

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369451904>

# The adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in hotels in Dubai

Article in *Tourism and Hospitality Research* · March 2023

DOI: 10.1177/14673584231164941

CITATIONS

3

READS

442

2 authors:



Simarna Singh

1 PUBLICATION 3 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Christopher S. Dutt

ARIU with the University of Derby

49 PUBLICATIONS 576 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

This is the accepted manuscript (AM) of a paper published in Tourism and Hospitality Research. Please cite as: Singh, S. & Dutt, C. S. (2023). The adoption of the UN sustainable development goals in hotels in Dubai. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584231164941>

## **The adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in hotels in Dubai.**

Simarna Singh<sup>1</sup>

Christopher S. Dutt (Corresponding Author: [chris.s.dutt@gmail.com](mailto:chris.s.dutt@gmail.com))<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, Dubai, UAE <sup>1</sup> (Website: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/simarnasingh/>)

<sup>2</sup> The Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, Dubai, UAE (corresponding author: [chris.s.dutt@gmail.com](mailto:chris.s.dutt@gmail.com))<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

Given the scope of tourism and hospitality, this economic sector has a significant role to play in the global effort to become more sustainable. As more initiatives are discussed and implemented to promote sustainability, such as the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and the regular emissions cuts promised in various COP summits, the need to understand tourism and hospitality's role in sustainability only increases. Results from a qualitative study conducted among 4- and 5-star hotels in Dubai suggested that, while hotels are keen, there is a lack of awareness and understanding about how best to implement sustainable initiatives.

Keyword: Hotel sustainability, sustainable development goals, triple bottom line, sustainable development, ESG

### **Introduction**

Sustainability is frequently associated with three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of economic, environmental, and social development (Aras & Crowther, 2013, p. 4), although environmental is often more favoured in literature (Fisher & McAdams, 2015).

---

<sup>1</sup> Present address: Sustainability Entrepreneur/Consultant & International Keynote Speaker, Singapore

<sup>2</sup> Present address: Al Rayyan International University College, Doha, Qatar

Despite sustainability's extensive history and discussion (P. Jones et al., 2016), governments, organizations, and individuals have only recently been participating in significant discussions and implementing noteworthy initiatives. Therefore, the United Nations introduced a framework to help "solve the world's long-standing problems" (Vääänen & Teplov, 2017, p. 2) by introducing the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2000. The main objective for the MDGs was to tackle the indignity of poverty (United Nations, 2021). However, there were limited achievements from the MDGs, since they favoured government entities, failing to include the private sector, limiting overall effectiveness and awareness. Therefore, in September 2015, this was rectified, and the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced and created for all stakeholders with an interest in creating impact and acting in the fast-paced and unpredictable environment. COVID-19 has also amplified the need to act by refocussing people's attention on sustainability, particularly in tourism (Eichelberger et al., 2021; Vinerean et al., 2021), or by creating greater pressure on sustainability initiatives (Barbier & Burgess, 2020). Simultaneously, governments and regulatory bodies around the world are beginning to require some form of sustainability actions or reporting, such as Switzerland's compulsory ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reporting for some businesses, based on characteristics such as revenue, industry, and staffing size (Baker McKenzie, 2023; The Federal Council, 2023).

This study intends to outline a comprehensive definition of sustainability from the literature provided, especially since each article has defined it differently. Secondly, this study intends to educate the hospitality sector on sustainable development (Mochizuki & Fadeeva, 2010). Thirdly, it addresses the limited commitment towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in hotels, which is valuable research to the Hospitality and Tourism sector, especially since tourism accounts for 10.4 per cent of worldwide GDP (WTTC, 2021) and 5.3% of carbon emissions can be traced to transport-related emissions from tourism (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & International Transport Forum, 2019). Therefore, there is an opportunity for hospitality and tourism to create a significant impact (Pratt, 2022). Furthermore, one of the major limitations of the SDG framework, is that despite outlining the goals and targets that are being set, there is limited explanation on how it can be achieved. This study will support the development of a clear strategy. Fourthly, there are numerous articles on how hotels intend to achieve environmentally-friendly practices, however, there is limited research on the other two factors – social and economic. Despite sustainability being a topic that has been written about for years, it is still a relatively new concept for the hotel sector

(Alameeri et al., 2018) and further recommendations have not been elaborated upon. Since there is no comprehensive framework or guideline for the hotel industry, this acts as a barrier because it might affect the effectiveness and consistency upon implementation (Alameeri et al., 2018). Therefore, a comprehensive framework with clear guidelines was analysed considering the SDGs to ensure that the hotel's reporting is transparent and presents accurate information on the specific sustainable development goals that they have achieved.

Suitable practical application for this study exists given the empirical base of Dubai. The government has categorised sustainability as a high priority, including it in their national agenda to be achieved by 2021 (Vision 2021, 2018). As part of this vision, the department of tourism launched Dubai Sustainable Tourism (Giardina, 2019), which embeds sustainability into Dubai's hotel classification system (Dubai Sustainable Tourism, 2016). Through Dubai's efforts to host Expo 2020, they have focused sustainability initiatives on a larger scale, with the conferences they host and infrastructure available (Giardina, 2019). Most recently, Dubai launched Dubai Can, an initiative to encourage the use of recyclable water bottles by providing free water (Visit Dubai, 2022). Furthermore, sustainability could offer a competitive advantage for hotels seeking to operate in this competitive environment. Hence, the following research question will be examined: "How are the Sustainable Development Goals implemented in 4 and 5-Star Hotels in Dubai?"

## **Literature Review**

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability has attracted interest due to increasing concerns in "continuous population growth, climate change, pollution, scarce water resources, depletion of natural resources and the loss of natural habitats" (P. Jones et al., 2016, p. 38). However, due to the varied definitions of sustainability, the topic is so broad that many solutions are considered theoretical (P. Jones et al., 2014).

Two of the most well-known models have been reviewed to understand how the sustainable development goals are adopted. The models utilised are the triple bottom line and the 5P's of sustainability.

## **Triple Bottom Line**

The triple bottom line (TBL) was created in 1990 by business consultant John Elkington (Hammer & Pivo, 2017). The triple bottom line provides a more holistic measurement of non-financial impacts brought by different stakeholders (Hammer & Pivo, 2017) in light of their economic, social, and environmental impacts (Henry et al., 2019; Ho & Taylor, 2007).

In terms of the definitions, initially, economic performance was solely measured through profit (Hammer & Pivo, 2017) however, this dimension has expanded and now focuses on presenting “a comprehensive view of corporate economic interactions with all stakeholders including shareholders, customers, employees, governments, the community and the general public” (Ho & Taylor, 2007, pp. 124–125). Environmental performance refers to the number of resources a firm uses in its operations, while social performance refers to the impact a firm has on its communities (Žak, 2015). This model is closely associated with the 3P’s of sustainability: people, planet, and profit (Hammer & Pivo, 2017) which are the three factors that are commonly used in businesses and governments (Seghezze, 2009).

The purpose of introducing the triple bottom line agenda was to encourage corporations to focus on the environmental and social value as opposed to just focusing on the economic value (Elkington, 2004), to minimise harm resulting from their activities (Ho & Taylor, 2007). Increased interest from governments, investors, and customers has driven increased awareness and utilisation of the TBL approach (Ho & Taylor, 2007). When organisations look to lessen their impact, it is recommended that they look to provide a balanced response to these three pillars (Henry et al., 2019).

## **5P’s of Sustainable Development**

The United Nations further developed the TBL model to offer the 5Ps of sustainable development to include people (society), planet (environment), prosperity (economic), peace, and partnerships (Figure 1) (United Nations, 2021). Promoting peace referred to “how policy makers and governments reduce violence” (Ledbetter, 2016, p. 239). ‘Partnerships’ addresses collaborations between all stakeholders, and therefore, acts as a vital connection in order to work on the remaining Ps (Movono & Hughes, 2022). ‘Peace’ refers to the creation of more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies (United Nations, 2021). The two additions; Peace and Partnerships are essential to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 Agenda.

Figure 1: 5P's of Sustainable Development

Source: (United Nations, 2021)



### Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs are a framework of 17 goals (see table 2) to encourage sustainable development (Filho et al., 2018) to address the current global economic and social challenges (Pomare, 2018) across most areas of human activity, including poverty, social exclusion, and environmental degradation (P. Jones et al., 2016; Pineda-Escobar, 2019). The SDGs are, however, frequently misused due to a lack of clarity on how they may be most appropriately applied (Pineda-Escobar, 2019). These goals are designed to support member states in achieving their 2030 sustainability targets.

