Chapter 10
Sustainable Practices in Spanish Hotels: A Response to Concerns on Quality of Life in Highly Visited Tourism Areas

Irene Gil-Saura and María-Eugenia Ruiz-Molina

Abstract The intense tourism activity may involve significant negative impacts on the quality of life in tourism destinations with a high number of tourist arrivals. The objective of this chapter is to explore the available tools and measures that hotels may implement to mitigate or cope with these negative economic, social and environmental impacts. An example of hotel managers' perceptions of the importance of the main environmentally sustainable practices in hospitality to mitigate the negative impact of the tourist industry on the quality of life of residents in highly visited tourism destinations in the Mediterranean coast of Spain is provided, with the purpose of stimulating further research in this topic.

Keywords Sustainable practices · Hotels · Quality of life · Consolidated tourism destinations

10.1 Introduction

It is widely accepted that quality of life, tourism activities, and sustainability are all interrelated (Mathew and Sreejesh 2017; Scheyvens 1999; Tsaur et al. 2006; Uysal et al. 2016). As tourism grows, an important challenge should be to conciliate sustainability and development, with quality of life of all stakeholders. In this context, tourism companies should contribute to improving the quality of life not only of tourists but also residents in host communities and employees of tourism services. In this vein, it has been highlighted the contribution of the hospitality industry to

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improve the quality of life in host communities through ensuring high labour standards, supporting local communities or promoting environmental sustainability (Bohdanowicz and Zientara 2009). Focusing on the latter, when hotels are highly committed to environmental management, they enhance the quality of life of destination residents, thus improving the local community's predisposition to accept tourism-related initiatives (Claver et al. 2007).

In highly developed tourism destinations, locals have generally informed positive attitudes in terms of improved economic quality of life (Teye et al. 2002). But in many cases, tourism destinations develop to meet tourists' needs and wants without caring about environmental impact (Andereck et al. 2005). Among the potential environmental consequences of tourism development, Andereck (1995) mentions air pollution related to traffic congestion, water pollution, plant destruction and deforestation.

In view of all this, tourism destinations' challenge is to minimize the negative impacts of tourism while maintaining the quality of life of residents, and maximize the positive impacts of tourism through "sustaining resources that provide quality experience and services for both tourists and locals" (Uysal et al. 2012).

The objective of this paper is to present the hotel managers' perceptions of the main environmentally sustainable practices in hospitality to mitigate the negative impact of the tourist industry on the quality of life of residents in highly visited tourism destinations. Since many areas in Spain receive millions of visitors year after year, assuming a Triple-Bottom-Line (TBL) approach, that considers economic, social and environmental issues, we aim at providing an overview about the assessment of the importance of several practices by the main hotel chains with 4 and 5-star hotels in the Spanish Mediterranean coast.

As one of the top-five tourism destinations in the world (UNWTO 2017), there is a trade-off between the contribution of Tourism to GDP and job creation, and the economic, social and environmental impact of this activity. Sustainable practices may allow to conciliate the economic benefits and the mitigation of the negative impact on the quality of life of residents and visitors. But the perceived importance of these practices by hotel managers may strongly influence their actual implementation.

10.2   Sustainable Practices in Hospitality

Three-pillar sustainability has been pointed out as a source of benefits for hotels, the local communities and the natural environment (Cvelbar and Dwyer 2013; Ryan 2003), being compatible with firm financial goals and competitiveness (Zink and Fischer 2013; Bryson and Lombardi 2009). Notwithstanding, there are still many companies in the tourism industry whose decisions are based on short-term economic benefits, thus neglecting social and environmental sustainability (Bach et al. 2014). In this sense, a heavy intensive usage of natural resources in search of short-term financial turnover may lead to overcrowding and the destruction of natural resources that could damage the company's long-term financial performance as well as the local economy (Clayton 2002) and threatening quality of life in the community (Bansal 2002).

Tourism development is considered as a way of improving a country's economy and social well-being, but if this development is not driven by sustainability principles, tourists may choose alternative destinations or attractions, thus resulting in limited business and economic results for the tourism companies in this region (De Sausmarez 2004).

