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Article

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Environmental Sustainability and Tourism Accommodation in South Africa: The managers' perspective

Love Odion Idahosa[1]

Abstract: A review of the existing literature indicates that academic research into environmental sustainability practices in the tourism accommodation industry is limited, with no literature defining the industry's context in detail. This paper addresses this gap by asking fundamental questions which establish a baseline and provides an introduction to how environmental sustainability is conceptualised and approached within the tourism accommodation industry. Using thematic analysis of thirty semi-structured interviews, the findings of the paper indicate that stakeholders have a proficient understanding of environmental sustainability and its applicability to their industry. It also demonstrates that participants are aware of their responsibility in successfully implementing sustainability in the industry, but uptake levels are still very low, and at best basic. The paper thus provides the necessary starting point for assessing the challenge of sustainability adoption and developing solutions to integrate sustainability ideas at the much-needed higher level of engagement.

Keywords: resource management; environmental sustainability; tourism accommodation; perceptions; South Africa

JEL Classification: Z32

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1 Introduction

The 12th Sustainable development goal – Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, focuses on promoting environmental sustainability (i.e. resources and energy efficiency; reducing waste, degradation, and pollution; and promoting overall quality of life for all) and is a requisite for sustainable development (Fuchs & Lorek, 2004). According to Tukker et al. (2008), achieving this goal requires collaboration between different stakeholders, including businesses, policy makers, consumers, development agencies, etc., and implementation would vary based on unique economic context. This implies that a one-size fits all policy cannot be adopted. In this vein, this study advances on the premises that to achieve the goal of sustainable consumption and production, an important starting point is a contextualisation of the characteristic and understanding of the concept in each individual context. For this study, the context of interest is the tourism accommodation industry (TAI) in a developing country – South Africa.

Globally, the resource intensive nature of the TAI has received increased attention, especially within the sustainability movement. The focus on resource consumption in the industry is a result of the high levels of energy and water use by industry establishments, with concomitant high waste and Green House Gas emissions. Resource consumption levels within the TAI are driven by the operating characteristics of Tourism Accommodation Establishments (TAEs), as well as the specificity of the hospitality functions and services they provide (Becken, 2013). Research has found that the resource

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consumption characteristics of TAEs imply that resource management in the industry has potential not only for environmental benefit, but also for economic advantages (Becken, 2013; Rogerson & Sims, 2012). This should provide added incentives for embracing sustainability within these establishments, however, evidence from the literature indicates low levels of both energy and water efficiency practices in many parts of the world, and in South Africa (van der Merwe & Wöcke, 2007; Becken, 2013).

The need to appropriately capture the perceptions of, and attitudes to sustainability by the owners, managers, and operators of South Africa's TAI is motivated by the following factors: the importance of tourism to South Africa because of its contribution to the economy; and the need to bridge the gap between South Africa's commitment to sustainability and actual uptake levels in the sector. These are further discussed below.

In South Africa, the tourism sector is a key contributor to its economy. It has been identified as having the highest potential for addressing the country's high unemployment levels, with significant contributions to the gross domestic product (Frey & George, 2010). The government has also recognised the sector's distinctive dependence on the beauty and hospitability of the host environment for its success and has categorised it as one of the sectors of the economy that is most contributory and vulnerable to climate change activities (Republic of South Africa, 2010). In light of these considerations, significant national commitments were made to address the environmental concerns of the sector in order to sustain its contributions to the economy. Various policy documents (such as the Development and Promotion of Tourism white paper released in 1996) and guideline documents (such as the National Responsible Tourism Development Guidelines and the Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa) were developed to provide a road map for the implementation of sustainability in the industry (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2002b, 2002a).

These documents emphasized responsible/sustainable tourism practices as an imperative for the nation and set out strategies for achieving them. In addition, South Africa has been in the forefront of facilitating the global discourse on responsible and sustainable tourism, hosting the World Summit on Sustainable Tourism and the first Responsible Tourism Conference, both in 2002. The World Summit on Sustainable Tourism birthed the "Cape Town Declaration" of 2002 which defined and explained the scope and focus of responsible tourism (Frey & George, 2010, p. 621). The commitment to improving the sustainability of the sector was further demonstrated with the establishment of a dedicated National Department of Tourism in 2009. This department was responsible for the development of the National Tourism Sector Strategy of 2011. This strategy set out the key policy agenda of the new department which was to encourage the sustainability of the nation's tourism sector by actively encouraging carbon emission reduction (National Department of Tourism, 2011).

Over time, the academic community has responded to the government's commitment and initiatives with research into responsible tourism activities in the sector. Frey and George (2010) provide a detailed review of these researches in South Africa. Findings from the literature however indicate that the uptake of responsible/sustainable practices in the South African Tourism sector is limited, despite increased awareness of its necessity by industry stakeholders (van der Merwe & Wöcke, 2007; Frey & George, 2010; Rogerson & Sims, 2012). Given the identified global environmental impact of TAEs globally, South Africa's dependence on the industry and its parent sector for economic viability, and its displayed commitment to incorporate sustainable practices into the tourism sector, the limited uptake of sustainability initiatives in the tourism sector is unsatisfactory.

