



**CELTH project**

**Fully Sustainable Hotel Experience**

**Final report**

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# CELTH project: Fully Sustainable Hotel Experience

## Final report

Elena Cavagnaro

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### 1. Introduction

Sustainability and CSR are major CELTH themes. The project elaborates on earlier research in this field at NHTV (F. Melissen) and Stenden (E. Cavagnaro). It approaches sustainability as a crucial element of entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry

### 2. Aim of the project

This project explored opportunities and challenges in the development of a 'Fully sustainable hotel experience' in The Netherlands.

'Fully sustainable hotel experience' is a term coined at Stenden to indicate the need expressed by the hospitality industry to engage in sustainability in a less ad-hoc and more integrated way.

The project has been set up as collaboration between NHTV and Stenden. The researchers involved have been Dr. Frans Melissen and MA Maartje Damen from NHTV and Dr. Cavagnaro and Anne Düweke from Stenden. Students from Stenden bachelor and master program have been involved, too, together with international students attending the VVV conference at NHTV in Breda.

KHN supported the project from the professional side for its start. Later on the support of Harriet Koopman, former GM of Radisson Blue Schiphol, has been invaluable to reach the industry.

### 3. Set up of the project

To reach the aim of the project Stenden and NHTV proposed four main activities:

- A. Literature study, partly carried out by Hospitality Management Students at Stenden and at NHTV under the supervision of the respective Research Groups;
- B. Two focus group meetings, one with representatives from the hospitality industry and one with key informants from its suppliers, to be organized and presided by KHN Woerden. The UAS will analyze the outcomes of both meetings;
- C. Two guests' focus groups, one to be organized by NHTV and one by Stenden. The UAS will analyze the outcomes of both meetings;
- D. Interviews with stakeholders in sustainability certification (such as *Green Key*). The UAS will organize the interviews in co-operation with KHN and analyze their outcomes.

All activities have been performed as planned, with the exception of activity B (focus group with GMs) and activity C (interview with guests).

Organizing a focus group with GMs and other managers from the hospitality industry proved very difficult, notwithstanding the optimism of KHN before the start of the project. The main issue encountered here was a delay by the side of KHN to publish the call for the focus group on their website and other communication media; the tight schedule of GMs and, ultimately, their preference to get personally interviewed. It was in this phase that alongside the personal network of Dr. Melissen and Dr. Cavagnaro the support by Harriet Koopman in opening up her professional network proved essential. During activity C alongside two focus groups with (future) guests also interviews with real guest have taken places. The reason for this change has been the offer by Accor to listen to guests on their premises. Accor requested, though, that guests would be approached individually and listened to only as long as they could make time for the interviewers.

Though this required some change to the set-up of the process, and involved a higher investment of research time than planned, the opportunity to listen to guests on a major hotel premises was taken by the researchers gratefully. Indeed, this offer also testifies of the satisfaction of Accor with the first 2 phases of the project in which they were involved alongside other stakeholders.

#### 4. Promised and achieved results

The table below summarised the promised results (from the project letter) and achieved results.

Promised results	Achieved results	Notes
Direct communication with KHN and industry stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KHN has been partner during the whole project</li> <li>• 14 GM were interviewed</li> <li>• 12 suppliers were interviewed</li> <li>• 39 guests were listened to on Accor and Stenden premises</li> <li>• 5 interviews with other industry stakeholder were conducted</li> </ul>	The support by Accor was unexpected and highly appreciated
4 management publications, one for each activity in the project in Hospitality and Tourism related media and/or the Science Guide website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 management report have been written, send to the participants and after the final approval of the project will be published on CELTH and AIHR website</li> <li>• 1 final management report</li> <li>• 1 master thesis (Anna Düweke) on phase 3 of the project (distinction mark)</li> <li>• 1 interview with E. Cavagnaro on the project has been published in the May number of Entrée (23.000 copies distributed all over The Netherlands)</li> <li>• 1 interview with E. Cavagnaro were also some results of the project are described</li> </ul>	More than planned

	<p>has been published by Science Guide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 interview with Elena Cavagnaro where the project is highlighted is in publication in Stenden 'At Home' (distributed to all Stenden employees)</li> </ul>	
Presentation of the project's results at a congress, e.g. EuroCHRIE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 presentation on the set-up of the project at a CELTH road-show September, 30<sup>th</sup> 2013</li> <li>• 1 presentation on results from activity A. at the CELTH congress on June, 5<sup>th</sup> 2014</li> <li>• 1 presentation of the main results during the International Tourism Student Conference (NHTV Breda) on April, 24<sup>th</sup> 2015</li> <li>• 1 presentation of main results during the UCF/RUG Autumn School on September, 14<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Leeuwarden</li> <li>• 2 presentations of main results of the whole project are planned for the AIHR Congress <i>Guests on Earth</i> on November, 24<sup>th</sup> 2015</li> </ul>	More than planned
1 academic publication on the results from the whole project.	An article co-authored by Frans Melissen, Elena Cavagnaro, Maartje Damen and Anna Düweke has been accepted by the Journal of Vacation Marketing	As planned
Student's direct involvement	5 Stenden MA students (Elective report) 1 Stenden MA student (master thesis) 3 Stenden HRP (BA 3 <sup>rd</sup> year) group	As planned
Student's indirect involvement	1 focus group at NHTV Breda held by E. Cavagnaro 1 workshop at Stenden Leeuwarden with 5 pre-master students held by E. Cavagnaro	More than planned

*Table 1: overview project's results*

Summarizing from the table above, the project has met all set goals and delivered overall more than expected.

## 5. Short summary of major results per activity

This section presents a short summary of the major results per activity.

### 5.1 Literature study.

Though the amount of academic literature dedicated to sustainability in hospitality is increasing, the main focus is still on the environmental dimension and more specifically on eco-efficiency. This is often the case even when stakeholders such as guests are considered.

Several authors voiced the need of a more holistic and integrated approach to sustainability in hospitality.

On the whole, the existing literature concurs in that the hospitality industry needs to take responsibility for its negative environmental and social impacts.

Looking to professional or web-based publications, several sites can be mentioned dedicated to sharing best practices in sustainability. These may be of (academic) associations (such as the CHRIE), hotel chains or association specifically targeted to sustainability (Green Hoteliers).

## 5.2 Interviews with GMs

All GMs interviewed agree that sustainability is here to stay. Essential in this context is transparency about the implemented measures. In the future it is expected that transparency would not always imply looking for certification by an external organization. GMs anticipate that it will be the chain itself to cater for certification (see e.g. Accor Planet 21 program). If an external organization is asked then it should listen to the needs of the hotel chain, and integrate the existing hotel (chain) certifications into the sustainability certification. A number of the interviewees are rather negative about Green Key: this Dutch organization is seen as not very flexible and too much focused on static measures. This is seen as counterproductive with respect to innovation and on-going improvement.

Overall two outcomes are interesting. Firstly, the absence of a vision on the future development of sustainability in hospitality is striking. Men would expect that managers in such high position and managing hotels with a sustainability agenda would look some years ahead. This happens not to be the case.

Secondly, the shown degree of uneasiness at the idea of involving guests brings us to the question whether GMs know their guests as good as they think they do. This question is central to the third phase of the project, that becomes therefore even more interesting than expected.