Moreover, tourism is an industry that very much depends on the natural environment (Weaver 2012). Recent research has emphasized the importance of the environment for tourism activity and development (Butler 2008). It has also been concerned with the impacts that tourism has on natural resources (Claver et al. 2007). In the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen in December 2009, it has been highlighted that the role of tourism in the generation or control of greenhouse gases is highly relevant. If global warming process evolves according to forecasts, winter sports, island holidays and sun and sand holiday destinations will be under massive pressure. Certainly, it will mean that the geography of the tourism industry will change dramatically (UNFCCC 2010). In this context, environmental factors have gained major importance. The hotel industry has been traditionally considered one that does not have a great impact on the natural environment compared to manufacturing industry. However, it generates much more negative environmental impacts that the public opinion perceives, consuming a vast amount of local and imported nondurable goods, energy and water, as well as emitting a large amount of carbon dioxide (Bohdanowicz 2006).

Since the early 1990s, tourism companies, mostly hotel facilities, have undertaken different initiatives to both, provide evidence of their commitment to sustainable tourism, and in particular for the mitigation and adaptation to the increasing threats of Climate Change. For instance, large corporations, such as TUI, try to promote "environmentally-compatible management" as well as socioeconomic viability, by publicizing and awarding the best practices of tourism services suppliers within its business network (Sigala 2008). Similarly, in Nordic countries, an innovative corporate social responsibility program has been implemented, contributing greatly to increased satisfaction amongst managers, employees and customers (Bohdanowicz and Zientara 2008).

Tools and practices to measure economic sustainability include business ratios and formulas (Bragg 2006), as well marketing metrics (Farris et al. 2006). Concerning social sustainability, a reference in assessing tools and measures is the CSR Europe's Toolbox (CSR Europe 2012) report, that covers personnel policies, human rights, and local community impact and activities.

In terms of environmental sustainability, the most common tools and mechanisms applied by the hotel industry are codes of conduct, best environmental practices, eco-labels, environmental management systems (EMS) and environmental performance indicators.

As indicators of hotel Environmental Management Standards (EMS), items included in the ISO14000 standards are considered. Some representative foreign green hotel assessment systems are also commonly considered as a reference in this industry, e.g. the Green Hotels Association, the State Economic and Trade

Commission, the Caribbean Hotel Association, Grecotels, the Coalition for Environmental Responsible Economies (CERES), the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO), the Global Stewards and the Bench-markhotel.com website.

These systems commonly undertake hotel and tourism environmental cooperation programs and activities. They are committed to promote the effective management of natural resource and to achieve sustainable tourism. These indicators consider the impact on the environment of both the internal management (services, operations, personnel, administration, marketing, and finance) and to the external environment (economics, technology, social trends, ecological environment, customers, competitors, and suppliers). In addition, the primary management issues of hotels (Webster 2000) were also given while auditing the environment.

When implementing an environmental policy, hotels are mainly focusing on technical efficiency (Hathroubi et al. 2014) and cost efficiency (Shieh 2012). In these sense, there is evidence in the hospitality industry about the importance of the savings arising from efficient water management (e.g. Kasim et al. 2014), measuring and implementing practices to reduce energy consumption (e.g. Abdi et al. 2013; Araki et al. 2013; Day and Cai 2012; Sheivachman 2011), and the benefits of recycling solid waste (Singh et al. 2014). Examples of sustainable practices related to the creation of a healthy and safe indoor environment in hotels are also provided in the literature, e.g. hotel management of construction (Cui and Hui 2011), LEED certification for buildings (De Lima et al. 2012), design (Brody 2014) and green renovation schedule requirements (Dienes and Wang 2010).

The hotel sustainable practices usually involve several stakeholders. First, regarding the corporate management, a relationship is found between managers' environmental perceptions, environmental management and firm performance in Spanish hotels (López et al. 2011).

Second, hotel sustainable practices often involve staff education. Indeed, according to Stalcup et al. (2014), sustainable programs in hotels should start with staff. In this vein, there is wide evidence about human resources practices for environmental sustainability in hotels (Chan et al. 2014; Chou 2014; Kim and Choi 2013; Park and Levy 2014; Stalcup et al. 2014; Yen et al. 2013).

Last, regarding consumers, as green practices are becoming more commonly used by hotels, guests are supporting these initiatives (Withiam 2015). When educating customers about sustainability, it has been highlighted the importance of developing effective communication strategies to encourage hotel guests' green behavior (Lee and Oh 2014), being credibility on green messages in hotels a major concern (Kim and Kim 2014). Recent research has found support to the relation between environmental friendly programs in hotels and customers intention to stay (Kim et al. 2012) as well as between sustainability and customer loyalty (Chen 2015).

