eco Hotels & Resorts' CEO), reinforcing the reliability of those chosen hotels for the subject of this thesis.

All four share a common purpose: to create a memorable and exceptional customer experience through luxury without neglecting sustainability. They are all 5-star hotels and can be classified in the same price margin starting at an average of €1000 a night, an extensive concern about sustainability practices, and a perfect combination between high-end luxury and sustainability. The only difference of having two independent resorts and two, Masseria Torre Mazzia and Tierra Chiloé belonging to the group of Rocco Forte hotels and Tierra Hotels, respectively. Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman (2003) point out that the validity of conclusions drawn from a qualitative analysis is dependent on the replication of findings from one case to another, and this validity is tested by diversifying the cases. The number of cases studied, here limited to four, is, in turn, justified by the necessary immersion that the exploratory nature of the research commands (Boddy, 2016). The chosen luxury hotels were successful for the subject of this thesis to understand how a luxury hotel can, in practice, integrate sustainability without neglecting luxury.

2.2. Data Collection

For this research, I relied both on primary and secondary data. I mainly collected data through semi-structured interviews. However, to triangulate the information collected, I checked for additional information and documents through the hotel's website, online booking platforms (e.g., TripAdvisor, Eco Hotels & Resorts), social media, and articles to cross-check the data (Yin, 2014). In the matter of possibility and to complement the interviewees' information, I requested additional information they would be willing to share, such as their corporate sustainability report. The motive of triangulation is to intensify the research findings' credibility (Yin, 2009).

The primary data mainly consists of semi-structured individual interviews to collect data by interviewing participants. The attractiveness of a semi-structured interview is linked to the belief that interviewees will be more accessible in expressing their views when the discussion is designed through open-ended questions or a list of topics to be addressed rather than in a structured interview or questionnaire (Meirinhos & Osório, 2010). I conducted ten interviews with each of the selected luxury hotel managers and owners since those have the control and impact on decisions taken at the hotel, more precisely sustainability implementation, and therefore are the qualified persons given the information needed. To gain further knowledge, I interviewed another person from each organization (such as the general, sales, marketing, or PR manager). Additionally, I had three interviews with the managers and owner of the eco-booking platform, Eco Hotels & Resorts. A summary table of the primary data collection is shown in Table 1 below. Following up on the interviews, I implemented a Q&A elaboration session through email with the property to possibly obtain documents supporting their sayings.

I developed an interview script based on this study literature review and research question to facilitate the data collection. The script highlighted the sustainability matter, its importance, and its implementation in the luxury hotel industry. The interview was divided into the hotel's history and perception, structure, occupancy, proposed services, positioning at the competition level, and sustainability perception and implementation. A script example can be found in the appendix. I started the interview with broad questions to create a positive and confident environment to narrow down further to gain more specific insights into each hotel's functioning.

Table 1 - Primary Data Collection

Type of data	Name of the interviewee	Organization	Position in the organization	Date of the interview	Length
Interview	Isabella Sanchez	Eco Hotels & Resorts	Sales Manager	March 24th, 2022	1h
Interview	Maria Olazábal Corral	Eco Hotels & Resorts	Founder, CEO	March 25th, 2022	1h
Interview	Regina Romero	Eco Hotels & Resorts	Marketing Manager	March 25th, 2022	45min
Interview	Andy Thesen	Hermitage Bay	Founder, CEO	April 11th, 2022	1h
Q&A over e-mail	Andy Thesen	Hermitage Bay	Founder, CEO	April 7th,2022	n.a.
Interview	Rachel Browne	Hermitage Bay	General Manager	April 13th, 2022	30min
Interview	n.a.	Hermitage Bay	Guest Relations Coordinator	April 18th, 2022	45min
Interview	Paola Pierno	Masseria Torre Maizza	PR & Guest Relations Manager	April 28th, 2022	1h
Q&A over e-mail	Paola Pierno	Masseria Torre Maizza	PR & Guest Relations Manager	April 20th, 2022	n.a.
Interview	n.a.	Masseria Torre Maizza	General Manager	April 22nd, 2022	45min
Interview	n.a.	Masseria Torre Maizza	Marketing Manager	April 25th, 2022	40min
Interview	n.a.	Ycona Luxury Resort	Founder, CEO (husband)	April 28th, 2022	45min
Interview	n.a.	Ycona Luxury Resort	Founder, CEO (wife)	April 28th, 2022	1h
Interview	Sarah Ranfone	Tierra Chiloé	Marketing Manager	April 29th ,2022	1h
Q&A over e-mail	Sarah Ranfone	Tierra Chiloé	Marketing Manager	April 8th, 2022	n.a.
Interview	n.a.	Tierra Chiloé	General Manager	April 12th, 2022	45min

2.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I selected, categorized, and labeled the data through the coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, I selected some pre-defined codes by reviewing the research question, the literature review, and both internal and external data. Through an in-depth

analysis, I identified 32 codes. From the latter, I transformed those codes into more generic categories, which was done based on similarities from which I obtained 13 different categories. The final step consisted of defining the overall themes based on the identified categories, mainly by analyzing the research question to ensure all relevant topics were covered. Three themes evolved being "sustainability integration," "luxury," and "customers' awareness & perception."

The following table (table 2) contains a visualization of the coding table used for the purpose of this research data analysis.

Table 2 - Coding Elements

CODES	CATEGORIES	THEMES
Energy efficiency	Environmental/Ecological Pillar	**Sustainability Integration**
Water preservation		
Optimal waste management		
Local produce & ecological materials prioritization		
Internal community – employees	Social/Cultural Pillar	
External community – customers		
Community development		
Cost	Economic Pillar	
Revenues		
Extensive range of room types	Facilities	**Luxury**
Varying depending on the geographical area		
Personalized	Services	
Higher end	Price	
Reputation	Image	
Differentiation		
Competitive		
Quiet place	Location	
Accessible to amenities		
Memorable & exceptional surroundings		
Specific clientele	Target	
Prioritizing quality, personalized service, and experience		
Customer loyalty	Experience	
Uniqueness		
Attractiveness of the establishment		
The main characteristic of a luxury hotel		
Social media	Communication Strategies	**Customers' Awareness & Perception**
Email marketing		
Digital Advertising		
B2B		
Satisfaction	Customer Perception	
Community of like-minded people		

3. Empirical Setting

Hotels can vary in size, function, and cost. Most hotels and major hospitality companies have established commonly accepted business standards to classify hotel types (Minazzi, 2010). However, the focus of this study is based on luxury hotels only, more precisely, a comparison between prestigious hotels around four different continents from a manager's perspective.

For the subject of this master thesis, I decided to focus on four 5-star hotels located in Italy, Antigua, Chiloé, and a soon to be opened one in Zanzibar. Every chosen luxury hotel has its own size, particularities, services, and vision, but they all share a common purpose of creating a memorable and exceptional customer experience.

3.1. 5-Star Hotels or The Exceptional Luxury

In a five-star hotel, guests are provided with concierge service or a personal butler. The huge five-star rooms are prestigious and elegant, equipped with quality linens, air conditioning, safety, and the latest technology with high-speed internet access, fresh flowers, and 24-hour service. Most five-star hotels also offer high-quality restaurants, on-site activities, ultra-modern fitness centers, spa services, tennis courts, and golf course access (Sherman, 2007).

Masseria Torre Maizza, a Rocco Forte Hotel – Puglia

"We want our guests to embrace the spirit of Puglia through the particular touch of Rocco Forte hospitality standards and philosophy."

Interview, PR & Guest Relations Manager.

a. Destination

Masseria Torre Maizza is an oasis located in the heart of Puglia's countryside. It rises in the Valley of Itria, considered one of the most authentic areas of unique territory between the Ionian and Adriatic coasts. The resort is surrounded by vineyards, almond trees, olive groves, and ancient handmade stone walls. The latter enables Masseria Torre Maizza to be the perfect starting point to discover a rich culture full of local tradition (Masseria Torre Maizza – Fact Sheet, 2022).

b. History

Masseria Torre Maizza was built in the 16th century and was hidden between secular olive trees and Mediterranean scrub. Since 2019, the property has been under Rocco Forte Hotels'

management. The Rocco Forte group, counting twelve hotels in the UK, Italy, Germany, Belgium, and Russia, is celebrating its 25 years. All have a perfect combination of historic and modern styles in iconic locations. The Rocco Forte is, for four generations, run by a family and distinguished for its quality and individual service, ensuring its customers experience the best of the destination and surroundings (Rocco Forte).

