

Eco-Certification in the Maltese hospitality industry among four stars hotels. Is it enough?

A dissertation submitted to The Institute of Tourism Studies in part fulfilment of the
requirements for award of BA in International Hospitality & Management

by

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September 2020

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of self-made research. I, as the authentic author, declare that this research study is my own composition, and has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Mr. David Pace

Signature:

Date:

ABSTRACT

Sustainability over time has made it an easy term to comprehend, but not easy to achieve. The discourse regarding sustainability presents, in several situations, a fragility when the sustainable thinking model is practiced in the industry.

Society's demands in relation to corporate responsibility are growing every day. Consumers want guarantees of quality and transparency concerning processes, including the level of sustainability. Thanks to these concerns and desires, different sectors of the market have become concerned with meeting these demands. Hence, the need for standards such as eco-certification.

Eco-certification arose from the need to certify hotels, which have varied accountability in terms of their environmental impact (from the stay and raw material to the disposal of waste). This certification is granted to hotels that comply with environmental legislation and their production processes, from providing a service to the procedures required by the certifying body.

Consequently, my question asks: Is eco-certification enough for four star hotels in Malta to argue that they are adhering to sustainable practices?

This dissertation focused on two specific four stars hotels in Malta: one being eco-certified and the other uncertified. The purpose is to compare and contrast their practices using the criteria list designed by the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA). The two hotels chosen are The Marina and the other, which decided to remain anonymous. Also, an interview with the lecturer of the eco-certification Mr. David Pace, was included to give depth to the study and to clarify what adhering to the eco-certification requires.

The results has showed that eco-certification has its gaps, being the reasons that it does not accommodate all sizes of hotels and due to the fact that matter is too serious for only having 19 eco-certified hotels in Malta.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this monograph first to God, my parents, and my siblings (Wanessa, Wicente, Wanderleia, Wanderley, Wanda & Wando) and my aunt Irene who raised me, and guided my upbringing, and gave me all the opportunities possible to become who I am today. I also dedicate this to my husband Bruno for the companionship in this whole process; and my friends (Cristina, Liliane, Nathalia & Tatiane, among others) who accompanied me on this journey. I thank my advisor and Karl Leonard very much, for the inspiration and motivation to get into the proposed theme and guiding me through the process. And last but not least, the ITS teachers and all the staff for having provided all the necessary support for this wish to be fulfilled.

GLOSSARY

Carbon footprint: in essence carbon dioxide emissions, which means the amount of greenhouse gases triggered by human activity (family, events, products, country, etc...).

Corporate citizenship: refers to the recognition in which a business (corporation) embraces the social, cultural and environmental aspects in the community.

Eco-certification, eco-labelling, green label and eco-label: are ways to be identified as a label, which is designed to address products, services, and establishments, which follow environmental best practices.

Environmental management system: is a model, which helps the organization to reach environmental objectives by engaging with a system of improvements in its environmental functioning. In addition, it is a set of measures, practices, and supervisory processes of a firm with the objective of obtaining a better environmental performance.

Green economy: refers to the set of actions aimed at promoting an economy with full growth, based on social well-being and focused on reducing environmental risks and conserving the natural environment. Therefore, the green economy seeks to reconcile the notion of low carbon production, the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources and social inclusion.

Green marketing: a branch of marketing which helps to identify products and services that are environmentally friendly. For the company to comply with the green marketing policies, it is necessary to follow principles such as having environmental, economic, social and cultural responsibility. In addition, it is still necessary to be subject to the “3 Rs” which means to reduce, reuse and recycle.

ISO Standards: are means of promoting the standardization of products and services, using certain standards so that quality is improved; with such standards are agreed by professionals at the international level.

Social and Environmental Responsibility: It is the ethical and responsible way in which companies fundamentally develop and incorporate all of their environmental, social and economic procedures to align their practices as well as attitudes with their performance,

both with the community and with workers. Social and environmental responsibility has to do with the internal and external environment and with all agents interested in the process, in a relentless search to achieve results that lead to the social inclusion, the common good and the preservation of the environment.

Stakeholder theory: The Stakeholder Theory means that a firm should recognize all of the agents that are connected directly or indirectly. In addition, the firms need to know them, and supervise their services; furthermore, it is a theory, which argues that a business should establish values not only for its shareholders but also, to its stakeholders.

Sustainability: the ability of a company or industry to be able to exist continually, by monitoring and controlling the use of natural resources and being able to maintain itself. In the context of this dissertation to prevent the diminution of natural resources in order to preserve the environment and sustain an organic balance within the environment.

Sustainable development: It is development that does not exhaust resources for the future. Its objective is to ensure the balance of the three dimensions: economic, social and environmental with governance (management).

Sustainable development goal: known as the global goals endorsed by the United Nations (UN) in order to improve and construct a sustainable future for all. There are 17 goals, which aim to be completed by 2030.

SWOT: An analysis tool to assess where an organization situates its strategy, based on its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

The Brundtland Report (Our Common Future Report): was published in 1987 by the United Nations (UN), which claims that 'Sustainable development is what meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland, 1987).

Triple bottom line: is a term created by John Elkington in order to appraise performance in companies. The term counsels that social, environmental and economic issues should be the company's main concern in the way they earn profits.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ABNT: Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas (which is equivalent in English to Brazilian Association of Technical Standards)
- BREEAM: Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment
- CFC: Chlorofluorocarbons
- CMP: Carbon management plan
- CRS: Corporate Social Responsibility
- EMAS: Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
- EMS: Environmental Management System
- ERA: Environment & Resource Authority
- EU: European Union
- GSTC: Global Sustainable Tourism Council
- GTBS: Green Tourism Business Scheme
- ISO: International Organization for Standardization
- LEED: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
- PMS: Property management system
- MTA: Malta Tourism Authority
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
- SD: Sustainable Development
- SDG: Sustainable Development Goal
- SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
- TCO in Swedish: Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation (which is equivalent in English to Confederation of Professional Employees)
- UN: United Nations
- UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization (formerly just World Trade Organization, WTO)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The hotel sector is a fundamental activity for the global economy as it provides economic and social development. Nonetheless, to establish their operations, processes and services, the hotel sector produces environmental impacts that can contribute to climate change and the exhaustion of natural resources Akenji and Briggs (2015).

In the face of public opinion and environmental awareness, hotels started to manage the environmental impact by trying to be responsible to society for this supervision and to the country's regulation. In this sense, warn that society's interest in sustainability has become a decisive factor in choosing a hotel, it is more than comfort and hospitality; it is a lifestyle choice (2015).

In the last two decades, it is clear that concepts such as social responsibility; corporate citizen; environmental responsibility; and more recently green marketing, have become the new paradigms of contemporaneity, perceived as a strategic factor by various sectors of the economy (2015). With the growth of the tourism sector experienced around the world, it is possible to visualize the tourist trade incorporating such concepts into their business models.

Nowadays, it may be perceived as a trending topic; however, it has become a philosophy or ethos for many people, which also has demands. As a response to this, many establishments are following their consumers by obtaining and delivering eco-certification, also known as eco-labelling, in order to acknowledge and attend the public's growing environmental awareness and concerns. This can also be recognized as a sign of the 'green economy,' and according to the United Nations '[a] green economy [is] one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities' (UNEP, 2020).

Eco-labelling is considered an essential tool worldwide to promote sustainable tourism and ecotourism for economic operators. With the proliferation of 'green' tourism certifications, there has also been an international growth in terms of the consensus of 'having a single authorization to estimate, and help to standardize these programs' (Honey, 2008).

The process of rationalization, harmonization and authorization of the various certification schemes in order to support the tourism industry began in November of 2000. The first

sustainable tourism certification meeting that took place at Moronk Mountain House, New Paltz, in New York and it made available to the world a new opportunity, to be part of the responsible tourism era, which is evolving and will soon be possible for all (Mohonk Agreement: Proposal for an International Certification Program for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism, 2000).

This research is being carried out with the perspective of understanding better the relevance of eco-certification as part of the sustainable development in the hospitality segment. The core objective of this dissertation is to show the difference between two four star hotels, one being eco-certified, and one uncertified; to understand their concerns and impediments in adhering to such practice.

Furthermore, the objective of this research aims to unfold the existing types of certifications worldwide, starting at those currently in Malta, as well as identifying which sustainable management practices have been implemented on the two hotels studied by comparing and contrasting their practices.

The supplementary objectives of this dissertation are to:

- Explore the environmental and sustainable policies that apply to the eco-certification in Malta; and
- Carry out a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis on eco-certification to fully understand what it implies for the hotels studied (Sezen Dogancilia, 2017).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Chris Hart (2001) '[t]he literature review, should contain an overview of what is existent, and the current approaches on the selected theme; even though the current theories are not part of the selected choices.' Also, as Paige West and James G. Carrier (2004) explain, the theoretical reference enables the verification of the researched problem under the conceptual aspects and the academic research previously conducted. Therefore, this foundation becomes of high relevance in order to achieve its objectives.

2.1 Sustainable development

Sustainability is a word derived from the Latin 'sustenare' which means to sustain and conserve; it implies the capacity of keeping maintained through proper usage (Sustainment/Sustainability Definition, 2012). With this in mind, its understanding must be expanded to allow a fuller understanding of the concept of sustainability, particularly as it applies in this dissertation to the hotel case studies and their operations.