A review of the literature has revealed that very few studies have been conducted into sustainability issues and practices in the TAI in the South Africa, with only three studies being identified (see Ismail & Rogerson 2016; van der Merwe & Wöcke 2007; Rogerson & Sims 2012). A detailed review of the literature also revealed that studies that investigate the attitudes and conceptualisation of sustainability in the TAI are lacking. This study aims to redress this gap by asking fundamental questions which establish a baseline and introduce how sustainability is conceptualised within the industry. Specifically, the essay aims to answer questions which clarify the industry's thinking of Sustainability: are they aware of Environmental Sustainability? If yes, how are they thinking about it? Do they understand its applicability to them and their industry? What role do they see themselves playing in achieving it? And what they have done so far to integrate sustainability in the industry? These would provide the necessary starting point for developing solutions to match governmental commitments to actual practices and integrating these ideas at the much-needed higher level of engagement. In the following section, the objective of this paper is contextualised within the framework of existing literature on resource management and sustainability in TAEs

2 Resource Management and Environmental Sustainability in Accommodation Establishments

A review of the existing literature indicates that academic research into resource management and sustainability practices in the TAI is limited. Within the tourism sector, the terms responsible tourism, environmental sustainability, sustainable tourism, and eco-tourism are often used interchangeably when referring to the environmental component of tourism. Responsible Tourism is in most cases viewed as a sub-set of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) when the discourse shifts to tourism establishments and their practice (Rogerson and Sims, 2012). Frey & George (2010) provide definitions of the most of these terminologies as they have been used in literature. This study takes the variations in terminology in the literature into consideration in the review provided. It hence adopts the use of the terms Responsible Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, and Eco-Tourism to connote Environmental Sustainability as it relates to the tourism industry.

With regard to the TAI, enquiry into sustainability practices has been densely concentrated in Europe and the developed world with focus on the developing world context being very sparse (Kasim, 2007a; Rogerson and Sims, 2012). It has however been highlighted that the economic and institutional peculiarities of developing countries have significant influences on the adoption and implementation of environmental practices and regulations in the tourism sector, making it more complex than in developed economies (El Dief & Font, 2010a). While Chan and Wong (2004) and Rogerson and Sims (2012) provide an exhaustive review of international research and debate on sustainability-related discourse in the global hotel sector, this study focuses on the developing country literature to provide a closer-to-home context for the study.

A detailed survey of the literature revealed sixteen twenty-first century, peer-reviewed, developing country studies, published in English, which focus on sustainability related issues in the TAI. Table 1 provides a summary of the authors, the research method adopted, and the overall focus of these studies. These studies span seven years and six countries, are mostly quantitative in nature, hotel-centred, and focus on understanding the determinants of sustainability adoption or resource consumption in TAEs. Only one study, by Kasim (2009), focuses on hotel managers' conceptualisation of, and attitudes to, sustainability in the TAI. The study focus is on small hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It employs a quantitative Likert scale with open-ended questions to elicit

the managers' responses to questions regarding their understanding of environmental management, its applicability to their industry, and their practice of it in their establishments. The study found that the managers in the industry demonstrated a positive attitude to environmental management, its relevance to their industry and operations, and their role in it. It established a gap between these attitudes and the actual practice of environmental management in the establishments – a finding not inconsistent with other developing country studies. Based on limited responses to open-ended questions aimed at capturing an understanding of environmental management, the author contends that this gap is driven by poor knowledge and understanding of the concept by the managers. The study hence attributes the positive attitude picked up by the Likert scale to the managers' need "to appear politically correct in the matter" and recommends that the managers of TAEs "must first understand the meaning of environmental management before they can effectively become part of it" (Kasim, 2009, p. 721).

Table 1 Developing country studies for Environmental Sustainability in TAEs

AUTHOR (Date)	LOCATION	FOCUS OF PAPER
Ali et al. (2008)	Jordan	Provides detailed breakdown of energy consumption drivers in Jordan Hotels, and recommendations for reducing consumption.
Chan (2008)	Hong Kong	Evaluates the barriers to adopting EMS and ISO 14001 in 83 Hong-Kong hotels.
Chan & Hawkins (2010)	Hong Kong	Evaluates the impact of EMS adoption on employees in one of Hong Kong's international hotels.
Chan & Hawkins (2012)	Hong Kong	Evaluates the factors that influence the various stages of adoption of EMS, using the case study of an international hotel.
Chan & Wong (2004)	Hong Kong	Makes use of exploratory factor analysis to predict motivation factors for the adoption of ISO 14001 in Hong Kong hotels.
El Dief & Font (2010a)	Red Sea, Egypt	Evaluates the impact of personal and organisational values, amongst other characteristics, as drivers of environmental management in Red Sea hotels.
Ismail & Rogerson (2016)	Gauteng, South Africa	Focuses on the sustainability adoption in the Protea Hotel Chain in Gauteng.
KamalulAriffin et al. (2013)	Malaysia	Develops and tests hypothesis on the determinants of the adoption of environmental practices in Malaysian hotels using factor analysis.
Kasim (2007)	Penang, Malaysia	Focuses on determinants (barriers and drivers) of sustainability adoption.
Kasim (2009)	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	Focuses on small and medium hotel managers' awareness, attitudes, and solutions for improvement.
Le et al. (2006)	Vietnam	Makes use of Diffusion of Innovation Theory to identify drivers of sustainability adoption.
Mensah (2006)	Accra, Ghana	Investigates the practice of environmental management in Accra hotels.
Rogerson & Sims (2012)	Gauteng, South Africa	Focuses on the awareness, practice, and major drivers of sustainability in larger hotels.
Tang et al. (2014)	Malaysia	Uses stakeholder theory to identify drivers of sustainability adoption.
Trung & Kumar (2005)	Vietnam	Evaluates resource use and waste management practices of hotels.
van der Merwe & Wöcke (2007)	South Africa	Identifies motivation and barriers to the adoption of responsible tourism practices in hotels using a quantitative study sample.