Table 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

UN SDG	UN SDG Description	Relation to 5Ps
1. No Poverty	To bring an end to all forms of poverty.	People
2. Zero Hunger	To end all forms of hunger and malnutrition.	People
3. Good Health and Well-being	To provide universal access to healthcare.	People
4. Quality Education	To provide free primary and secondary education for all children.	People
5. Gender Equality	To end all forms of gender discrimination.	People
6. Clean Water and Sanitation	Universal access to safe and affordable	Planet

	drinking water.	
7. Affordable and Clean Energy	To expand access to clean and efficient energy.	Planet
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth	To provide sustainable economic growth and end forced labour, slavery, and human trafficking.	Prosperity
9. Industry Innovation and Infrastructure	To develop infrastructure and industry to promote innovation, employment, and sustainable energy usage.	Prosperity
10. Reduced Inequalities	Reduce all forms of inequality, including income and mobility.	Prosperity
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities	To create more sustainable cities.	Prosperity
12. Responsible Consumption and Production	To encourage producers and customers to reduce, reuse, and recycle.	Planet
13. Climate Action	To take action to reduce the cause and effects of climate change.	Planet
14. Life below Water	To sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal environments.	Planet
15. Life on Land	To reduce the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity.	Planet
16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	To provide sustainable development through the promotion of peace and effective governance.	Peace
17. Partnerships for the Goals	To provide strong global partnerships to work on achieving the SDGs.	Partnerships

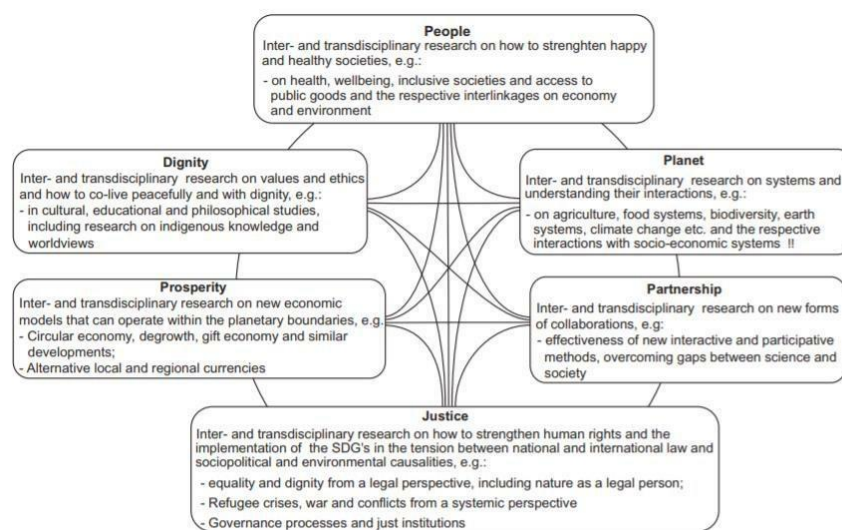
Sources: (United Nations Development Programme, 2022)

In table 1, the 17 SDGs have been grouped in terms of their relationship with the 5Ps. In this case, the SDGs are ranked in order of priority; therefore, the first five goals relate to people, the driving force to achieve the other dimensions. Since each dimension is interlinked, people will directly support and impact the prosperity dimension. Planet focuses on addressing the climate crisis. The Peace element relates to ensuring justice despite conflicts and terrorism. Partnerships is how each of the other P's will be achieved. Overall, the 5P's need to reinforce one another to achieve sustainable development.

However, there is limited literature on the 5P's and, therefore, little has been done to embed this approach in theoretical and business models. Hence, the triple bottom line is still the most prominent. One of the few papers which has considered the 5Ps has created a holistic model combining the triple bottom line, and 5P's of sustainable development into six thematic areas of dignity, people, planet, partnership, justice and prosperity (Filho et al., 2018) as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Thematic areas and Sustainable Development Goals

Source: (Filho et al., 2018)



The following table 2 provides a summary of the aforementioned sustainability models to reflect their relationship and connection to the 17 SDGs.

Table 2: Comprehensive Literature Map

<b><u>Holistic 6 Dimension</u></b> <b><u>Model</u></b>	<b><u>Triple Bottom Line</u></b>	<b><u>5P's of Sustainability</u></b>	<b><u>SDG Goals</u></b>
(Filho et al., 2018)	(Elkington, 2004)	(United Nations, 2021)	(United Nations, 2021)
People	Society	People	SDG 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
Planet	Environment	Planet	SDG 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15
Prosperity	Economic	Prosperity	SDG 8, 9, 10 and 11
Justice	-	Peace	SDG 16



Partnerships	-	Partnerships	SDG 17
Dignity	-	-	<i>Implied across goals</i>

### **Sustainability Challenges in Hotels**

Whilst many hotels have implemented sustainability initiatives, there are concerns that many have done so to provide themselves with competitive advantage (P. Jones et al., 2014; Vij, 2016), given increased demand by tourists for more sustainable hospitality experiences (Abdou et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2021), to boost their reputation and encourage customer loyalty (Goswami & Ha-Brookshire, 2015). In some cases, this can even link to improved customer experiences, provided the hotel is able to deliver on its sustainability commitments (Preziosi et al., 2022). Hence, one could argue that integrating sustainability within a hotel might not be due to legitimate ethical reasons, therefore, upon implementation, not all the stakeholders are thoroughly involved. This can result in improper implementation.

Furthermore, literature cites several additional challenges organizations face when implementing sustainable initiatives, even when the intention is to become sustainable. Firstly, these initiatives can be perceived as greenwashing due a lack of trust in organizations' sustainable commitments (Akturan, 2018). For instance, re-using towels may be perceived as a method to reduce laundry expenses rather than conserving water (P. Jones et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2015). This results in green scepticism whereby the consumer questions the brand reliability (Akturan, 2018). Despite such initiatives being a fair representation of many sustainability models by combining components, such as environmental and economic motives to be sustainable, the perception, and some times reality, can be more nefarious with economic – cost savings – being the more sought-after improvement. Secondly, the costs related to implementing environmentally friendly solutions can be high, with a long payback period (Yeh et al., 2017), which can include additional time and costs related to increased staff training (Salama et al., 2022), or even the recruitment of staff to oversee sustainability initiatives. Therefore, depending on the priority and strategy of the hotel, implementing these practices can differ. Thirdly, there is a lack of awareness of environmental solutions and related metrics (James & Card, 2012). Therefore, despite practices being initiated, results are not evident. Sometimes, this can be related to the responsibility of sustainability practices being delegated to several different departments, rather than one centralised authority, or centralised bodies having limited power and resources (Guix & Font, 2020). Finally, 5-Star hotels are perceived as luxurious and therefore, sustainability can be perceived as negatively affecting service quality (Karatepe et al., 2022; Yeh et al., 2017). Similarly, there can be a branding

misconception, especially since customers may not want to be conscious during their stay in luxury properties.

More recently, the lockdowns and travel restrictions introduced to manage COVID-19 have refocused attention on sustainability, particularly the environmental impacts of tourism. This, combined with the greater automation occurring in tourism businesses to reduce the number of high-touch surfaces and increase social distancing can support sustainability initiatives (Kenny & Dutt, 2021). Conversely, the number and durations of travel restrictions have encouraged many to participate in ‘revenge travel’ which could increase travel and carbon emitting activities. The impact of COVID on sustainability is beyond the scope of this research but should, nevertheless, be considered in the future.