The United Nations (UN) presents sustainability as a systemic concept that aims to supply goods or services with all social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects needed to guarantee a better future for the industry, society and the planet. It is with sustainability that natural resources are used intelligently and are protected with a view to safeguarding for the future generations (Achieving Sustainable Development and Promoting Development Cooperation, 2008).

Various definitions of the term 'sustainability' were described in the literature, which can be interpreted as the balance between economic development and the conservation of natural resources, based on the growth of the economy and the best living conditions for future generations (Justice and Ricart, 2019). Consequently, it is understood that it reflects the idea that one must develop a means to balance the needs of the environment and what is built in it, hence not causing losses or any other damages. That is why; it is believed that eco-certification would help the matter, since it is a way for companies within the industry to be monitored and held accountable that would benefit the environment.

According to Abdel-Shafy and Mansour (2018), society in general uses resources from the environment for the production of food and consumer goods; however, in this production process solid and liquid waste is generated, in addition to the emission of polluting and

harmful gases in large quantities that are harmful to the environment and contribute to the depletion of natural resources.

For Bengtsson et al., (2018) this environmental degradation produces constant changes in the way in which society sees the world, due to the increase in knowledge resulting from the scientific research on the impacts of production upon the environment; especially projecting those effects onto the future. Thus, the concern with sustainable development must be intrinsic to any business strategy.

Given this reality, the definition of the concept of sustainable development emerged in 1987 with the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future (Brundtland, 1987), known worldwide as The Brundtland Report. *This report was developed by The World Commission on Environment, and was defined as the development that aims to satisfy current needs in a way that does not compromise the ability of future generations to also meet their needs* (Weybrecht, 2013).

Our Common Future Report presents three fundamental elements for sustainable development that involves environmental safety, economic development, and social equality. Through these three components, it has created a concept developed by Elkington (1994), called the *triple bottom line*, which considers social, environmental and economic challenges. The following Table 2.1 conceptualizes the three pillars:

Environmental	Economic	Social
Organizations must ensure that they are not exceeding the planet's carrying capacity. One way to achieve this goal is to monitor its environmental impacts and those of its suppliers. When it comes to the environmental and social pillars, there are issues related to environmental injustices, in which people have losses.	In the context of sustainability, there is a need for companies to organize an accounting model that inserts environmental and social management. Among the economic and environmental pillars is eco-efficiency, covering goods and services that seek to eliminate or reduce the environmental impacts in their production processes and that have quality and competitiveness in the market.	It aims to measure the impacts of an organization in relation to internal and external people. Topics such as training and education, relationship with the surrounding community, job and product safety, generation of jobs for minorities and philanthropy are included in social costs. Besides, it encompasses economic and social pillars, addressing issues such as business ethics, unemployment and minority rights.

Table 2.1 [Source: Elkington (1994)]

In the last decades, Sustainable Development (SD) has become an increasingly familiar and discussed topic among world authorities; linked to this, there are other issues to be discussed such as the reduction of consumerism, the optimization of natural resources and the reduction of damage to the environment, aiming at improving society's quality of life (Pineda-Henson, Culaba and Mendoza, 2008).

Economic development, which contributes countless benefits to society, is entirely linked to the generation of capital and to benefiting the progress of nations, through poverty reduction; labor training; salary increases; improvement in supply and working conditions; greater accessibility to health; transport; leisure; and education. On the other hand, this impacts on the wear and tear that affects society itself, through socio-environmental impacts that are harmful as a result of the entire development process (2008).

The environmental vision, considered as a global phenomenon, has become a universal concern, where aspects such as the healthy and sustainable use of the planet and its resources, were prioritized (United Nations, 2018).

With regards to the adoption of sustainable practices, there is no consensus on which practices are the most suitable for better economic development; however, the organizations that promote the alignment and integration of the individual activities of its employees with company goals, and improving social values, have developed more improved sustainable practices and ways to reach a certain degree of sustainability (Hacking and Guthrie, 2006).

2.2 Eco-Certification

In the early 21st century, the certification processes were consolidated in such a manner as to orientate companies regarding the correct ways to operate and to improve the internal processes of operation in order to attend the demand for quality enhancements (2006).

The hotel segment is comprised of developments linked to the tertiary sector, to host people, to meet the basic needs and exceed the individual expectations of its customers (2006).

The damage caused by the imbalance of the social, environmental, and economic facets of the sector has attracted the attention not only of society but also of government and business spheres. This caused entities to analyze new measures to guarantee continuity of survival on the planet and the preservation of natural resources (Honey, 2008).

The sustainability certifications, 'green label' or 'ecolabel' were created to assist the consumer in their decision-making, as they indicate that the company has concerns for their sustainability (Hacking and Guthrie, 2006).

Eco-certification is a global term, which helps consumers to identify experiences, which are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Having said that, eco-certification comprises the three main areas of sustainability assessment tools, which, were already mentioned: economic, environmental and social (UNWTO, 2020).

According to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (2020), eco-certification ‘is a voluntary method of environmental performance certification and labelling that is practiced around the world.’ An ecolabel identifies products or services proven environmentally preferable overall, within a specific product or service category.

The process of certification, and the necessary actions to achieve it, assisted the accommodation business in the identification of inappropriate practices with regards to the management of environmental actions in its internal processes (Van Bellen, 2003).

Studies performed by Chung & Parker (2010) identified the necessity for a higher input of studies about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), detailing and examining sustainability in eco-certification through the hospitality industry, to understand what this process consists of, and how it applies in a broader context.

There is not a single and universally accepted way to label sustainability within the accommodation business; however, they contribute to the improvements of sustainable processes and the management in those places (Bohdanowicz, Simanic & Martinac, 2004). Nonetheless, the vast number of labels implies that there is an uncertainty within the consumers regarding their difference, or origin, and whether or not companies’ principles are to be trusted, or whether consumers are to be cautioned about the correct stance on these issues and reminded of the central theme, which is sustainability (Honey and Stewart, 2002).

Therefore, it is incumbent on the management side of the business to analyze which of them is the most appropriate certification process and to communicate this in a clear way to their customers, as well as their employees. The accommodation business is a potentially active polluter through its capacity to generate residues in different forms. The tourism sector is identified as one which is responsible for one of the biggest environmental impacts, and it is for this reason that there is a considerable demand for action to be taken to improve the effective practices in environmental management (Halog, Beeton and Nguyen, 2014) .

2.2.1 Assessment areas

The hotel sector in Malta is regulated by the legislation of the *Malta Tourism Authority* (MTA) that seeks to establish criteria for hotels to meet specific standards to offer a quality stay for guests.

To start standardization, the Ministry of Tourism qualifies a hotel as an establishment with reception service, temporary accommodation with individual units, and for the exclusive use of the guest, irrespective of the food and beverage service, and charging a daily fee.

Therefore, a hotel that has a certain star category, must meet some minimum requirements related to infrastructure, service provision and sustainability, according to the MTA (2020). Thus, there is a list of the main categories that are compulsory, and that defines the sustainability of a hotel and whether it is characterized by being eco-certified. These are, according to Baker (2008):

1. Environmental management system: Adopts an environmental management system together with other operational actions that aim to comply with the environmental legislation, control environmental aspects and impacts, also to reduce pollution. It is seeking continuous improvement and protection of the environment.
2. Waste management: Managing waste means adopting a set of appropriate actions in the stages of collection, storage, transportation, treatment, and environmentally appropriate final disposal; and aiming to minimize the production of waste, addressing the preservation of public health, and the quality of the environment. Waste management proves to be an ally of organizations who aim to eliminate their negative impacts, which are caused by waste, especially those associated with final disposal.
3. Control of Chemicals: Chemicals are associated with several adverse impact on public health and the environment. Proper management of reagents and waste is a specific goal within Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) - 'Ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns.' Responsible consumption and production require a systematic-based approach across the life cycle of chemicals and cooperation between actors and sectors across the chain of production, from producers to end consumers.

4. Purchasing: Certain products can be considered sustainable because they generate fewer losses since they are recyclable or more durable. Others because they contain less harmful or toxic substances, or because their production process uses less energy. The sustainable product is one that presents the best environmental performance throughout its life cycle, with a similar function, quality and level of satisfaction, or better when compared to a standard product. Therefore, companies must adopt green purchasing practices to minimize their impact in the long term.
5. Energy efficiency: Energy is the ability to do work - whether to move, heat, cool, light, sustain technology, telecommunications—and to produce the means necessary for human comfort and the production of goods and services.
6. Water management: Can be defined as a systematic process for the development, allocation and sustainable monitoring of water resources in the social, economic and environmental contexts.
7. Air quality: A group of actions aimed at adapting company processes to prevent, combat and reduce pollutant emissions and the effects of degradation of the atmospheric environment.
8. Noise pollution: It occurs when the sound changes the reasonable listening condition in a given environment. Despite the fact that, it does not conglomerate in the ambiance like other types of pollution, it creates several damages to the body, to the quality of life of people and fauna and, therefore, it is considered a worldwide public health problem.
9. Buildings and green areas: Is related to investing in the construction of green buildings, or in adapting old buildings to new sustainable practices, which is one of the ways to create cities that offer more well-being. This includes items such as water and energy efficiency; quality of materials used in construction (such as certified wood); internal air quality; thermal comfort and location; and nearby transport for instance.
10. Local culture: The sustainable hotel must have a very close and dignified attitude towards the community that lives in a place where tourism has arrived. The community cannot be seen only as a group of people to be exploited; they must not

just be related to, it is necessary to go further, to involve, promote and train, and to implement actions that contribute to the recognition, promotion, and enhancement of cultural heritage.