Apart from this study by Kasim (2009), no other developing country study has been identified which explores the perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability in the industry. This single study also highlights the need to explore this topic area within the framework of a qualitative study. Hence, the current study adopts this recommendation and explores the understanding of sustainability by the managing stakeholders of TAEs in South Africa within a qualitative framework. It expounds on the

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focus of Kasim's study by investigating the perceptions of, and attitudes towards, sustainability in the industry. It hence contributes to the limited research in this part of the world.

To further explore the challenge of low adoption of sustainability activities in the industry, a review of the literature is carried out to identify and profile the sustainability practices primarily adopted by TAEs in developing countries. Given the resource management focus of this study, the focus is on energy and water saving practices only. Four key studies were identified in the developing country literature which detailed the energy and water management practices of the establishments in their study samples. These studies were by: Trung and Kumar (2005) for Vietnamese hotels; Van der Merwe and Wöcke (2007), Rogerson and Sims (2012), and Ismail and Rogerson (2016) - all three for South African hotels.

The single most common sustainable practice identified across all four studies for energy saving is the use of energy-efficient light bulbs (e.g. Light Emitting Diode (LED) and compact fluorescents), while for water the installation of water saving and water-efficient showerheads. The popularity of energy efficient lighting is consistent with findings from international studies (Becken, 2013) and can be related to the low-cost, flexibility, and ease of implementation of this practice. These activities also have the characteristic of being cost-reducing and can be argued to be more economically motivated than environmentally driven. This further highlights the need to understand how industry operators perceive sustainability as a concept, as well as its applicability to their industry. Such investigation will provide a more precise lens for evaluating the activities and challenges with regard to sustainability implementation.

3 Methodology

To evaluate perceptions of sustainability and resource management, as is the objective of this study, the qualitative interview approach was adopted. A Semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the literature and cross validated with industry stakeholders for relevance and validity. The persons of interest for this study were the management (i.e. Owners, Managers, and Operators (e.g. maintenance engineers and sustainability directors)) of TAEs in the greater Cape Town region of South Africa. The management focus of the study stems from the fact that managers are in the best position to provide information on resource consumption as they are involved in the day-to-day running of the establishment, and hence possess a broader knowledge of resource consumption, as opposed to the service staff (e.g. housekeeping and kitchen) and guests (El Dief & Font, 2010a). The focus on management is consistent with the wider literature (Bohdanowicz & Martinac, 2007; Kasim, 2007b; Rogerson, 2013; Tang, Amran & Goh, 2014).

The target population was TAEs in the Stellenbosch and Cape Town municipalities in South Africa. These municipalities have a high concentration of TAEs due to the large tourist volumes they attract yearly. All TAEs in these municipalities were targeted for this study irrespective of their size, type, or star-grading. The final study hence consists of no-star to five-star BnBs, guest houses, backpackers and hotels. To identify participants, the targeted-convenience sampling technique, a non-probabilistic method for sample selection in which participation in the sample is dependent on ease of access (Marshall, 1996) was used in the selection of participants. This sampling technique was preferred due to the in-depth nature of the data required and the data collection tool which necessitated that all participants be interviewed face-to-face.

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A total of 34 interviews were conducted with 33 establishments. Four of the 34 interviews were not usable due to incompleteness, the non-management position of the interviewee, and response non-coherence due to language barrier. Each interview was about an hour long and was transcribed verbatim before analysis. The Thematic Analysis approach was employed for coding and analysing the transcribed data. This approach was chosen due to its characteristics of being flexible, and theory and epistemology independent, which allows it to provide exhaustive thorough interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is appropriate for this study which is pioneering and exploratory in nature, and not dependent on extant literature.

4 Findings and Discussion

In this section, the research findings are elucidated in line with the objectives of the study. Participants' understanding of the concept of sustainability is first reported, followed by their perceptions of how the concept is applied within the industry. Opinions on the responsibility and burden for sustainability both within and outside the industry are then reported, and finally, the resource management activities implemented in the industry as mentioned by participants are discussed.

In quantitatively profiling the characteristics the interviewees and their establishments, the data revealed that most of the participating establishments were either owned by a business/hotel group, a family, or a single individual. It also indicated that more than 80% of participating establishments have been in existence for more than half a decade, indicating that they are relatively established, would have a good grip on the running of the business, and would be able to provide adequately reflective responses that reflect the conditions of the general industry.

Over 70% of establishments belong to the three and four-star grading category, and all establishments are relatively evenly split between hotels and other accommodation types. The characteristics of the participants also show a relative gender balance and suggest that respondents in over 50% of the establishments combined both administrative and technical roles. This is important for the study in that it gives authority and credibility to the responses provided by the participants. This, combined with the fact that over 65% of respondents reported being in the industry for more than five years, makes the findings distilled from the responses reliable and dependable in reflecting the perceptions in the industry as a whole.

