

TMI Postgraduate Prize Submission Form

Abstract/Executive Summary (Please copy below the abstract/executive summary from your dissertation/project report)

Regardless of the growing concern towards the concept of sustainability, there has been a paucity of hotel industry related literature to evaluate how the adoption of such sustainable practices impact on hotel performance. Hence this paper seeks to assess how the adoption of sustainable practices impact on the overall performance of hotels in the context of the Sri Lankan chain hotel industry. The primary data for this study is obtained through in-depth interviews conducted amongst 31 hotel industry professionals belonging to Domestic and International chain hotels in Sri Lanka. The results of the study showcases that the hotel industry already adopts a plethora of sustainable practices, especially across the environmental and social bottom lines in its operations. Nonetheless the research further indicates that the industry has not yet reached the maturity level of measuring the overall impacts of sustainability with financial benefits of sustainability currently taking precedence over other performance indicators for majority of hoteliers. This paper also contributes to both theoretical and practical spheres where a theoretical framework is proposed based on the findings of the research along with several managerial implications that hotel industry professionals could consult to improve the overall sustainability in the hotel industry.

Key words:

Sustainability Sustainable practices Hotel performance Chain Hotels Sri Lanka

Please summarise your research findings (max 750 words)

The fundamental aim of this research was to assess how the adoption of sustainable practices impact the overall performance of chain hotels with a particular view on the Sri Lankan chain hotel sector where 3 major objectives were established to achieve this central aim.

The initial objective was to establish an in-depth understanding on the sustainable practices adopted by chain hotels in Sri Lanka. In line with this objective sustainability was acknowledged to be of phenomenal importance to the Sri Lankan hotel industry as per the findings of this research. Nonetheless the lack of consensus and the absence of clear direction with regards to sustainability as a concept was demonstrated even in the Sri Lankan hotel industry. Nonetheless, one of the novel features of this particular study was that it managed to curate a definition for sustainability from a hotel industry perspective where sustainability was defined as '*A holistic framework of initiatives that continuously and consistently focus on the environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of hotels in order to meet the needs of present generations while preserving opportunities for the generations to come*'. The findings further suggested that each hotel chain used its unique sustainability model inspired by the Triple Bottom Line when adopting sustainable practices. Environmental sustainable practices took primacy amongst the existing sustainable practices in hotels and it was closely followed by social sustainable practices with most hotels venturing into sustainable initiatives across both these pillars. The very fact that almost all hotels starting to address their sustainable initiatives by first mentioning their environmental practices and the overall observations made throughout the research demonstrated that sustainability as a concept still had a greater inclination towards the environmental pillar when it came down to the actual adoption of such practices in the hotel industry. Moreover even though the importance of the economic bottom line was unarguably validated through the research findings; what hotels consider as economic sustainable practices remained amorphous in the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

The second objective of the study was to identify the determinants that influence the adoption of sustainable practices in the context of Sri Lankan chain hotels. The findings showcased that the reasons for adopting sustainable practices in the Sri Lankan context were highly forthright and resonated directly with that of the existing literature with one exclusion. The exception was that chain hotels in Sri Lanka did not consider gaining competitive advantage as an influencer for adopting sustainable practices and instead viewed it as a potential indirect benefit that hotels witnessed as a result of enhanced brand image through successful adoption of sustainable practices. An unexpected discovery of this research was the surfeit of challenges faced by Sri Lankan chain hotels in adopting sustainable practices where the industry

identified more challenges for sustainability as opposed to the motivators of sustainability where the negative attitude of staff members towards sustainability and the lack of skilled staff took precedence amongst them.

The third objective of the research was to evaluate the impacts of the adoption of sustainable practices on the overall hotel performance in Sri Lankan chain hotels. The results obtained showed no significant relationship between implementation of sustainable practices and the overall hotel performance with all the hotels considering the impacts on either one or two aspects of performance when measuring the sustainable practices of their respective hotels. From their perspective the adoption of sustainable practices had the most vital impact on the hotel's financial performance hinting that the economic bottom-line of sustainability still remained as the most relevant pillar of sustainability in the hotel industry. Considering the limited attention given by Sri Lankan chain hoteliers towards sustainability's impacts on elements such as customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction showcased that the financial impacts of being sustainable has considerably overshadowed the impacts sustainability had on non-financial performance indicators of hotels as well.