11. Guest information: Communication plays a vital role in the transition to a sustainable development model. The simple disclosure of social and environmental practices by organizations is only one element of the contest of communicating sustainability. The elaboration of clear and coherent messages with the company's stance helps to raise public awareness of the need for more conscious consumption patterns and attitudes.

Currently, in Malta and Gozo, there are nineteen eco-certified hotels, of which eight are five stars, ten are four stars, and only one is three stars; even though the island comprises of more than 134 hotels, not mentioning guest houses or hostels (Malta Hotels Directory, 2020). This means that only 21% of the local hotels are eco-certified.

2.2.2 Certification process

According to Siobhán O'Neill (2016), the adhesion of eco-certification is voluntary; that is, no law requires a hotel to seek this type of certification. However, the market itself requires companies to invest in sustainability. According to Vella Aaron (2019), manager of the Marina Hotel in Malta, some large corporations, for example, only book spaces (rooms, conference meetings) that are eco-certified (see App. 1).

Consequently, hotels that do not demonstrate care about the environment or invest in social and environmental actions will inevitably gradually lose space in the market due to fierce competition.

Also, in accordance to Siobhán O'Neill (2016) to acquire the eco-certification, the company interested needs to abide by certain criteria, and can be developed by non-profit organizations, private tourism organizations, governments or through multi-stakeholder groups, and demonstrate the compliance with the requirements as well as the paperwork and applicable fees. However, it is essential to understand that the adherence of eco-certification is not the last effort towards a sustainable environment.

The activities related to the certification process may involve an analysis of the documentation, auditing, and inspection of the company, as well as product and service

testing; hence being able to evaluate the hotel's compliance with the criteria, and how it is maintained (2016).

Eco-certification schemes differ in terms of application, geographical area, cost and depth, with some concentrating (to a greater or lesser degree) on energy; water; waste; community participation; heritage and biodiversity conservation; sustainable procurement; accountability; human resources practices; architecture and design; with some focusing on all of these areas (2016).

These certifications follow one of two available methods of evaluation when it comes to measuring the effectiveness of the certifications, they are (2016):

- Performance-based: focus on benchmarking and awarding of their performance, as well as progress and compliance.
- Process-based: methodological focusing on the management systems, monitoring and improving practices related to their goal.

To have an idea of the proportion of hotels with the green certificate, the *Know How Guide by Sustainable Hotel Certification Schemes* published in 2016 was used to illustrate my findings. This report is based on the research of more than 130,000 hotels worldwide, and resulted in only 8,000 being found to be eco-certified (2016).

The proportion by continent can be seen in Table.2.2:

North America 10.1%	Africa 3.7%
Europe 6.1%	South America 2.7%
Oceania 4.8%	Asia 0.9%

Table.2.2: [Source: Adapted from Greenhotelier.org (2016)]

To conclude, The Environment and Development Planning Act of Malta (Chapter 504) declares: 'The effective management and planning of the environment and development shall be regulated by plans, policies and regulations, which are prepared and amended from time to time following the provision of this Act' (Environment and Development Planning - CAP. 504., n.d.).

2.2.3 Types of certification

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is responsible for the approval, imposition of standards, and recognition of certification schemes, which are considered as being the baseline standards for sustainable travel and tourism, and is also an international accreditation body for sustainable tourism certification.

Hotels, which are approved by following these guidelines and requirements, are authorized to use the GSTC logo conjointly with the certification or scheme logo (Global Ecolabelling Network, 2020a). Some of the schemes, which have accomplished the GSTC recognition worldwide, shown in Table 2.3 are:

Operation	Certification Scheme	Programme and Standards
Global	ABNT- Environmental Quality	TripAdvisor Green Leaders
	Earth Check	LEED – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
	Green Globe	ISO Standards
	Green Seal	Green Key Global
	Green Leaf Eco	Green Mark Program
	Green Tourism Active	
	Travel Life	
Europe	European Ecolabel or EU Flower	EMAS – Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
	Green Product Mark	BREEAM – Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment
	Nordic Swan	Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS)
	TCO Certified	Good Environmental Choice
	The Blue Angel Eco-Label	
Malta	Eco-Certification Malta	

Table 2.3: [Source: Adapted from Greenhotelier.org (2016)]

ISO 14001 is the most accepted standard worldwide for environmental management systems; it can be used as a basis for implementing a green sustainable hotel seal. However, it is essential to note that ISO 14001 is not just a green seal, but rather a standard that attests that the certified organization maintains an active environmental management system; so for the green seal to be recognized, it must have specific requirements on sustainable hospitality (Green Eco Hotels Resorts | ISO 14001 Hotels, 2018).

Nowadays, we can count over 140 certifications worldwide; therefore, the above mentioned are the most used around the globe. All of these Eco certifications have their criteria and characteristics (Ho and Chan, 2006). However, all of them have at least six of these main characteristics, and they are:

1. To have an ecological system based on sustainability;
2. The utilization of verified contribution techniques towards conservation;
3. To equip the company with green training (environmental);
4. To provide an economic return to the surrounding community;
5. Interaction and incorporation of cultural aspects;
6. Reliance on the natural environment and support that environmental impacts are reduced.

2.3 The development of eco-certification in the hospitality industry

With the expansion of the hotel sector, there is also concern about the impacts caused to the environment. Although the sector does not have, a history of degradation of environmental damage caused by the various hotel units individually, when combined it can represent a threat to nature.

According to Peter Mason (2003), hotels, faced with this, are waking up to the environmental issues and moving towards an environmentally responsible attitude. Hoteliers have found a way to reduce their costs, and still create the right image with the customer to establish a competitive foothold in the face of tough competition.

The search for the necessary balance between the development of the activity that benefits the environmental conservation, while also accommodating communities and tourists, involves the planning of several sectors. It is expected that environmental management

should be a priority of any enterprise that wishes to apply the principles of sustainable tourism (2003).

Moreover, as Bohdanowicz, Simanic & Martinac (2004) points out, the progress and welfare of the hotel industry in tourist destinations depends on the continuous availability of natural resources, and the ordinary inclination is to take tourists to these destinations where the resources are plentiful.

The specific reasons why the hotel sector has been concerned with the impacts of the sector on the environment, according to Jamal Mohammad et al. (2020), are, among others, the cost reduction and the environmental quality of the tourist destination as a prerequisite for tourists. In addition, the search for the adoption of environmental practices by hotels is linked to improving its image in the tourist environment and both with its potential and current customers. Regarding the environmental impact of a hotel's activities and operation, this is varied and complex, covering items such as: the use of water and energy; solid waste; organic effluents; CFC emission; waste disposal; and contamination soil and water, among others (Jamal Mohammad et al., 2020).

Also, many factors influence the sustainability of a hotel, and it is believed that the elements that have the higher impact on the environmental management of hotels are: the age of the facilities, the size of the hotel, the influence of the chain, the environmental pressure of the stakeholders and the use of operation management techniques, in addition to the legal category and the type of tourism prevalent in the place where the hotel is located (Jamal Mohammad et al., 2020).

In Malta, there are not many certifications aimed at hospitality. The most specific and complete of them is known as Eco-certification Malta, which is geared towards sustainable hospitality. It has the purpose of strengthening the sector, stimulating the awareness of hotels concerning sustainability and increasing their competitive advantage. Its function is to improve quality in the management and services of hotels; complying with the legislation; enabling preservation of environment and local culture; social awareness; economic and financial development; and increasing the possibility of hotels entering the international market.

2.4 Case study of Eco-certified hotels: Best practices

The first case study of *The Lovat*, Loch Ness, Scotland, shows a transition to a green journey based on the aim of contributing to their social engagement of reducing CO² emissions and generating a positive impact on the efficiency and savings of their business. The second case study of *Accor Hotels* shows an action plan amongst a hotel chain, and what they can achieve when aimed at the right cause. Thirdly, is a case study based on Sofitel Guarujá Jequitimar hotel, located in Guarujá, on the south coast of São Paulo outside the reference areas in Brazil, and its journey to acquiring an international certification and network among other hotel chains.

Carbon Emission—*The Lovat*, Loch Ness, Scotland

The Lovat is a fifteen-year-old hotel, which has rethought its ecological footprint in terms of saving money, time and energy. Until now, the hotel has been recognized and assigned with seven certifications and awards as a role model for its sustainability practices. The hotel is continually seeking touchpoints, which they can improve, aiming to develop and reduce their carbon footprint.

According to the interview given to the website Greenhotelier.org, (2018), it is of foremost importance that the hotel's actions are examined, discussed and established appropriately. Their plan provided them with a chance to add further steps to reduce their impact over the environment and acquire an efficient process of carbon management.

Back in 2007, the hotel went through a refurbishment programme and carried out the installation of a Froling 85Kw biomass woodchip boiler; it was linked to WIFI and computer programmed and connected to PMS in order to control the temperature of water and air in all rooms and bathrooms, including public areas. This project had a payback of four years and had saved over 50 tonnes of carbon per year. The hotel later introduced the ETA 195Kw biomass woodchip boiler, which also contributed to their performance improvements and resulted in an RHI payback of £20k annually following 20 years.