The Maizza tower (Torre) has long served as a fortress to defend the Puglian border throughout the centuries. A timeless symbol of protection and refuge, Torre Maizza slowly transformed into a working agricultural farm or "Masseria" over the years. Today, the space is a stunning resting place on the Adriatic coast of Puglia. An ancient olive grove rises at the heart of the property's nine hectares with thousand-year-old trees that still today produce olives that are harvested and pressed into olive oil, one of the region's most prized specialties (Masseria Torre Maizza – Fact Sheet, 2022).

Following an important restoration in 2018, Masseria Torre Maizza continues in the wake of tradition. The farmhouse, modestly renovated, retains the original mezzanine where the typical cheeses and meats of the region were produced, and is now a space dedicated to well-being. A harmonious union between the elegance of the Italian style and the characteristic warmth of the Rocco Forte hotel group creates an exceptional atmosphere where past, present, and future intertwine in a place that has a historical vocation for hospitality, having welcomed, fed, and protected people for hundreds of years (Masseria Torre Maizza – Fact Sheet, 2022).

c.   Design

A peaceful refuge is Olga Polizzi's design touch, director of Rocco Forte Hotels, used for Masseria Torre Maizza. She wanted to keep the modern Italian elegance, a playful design which she realized in collaboration with local artisans to accord contemporary design with local heritage.

d.   Rooms & Suites

The hotel counts 40 rooms ranging from superior rooms of 30 sqm to suites up to 80 sqm with an additional 50 sqm terrace. All rooms feature elegant living spaces with exquisite finishes and delicate fabrics. Designed for couples, many rooms offer charming private gardens with views either over the lush olive groves, the 9-hole golf course, or the sparkling Adriatic Sea.

Guests can personalize their stay at Masseria Torre Maizza with many proposed services such as 24-hour in-room dining, private car services, and (un)packing on arrival and departure.

e.   Restaurants & Passion for Food Activities

Fulvio Pierangelini, the creative director of food for Rocco Forte Hotels, oversees the different restaurants at Masseria Torre Maizza. He conceived selective menus to conquer each guest' taste. The main restaurant, 'Carosello,' a local vegetable that only grows in the hotel's part of the Italian region, lends to the chef's idea of using fresh, unique ingredients. The menu proposes dishes that combine timeless knowledge and techniques, such as handmade pasta with wild herbs and vegetables, fish of the day, to locally produced cheeses and meats.

The hotel suggests endless experiences to its guests targeting Puglia's unique gastronomic heritage. The activities go from cooking lessons with the resort' chef, wine tastings, private dinners, and olive oil tastings to the Italian 'aperitivo' at altitude in a hot air balloon.

f.   Meeting & Events

The charming 16th-century farmhouse and elaborate gardens of Masseria Torre Maizza offer a wealth of versatile spaces perfect for hosting unforgettable breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. Whether a magical wedding under the olive trees or a splendid, themed dinner, their teams are known for orchestrating remarkable occasions in a stunning event space surrounded by an olive grove, with terraces looking out over the greenery and the golf course.

g.   Experiences & Activities

The hotel entails a spa surrounded by a Southern Italian landscape comprising a relaxation corner, a gym, and two private wellness rooms. After a great day at the beach, the fun continues inside the estate with an indoor pool, a 9-hole golf course, and a driving range. Furthermore, there are endless outdoor activities, from horseback riding to watersports and sailing, from yoga to bicycle tours, all built to enjoy the beautiful Puglian countryside.

Concerning the more adventurous experiences, the hotel proposes to its guests vintage car tours, helicopter rides, zoo safari tours, hot air balloon tours, yacht experiences, and many more. Additionally, the fun and entertainment activities go from a night of shooting stars, live music, Puglian Fashion, and go-karting to art and culture from local artisans (RFH Masseria Torre Maizza Summer Brochure 2022). For example, Fasano, local crafts have been back in the

spotlight in the enchanting setting of the resort since April. The Cultural Association, "Fatto in Bottega," kicked off a new series of meetings and workshops designed to tell about the craft of artisans, their creations, and related processing techniques (La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno IT, 2022). Their summer brochure of experiences and activities is endless and can satisfy all tastes.

h.   Target Market

According to the Italian Real Estate Hotels Value Report, research by World Capital and PKF hotel experts, the real estate assets of Puglia are estimated at over 4 billion, with 408 million for 5-stars hotels, Masseria Torre Maizza being one of those (Vincenzo Chierchia, 2021).

The price of a room varies from €500 to €3500 a night, depending on the season and type. Their rooms are mainly intended for couples. The resort has recently welcomed the couple Chiara Ferragni, the famous Italian blogger, and Fedez Ferragni, the Italian rapper (Vincenzo Chierchia, 2021). According to PR & Guest Relations Manager, the typical customer is families, travelers, and luxury oriented.

3.1.1. Hermitage Bay - Antigua

In the typical 5-star hotel business, many resorts target the luxury sense through objects such as the use of materials like gold and marble. However, Andy Thesen and the Hermitage Bay in Antigua subsequently adopted a completely different approach. The resort is located on the beach and hillside, in the middle of 140 hectares of undeveloped land built on cohabitation with the natural environment.

> "Hermitage bay's mission is about giving the guests a great time, a memorable stay, and the best experience possible, emphasizing courtesy, warmth, happiness, and healthfulness."
>
> Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO.

a)   History

Andy Thesen, the owner of Hermitage Bay, is British and a former venture capitalist from London. He is and has always been an avid environmentalist. His sustainable awareness grew through his working experiences all around the globe in many different cultures. He became a hotelier following up on a series of coincidences. It began in 2002 when he decided to go on holiday to Barbados with one of his associates, where they visited a beach in Antigua. His associate's dad had been trying to raise equity to build a hotel on this deserted beach. After

being thrilled by the landscapes and local culture, Andy, who spent 15 years in venture capital, immediately invested. The initial scenario of just being an investor, taking his revenues, and telling his friends he got a hotel in the Caribbean quickly evolved to him helping with the whole development process.

"I helped clear all the land by hand to not damage it, I was helping the plumber, carrying sinks, I was whatever I needed to be."

Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO.

Without realizing it, he got emotionally evolved in the construction of the hotel in 2005, and it opened in December 2006 with a few rooms, which got finished by early 2007 to get to their 30 unique suites.

b)   Rooms & Suites

At Hermitage Bay, there are three types of suites: hillside pool, beachfront, and sea view garden suites between 106- and 144-meters square, maximizing privacy to relax mind and body and restore the soul. All suites have a deck offering an ocean view and open-air showers (Hermitage Bay).

c)   Services – The All-inclusive

Hermitage Bay is an all-inclusive resort where the idea is to pay everything upfront and ensure a carefree and effortless stay for its guests. The only service the customer needs to pay extra for is spa treatments. During their stay, they can enjoy seasonal and daily changing menus which they can either enjoy at the poolside or at the beachfront restaurant. The dining experience comprises local ingredients grown right in the resort's organic kitchen garden. Furthermore, the hotel has an outdoor pool, fitness center, meditation, yoga & pilates classes, a garden wellness retreat, and several resort activities, from cooking demonstrations, farm tours, fishing, golf & tennis, and historical sites to scuba diving, water sports, and sailing. Each guest benefits freely from all those services.

d)   Target Market

The average price per night ranges from €1200, the lowest fee during the low season (European summer), to €2300. Therefore, they are trendy for romantic stays, honeymoons, wedding anniversaries, or any celebration worth the price. They shifted over time from a majority of British and European customers to a plurality of North Americans, which Andy Thesen assumes

is due to proximity, Antigua being four hours from New York rather than eight hours from London. Their type of customers is surprisingly broad, ranging from very wealthy people to honeymooners who have not gotten much money. However, the regular repeat guests tend to be older, retired, and rich, able to afford a visit twice a year at the resort. Once again, according to reviews from both previous customers and the proprietor, the sense of humanness and the family feeling is what attracts them.

