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Sustainable Practices of Viennese City-centre and Outskirts Hotels

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed. In particular, I did not use any text generators or other paraphrasing tools. My thesis was not proofread.

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between the location of a hotel in a city and its sustainable practices. In order to achieve this aim, an interview was developed and directed to general managers of 4 or 5-star hotels, located in either the city centre or the outskirts of Vienna. Nine general managers participated in the interview, five of which were from the city centre and four from the outskirts. The findings revealed that, for the interviewed hotels, the location of a hotel does influence the choices of sustainable initiatives that are implemented, though other factors such as the hotel segment and the historicity of the building, were also found to influence the practices in place. Additionally, the importance of sustainable practices for each hotel did not quite depend on the location but rather on the importance that each general manager gave to sustainable initiatives.

Due to the location, hotels will or will not have space limitations which might result as restrictions in the choice of sustainable initiatives. Additionally, hotels in one of the two areas were found unable to modify the exterior part of their building, which in turn limited their sustainable practices. Finally, the findings showed that the location might affect the type of energy resources that a hotel can use. Even with the limitation in sample size, the research can be the basis for future research on this topic, to study furthermore the relationship between the location of a hotel in a city and its sustainable practices.

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List of Abbreviations

ECO - Ecology

EU - European Union

GSTC - Global Sustainable Tourism Council

MSC - Marine Stewardship Council

PET - Polyethylene Terephthalate (plastic)

ISO - International Organization for Standardization

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

UN - United Nation

UNWTO - United Nation World Tourism Organization

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WTO - World Tourism Organization

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the topic of the thesis to the reader as well as introduce the research question that will attempt to address the identified research gap. The last sub-chapter will present the outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background Information

Sustainability is "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, n.d.-a, para. 2). While this definition was introduced in the year 1987 by the United Nations Brundtland Commission the concept of sustainable development was first introduced in 1971 during the United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm. Shortly after, in the 1980s, a few hotels around the world started to incorporate eco-conscious practices (Millar & Berezan, 2014).

In the hospitality and tourism industry, hotels are considered one of the most energy and resource-consuming branches (Bohdanowicz et al., 2001), due to both the excessive consumption of resources and the number of wasted products. Nevertheless, the UNWTO (n.d.-c), in regard to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), stated that "tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the goals" (para. 1). Arguing that while doing so, the tourists and hospitality industry can also develop a wide range of market opportunities (Jones et al., 2017). The SDG consist of 17 goals, adopted by the UN in 2015, with the intention of ending poverty, protecting the planet and improving the lives and prospects of everyone and everywhere by 2030 (United Nations. n.d.-b). The Sustainable Development Goals include: no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace justice and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals (United Nations., n.d.-b). Tourism, while it has the capacity to contribute to all the goals, has been specifically included as a target for the 8th (decent work and economic growth),

12th (responsible consumption and production) and 14th (life below water) goals (UNWTO, n.d.-c).

Evidence suggests that companies within the hospitality industry are embracing sustainability by innovating their business model around greener options (Presenza et al., 2019). This will not only benefit the hotel and the guests' experience (Merli et al., 2019) but also enhance the quality of the location (Mousavi, 2022). In fact, the tourism sector has a major impact on the three sustainable pillars (economic, environmental, and social) (Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020), through the generation of direct and indirect economic wealth in the locations visited by tourists (Eskerod et al., 2019).

As will be later discussed in the literature review chapter, there is never only one reason for a hotel to implement sustainable hotel practices. Besides good morals and personal interest in the topic, economic benefits, brand image, and customer satisfaction are all common reasons why hotels become sustainable. Still, depending on the type of landscape (Kapera, 2018), available budget, and target audience, the type of sustainable practices changes. In fact, hotels located in the city centre might face architectural and planning constraints (Celata, 2012) due to the historical value of the building (Nocera et al., 2019). Consequently, the constraints will probably influence the kind of eco-practices, that can or can not be implemented and used.

1.2 Research Gap and Research Question

Previous research in the hotel and tourism industry were focused mainly on the benefits of sustainability (Eskerod et al., 2019; Floričić, 2020; Njoroge et al., 2019), motivations for implementing sustainability (Dodds & Holmes, 2016) as well as the most common sustainable practices in hotels (Berezan et al., 2014; Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020; Cunha et al., 2020). Other studies (Egan & Nield, 2000; Zolfani et al., 2019) tried to investigate the best location of a hotel based on their business perspective, including the sustainable one. The goal of the thesis is to try to investigate a possible relationship between the location of a hotel in a city and its sustainable practices, by comparing the city centre and the outskirts areas.

Consequently, this thesis tries to address the research gap by answering the following research question "In what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices?" by focusing on Vienna. This city was chosen because of its interest in being a sustainable metropolis (Vienna City Administration, 2014a). In fact, Vienna City Administration (2014a) published the guideline *STEP 2025: Urban development plan Vienna*, serving as a basis for sustainable future resolutions and measures related to the spatial development of the city in a more sustainable way. Notably, in different studies, Vienna has been described as a highly sustainable city, occupying the first place in the ranking of the "greenest" metropolis worldwide (Fair, 2020) and resulting as the second-best city that addresses climate change (Kutty et al., 2022).

Overall, the thesis will serve as a base for future research and will increase the knowledge of the importance of the location of a hotel in relation to how sustainable it can be. The findings can be used by hotel owners when deciding the type of sustainable hotel practices to implement, depending on the location of the building. Moreover, it can be helpful for people that want to build a sustainable hotel from the start, to decide the location of the hotel based on the different types of benefits and restrictions each location has.

1.3 Overview of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings & discussion, and conclusion. In the following chapter, more details will be given regarding different factors that, based on secondary research, are considered highly influential in the implementation of sustainable practices in the hotel. The different elements will be further analyzed with the data gained through the thesis's primary research method: interviews. These, are conducted with nine general managers each one of them representing a different 4 or 5 star hotel in Vienna, located either in the historic centre of the city (first district) or in the outskirts (from the tenth to the twenty-third district) (Vienna Tourist Board, 2023). The goal of these interviews is to gain an in-depth understanding of whether decisions, regarding the sustainable initiatives in a hotel, have been influenced by the location of the hotel. The researcher will then present and explain the key points and common

themes from the interviews in the findings and discussion chapter. In the conclusion, a summary of the findings will be provided followed by recommendations and implications, to highlight what has been learned throughout the thesis, and finish with limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide contextual background information by analyzing previous literature on the topic of sustainability within the hotel industry and more specifically how different factors related to sustainability and the hotel location affect the reason why a hotel chooses to implement sustainable practices.

2.1 Sustainability

The word sustainability has become a popular term (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010) used in multiple fields. In this part of the literature review, the researcher will introduce the reader to the concept of sustainability by starting with the origin of the word, followed by the explanation of the concept of greenwashing, going into detail on why it is a problem and how to possibly avoid it.

2.1.1 The Origin of Sustainability

Sustainability can be described as an open concept, because of its multiple interpretations and for changing its meaning depending on the context (Purvis et al., 2019). The word sustainability was first introduced in 1713 as a forestry term in Germany by Hans Carl von Carlowitz (Campbell et al., 2015; Seefried, 2015; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010; Purvis et al., 2019). Originally the word "Nachhaltigkeit" (sustainability in German) was used to express the concept of never harvesting more than what the forest yields in new growth (Wiersum, 1995). In 1987, during the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (mostly known as the Brundtland Commission), the modern concept of sustainability was coined (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010), defining sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, n.d.-a, para. 2). Furthermore, the Brundtland Report together with the Agenda 21, and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, are often

referred to as the originators of the "three-pillar" paradigm (Purvis et al., 2019). At the same time, others argue that this concept was created by Elkington (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Nevertheless, from the year 2001 onwards, the paradigm started to commonly appear in literature as a taken-at-face-value concept (Purvis et al., 2019).

Still, the definition of sustainability is very broad and as a result, there is no precise description of what a product/service has to have in order to be described as sustainable (Purvis et al., 2019). While environment and sustainability are not synonymous (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010), the descriptions of "being sustainable" and "being eco-friendly" are often used interchangeably. In practice, "eco-friendly" is a loose term used to describe a characteristic of a product/service that benefits the environment (Campbell et al., 2015). Both terms, because of their unspecific definitions, might suffer from greenwashing (Campbell et al., 2015) and consequently cause confusion among customers.