### **Sustainability in Dubai Hotels**

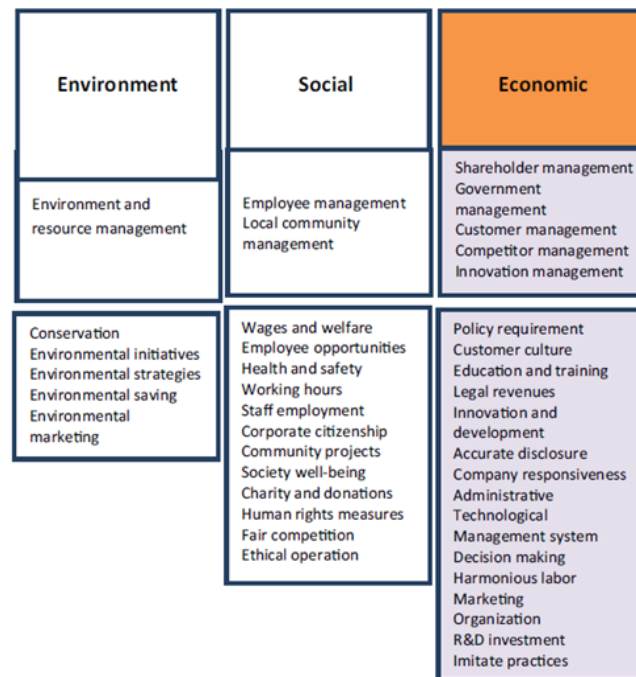
There are many sustainability challenges that are faced within the Middle East, despite tremendous progress from governments (Issa & Al Abbar, 2015). Furthermore, due to luxurious lifestyles of communities within the Gulf Cooperating Council (GCC), individuals have “struggled to find the resources to understand and implement sustainability” (Issa & Al Abbar, 2015, p. 36). It is, therefore, vital to further educate the public on possible sustainability initiatives. The hosting of COP28 in 2023 and the announcement that 2023 is to be the UAE’s “Year of Sustainability”, implementing numerous sustainability projects will help to develop sustainability initiatives and awareness of sustainability (*UAE President Announces 2023 as ‘Year of Sustainability’*, 2023).

According to Pérez and Bosque (2014) and Alameeri et al. (2018) the triple bottom line is utilised in hotels, which is the most traditional sustainability model. This could be because, the other models are not as well known, indicating an education gap. Attempts to address such education or awareness gaps usually attract additional training costs for organisations (Giardina, 2019; Salama et al., 2022).

Dubai hotels achieve sustainability through their management practices, which measures how hotels focus on environmental management, customer management, health and safety and social responsibility (Alameeri et al., 2018). The triple bottom line is a popular model which is used (Alameeri et al., 2018; Pérez & del Bosque, 2014), largely due to its simplicity, but also, probably, because of the greater awareness of it over other models. Figure 3 categorises

hotels' practices into the triple bottom line sustainability dimensions and demonstrates how they are currently implementing it.

Figure 3: Sustainability Management Practices and Sustainability Dimensions



Source: (Alameeri et al., 2018)

Employee management refers to the “employees environmental knowledge, awareness and concern” (Wu et al., 2016, p. 66) hence, it is classified as the employee training that is offered. It is vital that they “participate in corporate decision making” (Alameeri et al., 2018) to ensure sustainability is achieved.

Shareholder management is correlated to economic incentives, and due to decision-making occurring in higher level management positions, it is vital they are involved and understand the long-term benefits sustainability can provide. Hotels in Dubai have thoroughly focused on customer management and how to ensure their needs are satisfied, this includes handling customer complaints and recovery which determines repurchase intention. Government management is achieved by following the set policies and laws that have been implemented in the UAE (Alameeri et al., 2018).

In terms of the environmental impact, Dubai hotels focus on implementing measures such as energy conservation, water conservation, and waste management. In terms of the impact the firm has on local communities, there is priority on community projects, social well-being and charities; however, there is limited evidence to demonstrate the significance of the impact. Despite the intensifying competition in Dubai, the literature states that business is ethically conducted with fair competition (Alameeri et al., 2018).

It is evident that most of the sustainability management practices are done to enhance their economic value. Therefore, there is an unequal distribution of the commitment and priority towards the environmental and social factors. Hence, sustainability is not achieved holistically. Furthermore, from figure 3, there seems to be a “small range of sustainability issues and targets” with little evidence depicting how it has been achieved (P. Jones et al., 2017, p. 11).

## **Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was adopted to facilitate in-depth understanding and analysis (Azungah, 2018; Nam et al., 2021). The lack of literature on this topic, particularly in the context of the Middle East suggested that such an inductive approach would be appropriate to gather the necessary insight (Goulding, 2005; R. Jones & Noble, 2007). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted, enabling rich, detailed responses, whilst adhering to the scope of the research project.

The grounded theory approach mainly utilises a nonprobability, purposeful sampling approach (Goulding, 2005) which is utilised to identify information-rich cases (Suri, 2011). In 2019, individuals who were responsible for sustainability initiatives in 4 and 5-star hotels in Dubai were contacted and asked to participate. This was supplemented with snowball sampling to contact participants who were difficult to access (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Nam et al., 2021; Suri, 2011). In total, 44 suitable individuals were identified and contacted through a combination of personal contacts and social media, wherein 11 accepted the invitation, providing a response rate of 25%. In one instance, two participants from the same property participated in one interview, adding to, and enhancing each other's comments. Interviews were voice recorded, with participant consent, in their property. Interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes and were transcribed verbatim before being analysed. Participants

were asked seven broad questions related to sustainability and their hotels' initiatives (see Table 5). Additional probing questions were asked to explore participants' answers more thoroughly.

Data was analysed using content analysis, where transcripts were read multiple times to look for underlying themes and ideas. These ideas were then grouped into related themes and sub-themes for each individual case before looking into cross-cases analysis (Nam et al., 2021). Each researcher completed this process individually before compiling results to ensure inter-researcher reliability.

## **Findings**

### **Participant Demographics**

All of the 10 interviews were identified as being the individual designated with the responsibility for their property's sustainability initiatives. Of the 11, two were female, two represented 4-star hotels, and five were General Managers. The full demographics are provided in table 3. Given the seniority of the individuals and their specialised responsibilities, some demographic traits were withheld to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were largely expatriate, from a variety of nations, which partially reflects the population of the UAE in terms of a wide variety of different expatriates dominating the population (Newnham & Dutt, 2022a, 2022b).

Table 3: Participant Demographics

<u>Participant</u> <u>t</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Rooms</u>
1	Male	General Manager (responsible for 2 hotels)	2X 5-Star	Beach	300-400 each
2	Female	HSE Assistant Manager	5-Star	Beach	400-500
3	Male	General Manager	4-Star	City	200-300
4	Male	General Manager	4-Star	City	200-300
5	Female	Learning and Development Manager	5-Star	Beach	300-400
6	Male	Chief Engineer	5-Star	Beach	200-300
7	2X Male	General Manager & Director of Engineering	5-Star	City	100-200
8	Male	Chief Executive Officer	7X 5-Star 3 Island resorts	Beach	9 to 300+ (M=173)
9	Male	General Manager	5-Star	Beach	200-300
10	Male	Director of Engineering	5-Star	Beach	>500

## Consolidated Findings

The respective participants shared their perspectives to each of the seven questions and the findings are consolidated, as visualized Table 4, below.

Table 4: Consolidated Findings

<u>Question Number</u>	<u>Consolidated Findings</u>
Q1. What does sustainability mean to you / how do you define sustainability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Effectively using resources</li> <li>• Preservation for future generations</li> <li>• Three pillars social, economic and environmental</li> </ul>
Q2. What sustainability initiatives has your hotel implemented?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy savings</li> <li>• Water reduction and grey water</li> <li>• Recycling</li> <li>• Reducing single-use plastic</li> <li>• Some form of CSR</li> </ul>
Q3. Has sustainability implementation provided your Hotel with any competitive advantages?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelers are searching for more green and sustainable properties</li> <li>• Certifications acquired</li> <li>• Media publicity and marketing advantages</li> <li>• Has impacted the overall brand value</li> </ul>
Q4. Are you aware of the 17 SDGs? How do you think you are addressing those in your hotel?	Out of the 10 participants, only 3 were aware of the SDGs. The breakdown of contributions towards each SDG is visible in <b>Table 6</b> .

<p>Q5. Which of these SDGs do you think you are contributing to? Some of your future SDGs? Barriers upon implementation?</p>	<p><b>Contribution towards the SDGs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite listing several initiatives for each of the 17 SDGs, the majority of participants only mentioned they were contributing to a few.</li> </ul> <p><b>Future SDGs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shown in Table 7</li> </ul> <p><b>Barriers upon implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited understanding of the goals</li> <li>• Space and design restrictions</li> <li>• Further awareness and education for the guests</li> </ul>
<p>Q6. What are the greatest benefits of implementing sustainability practices? And what are the greatest benefits of implementing the SDGs? What are your largest challenges?</p>	<p><b>Benefits of sustainability:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting the planet, environment</li> <li>• Preservation for future generations</li> <li>• Contributing to the three pillars of sustainability – economy, environment and society</li> <li>• Higher ROI</li> <li>• More stories to share</li> <li>• It's not an option anymore</li> </ul> <p><b>Benefits of SDGs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To become a favoured employer / satisfying employee's needs</li> <li>• Makes it clearer to accelerate sustainable development, beyond just the environment</li> <li>• Resonates with the younger generation</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habits and behaviour</li> <li>• Awareness, shifting the mindset and satisfying all stakeholders</li> <li>• Investment / costs to implement</li> <li>• Practicality and logistics</li> <li>• Branding</li> </ul>
<p>Q7. In your opinion, what can be done to promote sustainability initiatives within Hotels?</p> <p>a) Organisational Perspective</p> <p>b) Government Intervention</p>	<p><b>Organisation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management involvement</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Policies internally</li> <li>• Green committee</li> <li>• Sustainability champions / role models</li> <li>• Embedded within the philosophy of the brand</li> <li>• Awareness to guests</li> <li>• Investing in technology</li> </ul> <p><b>Government:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislation and policies</li> <li>• Financial Rewards / incentives</li> <li>• They are proactive and doing enough</li> </ul>

## Defining Sustainability

### Theme 1: Triple Bottom Line

When asked about their perception of sustainability, participants provided similar definitions. The first theme identified was protecting the environment for future generations, which was often associated with one's family.