What contribution will your research and other elements of your postgraduate course make to destination management practice and/or theory? (max 750 words)

The findings of this research provided some important theoretical and practical implications which could benefit destination management as a whole. The theoretical implications of this research was primarily twofold. The most prominent contribution amongst these two was the theoretical framework proposed through the findings of this study (elaborated in Figure 1 below). The proposed framework identified a list of reasons that motivated hotels to implement sustainable practices, the challenges faced by hotels when implementing sustainable practices and also the impacts of adopting such sustainable practices on overall hotel performances as well. Despite of this research being predominantly focused on the hotel sector the findings proposed in the theoretical model could be potentially relevant to most business entities working within the whole of tourism industry in destinations. The second major theoretical implication was the proposal of a list of 24 sustainable practices across all three bottom-lines of sustainability using Mihalič, et al.'s (2012) Hotel Sustainability Business Model as its foundation whilst encompassing the plethora of sustainable practices identified within a wide variety of existing hotel industry literature (elaborated in Figure 2). Considering the myriad of sustainable initiatives adopted by all businesses working under the umbrella of the tourism industry across a majority of the destinations in today's context these practices could be utilized to identify, categorize and provide homogeneity for sustainable practices in future researches. Moreover destination managers could affectively look into the recommendations proposed in this dissertation in order to make their respective destinations more sustainable as well. For an instance the list of recommendations identifies the importance of the industry looking beyond its immediate environment in order to reach grassroots level when conducting educational programmes on sustainability, the importance of establishing proper indicators to measure the impacts of sustainable practices and also the importance of establishing a dedicated body to oversee the sustainable practices carried out by hotels in a given destination as well.

Apart from the dissertation module, the overall MSc. Programme provided ample attention towards destination management as a whole with the programme assigning one module specifically aimed at Destination planning and management. The individual assignment under this module in particular allowed the students to look at destination management from a unique perspective where it was observed from a visitor's perspective through a field trip to Northern Ireland instead of viewing destination management from the traditional supplier perspective. This particular assignment recommended destination managers the three important phases that a potential client go through when traveling (i.e. pre tour, during tour, post tour) and the role that destinations need to play at each specific phase as well. In addition to that the programme also had a module dedicated to Tourism and Hospitality Marketing where the module focused on the importance of marketing to the industry and the role played by marketing in various facets of the industry. The coursework under this assignment in particular focused on both innovation and tourism marketing and how the industry should utilize innovative marketing activities to promote their firms/destinations. My coursework for this assignment not only managed to curate a definition for Innovation from a tourism industry perspective but also managed to take a fresh outlook on all the different types of innovations currently existing in the industry through a case study approach. Moreover the postgraduate programme had a dedicated module for crisis and disaster management where the

assignment associated with this particular module required the students to create a crisis communication plan for a selected destination. This particular report made some valuable insights in to crisis and disaster management which could be easily adopted by a majority of destinations in creating their own crisis communication plans as well. In addition to these three core modules that are highly relevant to destination management, the MSc. also offered modules on E-services strategies in the industry, Managing people in the industry and also a module on competitive advantage in hospitality industry as well.

How do you think your academic and work related experience whilst undertaking your postgraduate course have contributed/will contribute to your own professional development? (max 750 words)

First and foremost the compilation of the dissertation and all the other assignments related to each module allowed me to widen my horizon on very specific subject areas of study such as sustainability in tourism and hospitality industry as I got the opportunity to refer to an extensive amount of sources on such concepts written by numerous authors over a long standing period of time. The knowledge that I gathered through reading a multiplicity of books/journals and conference proceedings not only allowed be to gain an in depth knowledge on these subject areas but also helped me to understand the importance of concepts such as sustainability for this industry and how each and every individual working in this particular industry has a role to play in it.