3.1.2. Ycona Luxury Resort – Zanzibar

"At Ycona, we believe in the 4Ys: the new generation resort 4.0 must act ethicallY, responsiblY, and sustainablY, without compromising luxurY."

Interview, Ycona's CEOs.

a)   History

Ycona Luxury Resort is a project launched by an Italian couple. Located in Marumbi, on the East coast of Zanzibar Island, the project is under finalization and will be opening to the public end of 2022. Developed over 60,000 square meters and 500 meters of soft white sand beach, the resort will open with 19 private villas, four restaurants, a gym, spa, yoga patio, a spice and botanic garden, and other top-notch facilities to celebrate couples, honeymooners, and family time. Ycona offers the perfect escape for those who love a combination of luxury, style, and comfort with caring and total immersion in nature.

Ycona is a new generation of resorts 4.0 that embeds eco-sustainable and circular economy practices, eco-luxury, privacy, style, and social distance by design and aims to become among the top 3 destinations of the luxury segment in Tanzania in 2 years.

"In Ycona, "luxury" means uniqueness, eco-sustainable lifestyle, wellness, and exclusivity in one of the most romantic and stunning spots on the planet."

Ycona's PDF Overview Report.

Following the market success received and the extremely positive feedback, Ycona just launched a new development phase of 21 unique villas for sale in the heart of the Ycona jungle, a few meters from the beach, and seeking investors: the "Ycona Luxury Tropical Suites Project." Ycona will welcome a maximum capacity of 50 people, with the villas departing from about €1000 the night.

b)   Villas

Immersed in the magnificent Ycona tropical Jungle of native palms, the 21 tropical one-bedroom private villas developed over a 450 sqm private garden are the ideal place for couples who love nature and want to feel an authentic African experience. Just a few meters away from the Ycona beach, each guest will feel part of the ecosystem in the privacy of their jungle garden.

The 50 sqm one-floor villa has a large outdoor patio, an outdoor tropical shower and tube, one modern, finely designed bedroom and bathroom, and a spacious storage area. Outdoor relaxing features will grant maximum tranquillity. Out of 21 villas, 11 have an upper floor with a panoramic rooftop patio, and ten are ideally immersed in the Ycona jungle atmosphere. The five majestic luxury villas have both a private beachfront pool and a jacuzzi in the back. The luxury hotel furniture is 100% made in Italy.

c)   Restaurants

The resort will count four different restaurants, from fine dining, Italian restauration, light and healthy dishes to the African food experience. The Ycona signature restaurant will be the 'Heart of Zanzibar,' the fine dining one proposing an Italian Mediterranean fusion and fresh seafood. Additionally, they will suggest private dinners to their customers.

3.1.3. Tierra Chiloé – Chile

"We seek to strengthen the unique identity of our hotel group, which offers travelers the opportunity to discover Chile in an integrated way – combining adventure and wellbeing with the highest quality service and leaving our guests with the desire to return."

Interview, Tierra Chiloé's Marketing Manager.

a)   History

Tierra Hotels was founded in 2007 by the CEO and Executive Director, Miguel Purcell, to offer exceptional, authentic experiences for its guests. The resorts seek to help the guests connect intimately with the natural landscapes while providing high-quality service and hospitality. The first one to open in 2008 was in the municipality of San Pedro de Atacama. It was followed by the opening of Tierra Chiloé, built-in 2011 and remodeled in 2014, and one year later, in 2012,

with Tierra Patagonia. The three hotels in Chile count from 24 to 40 rooms. For the subject of this study, I will focus on Tierra Chiloé.

"We want to represent what responsible tourism should be: a hotel destination that offers incredible experiences to its visitors but is also committed to conserving its ecosystem."
Tierra Chiloé's PDF Corporate Sustainability Report.

b)   Target Market

Their main target markets are rather broad, including Brazil, Europe, mainly Germany, Switzerland, and France, the UK, and the USA. They attract guests looking for high-quality service and value both the safeguarding of local culture and environmentally friendly and responsible architecture: outdoor types and people seeking rest while enjoying the landscape.

Their typical customer depends on the market, but it can go from families, honeymooners, retired couples, and solo travelers to millennials. Most are very active and choose one of Tierra's hotels for the excursions, but they also want to indulge in some self-care at the spa at the end of the day. Their guests are very discerning and prefer boutique design hotels, and they are very conscientious about sustainable initiatives.

c)   Design

The Tierra Hotels concept is to generate a profound connection with the local area. The hotel' design is built around the unique characteristics of the site resulting from protecting and taking advantage of it. It transforms visiting Chiloé into memory and experience. As it can get quite cold on the island, the design is focused on several sheltered interiors. However, there are also outdoor spaces to enjoy nicer weather conditions. Tradition and contemporary design tools make up for Chiloé's architecture (Cogley, 2018). With its unique and eco-friendly design and architecture, the hotel differentiates itself. The latter is purposely small to protect the land and create a friendly atmosphere for sociable guests (Interview, Tierra Chiloé's GM).

d)   Rooms & Suites

The main characteristic of each of the 24 rooms is the large windows offering incredible views over the surroundings, both the land and ocean. They all provide a deep interdependence with nature. The guests can choose between 2 suites, superior Rilan rooms overlooking the inland sea or superior Pullao rooms overlooking the Pullao wetlands. Each of the rooms is designed

with hand-crafted furniture and locally woven fabrics. They want to keep the bond with and inspiration of the regional heritage of the Island, Chiloé.

The rates per room vary between €615 to €1400 per night, depending on the room type and the season. It is based on the all-inclusive package, meaning it includes airport transfers, breakfast, lunch, dinner, two half-day excursions or one full-day excursion, and the use of pools, saunas, and a jacuzzi.

e)   Services & Activities

At Tierra Chiloé's, there is an extensive portfolio of guided, organized activities through the island's natural landscapes, including hiking, biking, horseback riding, kayaking, sailing, or scenic voyages. After an exploration day, the hotel offers some relaxation with its spa facilities and wellness. The charming and relaxing Uma Spa, one of the great attractions of the complex (VIE Magazine, 2022), was the big winner in the Best Hotel Spa in Latin America and Best Chilean Spa in 2021 (Brazil Comex Team, 2021).

The main restaurant at Tierra Chiloé has the concept of farm to table restaurant, meaning it offers local products from the hotel surroundings. The local fishing community enables the guests to taste many seafood dishes. On top of the collaboration between the fishermen, farmers, and the chef, the latter proposes homemade bread and pastries and the traditional Chilean cuisine dish "curanto."

4.   Findings

This section outlines the main findings retrieved from the empirical study. The results are divided into the different sustainability pillars outlined in the literature review to determine the final conclusions about how luxury hotels behave and integrate those practices through the managers' perception - followed by an understanding of the importance of creating customers' awareness of sustainability and their perception about the chosen luxury hotels.

4.1.   Adopting Environmental Sustainability Practices

Each of the four studied luxury hotels places utmost care on sustainability practices, and the company-wide teams continue to expand new sustainability practices. Only one of the luxury

hotels has an environmental management certification, and accordingly, Hermitage Bay in Antigua is Green Globe certified. After successfully achieving the Green Globe Certificate, Hermitage Bay must prove its sustainability efficiency and performance year after year to ensure it retains its ecolabel (Interview, Eco Hotels & Resorts' Sales Manager).

The environmental pillar focuses on water preservation, energy efficiency, optimal waste management, and local produce and ecological materials prioritization which will be developed in the following sub-sections.

4.1.1. Preserving Water

In order to minimize water consumption, the resort has to raise awareness among its clients and employees about the crucial importance of the respect and reduced use of this source. Each of the studied cases advises clients to prioritize showers over baths, take shorter showers, limit water consumption, and reuse the linen and towels for energy and water reduction during the laundry.