*I think sustainability is the ability to...perform...with the greatest consideration, the greatest respect, um, to the future from, and mainly from an environmental point of view. So, uh, to carry on with our guests with as minimal impact to the environment and to the future for, for all of us, our kids, our grandkids. Um, I guess that's what I think of first when I think of sustainability. (P4)*

The other pillars of sustainability were mentioned less frequently; two of the participants mentioned economic and social pillars, and only one motioned all three pillars.

*So, since we have three pillars of sustainability environment, society, and economy, I think it's more about really sustainability is to harmonize the relationship between these three pillars. And it's about developing that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations, um, which then are able to meet their own needs practically. (P7)*

### Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement

Participants referred to the importance of stakeholder engagement to ensure that sustainability is achieved.

*...it is what I have to use it as my passion to... support the all..., to the team, uh, to the people, to the mother earth. So, this is where we, uh, where we define as a sustainability and it's not only related to one person or something, it is the whole community... (P6)*

To track and monitor sustainability initiatives, participants used a mixture of internal and externally recognised frameworks and certifications:

*... here in the hotel, what we've done is just had a look at what sort of things we can do and then brainstorm away around how we gonna be able to make it effective. (P3)*



Most participants preferred using external frameworks to monitor and report upon their sustainability initiatives. These usually focussed on environmental metrics such as water, electricity, and energy consumption.

*...the guidelines are coming from DTCM, so whatever comes from them, we are known to go for it. Secondly, whatever our background is, we have achieved it from a certification called Green Globe certification... (P7)*

## **Current sustainability practices in Dubai Hotels**

### **Theme 1: Environmental Initiatives and CSR**

When the participants described their current sustainability practices, common themes emphasised the environmental initiatives relating to energy savings, water conservation, recycling and ensuring the hotel becomes plastic-free.

*So we do something for energy, something for the water and then of course recycling also. The energy work we do, we do have, we changed like in 2016 the whole hotel, the building changed to LED lights so that one was one of the biggest projects in here...(P2)*

Quite a few participants spoke about how they were eliminating single-use plastic within their property, possibly because of increased media hype surrounding plastic waste.

*One initiative that we're trying is to be a plastic free resort. We're working toward that initiative it started this year actually. So very few things happened already. For example, in the back of house we try to minimize the water bottles, the plastic water bottles and replace them... and collect your, uh, steel bottles and the five gallons dispenser is around the hotel... (P2)*

There was a noticeable lack of discussion around non-environmental initiatives. The few times these occurred, they were usually referred to under the hotel's CSR initiatives, and largely focused on social issues. With data being collected around the holy month of Ramadan, commentary on such social issues is not unexpected.

*So a nice touch is that we put a Ramadan sharing fridge down at the front of the hotel just tucked around at the start there." (P4)*

CSR initiatives were frequently included in employee orientation and training programmes. However, there were limited courses throughout the year to encourage employee involvement. When specifically probed on how they engaged with other stakeholders, participants mentioned the utilisation of tent cards or iPads to engage with their guests, to showcase their sustainability practices and certifications. While shareholders were more involved when there was some economic return or cost saving for the company.

*So the customers in their guestrooms uh, we place cards about the changing of their sheets and towels. So if they, and we, we, the wording is very much around, you know, we want to protect our environment. If you'd like your sheets not to be changed, or your towels not to be changed, place them in a certain place so the guests are aware of that. From a purchasing, uh, side, we work with our global suppliers for health and worldwide and we purchase more sustainable items. Um. I'm not saying they're all organic because the quality's not there. But we look at purchasing goods that are local rather than having to try and travel by air or we choose more of a, a sea travel. So it cuts down on that CO2 emissions. From the team members side, we have a corporate social responsibility committee. We meet every month. Uh, they bring ideas from the team members and we try and implement them, whether it's, uh, through doing things for the community, for the environment. ... Ah shareholders, um, the management team are aware of what we do and we have management on the corporate social committee, um, we work very closely with marketing, so any marketing materials that go around reflect our CSR guidelines. (P5)*

## **Theme 2: Communication Tool**

A variety of views arose in terms of the competitive advantage offered to hotels by practising sustainability. The most common advantage was from a marketing/communication perspective. The greater awareness and education of newer hotel guests gives hotels the requirement and opportunity to communicate with guests about their sustainability practices. Participants believed that such steps improved their brand value for corporate as well as individual business units.

*So, from that side of thing, since we got ISO certified initially, three or four years ago now, yes, we're able to at least market... So we can at least participate in the RFP [Request For Proposal]. It doesn't guarantee that you'll get business, but you can be*

*there on the list of approved hotels for that company that they will, you know, if they're looking for someone to stay here and then they could book with us basically...[customers] always want to look at what sort of things that company do or that hotel do to reduce their impact on the environment. (P3)*

*So besides contributing to the environment it's also giving us an advantage in terms of, since we are very ahead of, for example, zero food waste, it gives us an integrated marketing advantage. So I mean, you only gain an advantage if you speak about the things that you do. (P7).*

On the other hand, participants were unable to measure the impact sustainability had on the property in quantitative terms, limiting their ability to communicate thoroughly.

*But in terms of a clear competitive advantage that I can, that I can give you an in a financial figure or in a percentage, I can't ... (P4)*

#### Sustainability benefits and consideration in hotels

Participants felt that it was important to implement sustainability to appeal to both their customers and their employees.

*...to become a preferred employer, because you know, as times change and people become more aware, you know, they don't only look at, well am I getting salary, but do I get my salary on time? Am I treated fairly? You know, do I get recognized for the work that I do? And you know, is my company caring about the environment? So, you know, the more that the society becomes aware of these things the more important it is for the business to act like that. (P3)*

*I think this one of the biggest benefits because there will come a year where you will literally be avoided by the generation coming now, they will look at this, they will literally look at, okay, so what contribution in these 17 SDGs are you delivering? And if you don't commit I think you're out. (P7)*

When participants referred to the outcomes of their initiatives, the most frequent related to improving environment.

*The benefit of sustainability is to make the planet and world a better place to live in, to focus on future generations. (P1)*

Participant 9, however, questioned the validity of the term “benefit”, since it’s become mandatory or essential to implement sustainability.

*You see, this is not optional anymore as in where we are now. I don't think it's something that there's, I think a benefit, this is for everybody, but it's, it's not the sort of optional thing. (P9)*

### **Theme 1: Investment**

The theme of investment occurred throughout the interviews. Whilst the majority of the participants believed that investment was a challenge, they also saw an opportunity of superior returns on investment.

*...so there might be the barrier in the first instance where you say okay there's a large investment to be sustainable as required or maybe to be ahead of [requirements], but it's always in long-term perspective or mid-term perspective is going to be a higher return on investment. (P7)*

### **Theme 2: Branding**

Another common issue was ensuring that these issues were in line with the brand.

*This is unfortunately, that's where really have to see how does it maybe collide of the perception of being a luxury hotel. So I think that's something that still needs to be developed within the next couple of years, giving the opportunity for luxury hotels to provide, so let's say amenities in a proper packaging for the guests, so his perception is still being a luxury hotel, but also contributing to the environment. So also, you know, it's the thing between costs and environmental needs or requirements...having everything in glass is, I think, a little more expensive. (P7)*

### **Theme 3: Education and Awareness**

Participants commonly described the habits and behaviour of people as issues that, without the proper education and awareness, would make it difficult to achieve sustainability.

