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Sustainability Issues in Tourism and Hospitality Sector

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Abstract

In recent years we have observed the intensification of phenomena associated with climate change in several destinations in the world, causing drastic and sudden changes that deteriorate ecosystems and local communities. This phenomenon has contributed to a greater environmental awareness, with consumers, leaders, and businessmen more aware and concerned about sustainability and associated strategies. The Tourism and Hospitality sector cannot remain indifferent to this issue, giving rise to the debate around the emergence of Sustainable Tourism and the need for an agile contribution to the sustainable development of regions, at environmental, social, and economic levels, encompassing the various stakeholders (tourists, business leaders, marketeers, employees, partners, government organizations, DMOs, local community, among other entities). To this end, several Corporate Social Responsibility practices are adopted in tourist accommodations and Marketing strategies, to attract potential responsible tourists, which encourage the dynamism, growth and sustainable innovation of a destination.
In the development of this study a qualitative methodology was selected, consisting of an exploratory study, based on semi-structured interviews. The sample is composed of directors and/or managers of hotel units distinguished with the "Green Key" certification, in 2022, in the Northern region of Portugal. Additionally, some partner entities associated with the certification of these properties were included, namely ABAE and consulting companies in the Sustainable Tourism sector.
As main results, several motivations for tourists to seek certified hotels are highlighted, such as the involvement with the community, the preservation of natural resources, contact with nature, digital communication, the necessary travel to the destination and the hospitality of the locals. We also analyzed the socio-demographic characteristics of this segment of tourists, concluding that they are mostly female, in young age groups, from Nordic countries, with high purchasing power and level of education.

Keywords: *Sustainable Tourism; Marketing; Green Key; Northern Portugal; Sustainability certifications*

JEL Classification Z32

1. Introduction

The United Nations defines sustainability or sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 2022).

Sustainability encompasses three pillars - environment, society and economy - being useful for the sustainable development and dynamization of any tourist destination, originating several benefits, such as: preservation of natural resources; growth in tourism revenue; increase in job offers; improvement and maintenance of services; support to the local community (e.g. purchase of regional products, agricultural production, donations to NGOs and needy families, among others); equal opportunities; animal and social welfare (Choi et al., 2020). However, over the past few years there have been several negative impacts of travel to a particular tourist destination. Some examples of this are pollution, waste production, disrespect for tourist attractions, various forms of vandalism, and disrespect for wildlife (Su & Swanson, 2017).

The most developed societies have tried to fight against this phenomenon, and in the last decade new forms of Tourism have appeared with very similar concepts, but with different characteristics, such as "Sustainable Tourism", "Responsible Tourism", "Nature Tourism", "Ecotourism", among others.

According to UNWTO (2005) the development of Sustainable Tourism rests on three pillars - economic, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability.

Thus, the concept of Sustainable Tourism has several characteristics:

- Optimize the use of key environmental resources for tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of local communities, preserve their cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure long-term viable economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits equally distributed among all *stakeholders*, including stable employment opportunities, income and social services for the local population and poverty alleviation.

UNWTO (2005) adds that Sustainable Tourism should contribute to a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience for tourists, raising their awareness of environmental issues and promoting sustainable practices among them. Moreover, it is a continuous process that requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Ecotourism is considered one of the strands of Sustainable Tourism and a positive alternative to mass tourism, allowing a better management of resources, as well as the conservation and restoration of Nature (Cerqueira, 2020). The *International Ecotourism Society,* defined Ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, sustain the well-being of local people and involve interpretation and education" (TIES, 2017).

In the development of this study a qualitative methodology was selected, consisting of an exploratory study, based on semi-structured interviews. The sample is composed of directors and/or managers of hotel units distinguished with the "Green Key" certification, in 2022, in the Northern region of Portugal. Additionally, some partner entities associated with the certification of these properties were included, namely ABAE and consulting companies in the Sustainable Tourism sector.