Three hotels, except for Masseria Torre Maizza, have a greywater treatment plant, allowing water reuse to irrigate the gardens. At Hermitage Bay, for example, their sewage system is designed to retain, process, and dispose of treated waste. Once the treatment and the effluent quality are completed, the waste is transformed into greywater to water the garden. According to Tierra Chiloé's Corporate Sustainability Report 2019, having a secondary water source and nutrients through greywater is essential for sustainable water resource management. Additionally, favoring a local water supply is also one of their practices to reduce their carbon footprint.

Ycona Luxury resort benefits from an innovative water treatment system from the Netherlands. The latter will help the resort provide treated, drinkable, and local water to its clients, respecting the strict norms and enabling them to serve it in natural and sparkling water bottles. While at Tierra Chiloé, they possess an independent supply of water collected from the watershed, treated in tanks through a chlorination process to obtain drinkable and ready for consumption water (Corporate Sustainability Report 2019 – Tierra Chiloé).

As 5-stars luxury hotels operate 24 hours a day, they are considered big consumption organizations (Interview, Masseria's GM). Some measures taken at each hotel to reduce their

water consumption are also linked to their energy use, such as the amount of laundry. Therefore, the second section elaborates on energy efficiency measures.

4.1.2. Using Energy in an Efficient Way

To reduce energy consumption, each property, except Tierra Chiloé, is designed to allow solar panels to aliment all the resort's energy consumption. By implementing solar panels on the roofs and high efficiency solar thermal solutions for the water heating, it will cover over 60% with renewable energy solutions (Interview, Tierra Chiloé's GM). At Hermitage Bay (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO):

"I believe there is no better place than in Antigua to use photovoltaics in terms of the sunlight to generate power."

Their goal is to operate on 100% renewable energy to attain a carbon-neutral property shortly. Ycona aims to be the first carbon-neutral eco-resort in East Africa.

"The first big step to this carbon neutrality is using 100% renewable energy, which is the case in 7 out of the 18 villas." (Interview, Ycona's CEO).

As temperatures in Chiloe can get low, a good heating system was necessary. The heating system is highly efficient as the boilers are high performance, leading to low consumption. The boilers automatically turn off when temperatures reach 23°C. The latter is also applicable at Hermitage Bay; A/C units are set at 23 degrees. This strategy saves on energy consumption and, accordingly, operational cost (Interview, Hermitage Bay's GM). Tierra Chiloé was designed architecturally to allow cross-ventilation without electricity to refresh spaces. The entire building has thermo-panel windows with "Low-E" technology which allows for heat loss prevention of 66%, which usually occurs through windows (Corporate Sustainability Report 2019– Tierra Chiloé).

Additionally, Tierra Chiloé's resort is insulated, and each room has an automatic switch-off as soon as the guest leaves it, reducing energy consumption. Through the building's design with its large windows and light walls and curtains, the rooms, bathrooms, and hallways are naturally illuminated by the sunlight, which helps the reduction of artificial lighting. (Cogley, 2018).

4.1.3. Managing Waste Optimally

One of the leading waste management strategies applied at each hotel is composting. More precisely, they compost their food waste into biological fertilizers for their organic gardens.

Composting generates less environmental pollution due to its treatment of solid organic waste and results in valuable end products (Interview, Masseria's GM). Additionally, the switch from plastic, single-use bottles to refillable dispensing ones is a major and essential switch that stimulates reusable materials. Ycona Resort wants to focus its organization on the circular economy. Therefore, several initiatives have to be strictly linked to waste management practices.

Hermitage Bay's waste management system is based on the 4 "R": rethink, reduce, reuse, and recycle, which is one possible strategy. Different bins to separate plastic, paper, glass, and general waste are necessary to ensure optimal waste management, which is an alternative strategy mentioned by Tierra Chiloé and Masseria Torre Maizza. Tierra Chiloé acknowledges they want to understand the separation process:

"Currently, we are searching for a supplier to trace the recycled materials adequately we separate." (Interview, Tierra Chiloé's GM).

4.1.4. Prioritizing Local Produce & Ecological Materials

A common practice in each resort, besides at Masseria Torre Maizza, is the belonging of an organic garden where each hotel's guests can observe the locally grown fruits and vegetables they will find back on their plates. In the case of Tierra Chiloé, they have two hectares of plantation of 18 different crops, including herbs, fruits, and vegetables.

The organic garden enables the resorts to supply the kitchen with fresh and locally grown products. They, including Masseria Torre Maizza, will favor seasoned fruits and vegetables to ensure varied and healthy menus, responsible eating, and minimizing waste. Ycona will also suggest healthy food corners in some of their restaurants. They will allow their customers to choose their preferences from the botanic garden before being cooked or prepared directly.

"As a customer, you can go choose your vegetable, salad, etc., in the botanic garden. You do not choose the recipe but the ingredients you would like to find back on your plate. This way, we show our customers everything is grown locally and fresh." (Interview, Ycona's CEO).

Concerning the infrastructure and the materials, when designing the resort to minimize the environmental footprint, every case opted to cooperate with suppliers primarily using recycled materials. At the Masseria Torre Maizza, each supplier is checked and needs to adhere to strict regulations. Their bathrooms are realized in trani stone, a natural fine-grained limestone, and

provides exclusive products from Irene Forte Skincare, where each product involves ingredients grown organically in Sicily (Interview, Masseria's GM).

The Tierra Hotels concept is to generate a profound connection with the local area. Tierra Chiloé is built as an element of the place's nature (Cogley, 2018). During the search for new designers Tierra Chiloé wanted to work with, two architects were looking not only for awesome or attractive designs but also to work with native Chilean materials, which could further enhance the story of discovering Chiloé and its scenery (Salas, 2021).

> "What we want for the guest to experience the thematic and artistic "niches" as the balance of two forces; one thing is the information of specific Chilote themes, and the other is the artistic interpretation of the themes, where there is a mix of knowledge and poetry which to us, seems to be the best way to learn about these great cultural themes" (Edwards & Piano, architects of Tierra Chiloé).

Additionally, the architect has built parts of the buildings on stilts to avoid as much ground distortion as possible.

Hermitage Bay, Ycona, and Tierra Chiloé have been designed right from the start with a low ecological footprint and much indulgence towards sustainability implementation.

> "We have such a big advantage with the sustainability aspect. Implementing it from the design stage has allowed us to prioritize local suppliers and implement materials adapted to the location, environment, and culture." (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO).

Hermitage Bay's CEO acknowledges the importance of building sustainably from the start as it leads to huge benefits not only for the environment, but also socially, and economically. "You gain a competitive advantage."

4.2.   Integrating Social Sustainability Practices

Implementing sustainability practices is not only about the health and wellbeing of the planet; it is about the health and wellbeing of people.

> "Like our guests, we aim to treat every team member like a member of our family; equally, fairly and ethically, whilst providing a healthy environment to promote physical and emotional wellbeing."
>
> Rocco Forte Sustainability Program.

4.2.1. Internal Community

The internal community of each studied hotel plays an important role, if not the most important one, and is at the base of the experience provided to its guests.

They support the local communities by first hiring primarily local employees or, at most, from a nearby city. Each employee gets an employment opportunity, provided with community engagement programs, financial and health support, and sensibilization initiatives. The resorts aim at the positive personal and professional development of its employees by working together and treating them as a member of their family: equally, fairly, and ethically.

From the interviews with the two owners, Ycona cares a lot about the valorization and the development of its local community, more precisely about the education and the gender discrimination to start with. To reach those objectives, Ycona will fund and build the "Ycona training center," where its employees will benefit from training to excel in the hospitality sector and develop sustainable mindsets. Zanzibar is an impoverished island, and there is a big contrast between the beach areas full of luxury resorts and the inner island with its small villages where many young people do not have access to basic schooling. Therefore, Ycona wants to educate them, give them the opportunity, and even allow them to work at the resort afterward. On top of that, Ycona will give them the possibility between an average salary or a smaller one with the option of getting a loan to buy a house. So, they develop themselves and grow. "We believe that if the local community is happy, they give you back a lot" (Interview, Ycona's CEO).