*Awareness, I would say shifting the mindset that's very, very important. We do that but I think we need more. We need to change that mindset doesn't mean that if I work in environment or engineering that I am the only person interested in it, it should be*

*everyone. It should be every person. So that mindset and awareness should increase.*  
(P2)

### **SDG implementation in 4- and 5- Star Hotels**

The majority of participants admitted to having no prior knowledge of the 17 SDGs. According to the findings generated from the participants, the most common SDGs that are being implemented within the properties are SDGs 3, 4, 7, 10, 12 and 14. Participants categorised their initiatives into the SDGs as detailed below.

**SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being:** *Good health and wellbeing. Um, absolutely. I'm in Dubai Municipality just last week, brought in the old menus by the end of this year. I think even earlier I'd have to have a calorie count on them. We already marked them with our healthy symbol, the blue symbol that's on most menus. We have vegan items on our menus. In terms of, in terms of colleagues, obviously we welcome colleagues to use our, to use our gym if they're a certain level of position, which encourages, we've got a gym in our combination...So, it was a conscious effort to encourage that, with our, with our team members.* (P4)

**SDG 4 – Quality Education:** *This collides a little bit with our brand design restriction that we cannot hang anything. That's why we try to give as much and provide as about information in the room, through the iPad. But in terms of quality and education for our staff, for example, we have a learning development department within our corporate company. And here we have a large amount of quality and education opportunities, at all levels coming from [renowned international universities], going down to F&B upselling seminars, this a little bit of everything, sustainability is within there.* (P7)

**SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy:** *...whenever we are having renovation of a place like of a restaurant...then they start putting a solar system panels on the rooftop. So, I wouldn't say we do have converted the place, but some of the areas we do have the panels.* (P2)

*...especially with LED lighting. As you can see here, we have quite a few led lights. Uh, yeah. Uh, the consumption is really and reduced massively and all over the hotel because it's all newly installed LED lighting.* (P9)

**SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities:** *The team members are all on a level path so, whether they're female or male, if they're in the same position they get the same salary. (P5)*

**SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production:** *Whatever comes back from a buffet for example, which has been used before we give it to, to the process of composting we go through a technology is called Winnow and Winnow technology assists our chefs on a daily basis really to engineer what is coming back and they just have to weigh it to type in what's the ingredients, so they really know, um, is the menu that they are preparing for the clientele for the, is that properly engineered or not? (P7)*

*Okay generally, like back of house and all that, there is a plastic, cans, general waste and paper. Of course, in all offices you would find at least one paper recycling bin...So, what happens is, every pantry will have three or four bins: plastic, paper and general waste, cans also. Usually cans, is not much within the rooms but plastic of course, 'cause of the water bottles. So before getting the garbage down or the recycling they would segregate within the pantries and then they would bring it down to the recycling or the garbage room. So if it's not happening in the rooms, it should be happening in the pantries. (P2)*

**SDG 14: Life below the Water:** *Zero plastic initiatives in the back office is one of the things I think which goes in there. Changing the single-use straws to erm reusable straws... But uh, yeah, we, we do this, so I mean in terms of saving our environment and overfishing, even though we have a Japanese restaurant, but we don't utilize fish on the extinct list. (P7)*

Table 5 below summarises the current SDGs participants are currently committing towards, marked “x”.

Table 5: SDGs implemented within the properties

CURRENT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)																		
I N T E R V I E W E E S		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	1					x		x							x			
	2			x	x		x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x
	3			x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x
	4											x			x	x		
	5	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x		x	x	x	x
	6	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x
	7	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
	8		x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			
	9		x	x	x		x			x	x		x		x		x	x
	10	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x
	Total	4	5	8	8	4	6	8	6	4	8	4	8	6	8	6	7	7

Table 6 summarises the future sustainable development goals that the properties want to emphasize upon, the top three being SDGs 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 14 (Life below the water).

Table 6: Future SDGs that the properties want to focus on

FUTURE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)																		
I N T E R V I E W E E S		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	1											x						
	2						x					x						
	3			x						x				x				
	4	x			x													
	5				x													
	6						x						x					
	7														x	x		
	8			x			x		x				x	x		x		
	9						x						x		x			
	10	x	x												x			
	Total	2	1	2	2	0	4	0	1	1	0	2	3	2	3	2	0	0

When the property details and participant demographics were compared to the currently implemented or planned SDGs, no initial patterns were evident. This further supported participants' implications regarding factors encouraging the adoption of different sustainable initiatives.

### Concept Map

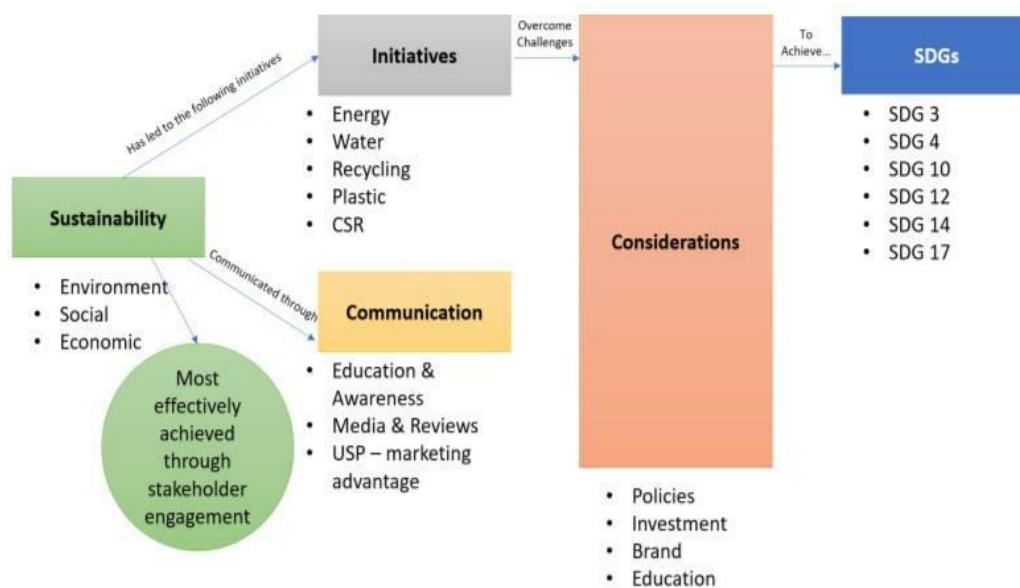
Figure 4 is a concept map that has been generated from the findings, the map has been further explained below.

The theme “sustainability” arose when participants referred to the triple bottom line and reflected particular favouritism for the environmental pillar. Sustainability was also discussed as a communication tool, firstly to create awareness about their initiatives, gain media coverage and social media reviews and finally, this would act as a unique selling point therefore, leading to an overall marketing competitive advantage. However, there are barriers that need to be overcome to achieve the sustainable development goals. The investment to implement these initiatives is often costly and there are concerns that some initiatives could



harm the brand image. Therefore, further policies need to be generated, to enhance the sustainable development goals within the property and educate all stakeholders more effectively. Whilst there are plans to address most of the SDGs, currently, preferences exist for SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 14 (life below water), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Figure 4: Concept Map



## Discussion

The term ‘sustainability’ is interpreted inconsistently by participants and extant literature (P. Jones et al., 2016). Participants in this study favoured the environmental perspective (Karatepe et al., 2022) and rarely discussed the other pillars of economic and social sustainability, or multi-stakeholder engagement (Movono & Hughes, 2022; Pratt, 2022). Literature, however, reports that businesses are frequently incorporating triple-bottom-line reporting practices (Ho & Taylor, 2007). Many participants did not utilise any sustainability models in their reporting, although some certifications were adopted, mostly in response to regulation by the local tourism authority to adopt their own framework. This conflicts with some literature which reported hotels’ adoption of certifications related to their commitment to environmental sustainability (Abdou et al., 2020). These findings suggest that despite the proliferation of literary discussion on sustainability – both academic and otherwise – significant uncertainty

and disagreement is present in sustainability definitions, implementation methods, and motivations.

Beyond the definition of sustainability, the preference for the environment extended to initiatives hoteliers tried to implement; water and energy savings, recycling, and reducing the amount of single-use plastic. Both participants and literature (Alameeri et al., 2018; Khatter et al., 2021) have questioned the long-term commitment to these initiatives:

*Whenever we have a CSR from a group level, I remember there was like going to the elderly house and communicate with them, talk to them, maybe give them some gifts, and things they need. So, some of people will take part in that... In five years, I saw it twice maybe” (P2).*

Part of the challenges organisations may be facing could be due to the practice of delegating responsibility for sustainable practices to several individuals or committees, as indicated by participants. While this has the advantage of considering sustainability from the perspective of different departments, it can limit accountability and responsibility for initiatives continuance and success. Literature has provided a similar discussion in terms of sustainability managers receiving limited power and resources to be able to implement and monitor their initiatives effectively (Guix & Font, 2020).