Thirdly, the rather harsh opinion about certification systems such as Green Key is surprising as Green Key is the leader for green certification on the Dutch market. To put this last point into perspective, it is important to note that not all interviewees that expressed negative feedback regarding Green Key are actually Green Key certified.

Obviously, we have asked a Green Key representative for a reaction on the rather harsh comments of hoteliers with respect to this certification scheme. In large hotels, Green Key communicates about the opportunities of its certification mostly at operational level (Green Key coordinator) and less at managerial level (i.e. the level covered by the person interviewed during this project). Simultaneously, Green Key points out that a lot more is happening and possible than most hoteliers seem to realize or make use of, especially based on a recent revision (2016-2018) of the Green Key standards, which incorporates: increasing the number of bonus point opportunities from 2 to 9 categories, and the inclusion of optional norms. Together with the dispensation mechanism within the scheme, this allows hotels to create their own profile and portfolio, also for the future. This is further supported, according to Green Key, with providing practical advice during certification sessions on location and additional services such as information sessions. Specifically regarding a future-focus, Green Key is proactively involved in linking Green Key to future development in (European) regulation, also in consultation with branch organizations. Moreover, green Key points to the positive judgment by a Dutch consumers' organization (Cosumentenbond) of its certification scheme.

### 5.3 Focus group with suppliers

Differently from most GMs for which sustainability seems to be in general an add-on to the existing practice, for the interviewed suppliers sustainability is a new business model. It is the central philosophy around which they design and from which they operate their own organizations.

External certification in general and *Cradle to Cradle* certification in particular is seen as a valuable tool because it supports the design of sustainable operations. Moreover, external certification is required by many clients – including hoteliers. The interviewees are aware that certification may be a questionable practice, surely in the case when the certification body is a commercial organization. Even more questionable, though, are classification systems such as the star system in the hospitality industry. This system gives no consideration to sustainability.

Suppliers agree that hotels are no forerunners in sustainability. They add that considering the claims of several existing and (probably) the majority of new guests this is a very risky stance.

The opinion held by suppliers is confirmed by other stakeholders that were interviewed in the last phase of the projects, such as architects involved in hotel building (renovation). They too agree that sustainability seems not to be top of the mind for hoteliers and point also to weaknesses in law and regulations making difficult to implement innovative solutions such as old glass as ballast on roofs. Moreover, the split existing in most hotel between ownership and management is seen as a complicating factor. More research is surely needed on the impact of hotel ownership on sustainability.

### 5.4 Interviews with guests

The majority of respondents is aware of the meaning and importance of sustainability. There are few respondents who have a very clear and thorough understanding of sustainability. Interestingly they see the limits of eco-efficiency and voice that sustainability goes far beyond that. Only a couple of interviewees do not understand the concept at all. Generally, sustainability is not an unknown area anymore and the sample provides a rather clear picture on what hotel guests understand, expect and accept in terms of sustainability in a hotel. On the same note, it also shows to be a grey area when it comes to the people and profit aspect as well as innovations and what more can be done. 8

In this activity of the *Fully sustainable hotel experience* project it becomes apparent how influential hotels, the information they provide and measurements they undertake are in terms of guests association with sustainability. This might also be the reason why mainly planet aspects are associated with sustainability and not so much the people and profit bottom lines which are mostly invisible and not communicated to the guest. The hotel does not only shape the guests understanding of sustainability in terms of hotels, but also sustainability in general as indicated by the keywords mentioned. Further, hotel guests are willing and open for more steps towards sustainability in hotels, they want them to take the lead. It is certainly a topic that concerns most of them and even worries a few. Whereas most respondents would not pay more for a sustainable hotel, they are mostly willing to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of sustainability, if reasonable and communicated as such.

## 5.5 Conclusion

After some challenges in its beginning, the project has run smoothly and has yield more than the expected results. Alongside insights in the present stance of hoteliers, their suppliers and guests concerning sustainability the project has also strengthened the bond between NHTV and Stenden, and between these institutions on one side and the industry on the other. That Accor allowed the researcher to listen to their guests on their own premises testify of the level of trust reached during the project.

Probably the most interesting result of the project is the insight that GMs seem not to understand their guests properly. While a majority of guests is aware of the sustainability challenge and measures that hotels can take, GMs still think that guests are on the whole unaware or unconcerned. While a majority of guests asks for more measures, specifically on food waste, and is even ready to forego some comfort if needed, hoteliers are mostly concerned with their comfort. While a consistent minority of guests clearly sees the difference between eco-efficiency and sustainability, GMs tend still to conflate the two and suppose that their guest think the same. Finally, while GMs think that guests do not wish to get disturbed by more information, guests are asking for it – under the condition that the information communicated is timely, authentic and verifiable and the communication tool itself well designed.

This gap needs further analysis in order to understand its cause better and be able to design ways to overcome it. It may be at the centre of a new CELTH project.



## Appendixes

### 1. Project proposal



## Project proposal form

### Project title

Fully sustainable hotel experience
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### Project leader

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### Fit within CELTH themes

Societal and economic value	
Innovative entrepreneurship	2
Sustainable development	1
Coastal destinations	

Please describe how the project fits within the theme(s).

*For example: does it build on previous research of CELTH partners in one of the themes; is the project crucial for further activities in the theme?*

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Sustainability and CSR are major CELTH themes. The project elaborates on earlier research in this field at NHTV (F. Melissen) and Stenden (E. Cavagnaro). It approaches sustainability as a crucial element of entrepreneurship in the hospitality industry.

## **Problem statement**

*Please describe which (current or latent) question in the industry is addressed.*

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This project proposes to explore opportunities and challenges in the development of a 'Fully sustainable hotel experience' in The Netherlands.

'Fully sustainable hotel experience' is a term coined at Stenden to indicate the need expressed by the hospitality industry to engage in sustainability in a less ad-hoc and more integrated way. In the section on 'Approach' this current question from the industry will be discussed in more detail.

## **Partners in the project**

*Please describe which universities of applied sciences are involved in the project and the role they have in the project.*

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CELTH partners NHTV (under leadership of Frans Melissen) and Stenden (under leadership of Elena Cavagnaro) will cooperate in this project in equal parts to secure the optimal employing of both their knowledge about sustainability and their networks in the hospitality industry.

It is important to notice that NHTV has prepared and submitted a SIA RAAK proposal this year, based on customer journey and touch point design in hospitals. Knowledge on which this SIA RAAK proposal is based will be fed into the 'Fully sustainable hotel experience' project. The other way round holds also true. In short: both projects will benefit from each other.

Stenden on her side has rounded off two (3<sup>rd</sup> year) students' projects in which a start has been made with the description of some components of a 'Fully sustainable hotel experience'. These projects have been supported by industry partners - such as Stenden University Hotel and EComunity Park in Oosterwolde, where the building of a sustainable hotel is planned for 2014. The here proposed project will benefit from the already gathered knowledge and help strengthening it.