2.1.2   The Problem of Greenwashing

With the increasing number of companies including sustainability in their business model, the concept of greenwashing was developed.   The term "greenwashing" was first introduced by Jay Westerveld in 1986 (Pimonenko et al., 2020) using the hotel industry as his example, though an increase of interest in the topic only started to appear around the beginning of 2000 (Pimonenko et al., 2020). According to Cambridge Dictionary , greenwashing is a "behaviour or activities that make people believe that a company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is" (Cambridge University Press, 2023)and is said to cause scepticism among investors and customers, as well as increase mistrust towards companies (Espahbodi et al., 2019; Pimonenko et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2015).

The difficulties in scouting greenwashing are immediately correlated to the lack of specific definitions for the terms sustainable and eco-friendly. This results in consumers having inaccurate information regarding the meaning of this terminology leading to confusion and possibly believing that environmental labellings are only a sales gimmick (Campbell et al., 2015). This has been demonstrated during the research of Baker et al. (2014) where, during the interviews, participants admitted

that they see the word green as a marketing ploy. This mistrust is incremented by the tendency of companies to greenwash (Dahl, 2010) which, as a result, negatively affects both the image of the brand and its outflow of investments (Pimonenko et al., 2020). For the hotel industry, according to Rahman et al. (2015), greenwashing resulted in losing the guest's intention to revisit the hotel.

In order to avoid being suspected of greenwashing, by both customers and investors, companies might consider obtaining a sustainable certification (Mzembe et al., 2020). Additionally, to increase the trust of stakeholders, the company should publish its financial and non-financial reliable information (i.e. figures on the environmental performance of a company) on the official online platforms (Pimonenko et al., 2020).

Though the act of greenwashing can be difficult to identify, a clear example can be found in the hotel industry. If the hotel provides the option of towel re-usage to their guests but the housekeeping team provides a set of fresh towels in any case (Baker et al., 2014), then the hotel is greenwashing its customers. Generally, hotels can be extremely tempted to adopt minimal sustainable practices and "greenwash" the customers because of the positive influence a green outlook has on their companies (Shanti & Joshi, 2022). In turn, organizations such as the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), focus solemnly on the promotion of what sustainable tourism can and should be (World Tourism Organization, 2013).

2.2 Sustainable Hotels

In this part of the literature review, the researcher will focus on all the different aspects of sustainable hotels, starting with how unsustainable tourism is, followed by the possible motivations that a hotel might have to become sustainable, consequently, the discourse of sustainable certifications will be reviewed, concluding with a review of commonly used sustainable hotel practices.

While hotels started to incorporate eco-conscious practices in the 1980s (Millar & Berezan, 2014), programs on sustainable tourism were not introduced until the year 2002 (UNWTO, n.d.-a). During that year, in fact, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) took part in the World Summit on Sustainable Development, whose final declaration included sustainable development of tourism (UNWTO, n.d.-a). The

following year the WTO becomes a United Nations specialized body, changing its acronym to UNWTO (UNWTO, n.d.-a). The UNWTO is known for promoting sustainable tourism while being the leading international organization in the tourism field (UNWTO, n.d.-b). The organization actively promotes tourism as a catalyst for economic growth, development of inclusivity and environmental sustainability. On top of that the organisation also offers support to all the members of the UNWTO (156 countries) in the tourism sector in order to minimize its negative impact (UNWTO, n.d.-b).

2.2.1   The Unsustainability of Tourism

The concept of tourism has been around for thousands of years, with the modern concept of tourism being formed during the 17th century (Stronza, 2001). Over the last 60 years, tourism has become one of the largest economic sectors globally (Abdou et al., 2020; World Tourism Organization, 2013), while also being one of the fastest-growing industries in the world (Presenza et al., 2019). Tourism has had major positive impacts worldwide by being in many countries, including developing ones, the principal source of income (World Tourism Organization, 2013). At the same time, tourism accounts for nearly 5% of CO_2 global emissions (UNWTO, 2019), with the hotel industry being appointed as one of the most, if not the most, energy and resource-intensive branches of tourism (Bohdanowicz et al., 2000). For this reason, the negative effect that the hotel industry has on the environment has become a major topic within the hospitality industry (Millar & Berezan, 2014). Most of the impact on the environment is a result of the immoderate consumption of both local and imported resources (Bohdanowicz et al., 2000), together with polluting emissions and large quantities of wasted products (Bohdanowicz et al., 2000). To compensate for this, there is a growing number of hotel companies that try to integrate into their business model sustainable and green practices (Abdou et al., 2020; Presenza et al., 2019). These help the hotel to retain their guests, in fact, findings suggest that customers are more likely to return to the same accommodation when the hotel is socially and environmentally responsible (Olya et al., 2021).

While tourism activities can be unsustainable, the industry has been recognized as a key contributor to the accomplishment of the United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals and their associated targets (Abdou et al., 2020). This is because

tourism has a major impact on all three pillars of sustainability (Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020) and, consequently, has the capability to help both directly and indirectly achieve all the goals (World Tourism Organization, 2013). Hotels, in fact, implement sustainable practices in their business model for multiple reasons, one of these being the goal of reducing their impact on the environment (Buunk & Van der Werf, 2019; Shanti & Joshi, 2022).

2.2.2 Motivations behind Becoming a Sustainable Hotel

This subchapter will focus on the different reasons why hotels might want to introduce sustainable practices into their business model. The reasons behind implementing eco-practices are multiple, starting from wanting to satisfy the request of guests, who have been described as the main driver for adopting eco-friendly practices (Abdou et al., 2020). After focusing on how guest satisfaction and sustainability relate to each other, the researcher will introduce the cost efficiency and revenue improvement associated with adopting sustainable practices in a company's business model. This will be followed by a discussion on how competitive advantages gained by the introduction of eco-practices are a common motivation for implementing sustainable practices. Finally, in the final part of this sub-chapter, the possible impact of sustainable practices on the hotel's image will be studied.

2.2.2.1 Guest Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the result of customer's assessment of their perceptions of the service compared to their pre-expectations (Johnston et al., 2012) and it is often considered a key component of profitability (Anshori, 2007) as well as what creates customer loyalty (Preziosi et al., 2019). In Eskerod et al. (2019) paper, many of the interviewed hotel general managers, were under the impression that guests expect hotels to incorporate and offer sustainable practices. Meaning that, in order to ensure customer satisfaction and consequently loyalty, the hotel has to live up to guests' expectations, and implement at least some sustainable practices. Other studies confirmed a positive relationship between hotels with environmental commitment, guest satisfaction, and loyalty (Berezan et al., 2014; Merli et al., 2019). In fact, because of the increasing demand for sustainable hotels, guests have come to expect and demand sustainable practices during their stay (Cerchione & Bansal,

2020). Indicating that an implementation of sustainable practices will result in an increase in customer satisfaction. Moreover, customer satisfaction in relation to sustainability is expected to help economically (Njoroge et al., 2019).

2.2.2.2   Cost Efficiency and Revenue Improvement

With the increase in demand for sustainable practices from guests, more and more hotel managers started to see the possible economic benefits related to sustainability. In fact, the act of satisfying and understanding the guest's needs has been shown to have a strong correlation with long-term economic success (Njoroge et al., 2019). As revealed by different studies, hotel guests, especially in luxury hotels but not only, are more willing to pay higher prices for hotels with sustainable practices (Berezan et al., 2014; Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020; Chen, 2019; Floričić, 2020; Kang et al., 2012). Not only that, sustainable practices no more appeal only to a niche market (Berezan et al., 2014) but to the majority of guests (Floričić, 2020). Furthermore, incorporating sustainable practices can benefit the economy of the hotel, by decreasing for example the cost of energy consumption. For instance, renovating the hotel with a more efficient and sustainable design will reduce on average 20 to 50% of the energy consumption (Eskerod et al., 2019). Moreover, as Njoroge et al. (2019) research shows, hotels that focused on sustainable growth showed profit maximization. Indeed, there is a consensus among previous research that sustainability can be integrated into business strategies (Njoroge et al., 2019). By doing so the efficiency of the operation will be improved which will result in reduced cost and long-term financial stability (Cerchione & Bansal, 2020).

2.2.2.3   Competitive Advantages

As already mentioned, in the past years, guests started to demand sustainable practices in hotels. Therefore, it is possible to assume that hotels that do conform to the expectation have a competitive advantage over the classic hotels. This view is supported by the results of the research of Floričić (2020) which, through a questionnaire, discovered that a high percentage of interviewees considered sustainable initiatives very important for the recognizability and competitiveness of a hotel. Similarly, Cerchione and Bansal (2020) found that environmental performances such as resource and energy conservation can improve competitiveness as well as profitability. Other studies (Balaji et al., 2019; Buffa et al., 2018; Molina-Azorin et al.,

2015) also assessed the strong relationship between implementing sustainable practices and having competitive advantages. Furthermore, other recent studies demonstrated that possessing a green certificate will help stand out from the competition even more (Eskerod et al., 2019; Floričić, 2020; Mousavi, 2022).