4.1   Understanding of the concept of Environmental Sustainability

To assess the understanding of Sustainability, participants were first asked if they were familiar with the concept, to which almost all the participants answered in the affirmative. They were then asked to explain their understanding of the concept. The emerging themes from the analysis of the responses is captured in quadrant A of Figure 1. Based on the responses obtained, two dominant themes relating to the understanding of environmental sustainability emerged: resource management and environmental protection. To further explore participants' attitudes to sustainability and assess how well their understanding of the concept was applied to their context, they were asked how they thought sustainability applied to the TAI. The emerging themes from analysis of the responses to this inquiry are captured in quadrant B of Figure 1. As can be seen in quadrant B, the two dominant reasons for the applicability of sustainability to the TAI are the resource-intensive nature of the industry, and that it is a business imperative. Each of the two dominant themes on the understanding of sustainability and its applicability to the TAI, respectively, are further discussed in the next two sections.
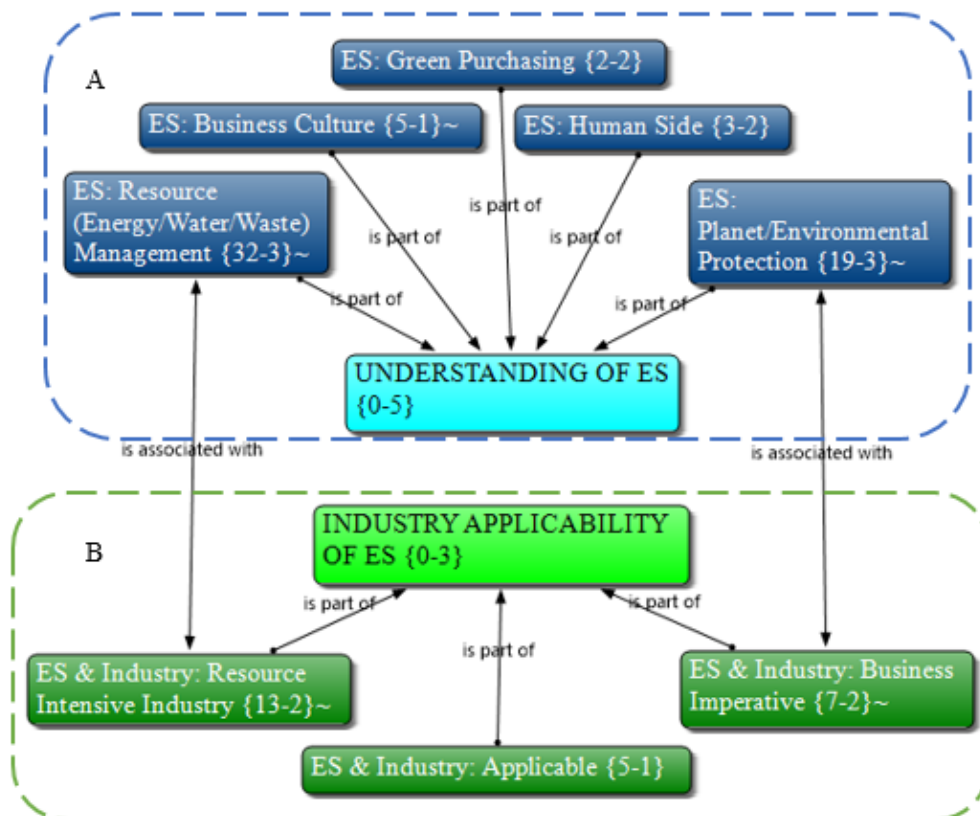
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Figure 1. Participants' understanding of Environmental Sustainability and its applicability to the TAI

4.1.1   Environmental Sustainability as Resource Management

Most participants (67%) in the study associated environmental sustainability with energy, water, or waste management. Some participants had a wholesome approach to their understanding and mentioned all three aspects in their conceptualisation of the term, with one participant's response being:

"… to have the least impact on the environment - the way that we use water or resources, so to speak, and that doesn't go just for water and electricity which is the obvious thing, but everything from packaging to materials, reusing furniture or repurposing them instead of throwing them away and buying new ones and if we do decide to change and we get rid of equipment and furniture or fittings that we try and make sure that that stuff that we get rid of gets reused and not just dumped." (17:9)

This theme emphasises the resource management component of sustainability and indicates that it is one of the most crucial aspects of sustainability in the industry. Some participants who associated sustainability with resource management however focused on the recycling aspect, indicating an almost skewed perspective. The responses given by participant 8 below capture this focus.

"To structure your deliveries in specific time, keep your wastage down … in fact, when we talk about wastages, it's all the consumables in a guesthouse's rooms, it's the consumables in the kitchen, separate the foods from the plastics and non-essentials and yah, have it delivered or picked up." (8:9)

This resource management perspective is consistent with the literature where resource management has been identified as the cornerstone of sustainability in the TAI (Becken, 2013). This theme

indicates a somewhat accurate understanding of sustainability within the industry's context. It also sets the expectation that one will expect to see more establishments implementing practices targeted towards their resource consumption.

4.1.2 Environmental Sustainability as planet/environmental protection

Some participants (57%) described their understanding of sustainability by referring to the need to preserve the environment. Preservation of the environment largely revolved around the impact of resource use on the environment, and the need to mitigate the negative impact of such use on the environment.