*Please describe which partners from the industry are involved in the project and the role they have in the project.*

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The need to set further steps in the integration of sustainability in hotels' strategy and operations was voiced by the industry during a research conducted by Stenden Research Unit in Service Studies. On the basis of the research's results KHN (Eveline de Kruif) was approached. KHN recognized the relevance of this issue for the industry and agreed to open up KHN network in order to set up the two focus groups needed for this project.

Two focus groups are intended to reach 24-30 key informants from the hospitality industry and its suppliers. Moreover, interviews are planned with 5 other stakeholders from the industry, such as representatives from certification organizations.

KHN has also agreed to give feedback on the whole research design of this project.

## **Approach**

*Please describe the project approach and (in the case of research) which methods are used.*

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In 2011-2012 Stenden Research Unit in Service Studies researched the main issues connected with the further integration of sustainability in hospitality. To this scope 12

professionals from the hospitality industry were interviewed. One of the most striking results from the interviews was the call for a new approach to sustainability in the hospitality industry. Respondents voiced the need to go a step further than an ad-hoc sustainability policy, often reduced (in their own words) to the use of organic ingredients in the kitchen or to measures for water and energy reduction. They stressed the need to design an approach to sustainability that is dedicated to hotels; integrates all three sustainability dimensions (people; planet and profit) and engages staff and guests without jeopardizing their guest-experience<sup>1</sup>. This need was labeled 'Fully sustainable hotel experience' by Stenden researchers, a label that got the approval of the interviewed professionals.

Though it is already interesting to have recognized the existence of this need, many aspects still remain unclear. Some of the questions that need to be answered are:

- What can be learnt from best practices regarding the integration of people, planet and profit in hospitality operations?
- What can be learnt from best practices in communicating and engaging staff and guests in the hotel sustainability efforts?
- Which are the challenges that still need to be addressed, focusing both on hard (e.g. product related) and soft (e.g. behavioral) aspects of sustainability?
- Which are the specific needs felt by the hospitality industry related to both hard and soft aspects?
- Are suppliers willingly and able to address these needs?
- What is the understanding of guests of sustainability in hospitality? What do they expect to find in a hotel in relation to both hard and soft aspects of sustainability? Etc.

The here proposed project is intended to explore answers to these and similar questions, both from the side of the supply (hotels and their supplier) and of the demand (leisure and business guests).

End in mind of the present project is to clarify opportunities and challenges connected with the design of a fully sustainable hotel experience, and in the process to form a consortium where supply and demand within the hospitality industry are represented. This consortium will then look for further opportunities for the development and implementation of a fully sustainable experience for hotel guests (for example via SIA RAAK).

At this juncture it is essential to stress that the end in mind of this project is not to come with a new certification system. On the contrary: the project wishes to be a step towards making 'sustainability' business as usual. So the main question will not be: how to certify? But: how to offer a *guest* a fully sustainable hotel *experience*?

If answering this question leads to new indicators of sustainability in hospitality, then these will be proposed as an integration to existing classification systems, such as 'Green Key', or the Hotelstar Union.

To reach the aim of the project Stenden and NHTV proposes four main activities:

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<sup>1</sup> See: Cavagnaro, E. (in press). Mind the gap: researching 'sustainability in hospitality' at the edge of academic and industry interests, *Journal of Research in Hospitality Management*, 2 (1-2).

- E. Literature study, carried out by Hospitality Management Students at Stenden and at NHTV under the supervision of the respective Research Group;
- F. Two focus group meetings, one with representatives from the hospitality industry and one with key informants from its suppliers, to be organized and presided by KHN Woerden. The UAS will analyze the outcomes of both meetings;
- G. Two guests' focus groups, one to be organized by NHTV and one by Stenden. The UAS will analyze the outcomes of both meetings;
- H. Interviews with stakeholders in sustainability certification (such as *Green Key*). The UAS will organize the interviews in co-operation with KHN and analyze their outcomes.

During the focus groups in activity B. best practices, needs, challenges and opportunities of integrating sustainability in hospitality will be discussed, considering both the soft and the hard aspects of hotel operations. Topics that will be discussed are exemplified in the questions listed above.

During the focus groups with guests (activity C.) their understanding of sustainability in hospitality, their expectations and their willingness to pay for it will be explored. It has already been observed that it is not the intention of the parties involved in the project to develop a new certification instrument. Activity D. aims at sharing the outcomes of the previous activities with stakeholders involved into the certification of sustainability in hospitality so that – eventually – they could integrate the outcomes to this research into existing systems.

*The results of the project will be used in a SIA-RAAK proposal for a follow-up project (this activity is not part of this proposal).*

### **Relation to education**

*Please describe the relation between the project and education: is there any student involvement, will the results be used in education and to what extent?*

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Students will be actively involved in:

- Research projects feeding the literature study for the project;
- Elaboration and analysis of focus groups.

It goes without saying that the outcomes of the projects will be reflected in future educational programmes.

### **Results**

*Please describe the results of the project, intended outcomes, and publications*

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It is expected that during each activity of the project (management focused) publications will be generated by the team of joint research lecturers and students of the involved UAS.

## Communication

*Please describe how the project (results) will be communicated, to the industry, to media (general public versus trade press), to the academic world.*

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- Direct communication with KHN and industry stakeholders;
- 4 management publications, one for each activity in the project in Hospitality and Tourism related media and/or the Science Guide website.
- presentation of the project's results at a congress, e.g. EuroCHRIE
- 1 academic publication on the results from the whole project.

Innovative approaches to sustainability can be considered pressworthy, and are usually reflected in the (professional) press and on websites.

## Strategic importance to CELTH

*Please describe the importance of the knowledge developed (does it give CELTH an advantage over other partners, is it unique in the Netherlands / world?). And please describe the importance of the partnership in the project.*

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At this moment there is a lack of knowledge about how guests look at sustainability in connection with the hospitality industry. Moreover, notwithstanding the developments of the last few years, there is a lack of knowledge about availability of 'fully sustainable' – including cradle-to-cradle - solutions for several aspects of the hospitality value chain from transport via room (re)urbishment to menu offer. Finally, people related aspects of sustainability have not yet been addressed by the hospitality industry with the same attention that planet related issues have commanded. By filling in these gaps CELTH could strengthen its profile as a source of applied knowledge into sustainability in the hospitality industry.

The end in mind of this project is to come to a well-designed request for further financial support for the concrete development of a 'fully sustainable hotel experience' by e.g. SIA RAAK. If this request is successful, it will have also a positive spin-off effect on CELTH.

## Budget

*Please provide a budget below, describing all costs and funding of the project.*

Costs		Funding	
Staff time of universities of applied sciences <i>(please specify per partner)</i>	Stenden 210 hrs. NHTV 210 hrs. (€37.800 equiv.)	Universities of applied sciences - staff time <i>(please specify per partner)</i>	Stenden 88 hrs. NHTV 88 hrs. (€15.840)
Staff time of industry partners	KHN 40 hrs. Focus groups 240 hrs. (€30.520)	Industry partners - staff time <i>(please specify per partner)</i>	280h staff time (€30.520 equiv.)

	equiv.)		
Travel costs <i>(please specify)</i>	€900 Breda/LWD- Woerden	CELTH	244 hrs. (€21.960) + €5.400 = €27.360
Materials <i>(please specify)</i>	€3.500 Meeting rooms and catering for focus groups. €1.000 printing and materials		
Other external costs <i>(please specify)</i>			
Total	€73.720	Total	€73.720

*Please describe the reasoning behind the proposed funding.*

In the proposed project activity A (the literature study) is a 'closed wallet' project, in which all partners involved invest their hours (88 hours supervision per partner).