2. Literature Review

In the Tourism and Hospitality sector, environmentally sustainable consumption activities include saving water and energy; reusing towels, bottles, and plastic bags; buying eco-friendly products, using local products and reducing food waste. "Green" products contribute to meeting the needs of travelers and the market, which are increasingly concerned with becoming

environmentally sustainable, encouraging businesses and destinations to adopt sustainable practices and offer environmentally

friendly products/services, increasing their competitiveness in the tourism and hospitality market
(Han, 2021).

It is up to *marketers to* identify and profile this market segment, as well as to influence it through successful marketing communications, so ecological sustainability emerges as a secondary effect. In this way, the pressure on the host destination's regulatory or educational efforts is diminished, and on the other hand, the trade-off between profit maximization and environmental conservation is attenuated (Dolnicar, 2006).

In the research of Blackstock et al., (2008) measuring the responsible behavior and practices adopted by tourists and hosts of a National Park in Scotland, as an indicator of Sustainable Tourism, the results suggest that Tourism labeled as sustainable, is not automatically responsible. The lack of attention to the negative impacts caused by Tourism, emphasizing only environmental information at the expense of socio-cultural interactions and an instrumental approach to engaging local communities, suggests that the economic performance of businesses is given higher priority over other issues. Therefore, all residents are seen as a resource for the industry and should support Tourism solely because of its economic importance, which goes against the ethical commitment of Responsible Tourism which focuses on Human Rights and social welfare, rather than the desire for economic growth. On the other hand, the focus is only on the tourism organizations and operators, and not on the employees, who are primarily responsible for interacting with tourists or managing their impacts. It is concluded that using the concept of Responsible Tourism is useful in that it contributes to the deconstruction of the claims regarding the sustainability of Tourism and the indicators designed to monitor it. In this way, Sustainable Tourism may benefit from the ethical principles of individual and collective responsibility.

Improved infrastructure, new sources of income, and market segments with different customs and lifestyles can generate positive results for the local population. On the other hand, massive flows of tourists are detrimental to the life and culture of the destination's residents. Additionally, tourism can lead to the degradation of nature, which reduces the quality of life of the local community and tourists (Cerqueira, 2020). Sustainability is not a static process; it is in constant search for balance that can only be achieved through a holistic view between the three sustainable dimensions. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly observe its evolution because a measure can be sustainable today, in the medium or long term may have an unsustainable impact (Hosteltur, 2022).

The most recent definition of Marketing proposed by the *American Marketing Association* emphasizes that "it is an activity, set of institutions, and processes to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value to consumers, customers, partners, and society at large" (AMA, 2017). It is perceptible a clear adaptation of the Marketing concept over time, since initially it was only directed to the product design and distribution, i.e., the focus was on mass production for a non-segmented market.

Currently, the focus in marketing is the customer, where companies in any industry work to meet the needs and desires of a particular market segment with common characteristics, and often the customer itself is involved in developing and improving the product/service, as well as price, distribution channels and communication to be adopted. It is crucial for companies to work together not only with their customers, but also with all other *stakeholders* (employees, partners, local community, government entities) in order to be able to innovate and gain competitive advantage in the market. Porter and Van der Linde (1995) were the first authors to address the "*win-win*" relationship between business and the environment, arguing that constant innovation with environmental issues is central to an efficient and productive use of existing resources, providing high value products to consumers. Hotels can play a more important role in destination if they can balance environmental protection and their economic gains, especially in developing countries where environmental leadership and political support is lacking (Kasim, 2006). Today, thousands of workers in the hospitality industry already adopt sustainable measures in

their daily lives that contribute to more sustainable tourism. Some of these practices used in the hotel industry are: control of the amount

of food served to avoid food waste; turning off all lights whenever a room of the hotel is not being used; implementation of limiters on taps and showers to control the flow of water; use of environmentally friendly cleaning products; dispensers for the most used *amenities* (shampoo, shower gel and soap) to avoid waste; complete elimination of single-use plastics; reuse of towels and bed linen; among others (Hosteltur, 2022).