"I would say environmental sustainability is to use the resources in a way that it does the least harm to the environment, that they are renewable, … that we basically don't finish them up, that they are not dangerous, like nuclear power and that it is guaranteed that the next generations will also have enough power without doing damage to the planet earth I would say." (12:9)

The theme also emphasised that sustainability applies both to general living as well as how business is conducted. Referring to sustainability as a part of how business is conducted, one participant stated that:

"Well, I think environmental sustainability is managing … your business in such a way that you, like, enforce, um, the people you work with, the people you do business with, the people you buy from, the people you sell to, um, and basically enforcing environmental needs, environmental sustainability, and environmental shortcomings, basically what it comes down to. And recognising that in every way of your… in every part of your business." (5:6)

Ultimately, participants' conceptualisation of sustainability as an environmental protection agenda indicates a consciousness of the impact of human activities, as well as industry activities, on the environment, and the need to ensure that these activities are carried out in recognition of their potential negative effects.

The two dominant concepts emerging with respect to the understanding of sustainability in the industry suggest that the participants have a good grasp of the concept and link the concept to their own individual activities in the industry. To clarify this, the study sought to find out the participant's perception of the applicability of sustainability to their industry. The emerging themes are discussed in the section below.

4.2 The applicability of Environmental Sustainability to the TAI

Participants were asked if they thought the concept of sustainability was applicable to the TAI, to which all participants replied in the affirmative. They were then asked to explain their perception of how the concept applied to the industry. Two major themes emerged from analysis of the responses are depicted in quadrant A of Figure 1 and are discussed in detail below.

4.2.1 It is a business imperative to ensure the future sustainability of the industry

The literature argues that the tourism establishments consider the future sustainability of the industry as an integral part of their business motivation, similar to profitability (van der Merwe & Wöcke, 2007). Participants were of the view that the success of the hospitality and tourism industry as a whole rested on the sustainability of the environment.

"So, the more we do to reduce that impact, the better. Otherwise there is not going to be an environment ongoingly that is going to encourage guests to come here. I mean the tourism in Cape Town is based on the

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natural beauty of Cape Town, so if that had to be impacted on and destroyed, why would guests come here, there's other places in the world they could rather go to." (18:39).

This theme captured both the short-term perspective of profitability, where participants argued that revenue is highly dependent on patronage by foreign clientele who are often sustainability conscious, as well as the long-term perspective, consistent with the findings of van der Merwe and Wöcke (2007).

"So, it's a business imperative, without a doubt, it's a business imperative. If we don't have a long-term view of the context in which we operate and how we can play a positive role going forward, and the more positive that contribution is, the greater the offering can be to people who come and visit." (10:30)

The business imperative view of the applicability of sustainability to the TAI indicates that participants are conscious of their direct relationship to the environment as the primary source of business success. This is associated with their understanding of sustainability as environmental protection as is indicated in Figure 1. In this sense, preserving the environment is crucial to the long-term viability of the industry.

4.2.2   *The industry is highly resource intensive*

In response to the applicability of environmental sustainability, many participants (37%) emphasised that the resource intensive nature of the industry had a huge impact on the environment and hence necessitated the adoption of sustainable practices. Participants posit that a lot of resources are constantly consumed throughout the entire stay of the guest and that this is integral to the hospitality process. As such, the sustainability of the industry requires that both the amount and the nature of the resources used be adequately evaluated to ensure that they do not harm the environment.

"Listen ... each and every time a guest walks into a property, they use something in the room, there is always consumable being used. If it is a shower cap which is wrapped in a plastic, there is pen, there is paper, there is this little shampoo bottles, there is everything. So, for us, we as hospitality managers ... it's to try and move to a certain direction to use biodegradable (products) in our rooms." (8:14)

This resource-intensive nature of the industry is hence associated with the resource management understanding of sustainability as is demonstrated in Figure 1.1. Furthermore, participants posit that the rapid growth in South Africa's tourism industry further compels the need for sustainability in the industry as the impact of resource consumption on the environment will worsen in the absence of intervention, which will ultimately be detrimental to the success of the local industry.

"Well, as I mentioned earlier, hospitality as an industry is extremely ... it uses too much resources and as a result of that it damages the environment. And tourism is a big part of our economy in South Africa and most probably will grow and is growing quite substantially ... So, that impact is only going to get bigger. So, the more we do to reduce that impact, the better." (18:15)

The high resource consumption levels in the industry hence need to be checked and moderated, and less harmful alternatives sought if the industry is going to thrive. Sustainability hence offers a wholesome space to address the resource consumption hazard of the industry.

These themes indicate that industry operators possess a good grasp of the concept of sustainability and its applicability to the TAI. This study sought to investigate if this is indicative of a successful awareness/education program. Given that the South African government has shown significant commitment to the incorporation of sustainability in its tourism sector (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2002b, 2002a), this study sought to verify if this awareness and these consciousness levels might be indicative of the success of the government's initiatives. To do this,

participants were asked if they were aware of the "Responsible Tourism Handbook", a manual for incorporating sustainability into tourism in South Africa, developed by the Department of Tourism. About 45% of participants who responded to the question answered in the affirmative, but they indicated that they were yet to read it. Furthermore, only 30% of respondents indicated an awareness of any responsible tourism standards in the industry. This strongly suggests that the government needs to do more to improve the reach of its programs in the industry.

