



**XXIII. International Balkan and Near Eastern Congress Series on
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**University of Agribusiness and Rural Development/Bulgaria
University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Faculty of Economics/Republic of North Macedonia
University "Isa Boletini" - Mitrovica, Faculty of Economics / Republic of Kosovo
IBANESS**

PROCEEDINGS

Editors

Prof.Dr. Mariana IVANOVA

Prof.Dr. Dragica ODZAKLIESKA

Prof.Dr. Rasim YILMAZ

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FOREWORD

International Balkan and Near Eastern Congress Series brings together many distinguished social and behavioral science researchers from all over the world. Participants find opportunities for presenting new research, exchanging information, and discussing current issues.

We are delighted and honored to host the IBANESS Congress Series in Plovdiv / Bulgaria. Presented papers have been selected from submitted papers by the referees. Sincere thanks to those all who have submitted papers.

We hope that through exchange of the presented researches and experiences, the Congress will enhance communication and dissemination of knowledge in Balkan and Near Eastern Countries.

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Sustainable Hotel Operations

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Abstract: It is common knowledge that business owners across all sectors need to be mindful about sustainability, since overall, it considers all aspects of a business that have the potential to influence future generations. To put it simply, sustainable hotel operations take into account and benefit current generations of guests without negatively affecting future generations. This implies that in order to be sustainable, hotels need to think about what eco-friendly hotel practices they might use. This includes areas like water conservation, waste management, recycling programs, energy efficiency, the use of renewable energy sources, and the sustainable purchase of locally produced and environmentally friendly goods. Equally important are social and economic sustainability, which includes fair treatment, diversity, and involvement of the workforce, as well as the hotel's long-term profitability and financial stability. It also means contributing positively to the surrounding community by creating jobs, supporting local businesses, and engaging in socially responsible initiatives, as well as finding innovative ways to reduce costs, increase efficiency, and attract guests who appreciate and support their sustainability efforts. Despite the obvious benefits, challenges including high implementation costs, reluctance to change, and operational limitations prevent broad adoption. Nonetheless, new developments like digital technology, circular economy methods, and sustainability certifications point to a move toward hotel operations that are more robust and resource efficient.

Keywords: guests, hotel, sustainability, operations.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the hotel sector, sustainable hotel operations are methods that combine social responsibility, preservation of the environment, and financial viability in a holistic manner (Muñoz-Torres et al., 2018; Lozano, 2015). This broad approach supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, which state that hotels ought to meet current guest demands without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to do the same (Tarnovskaya, 2023).

Environmentally, energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, and the support of regional economies and cultures are all essential elements of sustainable hotel operations (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Economically, sustainable business practices may increase long-term profitability, encourage eco-friendly tourists, and save operating expenses (Xanthopoulou et al. 2024). Socially, sustainability encourages better guest experiences, equal employment standards, and support for the local community (Yenidogan et al., 2016). These techniques also give hotels a competitive edge by changing the way they normally do business. This is because they often lead to better experiences for guests, repeat business, and lower operational costs (Moreno et al., 2024; Fukey & Issac, 2014). So, hotels can effectively solve major problems and build stronger community ties by making sustainability their top priority.

Nonetheless, it is important to underscore that the hotel sector has already embraced sustainability in many forms (Rodríguez-García et al., 2023). Just by prioritizing sustainability, hotels have already implemented common environmentally friendly practices, such as energy and water conservation (e.g., LED lighting, low-flow fixtures), (Warren & Becken, 2017) lowering waste production (e.g., recycling, composting), alternative energy sources (e.g., solar power) (Buhalis et al., 2019), and green certifications (Martínez et al., 2019). In addition, hotels participate in social community-based projects (Li et al., 2024), support fair labor standards (Ying-Chang & Yu-Ta, 2024), and make investments in economic energy-efficient technologies (Martín Lucas et al., 2024).