Governments should be receptive to innovative ways to improve natural resources management, through appropriate regulation and policies, to make hotels more committed and conscious in managing their consumption. The biggest challenge is to change their perception, however, proper communication that encourages businesses to be aware of environmental issues can convince hotels to be more rigorous about these issues. It is also important to mention that tourists and locals play a very significant role in the CSR activities of hotels, where they should be actively involved in their design, implementation, and development.

To achieve Sustainable Tourism, *marketers*, hotel managers and tour operators should establish programs to enhance tourists' environmental knowledge and sensitivity, encouraging their affection for the tourist destination, so that pro-environmental behaviors can grow in the market.

In the analysis by Olya et al. (2021) conducted on guests of some 4 and 5 star hotels, the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability were compared on guest satisfaction, loyalty and familiarity. In fact, customer satisfaction can contribute to company performance and competitive advantage. It was concluded that familiarity has a significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction, i.e., if guests are familiar with sustainability practices, they will be more satisfied with the hotel, reinforcing their booking intention. Additionally, a positive relationship was identified between customer loyalty and the social and environmental dimension, but not the economic dimension. This suggests that guests are more likely to return to a hotel if it is socially and environmentally responsible, although economic actions have no impact on their loyalty.

Fairweather et al. (2005) identified a segment of visitors in New Zealand that showed high interest in eco-labels, stating that these certifications are a reason for choice at the time of booking and that they are willing to pay more for eco-friendly accommodations. Therefore, the demand side is of central importance to the success of sustainable business behavior. If consumers are looking for green tourist accommodations, operators will have a motivation to become certified and the increased demand will offset the cost of certification (Dolnicar, 2006).

In Portugal, in the year 2021, 161 tourist units were awarded the "Green Key", with hotels obtaining the highest number of distinctions. In 2022, there was a significant increase, with 220 certified lodgings, with hotels keeping the lead (Green Key, 2022). This trend may be a response to the pandemic, which promoted in hoteliers an increased concern for environmental and social issues. Lissner and Mayer (2020) summarized the potential direct and indirect benefits that eco-certifications can bring to the different *stakeholders* involved in the Tourism sector. Firstly, the direct benefits, at the level of the certified organization, correspond to: framework for improving its sustainable performance, independent verification of ecological performance, and tangible achievement in recognizing its environmental commitment. At the consumers' level it is based on the signaling of environmentally conscious companies and a seal of quality. For governments it is an alternative to direct regulation. And in the local community it is an indication for employers with a strong focus on corporate social responsibility.

Hotels should be certified by independent agencies that are serious about sustainability, which is an excellent strategy to reduce consumer distrust (Rahman et al., 2015). According to Grapentin and Ayikoru (2019)when analyzing several scientific papers that evaluate Sustainable Tourism among tourists, 64% would be willing to pay more for a certified accommodation, 70% believe that companies should be committed to preserving the environment, 55% want fair working conditions for professionals in the sector, 75% want a more responsible vacation. Transparency and honesty is key for tourists who will consequently opt for companies with good sustainability credentials. Font and Scott (2017) argue that companies are more likely to achieve a change in tourist behavior through

messages that demonstrate that both are on the same side, i.e., working together towards a common and altruistic goal, which is in line with researchers Ponnapureddy et al. (2017) and Nelson et al. (2021).

3. Methodology

Despite the existing studies on the themes of Sustainability and Marketing, applied to the Tourism and Hospitality sector, especially from the tourists' perspective, the identification and analysis of the strategies adopted in practice by each hotel unit and also how they affect the region where they are located, as well as the experience of all *stakeholders* involved (guests, employees, partners, and residents) is still not very common in the literature.

Given the theoretical framework, and considering some of the previously mentioned studies (Dolnicar et al., 2008; Graci and Dodds, 2008; AMA, 2017; Font & Scott, 2017; Siqueira Soares et al., 2017; Su & Swanson, 2017; Gursoy, 2018; UNWTO, 2018; Shedenov et al., 2019; Cerqueira, 2020; Green Key, 2022; Liberato et al, 2021; Nelson et al., 2021) the following objectives (general and specific) were defined:

General Objective: Understand the importance of Marketing in Sustainable Tourism in the promotion of hotel units and dynamization of the Northern region of Portugal. Specific Objectives: Analyze the market offer (sustainable hotel units) in the Northern region of Portugal; Identify the profile of tourists (motivations, characteristics, consumption patterns) that value Sustainable Tourism.