All in all, we enunciate the following research questions:

RQ1: *What is the perceived importance of practices for economic, social and environmental sustainability by hotel managers?*

RQ2: *What is the perceived importance of measures for environmental sustainability for different stakeholders by hotel managers?*

10.3   Method

The present paper aims at providing an overview about the assessment of the importance of several practices for economic, social and environmental sustainability by the managers of the main hotel chains with 4 and 5-star hotels in the Spanish Mediterranean coast of Spain. Hotel chains are prone to standardize their procedures and manuals (Kasim 2007), while upscale hotels are a reference in this industry (Stylos and Vassiliadis 2015).

Following the Triple-Bottom-Line approach suggested by Elkington (1994), we have included items for measuring the level of development or implementation of practices for the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the hotel. The items were adapted from Stylos and Vassiliadis (2015), excepting those regarding consumer education about green mobility, that were proposed by the authors. All items were measured in a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important; 5 = totally important).

In order to perform the study, a census of 4 and 5-star hotels in two main Spanish cities in the Mediterranean in terms of tourist arrivals – i.e. Valencia and Gandía – was elaborated based on the secondary information available in the Official guide of hotels in Spain and the hotel directory of the Valencian Tourism Agency. Hotel managers of 39 hotel chains with 4 and 5-star hotels in the Mediterranean coast of Spain were invited to participate in the survey by phone and then the link to the structured questionnaire was sent by e-mail in the last week of May and the months of June and September 2015. The online questionnaire was generated through Google Forms, and the link to the survey was sent to the e-mail address provided by hotel managers who accepted to participate in the study. After several reminders by phone and e-mail, 12 valid questionnaires were finally received, representing a response rate of 30.77%. With the quantitative information collected through the valid questionnaires received, descriptive analyses are performed to provide an overview regarding the importance of these practices from the point of view of the hotel chain.

10.4   Results

First, regarding the importance of measures for economic viability, means values for responses are shown in Table 10.1.

Measuring customer satisfaction is considered as totally important by all hotels. Market share evaluation and measuring customer loyalty follow, being considered as totally important for almost all hotel managers interviewed. Scores are higher or near to 4 for the rest of items measuring the importance of the rest of issues regarding economic viability and innovation for the hotel manager.

Table 10.1 Means and standard deviations of items of importance measures for economic viability and innovation

	Mean	St. dev.
Hotel economic feasibility		
Market share evaluation	4.75	0.45
Brand development index	4.25	0.75
Evaluate brand penetration	4.42	0.67
Evaluate customer loyalty	4.75	0.45
Evaluate customer satisfaction	5.00	0.00
Calculate profit margins	4.73	0.47
Determine break-even sales	4.08	0.79
Estimate optimal prices of hotel services	4.58	0.67
Calculate promotional costs	4.25	0.75
Calculate advertising costs per medium	4.17	0.83
Count customers/customer visits	4.25	0.62
Implement SWOT analysis	4.08	1.16
Implement customer relationship management system	4.67	0.65
Innovation		
Support, analyze, record, and assess proposed and innovative ideas, processes, and services on behalf of personnel	3.83	0.94
Evaluate degree of innovation	3.92	0.79
Make use of models for planning, implementation, and control of investments and relevant budgets	4.25	1.22
Use of perceptual analysis for depicting the position of our hotel in relation to competitors in customers' minds	4.45	1.19

Next, respondents were asked about the importance placed by the hotel chain on social sustainability issues such as personnel policies, human rights and local community impact and activities (Table 10.2).

Regarding personnel policies, according to the scores provided by hotel managers, the hotel chains they represent consider as totally important or important (scores above 4) avoiding discrimination in staff recruitment, employing personnel with special skills and evaluating the impact of human resource decisions. In contrast, absenteeism does not seem to be a great problem for these companies.

Concerning human rights and impact assessment on the hotel chain activities on the local community, average scores are near to the midpoint of the scale. Therefore, in general, hotel chains put more interest on their internal stakeholders than in the external groups of interest.