At Tierra Chiloé:

"One of the best things about the hotel design project is the community spirit that was generated between the teams of local people working in different areas such as lighting, landscaping, gastronomy, the flow of work between the architects and together with the artists, artisans, and designers" (Edwards & Piano, architects of Tierra Chiloé).

At Hermitage Bay:

"We focus our energy on looking after the staff because, with 113 people, there is always something going on in somebody's life (people having cancer, a family member dying). We care, make sure people know that we do, and by having that kind of culture and philosophy, there is reciprocity from the staff to the guests." (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO).

The general manager, Rachel Browne, has been working for Hermitage Bay for 14 years. She oversees the staff and allows them to each express their unique personalities.

"We have allowed the natural hospitality of the Caribbean to come out, for people to be themselves." (Interview, Hermitage Bay's GM).

4.2.2. External Community

The hotels greatly support the local and national community, making the destination unique. They do so by funding several local charities and collaborating with local partners. While Ycona plans on opening its 'training center,' it will also support Marumbi local schools.

At Hermitage Bay, it is through its staff that a charity was set up to help families in need. For example, they donate food baskets several times a year. Additionally, they adopted the local Jennings primary school and support them through donations and physical services. The organization has its personality, with everyone knowing and caring for each other being transferred to their clients.

> The staff has built this community; as soon as guests get over the hotel's gate, they instantly become a part (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO).

Rachel Browne has created a culture and a mentality of caring for one another that has allowed guests to reconnect with themselves (Interview, Hermitage Bay's GM).

At Tierra Chiloé, they take some other initiatives by suggesting an extensive range of excursions to their clients through the island and local businesses. For example, they check out a local artist and sculptor during a full day of trekking. Additionally, every guest is welcomed with wool slippers as an arrival gift hand-knitted by Chilote women (Interview, Tierra Chiloe's GM).

4.3. Sustainability Practices as a Long-Term Investment

Concerning the economics, none of the studied cases stated implementing sustainability measures as a cost or a compromise to luxury but rather as a long-term investment and responsible luxury. Most of them did not even make a price comparison while selecting specific materials. They believe those have a longer lifetime value due to their adaptation to the local environment. Additionally, finding artisans nearby and local suppliers reduces transportation costs and all its costs. Tierra Chiloé's GM estimates that they have mostly absorbed the costs. Also, the hotels differentiate themselves from the competitive market; through the "practice what we preach" dedication to our sustainability efforts (Interview, Tierra Chiloé's MM).

> "Sustainability is part of our daily life and has a great importance at the hotel. Therefore, we do not look at those expenses separately from the other ones." (Interview, Ycona's CEO).

At Masseria Torre Maizza, the hotel being in a building with its history, they are incorporating sustainability practices step by step.

"We see it as a good investment with optimal results shortly. We are checking results in the long-term." (Interview, Masseria's GM).

4.4. Luxury and Sustainability Practices – Hotel Managers' Point of View

According to the studied cases, the vision of luxury has deeply changed during the last few years. Luxury is more about experiences than costly interiors or showing off (Interview, Masseria's GM). Travelers search for luxury experiences as a quick getaway from their daily routines. They often seek a place where they feel at home and services adapted to their expectations and needs (Interview, Hermitage Bay's Guest Relations Coordinator).

"Many of our customers' reviews on TripAdvisor, especially our repeat customers, say that the accommodation feels like family, thanks to the staff's outstanding service and care." (Interview, Hermitage Bay's GM).

Customers seek authenticity and unique experiences in luxury tourism rather than prominent consumption (Q&A over email, Masseria's PR & Guest Relations Manager). Customers loyalty revolves around a memorable experience and increases through a touch on his personal history.

"We attract customers that have suffered from some sort of trauma in their lives in need of rest and care which the resort provides them. The staff is very empathetic, and these guests become honorable members of our community!" (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO).

According to Tierra Chiloé's GM (Interview), luxury is in the details: globally praised design and architecture, the best views, attention to detail, and world-class hospitality.

There will always be some conflict between a luxury hotel and providing what some people think a luxury hotel should supply and be sustainable (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO). However, Andy Thesen believes that:

"The more people have traveled, the wealthier they are, the more they have experienced five-star luxury, and the more they like what Hermitage Bay offers because it is unpretentious. It is all about the quality of care."

There is a common belief from the cases that a lot can be done concerning sustainability. The luxury hotel industry is only at the beginning of this process. Their guests are also starting to care more about this in their private life, and eventually, everyone will have to adapt to those practices.

4.5. Raising Awareness on Environmental Issues

Each studied luxury hotel wants to provide its customers with an increasingly responsible hotel experience and engage them in acting alongside it. The hotel business is characterized more than any other by its proximity to customers. This proximity gives rise to high demand for services that include a strong environmental and social dimension, regardless of the brand or country. Therefore, the hotels are committed to respecting maximum environmental standards and eco-designing the main products displayed in their rooms. This proximity to customers also paves the way for a closer relationship with them based on civic engagement (Sustainable Communities - Romero, 2021). Studies show that clients are sensitive and ready to act alongside.

> "I was trying to figure out why things were working so well, and it was a cultural thing, how guests were feeling and looked after. It is about allowing the Caribbean people to make the culture in a way. They are very community spirit, which is the behavior that has made them such a success. Within that behavior, you don't have to voice sustainability. It just sits there because it will never go anywhere if we don't look after people."
>
> Interview – Hermitage Bay's CEO.

The hotels emphasize the importance of raising awareness of environmental issues. Communication is key for the resort to implement sustainable strategies effectively and create a positive ecological impact. It is essential for the employees to be educated about those practices and for the guests to understand their importance.

4.5.1. Communication Strategies

The information is shared in hotels and on their website, and they regularly communicate their sustainable initiatives through social media and email marketing. At Chiloé and Masseria, they have a variety of integrated strategies - digital advertising, B2B, social media, and email marketing. (Interviews Masseria's PR & Guest Relations Manager & Tierra Chiloé's MM). The hotel will be optimal for reducing water consumption if the guests comprehend the impact and are willing to cooperate (Q&A over email, Tierra Chiloé's MM). For example, they educate them about water and energy savings if they opt for a non-daily change of towels and linen (Interviews Hermitage Bay's Guest Relations Coordinator; Masseria's MM; Ycona's CEOs; Tierra Chiloé's MM). At Ycona, they plan to reinforce this act by offering them something in return, such as a free drink.

At Ycona, sensibilization will be a target program for the resort's community to fully comprehend the long-run value and impact. They decided to devote a certain percentage of their revenue to building a training center.

"Additionally, we plan on having a short weekly seminar to explain our concepts to our guests to ensure a complete understanding of the eco-resort" (Interview, Ycona's CEO).

4.5.2. Customers' Perception on Sustainability

The resorts find it hard to identify with certainty if their customers book their hotel for their sustainability factor. Still, they believe it is a growing trend and an area to invest energy and time in (Interviews Hermitage Bay's Guest Relations Coordinator; Masseria's PR & Guest Relations Manager; Ycona's CEOs; Tierra Chiloé's MM).

Both the Masseria and Tierra Chiloé find that their customers care about and demand sustainability because it continues to be a hotel decision factor for their guests (Q&A over email, Masseria's PR Manager & Tierra Chiloé's GM). The use of sustainable water and minimizing consumption is a common practice among the four cases, which is easily implemented by their guests as soon as they understand the impact of such a little gesture (Interview, Hermitage Bay's GM).

At Hermitage Bay, the rooms have a bathroom with a bath only and an outdoor shower. The bathtubs are large and quite impractical, which is most probably to discourage their use and favor the use of the showers. However, a previous guest only considers it a minor cavil as she considers the resort to have a special charm and character (Wrathall, 2007). Additionally, Andy Thesen believes Europeans tend to adopt and accept sustainability practices more easily, while Americans are more reluctant.