The methodology used was qualitative, with the application of semi-structured interviews, directed at employees in management positions (directors and/or managers) in hotels certified with the "Green Key", in 2022, in the Northern Region of Portugal, as well as partner entities that help certify these units (ABAE and consulting firms in sustainability). Semi-structured interviews are the most used in a qualitative research project. They are generally organized considering a set of pre-defined open questions, with the possibility of other questions arising during the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. This type of methodology allows the interviewer to understand, in a deeper way, the participant's social and personal issues. In addition, its main characteristics are its flexibility, accessibility and intelligibility, obtaining more complete answers (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The population is made up of the sustainable hotel establishments and tourism partners in the North region of Portugal. The sample includes the directors and/or managers, belonging to the hotels awarded with the "Green Key" award in 2022, in the study region. Also included were some partner entities that help certify these hotel developments, such as ABAE and two other consulting companies in Sustainable Tourism. Thus, in the present research, seven hoteliers and three tourism partners were interviewed.

This study was disclosed via e-mail and phone call, to contact the selected hotel units and tourism partners. If the directors and/or managers accepted to be part of it, informed consent was previously sent and online interviews were scheduled (via "zoom"), according to their availability.

To answer the general and specific objectives, described above, the questions created for the interviews are distributed according to the specific objectives, and are also based on the literature review, as shown in the following table:

Table 1. Theoretical background of the interview script

Interview Questions	Theoretical Foundation
Objective 1: To identify the profile of tourists (motivations, characteristics, consumption patterns) who value Sustainable Tourism	

1. What are consumers' main motivations when looking for hotel units with sustainability and/or ecological certifications?	Cheng & Wu (2015).; Karlsson & Dolnicar (2016); Grapentin & Ayikoru (2019); Ponnapureddy et al. (2017); Choi et al. (2020); Hosteltur (2022); Beall et al. (2021); Richards (2015); Amaro et al. (2016).
2. What is the profile of this type of consumer? (in terms of gender, age, nationality, income, profession, education, length of stay, ...)	Modica et al. (2020); Xu & Gursoy (2015); Miska et al. (2018); Ponnapureddy et al. (2017); Choi et al. (2020); Hosteltur (2022); Olya et al. (2021); Ayuso (2006); Dolnicar & Long (2009); Laroche et al. (2001); Boley & Nickerson (2013); Weaver (2002); Wight (2001); Weaver & Lawton (2002); Dief & Font (2010); Preziosi et al. (2019).

Source - Own Elaboration

The sample was divided between certain hotel units in the Northern Region of Portugal that have the "Green Key" certification in 2022 and, also, some tourism partners that contribute to certify them (ABAE and two consulting companies in Sustainable Tourism). It was possible to obtain answers from seven hoteliers and three tourism partners, for a total of ten interviewees. The functions performed by the interviewees in the hotel units or partner entities, correspond to senior hierarchical positions, being these directors and/or managers of the respective organizations. The participants were given the choice of answering by video call ("zoom") or in writing. There is equal gender representation in the sample. The hotels or partners are also classified according to the NUTS III where they are located. These data are shown in the following table:

Table 2. Characterization of the interviewees

NO.	NUTS III	Name of hotel or partner	Role of Interviewee	Gender	Mode
E.1	Douro	Douro Palace Hotel Resort & SPA Douro Royal Valley Hotel & SPA	Managing Director	Male	Written
E.2	Metropolitan Area of Porto	Pestana Douro Riverside	Managing Director	Male	Written
E.3	Alto Minho	Hotel Meira	Hotel Manager	Male	Video call
E.4	Douro	Six Senses Douro Valley	Sustainability Manager	Female	Written
E.5	Alto Minho	Hotel Minho	Managing Director	Male	Video call
E.6	Metropolitan Area of Porto	NEYA Porto Hotel	Quality, Environment and Safety Director	Male	Written
E.7	Tâmega and Sousa	Hotel Valxisto Country House	Director General	Female	Video call
E.8	Lisbon Metropolitan Area	ABAE - Green Key	National Coordinator	Female	Video call
E.9	Lisbon Metropolitan Area	ABC Sustainable Luxury Hospitality	CEO & New Business Manager	Female	Video call
E.10	Lisbon Metropolitan Area	Global Eco Sustainable Solutions	CEO & Partner	Female	Written