Activities B, C and D are partially supported by the involved industry partners through investment of their hours. For travel costs; out of pocket costs and the researchers' hours invested in the gathering and analysis of data from the industry (244 hrs. in total) NHTV and Stenden asks for CELTH support.

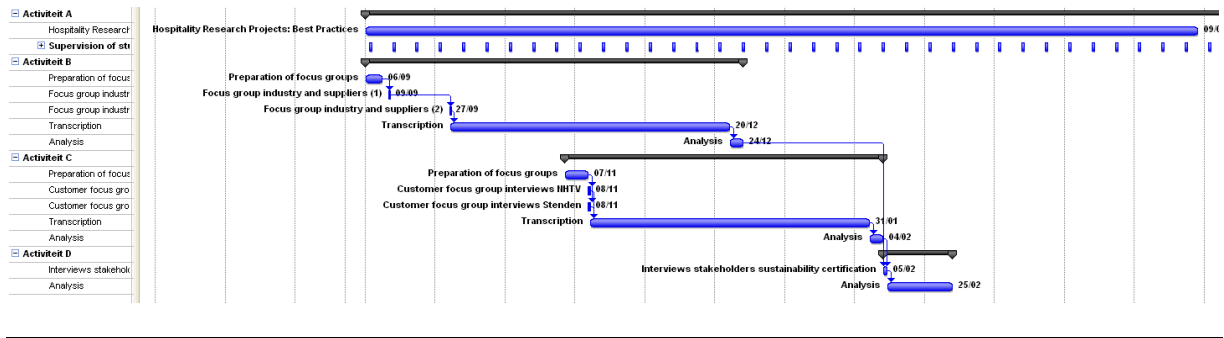
Note: The difference in the estimated costs in the project proposal (dd 20 06 2013) and the present budget are due to the following:

- In the proposal the investment of hours by industry partners was not reckoned with;
- In the proposal activity D consisted of one interview with GreenKey. The present proposal foresees in five interviews with the scope of better sharing the outcomes of activity B and C with industry stakeholders. If this constitutes an issue, then phase D can be changed back to the original plan.

## **Risks**

*Please describe the risks of the project, including any financial risks.*

Without the involvement of KHN a major risk could have been reaching out to key informants from the hospitality industry.



ote to the planning: the start datum of the project depends on CELTH approval.

## 2. Report on interviews with GM

### Management rapport

### Fully sustainable hotel experience – de General Managers aan het woord

September 2014

Van: E. Cavagnaro, F. Melissen, A. Duweke en M. Damen

Voor: respondenten; CELTH programma management; andere belangstellenden

#### *Inleiding*

Het project *Fully sustainable hotel experience* kijkt naar de toekomst van duurzaamheid in de hotelindustrie. Onder duurzaamheid wordt verstaan: een manier van bedrijfsvoering die winst oplevert zonder schade toe te brengen aan mens en milieu. Dit project is mede gefinancierd door CELTH en wordt uitgevoerd door onderzoekers uit Stenden (Leeuwarden) en de NHTV (Breda).

De eerste activiteit van het project is hotelmanagers te bevragen naar hun visie over de ontwikkeling van duurzaamheid in de komende 5 à 10 jaar, hun dromen en de drempels die zij ervaren bij het implementeren van duurzaamheid.

In totaal zijn 12 managers geïnterviewd. Voor de representativiteit zijn mannelijke en vrouwelijke managers geïnterviewd die werkzaam zijn bij ketens of onafhankelijk hotels in de Randstad maar ook in het Noorden en Zuiden van het land. We constateren wel dat de meeste respondenten werken in het luxe segment.

Hieronder worden de belangrijkste uitkomsten samengevat in drie secties: visie op de toekomst, *best practices*, dromen en drempels. In de conclusie kijken we ook nog kort naar de rol van certificering.

#### *Visie op de toekomst*

De respondenten hadden veel moeite met het beantwoorden van de vraag naar de kenmerken van een duurzaam hotel over 5 à 10 jaar. Dit is een interessant gegeven, want het wordt in de literatuur aangenomen dat zonder een lange termijn visie het onmogelijk is om duurzaamheid na te streven/te bereiken.

De meesten General Managers (GMs) die een antwoord op deze vraag hadden, denken dat in de komende jaren de technologie fors zal ontwikkelen en nog meer besparingen in water- en energiegebruik mogelijk zal maken zonder dat de gasten het opmerken. Enkele respondenten onderstrepen echter het belang dat samenwerking zal krijgen in de toekomst. Samenwerking met andere hotels: in de keten en met partijen in de omgeving van het hotel. In deze visie zullen grote stappen in verduurzaming alleen mogelijk zijn als meer partijen samen werken bij het zoeken naar een optimale oplossing – bijvoorbeeld bij het inperken van transport of bij het oplossen van maatschappelijke problemen zoals werkloosheid onder kwetsbare groepen.

#### *Best practices en dromen*

Bij alle geïnterviewden behalve één, is duurzaamheid (vooral in de betekenis van water- en energiebesparing) een vast onderdeel geworden van de dagelijkse praktijk: het is opgenomen in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) en rapportages. Vergeleken met enkele jaren geleden is dit een grote stap vooruit.



Ook interessant is op te merken dat de aandacht zich steeds meer richt op het nemen van maatregelen die een grote(re) positieve impact hebben. Zoals één van de respondenten zei: *we gaan over naar inductie en dat bespaart meer dan al die honderden LED lampjes.*

Er is ook een verschuiving van het ad hoc nemen van maatregelen naar een meer planmatige benadering. Zoals een andere geïnterviewde zei: *we kunnen niet alles tegelijk, daarom maken we nu een masterplan dat aangeeft wat we de komende 2 à 3 jaar willen bereiken en dan gaan we stap voor stap verder.*

Interessant is op te merken dat de meeste *best practices* die werden genoemd achter de schermen zijn en dus uit het zicht van de gasten. Bovendien hebben ze bijna allemaal betrekking op besparingen van water en energiegebruik of op materialen – en dus uitsluitend op de milieu dimensie van duurzaamheid. De service component – kenmerkend bij de gastvrijheidsindustrie – lijkt bij duurzaamheid geen rol te spelen.

De meest genoemde dromen liggen ook in de domein van besparingen; zelden werd de mogelijkheid genoemd om zelf energie op te wekken. Ook vaak genoemd als droom is (verdere) reductie van voedselverspilling.

Heel opvallend is dat aandacht voor de sociale component op lokaal niveau erg persoonsafhankelijk lijkt te zijn, ook in de ogen van de geïnterviewden. Dromen op sociaal vlak zijn dus meestal dromen van de GM en worden aangejaagd door de GM, veel minder vaak door het hotel of de keten, tenzij het gaat om *corporate citizenship* op ketenniveau gaat.