"The leaky box, for example, is probably the worst thing you can do; having an oversized air-conditioner to satisfy the Americans because the Europeans hardly use them." (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO).

As all the chosen luxury hotels are on the TripAdvisor Booking platform, an analysis could be done based on those customers' reviews.

Table 3 - Hotel Ranking based on Characteristics on TripAdvisor

	Location	**Cleanliness**	**Service**	**Value**	Overall
Masseria Torre Maizza (Puglia)	4.5	4.9	4.8	4.3	**4.5** (727 reviews)
Hermitage Bay (Antigua)	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.4	**5.0** (1613 reviews)
Tierra Chiloé (Chiloé – Chile)	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.5	**5.0** (160 reviews)

Even though famous, higher-class people probably do not spend time posting a review on TripAdvisor, many opinions can be found in the table above (table 3) to cross-check the customer satisfaction at each hotel. The table summarizes the rating of each category and the overall score for each hotel except for Ycona as they have not opened yet. Hermitage Bay and Tierra Chiloé both obtain the highest score of 5 out of 5, and Masseria Torre Maizza, a 4.5, which the management observes as very positive.

Additionally, Hermitage Bay was awarded 'Travelers' choice best of the best' on TripAdvisor. The latter is given annually to those businesses that collect excellent reviews from visitors and rank in the top 1% of properties worldwide, and this award is the highest recognition. Masseria Torre Maizza benefitted from the 'Travelers' Choice' award, based on travellers reviewing the accommodation, attractions, and restaurants greatly, and those are classified within the top 10% of properties on TripAdvisor.

4.6.   Biggest Challenge while Implementing Sustainable Practices

Masseria, in Italy, says its most significant challenge is food waste.

"We are doing our best, but I think it is a delicate topic everywhere" (Interview, Masseria's PR & Guest Relations Manager).
It is an ethical, ecological, and economic concern; by reducing this waste, hotels also lower their costs (Interview, Masseria's GM).

Chiloé believes the most challenging part is constantly having to innovate and improve their practices (Interview, Tierra Chiloé's GM). Probably the biggest challenge in Chile is finding local providers of high-quality products and amenities that are reliable and cost-effective for

the hotels (Podcast, Mimi Lichtenstein & Sarah Ranfone). Tierra Hotels are built around sustainable initiatives - eco-friendly design, sustainable water uses, and the first hotels in Chile to be 100% solar-powered thanks to their solar panels (Q&A over mail, Tierra Chiloé's MM).

"It is crucial that we continue to adapt and expand our sustainable initiatives to protect our planet and future generations. In Chile, there is much awareness around sustainability and changing both individual habits and at a higher corporate level."

Interview – Tierra Chiloé's Marketing Manager.

At Ycona in Zanzibar, the decision to install solar panels already introduced some challenges. As in Africa, their emphasis is on economic growth, neglecting environmental damages, and they are very underdeveloped concerning sustainability measures. Therefore, Ycona imported solar panels and sent someone from Italy for the installation. A second challenge for them will be to incorporate the culture of sustainability into the staff.

At Hermitage Bay, they experience some governmental problems preventing them from some efficient, sustainable measures. The legislation in Antigua has a long-term contract with a private owner of delivering equipment to produce power. Therefore, it is not easy for them to invest in more sustainable practices as they rely upon this contract. However, the hotel plans to perform on solar panels progressively. A second issue is a leaky box as they have to oversize the air-conditioners to satisfy their guests, which is their biggest concern and frustration. As the hotel was designed without windows to let the air blow naturally through each room, no air-conditioning should be needed (Interview, Hermitage Bay's CEO). Finally, the hotel's owner believes there is so much more to be done as technologies keep improving and the importance and awareness of sustainability increase.

The following figures show a summary table of the elements of a luxury hotel and the sustainability strategies applied to each case.

Figure 2 - Summary Table (Part 1)

	Hermitage Bay	**Ycona Luxury Resort**	**Masseria Torre Maizza**	**Tierra Chiloé**
Luxury Hotels Characteristics				
Facilities	Rooms from 106 – 144 sqm; outdoor pool; fitness center; meditation, yoga & pilates classes; garden wellness retreat; restaurants	19 private villas from 50 – 450 sqm; four restaurants; a gym; spa; yoga patio; spice & botanic garden; private beach	40 rooms from 30 - 80 sqm; private 9-hole golf course; beach club; spa & fitness center; large range of culinary activities	24 rooms; spa & wellness center; yoga patio; farm to table restaurant; plenty of outdoor activities
Service	All-inclusive & personalised service	High quality & personalised service	Personalised service & 24/7	All-inclusive & personalised service
Price	€1200 - €2300	~ €1000	€500 - €3500	€615 - €1400
Mission Statement	*"Giving the guests a great time, a memorable stay, and the best experience possible emphasizing courtesy, warmth, happiness, and healthfulness."*	*"We believe in the 4Ys: the new generation resort 4.0 must act ethicallY, responsiblY, and sustainablY, without compromising luxurY."*	*"Let our Guest embrace the spirit of Puglia through the particular touch of Rocco Forte hospitality standards and philosophy"*	*"Offer authentic, memorable, and high-quality trips, placing value on simplicity, nature and the intimate relationship between a landscape and its people, while encouraging sustainable development for local people."*
Image	Romantic getaway, honeymoon; seamless, relaxing, and luxurious experience; organic garden; beach front; at home feeling	(Not open yet)	Magical place; beautiful property; luxury; highly personalized experience	Wonderful stay; adventure; views; luxury property; unique & memorable
Location	Antigua	Zanzibar	Puglia	Chiloé

Figure 3 - Summary Table (Part 2)

Sustainability Practices/Strategies				
Water Preservation	• Encourage guests to take showers instead of baths • Reuse linen and towels when possible • Sewage system → hold, process, and discharge treated waste → waste used to water the garden (greywater)	• Clean water • Sea preservation • Reducing showers water consumption • Limiting the use of towels → reduce water used in the laundry • Water treatment plant • Innovative water treatment system → offering treated water to the clients	• Serving guests, a local water choice to reduce carbon footprint • Option for guests to have linen and towels washed every second day • Dual flush toilets installed across hotels • Time-sensitive water taps in back of house areas • Exploring rainwater harvesting system	• Water supply gathered from watershed • Water in the tanks is treated through chlorination process → drinkable & ready for consumption • Independent water supply • Low-consumption toilets with uxometers • Bathrooms & kitchen faucets have flow aerators → efficient use of water • Jacuzzi has a filter → longer use of the water before changing it • Laundry done by machines at maximum loads • Grey water treatment plant → to reuse water & irrigate their gardens
Energy Reduction	• LED bulbs • Inverter A/C units • A/C turned off when guests leave their rooms • A/Cs are set at 23 → conserve energy • Goal: operate on 100% renewable energy → carbon neutral property	• A/C alimented by solar panels • On-gird solar panel design → 60%+ coverage with renewable energy solutions • Photovoltaic solar panels on the roofs • Solar thermal solutions for water heating • First carbon neutral eco-resort in East Africa • 7 out of 18 villas → 100% renewable energy • Electric bulbs & solar lamps • Clean energy, energy efficiency & sustainable communities	• In-room key card system automatically switches off electricity when guest room is vacated • Individually controlled air-conditioning systems in all hotels • Energy-saving PCs • Energy-saving and Energy Code-certified kitchen appliances • Movement sensitive lighting in back of house areas • LED bulbs installed throughout our hotel	• Heating system: two biomass pellet boilers • thermostats & 4 inertial storage tanks to optimize heating function • Highly efficient & performance boilers → low consumption • Boilers turned off when temperature > 23 degrees • Electricity supply by a local company through regional distribution • Diesel generator used as backup • Architectural design allowing for cross ventilation to cool spaces down without electricity • Building is insulated • Thermo-panel windows with "low-E" technology → conservation of 66% of the heat normally lost through windows • Key card activated electricity → minimize energy consumption

Figure 4 - Summary Table (Part 3)