Source - Own Elaboration

4. Results

The results are presented for each of the objectives envisaged and presented above.

4.1 Consumers' motivations when looking for hotel units with sustainability and/or ecological certifications.

Hoteliers' Perspective

In the opinion of the directors and/or managers of the different hotel units interviewed, in general, the main motivations for consumers to seek their certified resorts are related to the following variables: feeling of belonging to the community (E.2 and E.3); contribution to a *better management of natural resources, continuous maintenance of the quality of life and economic development levels* (E.1 and E.7); greater awareness, environmental concern, and information (E.1, E.2, E.3, E.4, and E7); *being in touch with nature (E.*5 and E.7); seasonality (E.5); care for *animal and social well-being (E.*7). The authors Choi et al. (2020) support that there is a segment of tourists who seek to be in full communion with Nature, preferring comfortable, well-maintained facilities surrounded by it, or close to it. Also, the concern for future generations,

in leaving a safe and sustainable planet for their children and grandchildren (E.2). However, according to E.5, sustainability is not yet the main motivation for tourists to seek a certain hotel unit, *but it is moving towards it.* E.7 has the same opinion, certifications are *an added value that we have,* but guests do not seek the unit for the fact that it is certified. Nor does he contribute to the increase in demand, that is, he doesn't believe that he has more customers because of the certification**.** Several researchers support this view, stating that consumers with a high environmental education will be more likely to book in a certified hotel because of the sustainability factor, but it is not a variable, by itself, enough to change their purchasing behaviors (Cheng & Wu, 2015). Only a niche of consumers in the international market (20%) seek a more responsible vacation, with less than
1% in the UK actually prioritizing sustainability and only 10% converting their concern into purchase decisions
(Grapentin & Ayikoru, 2019; Ponnapureddy et al., 2017).
Another motivation is the dissemination in social networks, i.e., the fact that the guest can share that he is in a certified hotel, increases his social status, visibility, and identification with the local community. *Whenever we disclose something more external and there is something more visible, the customer likes to see, likes to publish, and likes to feel identified with the destination (E.3).* Sustainable Tourism is, in fact, dependent on the influence of digital technology, and is not only limited to *green-friendly* consumers, as "non-sustainable" tourists are often attracted to these hotels due to social disclosure. The focus has shifted to sharing a unique and unforgettable experience that guests want to share on their social media (Beall et al., 2021). Therefore, there are several motivations that go beyond sustainability, as mentioned above.

There is a demand for prior information about the product, the same choose/book the hotel taking into consideration the practices of the hotel unit in this regard. When seeking these hotels, they feel they are making a conscious choice, thus giving their contribution (E.1).
The constant climate changes that are occurring and in a future perspective for new generations, want to stop
the process of environmental deterioration (E.2).
In addition, being able to make a post on social networks has a great importance, that is, to say that you are in a hotel that has this certification or that has this care, this is also very important. We realize, more and more, that whenever we disclose something more external and that there is something more visible, the customer likes to see, likes to publish, and likes to feel identified with the destination (E.3).
Consumers are increasingly informed about these issues, which makes them have more concerns and make more conscious choices (E.4). People come because they start to have some sensitivity to these issues, they really choose to be closer to natural environments and that we have some care for animal welfare, social welfare, and the environment (E.7).
People don't come to us because we are Green Key or Biosphere certified, it's an asset that we have, but I don't believe that you have many more guests because you have those certifications (E.7).