The importance of the environmental policy for the hotel is also assessed (Table 10.3). Widely promoting the hotel's environmental policy to all employees, customers, and suppliers is important for most hotels. The rest of items show also values higher than the midpoint of the scale (i.e. 3).

Respondents are asked about the importance of some specific topics addressed by the environmental policy of the hotel, i.e. water management, energy, solid waste

Table 10.2 Means and standard deviations of items of importance measures for social sustainability

	Mean	St. dev.
Personnel policies		
Workers and managers are hired without an age, gender or nationality criterion	4.33	0.65
Hotel employs people with special skills	4.33	0.78
Absenteeism is a quite often phenomenon among the employees	2.33	1.44
The hotel tries to avoid high staff turnover	3.92	1.24
Salaries and working conditions are above average within local market	3.25	0.62
Hotel budget includes expenses for educational sessions and training	4.00	0.74
In case of important decisions such as personnel downsizing, training, etc., an evaluation of relevant impacts takes place	4.17	0.72
Hotelier is interested in a balanced relationship between work and personal life of personnel	4.00	0.74
Human rights		
Hotel supports local community's activities with money as a percentage of profits before taxes	3.08	0.67
Evaluation of unified value of salaries, bonuses, and other benefits directed to the families of local community	3.17	0.94
There are positive/negative comments or news concerning the actions taken by the hotel in respect of local community	3.50	0.67
Local community impact and activities		
Existence of an annual program for organizing events or supporting public infrastructure for the local community	3.00	0.74
Impact assessment of the support provided to local community organizations	2.92	0.67
Impact assessment of the support provided to environmental organizations	3.17	0.83
Impact assessment of the support provided to training social initiatives	3.33	0.98

Table 10.3 Means and standard deviations of items of importance measures for environmental sustainability: Hotel environmental policy

	Mean	St. dev.
Publicly declare the hotel's specific environmental policy	3.92	0.67
Widely promote the hotel's environmental policy to all employees, customers, and suppliers	4.08	0.67
Environmental policy possesses clear goals (short, medium, and long terms)	3.67	1.07
Hotel has already established action plan for potential environmental problems	3.75	0.62

management, health and safety in indoor environment and green purchasing (Table 10.4).

The average values of all items related to energy are higher than 4, evidencing the importance of measuring and saving energy for these hotels. In general, the importance of these environmental practices is high (i.e. above 3.5), excepting for converting kitchen or organic wastes into compost, that shows an average value below the midpoint of the scale. Figure 10.1 shows the average values for each aspect of sustainability under consideration.

Table 10.4 Means and standard deviations of items of importance measures for environmental sustainability: Topi

	Mean	St. dev.
Water resource		
Install low-flow showerheads and faucet	4.08	0.51
Install water consumption monitoring system to record the tracking	4.25	0.45
In areas where water usage is higher, install metering equipments to track and management	4.17	0.58
Install leak detection system, and provide for quick leak repair	4.25	0.62
Install water recycling system (e.g., reclaimed water or rain water collection and reuse)	4.08	0.51
Install sewage disposal and/or monitoring system	3.75	0.62
Provide customers the choice not to change towels daily	4.50	0.52
Provide customers the choice not to change bed linens daily	4.17	0.94
Energy		
Install energy management system in carrying capacity of electricity (e.g., lighting and air conditioning) of departments	4.50	0.52
For intermittently used areas (e.g., lighting equipment), use timers or sensors	4.33	0.65
Try to use natural lighting	4.17	0.58
Use natural ventilation as much as possible	4.00	0.60
Regularly maintain and clean ventilation, air conditioning, heating, and ice making equipments	4.42	0.67
Check at any time to make sure that all the freezers and windows are closed tightly	4.25	0.62
Actively adopt new energy-saving technologies, such as solar heating devices or wind power, etc.	4.00	0.74
Solid waste		
Avoid using disposable items (e.g., disposable tableware…)	4.17	0.58
Minimize food wasting through appropriate distribution, storage, and management systems	4.42	0.51
Convert kitchen or organic wastes into compost	2.83	1.19
Use refillable containers such as shower bottles	3.42	1.08
Establish two-side photocopy systems in the office, and reuse scraps, envelopes, and paper	4.25	0.75
Use electronic versions to transfer and save data in order to decrease paper consumption and waste	4.50	0.67
Provide recycling bins in public areas, kitchen and back office	4.25	1.06
Indoor environment (health and safety)		
Install air filter cleaning equipment in air conditioning system	4.33	0.78
Use low-vitality organic materials on building and decoration	4.00	0.43
Avoid using toxic and dangerous chemicals	4.42	0.51
Various places inside the hotel (lobby, rooms, corridors, etc.) have moderate lighting	4.42	0.51
Healthy and comfortable indoor environment (temperature, humidity, wind speed) with regular monitoring	4.42	0.51