While specifically focusing on the dissertation module, the comprehensive qualitative research methodology adopted in conducting this research comprising of 3 data collection methods of which depth interviews functioned as the main method of data collection enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding on how to conduct a qualitative research as well. For an instance carrying out my interviews repeatedly with various respondents allowed me to develop my communication skills where after the initial couple of interviews I was very comfortable in conducting such interviews with any person which has contributed tremendously for my own professional development. Moreover conducting these set of interviews allowed me to develop my translating skills as I had to conduct a significant part of the interviews in my native language (i.e. Sinhalese) which I personally believe has effectively helped me in developing a valuable skill that could potentially be attractive to Sri Lankan employers looking out for employees with professional bilingual skills. Even more importantly, undertaking this research enabled me to widen my network and provided me with invaluable exposure within the Sri Lankan hotel industry as I was able to meet some top industry professionals belonging to the Sri Lankan hotel industry ranging from General Managers in 5 star hotels to Marketing Managers in international hotel chains and obtain their views on sustainability while also building a rapport for myself with these recognized individuals as well.

Another important skill that I have personally developed throughout the last few months of compiling this dissertation and doing other coursework is effective project management. Apart from setting myself weekly deadlines and taking a very methodical approach towards all my assignments, my biggest achievement in terms of project management was the arrangement of the interviews for my dissertation. Even though arranging 31 interviews belonging to 14 different hotel chains in 14 different locations where sometimes I had to conduct more than one interview with hotels belonging to different hotel chains in the same day while being in the United Kingdom was no easy feat, planning ahead of time and providing my potential interviewees with ample time to make themselves available for a specific time slot that I requested for made it possible for me to conduct the majority of the interviews within a short span of two weeks whilst travelling around the country for approximately 1500km.

Apart from the dissertation, the key highlight during my time studying at University of Plymouth was the opportunity that I gained to participate in the 'International Student Conference on Tourism Research' held in Austria. I was not only able to participate in this conference but the paper I presented managed to secure the 'Best Paper Award' at this conference which has given me a huge boost to my career as well.