Partners' Perspective

From the perspective of the tourism partners (E.8, E.9, and E.10), some of the tourists' motivations mentioned agree with the interviewed hoteliers, namely: more demanding consumers; greater awareness and concern about environmental issues; contribution to the local community and sustainable development of the destination; quality of the product and/or service; alignment of their ecological values with those of the hotel unit.

There is a large and growing percentage of *consumers who have these ecological concerns in their daily lives* and therefore *want to see them reflected in the hotels they choose for their vacations* (E.8). Also,

the *corporate* segment, i.e., *companies that seek these units for their meetings and/or gatherings* and *want to see their environmental values aligned* (E.8).

According to E.9, there are many other motivations, besides those already mentioned, for tourists to seek sustainability, such as: distance to the destination and necessary travel (Hosteltur, 2022; Limbado, 2021; Higham et al., 2022). Perception of what the region and hotel do for the community; hospitality and authenticity of places; happiness of people, including employees; distribution of economic wealth; partnerships and other entities the hotel works with; perception of who is leading the organizations and what their contribution is. Increased consumer demand and intelligence, due to the vast information available, means that business leaders must make decisions to leverage investment in sustainability (E.9).

I think that these consumers are those who are already aware of these issues and effectively choose these units because they give them the guarantee that their stay will have identical concerns to those they have in their own homes (E.8).
Today, consumers are already looking at this, the increase in demand will clearly leverage these entrepreneurs to have to make decisions and move towards investing in sustainability (E.9).
We are entering a new mindset, where the new generation is very concerned about the planet (E.9).
The consumer wants to understand if he himself is contributing to something bigger, if the unit or destination where he is, helps others.
Hospitality is another very important motivation. To achieve this hospitality, we must have people properly compensated, both materially and immaterially (coaching and personal development sessions, among others) (E.9).
Consumers are more demanding with the products they buy, demanding quality, but without compromising the economy and the environment. The search for certified units ensures that these concerns are considered and that they are aligned with their expectations (E.10).

4.2 Profile of this type of consumers, in terms of gender, age, nationality, income, profession, education and length of stay

Hoteliers' Perspective

Regarding gender and profession, the opinion of all hoteliers is unanimous, there are no significant differences (E.1, E.2, E.3, E.4, E.5 and E.7). This goes against the theories that assure that these types of consumers are mostly female, with high income and education. There is a growing trend of the "feminization" of Sustainable Tourism (Ponnapureddy et al., 2017; Olya et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2020; Weaver, 2002; Wight, 2001; Laroche et al., 2001). As for age, the tendency is for younger generations *to* have a greater concern about sustainability issues, *up to the age of 30 (E.7) or 50 years old* (E.2). Generally, it is young couples, with small children, (E.4) that show more interest. In the national tourist, compared to the international tourist, one notices a *greater awareness in the younger ones, even in the children (E.5 and E.7).* The younger tourist is more sensitive to these areas *because they see their future compromised (E.7)* (Ponnapureddy et al., 2017; Olya et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2020). According to Hosteltur magazine (2022), 10 years ago the *green-friendly* mentality was marked in older consumers, but nowadays it is across different generations and nationalities, with a focus on younger ones. In contrast, E.1 sees no age differences, supported by the research of Dolnicar and Long (2009) and Laroche et al. (2001).
Nationality was the variable that showed greater relevance, defended by most hoteliers, where tourists coming from Nordic countries (Germany, Holland, among others) are the ones who show greater sustainable awareness, therefore they look more for this type of certified units (E.3, E.4, E.5). This approach is verified in

the studies of Ayuso (2006), Dief and Font (2010), Preziosi et al. (2019) and Ponnapureddy et al. (2017), where the German market ranks fourth in the ranking of countries with the most green initiatives in the Tourism sector. Tourists from Northern Europe are *more environmentally aware*, as they comply with good sustainable practices in their daily lives, so they are *more receptive than the Portuguese*. *Although, in recent years, there has already been a change in relation to the national customer (E.5 and E.7).* On the other hand, E.1 and E.2 do not see changes at this level.