Table 10.4 (continued)

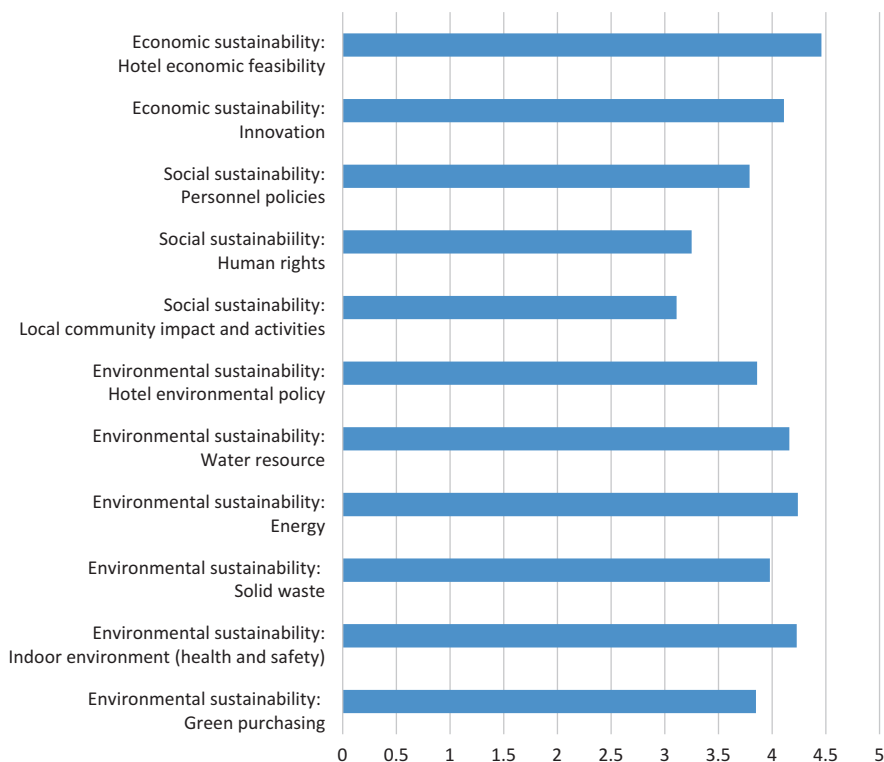|	Mean	St. dev.
Noise volume controls within the statutory standards	4.00	1.04
Should regularly monitor noise levels generated by air-conditioning, bathroom, water supply, and drainage	4.33	0.49
Guest rooms set up with independent air-conditioning systems to reduce the chances of pathogens spreading	3.92	1.31
Green purchasing		
Procure durable goods that can be reused and recycled	3.75	0.97
Only work with suppliers who have a clearly declared environmental policy	3.58	0.67
Purchase local goods (e.g., food and materials)	4.08	0.67
Use minimum amounts of chemicals (e.g., cleaning agents, disinfectants, etc.)	3.83	0.58
Purchase goods that have national certification mark (of environmental protection or health)	4.00	0.60

Fig. 10.1 Means of items of importance measures for each category of sustainability

Table 10.5 Means and standard deviations of items of importance measures for environmental sustainability: Stakeholders