2.2.2.4 Brand Image

Studies have shown that many hotels adopt sustainable practices not only to reduce the negative impact on the environment but also to increase the hotel's image among the guests (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Shanti & Joshi, 2022). Brand image can be described as whatever is linked to a brand in the memory of the customers (Aaker, 2009) and it is an essential part of a hotel since it is what makes the company stand out from competitors. The hotel industry, because of its intangibility, has to rely heavily on the image of the brand as well as word of mouth (Abrudan et al., 2020). Additionally, studies have shown that there is a positive relationship between successful brand image and green branding (Hu & Wall, 2005; Shanti & Joshi, 2022).

2.2.3 Sustainable Certifications

One of the possible ways for reducing criticism of greenwashing is to have a certificate attesting to the hotel's sustainability. Sustainability / green certifications, are acknowledgements from third-party organizations, that state that a company is following a set of environmental standards and repeatedly tries to have a positive impact on the environment (Chi et al., 2022). The criteria by which these certificates are given often follow the GSTC criteria, which serve as a global standard for sustainability travel and tourism (GSTC, 2022). Besides giving a basis for certifications, measuring and evaluating sustainability practices, the GSTC criteria are also used for education and raising awareness as well as policy-making, both for businesses and government agencies (GSTC, 2022).

2.2.3.1 Austrian Ecolabel

While there are many certifications globally, Austria also has its own Ecolabel called "Österreichisches Umweltzeichen", which directly translates to Austrian Ecolabel. It was created in 1990 as a Federal Ministry of Environment initiative (Vienna Convention Bureau, 2023) and is awarded to both products and tourist services as well as educational institutions such as schools (Austrian Ecolabel, 2023).

This ecolabel is the most important state-certified seal in Austria which guarantees that the certified service only creates a low impact on the environment (Austrian Ecolabel, 2023; Vienna Convention Bureau, 2023).

Hotels, in order to receive this certificate, need to follow the guideline "Tourist Accommodations" which is based on the GSTC Criteria (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, 2018). These specific guidelines of the Austrian Ecolabel do not only apply to hotels but also for accommodation enterprises (EL 201), private accommodations (EL 201a), restaurants and catering enterprises (EL 202), event catering and party service (EL 203), industrial catering (EL 204), campsites (EL 205), shelter huts (EL 206), congress and event locations (EL 203), and museum and exhibition buildings (EL 208) (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.). In order to receive the certification, hotels need to follow all mandatory criteria and reach a certain number of points from the optional criteria (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, 2018). These criteria are divided into ten different groups, including operational management, waste, energy, water, air/noise, cleaning/chemicals/hygiene, buildings/furniture, office/printing, transport/mobility, food/kitchen, and outside area (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.).

In order to obtain and maintain the Austrian Ecolabel hotels need to pay the application fee and annual fees. These fees range in price depending on the number of hotel beds and servicing places. This parameter will split hotels into five different categories with the application fee going from € 490,00 to € 1500,00 and the annual licence fee ranging between € 170,00 and € 920,00 (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.). These fees include the costs for the initial inspection, support of the licensees, the provision and maintenance of the testing software, the financing of marketing activities and the costs of follow-up tests (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria, n.d.).

2.2.3.2 Sustainable Certifications in the Hotel Industry

In the hotel industry there are many firms that can certify the sustainability of the hotel. Among them, some of the prominent ones are Travelife, Eu Ecolabel, Sustainable Hotel, ISO 9001, and Green Key (Floričić, 2020; Mzembe et al., 2020).

Because of the lack of a defined meaning behind being eco-friendly and sustainable, certifications play a key role in ensuring both guests and investors that the hotel in question is actually sustainable and not only on paper (Abdou et al., 2020). Prakash and Potoski's study (2007) confirmed this theory, finding that guests will trust more the eco-friendliness of the hotel when it has a certification.

Green certifications are one of the multiple initiatives that the hotel industry started in order to show its willingness to support sustainability (Abdou et al., 2020). Besides being one of the approaches that hotels have, to start putting sustainability into practice (Chi et al., 2022), certifications are also a way to attract a certain type of customers (Abdou et al., 2020; Chi et al., 2022). Additionally, according to the research of Mzembe et al. (2020), some companies consider having such certification as fundamental and vital for attracting new businesses.

Despite all the multiple advantages, the results of Mzembe et al. (2020), shows that different firms are removing themselves from sustainability certification contracts, even while still employing equivalent environmentally friendly practices (Pereira et al., 2021). This shift was due to different reasons but mainly it happened for the decrease in market benefits while the certifications remained highly time-consuming and expensive to acquire (Chi et al., 2022). In fact, with the rise of hotels with green certifications, the exclusivity that came with it disappeared (Mzembe et al., 2020). On top of that, it has been shown that the increase in customers' intention to visit a hotel due to the green certifications, did not reflect an increase in the guest's actually visiting such hotel (Chi et al., 2022). Rather than focusing on having a certification, hotels should focus more on informing their guests of the hotel's green practices comprehensively.

2.2.4 Sustainable Hotel Practices

In order to be more sustainable, hotels introduce sustainable practices into their business model. While these practices can be divided into the three-pillars (environment, social, and economic) (Pereira et al., 2021), this research is going to focus mainly on environmentally sustainable practices, as they are the most commonly researched ones (Abdou et al., 2020) and what directly affect the guest's experience (Olya et al., 2021). These practices can be divided into three major

categories: water consumption reduction, energy saving, and waste management and reduction (Abdou et al., 2020). For the first category, studies have shown that low-flow toilets and showerheads together with the installation of water-efficient devices and appliances, and the implementation of linen and towel reuse programs, are the most common practices that attempt to reduce water consumption (Abdou et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2021). At the same time, the research conducted by Berezan et al. (2014), showed that the introduction of the program for reusing towels and linen was rated by guests as the least appreciated sustainable practice. Still, initiatives regarding water management and reduction, are generally seen as attractive to environmentally concerned customers (Kularatne et al., 2019). Additionally, these initiatives can also enhance the competitiveness of a hotel and save money (Kularatne et al., 2019).

In the study conducted by Berezan et al. (2014), the eco-friendly practices with the highest rating of satisfaction from the guests, resulted to be hotel recycling policy, while the second lowest level of satisfaction was for another waste management practice: the use of dispensers instead of individual containers. Both, energy efficiency and waste management measures are said to improve a hotel's technical efficiency (Kularatne et al., 2019). Still, hotels should be cautious in communicating adequately their sustainability practices to their guests, in order to avoid possible disappointment. In fact, it has been shown that the guest's familiarity with the hotel's sustainable practices has a positive impact on the level of guest satisfaction (Olya et al., 2021).

2.3 Location and Sustainable Practices

The location of a hotel will have a big impact on the type of energy needs and energy resources (Bohdanowicz et al., 2000). Studies have shown that activities in the sustainable development area can already be included in the planning and design phases (Kapera, 2018). According to the research of Kapera (2018), while hotels located in the inner-city can utilize existing power and water infrastructures, outskirts hotels have the possibility to use alternative sources for both water and electrical energy. Indicating that outskirts hotels have an easier chance of providing sustainable sources.

In this part of the literature review, the researcher will study the limitations and benefits associated with the space available, and the type of building, concluding with the analysis of both the city centre and outskirts of Vienna.

2.3.1 Space Available

For many years, green technologies and the use of alternative sources for both water and electrical energy were labelled as too bulky (Eskerod et al., 2019) but more recent studies ensured that many, if not most, of these sustainable measures, do not require extra space (Cunha et al., 2020). Studies regarding different barriers to the implementation of sustainable practices are multiple (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016; Chan, 2008; Pham et al., 2020; Satchapappichit et al., 2013) though none of them considers the space available to a hotel as a possible barrier. Still, the results of Celata (2012), confirms that space limitation will equal planning constraints, whereas the availability of large empty spaces (often available in the outskirts areas of a city) will equal high functional flexibility.