Furthermore, whilst improvements have been made around linking CSR initiatives to economic metrics, the lack of consistent and reliable methods to track, score, and communicate CSR activities (The Economist, 2022) can have significant ramifications when considering shareholders’ demands for clear evidence of return on investment (ROI) for sustainable initiatives (Karatepe et al., 2022).

Literature mentions that “companies in environmentally sensitive industries, such as tourism, are likely to report on sustainability because they will be under environmental scrutiny” (Jenkins & Karanikola, 2014, p. 363) and increasingly under greater legislation to do so (see Baker McKenzie, 2023), suggesting that the environment pillar is of a priority for hotels, which is also showcased by its prevalence in the findings. However, given the heavy research and media focus on environmental sustainability (Kim et al., 2019), such an outcome is not unexpected, but does suggest more emphasis is needed on the other dimensions of sustainability.

The literature and findings showcased similar results, wherein, sustainability is utilised for strategic purposes; as a communication and branding tool to build customer loyalty, create a positive brand image and increase long term profitability (Goswami & Ha-Brookshire, 2015; Kim et al., 2019). Participants were, however, unable to measure the impact sustainability has had on the property in quantitative terms, despite citing this as a significant advantage. This should carefully be considered to provide stronger evidence of sustainability initiatives' ROI, furthering shareholder support and investment in sustainability. Similar issues have been discussed and proposed in other domains, such as marketing (Krizanova et al., 2019), and some have been developed specifically for hotel sustainability (Guix & Font, 2020).

### **Sustainability challenges in Hotels**

The literature and findings conveyed similar challenges regarding sustainability. Both literature and the participants commented on the high initial investment and delayed ROI in sustainable solutions (Yeh et al., 2017). Participants explained that the delayed ROI meant that shareholders' support for sustainable initiatives were vital to consider (Karatepe et al., 2022).

Participants explained that if they focused on internal communication, external communication became more effective, since all stakeholders are part of an overall strategy which is discussed by the higher-level management. While participants agreed with literature, that educating the public was vital (Issa & Al Abbar, 2015; Karatepe et al., 2022) they admitted that their current actions here were largely rudimentary, such as the use of tent cards (P. Jones et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2015) usually as a means to reduce costs by encouraging guests to change their behaviour (Rahman et al., 2015). Therefore, it was evident that companies looked for an economic argument to justify an initiative. Additionally, to achieve a significant impact, it is imperative to embed sustainability within the corporate culture:

*I think it's also needs to be implemented in the philosophy of a brand of a company and once you have this implemented in your philosophy and is part of your culture of your company culture to evolve and develop terms and conditions within the sustainability sector. (P7)*

In terms of branding, the majority of participants mentioned that incorporating sustainability initiatives, such as refillable toiletries and amenities in the bathroom to reduce plastic, would

present a branding misconception, as suggested by existing literature (Karatepe et al., 2022; Yeh et al., 2017). Participant 5, however, suggested that hotels could do more here to teach customers that sustainable does not mean low quality *“You know, our luxury guests, expect a level, whether it's sustainable or not. But then do we do enough marketing to ask them would they prefer it to be sustainable or not? I think if we were to ask the question more, we would get a different response.”*

In some cases, the opposite can be observed where sustainable solutions attract premium prices, which could discourage potential customers who do not wish to pay more (Casado-Díaz et al., 2020). Furthermore, guests increasing awareness of sustainability can mean that branding anything as sustainability, particularly with a higher price, may attract increased scrutiny from customers, requiring more established green certifications (Rahman et al., 2015).

#### **SDGs in 4 and 5-Star hotels**

Table 7 demonstrates the number of times participants discussed a goal, organised by the goal's relationship to the 5P dimensions of sustainable development (Ledbetter, 2016), and how many times each of the 'P's was mentioned by participants. From this table, the participant's favouritism towards Planet is clear.

Table 7: The dimension most applicable in the hospitality industry

<b><u>The “P” Dimension</u></b>	<b><u>SDG Goals</u></b>	<b><u>Total Count</u></b>
<b>People</b>	SDG 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5	29
<b>Planet</b>	SDG 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15	42
<b>Prosperity</b>	SDG 8, 9, 10 and 11	24
<b>Peace</b>	SDG 16	7
<b>Partnerships</b>	SDG 17	7

Most of the participants claimed to have no prior knowledge of the SDGs, which indicates a lack of awareness among industry players and possibly a lack of insight in how the SDGs could be implemented on a property level. The lack of clear relationship between the SDGs

and corporation's economic motives could also make the SDGs appear less operationally relevant.

Initially participants could not identify the connection between the sustainable development goals and the hotel property, however, upon discussion it became more apparent:

*I guess they break it down more, don't they? They make it really clear. Like I said, there's a few of these at my, when I first sat down and told you what it meant to me, it was all about the environment, but, but these open yourself, these open yourself up to, to other areas of sustainable development, which I, which I didn't consider as important or even a part of sustainability. (P4)*

With both literature and participants emphasising the importance of stakeholder engagement (Movono & Hughes, 2022; Pratt, 2022), it is important to note the role all staff play in educating each other and guests. Therefore, if staff, and particularly senior staff, are unaware of the SDGs or how best to implement them, the likelihood of any form of successful implementation becomes increasingly unlikely (Karatepe et al., 2022).

On the whole, participants still contributed to the planet dimension the most, since the definition of sustainability was frequently associated with this (see Kim et al., 2019). People was ranked second, however, due to the hospitality industry being people-oriented, one could question why there were few initiatives in this area. Participants made it clear that it was difficult to contribute to the first two goals due to being in a luxurious environment like Dubai, however, one could argue that, if they have international connections as a multinational company, such initiatives should be extended to other locations. Therefore, it could be concluded that these sustainable development goals also require time and effort to plan, then execute hence, it is vital to accelerate the commitment. However, peace and partnerships were expected to have a limited contribution due to only presenting one goal each in the framework, their inherent value and importance notwithstanding (Liburd et al., 2022; Movono & Hughes, 2022). In terms of ethics, it was difficult to measure or quantify this due to varied responses, however, it was often associated with peace. In terms of the future SDGs that the property wants to focus on, the top three are SDG 6, SDG 12, and SDG 14, this is perhaps due to the participants being familiar with these goals. Surprisingly there is limited engagement with SDG 9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure however, the literature showcased that technology and innovation is not of high priority, since Dubai

adopts a more traditional and customer-oriented approach (Alameeri et al., 2018; Nam et al., 2021). Furthermore, since peace and partnerships are usually more cross-business, it is possible that such initiatives would occur on a more senior corporate level. Their limited discussion here could reflect the lack of senior corporate leaders in the sample. It is also possible that elements related particularly to peace are included in employment contracts or onboarding communiques, but rarely discussed on a day-to-day basis.

## **Conclusion**

As more organisations begin to make notable shifts towards sustainability, the role hospitality has to play cannot be understated. It is, therefore, surprising that little is known about hotel's practices to implement sustainability initiatives, notably through the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The current sustainability practices of Dubai hotels revealed that they frequently adopted initiatives connected to the environmental pillar, such as: energy savings, water conservation, recycling, reduction of single-use plastic. The common challenges that were faced by hotels as they tried to implement sustainability initiatives related to high initial investments, brand misconception, and the need for further policies. This can be supported by additional accountability and support for those responsible for implementing sustainable practices. It is also important that those with responsibility and accountability are aware and knowledgeable of different sustainability initiatives and still supported by all departments. The lack of awareness of the SDGs and hotels' solutions towards these goals can be improved by increased use of certification programmes and multi-stakeholder involvement, which can help hotels in their monitoring and tracking of sustainability. This is vital if hotels wish to justify the value of these initiatives to encourage greater investment in the future.

## **Implications**

There are many implications that can be drawn from this study. Due to sustainability becoming a topic of importance with the younger generations, it could provide the brand with a competitive advantage, and guide their current and future sustainability initiatives if hotels openly adopt and commit to the 17 SDGs. This would include clearly linking strategies and operational practices to the SDGs and openly communicating this to all stakeholders. This could include 'passive' activities such as signs around the property, in the rooms, or in menus detailing the hotels' sustainability initiatives and connection to the SDGs. This could also

include more ‘active’ activities such as offering discounts or incentives to guests to support the hotels’ sustainability initiatives, with explanations to connect these initiatives to the SDGs.