This shows that by adopting eco-conscious initiatives, hotels can support the global sustainability goals, ensuring a positive impact across the whole tourism industry. Hence, from this point, this paper will elaborate on the complexity of what the sustainability pillars represent in terms of adopting sustainable practices into hotel operations but also address the sustainability challenges and future trends in the hotel sector.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Current practices in hotel operations reflect a growing commitment to environmental sustainability (also known as the “planet” pillar of sustainability) (Ruíz-Molina et al., 2024), since hotels are among the biggest consumers of resources, including energy, water, raw materials, and significant waste (Xanthopoulou et al. 2024; Skordoulis et al., 2022a).

However, the growing awareness of eco-friendly guests coupled with the demand for sustainable practices to be implemented, has encouraged hotels to adopt various environmental preservation measures to reduce their impact on the environment (Skordoulis et al., 2022b). Water conservation, waste separation and management, energy saving technology and renewable energy use, eco products, and local sourcing are some of the major focus areas (Iddawala et al., 2024).

Water, as a vital resource of hotel operations, is essential for various purposes, including guestroom utilization, laundry services, horticulture, and the maintenance of swimming pools (Marneros et al., 2023). Thus, one of the hotel sector's environmental sustainability factors is effective water maintenance. Hotels have used several water conservation measures to cut down on water waste and operational expenses. Installing low-flow toilets, showerheads, and faucets may reduce water usage in guest rooms without compromising their comfort (Abdou et al., 2020). These practices guarantee that water usage is minimized to regulate flow rates, which frequently total hundreds of liters per room per year. The collection of rainwater is another effective technique. For non-drinkable uses like watering and gardening, hotels can set up systems that collect and hold rainwater. Especially in regions where water shortages occur frequently, this technique reduces the demand for municipal water resources (Gossling & Reinhold, 2024). Even so, to conserve water, guest participation is required. These days, a lot of hotels encourage their guests to reuse bed sheets and towels during their stay to help save water. These reduce the need for regular laundry, which results in greater water and energy savings. Many hotels also encourage guests to engage in ecologically friendly activities while they are there just by notifying them about their water-saving initiatives.

Waste management has become an additional essential aspect of hotel sustainability. Hotels produce a lot of waste, from leftover meals to packing to waste from guest rooms, but effective waste management techniques can decrease the amount of waste that goes up in waste dumps and the negative effects that hotels have on the environment (Makoondlall-Chadee & Bokhoree 2024b). Establishing recycling programs to keep recyclable materials, specifically paper, glass, plastics, and metal, away from waste dumps is an additional option (Gossling & Reinhold, 2024). Nowadays, a lot of hotels feature recycling facilities on-site to encourage guests as well as employees to properly separate waste. Usually placed next to ordinary trash cans in tourist areas, recycling bins include obvious signage telling guests how to dispose of trash. In order to guarantee that the waste products that are being collected are recycled properly, hotels may also be able to collaborate with nearby recycling facilities. In addition to recycling, several hotels have developed the sustainable practice of composting food waste, particularly for those with sizable dining operations (Lee & Huang, 2023). Composting organic waste will help decrease the amount of waste that ends up in waste dumps while also returning nutrient-rich materials for local agriculture or horticulture (Marneros et al., 2023). Even more so, hotels are starting to embrace a zero-waste approach regarding non-recyclable waste (Lee & Huang, 2023). This frequently consists of reducing single packaged products (such as plastic straws, bottles, and toiletries) and choosing alternatives like paper or glass packaging and bulk toiletry dispensers. By minimizing the volume of waste generated at the primary source, hotels could lower their environmental impact and improve their standing within the circular economy (De Martino et al., 2025).