4.3   The burden for environmental sustainability in the TAI

To further understand the applicability of sustainability to the industry, and to identify specific actionable areas for intervention, participants were asked who they thought should be responsible for Sustainability. Emphasis was placed on the role of the management, staff and guests in implementing sustainable practices within establishments in the industry. More than half of participants were of the view that all stakeholders were responsible for the success of most sustainability initiatives. The themes identified for individual stakeholders are depicted in Figure 2. This figure indicates that management is expected to play more of an initiatory and regulatory role.
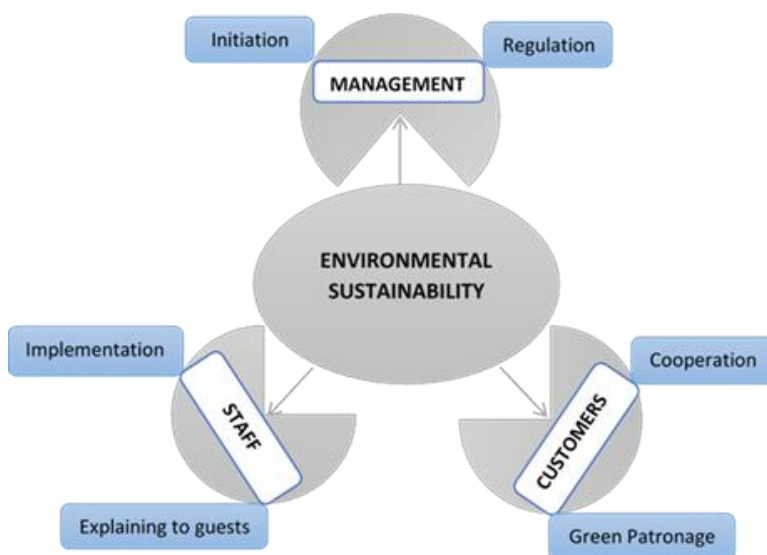

Figure 2. Responsibility for Environmental Sustainability within TAEs

Staff are responsible for implementing adopted initiatives throughout establishments, while guests are expected to cooperate with the management and staff with regard to the initiatives implemented, and to encourage establishments which implement these sustainability initiatives by patronising them. These roles are further discussed below.

4.3.1   Management responsibilities

Participants were of the view that management's role revolved around (a) initiating the sustainability process and (b) regulation and enforcement. These roles are further discussed below:

(a)The Role of Management as the Sustainability Initiator: According to participants, management was responsible for initiating the resource management & sustainability process. As initiators, management is responsible for charting the course and giving out the directive of the way to go. This involves making the financial and capital investments necessary for implementing sustainability practices in the establishment and ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is available. They are also responsible for rallying the staff body toward achieving whatever sustainability goal is initiated.

"From a management perspective, it's the setting of goals and the setting of direction and taking the team with on the journey of what that team wants to achieve, and that the team never lacks understanding of the

contribution that they make individually, so really understanding what it's important to do what we're doing." (10:52)

Rallying the staff body necessitates that the details of the process be communicated with the staff so that they understand the necessity of the sustainability practices being implemented. A participant emphasised that the training of staff is not a once-off process but needs to be ongoing as the staff might be prone to forget. For the process to be the most effective, it needs to go beyond teaching, to ensuring that staff understand the importance of their role and the actions they take with regard to the process. These responses by participants advocate the need for a fully cooperative and informed management and staff team for the success of most sustainable endeavours. While it was not disregarded that some projects (such as the installation of renewable energy) might not involve the direct involvement of the staff, the success of many activities require their buy-in.

(b) The Regulatory Role of Management: Participants proposed that another role of management is also to ensure that the process initiated is being implemented and that staff adhere to their training. This necessitates that management not only follow up on implementation of guidelines, but also lead by example:

"Well, I think in everything you do people watch you so, management has to act in the same way as you would like your staff to be. So, if you are throwing your rubbish wherever you like, everybody else will be doing that as well, because they look up to you as the manager and see what you're doing ... So, as management you have to be on the ball ... if you want people to be like that, you have to be like that." (13:41)

The regulatory and role model function goes together and need to be carried out simultaneously if they are to be effective.

4.3.2 Staff responsibilities

In implementing sustainability practices in TAEs, participants interviewed suggested that the role of staff is closely tied to their roles of hands-on implementation and as "boundary spanners" (Kim et al., 2009, p. 612), being the physical embodiment of the establishment to the guests (Lewis & McCann, 2004; Kim et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2009). These roles are detailed below.

(a)   Staff as implementers of Sustainability initiatives: Given the role of staff as hands-on implementers of management decisions to ensure the smooth running of the firm, their role in sustainability directly feeds off this. The staff in an organisation are responsible for carrying out the initiatives implemented by the management.

"I wouldn't say ..., they come in as people that will effect it. You know, they won't actually make the decision about it, ... they have a vital role of making sure that it runs. So, ... you decide to bring in a policy of whatever, and then they are ... the ones that are actually going to physically do it... And as I said before, the buy-in from them, when you decide to do this is important." (7:48)

This emphasises that although the staff are not responsible for the decision-making process, the success of any sustainability initiative is largely dependent on their buy-in and dexterity.