2.3.2 Historical Buildings Limitations

Historical buildings are part of the culture of a city and often cities and entire nations will set demolition restrictions to preserve the built heritage of the city and country (Delafons, 1997). Because of this limitation, adaptive reuse has been seen as a possible solution to extend the building's life and offer possible social, cultural, and economic benefits to society (Yung et al., 2014). While the adaptation of historic buildings has been labelled as part of sustainable development (Rodwell, 2012), there are many difficulties when integrating components of sustainability into traditional buildings (Yung et al., 2014). In fact, studies have pointed out that historic buildings faced reductions in the choices of green technologies during the renovation process (Nocera et al., 2019). Other limitations come from rules and principles placed by the local and international charters (Ab Wahab et al., 2016). For instance, the United Nations set, in the National Heritage Act (2005), principles of conservation that need to be followed when adopting a historical building that is listed as a National Heritage Building.

From the moment that the majority of historical buildings are located in the city centre, most of the building's regeneration also takes place in the central part of cities

(Steinberg, 1996). This makes the adaptation process even more complicated and slower since it requires the hotel to conduct a study both on the building and the surrounding streetscape, before being able to proceed with the project (Yung et al., 2014). These limitations also apply to hotels that are in historical buildings. In their research, Nocera et al. (2019), noted that the studied hotel, which was under renovation to become almost zero-energy, faced different constraints because of its historical features. Nocera et al. (2019) took into consideration both the site and the obligation of preserving the hotel façades because of their high cultural value and chose the most appropriate solutions based on that.

2.3.3   The City Centre of Vienna

Owing of the fact that the historic centre of Vienna has been appointed in 2001 as part of the world heritage list by UNESCO (Vienna City Administration, 2014b), constructions or renovations projects within that area need to utilize a "sustainable scale and respect the historic environment with great sensitivity", says the Director of Urban Planning of the City of Vienna (Vienna City Administration, 2014b, p. 11). While the city centre of Vienna consists of the first district only, the historic centre includes also the area around the Belvedere (Vienna City Administration, 2014b; Vienna Tourist Board, 2023).

In the publication *The Historic Centre of Vienna: World Cultural Heritage and Vibrant Hub* by Vienna City Administration (2014b), multiple examples are shown of contemporary architecture in the city centre that does not harm the world heritage site. Among these examples, the Hotel Topazz is mentioned for being able to blend in with the historical urban space while also being sustainable, demonstrating that hotels can be sustainable while adhering to the regulations of conservation of the protected zones. These protection zones are listed in the Land Use and Development Plan and are areas where the preservation of the characteristic cityscape must be protected (Vienna City Administration, 2014b). For instance, for a new building to be built, it has to integrate into the surrounding and cityscape (Vienna City Administration, 2014b). Similarly, historical buildings might have regulations of monument conservation that prohibit demolition or deformation. Moreover, a renovation of a historical building requires "innovative cooperative expert procedure"

to start the plan and to follow guidelines formulated by Vienna's Commission for Urban Development (Vienna City Administration, 2014b, p. 33).

It must be noted, though, that the city of Vienna does not want the Austrian capital to become a museum (UNESCO, 2005), instead urban development is seen as a requirement of a modern city (Vienna City Administration, 2014b). At the same time, any possible interventions and changes to the historic urban landscape must be considered carefully and overseen by experts and professionals (UNESCO, 2005). The Vienna Memorandum (UNESCO, 2005), goes into detail specifying the different guidelines and means for both urban development and conservation management, underlying multiple times the importance of urban design for both enhancing spatial structure in and around historic cities and increasing the functionality of the public spaces. Furthermore, the guidelines stress that particular attention should be paid in ensuring that the development of contemporary architecture complements Vienna's historic urban landscape and does not exceed the limits that ensure that the historic nature of the city is preserved (UNESCO, 2005).

Generally, the centrality of the hotel, because of the high mobility, is a key sustainable factor (Aranburu, 2016) and this might be a contributing factor to the city centre being the urban area with the highest percentage of sustainable hotels. In the list of accommodations made by the Vienna Tourist Board (2023), out of the 277 hotels in Vienna, 43 of them are sustainable (15.5%). Out of these 43, 11 are located in the city centre and they make up 19% out of 56 hotels in the first district. In comparison, the outskirts of Vienna also has 11 sustainable hotels but they make up only 11% out of the total 94 hotels in that area.

2.3.4   The Outskirts of Vienna

To define the districts that are considered part of the outskirts of Vienna, the researcher follows the guidelines used by Vienna Tourist Board (2023), which defines hotels located in districts 10th to 23rd as hotels in the outskirts.

In the research conducted by Pérez and del Bosque in 2014 regarding aspects of sustainability directly related to environmental issues, around 22% of the participants reported that the protection of landscape and the preservation of flora ad fauna are major environmental issues. This indicates that when companies are trying to build

new infrastructures, they would need to find a way to protect the landscape. For Vienna, this would especially apply in the outskirts, since it would impact the green areas that risk being replaced by cement (Vasarus & Lennert, 2022). Additionally, another sustainable concern related to having a hotel in the outskirts is the high dependency on cars (Cavoli, 2021) because of the lack of adequate transport facilities (Vasarus & Lennert, 2022). Though, it must be noticed that the city of Vienna is constantly trying to improve its urban mobility plan with different plans for the development of different routes that connect furthermore the outskirts areas to other parts of the city (Vienna City Administration, 2014a).

3   Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological decisions made in this thesis to collect the data needed to answer the research question. More specifically, this chapter will describe and justify the type of approach, research method and data collection used, as well as, how the data were analysed.

3.1   Introduction to Interviews

The function of research design is to describe the methods used to collect and analyze data (Hair et al., 2021) and consists of three main approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). For this thesis, the researcher will make use of a qualitative approach, whose goals include developing and building theories through possible patterns in the gathered data (Carter & Henderson, 2005; Fossey et al., 2002). Moreover, thanks to its interpretative form (Carter & Henderson, 2005), it allows the researcher to delve deeply into the topic at hand (Baker & Edwards, 2012). In qualitative research, there are multiple methodologies for collecting primary sources. For the present thesis, the researcher will employ the most commonly used methodology: interviews (Jamshed, 2014; Queiros et al., 2017).

3.1.1   What is an Interview?

Interviews are encounters between a researcher and the researcher's participants (Carter and Henderson, 2005), with the final intention of discovering

information on certain topics (Queiros et al., 2017). Often, interviews are described as a flexible way of gaining data from people's experiences and opinions (Carter & Henderson, 2005; Fossey et al., 2002; Mack et al., 2005; Queiros et al., 2017). Overall, the prime purpose of an interview is to construct stories and narratives, from which the researcher can possibly create theories (Nunkoosing, 2005).

This type of data collection can be conducted with different techniques and approaches (Carter & Henderson, 2005) though, in general, they are either structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Jamshed, 2014; Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2002). The latter tends to focus on fewer topics than the other two approaches, but in much greater detail (Queiros et al., 2017). Differently, semi-structured interviews will utilize open-ended questions based on an interview guideline (Jamshed, 2014), in order to tackle a series of issues the researcher sees as relevant to the topic (Hopf, 2004; Queiros et al., 2017). Interviews can be also conducted in different ways and settings, they can be person-administrated, in the respondent's office for example, or telephone-administered, which also includes computer interviews (Hair et al., 2021).

Generally, most interviews start with demographic questions asking, for instance, the participant's age, gender, nationality, and current job (Berezan et al., 2014). These questions are used as "warm-up questions" and have the objective to make the interviewees feel at ease (Hair et al., 2021). Subsequently, the researcher can start asking more specific questions (Hopf, 2004) and, if needed, follow-up questions such as "*You mentioned earlier* (the relevant situation) … . *Could you give me a little more detail about this situation?*" (Hopf, 2004, p. 206). The core part of the interview can use questions such as "*What three words come to mind when you think of …? *" (Berezan et al., 2014, p. 9) or "*Do you think that …?*" (Abrudan et al., 2020, p. 18) and many others.

This method is optimal when trying to collect participants' personal perspectives on a certain topic (Hopf, 2004; Mack et al., 2005). Generally, qualitative research is known to not require a sample as big as the one for quantitative research (Fossey et al., 2002), though the former often requires using experts in the research field (Hopf, 2004). This, as a result, gives an opportunity for the researcher to inquire about what a situation might mean or the motivations behind certain actions, all according to

someone involved in that matter (Hair et al., 2021; Hopf, 2004). In fact, recording and analyzing the participants' perspectives is always the key part of an interview (Mack et al., 2005). Additionally, because of the tendency of interviews to be lengthy, the researcher can gain a considerable amount of data from a single meeting (Queiros et al., 2017). As a result of this, the researcher will be able to collect rich and extensive data on the researched topic (Fossey et al., 2002; Queiros et al., 2017).