Their development on the Carbon Management Plan (CMP) has led to achieving a target of a 15% reduction in CO² emissions by 2016, showing they are equipped to contribute to their goals of reducing CO² emissions. Also, the hotel was known for being the first hotel in the city to have such technologies; and furthermore, it incorporated the eco-conscious

practices into the daily life of the staff, management, guests, and helped to raise awareness within the community (2018).

Some of the eco practices adopted were:

1. Use of local suppliers (vegetable, fruits and flowers);
2. LED lighting;
3. PC automated switch off;
4. Reduction of food waste;
5. Carbon rewards program (by encouraging guests to use public transport in exchange for a discount on the bill);
6. Staff engagement, among others.

Clearly, these practices not only helped with the cost reductions, but also the impact on the environment, community and the granting of awards and certifications that maybe would not be possible without such (Greenhotelier.org, 2018).

Accor Hotels—Sustainable practices.

Accor Hotels has a sustainability action program for its hotels called Planet 21. In the first five years of the program—which now bears the signature *Acting Here - Planet 21*—the network achieved significant results. The group delivered two thirds of the 21 goals. In the five-year period, water consumption decreased by 9%, energy 5.3% and the emission of CO² in the atmosphere in the construction and renovation of hotels fell 6.2%. Since 2009, 4.5 million trees have been planted (Accor—The commitment to the planet, 2020).

Sofitel Guarujá Jequitimar— Every drop matters

Sofitel Guarujá Jequitimar, located in Guarujá, on the south coast of São Paulo, has continuously invested in ecologically correct practices and recently implemented the "zero-emission" project, which reuses all rainwater collected at the resort.

The project was implemented a year ago, which has two treatment plants that capture rainwater and treat it in a way that can be reused in toilets, gardens, washes and aquariums. The iodine used as a disinfectant in the water, generated by the treatment process, receives dehydration treatment for six months and the dry product is reused in gardens and added to maintenance works. In twelve months, completed in June of 2019, the resort will have prevented the release of 40 million litres of effluents into the environment. Based on this

initiative, Sofitel Guarujá Jequitimar is the first Brazilian hotel to seek international certification on zero-emission of effluents.

The project also has a recycling program that covers all waste produced at the hotel—except organic—that is, 380 kilos of garbage per day. Every two days that amount, duly separated, is forwarded to a local recycling company. There are twelve tons of garbage reused per month. The Sofitel Guarujá Jequitimar also participates in Plant for the Planet, a program created by the Accor Hospitality group together with the UN, which proposes that one tree should be planted for every four towels reused in hotel apartments. The economy of washing towels generates funds for NGOs to plant trees in areas on the banks of the São Francisco River. So far, 1,000m² of the area have been filled with planted trees. Planet action maintained in the network's new guidelines. At the end of 2015, all hotels in the chain were committed to protecting children from abuse by the internal program awareness campaign (Sustentabilidade na hotelaria, Revista Hotéis, 2020).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research can be considered as qualitative and descriptive, whose objective is to describe the sustainable practices according to the non-compulsory standards present on the requirement list by MTA (2020). Also, it aims to compare and contrast the selected hotels as well as to analyse their responsibility and contribution towards the environment. It was done by identifying which of the studied hotels were aligned in terms of sustainability and which initiatives were applied to consolidate this objective.

According to Aberdeen (2013), the use of multiple cases results in a more robust and convincing research outcome. Have said that two hotels were chosen, they are The Marina and the other, which decided to remain anonymous. These hotels are located in the city of St. Julians, Malta, which according to Malta Hotels Directory (2020) is one of the main areas of touristic activity. This area is also known nationwide as a city that has increasingly aroused the interest of entrepreneurs looking for promising places to continue the expansion of the hospitality businesses.

Data analysis was performed according to each of the research phases, as Aberdeen (2013) suggests. In the first phase, secondary data was used through the literature and

interpretation of this data, in addition to content found on websites, to find relevant case studies, which helped, illustrate this research.

The second phase, comprises of a semi-structured interview script which was developed following the literature review. These interviews were conducted in person at each of the hotels. The interview at the eco-certified hotel took about fifty minutes and was recorded with the interviewee's permission. The meeting at the uncertified hotel took about an hour and a half due to the fact that all details taken were handwritten, since the interviewee chose to be anonymous. This interview had two stages—the first with a series of open questions aimed to verify the environmental actions of the hotels; the second stage of that interview also contained a questionnaire adapted from the eco-certification criteria list of requirements written by the Malta Tourism Authority (2020). The criteria chosen for the questionnaire is the non-compulsory (or voluntary as the new guide says), since the compulsory would be assumed to be in accordance with the criteria if qualified as eco-certified. A transcript of the questionnaires and interview responses are included in Appendix 1 and 2. The interviews sought to find out if there was already an environmental policy concerning the practices performed, and when the answer was positive, the questionnaire asked to specify which ones they were.

The third phase of this methodology was an interview with the lecturer of the eco-certification criteria list at the MTA (2019), Mr. David Pace, who gave more depth to the study and helped to clarify what adhering to the eco-certification requires. The interview transcript is found in Appendix 3.

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 below shows the respondents qualifications by hotel visited:

Table 2.4: Interviewee's details

Hotel	Marina Hotel Corinthia Beach Resort Malta	Anonymous
Position	General Manager	General Manager
Interviewee	Mr. Vella Aaron	Anonymous
Length of Employment	Two Years	Around ten years

Source: Data from author's research (2020)

Table 2.5: Infrastructure details

Hotel's Name	Marina Hotel Corinthia Beach Resort	Anonymous
Location	St. Julian's	St. Julian's
Size	Medium	Medium
Number of staff	110	105
Number of rooms	200	220 rooms
Number of F&B outlets	3	2

Source: Data from author's research (2020)

The questions used for interviewing the eco-certified hotel manager are:

1. How long has the hotel had eco-certification?
2. From the adherence of the eco-certification, is there any significant change in the hotel's management strategy?
3. What are the benefits of having eco-certification?
4. What are the challenges?
5. What are the elements driving this shift towards investment in greener and more sustainable facilities?
6. Does the staff find it challenging to keep up with the demands of the eco-certification?
7. How do you train your staff?
8. Have you found it challenging to find a coordinator for this specific role (the environmental management system)?
9. Which part of the eco-certification process do you find most challenging to comply with?
10. Do you feel that Malta is ready to implement eco-certification in all hotels; particularly 3 to 4 stars ones?
11. Is there any other green certification that the hotel is planning to adhere to? (such as ecolabel, travel life)
12. Do you think your guests are concerned about sustainability? Through their practices of not changing the towel, for example?

13. Is there a particular demand by the guests regarding green practices or do they give suggestions, comments? What would be the most concerning item?

The questions used for interviewing the uncertified hotel manager are:

1. Why does the hotel not have an eco-certification?
2. What are the elements driving this shift towards investment in greener and more sustainable facilities?
3. Does the hotel have plans to adhere to the certification?
4. Which part of the eco-certification process do you find most challenging to comply with?
5. Is there any other green certification that the hotel is planning to adhere to?
6. Do your customers ask for it?
7. Is there a particular demand by the guests regarding green practices or do they give suggestions, comments? What is the most common one?
8. Does the staff ask for it?
9. Do you feel that Malta is ready to implement eco-certification in all hotels; particularly 3 to 4 stars ones?
10. What do you think would be the effect on the customer's impression of your hotel once it acquires the green certificate?

In your opinion:

11. What do you think would be the significant challenges of acquiring an eco-certification?
12. What do you think would be the benefits of having eco-certification?

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

According to Akenji and Briggs (2015), the existence of a large number of environmental labels specific to tourism at a global level demonstrates a market trend in the search for products and services considered ‘green.’ In the course of the research for this dissertation, twenty-four environmental certifications were found at a global level that could apply to the means of accommodation, noting that some may have been left out and others were applied to other sectors of tourism, which demonstrates the market trend in the search for green services.

This dissertation aimed to study, on the one hand, the leading sustainable practices applied to four-star hotels in Malta, also to identify the main obstacles to the application of new eco-friendly measures, and to know which hotels were more advanced in terms of technology implemented in this area of study.

Having concluded the interviews, the information gathered was compared and contrasted in order to observe the similarities and differences in the practices performed by the hotels.

It was noticed that the Marina Hotel Corinthia Beach Resort fulfils the definitions of the sustainability tripod in their practices, seeking to execute actions of the three fundamental pillars of sustainability: environmental, social and economic, defined by Elkington (1994). On the other hand, the uncertified hotel referred to as anonymous, does not meet all the criteria listed, neither compulsory nor non-compulsory. In my view, even though the anonymous hotel is not eco-certified, they have tried some of the initiatives proposed by the MTA (Malta Tourism Authority, 2020).

However, all actions that a hotel takes are influenced by the stakeholder theory, defined by Edward Freeman (2001), who says that all companies are influenced by, or influence, their stakeholders to achieve their goals.

To start this portion of the chapter, of comparing and contrasting both hotels, I will be analyzing each of the sections of the non-compulsory requirement list present on appendix two.