Regarding income, it affects the upper-middle social class, which is usually the one with the highest purchasing power. Since, the prices charged for sustainable products and/or services and technology are higher (S.1 and S.2). On the other hand, E.7 has a different approach, stating that it is *the tourist with less money and looking for a different lifestyle*, who identifies more with sustainability issues. He also adds *that the national tourist has less income than the foreign tourist* (E.7).

The level of education also influences, i.e., *the higher the education, the higher is also the environmental concern* (E.2) (Ponnapureddy et al., 2017; Olya et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2020; Weaver, 2002; Wight, 2001; Laroche et al., 2001). The other participants were silent on this issue. The length of stay was only mentioned by E.1, where it *ranges from 1 to 3 days.*

Water scarcity and energy shortages affect everyone from the lowest to the highest income earners. However, it is the prices of sustainable products and technology that define that, to access these products, purchasing power must exist (E.1).

We have filtered water in the hotel, and we had comments from a Dutch customer and a German customer, who were very satisfied and asked about it. It was interesting to see that care and concern of the guests to give their feedback to those who were working at the time, to say that it is a good initiative (E.3).

Foreigners are more environmentally aware than the Portuguese. Although, in recent years, we have already seen a change in relation to the national customer (E.5).

I think that the tourist who is most sensitive to these areas is the younger tourist, who is now starting to have a different concern about environmental issues because he sees his future compromised (E.7).

Partners' Perspective

Regarding the profile of "sustainable" tourists, in terms of gender, all partners (E.8, E.9 and E.10) mentioned that it tends to be female, unlike hoteliers, which is in line with some authors (Ponnapureddy et al.,
2017; Olya et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2020; Weaver, 2002; Wight, 2001; Laroche et al., 2001).

E.9 points out that, usually, *in couples*, *it is the woman who chooses the destination and the hotel unit where they will spend their vacation.* This is mainly due to the *emotional side*, which is activated during this process. In addition, he adds that *homosexuality* is another extremely important point, since this segment is highly *concerned with sustainability*.

On age, they claim it is the younger generations, *between the ages of 25 and 50* (E.9 and E.10), with *children* also starting to have this environmental concern (E.9) (Ponnapureddy et al., 2017; Olya et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2020; Hosteltur, 2022).

Regarding nationality, *green-friendly* tourists come mostly from *Nordic countries* (*Germany, Denmark*) - S.8 and S.9, but the *demand for Portugal in the US market has* also *increased* (S.9). *These countries have high knowledge* about the issue in question and already develop *ecological practices in their daily lives for many years*, so *hotel* directors and/or managers must *adapt and evolve in* this direction, otherwise they may lose business with certain tour operators (E.9). On the other hand, the ABAE (E.8) argues that the information they have about this consumer profile, comes from *empirical knowledge* they receive *through contact with the hotel units*. However, it argues that *more effective* research on the subject is needed, which would be *useful* for the activity sector. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to that.

Income is medium-high (E.9) or above average (E.10). Sustainability consists of *people with greater economic power giving to* those who have fewer possibilities, therefore, the social aspect (E.9).

In terms of profession, E.9 was the only partner to speak, arguing that there is no distinction, they are *the most varied professions.* Education, usually, are people with *higher education (above the 12th grade*) - E.9 and E.10.

Finally, E.10 proved with his study that the length of stay is on average 3 days.

We receive information about the profile of tourists through contact with the hotel managers themselves, who say that some guests are more sensitive than others, but it would be interesting to do a more effective study on the subject (E.8).

Then we have the United States market, which is evolving and looking for Portugal a lot. These are countries that have very high environmental concerns, already have a high level of knowledge about sustainability and are looking for it (E.9).

There is a study that came out a few years ago that says that when people are in a couple, it is usually the woman who chooses the destination and the hotel unit where they go. This is due to the emotional side, which is activated when we go on vacation.

I also wanted to talk about homosexuality because, nowadays, they are clearly people who are very concerned about sustainability, and it is interesting to see (E.9).