	Mean	St. dev.
Corporate management		
Environmental policy can be successfully implemented under corporate management systems	3.42	0.67
All employees are aware of the appointed objectives and are assigned environmental responsibilities	4.08	0.67
Under the principle of introducing minimum impact to the environment, reduce operating costs	4.25	0.45
Hotel provides concept of green consumption and actively implements it	4.42	0.51
Customer satisfaction with hotels' implementation of environmental policies is more than 80%	4.10	0.57
Service quality of the hotel has obtained relevant certification mark (e.g., ISO14000)	4.25	0.75
Company has related insurance (accidental insurance, environmental damage insurance)	4.40	0.70
Staff education		
Provide training courses and environmental education workshop	3.58	1.08
Employees fully understand the extent of corporate environmental policy	3.67	0.98
Employees develop habits for effective use of resources (e.g., turning off the lights, exhaust fans, and air conditioning when vacating areas)	4.42	0.51
Actively reward employees who provide suggestions on environmental improvement	3.42	0.79
Encourage employees to use public transportation	3.10	1.10
Public community relationship		
Promote the green hotel concept	3.58	0.51
Actively involved in green and environmental protection-related activities	3.00	0.95
Donate surplus materials to local non-profit organizations	3.83	0.72
Actively participate in public affairs of local community	3.58	0.67
Provide green messages in public areas, rooms, and websites	3.75	0.97
Consumer education		
Provide signs to remind customers whenever to save resources	3.58	1.24
Provide customers with ways to participate in recycling and re-utilizing	3.75	0.87
Provide customers with public transportation information (MRT, bus, shuttle, etc.)	4.09	1.04
Bikes rental available at the hotel	2.75	0.62
Car sharing available at the hotel	1.42	0.79
Charging facilities for e-vehicles (bikes; scooters; cars) available at the hotels	1.75	0.87
Free public transport tickets for guests	1.08	0.20

The importance of the environmentally sustainable practices in relation to the hotel stakeholders is also assessed (Table 10.5).

In general, hotel managers consider the involvement of corporate management in the hotel environmental practices as very important. The items with the highest scores are those related to the hotel active implementation of the concept of green

consumption and the existence of an insurance policy covering potential hotel environmental damage.

Concerning staff education, hotel managers consider as very important or totally important developing habits for efficient use of resources among their employees. The rest of environmental practices related with the staff are also considered as important (i.e. average values above 3).

Regarding the importance of the relationship of the hotel with the public community, average scores are near to 4 in donating surplus materials to non-profit organizations and providing green messages. In contrast, hotel managers seem to be indifferent regarding the hotel being actively involved in environmental protection activities.

Last, hotels state they make an effort to educate customers about saving resources and the use of public transport services. Notwithstanding, it is still reduced the perceived importance of providing customers with services for low carbon mobility – bikes rental, car sharing, charging facilities for electrical vehicles, or free public transport tickets for hotel guests. Figure 10.2 summarizes the averages of the items for environmental sustainability for each stakeholder.

In order to test the existence of significant differences in the importance measures for sustainability and stakeholders depending on hotel category (4 vs. 5 stars) and location (city vs. seaside), due to the small sample size, we calculate the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. This test can be used to analyse the existence of differences between groups, being suitable for small samples (5–20 individuals) and for variables measured in an ordinal scale (Nachar 2008) (Table 10.6).

As a result of this analysis, only significant differences are obtained in the importance of measures for hotel economic feasibility between 4 and 5 star hotels, whereas differences are observed between city and seaside hotels for human rights, solid waste management and consumer education, being more important for city hotels in comparison to those located in coastal areas.
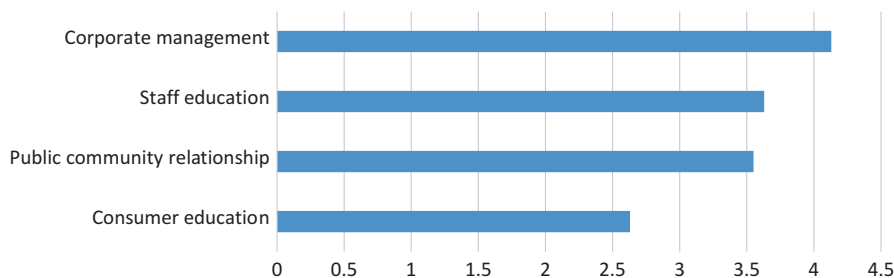

Fig. 10.2 Means of items of importance measures for environmental sustainability for each stakeholder

Table 10.6 Differences in means of importance measures for environmental sustainability and stakeholders depending on hotel category and location