In section one, covering environment management—the initiative that had not been implemented by the anonymous hotel—is the fact that they do not adopt sustainable

practices on their procurement purchasing system, as their goal on that regard is to lower costs, and much of what is brought to the hotel comes from abroad. At the same time The Marina hotel tries as much as possible to incorporate this specific criteria due to the fact that they believe in sustainability.

In section two, on the non-compulsory requirements, referred to as the waste management section, I noticed that there were many of the requirements being met in both hotels, such as the waste management, reuse or reduction of paper, linen and plastic on the individual portions of breakfast items. According to Elkington (1994), these measures once applied, can improve the bottom line of the hotel as well as the internal ecological practices.

In section three on procurement, we can see that the Marina Hotel takes almost all the initiatives proposed, leaving only a few which were not followed due to the restrictive standards, and finding a good fit in order to substitute those practices and products that were not included, which was discussed with the manager during the interview.

Conversely, the anonymous hotel cooperates more on the side of reusing papers, which is a measure that is easy to apply, rather than altering the way they do their procurement in aiming for greener practices such as using recyclable napkins and toilet papers, which is the case with The Marina hotel (which still wants to keep its high standards), or perhaps they have not yet found a supplier that could offer quality products at a reasonable price.

In the last requirement of section three, both hotels answered no to eliminate or to reduce chlorine in their swimming pools, according to the ChemicalSafetyFacts.org.(2020)

‘Chlorine is a naturally-occurring chemical, made from salt by passing an electric current through a brine of water solution called electrolysis, and this solution is added to the pools to kill germs and bacteria such as salmonella and E. coli.’ With this in mind, it is essential to reduce and eliminate such chemicals in order to minimize the use of harmful chemicals on the environment and to the people. However, to use an alternative to this chemical, it will require one of the most expensive options available such as a robotic pool cleaner, or a solar heating system, etc.

In section four, the Marina hotel takes more initiatives on energy use from the non-required list than the anonymous hotel. As well as adhering to these practices, the Marina hotel interviewee mentioned that they also plan to take more initiatives on the list, since they believe it would be of great use in order to reduce electricity usage. On the other hand, the anonymous hotel interviewee mentioned that once they adhere to the eco-certification,

those other measures would be applied since it will be an investment in their future business to focus on that matter; since they did not currently fit in their refurbishment budget.

Section five is about water use, which has not many non-compulsory requirements, the only one which both hotels answered yes to was that both hotels are monitoring the swimming pool water consumption, which undoubtedly reflects on the hotel's expenses. On the other two requirements, the anonymous hotel does not use turn-off devices on public toilets and showers—although the interviewee said that would be the next measure to be applied even before getting the eco-certification since they have seen that it would have a positive impact on both their expenses and the environment. Also, the anonymous hotel does not operate its water treatment plan and, according to them, that would come with the eco-certification process.

In section six, air quality, both hotels said that they have several non-smoking rooms and that they are informing guests to use public transport as a way to get in the hotel. Both hotels have a bus stop close to their hotels; with this in mind, public transport is of great use to the guests, and naturally a good aspect that both hotels can add as a feature on their advertisement. The only initiative that the anonymous hotel is not adhering to is monitoring boiler emissions due to the lack of equipment and internal processes that the hotel does not have at the moment.

In section seven, noise, both hotels had practically the same answers, the only requirement that differs is on is the requirement that rooms are insulated; the anonymous hotel's answer is no, while the Marina is partial, a process that they have started but not yet finished. With regard to these answers, that were practically the same, both hotels have not received complaints about external noise, and they do not use a system to limit the volume of the music since it is not needed according to them, as they only have music in some areas of the hotel as part of the ambient sound and do not have music outside of their premises. Both hotels do not have carpet and do not make use of double glass windows or systems to reduce external noise since it is an initiative that requires an investment that is not possible at this point in time.

In section eight, building and green areas, the Marina hotel do have native plants on their external areas, and their landscape is mainly planted with low water consumption plants (which they water with saved, collected rainwater). On the other hand, the answers to both

questions for the anonymous hotel was partial since the hotel does not have so many plants on the site, and those they do have are native plants as a cultural aspect of their surroundings being embraced. Both hotels answered no to the use of natural fertilizer and producing their own compost. The Marina hotel affirm that they do not have space for such a practice yet, while the other hotel mentioned that was not needed given the fact they do not have as many plants as other hotels do.

In section nine, local culture, most requirements had an affirmative answer, the only ones being different were that The Marina hotel partially has the local language in their menus (not all) while the anonymous hotel does not, and that the Marina hotel has organic food included on their menus. With regards to the positive answers, both hotels use local dishes as well as serving vegetarian and vegan meal options as part of their menu, and incorporate elements of their culture in their decoration, as well as promoting cultural excursions.

To conclude this non-compulsory requirement list we have section ten, which is information dissemination. On this section, the only two different answers are firstly that the Marina hotel does not have a suggestion box, while the anonymous hotel does. Also, the Marina hotel does inform their guests about its environment practises and their results which, according to them, is a way to encourage the guests to keep the good work up. Other than that, both hotels inform and encourage guests to participate in their green practices such as reuse of towels, not to waste food, as well as informing guests about local and even environmental activities and initiatives that they can participate in as part of their activities while they are on their holidays. The only requirement that both hotels had a negative answer to is the fact that they do not inform about harmful activities such as 4x4 motor vehicles in natural areas or collecting plants, for instance. According to them, it's not something that they feel they should do (said in different words).

From this comparison and contrast of results, I noticed there is an effort coming from the Marina hotel to become a more sustainable hotel even though they have already an eco-certification. In my analysis, from what I observed, the Marina hotel has not practised all of the non-compulsory requirements due to the fact that the hotel has focused their effort on abiding by the eco-certification; however, resulting in them not being able to finish with their intentions due to budget constraints.

On the other hand, the anonymous hotel has opted to implement some of the non-compulsory requirements given the fact that the hotel has just completed a refurbishment

and due to budget constraint and financial priorities at that point in time. Those requirements, which were taken by the hotel, were completed, as they did not require much investment. The hotel has been trying to find other ways to help the environment while they are not eco-certified.

Their challenges are, the obligation to renew the eco-certification, which brings more requirements and changes from the previous practices; and those may affect even more on the return of investments. Another challenge to consider is the capital and investment needed for implementing such measures, something that is very important in the matter of doing what is right, namely to protect the environment. Another aspect, which may or may not be considered a weakness, is the fact that the Marina hotel has the same employee (the chief engineer) to oversee the sustainable operations. Therefore, there are no fresh perspectives needed on what could be changed or improved. At the anonymous hotel, notably, their primary concern is to expand and consolidate the brand rather than concerns with sustainability added to this.

Both managers believe that the hotels in Malta are ready to implement eco-certification in all ratings (two, three, four and five stars). The general manager of the Marina hotel added: *Even boutique hotels should be included since it is growing significantly on the island* (Vella, 2019). As for the anonymous hotel's manager, they believe they are close to achieving this goal in Malta since it has evolved a lot and that business should evolve as much in order to enhance that aspect of the island. The reason that his hotel does not have eco-certification yet is because of the budget constraints but, according to him, it is something that it is on the way to be accomplished in the coming years.

Many of the actions implemented are very similar and show themselves as a kind of sustainable hotel standard, others are often not priorities and end up being seen as unnecessary by managers.

Challenges related to economic reasons are revealed and normally associated to the deficiency of capital resources to enable the attainment of advanced technologies in order to adapt and improve production processes; which commonly present the need for considerable changes in terms of deadlines, standardizations and methods of application. However, these changes are essential since they are the ones that encourage the minimization of the detrimental environmental impacts of certain activities.

Another issue is the conformity with the environmental legislation necessary by the rules and legislative measures that include bureaucratization that can defer in the certification's validation. However, the arguments mentioned above are not the major problems encountered by hotels in the existing scenario.

The major problem encountered by hotels is staffing problems as a result of resistance to adjust to change, unwillingness to commitment, turnover and great difficulty in breaking paradigms (also mentioned by the three interviewees, see Appendices).

Thus, at the same time, financial issue and difficulties in the adaptation process could be fixed as a result of a well-planned set of actions. Therefore, it is essential to use means to reduce issues with employees. Also, it is indispensable for the hotel to propose activities such as stimulating and training programs for employees so that they hold a dynamic approach in the throughout the operation, respecting the environment, guaranteeing proper practices in the performance of their efforts and activities.

The growing awareness of companies and consumers regarding sustainability factors is notable. Despite this concern of being more commonly related to environmental concerns, certain companies, specifically hotels, have gradually developed their social responsibility, as well as their understanding that, for their business to survive in the long term, immediate actions are necessary.

Given this, (Prieto-Sandoval et al., 2016) reports that the existence of environmental labelling in the most diverse sector of tourism therefore, means greater credibility, as it guarantees the minimum compliance with established standards, meaning a more excellent choice in services with environmental quality.

4.1 SWOT analysis based on interviewee's answers

A company must know its virtues and its limits, in order to grow; therefore, an internal analysis is often needed. The interaction of the internal environment with the external environment brings a demonstration of how a company is performing and points out what could be improved and solved (Sezen Dogancilia, 2017).

Having said that, it was decided that a SWOT analysis would bring a clear insight into what an eco-certification means to a hotel. Moreover, it serves to position and verify the situation of the company in the environment in which it operates (2017).