Energy use, which includes heat, cooling, light, and appliance use, is another of the biggest environmental harms to hotel operations (Makoondlall-Chadee & Chandradeo, 2024a). Therefore, carbon emissions are quite high if the energy comes from non-renewable sources. That is why the first item on the list to reduce energy consumption is energy-efficient technology itself (Marneros et al., 2023). For example, hotels typically use smart thermostats, motion sensors, and LED lighting to use energy more efficiently (Ристова Магловска, 2022). For instance, energy-efficient HVAC systems with adjustable-speed motors provide more precise temperature control and reduce energy waste. Another important practice of a hotel with an energy sustainability focus is renewable energy. Solar panels, wind turbines, and geothermal heating and cooling systems are cleaner alternatives to traditional fossil fuels. In order to lower their need for electrical supply, some hotels have even gone as far as to install solar panels on their rooftops (Ангелкова Петкова & Ристова Магловска, 2025). Therefore, in addition to further saving operating costs, using renewable energy improves the hotel's reputation as a sustainable business and attracts more environmentally concerned guests (Manoharan et al., 2024).

For the purpose of encouraging sustainable hotel development, *environmentally friendly products* should also be mentioned. A practical approach for hotels intending to reduce carbon footprints in their operations would be to select any product—from cleaning materials to guest amenities—that have the lowest possible impact on the environment. Many hotels have drastically lowered their impact on the environment and the health of their employees by using green-certified cleaning products that are non-hazardous and ecologically friendly (Marneros et al., 2023). Eco-friendly cleaning solutions are usually non-toxic and biodegradable; they will not damage

ecosystems and additionally reduce chemicals (Witek, 2020). Biodegradable toiletries, bamboo toothbrushes, and refillable amenities are also being more widely used as sustainable substitutes for traditional guest amenities (Lyne et al., 2020). Bulk dispensing approaches are replacing the previous practice of storing shampoo, conditioner, and soap in single-use plastic bottles (Witek, 2020). Also, hotels are starting to adopt sustainable practices by using organic or recycled materials for furniture and table linens. As a result, these materials would reduce the use of raw resources and encourage better indoor air quality for workers as well as guests. Furthermore, some hotels are collaborating with eco-friendly retailers to furnish their properties with furniture, textiles, and art created from sustainable resources like recycled textiles or recovered wood.

Increasing *local sourcing* is another key practice for hotel operations to be more sustainable and boost the local economy. By doing this, hotels help local farmers, craftspeople, and companies while lowering transportation-related carbon emissions (Pas, 2021). In terms of cuisine, a lot of hotels have embraced farm-to-table dining, which offers seasonal menus that highlight sustainably farmed and produced foods. These services lessen hotels' carbon footprints associated with food transportation while improving guest experiences with unique and fresh cuisine. But local sourcing extends beyond food; hotels are increasingly choosing local craftspeople for the décor and services offered to guests. By using this strategy, hotels may save the environmental expenses associated with producing and shipping items over kilometers while also contributing much-needed financial boosts to the community.

3. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Social as well as economic practices of sustainability are just as significant and essential for the future viability and profitability of hotel businesses (Molina-Azorin et al., 2015; Bos-Brouwers, 2009), even if the environmental practices of sustainability frequently gain the most focus when it comes to adaptations in hotel operations.

The “people” pillar of sustainability, also known as ethical sustainability or social sustainability (Ruiz-Molina et al., 2024), is a term that refers to a mix of official and unofficial practices that use infrastructure to support people's social and cultural lives. It creates a place that is favorable to social interaction and allows for the evolution of both people and places (Shegrani 2019). By providing them with equal possibilities and opportunities for helping their families both socially and economically, it enhances the welfare and health of individuals (Mokadam 2013). In addition, some of the social sustainability practices that hotels can enforce are:

- *Fair labor practices*: Treating hotel employees correctly is one of the most vital elements of social sustainability. Business profits should not take precedence over the rights and benefits of employees in the supply chain. Prioritizing employee welfare, providing secure working conditions, and paying fair pay are all part of practicing fair labor standards (Henson, 2019). The primary objective of any hotel business should be to acknowledge that its employees are significant stakeholders (Kong et al., 2019).
- *Community engagement and cultural preservation*: As a fundamental aspect of sustainable development, community engagement and cultural preservation allow initiatives to address local demands, encourage social inclusion, and advance the protection of the environment (Nocca, 2017). Sustainable development practices may have long-lasting beneficial effects on both communities and the environment by promoting trust, elevating local voices, co-designing solutions, raising awareness, and educating people. But to achieve sustainability goals and create strong, prosperous communities for the generations to come, it will be crucial to give priority to true community engagement further ahead. Additionally, via community engagement initiatives, hotels may enhance guest experiences by embracing local culture and tradition. By collaborating with regional businesses, artists, and cultural institutions, hotels can provide immersive, genuine experiences that highlight the destination's distinct character and uplift the local economy (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2017). Through goods from art exhibits and food trips to volunteer opportunities and philanthropic activities, hotels can provide lasting memories that connect with guests and help them feel a sense of belonging.
- *Guest satisfaction and their well-being*: Hotels can meet the growing need for holistic guest experiences that put well-being and good health first by implementing wellness and mindfulness services (Moreno et al. 2024; Filimonau et al. 2022). Hotels may give guests chances to unwind, revitalize, and preserve their physical and mental health while they are visiting by offering anything from on-site yoga classes and fitness facilities to spa services and meditation lessons. Furthermore, providing organic meals, wellness activities, and nutritious meal alternatives encourages a balanced lifestyle and builds trust

between guests. Hotels can also provide accessible and inclusive services to accommodate all kinds of guests, including those with disabilities.

The “profit” pillar of sustainability, or economic sustainability (Ruíz-Molina et al., 2024), refers to practices that guarantee the hotel's financial viability while reducing negative consequences such as an excessive reliance on limited assets (Dos Santos et al., 2017). Hotels that consider economic sustainability will guide their business to succeed in the long haul. Hotels may also achieve maximum efficiency at lower costs (Hamid et al., 2020) while improving the guest experience by promoting a sense of community between the hotel and its guests. That is why hotels can maintain their economic sustainability by:

- *Long-term cost savings*: Reducing expenses is one of the most common rewards of using sustainable hotel practices (El Ghoul et al. 2018). Examples of ways to reduce utility expenses in hotels include installing low-flow faucets and showerheads (El Ghoul et al. 2018), switching to more energy-efficient heaters, and replacing light bulbs with energy-efficient ones. Installing energy-efficient lighting systems lowers power costs by using less energy to deliver enough light for its intended usage. Similarly, modern HVAC systems used for efficiency save money on heating and cooling. When combined, these techniques lower expenses, increasing the profit-to-expense ratio.
- *Increased revenue from eco-friendly guests*: An increasing number of guests actively look for accommodations that are environmentally friendly. Green-certified or award-winning hotels can bring in these eco-aware guests, often allowing for premium pricing. Offering eco-friendly guest experiences, like farm-to-table meals or eco-tours, may help hotels stand out from the competition, attract additional reservations, and return guests (Giovannoni & Fabietti, 2013). Additionally, a hotel's commitment to sustainability can enhance its brand image in the social media era, leading to positive feedback and word-of-mouth referrals.

4. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE TRENDS

Implementing sustainable practices within hotel operations involves dealing with numerous obstacles that obstruct the successful transition to better sustainability. In addition, several of those challenges imposing obstacles are listed below:

- *Financial constraints and budget limitations*: The economic and financial constraints that sustainable operations must deal with seriously limit the implementation of environmentally conscious practices in hotels (Ruíz-Molina et al., 2024). Numerous external variables, such as changes in guest demand and economic instability, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, have made the hotel sector's preexisting financial limitations worse (Nedzvedskiy et al., 2024). Such financial constraints frequently restrict innovation and the adoption of sustainable practices by forcing hotels to put short-term operating expenses ahead of long-term sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, a strong approach to resource allocation and strategic planning is required due to the inherent difficulty of financial management in the hotel sector (Nedzvedskiy et al., 2024). Hotels must take advantage of creative financing options and encourage partnerships that improve resource efficiency to successfully manage these limitations. In the end, resolving financial constraints is essential for the sector to adapt its sustainability agenda, assuring long-term sustainability while adapting to changing market conditions.
- *Lack of awareness and training among employees*: A significant obstacle to successful sustainable hotel operations is the general lack of knowledge and training among employees. These shortcomings lead to increasing resource losses and increased environmental consequences in addition to preventing the adoption of environmentally friendly practices. Employees frequently lack proper understanding of sustainable practices, ranging from energy conservation to waste management, which eventually compromises the successful implementation of sustainability programs in hotels. According to research by Ying-Chang & Yu-Ta (2024), comprehensive training programs may significantly improve employees' competencies and match their abilities with the objectives of a hotel's sustainability. Also, people who do not get enough training are less able to recognize operational risks and respond appropriately to them, which makes it harder to make good decisions when things get tough (Aktas et al., 2016). To solve these issues, it is essential to provide specific training courses that include certain sustainable practices and promote awareness. In the end, this paradigm change will result in a more sustainable future by increasing the hotel's dedication to environmental care and operational efficiency.

- *Resistant to change from management and stakeholders:* Management and sector stakeholders' resistance to change presents major challenges to the adoption of sustainable hotel operations. Fear of the unknown, embedded interests, or perceived dangers to profitability and established methods are frequently the causes of this unwillingness to do so. According to Khatter et al. (2021), getting past this kind of opposition needs good cross-functional collaboration, which lets different points of view be heard and helps align business goals with environmentally friendly practices. Furthermore, Anarene et al. (2024) emphasize how important digital transitions are in changing industrial standards, which may surprise people used to more conventional approaches. It takes open communication, strong training initiatives, and the development of an innovative culture to overcome this disapproval. By making stakeholders feel valued and involved in the change process, hotels may reduce disagreement and improve the effectiveness of sustainability efforts (Sarkis et al., 2010). This will lead to better operational performance and stakeholder satisfaction.
- *Regulatory and compliance issues:* Regulatory and compliance concerns pose a complex problem in the field of sustainable hotel operations, having a big impact on operational and environmental practices. Hotels must comply with a complicated network of regional, national, and worldwide laws that control water, electricity, and waste management. As governments place greater emphasis on sustainability, these rules are frequently open to change; therefore, hotels must continue to be flexible in their compliance efforts. Adding innovative technologies like AI or operations in the metaverse (Dwivedi et al., 2023) also comes with extra rules about data protection and how things must work. According to Dwivedi et al. 2023, generative AI talks along with the moral problems with compliance stress the chance of biases and false information, which could make it harder to follow the rules. So, good compliance management not only makes sure that laws are followed, but it also encourages the use of eco-friendly methods that support larger goals. This shows the link between environmentally friendly hotel operations and regulatory frameworks.
- *Balancing guest expectations with sustainability goals:* Another significant obstacle in the drive for environmentally friendly hotel operations is striking a balance between guest expectations and sustainability practices. Hotels must manage the complex relationship between traditional service offerings and innovative sustainability initiatives as eco-friendly practices become increasingly important to guests. To improve operational efficiency and satisfy the changing needs of a conscientious customer base, it is necessary for strategic planning and the use of innovative technology (Bevz, 2024). Using energy-efficient technologies and serving locally produced, sustainable food, for example, might draw in eco-conscious customers and increase their sense of satisfaction and loyalty. The difficulty still lies in managing the various expectations of guests who could place a higher value on convenience and luxury than sustainability. In order to successfully bridge the gap between sustainable practices and the high levels of service required by the sector, hotels must adopt a comprehensive strategy that harmonizes their operational approach with consumer values. By doing this, hotels may support more general environmental objectives while putting themselves in a competitive position (Filimonau et al. 2022).