	Ave. rank 4 stars N = 9	Ave. rank 5 stars N = 3	Mann-Whitney U test	Ave. rank City N = 7	Ave. rank Seaside N = 5	Mann-Whitney U test
Sustainability measures						
Economic sustainability						
Hotel economic feasibility	7.72	2.83	2.50[b]	5.71	7.60	12.00
Innovation	6.94	5.17	9.50	6.50	6.50	17.50
Social sustainability						
Personnel policies	6.61	6.17	12.50	6.50	6.50	17.50
Human rights	6.22	7.33	11.00	8.21	4.10	5.50[a]
Local community impact and activ.	6.33	7.00	12.00	7.36	5.30	11.50
Environmental sustainability						
Hotel environmental policy	6.28	7.17	11.50	6.36	6.70	16.50
Water resource	6.39	6.83	12.50	7.79	4.70	8.50
Energy	6.67	6.00	12.00	6.64	6.30	16.50
Solid waste	6.44	6.67	13.00	8.14	4.20	6.00[b]
Indoor environment	6.72	5.83	11.50	6.71	6.20	16.00
Green purchasing	6.11	7.67	10.00	7.21	5.50	12.50
Stakeholders						
Corporate management	6.28	7.17	11.50	6.86	6.00	15.00
Staff education	6.00	8.00	9.00	8.00	4.40	7.00
Public community relationship	6.17	7.50	10.50	6.93	5.90	14.50
Consumer education	6.06	7.83	9.50	8.43	3.80	4.00[a]

[a, b] Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.10$, respectively

10.5 Conclusions

The policies implemented by hotels to guarantee economic, social and environmental sustainability are expected to contribute to the quality of life of residents in tourism destinations, being generally accepted that sustainability is an important driver for the future success of the hotel industry (Boley and Uysal 2013). The perceptions about the importance of sustainable practices by hotel managers may be considered as a determinant of their actual implementation (Carmona et al. 2004).

Although hotel managers of upscale hotel chains interviewed declare considering as very important or totally important most of items used to assess economic,

social and environmental sustainability, the TBL pillar related to economic viability is the one with the highest scores, in the line of previous studies (e.g. Bianchi 2004; Harrison et al. 2003). Environmentally sustainable practices are also prioritized by hotel chains, specially those increasing efficiency and reducing costs in the use of resources. In comparison to practices oriented towards economic and environmental sustainability, social sustainability issues as not considered as important. Therefore, hotel managers seem to be specially concerned on the factors with a direct impact on hotel financial performance, as well as those environmental measures contributing to increase efficiency and reduce costs, i.e. water and energy management. Although many researchers have underlined the importance of social sustainability for the hotel industry (Kang et al. 2010; Tsai et al. 2014), in the case of Spanish hotels in the Mediterranean coast, measures addressing economic and environmental sustainability are more appreciated.

Concerning stakeholders, more attention is paid to practices related to sustainability for internal groups of interest (i.e. corporate management and staff education) in comparison to external stakeholders (e.g. local community), even if they may experience a strong impact of the hotel activity on their quality of life (Uysal et al. 2012). In particular, corporate management followed by staff and public community, are the stakeholders on which measures for environmental sustainability should be mainly focused, while investing in environmentally sustainable measures targeting customers are perceived as much less important. Therefore, there is the need for hotels to consider all stakeholders in order to bring a holistic sustainable strategy into the hospitality industry.

Notwithstanding, the present research is not free from limitations. First, due to the reduced sample size, our findings can not be considered as conclusive, since ANOVA and multigroup analyses cannot be performed. Extending the geographical scope and including also other hotel categories may help to increase the number of respondents. This may also allow to perform comparisons to test if hotel location is a determinant of the implementation of sustainable practices, as some researchers suggest (e.g. Erdogan and Baris 2007; Le et al. 2006).

Second, only one respondent was interviewed in each organization. Additional responses of other members of the hotel staff, and other hotels in the same hotel chain may provide a more objective overview of the perceived importance of the sustainable practices for each organization. In this sense, it would be interesting to analyse if the importance of sustainable practices differs across hotel category or hotel chain characteristics. Qualitative research could be employed in order to gain insight about the reasons for prioritizing the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability in comparison to the social one. In addition to this, managers could be asked about the real implementation of sustainable practices. And not only managers but also employees, customers or specialists could be interviewed for obtaining objective information as the managers' opinion could be biased.

Last, policy makers may find useful to analyse if changes in some interventions may modify hotel managers' perceptions on their relative importance of the practices for economic, social and environmental sustainability. In this way, the use of longitudinal analysis through panel data, i.e. replicating the survey in a future moment of time, may be a further research avenue with practical implications.

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