### *Drempels*

Anders dan de literatuur doet vermoeden, worden weinig drempels ervaren in de implementatie van duurzaamheid. Wetgeving werd amper genoemd, en zo ook moeilijkheden om leveranciers duurzame goederen te laten leveren. De meest gehoorde klacht betreft de ouderdom van gebouwen en dit geldt als een beperking om besparingsmaatregelen te realiseren.

De wensen van klanten worden ook gezien als een drempel. Zoals bijvoorbeeld een geïnterviewde zei: *we werken zo veel mogelijk met lokale producten van het seizoen; maar als een gast aardbeien in de winter wil, dan krijg hij die.*

Andere respondenten wijzen op de luxe die gasten gewend zijn, ook thuis, en de noodzaak om deze luxe te evenaren en liefst te overtreffen. Opvallend is dat luxe hier gezien wordt als meer van hetzelfde – meer en dikkere handdoeken, bijvoorbeeld.

Aan de andere kant werd ook juist de klant gezien als de motor achter duurzaamheid: de aandacht van de gemiddelde burger voor deze problematiek stijgt – werd gezegd – en dit zie je terug in vragen van klanten en van medewerkers. Bijvoorbeeld vragen naar biologische producten of opmerkingen over tonijn of paling op het menu.

Vaak maakten onze respondenten onderscheid tussen type klanten, bijvoorbeeld naar herkomst of doel van hun verblijf. Maar hierbij is er geen consensus te vinden welk type klant het meest geeft om duurzaamheid. Bijvoorbeeld: volgens enkele respondenten zijn Chinezen verder dan de meeste andere gasten, terwijl zij volgens anderen juist achter lopen den opzichte van bijvoorbeeld Nederlanders of Duitsers.

### *Conclusie*

Duurzaamheid is voor alle geïnterviewden blijvend. Hierbij wordt benadrukt dat men transparant naar de markt moet zijn over de genomen maatregelen. Transparantie zal in de toekomst echter niet altijd betekenen dat men voor externe certificering kiest. Certificering zal steeds meer door de keten worden verzorgd, of door organisaties die in gesprek treden met een hotel over te nemen maatregelen. In dit opzicht zijn alle geïnterviewden behalve één negatief over GreenKey: deze Nederlandse instantie wordt gezien als weinig flexibel en voorstander van afvinklijsten op basis van statische maatregelen in plaats van voorstander van continue verbetering. Om dit bijzonder negatief beeld in de juiste perspectief te zetten is wel van belang om te onderstrepen dat niet alle deelnemende hotel zijn Green Key gecertificeerd.

Concluderend vallen twee zaken op: het ontbreken van een visie over de toekomstige ontwikkeling van duurzaamheid aan de ene kant en een zekere aversie om de gast erbij te betrekken aan de andere. De vraag rijst hierbij of men de gast goed kent; een spannend vooruitzicht voor het volgende deel van het onderzoek dat zich juist richt op gasten en hun verwachtingen en wensen bij een 'fully sustainable hotel experience'.

### 3. Report on Focus group with suppliers

#### Management rapport

#### Fully sustainable hotel experience – de leveranciers aan het woord

November 2014

Van: E. Cavagnaro, F. Melissen, A. Duweke

Voor: respondenten; CELTH programma management; andere belangstellenden

#### *Inleiding*

Het project *Fully sustainable hotel experience* kijkt naar de toekomst van duurzaamheid in de hotelindustrie. Onder duurzaamheid wordt verstaan: een manier van bedrijfsvoering die winst oplevert zonder schade toe te brengen aan mens en milieu. Dit project is mede gefinancierd door CELTH en wordt uitgevoerd door onderzoekers uit Stenden (Leeuwarden) en de NHTV (Breda).

De tweede activiteit van het project is leveranciers te bevragen naar hun visie over de ontwikkeling van duurzaamheid in de komende 5 à 10 jaar, hun rol en de drempels die zij ervaren bij het implementeren van duurzaamheid.

Er is een focusgroep georganiseerd waaraan 11 deelnemers uit 7 verschillende bedrijven hebben deelgenomen. Voor de representativiteit zijn leveranciers gezocht van uiteenlopende producten en diensten, van bedden en tapijt tot linnen; van voedsel tot *amenities*. Ook een gespecialiseerd projectbureau was aanwezig bij de focusgroep. Allemaal zijn ze voorlopers bij duurzaamheid.

Hieronder worden de belangrijkste uitkomsten samengevat in drie secties: duurzaamheid, visie op de toekomst, eigen rol en de gast. In de conclusie kijken we ook nog kort naar de rol van certificering.

#### *Duurzaamheid*

Alle respondenten hebben een duidelijke visie over duurzaamheid, waarbij naargelang het type bedrijf ook begrijpelijke verschillen zijn in accenten.

Wat opvalt is dat bij de aanwezige organisaties duurzaamheid geen *add-on* is maar in alle vezels van de organisatie is verweven: van visie en missie tot processen en procedures; van het meten van resultaten en tot de keuzes van eigen leveranciers.

Er worden soms drempels ervaren, bijvoorbeeld het ontbreken van een nog duurzamer oplossing of beperkingen bij certificering van producten (zie ook hieronder).

Er is consensus dat als duurzaamheid niet door de top gedragen wordt, dat het gedoemd is te mislukken. Dit geldt ook bij hotels: het hoofdkantoor moet een duidelijk beleid hebben, want GMs runnen een hotel alleen een aantal jaren en bovendien is hun autonomie beperkt.

#### *Visie op de toekomst van duurzame hotels*

De respondenten hadden enkele moeite met het beantwoorden van de vraag naar de kenmerken van een duurzaam hotel over 5 à 10 jaar. Toch werd uiteindelijk een helder beeld geschetst: een volledig duurzaam hotel is zelfvoorzienend als het gaat om energie en water, en levert zo mogelijk elf energie op. Verbouwt zijn eigen groente, bijvoorbeeld op het dak; gebruikt planten als bekleding van wanden; heeft een uitstekende klimaatbeheersingssysteem maar zonder airco's; gebruikt lokale producten – dit laatste is nu al gezien als een vanzelfsprekend aspect.

Zeer interessant is de nadruk op de sociale component: het gaat hierbij niet alleen om samenwerking met de omringende gemeenschap, maar ook om op een respectvolle manier omgaan met de eigen medewerkers.

Waarschijnlijk trekt dit hotel ook andere, meer bewuste gasten naar zich toe. Maar het is geen hotel voor de happy few.

#### *Eigen rol en rol van hoteliers*

Er is consensus dat het is de rol van leveranciers om te innoveren. Dus dat de vraag naar duurzame innovatie niet van hotels komt, wordt niet ervaren als een probleem.

Wel zien leveranciers zich als een deel van een (lange) keten: lals alle partijen in de keten meewerken (inclusief de klant, het hotel) dan kunnen grote stappen gezet worden; anders wordt het moeizaam.

Hoteliers (en andere partijen) vragen wel om certificering om te kunnen meedoen met een tender, een offerte. Maar als de aangeboden product en dienst geen andere toegevoegde waarde heeft, zal de voorkeur aan een andere (wellicht minder duurzame bedrijf) worden gegeven. Prijs speelt nog steeds een belangrijk rol: essentieel is GMs te laten inzien dat men op langere termijn besparingen kan realiseren tov een concurrerend product bijvoorbeeld omdat de aangeboden duurzame product vaker gewassen kan worden zonder verlies van kwaliteit.