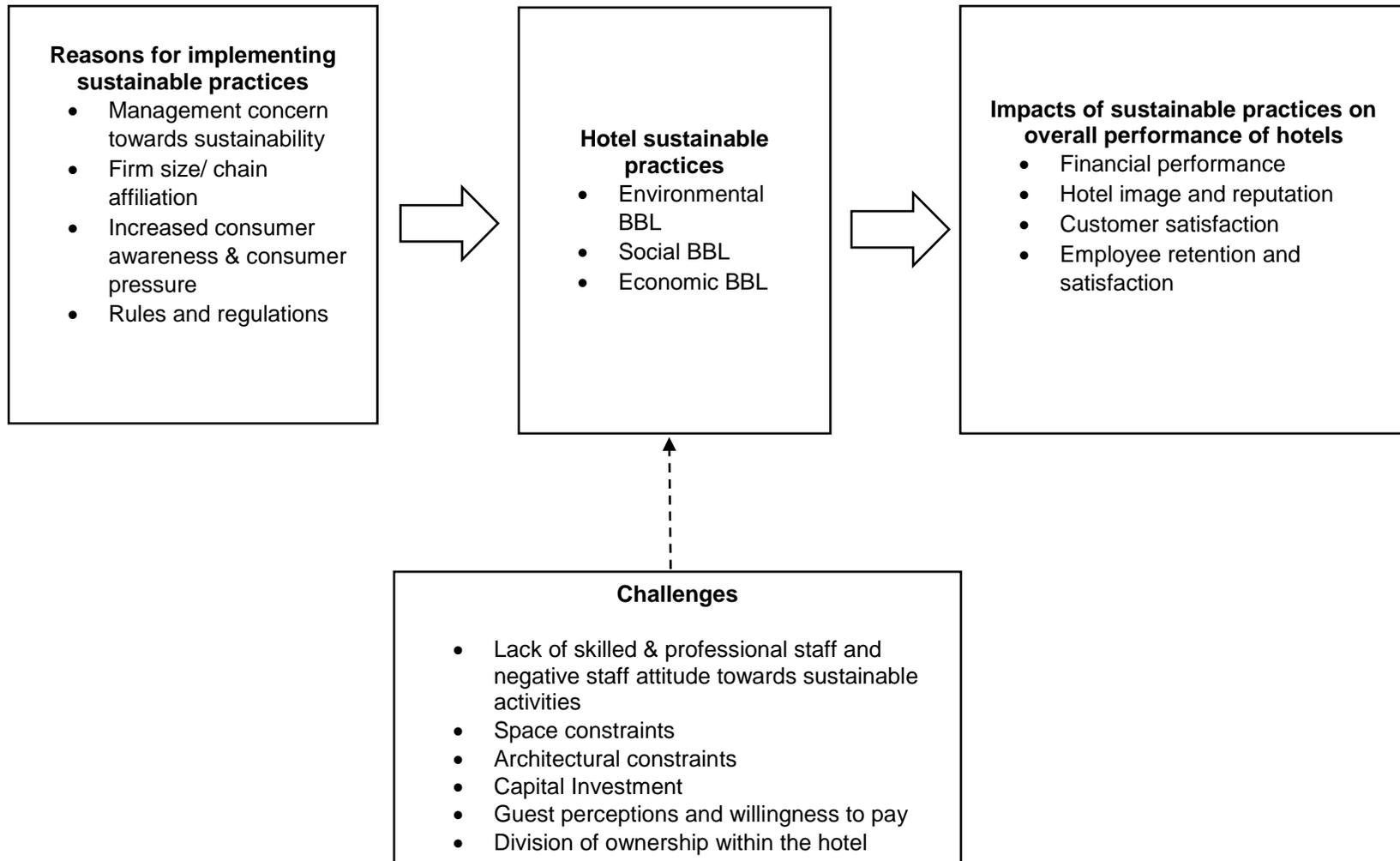
During my time as a postgraduate student of University of Plymouth where I also got the opportunity to work part time both as a student ambassador of the University and a sales assistant a filling station while simultaneously working tirelessly on my Masters has taught me incredible discipline and composure while tremendously developing my ability to commit towards a given task and also to prioritize my work depending on various situations as well. Overall I personally believe that my Masters programme has enabled me to develop determination, self-motivation and critical thinking which will undoubtedly help me in showcasing myself as a competent candidate in front of potential employers in the near future.

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Closing date for entries is 31 October 2018.
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Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework



Business Bottom Line (BBL)	Practices	Authors
Environmental BBL Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of renewable energy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar panels • Use of natural ventilation/ Open air design • Rainwater harvesting • Solar water heating panels • Energy efficient boilers [biomass bio-mass plant for steam production] 2. Water Conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub metering systems • Waste water treatment • Use of non-chlorinated water in pools • Low-flow shower heads • Sewerage treatment plant • Use of grey water in irrigation 3. Electricity conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy efficient lighting [Use of LED/ Motion sensors/ scheduled light switching/ color coding all light switches] • Card key control systems • Energy efficient absorption chillers • Sub metering systems 4. Waste Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste recycling • Waste control • Compost production • Re-use of disposable items 5. Air quality management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise control • Reduce Greenhouse gas emissions 6. Elimination/ Reduction of plastic usage 7. Green purchasing 8. Environmentally friendly housekeeping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmentally friendly cleaning products • Reduced chemical usage in 	(Enz & Siguaw, 1999), (Bader, 2005), (Bohdanowicz, 2005), (Yaw Jr, 2005), (Mensah, 2006), (Erdogan & Baris, 2007), (Kelly, et al., 2007), (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007), (Houdré, 2008), (Beccali, et al., 2009), (Butler, 2009), (Erdogan & Tosun, 2009), (Naukkarinen, 2009), (Jackson, 2010), (Millar, 2010), (Kabir, 2011), (Levy & Park, 2011), (Grosbois, 2012), (Hsieh, 2012), (Kim, et al., 2012), (Maleviti, et al., 2012), (Peng Xu, et al., 2012), (Radwan, et al., 2012), (Berezan, et al., 2013), (Efiang, et al., 2013), (Punitha & Rasdi, 2013), (Yusof & Jamaludin, 2013), (Wyngaard & De Lange, 2013), (Brody, 2014), (Berezan, et al., 2014), (Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014), (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014), (Hsiao, et al., 2014), (Kasim, et al., 2014), (Pirani & Arafat, 2014), (Gunarathne & Lee, 2015), (Upadhyay, et al., 2015), (Xu & Gursoy, 2015), (Jones, et al., 2016), (Brazytè, et al., 2017), (Pérez-Pineda, et al., 2017), (Walsh & Dodds, 2017), (Cingoski & Petrevska, 2018)