(b)   Staffs' role in explaining to guests: In their role as the physical embodiment of the organisation, the staffs in a TAE represent the management to the clients. Within this role, they are hence responsible for communicating the details of any practice to the guests. This role of the staff is crucial to gaining the buy-in of the guests, especially for practices or activities that require guests' participation.

"So, just put..., and I know that information brochures are the least successful thing, so somehow you must do it on check in or when you room a guest that you tell them that it's an environmentally aware property or something like that and will ask you to ... ask their participation in the program". (17:49)

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This also highlights the need for getting the buy-in of the guests for sustainability initiatives to be successful, as suggested in the literature. Chan and Hawkins (2010, p. 642) state that "to improve the chance of success of environmental protection activities, employee involvement is vital, and should include teamwork, cooperation and individual employee initiatives".

4.3.3   Guest responsibility

Participants indicated that the responsibility of the guests in implementing sustainability is to cooperate with the management and staff within the establishment, especially with regard to sustainability initiatives implemented, and to patronise environmentally conscious establishments.

(a)   Cooperation: More than 65% of participants indicated that the biggest role the guests can play is to cooperate with the initiatives the management and staff have implemented by adjusting their expectations on luxury in one way or the other. This expectation of adjustment often involved industry activities associated with resource wastage within the guest rooms, and includes: having linen and towels changed daily, leaving taps running and unused lights turned on, switching on the air conditioning and television set when not in rooms or when the weather is amiable, and switching on air conditioning with windows open. Some establishments indicated that some systems had been put in place to check these activities, but that it was up to the guests to cooperate by accepting and working with those systems:

"... and also, not to try and be divisive and work against the system. So, if we've implemented a certain process to try and reduce our impact then to actually try and embrace that system and work with it … There's only so much we can do and then it's up to their impact and what their demands are, and their demands are more than what we would like to give them, we're going to either have to lose the guest or we're going to have to give them what they want and that is the challenge." (18:69)

These participants indicated that the activities of the management and staff are only effective up to a certain level, and that fully maximising sustainability initiatives in the TAI is highly dependent on the cooperation of guests. Participant 24 below explained this using an example of LED light installation:

"Oh yes. They've got the biggest role to play… you can implement as many devices as you like, till it's running out of your ears, but if they don't make use of it properly, it's pointless. You can maybe drop your load on the system, but the demand can still be high. It's like installing 3-watt LEDs…to reduce the demand on the system … to be a bit more cautious and sustainable. But, if you leave the lights on for 24 hours, how does that help? It really doesn't. You've reduced the demand, but you're still misusing what you've got." (24:21)

Some participants mentioned that they had employed technology such as the key card system which switches off the electricity supply to the rooms when it is pulled out on departure from the rooms, but that guests have found ways to cheat the system. They also place advisory notes in the rooms encouraging guests to reduce wastage in various forms but find this is completely subject to the discretion of each guest. This indicates the need for a means of encouraging guests' cooperation during the duration of their stay.

(b)   Green patronage: Some participants were of the opinion that another role guests could play is to choose to patronise establishments that practice Sustainability. This is emphasised where these establishments charge a premium for being more sustainable than their counterparts.

"I don't think it's always about the obvious-offsets or getting involved in community projects ... the obvious is "come and stay here", because by supporting us financially, you support the whole circle of everything else. So, when you come and stay here, and you eat in the restaurant, then all of these waiters have a job because you're enjoying the experience." (10:54)

One participant indicated that the patronage choices made by the guests go back to influence the sustainability decisions made by the management, and also have the potential to stimulate the adoption of these practices by more establishments in the industry.

These guests' roles of cooperation and green patronage suggests that to influence environmental policy, stimulating the awareness of the public and potential TAI client base can be a tool to motivate the adoption of more sustainability behaviour among TAEs. If they know that their clients will demand it, they might be more likely to embrace it.

4.4   Resource management practices in the industry

Participants in the study were asked to provide a list of the activities they implement to be more sustainable. Consistent with their resource management understanding of the sustainability concept and its resource intensive applicability to the industry, most of the activities revolved around energy and water conservation and waste management. The list provided was entirely subject to the participant's ability to recall, which was more difficult for establishments who had incorporated a lot of these activities. More specifically, participants were asked to detail the activities implemented to save energy and water resources.

The resource management practices most frequently implemented by the establishments, as reported by the participants, were energy efficient lighting and water-efficient showerheads/taps. The occurrence of these activities is consistent with the findings of resource management practices adopted in developing countries in other studies (as discussed in section 2). These, as well as the other top two activities identified and adopted for energy and water saving by the majority of establishments (see Table 2 below), can be argued to be minimalist in nature in that they are low cost and relatively easy to implement. This could also suggest an economic motive of adoption as opposed to, or as well as, an environmental motive. To verify this, participants were asked to clarify what they thought were the low-cost and high-cost opportunities for implementing resource management in the industry.

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Energy-efficient/LED lighting and use of water-efficient showerheads were identified as low-cost options for energy and water saving respectively. Other low-cost opportunities for energy and water saving mentioned include behaviour change, use of hot water bottles for heating in winter, natural ventilation, and water-efficient showerheads. The high cost opportunities identified include appliance replacement, grey water system, heat pumps, energy monitoring/measurement system, rainwater harvesting, and use of renewable energy.