Optimal Waste Separation	• Based on 4 R: rethink, reduce, reuse & recycle • Shower gel and shampoo in refillable dispensing bottles • Compost kitchen waste on their onsite organic garden	• Circular economy • Waste food used in composter → high efficiency biologic fertilizers for the gardens • Recycled material & eradication of single-use plastics	• Separate plastic, paper & general waste management bins used throughout back of house • Recycling initiatives such as equipment to dewater, shred and/or compress organic wastes → reuse as compost in parkland • Recycle kitchen oil, ink cartridges & coffee capsules	• Recycling waste • Collects & separates cardboard, aluminium cans, glass, and plastics • Searching for a good supplier with adequate traceability to recycle the materials separated
Local Produce & Ecological Materials Prioritization	• Locally grown and supplied fruits, vegetables, and fish • Onsite organic vegetable garden supplying the kitchen	• Local food • Botanic garden • No pesticides → only biological products • Healthy menus → maximizing seasonal fruits & vegetables • "Healthy corners" → guests can pick their preferences from the garden of what they want in their plates • Local ecosystem preservation • Preserving the sea	• Sourcing seasonal, local produce • Fish suppliers specially chosen for their sustainable practices • Meat supplied by farmers using non-invasive farming practices • 'Healthy Nourish' menus in • Reusable or recyclable food packaging • Irene Forte Skincare professional products → natural, sustainable & vegan-friendly • Brand's packaging: 100% recycled fibres with vegetable and soya-based inks • Hand-made Sicilian ceramics & handcrafted Sicilian bells for display & treatments • Flip-flops made from bamboo • Reusable material bags for newspapers, laundry, and shoes • Eco-friendly cleaning materials	• 2 hectares of 18 different crops: herbs, fruits & vegetables • 9 are native to the region
Community	• Adopted local Jennings primary school • Donations & physical services → support school • Downgraded linen donated to local community clinic • Hermitage Bay Charity → donation of food baskets, Christmas gifts, etc.	• Local content valorisation & development • Focus on education & gender discrimination • Ycona ESG fund activities → built the Ycona training centre → employees of 2030 will be formed & developed to excel in the hospitality sector & sustainable mindsets • Marumbi local school's support	• Local & national communities • Support local charities • Promote tourism through partnerships & campaigns • Treat each member as a member of our family: equally, fairly & ethically • Providing a healthy environment → physical & emotional wellbeing • Support teams' welfare & career development	• Bosque Piedra supports the conservation work & study of the ecological park • Guests get wool slippers as an arrival gift → hand knitted by Chilote women • Activities benefiting the island businesses

5.   Discussion

As observed through the literature and the cases, the trend of travelers seeking unique experiences and individualized service rather than traditional luxury hotels keeps growing. The hotel industry is at the center of sustainability concerns nowadays, considering the climate issues, pollution, and other issues affecting society (Scott et al., 2012). Therefore, the hotel industry is increasingly involving sustainability practices. The environmental pillar is the first necessary condition to attain sustainability. The hotel focuses on lowing its energy and water consumption, optimizing its waste management, and favoring local produce and materials. Continuous and effective implementation of ecological factors grows alongside the social pillar, preserving the cultural heritage of the host communities (Swarbrooke, 1999) and ensuring the health and well-being of both the internal and external community.

The main objective of this work was to investigate whether managers can combine sustainability practices within the luxury hotel industry without neglecting the customer experience that the latter is seeking.

This research suggests that adopting sustainability strategies is an investment rather than a one-off cost, which might positively balance managers' uncertainty about adopting them. The costs are one of the main concerns for not applying the practices (Farrington et al., 2017). Through the managers' perspective in this study, they want to acknowledge the opposite and help managers review this thought. Additionally, the findings highlight that each hotel is performing well and has a high level of satisfied customers, which can be retrieved through the number of reviews and favorable high rates on TripAdvisor. Customer satisfaction leads to a positive image of the hotels and a continuous increase in occupancy rate. Those results contradict the belief that sustainability practices within luxury hotels will neglect customers' comfort and, consequently, their image and reputation. Therefore, the four cases demonstrate the shift of this study towards compatibility between luxury and sustainability practices within the hotel industry. This positive effect is aligned with previous studies explaining that some consumer segments, such as millennials, want to establish their luxury consumption with sustainable companies (Lee, 2017; Schemken & Berghaus, 2018). Also, the importance of communication strategies for customers to be aware of the implemented practices at the hotel is of a major role and applied through the four cases. Research shows that a luxury hotel using sustainability practices evokes a positive consumer reaction, which increases even further if the hotel communicates it efficiently (Amatulli et al., 2021). Last, this study shows that the hotels

differentiate themselves and create a long-term competitive advantage by putting sustainability into practice.

6.   Conclusion & Limitations

The concept of sustainability is increasingly present in the tourism and hotel industry because of the challenges and the significant impact of this sector of activity on the host country's environment, culture, and economy. The development of the tourism industry and its destinations is in close and constant relation with the availability of local natural resources (UNWTO, 2007). Bohdanowicz (2005) further states that "the natural appeal of a destination is typically one of its main tourism-related assets." However, the receiving country is also susceptible to any environmental, cultural, or economic disruption that tourism may cause. The hotel industry is particularly consumptive of local natural resources, sometimes causing a significant carbon footprint (Bohdanowicz, 2005). Deterioration of the natural area can then threaten the health of the hotel and tourism industry if a more comprehensive and participatory policy or strategy is not put in place. By presenting the cases of Hermitage Bay in Antigua, Ycona Luxury Resort in Zanzibar, Tierra Chiloé in Chiloé, and Masseria Torre Maizza in Puglia, this research has thus highlighted the importance of the involvement of all stakeholders in the choice of the strategy aimed at integrating the sustainable dimension into the organizational management of a tourism company.

The approach to more sustainable management requires the stakeholders' participation and sustained collaboration, both internally and externally. The managers, being responsible for each of the different departments of the hotel, ensure the involvement of everyone, employees as well as members of the administration, towards a participative approach, an essential element in such an approach. They are also themselves stakeholders in turn towards more sustainability. The managers also ensure the application of sustainable practices by the hotel's employees and organize the training and awareness of the hotel's staff. This participation promotes learning and is part of a dynamic of continuous improvement. Voyer (2006) states that "a participatory and formative approach is the only way to ensure that managers have an adequate approach and use of a system that they have given themselves and that they share perspectives, concepts, and a common language" (Voyer, 2006). The hotel's suppliers are also an integral part of a

sustainable strategic reorientation by being invited to share their environmental strategy and performance to encourage them to switch with the studied hotels.

The importance of controlled development is affirmed by many authors for these fragile areas, especially because of their isolation (Jurado et al., 2013). However, this type of development is equally important for other types of tourist destinations, such as urban areas, regions, and even entire countries. As tourism is a sector of activity that has played an increasingly important role in socio-economic growth, development, and employment (UNWTO, 2007) since the 1960s, it is essential to be done in a controlled manner. Tourism, therefore, represents a real potential for progress for many countries in economic terms but also in social and human terms, thanks to, among other things, more accessible education, greater respect for the rights of equity and equality between genders and generations, and is a vehicle for scientific and technological innovation. Sustainability, therefore, plays an essential role in these global issues.

However, this study encounters a few limitations. As observed, past research is still relatively restrained about the cooperation between sustainability and luxury hotels. Therefore, the subject needs to continue to be elaborated on as it is an ongoing and increasing matter. First, this thesis only considers four different luxury hotels in four different countries. Therefore, it could be that various sustainability measures or none are implemented in other luxury hotels within the same area. An interesting point for further research would be to look more into other luxury hotels in each given country to check for a pattern or establish a comparison. Also, research can be done on each studied resort' country about their general perception, culture, and adoption of sustainability strategies within the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, the research was restricted to two independent island resorts and two chain-affiliated ones, which indulges some differences. For Masseria Torre Maizza, belonging to the Rocco Forte Group, the data is mostly based on the overall groups' initiatives applied to the Masseria. The analysis is limited to the managers' point of view rather than also taking the suppliers' or other employees' perspectives. Finally, the study has been done based on the managers' perspectives, but including other stakeholders, such as hotels' suppliers, employees, or even the customers' perception and behavior, would be value-adding and enhance either similarities or differences between each stakeholder. This alignment can give a better overview of the sustainability concerns within the luxury hotel industry.