Ontzorgen wordt ook gezien als een belangrijke rol van leveranciers: door oude producten op te halen; onderdelen te hergebruiken; helpen bij het vertellen van het verhaal achter de product naar de gast toe.

Leveranciers herkennen niet een speciale aandacht vanuit hotels voor de sociale component van duurzaamheid.

#### *De gast*

Er is consensus dat de gast moet worden geïnformeerd over duurzame maatregelen genomen in een hotel, ook is er twijfel over of deze generatie haar keuze laat bepalen door deze informatie.

Over de manier waarop gasten kunnen worden geïnformeerd worden suggesties gedaan die verder gaan dan alleen de gebruikelijke kaartjes over hergebruik van handdoeken of linnen: het gaat om design (waarbij wel wordt opgemerkt dat daarbij de bewustzijn van de gast niet wordt aangesproken); over financiële prikkels; over storytelling mede door het personeel; over ervaren van authentieke gastvrijheid.

Ook zijn er twijfels over de huidige generatie, er heerst consensus dat de komende generatie veel bewuster is. Zij zullen eisen dat hotels duurzaam zijn – als hotels dan nog achterlopen in dit opzicht zullen ze de competitie om de gast verliezen.

Nu al zijn trends zichtbaar waarop hotel moeten gaan inspelen: het gaat niet alleen om aandacht voor gezond, natuurlijke en lokale voeding maar ook om het afnemen van behoefte aan bezit (*share economy*). Hotels moeten op deze trends inspelen, mede met behulp van leveranciers.

De gast ziet meer dan men denkt: een transparante, authentiek verhaal gedragen door de medewerkers is essentieel. Maar de vraag is of hotel met hun enorme nadruk op efficiëntie dit kunnen leveren (in het algemeen en tov duurzaamheid in het bijzonder). Dat veel angsten nu kiezen voor andere type accommodaties is een signaal.

#### *Conclusie*

Bij de geïnterviewde leveranciers staat duurzaamheid gelijk aan hoe ze hun bedrijf vormgeven en opereren. Het gaat veel verder dan wat de meeste GMs onder duurzaamheid verstaan.

Certificering zoals Cradle to Cradle wordt nagestreefd omdat helpt in het vormgeven van een duurzame bedrijfsvoering; en/of omdat zonder externe certificering men niet kan bedingen voor opdrachten. Er zijn wel vraagtekens bij certificeringen, zeker als achter de keurmerk een commerciële partij schuilgaat. Er is ook kritiek op classificatiesystemen zoals de sterrenstelsysteem want daar bij wordt geen rekening gehouden met duurzaamheid. Leveranciers zijn van mening dat hotel niet voorlopen bij verduurzaming, en dat (gezien de eisen van enkele bestaande en mogelijke en meerderheid van de nieuwe gasten) dit zeer risicovol is.

## 4. Report on focus groups and interviews with guests

### Management report (in English)

#### Fully sustainable hotel experience – hotel guests

April 2015

By: E. Cavagnaro; A. Duweke; F. Melissen

For: CELTH program management; other interested parties

#### *Introduction*

The *Fully sustainable hotel experience* project looks at the future of sustainability in the hotel industry. Sustainability means: creating value on the triple bottom line of people, planet and profit. This *Fully sustainable hotel experience* project is supported by CELTH and is carried out by researchers from Stenden (Leeuwarden) and NHTV (Breda). The project aims at understanding the vision of hotel managers, suppliers and guests on the implementation of sustainability in hospitality. Hotel managers and suppliers have been, respectively, the target of the first and second activity of this project. Results of both these activities are summarized in the Appendixes 2 and 3 of the present report.

The project's third activity is to question hotel guests about their understanding of sustainability and their expectations of a sustainable hotel. This is done by means of direct questions as well as by taking the respondents on parts of an imaginary guest journey through a hotel. Finding out whether or not guests want to be informed about sustainability measures, and, if so, how this information should be provided, is another aim of the study. Additional areas of attention are the possible sacrifice of comfort and the guests' understanding of sustainable and healthy food.

Interviews were conducted at a four-star, midscale hotel in Den Haag City Centre, during three days (15 December 2014; 19 & 20 January 2015). Eighteen of the guests who were approached declined to participate in the interview. Thirty interviews were held, four of which were not audio-recorded at the request of the interviewees. Seventeen respondents were men and thirteen were women. Twenty-six respondents were travelling for business purposes and two for leisure, while two combined business with leisure. The respondents were of different nationalities, including people from India, the Caribbean and Africa. The majority, however, were residents of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The interviews ranged from approximately two to twenty minutes. This variation was due to the limited time available to the hotel guests.

Alongside interviews, a focus group with eight Dutch representatives of the so-called Millennial Generation (five female, three male) was held on 11 February 2015 at the NHTV in Breda. Millennials were born between 1980 and 2000. Not only do they represent the hotel guests of the future, they already form an important market segment for hotels now. The focus group was audio recorded and lasted about 50 minutes. As the results of the interviews and the focus group support each other, the remainder of this report refers to both, unless stated otherwise.

The main results are summarised in six sections: association with sustainability; expectations of a sustainable hotel; booking and information about sustainability; comfort; associated colours, materials, and shapes; and, last but not least, food.

#### *Association with sustainability*

During the interviews and the focus group, the first question asked was about associations with the term *sustainability*. Almost all respondents had more than one

association with this term. The keywords and responses<sup>2</sup> given have been grouped according to the triple bottom line of people, planet and profit, as introduced by John Elkington. The majority of keywords (12 out of 18) and responses (48 out of 56) related to the 'planet' bottom line. Only a few (4) respondents recognised the bottom lines 'people' and 'profit'. The following quote nicely illustrates the link that guests made between sustainability and the financial bottom line:

*"Sustainability is also hard business. You can make money with it."* (Interview 3).

This interviewee clearly refers to eco-efficiency measures, i.e. planet-related measures with an impact on the financial bottom line.

While the 'planet' bottom line seemed to be top-of-mind for hotel guests, in the focus group discussion the bottom line 'people' received increasing attention during the conversation. Looking into the associations more specifically, it is interesting to note that waste and re-cycling related actions are the measures most often mentioned. It seems that guests are particularly aware of these types of measures. Furthermore, both the interviewees and the respondents of the focus group associated renewable energy and energy and water conservation with sustainability. Interestingly, four interviewees spontaneously mentioned the towel policy when asked about an association with the term sustainability. This might be explained by the fact that guests at the hotel where the interviews took place were informed about this specific sustainability measure by a card on the towel rack: they therefore had a recent memory of it. The following quote offers a nice illustration of this point:

*"They plant trees with our towels. Well, but it makes sense. So that's what came to me immediately when you asked about this idea of sustainability."* (Interview nr. 14).