Table 2.Error! No text of specified style in document. **Resource management practices in study sample**

Energy Saving Activities	Frequency	Water Saving Activities	Frequency
Energy efficient lighting	21	Water-efficient showerheads/taps	13
Guest linen re-use notice	15	Water efficient toilets/urinals	8
Energy efficient appliances	6	Grey water recycling	3

The categorisation of the more popular initiatives as low-cost opportunities could suggest that the most popular energy and water saving initiatives adopted by establishments in the study are not entirely economically driven to save costs: industry operators are aware of their environmental merits and implement them as efforts to be environmentally conscious. Their popularity in the industry is however driven by their low cost and the budget constraints of TAEs. These show that there are numerous options for establishments willing to implement sustainability initiatives but with constrained budgets.

4.5. General Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that managers in the accommodation industry in the study area have a good grasp of the concept of environmental sustainability. The majority of participants indicated that they understand the concept, and their conceptualisation of it indicates that it is regarded as a crucial and integral part of the industry. Their responses also indicate a consciousness of the impact of the industry's activities on the environment, and the need to ensure that these activities are carried out in recognition of their potential negative effects.

Regarding the understanding of environmental sustainability in the industry, two main themes emerged from analysis of responses: resource management and environmental protection. Both themes suggest that the participants are able to internalise sustainability to their individual activities in the industry. To further investigate their internalisation of the concept, the study solicited the participants' perceptions of the applicability of sustainability to their industry. Responses indicated that participants were of the view that, as a result of the high resource consumption nature of the industry, sustainability is needed to ensure the future sustainability of the industry by mitigating the harmful impact of its consumption levels. These responses confirm that the participants do indeed understand sustainability and view it as crucial to the survival of their individual establishments, as well as the industry as a whole. Furthermore, the responses highlight the significance of the resource management component of sustainability as it relates to TAEs. The business imperative view of the applicability of sustainability to the industry also embodies the direct dependence of tourism as a whole on the environment to meet the basic business obligation of profitability and survival.

Study participants indicated that this sustainability concern, and its applicability in the TAI, is all the more crucial in the South African context where the economy relies heavily on the success of the industry, which is in turn reliant on the environment. According to participants, the rapid growth in South Africa's tourism compels the need for sustainability in the industry. They contended that the impact of resource consumption on the environment will worsen in the absence of an intervention, and that this will ultimately be detrimental to the success of the local industry. They also argued that high resource consumption levels in the industry need to be checked and moderated, and less harmful alternatives sought if the industry is going to thrive, and that sustainability offers a wholesome space to address this resource consumption hazard.

Participants also showed their commitment to implementing sustainability within TAEs by suggesting that the management, staff and guests all have key roles to play in the implementation process. Their suggestions of the roles indicate that the management is expected to initiate and regulate the processes. The staff are responsible for implementing adopted initiatives throughout establishments, while guests are expected to cooperate with the management and staff with regard to the initiatives implemented and encourage establishments which implement these sustainability initiatives by patronising them. Consistent with the literature, the role of the staff in the implementation of sustainability practices is also emphasised in this study. Responses by participants advocate the need for a fully cooperative and informed staff team for the success of most sustainable endeavours. While some projects, such as the installation of renewable energy, might not involve the direct involvement of the staff, the majority of activities require buy-in from staff. However, participants highlight that the success of the actions of the management and staff is highly dependent on the cooperation of guests. This indicates the need for a means of encouraging guests' cooperation during the duration of their stay.

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The low level of awareness of the government's responsible/sustainable tourism initiatives or other responsible tourism initiatives in the industry implies that the programs implemented by the government for the industry needs to be improved. Overall, this study provides evidence of the understanding and willingness of the private sector, particularly in the TAI, to engage in the sustainability movement. It also provides information on the peculiarities of their context, hence providing baseline information, for academics and policy makers, for designing a private sector engagement strategy for TAEs.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper is based on the premise that an important starting point in the analysis and understanding of sustainability issues and challenges, is the contextualisation of the industry's take on the concept. Hence, the paper sought to understand the perception of sustainability by managing stakeholders (i.e. owners, managers and operators of TAEs) in the industry, their understanding of the applicability of sustainability to the TAI, who they think should be responsible for sustainability in the industry, and the activities they have implemented to conserve energy and water resources. Using thematic analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews, the findings of the paper indicate that the participants are very aware of sustainability and its specific applicability to their industry. Emerging themes revealed that the industry operators mostly viewed sustainability in line with energy, water, and waste management and preservation of the environment. They indicated that the applicability of sustainability to the industry is driven by the resource intensive nature of TAIs, and the need to preserve the planet for future generations.

These themes indicate a proficient understanding of sustainability and its specific applicability to their industry and provides new evidence on the willingness of the private sector to engage in the sustainability movement, especially for the TAI. Participants also indicated that the responsibility for sustainability in TAEs falls on all establishment stakeholders –management, staff and guests, with each having unique but overlapping roles. However, despite the adept level of understanding, the acceptability of the concept's relevance to the industry, and the acceptance of sustainability responsibility show that the level of take-up of resource management activities in the industry is still very low, and at best basic. This low level of adoption is consistent with the findings of other studies on developing countries' TAEs. It is hence recommended that the reason for this low adoption rate be further investigated for the South African context. Examining the determinants of adoption and motivation for adopting sustainability in the industry, as well as the barriers to adoption, will provide more insight to the issues driving low adoption, as well as key intervention areas to boost take-up of sustainability in the industry.

7 Acknowledgements

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