3.1.2   Advantages and Disadvantages

In general, qualitative methods are reported as more flexible than quantitative data (Fossey et al., 2002), since they allow the participants to answer the questions more spontaneously (Mack et al., 2005). Moreover, the interactions between the participant and researcher can be adapted and do not have to be standardized (Hopf, 2004; Mack et al., 2005).

During interviews, the researcher might opt to use a guideline to somewhat structure the interaction (Taylor et al., 2015) which will result in having, later on, more constant data from the different meetings (Jamshed, 2014). In fact, interview guidelines are used by most researchers as a tool to make sure that each key topic is explored (Jamshed, 2014). These guidelines might include a core question with secondary questions relating to it (Taylor et al., 2015). It is neither a schedule nor a protocol, rather it gives the researcher a general idea of the different topics that were precedently decided as essential, while also ensuring that the interviews are done in a more systematic way (Taylor et al., 2015). Nevertheless, an interviewer, in semi-structured or unstructured interviews, can opt to exclude or add more questions depending on each situation, and questions will probably be worded in a slightly different way each time (Taylor et al., 2015). Additionally, researchers have the opportunity to ask follow-up questions in order to avoid having unclear data (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2002).

An advantage of interviews and qualitative research, in general, is that they tend to use open-ended questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) which result in participants being free to express their opinion on a certain topic and not having to adhere to a "yes or no" or multiple-choice answer (Mack et al., 2005).   As a result, a researcher will often gain complex answers since interviewees are free to reply with their own

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words (Hopf, 2004). On the negative side, qualitative research can not be used to test a hypothesis (Carter & Henderson, 2005) and they are rarely conclusive (Sofaer, 2002).

With interviews, researchers need to be very careful to distinguish observations from personal interpretations (Sofaer, 2002) and they need to ensure that they are authentically representing each participant's perspective, without being biased by personal opinions (Fossey et al., 2002). For this reason, conducting interviews is considered to require a certain level of expertise in forming questions (Sofaer, 2002). Moreover, researchers need to be mindful to not generalize the findings beyond the narrow researched group (Koerber & McMichael, 2008).

While in quantitative analysis the research validity is assessed numerically, the reliability of a qualitative analysis depends solely on the level of diligence used to collect and analyze the data (Hair et al., 2021). More specifically, the answers need to be collected in a clear way that does not allow for any wrong understanding of the data (Jamshed, 2014). For this reason, many interviewers will choose to record the sessions in order to have a more reliable source than handwritten notes (Jamshed, 2014). In this case, it is essential that the researcher has the permission from the participants to do so, being otherwise considered unethical (Hair et al., 2021). Additionally, in regard to the ethical part of an interview, researchers need to ensure anonymity and confidentiality which might come as a difficult aspect to maintain in small samples (Queiros et al., 2017).

Finally, interviews are highly time-consuming for both parties involved (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2002), requiring up to two hours per interview (Queiros et al., 2017). While this allows the interviewer to collect a profuse amount of data (Fossey et al., 2002), the researcher needs to be able to find a time slot that works for both the interviewer and the interviewee (Hair et al., 2021).

3.2 Development of the Interview Questions

In this sub-chapter, the researcher will outline the questions asked during the interviews, going into detail on how each question connects to the literature review

chapter and the research question (In what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices?).

As it will be explained in the next section, the total number of questions changed depending on the type of answer each participant gave, going from an eight questions interview to a twelve questions interview. Overall, the questions can be divided into three different segments, each one having its own purpose with the aim of having a full understanding of the participant's point of view. The first part of the interview includes an introductory question as well as ensuring that the participant consented to be recorded.

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1. **I would like to do a sound recording for this interview. Is this fine?**
2. **Can you please introduce yourself and the hotel you are representing?**

Question number 1 ensures that the interview is done ethically. The second question makes it possible for the researcher to see whether similar types of hotels have similar opinions and if hotels in the same area will share similar ideas on the implementation of sustainable practices.

The second part of the interview is also the main part, where all the specific questions regarding the hotel's opinion on sustainable initiatives are asked.

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3. **In your opinion, what is the importance of sustainable initiatives in the hotel industry?**
4. **In your opinion, in what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices? Please elaborate.**
5. **Is sustainability a key strategic priority in your hotel? Yes/no?**

    If yes to Q5:

    5.1. **Does your hotel have any certification in sustainability?**

    5.1.1.   **If yes, which ones and why those specifically?**

    5.1.2.   **If no, why not?**

5.2.   **Which sustainability practices take place in your hotel?**

5.3.   **Did you have to exclude some sustainability practices because of your location?**

    5.3.1.   **If yes, which ones?**

If no to Q5:

5.4.   **Are sustainability practices not a priority because of the location of the hotel or is there any other reason for this?**

6.   **Would your sustainability practices change if your hotel was located in a different district of Vienna?**

In the core part of the interview, questions 3, 5, 5.1 and 5.2 derive from past literature while questions 4, 6, 5.3 and 5.4 derive from the research question.

With question 3 the researcher wants to gain some insights into the participant's opinion on sustainable practices since the stand of the interviewee on this topic might influence how the following questions are answered. The question is based on the study of Floričić (2020, p.1109) and through it, the researcher, attempts to understand whether the view of the interviewees matches with the sustainable practices of their hotel. Additionally, Q3 is the question that introduces to the participant the actual topic of the interview, trying to start the core part of the interview while still being pretty general to maintain the respondent feeling comfortable throughout the interview.

The fourth question is a transcription of the research question, enabling the researcher to understand clearly the opinion of general managers of hotels on this topic. Similarly to Q3, this question does not bring into the discourse the respondent's hotel yet. This is to avoid forcing the interviewees to talk about their hotel from the start, instead, the researcher tries to make the participants firstly comfortable with the topic and going later on into more specific details. Moreover, the author purposefully asks three similar questions at different points of the

interview, in order to see whether the point of view of the participants changes during the interview or remains the same throughout it.

Question number 5 is a follow-up question on Q3, no longer enquiring about the participant's personal perspective but focusing on whether or not sustainable initiatives are a strategy for the hotel. Moreover, depending on how the respondent answers Q5, the interviewer will either continue with the normal order of the questions (5.1, 5.2, 5.3) and skip question 5.4, or go directly to question 5.4. With question five, the author wants to understand if the point of view of the participants regarding the importance of sustainability in the hotel industry (Q3) is actually translated into facts. With sustainability as a key strategic priority for the hotel or not. Additionally, this question might be used to better understand the reasons for a hotel to be sustainable and whether these are in any way affected by the location.

Both questions 5.1 and 5.2 connect directly to the literature review chapter and they are based on Eskerod et al. study (2019, p.18-19). In the literature review chapter, the researcher finds that multiple certifications exist and that some hotels are practising sustainability without having any certification to affirm it. Additionally, literature has shown that sustainable certifications are also used as a way to promote a hotel so, with Q5.1, the researcher wants to find out whether there is a pattern between the location of the hotel and the possession of a sustainable certificate. Moreover, with this question, the researcher will learn if hotels prefer a specific certification over others and if it is generally common or not to have a sustainable certification.

The literature review chapter showed how some sustainable practices might be affected by the location of the hotel. Therefore, with Q5.2 the researcher tries to understand whether some sustainable practices are present only in some locations of the city. Following Q5.2, question number 5.3 is asked in order to understand better why some sustainable practices might be present only in some locations of the city.

As previously mentioned, question number 5.4, is only asked if the respondent answers negatively to Q5. Similarly to Q5.3, this question tries to understand whether sustainability is not a key strategic priority because of the location. This will further help the researcher answer the research question.

The last question of this section, question number 6, is also connected to the research question. It serves to understand whether hotels that are not sustainable would implement some practices if they were located differently and if hotels that are already sustainable would change their initiatives if they were in another location.

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7. Is there anything that you think we have not covered related to the topic?

The last segment is focused on ensuring that all opinions of the participant on the topic are covered. This will help enrich the data collected by the researcher and with this question, the researcher concludes the interview.

3.3 Data Collection Process and Analysis

In this part of the methodology chapter, the researcher will explain the way the data for the thesis were collected and how they have been analyzed.

Since this thesis tries to find how the location of a hotel in a city affects its sustainable practices, the author decided to have two subgroups from the selected population that can be easily compared. The population consists of general managers of 4 or 5-star hotels in Vienna, while the subgroups are the general managers of hotels in the 1st district (the city centre) and general managers of hotels between the 10th and 23rd districts (the outskirts). General managers were the selected population since they are considered by the author as the figure with the highest knowledge of the hotel strategy and would therefore answer the questions with the most insights. Additionally, only 4 or 5-star hotels were selected in order to remove any other variations beyond the studied one (the location of the hotel in a city) and at the same time not reduce too much the sample pool by only focusing on either 4 or 5-star hotels. Finally, the two areas of the city were specifically selected because they represent the two extremes of a city location, therefore making the similarities and differences between the two sub-groups clearer and more distinct.