Sustainability is a very broad term, even perceived as vague by some authors. It is argued by various scientists that guests do not have a clear view of what the term means. However, the results from our interviews and focus group presented above challenge this vision. Even more interestingly, several hotel guests (15 to be precise) recognised that a long-term vision and leaving the earth liveable for future generations are key to achieving sustainability. Their answer is in line with the classic definition of sustainability proposed by Brundtland in 1987: sustainability is a form of development that does not jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. At least half of the respondents may therefore be considered well informed about sustainability. Moreover, as mentioned above, respondents also related, though in varying degrees, to the 'people' bottom line proposed by John Elkington in 1997. The triple bottom line is by now a common tool for managing and reporting on sustainability. Finally, it should be noted that only two respondents had no understanding of sustainability and were given a brief description by the interviewers. The conclusion can therefore be drawn that, nowadays, hotel guests are sustainability-savvy.

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<sup>2</sup> Keywords: interviews are analysed and summed up according to various keywords; Responses: number of times keywords are mentioned; responses are both direct answers to a question an indirect mention of a specific theme without being prompted or while answering another question. Please note that one respondent may give multiple responses; therefore, the number of responses may sometimes be higher than the number of interviewees.

### *Expectations of a sustainable hotel*

When asked to relate sustainability to a hotel, some interviewees (5) did not immediately see a link between the two, while some others (3) found the question hard to answer. However, later on in the interview, all but one respondents were able to mention sustainable measures that they expected a hotel to take. This reinforces the conclusion reached above – that guests are well informed about sustainability – and adds to it that guests do have expectations about specific measures that a hotel may take. As we shall presently see, these expectations are influenced by what guests have previously experienced. In other words, hotel guests find it easier to relate to measures that are already being widely undertaken in hotels, such as the towel-reuse policy. Before we briefly present the expectations of the guests in our study, it is important to note that previous research has found a limited number of sustainability measures expected by hotel guests, ranging from two (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010) to thirteen (Baber, 2014). Measures listed are, for example: better air quality in rooms (toxin-free and hypo-allergenic); certification; energy and water conservation; refillable shampoo dispensers; recycling; linen policies; solar energy; and the maintenance of green areas (Millar & Baloglu, 2008; Millar & Baloglu, 2011; Abrams, 2012; Berezan *et al.*, 2013; Berezan *et al.*, 2014). Clearly all measures mentioned by these authors relate to the ‘planet’ bottom line. In our study, and only considering the environmental dimension of sustainability, guests mentioned 34 different measures, of which half related to food. Due to the importance given to food by our respondents, these results will be presented later on in a dedicated paragraph. Notably, a reference to food is absent in existing literature. Our respondents have thus proven that existing literature is too limited in its view of what hotel guests expect from a sustainable hotel. It may be argued that, in the last few years, sustainability has become more and more intertwined with people’s lives, leading guests to expect a more profound and variegated engagement with the sustainability provided by hoteliers.

Looking at specific measures, the measure mentioned most often (15) is the towel reuse policy, followed by re-cycling (5), renewable energy (5) and water and energy saving measures. Regarding recycling for example, guests expected unused amenities and soap leftovers to be recycled or reused. Looking at energy, they mentioned the use of energy-saving bulbs or LED; key cards for switching the room lights on and off; and alternatives to air-conditioning such as better insulation. Alongside these rather well-known measures, the Millennials focus group also mentioned some more creative possibilities, such as an elevator powered by cyclist-generated energy, to illustrate how much energy is being used.

Most importantly, the interviews show that guests believe that a sustainable hotel should fully embrace the concept and facilitate the guests’ sustainability experience, while constantly communicating with them. As two respondents put it:

*"Unfortunately what happens is, they give you a tiny towel which is quickly wet, you don't want that for three days running"* (Interview 9) and

*"I think it would be fantastic if a chain like (name hotel) or a big chain were to take the lead on it and say, you know, I think it would be an important ad campaign, sustainability. I think every little bit, I don't think people have green fatigue. I think people are still hoping that that happens, yeah."* (Interview 4)

During the interviews, we also probed whether guests would be prepared to pay more for a stay at a sustainable hotel. In general, the answer was no. The reason for this



negative answer is that hotels are more concerned with eco-efficiency measures than with sustainability – and that eco-efficiency measures reduce costs. One respondent went a step further by saying:

*"So, I think there is certain, you call it, getting on the band wagon, certain companies or concepts, people get on the band wagon and think, oh we can do this, we can do this and charge more money. Won't work." (Interview 12)*

The implication here is that guests will not pay anything extra for initiatives that reduce hotel costs and that are not innovative.

In conclusion, guests are well informed about sustainability and expect a hotel to not only undertake a vast array of measures, but also to communicate those. Communication and information about sustainability are an interesting issue, which will be elaborated on in the next section.

#### *Information about sustainability*

Hotels usually choose to inform their guests about their sustainability efforts through certifications schemes such as GreenKey. Another general accepted practice is, as we have seen above, the use of a card to alert guests to the hotel's reuse-your-towel policy. Some hoteliers, though, still have doubts about the benefits of communicating with guests and, in case they do wish to communicate, they may not know the best way to reach their guests. Literature is divided on both points, though there is a growing consensus that certification schemes and reports are not the best way to communicate with guests.

Both interviewees and focus group members would like to see proof of the hotel's sustainability policy. A theme emerging from the answers is that there is a fine line between too little and too much information, and that hoteliers should therefore be careful in deciding what to communicate, and how.

In terms of what to communicate, guests would like the hotel to inform them about the reasons behind the hotel's sustainability measures and the benefits. Their concern in this regard seems to be the impact that these measures have. There is also a wish for further information to prove that the products offered are indeed sustainable and fair-trade. Guests seem to be somewhat sceptical about the hotel's claims on these topics and wish to see evidence, such as third party certification.

Looking at how to communicate on sustainability, suggestions have been made to use info-graphics, pictures and storytelling, rather than information signs and written texts. Moreover, guests prefer that information is given timely (i.e. when an action is required), using gentle and positive reminders. As an example, they suggested placing little signs providing information about the hotel's amenity policy next to the washbasin, or signs about the food's origin on the breakfast buffet.

Overall, it can be concluded that guests wish to be informed, though they prefer a less text-heavy and more subtle and timely approach.

#### *Comfort*

It is a common belief that sustainability comes at the expenses of comfort. GMs voiced this idea by claiming that they would never put their guests' comfort at risk for the sake of sustainability, because they sell comfort and guests would be unwilling to forego comfort to support the hotel's sustainability policy. To probe this assumption, guests were asked five different questions about their perspective on comfort and sustainability: two about the re-filling of the breakfast buffet, two about their bathroom

experience and one that openly enquired whether sacrificing comfort for the sake of sustainability would be acceptable.

To start with the last question, almost all respondents were willing to forego a certain level of comfort to increase sustainability. It is important to note that this answer was often given with a specification of the level of comfort that should be provided. As one interviewee put it:

*"Erm, that is very tricky actually, the question. Because when you are paying for your hotel you expect something, a minimum comfort and, you know what I mean? That is important, that is for sure, that is important. But I am not picky, so that's just personal. I am sure you will interview people that are really picky, especially in hotels. Terrible, they expect exactly what they have home and, erm, that's, I mean no place is as comfortable as home."* (Interview 14)

Looking at comfort in the bathroom, the focus was on the provision of amenities on the one hand, and the shower's pressure and amount of water on the other. The water pressure and the amount of water were chosen as a focal point because they are typical GreenKey certification measures and because the GM reported to regularly receive complains from guests about the reduced water flow. Individual amenities are more and more replaced with dispensers, even in the more luxurious hotels. Some GMs, however, consider dispensers a no-go for their hotel, due to their cheap appearance. This is the reason that the issue of amenities vs. dispensers has been chosen as the second focal point in probing the extent to which guests are willing to forego comfort.