Each item addressed in the questionnaires served as a support for the construction of the SWOT analysis, observing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

STRENGTHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training available for all the staff; • Social programs among the community; • Eco-certification is seen as an attractive feature sought especially by the Nordic countries (Vella, 2019); • People started to notice the green movements, therefore, becoming more aware of it; • Guests contributions' on applied measures. • Cost reduction: reduce waste and improvement of internal processes; • Malta top's destination for tourists.
WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive equipment and services on the implementation of green practice; • Absence of an environmental marketing area; • Seen as a challenge: the need to deliver training more often due to high staff turnover • Guests do not engage totally with the hotel feedback towards the green practices; • Having to obey to the hotel star classification standards which in some cases are not adequate for sustainable practices; • Difficulty in obtaining financial support; • Disarticulation between sectors of society; • Time-consuming and costly.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Deliver training with a more in-depth focus on sustainability;
- In the long term: implement proper environmental management;
- Use of refills and packaging with a shorter life cycle;
- Reduce plastic present in straws, coffee cups and single-use items as a start;
- Change in the ‘mentality’ of locals and government (in the sense that climate change is there and we need to all work together to solve it);
- Adhere to international eco-certification and programs;
- Go beyond the eco-certification criteria list (adhering to more practices);
- Invest more in green marketing to gain competitive advantage and create competition among hotels;
- Changes in consumption habits;
- Expansion of the economy;
- The emergence of new technologies;
- Contributing to a more sustainable planet;
- Strengthening business partnerships and new clients;
- Improve the hotel's relationship with the local community;
- Add value to the brand, creating a better image for guests, which value and look for places that are sustainable and responsible.

THREATS

- Rising costs with changes in equipment and technologies;
- Deficiency in the consolidation of public policies;
- Change in regulations;
- Depending on the practice, the acceptance of locals and guests;
- Little involvement of the local community.

Source: Data from author's research (2020)

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although, the perception of society in relation to the degradation of the environment has intensified since the end of the 20th century due to the deepening of the environmental crisis, nowadays we can count on good alternatives to encourage and influence society to reflect upon and then embrace the change and new processes.

The traditional production model of business management sees nature as an inexhaustible resource available to human beings. However, this paradigm is changing every day; the cycle of renewal, and nature's offerings are failing to reach the rate of the demand. However, it should be noted that little more than a decade ago, the idea of sustainability was seen as a fringe theory in the business world (as though they were compensatory initiatives supported by the government) (West and Carrier, 2004).

From the literature review, and the development of this study, it was possible to realise that many hotels seek to develop sustainable practices that are within the sustainability tripod, the *Triple Bottom Line*, covering the three pillars, environmental, social and economic, combining that with their goals and objectives (Elkington, 1994).

Having said that, eco-certification is an instrument that incorporates sustainable and social management practices, and offers transparent and credible recognition for potential guests and tourists. This initiative recognizes the hotel's sustainable policies are useful as a differentiation element for marketing in the hospitality sector. For a hotel, a certification with these characteristics can facilitate the identification of areas for improvement, the implementation of environmental management practices, social inclusion and the development of socially responsible tourism activities, contributing to the sustainability of the destination.

This research has identified that there are many types of eco-certification around the world, which are all under the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) which is responsible for the standards and their approval. Each one with its compliance aspects and requirements, but all with common assessment areas. Once the hotel demonstrates its interest in eco-certification through abiding by the requirements, then after a process of auditing and evaluation, they can acquire the certification.

Eco-certification is a way to protect the environment from the impact of many businesses' growth. The same applies with regards to hotels; due to its growth the hospitality industry has raised concern about its effects on the environment both globally and locally.

From hotels around the world, which adopted the eco-certification, we were able to see that it is possible to become a green hotel even though it was not designed as such. The case studies of the hotels examined in this dissertation demonstrates how hotels have improved their environmental footprint; contribution to the environment; and consequently their bottom line with the help of eco-certification. Moreover, this change can lead to excellent outcomes and improvement.

Those improvements are noted based of three aspects (environmental, social and economic). Practices must be adopted with the aiming of reduce the impacts created by the hotel operations. Whether by reducing the use of natural resources, such as water and energy usage; protecting biodiversity and natural habitats; respecting and embracing the local community and culture; improving working conditions by adopting fair trade practices and increasing job creation, all of these mentioned could bring an positive impact to the business, even if not designed as such (as mentioned before).

These actions taken could be used as a strategy to obtain a greater economic benefit by increasing business through fostering attraction with consumers. The initial costs of implementing alternative sources of energy or equipment and eco-efficient products are compensated by the financial return and the feasible increase in the number of customers because the market is increasingly aware of and concerned with preserving the natural environment.

The hotels, which were compared and contrasted in this dissertation are two four star hotels, based in St. Julians, in Malta, with approximately the same number of rooms, food outlets, location and their view to eco-certification. One hotel being the Marina Hotel, Corinthia Beach Resort, Malta, and another which preferred to remain anonymous. This dissertation sought to identify how both managers perceived the process of eco-certification, and the importance of sustainability in the hotel industry (the managers' perceptions were investigated and assessed through an interview). The objective of the interview process was, among other things, to identify whether both hotels are currently executing the basics of sustainable practices, even though one is already eco-certified and

how easy or difficult it has been or will be for the hotels to comply with the requirements of the evaluation and accreditation process of eco-certification.

Aside from the difference of one being eco-certified and other not, the interviews revealed a considerable effort for the anonymous hotel to reduce its impact on the environment by implementing some of the non-compulsory initiatives listed by the MTA (2020). There was a limitation in the interview process however, as sticking to that list rather than allowing open discussion during the interview failed to happen upon any of the other possible initiatives being ventured by the hotel in their journey to eco-creditation. The Marina hotel, on the other hand, revealed significant interest in contributing to the preservation of the environment and its community by going beyond the compulsory items present on the criteria list.

From the 63 non-compulsory requirements, Marina Hotel had 44 positive answers to those, and the anonymous Hotel 26. In this regard, the anonymous hotel lags behind its commitment to being conscious about its impact on the environment. This is due to different priorities, as the anonymous hotel is more focused currently (financially anyway) on its refurbishment process, and cannot give as much time and financial energy to their eco-certification.

It was also noticed; there is a need to work with environmental education that is still not very representative or inclusive of the island's residents and activities aimed at tourists. Therefore, the big challenge is working with environmental awareness to provoke a transformative experience in people.

Despite the advances recorded in the hotels studied, it is essential to note that there are opportunities for improvements in the implementation of environmental strategies in the hotel sector, even in eco-certified hotels with a well-defined environmental policy. The big challenge is to encourage the hotel industry and the tourism sector as a whole to incorporate the environmental variable into their decision-making process.

Furthermore, it is a challenge nowadays for businesses (such as the hotel sector examined in this dissertation) to engage the public's desire to overcome the hurdle of a material society and develop a healthier more environmentally balanced world that benefits the collective needs of society, rather than businesses simply focusing on one thing namely their economic growth, and customer simply focusing on their material pleasure. It is my

belief that managers, staff and guests should reflect more critically on the issues raised, and that they should serve as inspiration for the implementation of actions, and also the decision making process in determining what becomes relevant actions that meet the concept of sustainable development presented in this research.

The interview with Mr. David Pace (2020), who has been lecturing hoteliers and hospitality students about eco-certification, agrees that it is not a perfect system.

Small hotels find it particularly difficult to implement, and that is why there are so few certified in Malta. Certain changes regarding waste management can be implemented in a large hotel because this produces a large amount, while a small boutique hotel can control its waste without resorting to eco-certification benchmarks.

Although the government and MTA (2020) provide quite a lot of support to hotels so that they can implement eco-certification successfully, there is very little help regarding the use of new technologies such as organic digesters and dealing with the problems of an economy of scale.

In the interview, the manager also posited why the Marina hotel chose the chief engineer officer to be an environmental representative for the hotel, namely due to his expertise and time spent working in the company. He also addressed the staff turnover as a significant problem on the sector.

When asked if hotels in Malta were ready for eco-certification, he mentioned how the COVID crisis that happened in 2020 can possibly impact the business, and how it will likely divert the attention away from environmental impacts and eco-accreditation now; the hotel sector will now be focusing their efforts on gaining back investment and tourists. He mentioned as well the importance of the government, namely MTA (2020), to continue their support in resolving this issue.

One idea that I gleaned during the preparation for this dissertation was that environmental certification should be mandatory. The matter is too serious and urgent for eco-certification to be the only mandatory one. The future necessarily depends on awareness and action. I must add, the future necessarily involves environmental responsibility. We all have to contribute to the solution; not to do so is to be part of the already huge problem.

Above all else, I hope that this work has contributed to raising awareness of the issue and perhaps even teaching someone something.

The eco-certification, based on what was studied in this dissertation, works as a counterpart mechanism to the State, for guiding the productive processes under the prism of sustainable development. Counterpart because it is based on voluntary, private, and recognized standards by international organizations. The only valid certifications in Malta, suggests that the maintenance of environmental certification requires technical and financial investments by companies and by the government, as Mr. Pace mentioned it is not a perfect system, with this in mind we can say that this system does not accommodate all the hotels and similar in Malta, in the sense that environmental certification can represent a barrier for small and medium-sized hotels.