The researcher, contacted through e-mail 29 general managers in total, 15 of which with the hotel located in the outskirts and 14 in the city centre. The total number of general managers contacted was decided on the basis of hotels that met the previously selected criteria and that were also reachable by the author. The e-mails were sent either directly to the general manager or, when the former contact was unavailable, to the hotel's general e-mail address. Of those 29 e-mails, 9 general managers accepted to participate in the interview, 4 declined because too busy and the rest did not reply. Of these nine, 5 are from the city centre and the remaining 4 are from the outskirts. Additionally, four hotels were 5-star hotels, while five of them were 4-star hotels.

The interviews were designed and conducted fully in English and took place either face-to-face (4 interviews) or online via Teams (5 interviews), depending on the interviewees' preference. This choice was given in order to ensure that the participant felt the most comfortable. The interviews took place between the 9th and 24th of May 2023. After having the permission of the participant, all the interviewees were audio recorded, in order to ensure a truthful transcript of the meeting. Additionally, the researcher took notes during the interviews to balance any possible mishearing from the audio records. On average the interviews were 20 minutes long. The interview questionnaire can be found in the Appendices chapter while the transcripts of the interviews would be kept private since the author did not receive from all the participants the permission to publicize them.

In order to analyze the data collected, the researcher coded manually the transcripts of the interviews. To study thoroughly the data the author started by dividing the answers into four main codes that will correspond to the four subchapters of the following chapter. Each code was then organized into different categories and/or subcodes.

4   Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and discuss the findings of the nine interviews to be able to answer the research question: *In what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices?* This will be done by

dividing the chapter into multiple sections, with each subchapter delving into a different theme found in the transcripts, by comparing and contrasting the data. To maintain the anonymity of the participants and protect their identity, in the following text the researcher will number the participants from 1 to 9, following the chronological order of when the interviews took place (i.e. Interview 1 - Participant 1).

4.1 The Importance of Sustainable Initiatives in the Hotel Industry

Looking at the responses to the third question, regarding the importance of sustainable initiatives in the hotel industry, it is clear to see that every single participant agrees that sustainability is important, if not extremely important, for the industry. The first participant underlines how it should be every hotel's goal to become sustainable, mentioning how this is a European ambition. The fifth participant answers similarly, explaining how companies, even big ones, need to have sustainable initiatives because there is an increase in demand from the customers. They also share their idea that the hotel industry is a luxury good, not something a human being needs to survive, but it is still important to "make luxury sustainable". The second participant also mentions in the answer to this topic, that sustainability could be a challenge in the luxury industry because it might result in service limitations. Still, they acknowledge the importance of sustainability in general, saying that even small changes can make a big impact because of the size of the hotel industry. Additionally, they share how sustainability is highly important for the company which has set worldwide goals that each hotel in that company needs to achieve. Following, participant 3 declared that this (*what is the importance of sustainable initiatives in the hotel industry?*) is one of the most important questions for the future since tourism is "one of the big players in being unsustainable". Participants 9 and 7 share similar opinions, affirming that the hotel industry has a major impact as a result of the resources being used on a daily bases by every hotel. Furthermore the fourth participant answers the question by explaining how tourism is highly dependent on having an eco-global system and that sustainable initiatives have a huge impact on the hotel industry.

Participants 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9 agree that the public interest in the topic of sustainability in the hotel industry has increased in the past few years, with participant 9 affirming that "it's a topic that's growing in importance so you have to have it, even if you don't want to". At the same time, participant 6 shares that the importance of SDG has grown in the past 2,3 years. Notably, they are the only participant to ever mention the sustainable development goals, underling how sustainability is "not just for the environment but it is also for the guests, team members and it's a reputation of the company". Similarly to participants 5 and 8, participant 6 also thinks that customers are increasingly requesting sustainable initiatives, confirming that there is a trend of guests and event organizers that actively ask for sustainable practices. Their opinion reflects the results of the research of Eskerod et al. (2019), which shows that many of the interviewed hotel general managers were under the impression that guests expect hotels to incorporate and offer sustainable practices. In addition to this, participant 8 notes that even big online agencies are interested in the presence of sustainable initiatives, actively asking if the hotel has a sustainability program in place, in order to include or not the icon of sustainability on the hotel's page.

Additionally, almost everyone agreed that sustainability is a key strategic priority in their hotel. These results match with the ones of previous studies which found significant growth in the number of hotel companies that integrates sustainable practices into their business model (Abdou et al., 2020; Presenza et al., 2019). The only hotel that disagreed (participant 2), explained that while sustainability is a key strategic priority for their hotel's meetings, it was not for the whole hotel since it is not a "decision-making point" for guests. Explaining further that only customers booking meetings at their hotel seem to expect sustainable initiatives.

The answers to the third question do not seem to change depending on where the hotel is located.

4.2 Sustainable Certifications

In question 5.1, participants were asked if their hotel had any certification in sustainability. Of all the nine participants, all of them had some kind of sustainable initiative, though not all of them had sustainable certifications. More specifically, only one did not have a sustainable hotel certification. Notably, it was the same

participant that did not perceive sustainability as a key strategic priority for the hotel. The rest of the participants that did have at least one sustainable certification most commonly had the Austrian Ecolabel one (seven out of nine hotels). Besides the hotel of the second interview, only the fifth participant did not have the Austrian Ecolabel, opting instead for the Green Key certification. Notably, participants 4, 6 and 7 had two sustainable hotel certifications with two of them having the EU Ecolabel certification and the other having the ISO 9001. Besides sustainable hotel certifications, five hotels also offered products that were Fairtrade Austria certified. These findings go directly against the ones of the research of Mzembe et al. (2020), which showed that multiple companies were removing themselves from sustainability certification contracts.

Besides the already shared sustainable hotel certifications, participant 1 explained that they also have some other certifications both for their events and for their food and beverage. More specifically, the certification of Eco Event Vienna for their events and one of their latest events was also certified by the Austrian Ecolabel. While for food and beverage, they have different products, such as coffee and chocolate, that are Fairtrade Austrian certified, additionally one of their restaurants is AMA Genuss Region certified. Similarly, the third participant also offers products that are Fairtrade Austrian certified, notably not only food products but also beddings and such. Furthermore, participant 4 shared how their building has been awarded the Green Building Award even before the hotel was opened to the public. Remarkably, the only building certified as sustainable is in the outskirts area.

Similarly to the research findings of Chi et al. (2022), participant 3 admitted that the choice of certification was depended on how strict the certification is and the fact that it forces the hotel to do their "homework", underling how the choice of having a sustainable certification was not because of the "good advertisement". Noticeably, this participant was also the only interviewee mentioning the concept of greenwashing and how they excluded some specific practices to avoid risking greenwashing the guests. Furthermore, participant 8 shares the process of how Austrian Ecolabel ensures that the property is adhering to their criteria, explaining that it takes a long time of preparation since the hotel, every five years, has to

"upload proof of nearly 100 items" following this, an auditor of the label would come to the hotel and spend an entire day in re-checking everything.

While there are no noticeable differences in the choice of sustainable certification between the two areas of the city, the only hotel with a Green Building Award is located on the outskirts of Vienna.

4.3 Sustainable Hotel Practices

This section will study the answers to question 5.2: *which sustainability practices take place in your hotel?* In order to analyze the multiple sustainable practices of the hotels in the clearest way, the author will divide the sustainable practices into four major categories: water consumption reduction, energy saving, waste management and other initiatives. Almost all of the categories are included in all hotels, with the exemption of water consumption reduction.

4.3.1 Water Consumption Reduction

Sustainable practices that fall in this category were the least common in the interviewed hotels. Five of the participants shared that they had some initiatives to reduce the waste of water, but not all of them went into details regarding what those practices were. Among these initiatives, participants 5, 6 and 8 had low-flow toilets with participant 6 also having low-flow showerheads. The latter, together with participant 9, shared that their hotels offer the linen and towel reuse program, with participant 6 having a sticker in each bathroom of every room of the hotel to remind the guests of this option. Differently, participants 4 and 7, do not even offer clean service automatically but only on request of the guest. These results comply with the findings of the researchers of Abdou et al. (2020) and Pereira et al. (2021), where the authors found that the above-mentioned practices are the most commonly used ones when trying to reduce water consumption.