At Global Eco, we did a small market study, with a sample of 500 individuals and with the objective of understanding the type of users of these products. We can advance that, looking for stays and products/services that reveal environmental concerns, the majority are women, between 25 and 50 years old, with higher education and monthly income above average. The average length of stay is 3 days (E.10).

4.3 Summary of evidence on the profile of tourists

Table 3. Summary of evidence on the profile of tourists

Objective: To identify the profile of tourists (motivations, characteristics, consumption patterns) who value		
Tourism	Sustainable	
Interview questions	Subcategories	Interviewees
1. What are consumers' main motivations when looking for hotel units with sustainability and/or ecological certifications?	Involvement with the community	E.2; E.3 E.8; E.9; E.10
	Better resource management	E.1; E.7
	Increased awareness and concern	E.1; E.2; E.3; E.4; E.7 E.8; E.9; E.10
	Contact with Nature	E.5; E.7
	Animal and Social Welfare	E.7
	Contribution to the sustainable development of the destination	E.8; E.9; E.10
	Seasonality	E.5
	Digital communication	E.3
	Product and/or service quality	E.1; E.10
	Location and distance to destination	E.7; E.9
	Hospitality and authenticity of the places	E.9
2. What is the profile of this type of consumer? (in terms of gender, age, nationality, income, profession, education, length of stay, ...)	Gender: Female, mostly (And homosexuality)	E.8; E.9; E.10
	Age: Younger generations (25 - 50 years)	E.2; E.4; E.5; E.7; E.9; E.10
	Nationality: Nordic countries (Germany, Netherlands, Denmark); Other countries (USA, France)	E.3; E.4; E.5; E.8; E.9
	Income: Upper-middle class; Higher purchasing power	E.1; E.2 E.9; E.10
	Profession: Varied, there are no differences	E.9
	Education: Higher level of schooling	E.2; E.9; E.10
	Length of stay: On average, 1 to 3 nights	E.1; E.10

Source: Authors

5. Conclusion

It was verified that the hoteliers and tourism partners in question have only empirical knowledge about the theme under analysis. This study allowed us to obtain concrete and substantiated results, which will be useful in market segmentation and implementation of marketing strategies to attract potential tourists, concerned about the planet and the society where they live.

From an analytical perspective, it provides interesting findings for the Northern region of Portugal, where a continuous growth towards its sustainable development is expected, with more and more certified tourist accommodations and their contribution to the distribution of economic wealth in the region, its dynamization and promotion, as well as the responsible involvement of tourists with local inhabitants.

Objective 1: Analyze the market offer (sustainable hotel units) in the Northern region of Portugal.

In 2022, 19 hotels awarded with the "Green Key" were identified in the Northern region of Portugal. However, in the sample of this study, it was only possible to interview 7 of these hoteliers, adding 3 more tourism partners (ABAE, ABC Hospitality and Global Eco Solutions), for a total of 10 interviewees.

It was also identified that the Northern region of Portugal had a continuous growth, over the last four years, regarding the number of certified tourist resorts.

Goal 2: Identify the profile of tourists (motivations, characteristics, consumption patterns) who value Sustainable Tourism.

Several motivations were found for tourists' demand for certified hotels, such as: involvement with the community; better management of natural resources; greater environmental awareness and concern; contact with nature; animal and social well-being; contribution to the sustainable development of the destination; seasonality; digital communication; quality of the product and/or service; location and distance to the destination; hospitality and authenticity of the places.

As for the demographic and sociocultural characteristics of this type of consumers, it was identified that they were mostly female. Additionally, the LGBT segment was also approached as having a high concern for sustainability issues, being a segment to be considered by hoteliers. The younger generations, aged 25 to 50, were most often mentioned by the respondents. Nordic and Central European countries, with a focus on Germany and the Netherlands, as well as other nationalities (USA and France), tend to be the tourists that most enjoy a sustainable lifestyle and adopt good ecological practices in their daily lives, and therefore look for hotels that meet their environmental and social values.

Sustainability and/or ecological certifications bring, indirectly, a competitive advantage in terms of benefits for the sustainable development of a tourist destination.

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