In our study we found that some guests were genuinely worried about the environmental impact of the little plastic bottles containing shampoo and body lotion: for this reason, they would prefer to have a dispenser rather than individual amenities. In general, individual amenities are regarded as unnecessary, though they should be available upon request. To most respondents, substituting the little plastic bottles with squeeze dispensers is acceptable. The design of the dispensers and the way they are presented are crucial, however. As one interviewee describes it:

*"If you go down to a very, very low budget range you have often found that they have a dispenser of soap screwed to the wall. [...] Some people don't find that very, well they worry that the fact that it's screwed to the wall means that the hotel thinks they were thieves. So, you got to have a balance. Personally I don't mind. But I know some people get very, they just don't like the idea of the one that it's actually screwed to the wall"* (Interview 9)

As can be read in the report on the suppliers' focus group that was held in the context of this project, suppliers are willing to take the lead in designing sustainable products that look beautiful. A partnership with these suppliers will be essential for GMs who wish to take further steps in this direction.

When it comes to the shower's water pressure and the amount of water used, results are mixed. Some guests, as the GM noted, are outspokenly negative about the reduced water flow; others find a reduced flow equally comfortable compared to a 'normal' flow. This last group refers to devices where water is mixed with air, so that a flow similar to that of 'normal' showers is generated. Here, choosing the best technical option is essential to satisfy the guest and spare the environment.

Answers were also mixed regarding the willingness to ask for a re-fill at the breakfast buffet. Some guests do not mind asking, and find it a sensible measure not to put too much on a buffet because of the amount of food that would be wasted. Other guests

insist that they would not accept waiting for a re-fill, not only for themselves but even more so if they were hosting a client in the hotel. It may be assumed that the variety of responses is related not just to personal tolerance, but also to underlying definitions and perceptions of waiting times, an issue that is not further examined in this study. Finally, and to conclude this section on comfort, it is noteworthy that without being asked, two respondents voiced that sustainability and comfort do not need to exclude each other.

#### *Associated colours, materials, shapes*

This rather specific question was asked because colours, material and shapes have a proven effect on people's perceptions and behaviour. We were interested to see whether guests associate sustainability with specific colours, such as green; materials, such as wood; and shapes, such as a rounded shape – a conclusion that A. Björkqvist derived from his research on the hotel of the future.

Twelve respondents answered this question directly and four brought it up themselves during the interviews. Colours and materials were more often associated with sustainability than shapes. In fact, only one respondent quoted a shape, whereas 23 responses concerned materials (16 keywords) and 21 colours (8 keywords). Colours associated with a sustainable hotel lie in the natural and light range. More specifically, besides white, light blue, sandy and 'cold' colours were mentioned. As expected, green was the colour most guests (7 out of 16) associated with sustainability, even though it was sometimes rejected as being too obvious and easy. In terms of materials, these were described as: re-used and re-cycled, not containing any plastic and environmentally-friendly or natural. Wood was named more often than any other material. Cotton and tropical materials (bamboo, banana leaf, paper) were also mentioned. Opinions on the feel of materials ranged from soft fabrics to no fabrics at all and less material in general to keep the hotel's look-and-feel simple and modern.

As mentioned previously, only one person had an association with shapes, namely curvy and without sharp edges.

These results confirm the findings of A. Björkqvist.

#### *Food*

The provision of food is key to hospitality, and food took centre stage during the interviews and the focus group. We decided to give food this central role even though, as mentioned before, existing studies on sustainable measures expected by guests do not particularly mention food.

During the interviews, we received 28 answers to the question as to what is considered healthy and sustainable food. It is interesting to mention that three respondents had no association with sustainable food at first, but were able to give their opinion on the subject later on in the conversation.

Considering the central role of food in hospitality but contrary to what existing literature suggests, it is not surprising that food is a major concern among hotel guests. Perhaps surprisingly, the guests' main concern is not health (as literature proposes), but food waste. In this respect guests plead for smaller portions and smaller quantities of food on buffets. Interestingly, two respondents suggested reducing food waste by giving leftovers to people in need, where possible. With this answer they were unwittingly connecting the bottom lines of 'planet' and 'people'. Another suggestion was to use food waste to generate energy.

Hotel guests expect sustainable food to be local, seasonal and organic. This may lead to a more limited variety in food than is currently the case (which can happen when using local and seasonal ingredients). In the case of sustainable food provision, guests expect to see more vegetables and less meat.

Guests were divided on the question whether a buffet is more or less sustainable than an 'a la carte' option. Interestingly, one respondent found a buffet more economically sustainable even though he recognised the amount of food wasted. As he put it:

*"That's, I have seen buffets people they take, they take far too much. I think food in terms, I think in terms of profitability, I know having worked doing that kind of thing, you make a lot of money on a buffet because people take something on their plate that is low value and so economically it pays off. And I think that is another side of sustainability, economics have to work as well."* (Interview 9)

Food waste is, as noted earlier, a serious concern of guests. Several people mentioned how much they objected to wasteful behaviour at the buffet. Clearly, witnessing food waste is offensive to guests, and hoteliers should take care of this issue before even considering any other sustainability measure in their food provision.

### *Conclusion*

Contrary to the expectations voiced by GMs, the majority of respondents is aware of the meaning and importance of sustainability, even though only a minority has a very clear and thorough understanding of sustainability. Interestingly, this group of more knowledgeable guests sees the limits of eco-efficiency, and according to them, sustainability goes far beyond that. It may be expected that the savvier group becomes more substantial in the future because sustainability is becoming more and more mainstream in wider society. In sum, sustainability is not an unknown area anymore and the sample provides a rather clear picture on what hotel guests understand, expect and accept in terms of sustainability in a hotel. At the same time, our study shows that there are still some grey areas – such as the 'people' bottom line and more innovative sustainability measures.

During the interviews and the focus group it became apparent how influential the information provided by hotels is in shaping guests' understanding and expectations. Guests mentioned first what they have seen happening in hotels, such as the linen policy or the key-card to switch the room lights on and off. The level of disclosure by hotels might also be the reason why guests' associations with sustainability are mainly related to the 'planet' bottom line: the 'profit' and 'people' bottom lines are mostly invisible and not communicated to the guest. In other words, hotels have power when it comes to what guests expect, and with power comes responsibility.

That being said, it is not the case that guests are fully dependent on the information provided by hotels to shape their own expectations. As has been observed above, guests are more and more knowledgeable and critical – and they expect measures that hotels are not usually taking, such as fighting food waste and using renewable energy.

Finally, hotel guests are open to taking more steps towards sustainability in hotels, even though they want hotels to take the lead. Sustainability is certainly a topic that concerns most of them and even worries a few. Whereas most respondents would not pay more for a sustainable hotel, they are mostly willing to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of sustainability, if the request is reasonable and communicated in a friendly and timely manner.

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