Furthermore, future developments in sustainable hotel operations have the potential to drastically alter industry paradigms as the hotel sector grows increasingly committed to sustainability. Incorporating artificial intelligence is essential because it optimizes energy management and resource allocation while lowering operational inefficiencies (Khoalenyane and Ajani, 2024). Additionally, through intelligent energy consumption and waste reduction technology, the Internet of Things aims to improve guest experience while also encouraging sustainable habits (Shirvani & Ghasemshirazi, 2024; Poullas and Kakoulli, 2023). These rapidly changing technology developments call for the creation of detailed frameworks to guarantee their moral application, therefore enhancing public confidence and responsibility. Moreover, encouraging guest participation in sustainability projects—through educational efforts and firsthand conservation activities—is going to become a major area of focus. When taken as a whole, these trends aim to build guest awareness and trust while also improving operational efficiency, which will help the hotel sector become more sustainable.

The integration of circular economy principles in sustainable hotel operations represents another pivotal trend from conventional linear models toward more resource-efficient practices (Bux & Amicarelli, 2023). Hotels may significantly reduce waste production and optimize resource use by adopting these regulations, thus creating a more sustainable operational framework. For example, putting waste reduction techniques like recycling non-

biodegradable products and composting organic items into practice not only reduces waste contributions but also lowers total operating expenses (De Martino et al., 2025). Additionally, circular methods place a strong emphasis on product lifecycle management. By using solid and reusable furniture, hotels may reduce their reliance on materials and improve their environmental responsibility. The challenges of putting these principles into action, like the need to train employees and the excessive cost of sustainable technology, might be easier to manage if there is strategic planning and cooperation with groups like regional suppliers and waste management groups. Ultimately, using the concepts of the circular economy not only solves environmental issues but also establishes hotels as pioneers in sustainable tourism, attracting more environmentally aware tourists (Renfors & Wendt, 2024).

Certifications and eco-labels are one more trend who is influencing sector standards and guest behavior in the rapidly evolving field of sustainable hotel operations. They also improve the legitimacy of businesses dedicated to sustainable practices in addition to acting as standards for environmental performance (Martínez et al., 2019; Margaryan & Stensland, 2017). According to research by Bianco et al. (2023) and Wainwright (2020), eco-labels—like the Green Key and LEED certifications—give guests clear information about a hotel's environmental effect, enabling them to make well-informed decisions (Wainwright, 2020). Additionally, obtaining these certifications frequently encourages hotel management to put strict sustainability policies into place, bringing operating procedures into compliance with more general environmental standards (Wainwright, 2020; Battaglia, 2017). The creation of acknowledged eco-labels unquestionably contributes to a paradigm shift toward responsible tourism, where even though obstacles still exist, such as the inconsistent level of certification criteria and the possibility of greenwashing. As a result, these programs put hotels in a position to use sustainability as a differentiator and successfully meet the growing demand from guests for eco-friendly travel choices (Bernard & Nicolau, 2022; Esparon et al., 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

The rise of sustainability in the hotel business is a major shift that is changing the sector, not just a fleeting trend. But while adopting sustainable practices, there are many opportunities and challenges along the way to sustainable hotel operations, which all require careful planning. In today's environmentally concerned hotel sector, environmental sustainability in hotel operations is becoming a need rather than a luxury. Hotels are using a variety of strategies to use eco-friendly goods, manage water resources effectively, cut waste, save energy, and boost local economies. In addition to improving the planet's general health, these sustainable practices provide hotels with substantial financial and social advantages, especially when it comes to creating a balance between environmental care, social responsibility, and long-term economic profitability.

However, the integration of eco-friendly practices, while imperative for mitigating sustainability impact, often encounters obstacles such as financial constraints and the necessity for employee retraining. Consequently, management and stakeholders must embrace a collaborative approach to establish frameworks that promote continuous improvement in sustainable practices while ensuring economic viability. These practices align with growing guest preferences for sustainability, indicating that hotels adopting such measures can gain a competitive edge in the market.

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