With hospitality and tourism accounting for a significant portion of global GDP, the industry has the potential to significantly impact global sustainability efforts. Therefore, this study aims to create further awareness on sustainable development and the goals in the hospitality industry.

In terms of recommendations, the following were generated from the findings:

- More commitment, involvement, awareness, and education of stakeholders is needed, especially at higher-level management. While general trainings can support this, more specific initiatives such as the adoption of sustainability certificates, and dedicated sustainability departments may be more helpful here.
- Invest in innovation and technology, particularly to support the more accurate tracking of CSR initiatives and their contribution to the business. Increasing requirements for companies to report on their emissions can be supported through investments in appropriate tracking technology.
- Hotels should consider dedicated sustainability departments who can take responsibility and accountability for the accurate and long-term implementation of sustainability initiatives. This would also support hotels to keep up-to-date with rapid changes in sustainability initiatives, technology, legislation, and developments in project management best practices.
- Enhanced communication – incorporate it in the philosophy of the brand, try to spread more awareness, encourage consumers to post on their social media that the organisation is more committed towards sustainability. It is important that the improved reporting metrics are then clearly communicated publicly (Guix & Font, 2020), through mediums such as company annual reports.
- Utilise a holistic model or framework that contributes to all the pillars of sustainability (people, planet, prosperity, partnerships, peace, and ethics) with specific targets, and provide this plan to all the stakeholders. It is vital to track the progress of such outcomes, and to update these to all management and employees e.g. through newsletters or messages from the CEO. For guests, particularly those who are also choosing properties based on sustainability practices, these outcomes can be shared

via mediums such as the room television, verbally upon check-in, company website, or social media.

- Governments should incentivise organisations to become more sustainable through exclusive access to subsidies, tax breaks, or government contracts if they can prove efforts to become sustainable. Simultaneously, governments should provide organisations with support to become more sustainable, through recommendations, trainings or training subsidies, grants, and resources to adopt more certifications, sustainable technology, or tracking systems.
- Governments or certification organisations could also create lists of approved partners who meet and share their sustainable results to provide additional marketing, validation, and evidence of sustainability practices.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There were a few limitations that occurred during the study. Firstly, the study was only explored in Dubai, therefore, further international research is required to explore the international generalisability of the results. While saturation was reached in the study, the small sample size limits the possibility of exploring possible relationships between chains, room numbers, and hotel locations, amongst other possible variables. It is also interesting to consider the lack of gender diversity in the sample; only 2 out of the 11 participants were female. It is also noteworthy that the two female participants were also the more junior of the participants, in terms of job title. As pointed out by Alarcón and Cole (2019), this does question the sustainability of initiatives if gender equality is not present. While it is not expected or felt that this has ramifications for the implications of this study, future studies should consider the sample constitution. In Dubai's case, efforts to improve gender equality have improved recently, showing a positive trajectory (UAE Embassy in Washington, DC, 2022). A follow-up quantitative study could provide access to a larger sample and facilitate a more detailed exploration of possible mitigating variables. Future studies should also consider the increasing role of governance in encouraging, or hindering, the adoption of sustainable practices. Finally, since the study engaged higher-level employees, it is unclear how widespread their opinions and observations are throughout an organisation. Therefore, a quantitative study with a wider sample base to include a wider variety of stakeholders would



improve understanding and insight into the implementation of sustainability practices throughout organisations.

## Reference List

- Abdou, A. H., Hassan, T. H., & El Dief, M. M. (2020). A description of green hotel practices and their role in achieving sustainable development. *Sustainability*, 12(22), 9624. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229624>
- Akturan, U. (2018). How does greenwashing affect green branding equity and purchase intention? An empirical research. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 36(7), 809–824. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-12-2017-0339>
- Alameeri, A., Ajmal, M. M., Hussain, M., & Helo, P. (2018). Sustainable management practices in UAE hotels. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 12(4), 440–466. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCTHR-10-2017-0100>
- Alarcón, D. M., & Cole, S. (2019). No sustainability for tourism without gender equality. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 27(7), 903–919. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1588283>
- Aras, G., & Crowther, D. (2013). Sustainable practice: The real triple bottom line. In D. Crowther & G. Aras (Eds.), *Developments in Corporate Governance and Responsibility* (pp. 1–18). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S2043-0523\(2013\)0000005004](https://doi.org/10.1108/S2043-0523(2013)0000005004)
- Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: Deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(4), 383–400. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035>
- Baker McKenzie. (2023). Switzerland: ESG reporting and due diligence requirements [Consultancy news]. *Baker McKenzie Investigations, Compliance & Ethics*.

<https://insightplus.bakermckenzie.com/bm/investigations-compliance-ethics/switzerland-esg-reporting-and-due-diligence-requirements>

Baltar, F., & Brunet, I. (2012). Social research 2.0: Virtual snowball sampling method using Facebook. *Internet Research*, 22(1), 57–74.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/10662241211199960>

Barbier, E. B., & Burgess, J. C. (2020). Sustainability and development after COVID-19.

*World Development*, 135, 105082. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105082>

Casado-Díaz, A. B., Sellers-Rubio, R., Rodriguez-Sanchez, C., & Sancho-Esper, F. (2020).

Predictors of willingness to pay a price premium for hotels' water-saving initiatives.

*Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 37(7), 773–784.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2020.1812469>

Dubai Sustainable Tourism. (2016). *Dubai Sustainable Tourism*. Dubai Sustainable Tourism.

<https://dst.dubaitourism.ae/>

Eichelberger, S., Heigl, M., Peters, M., & Pikkemaat, B. (2021). Exploring the role of

tourists: Responsible behavior triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sustainability*,

13(11), 5774. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13115774>

Elkington, J. (2004). *The triple bottom line, does it all add up?: Assessing the sustainability*

*of business and CSR* (A. Henriques & J. Richardson, Eds.). Routledge.

<http://site.ebrary.com/id/10128901>

Filho, W. L., Azeiteiro, U., Alves, F., Pace, P., Mifsud, M., Brandli, L., Caeiro, S. S., &

Disterheft, A. (2018). Reinvigorating the sustainable development research agenda:

The role of the sustainable development goals (SDG). *International Journal of*

*Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 25(2), 131–142.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2017.1342103>

- Fisher, P. B., & McAdams, E. (2015). Gaps in sustainability education: The impact of higher education coursework on perceptions of sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 16(4), 407–423. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-08-2013-0106>
- Giardina, G. (2019). Expo 2020 and sustainability: Luxury hotel properties challenges and future outlook. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 11(3), 314–326. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-01-2019-0005>
- Goswami, S., & Ha-Brookshire, J. (2015). From compliance to a growth strategy: Exploring historical transformation of corporate sustainability. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 6(2), 246–261. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGR-04-2015-0005>
- Goulding, C. (2005). Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research. *European Journal of Marketing*, 39(3/4), 294–308. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560510581782>
- Guix, M., & Font, X. (2020). The Materiality Balanced Scorecard: A framework for stakeholder-led integration of sustainable hospitality management and reporting. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 91, 102634. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102634>
- Hammer, J., & Pivo, G. (2017). The triple bottom line and sustainable economic development theory and practice. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 31(1), 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891242416674808>
- Henry, L. A., Buyl, T., & Jansen, R. J. G. (2019). Leading corporate sustainability: The role of top management team composition for triple bottom line performance. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 28(1), 173–184. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2247>
- Ho, L.-C., J., & Taylor, M. E. (2007). An empirical analysis of triple bottom-line reporting and its determinants: Evidence from the United States and Japan. *Journal of*

- International Financial Management & Accounting*, 18(2), 123–150.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-646X.2007.01010.x>
- Issa, N. S. C., & Al Abbar, S. D. (2015). Sustainability in the Middle East: Achievements and challenges. *International Journal of Sustainable Building Technology and Urban Development*, 6(1), 34–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2093761X.2015.1006709>
- James, M., & Card, K. (2012). Factors contributing to institutions achieving environmental sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 13(2), 166–176. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14676371211211845>
- Jenkins, N. R., & Karanikola, I. (2014). Do hotel companies communicate their environmental policies and practices more than independent hotels in Dubai, UAE? *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 6(4), 362–380.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-01-2014-0003>
- Jones, P., Hillier, D., & Comfort, D. (2014). Sustainability in the global hotel industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(1), 5–17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2012-0180>
- Jones, P., Hillier, D., & Comfort, D. (2016). Sustainability in the hospitality industry: Some personal reflections on corporate challenges and research agendas. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(1), 36–67.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-11-2014-0572>
- Jones, P., Hillier, D., & Comfort, D. (2017). The sustainable development goals and the tourism and hospitality industry. *Athens Journal of Tourism*, 4(1), 7–18.  
<https://doi.org/10.30958/ajt.4.1.1>
- Jones, R., & Noble, G. (2007). Grounded theory and management research: A lack of integrity? *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 2(2), 84–103. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17465640710778502>