On the other hand, eco-certification acts as an ecologically balanced defense mechanism for the environment, guaranteeing the effectiveness of preventive measures and the organic sustainability, through management and self-inspection (carried out through required audits) to maintain the certificate. Ultimately, it must be recognized that environmental certification stimulates competition and competitiveness in the market, especially at the international level, a characteristic desired by all enterprises in the current globalized economy.

To conclude, some topics were raised as a suggestion for future studies in the area of environmental management, which are: to extend the methodology used to include more samples; to make a comparative analysis of the strategies adopted by those; and possibly an assessment of the perception of customers concerning the environmental practices adopted by hotels.

At the end of this research, I found the primary implication of the convenience of a small sample that was used was that it limits the reach and ability to forecast the meaning of the results. I believe that if the sample were bigger and more focused in specific categories, the outcome would be a good indicator of whether the eco-certification is, in fact, as effective as we think. It is also important for more research to be conducted on the Maltese environment, and regulations towards the environment. Due to the small sample size, being only two, and a reticence on the part of one of the managers to divulge much information, or even have their name included in the dissertation; these factors also conditioned the generalization of the results since it may be seen as an evident sign of some prejudice or resistance in relation to these matters, that businesses such as theirs may be dealing with

while attempting to improve their environmental impact, but are unwilling or unable to divulge for certain private reasons, and which must be resolved. Although for each practice, an explanation and justification was requested; however, the fact is that the explanations were diffuse and somewhat vague. In addition, the set of variables studied is necessarily limited, so it is recognized that other variables relevant to environmental attitudes and attitudes towards eco-hotels could have been included.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.1

Interview transcript of Eco-certified Hotel

Questions to the General Manager: Mr Vella Aaron who has been working there for the past two years		
1.	How long has the hotel had eco-certification?	<i>For the past six years (through renewals, since it lasts three years.)</i>
2.	From the adherence of the eco-certification, is there any significant change in the hotel's management strategy?	<i>According to him, people's mentality towards what is happening environmentally rather than financially, there was not a significant change in the strategy or structure.</i>
3.	What are the benefits of having eco-certification?	<i>According to him, there is a sector of the market who look for this kind of certification when it comes to events, also companies from the Nordic countries who would stay at the hotel only if it was eco-certified, as well as tours operators who ask are interested in such information—he emphasized. Apart from that, they strongly believe in sustainable tourism.</i>

4.	What are the challenges?	<i>Indeed, training is part of the challenges even though they have always supported training (which according to him employees have very much appreciated); cost as well, which keeps them from implementing specific measures as it is hard for the hotel to absorb all the costs in a year. At the moment they are trying to reduce their single-use plastic, he mentioned that such a measure comes with phases; they are starting from cups in the cafeteria and plan to keep going with the changes. He also mentioned a change in mentality and culture, which began to change. Turnover of employees also plays a significant role due to the need to train and explain standards and procedures more frequently than otherwise. According to him, those may look small, but that makes a difference in total.</i>
5.	What are the elements driving this shift towards investment in greener and more sustainable facilities?	<i>People are more aware than before, and the government have been more active by implementing and readjusting regulations towards to green movement.</i>
6.	Does the staff find it challenging to keep up with the demands of the eco-certification?	<i>Not really, they say staff are very cooperative, according to him nowadays with social media; everyone is aware of the need, and when employees see these measures, they want to make their contribution towards helping the environment. Not only environmental effects are achieved, as eco-certification also encompasses social and corporate responses; he mentioned that kindness is a trait of the Maltese; therefore they have done social events in order to help people in need, Christmas special sweets for children, according to him the staff participate quite a lot in sharing that awareness.</i>

7.	How do you train your staff?	<i>They have online courses in their system; they also included in their orientation meeting specific environmental measures that staff needs to comply with. Which is a new practice part of the new procedures.</i>
8.	Have you found it challenging to find a coordinator for this specific role (the environmental management system)?	<i>It was not a problem since they had a reliable Chief-engineer whose activities were concerned with his expertise.</i>
9.	Which part of the eco-certification process do you find most challenging to comply with?	<i>According to him the Renewing of the eco-certification, which brings slightly new changes.</i>
10.	Do you feel that Malta is ready to implement eco-certification in all hotels; particularly 3 to 4 stars ones?	<i>Why not? It should be. All hotels should implement it, even boutique hotels, the numbers of which have increased considerably lately; they also have to abide by the standards. Besides the environment, thanks to us—he added.</i>
11.	Is there any other green certification that the hotel is planning to adhere to? (such as ecolabel, travel life)	<i>They just adhered to the ERA a year ago—the Environmental permit. They also mentioned that they are doing some practices, which are not on the criteria list; however, they do carry out these measures voluntarily and in order that they are not causing any harm to the environment. Such practices are re-using the rainwater for cooling off the equipment. They are also planning soon to put solar panels on the roof, according to him, there is more space to grow it is just a matter of investments in a number of years.</i>

12.	(extra) By the way, I liked the website of the hotel, especially the blog part, very well designed, but I was wondering why the hotel does not show the eco-certification logo? Even the tag part, it does not show the eco-certification word, is there a reason for not to?	<i>He was not aware of such. According to him, it should appear on the website. A good point raised—he added (A few weeks later they included the logo on their website)</i>
13.	Do you think your guests are concerned about sustainability? Through their practices of not changing the towel, for example?	<i>They give their contributions indirectly, through some practices such as reusing the linen. According to him, the fact that the guests do not mention these issues could indicate that they are not bothered with the hotel's practices. If there is no news, there is no bad news, he joked. He also mentioned that there are some practices which the guests tell the servers that they happy about, especially when it comes to avoiding the single-use of plastic. These comments eventually come to the general manager.</i>
14.	Is there a particular demand by the guests regarding green practices or do they give suggestions, comments? What would be the most concerning item?	<i>They rarely mention something apart from asking if they provide eco-certification, he mentioned that there are some guests from particular countries who would ask for eco-certification in order to stay in their hotel. He also mentioned that even though leisure guests do not ask, they participate indirectly by following the hotel's proposed measures of reducing waste, such as reducing the use of getting their towels to wash by adhering to new compostable straws (they like the initiative). According to them, it is a good sign because if it were a problem, they would mention it.</i>

APPENDIX 1.2

Interview transcript of non-eco-certified Hotel

Questions to the General Manager: Anonymous		
1.	Why does the hotel not have an eco-certification?	<i>According to them, they are firstly concerned about the growth and expansion of the hotel, and to consolidate the brand before adhering to any other strategy, but he believes it will adhere soon. He also said: it is not a big hotel; therefore, he does not believe it is suitable for them.</i>
2.	In your opinion:	<i>According to him, it is time-consuming and costly, something that the hotel is not willing to go through at that point in time since the hotel has just passed through a refurbishment.</i>
	What do you think would be the significant challenges of acquiring an eco-certification?	
3.	In your opinion:	<i>Apart from getting more prominent visibility and competing with other hotels, he mentions that it is something that would encourage other hotels to adhere to, and do their part for the world (as a responsible hotel).</i>
	What do you think would be the benefits of having eco-certification?	
4.	What are the elements driving this shift towards investment in greener and more sustainable facilities?	<i>Accessible information, people are more aware therefore they demand more, not only it but also the “pressure” of government in trying to make changes</i>
5.	Does the hotel have plans to adhere to the certification?	<i>Indeed, the hotel had passed through a refurbishment, and as soon they get back the investment back, they will seek for further information in order to adhere.</i>

6.	Which part of the eco-certification process do you find most challenging to comply?	<i>According to them, everything that will demand an initial high cost as well as employee training and the mindset, which may be hard at the beginning, but surely worth it in the long run.</i>
7.	Is there any other green certification that the hotel is planning to adhere to?	<i>Their priority is to get the Eco-certification first.</i>
8.	Do your customers ask for it?	<i>Some customers do ask. Especially at the booking time.</i>
9.	Is there a particular demand by the guests regarding green practices or do they give suggestions, comments? What is the most common one?	<i>We have received suggestions and even though we are not eco-certified yet we are implementing some initiatives which for them, is something desirable.</i>
10.	Does the staff ask for it?	<i>He mentioned he was not aware of any comments or queries related to such.</i>
11.	Do you feel that Malta is ready to implement eco-certification in all hotels; particularly 3 to 4 stars ones?	<i>I think we are close, Malta has evolved a lot, and as a business, we have to evolve as well, contribute to the improvement of the island should be a priority to everyone and every business—he added.</i>
12.	What do you think there would be an effect on customer's perspective of your hotel once it acquires the green certificate?	<i>According to him, it should have, as customers are more aware of sustainability, and due to the feedback, he had heard so far about what the hotel could have been doing in this regard.</i>

APPENDIX 2.

Eco certification requirement list by Mr. David Pace (Malta Tourism Authority, 2019) used as the base for this survey.

An observation: Only the non-compulsory were asked since the compulsory are undoubtedly taken in the case of eco-certified one.