	<p>housekeeping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-use of linen • In-site laundry <p>9. Introducing sustainable transportation options</p> <p>10. Introducing sustainable recreation options</p>	
Environmental education	<p>11. Environmental education and training to employees</p> <p>12. Environmental education for guests</p>	(Enz & Siguaw, 1999), (Erdogan & Tosun, 2009), (Levy & Park, 2011), (Hsieh, 2012), (Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014), (Gunarathne & Lee, 2015), (Jones, et al., 2016)
Biodiversity	<p>13. Protection and preservation of natural resources and biodiversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoring natural habitats - Reforestation/ Tree plantation programmes • Animal protection programmes • Architecture and landscape design harmonized with the environment • Partnering with local experts to preserve biodiversity 	(Enz & Siguaw, 1999), (Erdogan & Tosun, 2009), (Levy & Park, 2011), (Abaeian, et al., 2014), (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014), (Jones, et al., 2016), (Pérez-Pineda, et al., 2017)
Social BBL Human capital	<p>14. Diversity and equality of opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide equal opportunities within the workplace • Ensuring fair wages • Hiring employees with disabilities • Anti-harassment measures for employees <p>15. Staff training and development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition grants • Agreements with educational institutions <p>16. Health and safety of employees</p>	(Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2009), (Kabir, 2011), (Grosbois, 2012), (Efiang, et al., 2013), (Abaeian, et al., 2014), (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014), (Jones, et al., 2014), (Brazytè, et al., 2017), (Jones, et al., 2016)
Cultural capital	<p>17. Contributing to cultural heritage preservation</p>	(Kabir, 2011), (Chen, 2015), (Brazytè, et al., 2017)
Power to change	<p>18. Community commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local purchasing/ local sourcing 	(Enz & Siguaw, 1999), (Mensah, 2006), (Houdré,

participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employing local people - employed local modest skilled labour • skill-development programs for community members • infrastructural development in local areas <p>19. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charitable giving • Guest volunteerism • Charity events • Local event sponsorship <p>20. Implementation of sustainable policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt Environment Management Systems (EMS) • Adopt a Co-operate sustainable policy • Adopt Green service processes • Follow Green construction standards 	<p>2008), (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2009), (Levy & Park, 2011), (Kabir, 2011), (Grosbois, 2012), (Berezan, et al., 2013), (Abaeian, et al., 2014), (Berezan, et al., 2014), (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014), (Brazyté, et al., 2017), (Jones, et al., 2016)</p> <p>(Smerecnik & Andersen, 2011), (Chan, 2008), (Xu & Gursoy, 2015)</p>
Economic BBL Financial (Tangible)	<p>21. Profit & revenue growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost control • Market share growth • Building shareholder value <p>22. Fair trade & legal compliance</p>	<p>(Jones, et al., 2014), (Xu & Gursoy, 2015), (Jones, et al., 2016)</p>
Marketing (Intangible)	<p>23. Visible communications on sustainable practices</p> <p>24. Reflecting guest opinions by including them in hotel activities</p>	<p>(Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007), (Erdogan & Tosun, 2009), (Han, et al., 2009), (Jones, et al., 2016)</p>

Figure 2 – Sustainable practices