- Karatepe, T., Ozturen, A., Karatepe, O. M., Uner, M. M., & Kim, T. T. (2022). Management commitment to the ecological environment, green work engagement and their effects on hotel employees' green work outcomes. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 34(8), 3084–3112. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2021-1242>
- Kenny, J., & Dutt, C. S. (2021). The long-term impacts of hotel's strategic responses to COVID-19: The case of Dubai. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 146735842110345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584211034525>
- Khatter, A., White, L., Pyke, J., & McGrath, M. (2021). Barriers and drivers of environmental sustainability: Australian hotels. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 33(5), 1830–1849. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-08-2020-0929>
- Kim, Y. H., Barber, N., & Kim, D.-K. (2019). Sustainability research in the hotel industry: Past, present, and future. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 28(5), 576–620. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2019.1533907>
- Krizanova, A., Lăzăroiu, G., Gajanova, L., Klietkova, J., Nadanyiova, M., & Moravcikova, D. (2019). The effectiveness of marketing communication and importance of its evaluation in an online environment. *Sustainability*, 11(24), 7016. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11247016>
- Ledbetter, B. (2016). Business leadership for peace. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 12(3), 239–251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-04-2016-0016>
- Liburd, J., Duedahl, E., & Heape, C. (2022). Co-designing tourism for sustainable development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 30(10), 2298–2317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1839473>

- Mochizuki, Y., & Fadeeva, Z. (2010). Competences for sustainable development and sustainability: Significance and challenges for ESD. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 11(4), 391–403.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/14676371011077603>
- Movono, A., & Hughes, E. (2022). Tourism partnerships: Localizing the SDG agenda in Fiji. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 30(10), 2318–2332.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1811291>
- Nam, K., Dutt, C. S., Chathoth, P., Daghfous, A., & Khan, M. S. (2021). The adoption of artificial intelligence and robotics in the hotel industry: Prospects and challenges. *Electronic Markets*, 31(3), 553–574. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-020-00442-3>
- Nelson, K. M., Partelow, S., Stäbler, M., Graci, S., & Fujitani, M. (2021). Tourist willingness to pay for local green hotel certification. *PLOS ONE*, 16(2), e0245953.  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245953>
- Newnham, M. P., & Dutt, C. S. (2022a). Knowledge sharing among hotel workers in Dubai, UAE. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 21(2), 315–339.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2022.2031613>
- Newnham, M. P., & Dutt, C. S. (2022b). Treasure hunt: The quest for knowledge by hotel employees in Dubai, UAE. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2023.2153555>
- Pérez, A., & del Bosque, I. R. (2014). Sustainable development and stakeholders: A renew proposal for the implementation and measurement of sustainability in hospitality companies: Sustainability in hospitality companies. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 21(3), 198–205. <https://doi.org/10.1002/kpm.1452>

- Pineda-Escobar, M. A. (2019). Moving the 2030 agenda forward: SDG implementation in Colombia. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society*, 19(1), 176–188. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CG-11-2017-0268>
- Pomare, C. (2018). A multiple framework approach to sustainable development goals (SDGs) and entrepreneurship. In N. Apostolopoulos, H. Al-Dajani, D. Holt, P. Jones, & R. Newbery (Eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research* (Vol. 8, pp. 11–31). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2040-724620180000008006>
- Pratt, S. (2022). Can Tourism contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals? Evidence from Pacific Island Countries & Territories. *International Marketing Journal of Culture and Tourism*, 1(1), 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.33001/18355/IMJCT0102>
- Preziosi, M., Acampora, A., Lucchetti, M. C., & Merli, R. (2022). Delighting hotel guests with sustainability: Revamping importance-performance analysis in the light of the Three-Factor Theory of Customer Satisfaction. *Sustainability*, 14(6), 3575. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063575>
- Rahman, I., Park, J., & Chi, C. G. (2015). Consequences of “greenwashing”: Consumers’ reactions to hotels’ green initiatives. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(6), 1054–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-04-2014-0202>
- Salama, W., Nor El Deen, M., Albakhit, A., & Zaki, K. (2022). Understanding the Connection between Sustainable Human Resource Management and the Hotel Business Outcomes: Evidence from the Green-Certified Hotels of Egypt. *Sustainability*, 14(9), 5647. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14095647>
- Seghezze, L. (2009). The five dimensions of sustainability. *Environmental Politics*, 18(4), 539–556. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010903063669>

- Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 11(2), 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ1102063>
- The Economist. (2022, July 21). A broken system needs urgent repairs. *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2022/07/21/a-broken-system-needs-urgent-repairs>
- The Federal Council. (2023, September 9). SR 220—*Federal Act of 30 March 1911 on the Amendment of the Swiss Civil Code (Part Five: The Code of Obligations)* [Government]. The Federal Council. [https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/27/317\\_321\\_377/en#part\\_4/tit\\_32/chap\\_6](https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/27/317_321_377/en#part_4/tit_32/chap_6)
- UAE Embassy in Washington, DC. (2022). *Women in the UAE | UAE Embassy in Washington, DC*. Women in the UAE | UAE Embassy in Washington, DC. <https://www.uae-embassy.org/discover-uae/society/women-in-the-uae>
- UAE President announces 2023 as ‘Year of Sustainability’. (2023, January 21). [Government]. UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. <https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2023/1/21/21-01-2023-uae>
- United Nations. (2021). Take action for the Sustainable Development Goals. *United Nations Sustainable Development*. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *The SDGs in action*. UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>
- Väätänen, J., & Teplov, R. (2017). Introduction: How multinational enterprises can contribute to achieving sustainable development goals. In P. N. Ghauri, X. Fu, & J. Väätänen (Eds.), *International Business and Management* (Vol. 33, pp. 1–12). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1876-066X20170000033001>



- Vij, M. (2016). The cost competitiveness, competitiveness and sustainability of the hospitality industry in India. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 8(4), 432–443. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-04-2016-0019>
- Vinerean, S., Opreana, A., Tileagă, C., & Popșa, R. E. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on residents' support for sustainable tourism development. *Sustainability*, 13(22), 12541. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132212541>
- Vision 2021. (2018). *Sustainable Environment and Infrastructure*. Vision 2021. <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/national-agenda-2021/list/environment-circle>
- Visit Dubai. (2022). *Dubai Can*. <https://www.visitdubai.com/en/dubai-can>
- World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & International Transport Forum (Eds.). (2019). *Transport-related CO2 Emissions of the Tourism Sector – Modelling Results*. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284416660>
- WTTC. (2021). *Economic Impact*. World Travel and Tourism Council. <https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>
- Wu, M.-H., Thongma, W., Leelapattana, W., & Huang, M.-L. (2016). Impact of hotel employee's green awareness, knowledge, and skill on hotel's overall performance. In J. S. Chen (Ed.), *Advances in Hospitality and Leisure* (Vol. 12, pp. 65–81). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1745-354220160000012004>
- Yeh, S.-S., Fotiadis, A. K., Huang, M.-L., & Huan, T.-C. (2017). Barriers to implementing green management in the hospitality industry. In J. S. Chen (Ed.), *Advances in Hospitality and Leisure* (Vol. 13, pp. 47–61). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1745-354220170000013004>
- Żak, A. (2015). Triple bottom line concept in theory and practice. *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego We Wrocławiu*, 387. <https://doi.org/10.15611/pn.2015.387.21>

---

### **Appendix A: Interview Schedule**

1. What does sustainability mean to you / how do you define sustainability?
2. What sustainability initiatives has your hotel implemented?
3. Has sustainability implementation provided your Hotel with any competitive advantages (qualitative and quantitative)?
4. Are you aware of the 17 SDGs? How do you think you are addressing those in your hotel?
5. Which of these SDGs do you think are most important? What do you think is needed to help implement these?
6. What are the greatest benefits of implementing sustainability practices? And, what are the greatest benefits of implementing the SDGs? What are your largest challenges?
7. In your opinion, what can be done to promote sustainability initiatives within Hotels?
  - a. An Organisational perspective?
  - b. Government Intervention?