Overall, seven hotels out of nine shared having some water consumption reduction practices, four of these were hotels in the outskirts and the remaining three were hotels in the city centre. More specifically, low flow systems were used by two hotels in the city centre and one in the outskirts; towel reusal programs were in place in two

hotels, one in each area, and two hotels in the ourskirt offered cleaning service only on request.

4.3.2   Energy Saving

The most common energy-saving practice appeared to be using LED light bulbs, which were present in five different hotels. Additionally, most of the hotels offered a charging station for electric cars, with only three hotels not adhering to this practice. More specifically, participant 2 also shared having installed lighting motion sensors in the hotel as well as a ventilation system that turns off automatically when there is no guest in the room. Likewise, participant 9 shared about having motion sensor lights in the hallway of their hotel. While the sixth participant installed lighting motion sensors in the back of the house and energy-saving systems in all the rooms of the hotel, which turns off all electrical appliances when the guests exit their room. Furthermore, participant 6 also applied solar window foils on all the windows of the hotel, to reduce the usage of the heating/cooling system. They also installed various heating recoveries, where they recycle and reuse the heat. Additionally, they mentioned how all the electricity is produced without any CO_2 emissions. Finally, participant 6 was the only interviewee mentioning how they constantly check and invest in newer and better equipment because "a lot of the old equipment takes a lot of energy consumption", adding how such investments are not only done from an energy saving perspective but also for the return on investment.

Two out of the nine hotels shared having photovoltaic systems, though participant 4's system produced up to 50% of the hotel's energy need, while participant 2's system was only producing enough energy for their suite. The latter explained also that their hotel could not add any more solar panels because of space limitations. Another hotel with green energy was participant 1's hotel, who affirmed to have "green energy for the entire building", though they did not specify the source of their energy. Furthermore, participant 9 shared that they utilize the "Fernwärme offering of the city of Vienna", which derives energy from natural gas or other sustainable sources.

All of the interviewed hotels had some sustainable initiatives regarding the energy usage. Most notably charging stations for electric cars were offered by all hotels in the outskirts areas but only by one in the city centre.

4.3.3 Waste Management

For the waste management practices, many of the participants gave general answers, only stating that they do have some practices from this category, without going into much more detail. This category will also include food waste management and reduction practices but will not include any other food practices such as regional food, which will be included in the next subsection.

Participant 1 starts the answer to the question by mentioning MA 48, which is Vienna's municipal waste disposal company, explaining how each year they attend a training seminar managed by the company to ensure that the hotel "comply with the legal requirements and also achieves the waste reduction goals". The first hotel also has an initiative called Rally where they try to reduce food waste in addition to what their culinary team already does during the production process. At the same time, they give the food that would go to waste to a vendor who in turn transforms it into biogas, fuel or fertilizers. In a similar way, participant 2 gives away their used cooking oil to an external company, that reuses it for other functions.

Another waste management practice that the second participant mentions is the complete removal of single-dose amenities, though this initiative is not yet full in practice and will be implemented next month. Differently, participants 3, 4, 6 and 8, already have reduced their usage of single-dose products. Participants 3 and 8 also have no single portions in their buffet, with particant 3 sharing how this change helped them reduce by 20% their food waste. Both participants 5 and 6 mentioned that they try to minimize the waste of paper by going almost completely digital. This applied to both the back of the house and all guest touch points .

Furthermore, participants 4 and 6 reduced the use of plastic by de-incentivising the usage of single-use bottles. Hotel 4 does not offer any PET bottles to the guests any longer, instead, replacing all plastic bottles with bottles made of glass. In addition to this, they incentivise the usage of reusable bottles by having a fountain in the lobby area where guests can refill their bottles. Moreover, participant 6 mentions that this is only possible because of the quality of Vienna's water, in fact, the hotel installed

some BRITA[1] products both for the guests, the back of the house and also for all buffets. This allows the hotel to both filter and bottle up the water themself, which in turn reduces the usage of PET bottles. Differently, participant 9 shared how their hotel is still using plastic items. Explaining that, while they already made the decision to be "plastic-free at every touch point", they prefer to use the remaining plastic items from their old stock rather than throw them away. The same participant also shared having green-meeting options where no paper is being used and all coffee breaks are green.

Furthermore, participant 6 shared having a recycling composting system in place and also having installed a system called Winnow. This is an artificial intelligence system for the kitchen, that allows the head chef to know what food goes to waste the most and therefore what they should change in their dishes to reduce food waste to the maximum. Moreover this participant, on top of having reusable amenities in the rooms, also decided to work with Clean The World program and donate all the soap leftovers. Finally, four hotels mention cooperating with Too Good To Go, an app that allows businesses to sell any extra food that has not been consumed by their customers but can still be eaten.

While all the interviewed general managers shared some waste management practices, initiatives for the reduction of plastic usage where mainly conducted in hotels in the city centre.

4.3.4   Other initiatives

Among initiatives that do not fit into the previous three categories, sustainable practices regarding food were found to be the most present. Among these, regional and organic food is the most common, with only one of the interviewed hotels not offering it. Out of the remaining eight, three of the participants did not mention having products that are Fairtrade certified. Participant 2, while not offering any Fairtrade-certified products, shares how the hotel offers sustainable fish products, certified by MSC[2]. Explaining how the importance for them

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[1] BRITA - German company which manufactures water filtration products for household and professional applications (BRITA, n.d.).
[2] MSC - Marine Stewardship Council, an international non-profit organisation that recognises and rewards efforts to protect oceans and safeguard seafood supplies for the future (Marine Stewardship Council, 2023).

is not having a certificate in sustainable food but using locally sourced food. This, in their opinion, is already "a big point" since it will result in shorter transportation and less waste. Another initiative concerning the food was having a substantial offer of vegetarian or vegan dishes, which was mentioned by both participants 1 and 8. The latter also has a small herbal garden that allows the chefs of the hotel to have fresh herbs to use in their dishes. Lastly, participant 7 shared that their company produced their own honey.

Besides initiatives regarding food, five of the participants said that they provide sustainability training to their staff, with most of the interviewees sharing that they provide it during the onboarding process and a couple of times, throughout the year. Additionally, participants 1 and 6 also mentioned awareness building underling the importance of it. For instance, to create awareness, participant 6 often provides special offers online around sustainability. Also, other hotels incentivise sustainability through special offers or discounts. For example, participant 8 explains how, as per company policy, they will apply a 10% discount to guests arriving to the hotel by public transport. Similarly, hotel 4 offers a free welcome drink to guests arriving at the hotel by public transport. Meanwhile, participant 6 tries to incentivise the usage of public transport by providing each of their workers a yearly card for the "Wiener Linien", Vienna's public transport company.

Five of the participants declared that they try to minimize any use of chemicals, especially when choosing their cleaning products. Some of them also have external companies that check on the chemical products being used and in particular what is utilized by the hotel for cleaning.

Overall, it clearly appears that for sustainable food initiatives there is no major difference between the hotels in the city centre and the ones in the outskirts. With the most notable fact being that, among the hotels with fairtrade products, two are in the centre and three in the outskirts. Interestingly, while incentives for the usage of public transport are offered by hotels in both studied areas, two of the hotels in the outskirts offer some discounts or a welcome drink, while the one in the city centre offers their workers tickets for the Wiener Linien.

4.4 Location and Sustainable Practices

The topic of how the location of a hotel in a city might affect its sustainable practices has been brought up during the interviews through three different questions. The first time in general terms (*In your opinion, in what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices?*), then in regards to the hotel's sustainability practices (*Did you have to exclude some sustainability practices because of your location?*) and finally with the hypothesis of moving the hotel to another location within the city (*Would your sustainability practices change if your hotel was located in a different district of Vienna?*). Consequently, the researcher will combine the answers to all three questions to study the possible relationship at best and also notice whether the opinion of the participant changed throughout the interview. Notably, the three participants that answers to the three questions incoherently were all outskirts hotels. To the first question, all of them answered that different locations would imply different practices, while in the last question of the three, they stated the opposite thing. Saying that, even if the location of their hotel would change, their sustainable practices would not.

To the first question (*in your opinion, in what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices?*) many participants agreed that "depending on the location you will have different opportunities for sustainable practices", with most of the interviewees also mentioning the importance of good transportation. Most notably, participant 1 brings up the topic of transportation in all three different answers. While two other hotels, participants 2 and 6, mention how location can also allow the hotel to have a wider range in the choices of sustainable practices. They explain how, by being easily reachable by suppliers, the hotel can work with multiple companies and choose only the ones with similar working ethics. On the same topic, participant 4 shares how by being near the main train station they can decide to implement small complimentary options to incentivise the usage of public transportation. The same participant admit to be lucky with the hotel location since it gives "more opportunities to have sustainable practices". Overall, while most of the hotels agreed that the location has an impact on the sustainable practices of a hotel, only participant 5 gave an example that reflected the question, explaining how hotels

located in the city centre will be limited in some initiatives, especially regarding green energy.