<i>Criteria list of the non-compulsory requirements (list of compulsories in annexe)</i>		<i>Marina Hotel</i>	<i>Anonymous Hotel</i>
Section 1: Environmental management			
<u>108</u>	The hotel adopts green procurement principles in its purchasing policies	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Section 2: Waste management			
<i>The hotel:</i>			
<u>201</u>	The hotel implements a waste separation and management scheme for recyclable wastes (minimum of 3 of the following: glass, plastic, paper, metal, organic waste)	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>203</u>	The hotel has a proper garbage room that is air-conditioned and maintained in a good state	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Partially</i>
<u>206</u>	The hotel is reusing used paper	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>207</u>	The hotel is reducing paper reports from the computer system	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>208</u>	The hotel is using soap and shampoo dispenser containers in rooms	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>209</u>	The hotel is using soap dispenser containers in public toilets	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>210</u>	The hotel is using cleaning product dispensers	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>211</u>	The hotel is using bulk products instead of individual portions (butter, marmalade, etc.)	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>212</u>	The hotel is reusing bed sheets, towels and tablecloths	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Section 3: Procurement			
<u>301</u>	The hotel is using recycled or ecological paper for advertisement	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>

<u>302</u>	The hotel is using recycled or ecological paper for mailings	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>303</u>	The hotel is using recycled or ecological paper for fax and photocopies	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>304</u>	The hotel is using recycled or ecological paper for napkins	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>305</u>	The hotel is using recycled or ecological paper for toilet rolls	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>306</u>	The hotel is using recycled toners	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>307</u>	The hotel is using recycled paper for hand towels in public toilets	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>308</u>	The hotel is using ecological or re-usable packaging for rooms amenities	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>309</u>	The hotel is using ecological or reusable lunch packs	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>316</u>	The hotel is using a system to reduce or eliminate chlorine in the swimming pool	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
Section 4: Energy			
<u>401</u>	The hotel has installed electricity power corrector (stabilizer)	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>404</u>	The hotel is using automatic turn-off system for external illumination	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>406</u>	The hotel is using a centralized air conditioning system	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>407</u>	The hotel is using independent automatic turn-off system for rooms air conditioning	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>408</u>	The hotel is using an independent temperature control in rooms	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>410</u>	The hotel is using presence sensors in corridors	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>

<u>411</u>	The hotel is using presence sensors in public toilets	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>412</u>	The hotel is using electric hand dryers with automatic turn-off system	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>413</u>	The hotel is using a constant water pressure system to save water and energy	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>414</u>	The hotel is using a computer system to monitor the electric installation	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>415</u>	The hotel has installed thermal insulation in the building	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>416</u>	The hotel is using a system to re-use heat generated by the air conditioning	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>417</u>	The hotel is using alternative energy for illumination, heating or other purposes	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>418</u>	The hotel kitchen is using manual devices	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>419</u>	The hotel is using a preventive maintenance program for all electric apparels and records it	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Section 5: Water			
<u>503</u>	The hotel is monitoring the swimming pool water consumption	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>504</u>	The hotel is using automatic water turn-off devices in public toilets and public showers	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>508</u>	The hotel operates its own waste water treatment plant	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Section 6: Air quality			
<u>601</u>	The hotel has a number of non-smoking rooms	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>602</u>	The hotel is monitoring boiler emissions	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>603</u>	The hotel is informing and encouraging guests to use public transport and bicycles	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Section 7: Noise			

<u>701</u>	The hotel did not receive complaints for external noise	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>702</u>	The hotel is using a system to limit the music volume	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>703</u>	The hotel is not having music outside every night	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>704</u>	The hotel is using double glass windows or other system to reduce impacts of external noise	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>705</u>	The hotel is using carpets or other system to avoid noise in corridors	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>706</u>	Hotel rooms are insulated	<i>Partially</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>707</u>	The hotel is insulated from noise generated by AC, generator and compressors	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
Section 8: Buildings and green areas			
<u>801</u>	The hotel is predominantly using native plants in its external areas	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Partially</i>
<u>802</u>	The landscaped areas are predominantly planted with low water consumption plants	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Partially</i>
<u>803</u>	The hotel is predominantly using natural fertilizers (including compost)	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>804</u>	The hotel is producing its own compost	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
Section 9: Local culture			
<u>902</u>	The hotel is promoting or /and organizing cultural excursions	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>904</u>	The hotel is using local language in menus	<i>Partially</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>905</u>	The hotel is using local elements in decoration	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>906</u>	The hotel is serving local dishes	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>908</u>	The hotel is using organic products for food	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>909</u>	The hotel is serving vegetarian meals	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>

Section 10: Information dissemination			
<u>1001</u>	The hotel is informing guests of its environmental management system results.	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>1002</u>	The hotel is informing and encouraging the guests to participate in its environmental management programme.	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>1003</u>	The hotel is using a guests suggestion box.	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<u>1004</u>	The hotel is informing guests of the effects of harmful activities like 4x4 vehicles, motors in natural areas, collecting plants, etc.	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<u>1005</u>	The hotel is informing guests about local environmental initiatives and activities in which they can participate.	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Partially: Yes with not in full requirement.			

APPENDIX 3.

Interview transcript of the interview with Mr. David Pace, creator of the Eco-certification criteria list by MTA (2020).

What do you think are the main problems that hotels face when adhering to Eco-certification?

First of all, some aspects of eco-certification such as waste (which is mentioned quite a lot when doing my lectures on eco-certification for managers), one of the problems that they face is a problem of scale, which if we look at small hotels such as boutique hotels, for example, we may find some of the aspects of waste is part cultural outreach, why? Because the hotel is small, and when it comes to waste, they usually take care of it themselves. They do not need a waste disposal agent to take care of their waste, and they only need for specific things such as an agent for removing disposal oil or appliances. While if it is a big hotel, they have an agent who takes care of the waste such as car oil, batteries and such things.

Another thing is when we talk about cultural outreach, bigger hotels have more money and bigger grounds, so it is easier for them to, for example, prepare a clean-up of the area,

because they have many people, while small hotels (20–30 rooms) have not enough people to do it. Hence, for this reason, they have cultural outreach. Another thing is that small hotels do not compost because they do not have the space, while big hotels that have the space at times do not do as well, which is a pity.

When we talk about electricity and water in some cases, larger hotels which have larger areas may be quite expensive to install solar panels in, because they need quite a lot of them, and that is an area that they need. While in the case of boutique hotels, although they need solar panels, they have even less money or have small roof space (you may find these places in Valletta, Birgu, Rabat), since these places you may find have larger villas instead of hotels (therefore not enough height).

Another case that could be addressed is that the specific law that makes up the eco-certification criteria list maybe needs to be more adapted to small hotels, while others could be adapted to larger hotels, we should not have one size that fits all, because of certain problems that I have just mentioned. Even for collecting water, some hotels may have larger reservoirs while boutique hotels may have less rooftop areas and are sometimes found in built-up areas where space is at a premium. Therefore, it is a bit difficult for them to collect the same amount of water as the larger ones.

All of those mentioned are part of the eco-certification list; in fact, sometimes I find some hotels that do not go for eco-certification due to non-completion of a few things, and these things are very important for them, such as waste, energy generation. Therefore, I think there is a case to be made where the green certification should be divided between smaller hotels (50 rooms and less) and larger hotels (50 rooms or more) so that we can cover all the problems of scale.

Although disposal companies do need a license to operate (when it comes to waste), not all of them are the same (with same services), some are more cooperative than others, and this may pose difficulties for some hotels. There are the cases as well, of hotels that kept their savings and managed to buy and install their own machinery such as cardboard machine compressor (which helps to save up space).

Furthermore, another thing that I find not only in Malta is that hotels which have certain types of food waste such as meat (which you cannot place in a compost bin otherwise it will stink and as we know food waste is a big problem in hotels) could have a solution,

which is Digester machine which costs around five thousand euros and basically consists of a big tank (like a stomach) which digests the food and turns the waste into methane (bottled gas), fuel. Unfortunately, such practice has not been used here in Malta. There is also a water system, by the engineer Marco Cremona that turns approximately 50% of the water into clean water, according to him the Golden Sands hotel placed in Malta is using this technology, but again it is a bit expensive which is why it is not being used that much on the island. These practices will make a hotel greener.

Further to our interview, while I was thanking him for giving such a thorough and insightful explanation, since managers are quite practical on this matter (usually answering that they do not do those because of lack of investment, money, personnel etc.). He mentioned that usually, the person responsible for green initiatives and this transformation is either the chief officer, general manager or the engineer; therefore, their workload is increased and are not able to give all the attention necessary to the matter. I asked they cannot hire someone else, since it would be interesting to have someone new with fresh perspectives and proper training? He answered that this happens because of the high turnover of employees in the tourism segment, people change frequently, and as a result, it will lead to training and sometimes having to retrain again which is at the end of the day costly, especially when that person leaves. Training takes time. This professional would have to know the hotel from inside out, where is it losing the most water? Electricity? Moreover, that is why they give this ‘task’ to someone who is already there. He emphasized that turnover is a massive problem for the segment.

Do you think that hotels in Malta are ready for eco-certification?

Based on the current situation we are facing right now (COVID-19), definitely eco-certification will not be a subject that managers would be interested in. At the moment, it is just about recovering their investment, economy and bringing tourists back. It will create a dent on the eco-certification process for hotels—he added. When it comes to big hotels, the government is helping them with regards to electricity and water, with their audits (which is very expensive and are the two central audits). He concluded the interview by saying that, now it will depend on how much MTA (2020) is willing to help these hotels with regards to eco-certification since they are already helping with other matters.