Additionally, the economic pillar is only briefly mentioned based on their broad observations. The latter could not be based on any financial report as this was obtained from none of the chosen cases and kept as private data. Last, the qualitative data was limited to semi-structured online reviews due to the hotel's location in every sight of the world. However, gaining evidence from direct personal observation could have enhanced and supported the data. Also, face-to-face interviews have several advantages over remote ones. Jennings, 2005 states, "the ability to control interactions, to ask complex (more sensitive) questions, and to use probe mechanisms" as in-person interview benefits.

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Appendix

Data Collection List:

Table 3 - Secondary Data Collection

Type of data	Case	Title	Platform	Author	Date
PDF Report	Masseria Torre Maizza	RFH Masseria Torre Maizza Summer Brochure 2022	Masseria Torre Maizza internal document	Masseria Torre Maizza	2022
Document	Masseria Torre Maizza	Masseria Torre Maizza – Fact Sheet	Masseria Torre Maizza internal document	Masseria Torre Maizza	2022
Article	Masseria Torre Maizza	Puglia for couples	Financial Times	Carola Hoyos	2009
Article	Masseria Torre Maizza	Top hotels: Chiara Ferragni, Fedez e Gianna Nannini alla Torre Maizza di Rocco Forte	Il sole 24 ore	Vincenzo Chierchia	2021
Article	Masseria Torre Maizza	Hotel: il patrimonio della Puglia vale 4 miliardi, valori record a Polignano	Il sole 24 ore	Vincenzo Chierchia	2021
Article	Masseria Torre Maizza	"Fatto in Bottega" a Masseria Torre Maizza: in programma incontri e laboratori sull'artigianato locale	La gazzetta del mezzogiorno IT	/	2022
Blog Article	Masseria Torre Maizza	A Pedacito Of Masseria Torre Maizza, Italy	Pedacitos travel & culture blog	Kay Jones Davis	2022
Online article	Hermitage Bay	Interview with Andy Thesen, Owner of Hermitage Bay Antigua	Luxury Travel Magazine	Tim Cotroneo	2012
Online article	Hermitage Bay	A Place to be Human: Hermitage Bay, Antigua	VUE New Jersey	Michael Scivoli	2016
Podcast	Hermitage Bay	Hermitage Bay | Owner, Andy Thesen: 365 Beaches, Antigua's Diverse Cultures, and a Reformed Financier	Luxury Travel Insider – apple podcasts	Sarah Groen	2021
Online article	Hermitage Bay	Hermitage Bay hotel review, Antigua	The Telegraph	Antonia Windsor	2019

Video	Hermitage Bay	Ultimate All-Inclusive Hermitage Bay Resort, Antigua Hill-Side Pool Suite KVS TRAVEL 610-334-1917	Youtube	KVS Travel	2020
Article	Hermitage Bay	Across a turquoise sea	Financial Times	Claire Wrathall	2007
Article	Hermitage Bay	Balancing newcomers and natives	Financial Times	Julie Earle-Levine	2006
Blog Article	Hermitage Bay	The Ultimate Guide Of Hermitage Bay; Everything You Need To Know Before Your Visit	Eco Hotels and Resorts	Regina Romero	2022
Article	Hermitage Bay	20 Caribbean Hotels We Can't Wait to Visit Again	Islands.com	Jimmy Savard	2021
Blog Article	Hermitage Bay	Top 4 Resorts For A Summer Romantic Getaway	Eco Hotels and Resorts	Regina Romero	2022
Blog Article	Hermitage Bay	Ultimate Summer Bucket List; The Best Places To Travel To In 2022	Eco Hotels and Resorts	Regina Romero	2022
PDF document	Ycona Luxury Resort	Ycona Luxury Resort – Overview	Ycona Luxury Resort - Internal document	Ycona Luxury Resort	2022
Article	Ycona Luxury Resort	What A $1M Home Looks Like In 10 Different African Countries	African Vibes	Chidera	2021
PDF document	Tierra Chiloé	Sustainability report 2019	Tierra Hotels – internal document	Tierra Hotels	2019
Online Article	Tierra Chiloé	Mobil Arquitectos designs Tierra Chiloe hotel for exposed Chilean island site	Dezeen	Bridget Cogley	2018
Online article	Tierra Chiloé	Hotéis no Chile estão entre os melhores do mundo e são destaque nas principais premiações de turismo	Comex do Brasil	Equipe Comex do Brasil	2021
Article	Tierra Chiloé	L'intermission – Tierra Chiloé	VIE Magazine	/	2022

Blog article	Tierra Chiloé	Tierra Chiloé: Collaborative design	Tierra Hotels	Diego Salas	2021
Blog article	Tierra Chiloé	Best Sustainable Hotels in Chile	Eco Hotels & Resorts	Regina Romero	2021
Blog article	Tierra Chiloé	Top 5 bucket list hotels	Eco Hotels & Resorts	Regina Romero	2021
Article	Tierra Chiloé	DISCOVER CHILE IN-DEPTH WITH TIERRA	POE Travel	/	2021
Article	Tierra Chiloé	Travel 2022 - 10 Best Trips For Next Year And Your Post-COVID Vacations	Forbes	Larry Olmsted	2021
Podcast	Tierra Chiloé	Adventures in Luxury Travel – Chile	Adventures in Luxury travel	Mimi Lichtenstein & Sarah Ranfone	2021
Book	All cases	Reinventing organisations	/	Frederic Laloux	2014
Blog article	All cases	Sustainable Communities	Eco Hotels & Resorts	Regina Romero	2021
Blog article	All cases	The Importance of Traveling to Sustainable Hotels	Eco Hotels & Resorts	Regina Romero	2021

Interview Script (Example):

I am a last-year master's student in International Management. I am currently writing my thesis about luxury hotels. More precisely on "How luxury hotels face sustainability." I would like to understand how hotel managers perceive sustainability practices in luxury hotels and whether they are confronted.

Also, how luxury hotels are conceived and designed to stand out from the competitive hotel market and what is the main image they want to convey.

Knowing that many luxury hotels do not include sustainability practices, I try to understand why and what the biggest challenge is according to a luxury hotel to incorporate sustainable practices.

1.   History and perception of the hotel.
- Can you tell me a bit about the history of the hotel?
- In your own words, what is the main mission of X?
- What is the vision of X?
- How do you want to come across to your customers?
- How would you define a luxury hotel?

2.   The structure of the hotel and occupancy.
- How many rooms do you have? Do you have different types?
- When is your high season?
- Do you have many regular customers?
- How would you describe your typical customer? (Families, tourists, travellers, special, business, luxury, eco-friendly, etc.)

3. Hotel Services
- What services do you offer to your clients to make them experience a luxury hotel?
- As X is an all-inclusive hotel, does this include food and drinks or also activities? What was your perception about this?
- What is the most efficient and attractive offering of your services according to the clients? And that you notice are the most widely used?

4.   Competitive market
- How do you differentiate yourself from the competitive market?
- What is your main point of differentiation?

5.   Sustainability
- What do you think about sustainability in general?
- What do you think about sustainability and luxury hotels?
    - Did you integrate sustainability practices from the moment you opened?

- Do you communicate these sustainable strategies to your clients? If so, how is it perceived?
- What marketing strategy do you primarily use?
- Do you find that your customers care about and demand sustainability?
- Have these practices resulted in a cost to the facility? If so, has it caused a price increase for customers?

- How important is environmental responsibility to you?
- According to experts, there is a general belief in the hotel industry that luxury and sustainability will always be at odds, that no sustainable measure can be considered luxury. What do you think about this?

- **What is the biggest challenge with implementing sustainable practices into a hotel?**

I thank you very much for your time and consideration. It is a great help to me in realizing my master thesis.