Two common themes that were found throughout the interviews were the limitation related to being in the first district as well as the limitation of having the hotel in a historical building. Participant 3, in fact, thinks it is easier for hotels outside the city centre to be sustainable. Similarly, participant 5 says that hotels in the city centre are "constrained by limitations". Whereas participant 6 shares that, in their opinion, while there are some disadvantages correlated to being in the first district, there are also many advantages. Similarly to the results of the research of Ab Wahab et al. (2016), all of the participants with the hotel located in the city centre agree that there are many limitations due to the fact that the historical centre of Vienna is a protected area. In addition, also participant 9 who is located in the outskirts area, shares being limited in some of their options due to the historicity of their building. All in all, it must be pointed out that all of the hotels located in the city centre are in historical buildings, consequently the limitation of the location might overlap the limitations due to the protection of historical buildings, which would comply with the findings of the research of Nocera et al. (2019).

When talking about the sustainable practices that the hotel had to exclude due to their location, most of the hotels with historical protected buildings complained having to exclude solar panels because of city regulations. On this topic, participant 3 explains that solar panels have been forbidden by the Vieneese government on historical buildings for the past few years, but that it seems that this restriction is going to be revoked. Furthermore, participant 6 says that they also wanted to incorporate a green facade but this was not possible due to the "local registration on the first district". Additionally, the interviewee shares that other sustainable projects such as a herbal garden or a bigger outside space had to be excluded due to space limitations, which aligns with the research findings of Celata (2012).

When asked if the hotel's sustainability practices would change if the hotel was located in a different district of Vienna, almost all of the hotels in the city centre answered positively. The only one that neither disagreed nor agreed was the second participant, that did not see sustainability as a key strategic priority for the hotel. Differently, the hotels in the outskirts were not as sure in their answer, most of them

saying that slight changes might happen, with participant 8 saying how it would "very much depend on the building itself".

Overall, when looking at the number of sustainable practices that were shared during the interviews and comparing hotels in the two areas of the city, it seems that in general, hotels in the city centre offer more sustainable practices than the ones in the outskirts. At the same time, hotels in the city centre explained how they do not use their sustainability practices to attract guests. Notably, hotel 2 says that when guests are booking the hotel, they consider many other aspects before sustainability. While past researchers have found that luxury hotel guests are more prone to pay higher prices for hotels with sustainable practices (Berezan et al., 2014; Boronat-Navarro & Pérez-Aranda, 2020; Chen, 2019; Floričić, 2020; Kang et al., 2012) participant 2 says that their customers "do not seem to care" and that they would "choose the hotel regardless of the practises". On the contrary, participant 3 declares: "I do not think that because we are on the luxury side, our guests are less interested in sustainability". At the same time, the same participant admitted that some of the practices that they have in other properties can not be implemented in the studied hotel due to being a luxury hotel.

Concluding, the location of a hotel in a city does affect in some ways sustainable practices that can be implemented. At the same time, other factors such as the historicity of the building and the hotel's segment, will also affect sustainable initiatives. Overall, the relationship between the location and sustainable practices does exist, since the location will limit or allow some sustainable practices, such as solar panels or other green energy initiatives. Additionally, the location will result in the possession or not of a garden, and the possibility of modify the exterior of the building. Another finding that stands out from the results reported earlier, is how the location can limit or increase the choice of suppliers. Furthermore, the author found that while hotels in the city centre seemed having a higher amount of sustainable practices compared to the hotels in the outskirts, no hotel in the city center advertised themself as sustainable nor green. Comparably, some hotels in the outskirts advertised themselfs as sustainable. Notably, the importance of sustainable practices for each hotel did not depend on the location but rather on the importance that the general manager of the company itself gave to sustainable initiatives.

Additionally, the relevance of them in each hotel was also quite depending on the hotel's segment.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

This thesis set out to investigate a possible relationship between the location of a hotel in a city and its sustainable practices. The researcher found that, while multiple researches has been already conducted on sustainability in the tourism industry, there is a lack of studies considering the location of the hotel as a main reason to the sustainable practices in place. Thus, the researcher has tried to address the research gap by answering the following research question "*In what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices?*". To do so, the author conducted nine interviews with general managers of hotels located in the inner city or the outskirts area of Vienna. Additionally, the researcher decided to focus only on hotels that were either 4 or 5-star to reduce the number of external variations as much as possible.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this work offers valuable insights into the limitations that a location might have on the sustainable practices of a hotel. This thesis research has identified an existing relationship between the location of a hotel in a city and its sustainable practices but has also shown that the initiatives might be also limited by the target customer and the building of the hotel. Thus the findings will be of interest to investors and developers of hotels, since it may be of assistance when choosing the location of a hotel.

The research found that sustainable practices are indeed affected by the location of a hotel in a city. More specifically, this study confirms that, like the findings of Bohdanowicz et al. (2000), the type of energy resources that can be used by a hotel are associated with the location of the hotel. The results also reflect those of Kapera (2018) who found that hotels in the outskirts have the possibility to use alternative sources of electric energy. Additionally, the thesis found that the hotels both in the inner city and the ones with historical buildings will be limited in the choice of sustainable practices because of regulations that, for instance, do not allow them to modify the exterior part of their building.

Through the interviews, the author discovered that, while general managers of hotels in the city centre notice many different limitations due to their location, they also consider being in the city centre a major advantage. This is due to the fact that they feel in a more privileged position in regard to the choice of suppliers. Because of their centrality, they have many different suppliers to choose from and can select the ones that share their interest in sustainability, though it must be noted that no outskirts hotel complained about this topic. Among the disadvantages, many participants complained about the space limitations due to their location, which reflects the results of Celata (2012) who also found that space limitation will imply planning constraints.

Different participants shared the opinion that the hotel's segment affects the sustainable initiatives in a hotel much more than the location does adding that the guests will choose that specific hotel because of its location. Additionally, the author noticed that hotels in the city centre never wanted to advertise themself as green or sustainable hotels, even when certified as sustainable and with multiple sustainable initiatives. Some of the participants explained that this choice was due to the fact that they consider city hotels non green hotels per definition and wanted to avoid greenwashing.

Throughout the process of collecting data for the thesis, the author encountered multiple limitations, starting with the difficulty of establishing a direct contact with the general managers of the hotel that met the previously selected criteria (4 or 5 -star hotels that are either in the inner city or outskirts of Vienna). On top of this restriction, most hotels did not reply to the researcher's e-mail even when specified to reply to the request either way. With the general managers that did agree, some challenges were met in finding a time slot that could suit both parties involved. This was also due to the limited time available for collecting and analyzing the data. Finally, some of the participants were somewhat limited by the use of the English language. During the data analysis, the researcher found sometimes difficult to compare the data since some participants shared more information while others much less. Additionally, some participants did not interpret the questions in the way the author expected them to do, resulting in the answers not always being easily

comparable. Lastly, because of the small sample size of the research, the findings can not be generalised since they only represent the researched group.

Consequently, future studies on this topic should consider conducting primary research with a bigger sample size to examine more effectively the links between the location of a hotel in a city and its sustainable practices. A further study could conduct the research in multiple cities and compare the results to have a broader understanding of such relationships. Finally, researchers wanting to study this topic furthermore, should consider conducting a quantitative study rather than a qualitative one in order to have a higher chance of obtaining conclusive research.

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Appendices: Interview Questionnaire

1. I would like to do a sound recording for this interview. Is this fine?

2. Can you please introduce yourself and the hotel you are representing?

3. In your opinion, what is the importance of sustainable initiatives in the hotel industry?

4. In your opinion, in what way does the location of a hotel in a city affect its sustainable practices? Please elaborate.

5. Is sustainability a key strategic priority in your hotel? Yes/no?

   If yes to Q5:

   5.1. Does your hotel have any certification in sustainability?

      5.1.1. If yes, which ones and why those specifically?

      5.1.2. If no, why not?

   5.2. Which sustainability practices take place in your hotel?

   5.3. Did you have to exclude some sustainability practices because of your location?

      5.3.1. If yes, which ones?

   If no to Q5:

   5.4. Are sustainability practices not a priority because of the location of the hotel or is there any other reason for this?

6. Would your sustainability practices change if your hotel was located in a different district of Vienna?

7. Is there anything that you think we have not covered related to the topic?